
Storytelling as participatory public dialogue: Possibilities for socially inclusive communicative practice

Marcella LaFever
Shirley Hardman
Pearl Penner

❖ The Problem

- Public planning is a dialogic process
- Without participation from the whole public, planning outcomes are skewed
- Norms for participation are set by the dominant culture
- Real and authentic dialogue across cultures requires finding ways to meet the participatory needs of the whole public
- One such way is by honouring the communicative practices of the non-dominant cultural group(s)

LaFever, 2005 & 2011

❖ The Case

- In 2010, the government of Canada initiated an inquiry into declines of sockeye salmon stocks in the Fraser River (Terms of Reference, 2010).
 - Eight of the 21 groups granted standing represented 28+ First Nation councils, bands and aboriginal organizations (Participants, 2010).
 - The dialogic process was set by the government
 - The process did not use the communicative practice of the participating indigenous peoples
 - One such practice is the use of storytelling (Archibald, 2008)
-

❖ A Story

Chief Willie Charlie at the Cohen Commission
13 December 2010

❖ The Questions

- Was storytelling used as a dialogic practice in First Nation/Indigenous community submissions to the Cohen Commission of Inquiry?
 - If so, to what purpose was storytelling used?
-

❖ The Methodology

- From archived transcripts, we identified 468 submissions made by indigenous groups
 - Loaded all transcripts into NVivo
 - Searched transcripts for stories using a framework consisting of the two types of Stó:lō oral history (Stó:lō Heritage, 2003),
 - Sqwelqwel [True Story] (oral narratives relating to personal history)
 - Sxwôxwiyám [Origin Story](oral histories that describe the distant past)
 - Stories were then coded for how they were used in the context of the inquiry
-

❖ The Findings

- Sxwôxwiyám
 - Give a welcome to the territory
 - Provide affiliations within the territory
 - Identifying the cultural norms and core values
 - Describing laws of resource management

❖ The Findings

- Sqwelqwel
 - Give contextual information
 - Provide territorial descriptions
 - Describe values
 - Catalogue changes
 - Describe fishing/harvesting methods
 - Explain traditional ecological knowledge
 - Describe uses of salmon
 - Indicate importance of salmon
 - Provide professional biography
 - Describe roles in the community
 - Explain communication processes
 - Provide definitions

❖ The Findings

- Sqwelqwel
 - Provide definitions
 - *Enculturation*
 - *Equal Partners*
 - *Ethics*
 - *Evidence*
 - *Management, co-management, joint-management*
 - *Nation*
 - *Rights vs. Privilege*
 - *Stewardship*

❖ The Importance of Story in the dialogic process

- Way of knowing and understanding the world
- Connect the past to the present
- When we tell stories we have pictures in our minds
- In oral traditions stories
 - are a way of remembering
 - teach us why things are the way they are
 - teach us how to live right

❖ The Implications

- Cannot achieve full participation if we do not understand across cultures
- It is the storytellers job to tell the story
- It is up to the listener to find themselves reflected in the story
- Real and authentic dialogue demands that the dominant culture change their way of listening

❖ References

- Archibald, J. (2008). Storywork in action. In *Indigenous storywork: Educating the heart, mind, body, and spirit*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
- LaFever, M. (2008). Communication for public decision-making in a negative historical context: Building intercultural relationships in the British Columbia treaty process. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 1(2), 158-180.
- LaFever, M. (2011). Empowering Native Americans: Communication, Planning, and Dialogue for Eco-Tourism in Gallup, New Mexico. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 4(2), 127-145
- Participants granted standing, *Cohen Commission*. (2010). Retrieved from http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/206/301/pco-bcp/commissions/cohen/cohen_commission/LOCALHOS/EN/PARTICIPANTS.HTM
- Stó:lō Heritage Policy Manual*. (2003). Stó:lō Nation Lalems ye Stó:lō Si:ya:m (LYSS). Retrieved from www.srmcentre.com/media_pdf/StoloHeritagePolicyManual.pdf
- Terms of Reference, Cohen Commission* (2010). Retrieved from http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/206/301/pco-bcp/commissions/cohen/cohen_commission/LOCALHOS/EN/TERMSOFREFERENCE.HTM