
THE STORIES WE TELL

STORIES AS HARD DATA: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH TO EVALUATION

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EXPECTATIONS



EXAMINING THE ORIGIN

noun | *sto·ry* | \ 'stɔr-ē \

a : a fictional narrative shorter than a novel; *specifically*

b : the intrigue or plot of a narrative or dramatic work

noun | \ 'bɒŋk \

a : a place where something is held available <memory *banks*>; *especially* : a depot for the collection and storage of a biological product <a blood *bank*>

WHY ARE WE INTERESTED?

Backgrounds
in social work

Challenging the
idea of people
as numbers

Pairing social work values
and principles with
evaluation best practices

Worked in non-
profit settings

Accounting for
the power of
data in
evaluation

HOW MANY METHODS CAN WE COME UP WITH?

Based on the definition, let's create a **list of evaluation methods** which might fit under the category of *storybanking*.

PROS OF UTILIZING STORYBANKING

Talking about *real people* humanizes the information.

It is easier for people *retain the information* when it is tied to a real person's experience.

It *depoliticizes the issue*. It's not about a candidate or a party, it's about a person.

In areas where it is difficult to discuss reform effort, sharing a simple story is a way to *open a dialogue*.

CONS OF UTILIZING STORYBANKING

Storybanking works best in combination with other methods for gathering, analyzing and reporting data.

It doesn't provide comprehensive information about the impacts produced by an intervention.

The time commitment necessary for storybanking may be daunting.

MCCLINTOCK'S ATTRIBUTES FOR STORYTELLING

Storytelling lends itself to participatory change processes because it relies on people to make sense of their own experiences and environments.

Stories can be used to focus on particular interventions while also reflecting on the array of contextual factors that influence outcomes.

Narrative methods can be integrated into ongoing organizational processes to aid in program planning, decision making, and strategic management.

MCCLINTOCK'S ATTRIBUTES FOR STORYTELLING

Narrative data can be analyzed using existing conceptual frameworks or assessed for emergent themes.

Stories can be systematically gathered and claims verified from independent sources or methods.

TOPIC EXAMPLES

Organizational Topics

How I feel about the group dynamics...

A major change or transition and how the organization handled it...

A time when I needed help and couldn't get it...

A time when I was happy with the help I received...

TOPIC EXAMPLES

Learning and Change Topics

I learned something that changed how I work...

The biggest change I ever made was...

The most important thing I learned was...

TOPIC EXAMPLES

Program Topics

In the last year the program has...

The program has changed the way...

I find it challenging to participate in the program because...

BUT ISN'T THIS A KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW?

Collecting stories is viewed as an *unstructured interview*.

Interviews are completely qualitative, and include only topic areas and themes rather than standard questions.

Data collection takes the form of natural conversation between two or more people, and allows the interviewer to pursue follow-up questions or new lines of discussion as they see fit.

The interviewee is often asked to identify the information they feel is most important for the discussion.

DISCUSSION

Ways in which *storybanking* might be used in *evaluation*:

How might storybanking be used to answer evaluation questions?

What kind of program lends itself to storybanking as a method of data collection?

ACCESSIBILITY

“Recently, there has been a marked interest in the use of narrative in evaluation practice, reflecting the increasing *attractiveness* of narrative in social inquiry more broadly.”

(Constantino & Greene, 2003)

MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE

MSC can be very helpful in explaining **HOW** change comes about (processes and causal mechanisms) and **WHEN** (in what situations and contexts).

It can be useful to support *program theory development*.

STEPS FOR USING MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE

1. Deciding the types of stories that should be collected
2. Collecting the stories and determining which stories are the *most significant*
3. Sharing the stories and discussion of values with stakeholders and contributors so that *learning happens*

TIPS

MSC is particularly useful when you need *different stakeholders* to understand the *different values* that other stakeholders have in terms of "what success looks like"

MSC works best in *combination* with other options for gathering, analysing and reporting data. It doesn't provide comprehensive information about the impacts produced by an intervention

PHOTOVOICE

The *intermingling* of images and words

Identifies and records *community* strengths and struggles

Explains *experiences* through critical reflection and group dialogue

Informs *decision-makers* and influences policy



GROUP STORYTELLING

"Group storytelling is a means of getting at experiences an individual is reluctant to claim or at material that might not be accessible to conscious thought." (McClintock, 2004)



THE BASICS

When working with youth or other vulnerable populations that may have reservations about openly sharing personal stories

Each group member contributes to a narrative about a made-up individual who participates in the program

In group storytelling, the narrative can become exaggerated

Convey the "psychological experience" of program participation (McClintock, 2004)

AEA AND NASW ETHICS

AEA Guiding Principles

- A. Systematic Inquiry
- B. Competence
- C. Integrity/Honesty
- D. Respect for People
- E. Responsibilities for General and Public Welfare

(AEA, 2004)

NASW Core Values

- 1. Service
- 2. Social Justice
- 3. Dignity and Worth of the Person
- 4. Importance of Human Relationships
- 5. Integrity
- 6. Competence

(NASW, 2008)

ETHICS

Confidentiality/Informed consent
Mandatory reporting
Triggering trauma/Service referrals
Asking leading questions
Body language
Transcription
Selection bias
The truth of the story



BEST PRACTICES

Train staff on **empathic responses** and **ethical challenges**

Provide **supervision** and **debriefing**

Have **more than one person** analyze stories and **record verbatim**

Deidentify and have a system in place for the **protection of stories**

COMING FULL CIRCLE

What other methods would you like to discuss?

A MIXED-METHODS APPROACH

"No numbers without a story; no story without numbers"

(Global Fund for Children, 2011)

