

Story of the 'Dare to Share Fair'

Presented at the 'Learning across Borders' conference - Bern, Switzerland
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Team

Victoria Ward
Carol Russell
Stephanie Colton

All from Sparknow, London.

Background

The 'Dare to Share Fair' story was a contribution which involved us assuming the role of 'travelling collectors' within a special 'observers' group that include a journalist, lessons learned specialists, a cartoonist, a photographer and a film crew. Together we were charged with evidencing the highlights of the Fair and presenting them back to an interested public at the 'Learning across Borders' conference in Hotel Allegro, Bern on Friday 2nd April 2004.

As a team of three we brought different perspectives to the mix, including insights from traditional storytelling, markets and exchanges and anthropology. Working as a team we spent the time between workshops picking up stories from both the travellers and hosts as we moved around the fair and then finally spent a day in our hotel room, weaving this material together to form a compelling narrative to be performed by one of us at the conference.

Making the story

Following three days of being both travellers and hosts, the three of us met up in a hotel room in Bern to make the story. Using the scrapbook of stories and images we had collated in the tent as well as notes from our personal laptops to refresh our memories we pooled the things we'd noticed individually to get a shared sense of what we'd encountered.

Once we'd decided that the story should be told from the point of view of the three storytellers we used the template for creating group stories we'd made for Tuesday's storytelling workshops to build the structure.

We decided that the story style would be reflective, looking back on what had happened. We discussed whether the tone of the story should be argumentative, which in some ways makes for dynamic entertainment, or constructive, building 'noticings' on top of one another. We decided on 'building' as this is more consistent with positive dialogue and the sharing of knowledge and experience. We then noticed how each successive 'noticing' refreshed the whole.

A set of major themes emerged at this point and using these as a starting point we chose five 'archetypal branch stories' to illustrate them. These stories were chosen because they were both universal and specific, as specificity creates the most conducive environment for the transfer of knowledge. We decided not to name those whose stories we told, instead identifying them using their country of origin, or the location in which the story took place as we felt that

this strengthened the story's universal qualities. By recalling and telling each of these stories in turn, the remaining two listeners were able to create the links between them.

Once we'd written the basic structure of the story, one of us suggested we write it a;; out, word-for-word. At this point the story performer asked we stop writing mostly because at the moment you write something down, people feel obliged to be faithful to the text and not to th essence of the story. Of paramount importance was that the images were strong enough to negate the need to remember it verbatim. A story told needs spontaneity to stay alive, and the teller needs to be able to really inhabit it, make it their own. As such it was agreed that the broad sequence of events and the links would be the only thing written down before the telling. This involved a great deal of trust from the other tellers.

After a break, the tellers reconvened and the story performer put forward her perspective on how the story could start and end. All agreed that the story had taken on a great shape, and so all that was left was to feed her with additional visual hooks and threads to inspire the performance.

During a live storytelling performance changes to a story occur, shifts of emphasis, contractions and expansions. There are many reasons for this: one of the main ones is that the audience is as much a part of the telling of the story as the teller. Another is that the teller is seeing images and painting them in words, capturing the emotions as well as the sights and transferring all that to the audience. This occurs whether one person or a thousand are listening.

What is presented below is the story, as it was told at the conference (in the left hand column). In addition we have chosen to reveal the original structure to show how the story evolved during the process of telling.

The story as Carol told it at the conference	The original story synopsis created by the 3 story collectors from Sparknow
<p>[Singing a Ghanian story song in Twi which calls upon the Story Spirit to enter the space and hearts of the participants.]</p> <p>In the storytelling tradition from which I myself am grown we have a particular thing that we do. It is a call and a response. So the storyteller sends out a call and the audience sends back a response. This does two things. First of all it catches everyone's attention, and second of all, it makes sure that everyone is ready together, giving the spirit of the story to the storyteller so the storyteller can tell the story the best way they know how. So for this story, when I say 'Il' I want you to say 'Ou'</p> <p>'Il' [audience does rather lukewarm 'Ou']</p> <p>Now you see, I really need some more of your energy to really down inside this story, so shall we try again?</p> <p>[much stronger call and response follows]</p>	<p>3 storytellers discuss what they have seen at a knowledge fair</p> <p>Location : Mountains (secret, mysterious, sacred, edgy, dangerous, typifying Switzerland and also the homelands of many of the visitors) A building [in Switzerland] of concrete, steel and glass, high rising atrium, bridges, banana shaped, dressed for the fair.</p> <p>Also bring in specific locations of travellers, where the work of the organisation is actually done – Peru, Pakistan, Rajasthan, Nepal etc.</p>

