Ethical Principles of Storytelling Process Green and Blue

The Green and Blue Project has adopted an ethical approach to storytelling. These ethics are based on those used by Towards Understanding and Healing and a full copy is on the Green and Blue web page www.green-and-blue.org

Ethics are the principles or moral values in the process. They are resolved in terms of moral standards of right and wrong.

They cover issues such as
  o Personal behaviour
  o Treatment of others

The principles have been defined as (Polit & Beck 2004) as
  o Beneficence
  o Dignity
  o Justice

Beneficence/Goodwill

At its most basic this means that you do no harm to the person but rather ‘do good’ and help the person.

This process should
  • benefit the participants and contribute to their welfare.
  • be free of harm and exploitation
  • not force participants into the process or any part of it
  • treat people as ends in themselves not as a means to an end

There are risks and benefits in the process and both need to be communicated to all so that the decision to take part or not to take part is based on the widest possible understanding of what is involved.

The process will recognise the risks and try to reduce them and accentuate the benefits.

Participants will not be asked to reveal more than they wish for the benefit of the facilitator. The individual needs of participants will be recognised.

Voluntary participation

This rests on the dignity of all involved.

Every stage is voluntary.

It is Ok to speak and it’s OK to pass. It is OK to stay and its OK to leave.

Participants can withdraw at any stage.
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The participant has the final say on what if anything is put into the public domain. Participants will be fully informed about the process in a way that they can understand and comprehend.

Justice

The process will respect people so that have justice. Participants are entitled to privacy it is they who determine what to reveal and what not to reveal. There will be no coercion. The process will foster to develop a trustful relationship between facilitator and participant.

- Confidentiality is a key component. We can only responsible for our own confidentiality so the process relies on the trust of those involved. Thus it is important to discuss and agree the degree of confidentiality. The Chatam House Rule is a good basis. This will be discussed and agreed in a form and language that is understood by all –

  ‘Participants are free to use the information received in the discussion, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.’

- Confidentiality can not cover any disclosure of an incident where details or threat of a potential of a crime are given. In these circumstances the facilitator is duty bound to inform the appropriate authorities. Thus we will not collect stories on events where there is an unsolved crime.

- Participants and facilitator will agree ‘Informed Consent’ as the basis of the contract/agreement for the process. This means that the consent is given from an informed basis and not as a result of any coercion or pressure or reward. It gives the person the option of withdrawal at any stage. It should also give them the control of the process. So if material is to be recorded they agree to that, transcriptions are brought back for approval. The use of recording audio or video is to be agreed before use.

- Facilitators will work with participants to ensure that any published material does not result in the project or participant(s) being part of any legal proceedings.

Power Relationships within storytelling

Knowledge and experience are some of the most powerful tools in any process. The facilitator often has these and participants may not. Thus at the start of the process there can be a difference between facilitator and potential
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participant. There is also knowledge of how researchers have used their power to get people to say things record them and leave. Use the material for the benefit of the researcher and leave the giver of the information abused by the process. The knowledge of this in the ‘ether’ can mean that potential participants are sceptical of ‘Geek’s bearing gifts’ sceptical of the process and concerned at what they are being asked to do.

It is therefore important to try to develop trust and reduce any concept of a power differential. This can be done by the facilitator being open by getting endorsement from people the participant trusts. By taking time and not rushing the process.

In a group the power dynamic can shift. Particularly if there is a participant who is voluble and domineering. The facilitator can be overpowered by this and thus the process can be damaged as this person takes over. This is where a co-facilitator is important and where the groundrules and contract can play a key part.

There can also develop a hierarchy of stories where one person tells a particularly poignant story and others feel they have to match it, or that theirs is of less importance and not relevant. This can result in self censorship.

Voyeurism can also take place where the story starts a process of questioning to gain more information.

The nature of the relationships

It is important the relationships are kept on an even keel. If there is power shift where the power is resting with one person or group and is not balancing out then the process is in danger. Again this is where a co-facilitator can be important where there is another set of eyes and ears looking at the dynamic and able to intervene to redress balance.

Support for Physical Social and Psychological wellbeing of participants.

As part of the process there will be support available to anyone who may have suffered trauma or form whom recalling past events creates. Facilitators have experience in this work to recognise the signs of trauma.