

From Many – One: The Story-Potluck

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ABSTRACT

Come and join the story potluck! Let's engage in a session that will trigger our creative juices about a topic that we all increasingly encounter in classrooms and workplaces: diversity. Come listen to- and share some captivating stories to be used in your OB courses and other training sessions. Our stories will come from various cultures, and entail content that will trigger critical thinking. We will share our best stories with you, and encourage you to share some of your own. We will then engage in dialogue about interpretations for OB, and brainstorm about further ways to celebrate differences.

Keywords: Diversity, differences, story telling, sharing, multi-cultural

PLANNING DETAILS

Proposed audience:

Instructors of OB-courses in the broadest sense, as well as trainers/coaches in corporate settings.

Maximum number of participants:

There are no constraints on the number of participants.

Type of session:

Activity-based and brainstorming afterwards:

- The presenters of this session will first share their experiences in attaining the highest levels of inspiration and motivation among their students through stories.
- Participants will be asked to share a story (if

they have one)

- Collaboratively, we will engage in dialogue toward reciprocal enrichment towards future diversity embracing practices.

Special requirements:

No special requirements.

Length:

90 minutes

Proposal level:

Course

INTRODUCTION

Diversity is becoming more rule than exception in our 21st century classrooms. It is infused in our student populations, but also in our teaching styles and attributes. As teachers, more than ever now, we need to be aware of the wealth of information that is at our disposal, not just through the Internet and our textbooks, but even more within our students.

Yet, while the contemporary trends of YouTube and Google material increase in popularity in- and outside our classrooms, timeless concepts still seem to sort at least an equal effect of interest. As long as there have been human beings, there have been stories. Stories capture the imagination, and raise questions beyond the here and now. The message we can convey with our stories can exceed the boundaries of our course description, our syllabus, and our textbooks, and help us achieve what we all want to achieve: deep thinking and transformation within our students.

In this session, the presenters will share some of the most captivating stories they used in their OB courses and other trainings for corporate workers. They will ensure a variety of stories, derived from various cultures, and with content that triggers critical thinking. After their stories, they will encourage you to participate in sharing some stories of your own, and engage in a dialogue toward further ways to engage difference.

THEORETICAL GROUNDING

Storytelling is an ancient art. Ever since human beings have lived together, they told each other stories. Stories have always been shared in every culture for purposes of entertainment, education, preservation of traditions and cultures, and to instill moral values. Randall and Martin (2003) agree, “Stories or family narratives are powerful tools describing families/organizations as a whole and family/organization members in particular” (p. 44). In line with the practices of the presenters of this session, Randall and Martin also successfully use storytelling in their classrooms on Organizational Behavior. They have found that stories create meaning and provide purpose.

Stories speak to the imagination of people, regardless of their level of education. Stories captivate, and encourage thinking. It is, therefore, no wonder that story telling has not become obsolete over time. It is quite the contrary! A quick glance at Google shows more than 8 million web-pages on “story telling”, while Amazon.com’s database delivers almost 200,000 books on story telling. Underscoring the revival of storytelling in modern times, Ferneley (2009) asserts, “the use of storytelling as a knowledge elicitation tool has attracted much attention in recent years” (p. 121). Van Vuuren and Elving (2008) consider storytelling one of the three most important ways of framing organizational change in the right perspective. Indeed, a good story lingers in the mind long after complex theories and wordy texts have been forgotten. In these days of “short, sweet and creative”, story telling once again runs to the forefront in attracting audiences, making learning stick, spurring critical reflections, and enhancing respect among cultures!

SESSION DESCRIPTION

The session will be about 90 minutes long, divided into three main sections. The structure will be as follows:

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| 1 | Each of the three presenters will share his or her best stories, derived from his or her cultural background as well as from other cultures, with regular interaction from the participants about possible interpretations/morals of the stories told. | 45 minutes |
| 2 | Participants will be asked to share their stories in a similar way: with room for the entire group to think about interpretations, particularly within OB and life in general. | 20 minutes |
| 3 | Dialogue session: collaboratively, we will contemplate about the creative use of stories in our courses/workshops, and other ways of celebrating differences. | 25 minutes |

APPLICATION TO CONFERENCE THEME AND SUB-THEME(S)

The theme of this workshop resonates highly with the overall conference theme as well as several sub themes.

“**Engaging differences**” is the main focus on this story-telling workshop. Because the stories will be borrowed from different cultures, an overarching message of respect to the multiplicity of cultures of the world will be conveyed, while the common trait of unified human values will be underscored.

Sub-themes:

- **Creating connection**
 - Through the stories from different cultures, we encourage our audiences (students in our courses) to feel included, and to share the beauty and wealth of their own background. Stories are multi-interpretable, and they usually bring to mind other stories with similar morals, from other cultures. This creates a sense of connection and mutuality among attendants, while it also helps to create a more informal atmosphere, and therefore, greater engagement from all involved.

- **Where’s the magic?**
 - Because stories are so entertaining, they create magic that is beyond the potential of straightforward lecturing. Stories create a sense of wonder, and *because* of that, stick longer than any formal instruction method. The ancient art of story-telling brings magic back to the 21st century classrooms.

References

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