<p>Two people met at a place between the mountains to share a breakfast of fruit, good coffee and bread. As they sat together eating, one of them said to his friend</p> <p>'You know, sharing is good.'</p> <p>And his friend said</p> <p>'I agree. I wish we could find a way to help and encourage other people to share more.'</p> <p>'You know that is a good idea.'</p>	<p>Showing the places from which the travellers have come.</p> <p>Dwelling: A small, brown Bedouin tent, at the end of the 2 day fair, which has been a market with market stalls. Tent full of cushions, candles, carpets. Set in front of the tent, on a small stool is a brass tray with brass teacups.</p> <p>Characters: 3 storytellers, 2 friends, the host who stole time, the hosts whose time-stamping was interrupted by objects, the young boy from Rajasthan who found time and acted as host, the lady from Peru who stepped over the threshold, the woman from Nepal who shared her story with another man. Objects: brass tray and teacups, objects offered to the storytellers to use in their work, objects exchanged at the fair,</p> <p>Themes: Fast and slow time, taking time, making time Travellers and hosts – the characteristics of each group. Taking risks; openness; trust; curiosity; Bridging spaces internal and physical; friendship; making connections; sharing; memories that outlive and re-create immediate experiences.</p> <p>Dilemma: The fair is being packed up. What really happened? What did the tellers notice?</p> <p>Action:</p> <p>In a café, as they share food and drink, 2 colleagues/friends are locked in a passionate, friendly discussion about to sharing. 'Its about order, its about complexity, speed.' 'Its about dialogue, its about a time and place to meet, its about slowness' 'Why not have a knowledge fair which brings people together from all over the world, and allow them to share in these different ways?' And so the D2SF is born. (<i>This was condensed for the purposes of staying within allotted time.</i>)</p> <p>And the storytellers are invited.</p>
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<p>And they talked, and they discussed and they bounced ideas off each other and they widened the search and they widened the discussion. And so it was that in a building of glass and steel a marketplace for the exchange of knowledge was born.</p> <p>Trees grew where none had been before. A basket of fruit greeted everyone arriving. Birdsong was heard in unexpected places, as people, hosts and travellers, mingled, came together as strangers and parted as friends, as people who had shared something, had exchanged something, had learned something from each other.</p> <p>Three travelling tellers, at the end of the second day of this wonderful sharing of knowledge and experience, sat in the mouth of the Bedouin tent that their hosts had so generously and thoughtfully provided and they watched as the other travellers packed up their stalls and they shared peppermint tea.</p> <p>'How amazing was that?' One of them said as another poured the peppermint tea and passed it around.</p> <p>'You know what I noticed?' The second one said, 'I noticed the gifts, the currencies of friendship, the currency of knowledge and memory'</p> <p>The third one said, 'I noticed something else too. The generosity of all of the people who were here. Starting with our hosts. When the call went out, that we asked them to send out for us, for objects to do the work that we needed to do, some beautiful and wonderful things came. And I noticed also that on the table where we laid out these objects, there was a time stamp machine. Time is an</p>	<p>They arrive to find that their hosts have made for them a small, brown Bedouin tent, a space that overwhelms them with its beauty. (<i>This was moved from its original place to promote flow.</i>)</p> <p>And on the day the fair opens, people have come from all over the world. For 2 days they exchange gifts, feed each other sweets (sweeten their market pitch, their selling), give out leaflets and brochures, show videos, run workshops, hear music and birdsong etc. (<i>This was changed by the teller for the purposes of flow.</i>)</p> <p>Then all too soon it is over.</p> <p>The 3 storytellers sit and rest for a moment and share a cup of peppermint tea as they dismantle the tent and pack up. Then they start to talk about what they remember:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Travellers and hosts exchanging things. Objects, exchange, gifts, currency of friendship, warmth - something all the storytellers noticed over the 2 days <p>[Objects as friendship, then objects as memory is bridge, with background context of what it is to travel and what it is to host]</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Objects offered when host called for them to help storytellers in their work, objects as memories bursting from cupboards. Located on a table where a timestamp also sits. Uneasy conjunction of 2 kinds of time – long slow time, rhythm, memory, and unitised time, clocking in and out. The disturbance to the normal time-stamping habits, the interruption which
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<p>important and sometimes misunderstood thing.”</p> <p>‘What do you mean?’</p> <p>‘Well in another life, time was very important to me. I had to use one of those time-stamp machines, and I noticed how our hosts would arrive and they would pick up their cards to put into the machine and they would stop and they would take the time to look at all of the different objects on the table and some of them even came back, made the time to come back and look and see what was new, what had grown.’</p> <p>‘I also noticed how time in this space stretched and contracted as people came together and parted.’</p> <p>‘Do you know something else I noticed?’ said another one. ‘I noticed how, when people came together, they were pleased to see each other, they were pleased to share something with someone that maybe they didn’t know before. Do you remember some of the stories?’</p> <p>‘Ah, yes. There was one in particular which came to me from one of our hosts, who I had met outside, juggling a cup of coffee, a croissant and a cigarette. And he had spoken about how he had stolen time to make his way around the fair. He should have been in his office preparing a presentation for a conference but he had to get out, he had to see. And he said he was glad that he had done so, because two wonderful things happened to him. First of all, he met someone he had not seen for 18 years. Second of all, someone in that fair gave him a piece of knowledge that he was then able to use in his presentation, so actually, they cut his work in half. You see time, making time, is a wonderful thing.’</p> <p>‘And that reminds me also of a story that was made inside our tent. The two travellers who went to Rajistan and met a small boy, no more</p>	<p>for some is good and for others and irritant (note time-stamping orders is also in the memory of one storyteller from a previous work life, so this is particularly noticeable to her) – something all storytellers noticed, but one in particular.</p> <p>[Time, fast, slow, making, stealing etc is bridge, with some reference to the disruption to the host of the activities of the traveller]</p> <p>3. Isn’t it funny how when the Minister came she observed that the fair was ‘giving people time’ and at the same time there was the man from the host, juggling his coffee, croissant and cigarette and bemoaning the lack of time in his diary because of pressing engagements, but when he took a risk and stole time to go to the fair, he found exactly what he needed – hearsay from travellers conversations, plus two storytellers conversations with the individual</p> <p>[Being a warm host is the bridge]</p> <p>4. The host giving time. The story in Rajistan of two travellers, strangers, who a young boy with mirror eyes follows and guides for a day. Although</p>
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<p>than seven, with mirrors for eyes. And he showed them around his village and around his town and even though they couldn't speak his language, he spoke with such dignity, such pride, such integrity, that the words were not important, the spirit was what was important.. And so that little boy found the time to teach visitors something about himself and his people.'</p> <p>'And that also reminds me of another story. Do you remember the woman from Peru who came into our tent not knowing if anyone would be able to understand a single word that she said. She made a leap of faith, and as luck would have it, inside was a man who spoke her language, and it was through him, and through his generosity that we to heard how she is using the Inca legends to teach the young people to take care of the land. Oh, her voice as she spoke, and her gestures, they were beautiful and we learned a lot that time and we shared so much in that time.</p> <p>'You know that also reminds me of something else. Another story that was made inside the tent, this time from 2 different stories. One was a man who had a little son, 8 months old, and he wanted to keep the openness and the curiosity that this child had. And a woman who was in his group also had a child that was three years old, and she too wanted to retain the openness and the curiosity of her child. And these two people brought their two stories together and it became the story of a little boy who loved to drum, he loved to make people dance, he loved to watch himself push the boundaries, learn new things, explore new, different places and watch as the people danced.</p> <p>And that reminded me of a story that I heard towards the end of the second day, as we were looking at the cups that were so generously provided to drink peppermint tea. A man from Pakistan came to me and he said</p>	<p>they shared no language in common they could understand each other perfectly well.</p> <p>[Translation, communication is beyond words is the bridge]</p> <p>5. The woman from Peru who took a risk. She was at the threshold of our tent, uncertain of whether to step in, would she be understood, would she speak our language. We invite her in ('to our shame we do not speak Spanish') and by chance someone already in the tent is there and offers to translate, so through him we hear the creation myths of Peru which are used to teach the young, through tradition, the values of custodianship of the land</p> <p>[Taking risks, openness to experience is the bridge]</p> <p>6. The story made in our tent which fused two stories of keeping curiosity and openness alive in the young children, into the story of a young boy learning to drum, using all kinds of materials, experimenting, wanting to make people dance.</p> <p>Pause, to refill cups with peppermint tea.</p>
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'Those cups remind me of Kissakhani, a bazaar, a market. Now, in the 18th century, late 18th and early 19th century there was, on the silk route between Europe and Asia, a bazaar called Kissakhani. He told that Khani in Urdu means telling and Kissa are the stories that they tell over green tea. So Kissakhani was the storytellers' bazaar. People would come from miles to come and share knowledge, tell the stories of their adventures, their experiences, and he said 'and even now, today, even now that the silk route is no more, this one remnant, Kissakhani, in Peshawar still remains as a place where people meet to share experiences and knowledge.

As all of the tellers packed up and left the structure of glass and steel, they turned to give it one last look. And what they saw were the vapours, the strings of memories hanging in the air of knowledge shared and experiences shared and things learned, and as they walked away, each person carried something new in their heart.

Ah, using the cups reminds me of the man from Pakistan who wrote in our storybook, the one who said these cups reminded him of the Kissakhani, the storytelling fairs of the silk route. Khani means telling, and kissa means long legends. A toast to the kissa khani.

All the travellers are now packed and ready to go, and they depart, leaving behind in the air the trace of memory and laughter, and as they go they are connected in some way, with an invisible thread or chord to the memory of what they have dared to share.