

The power of song, music and narrative practice
A workshop with David Denborough
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What sustains us during hard times?

1. Please describe something (a particular value, belief, skill or knowledge) that sustains you during hard times.
2. Share a story of a time when this special value, belief, skill or knowledge has made a difference to you or to others.
3. Please speak the history of this skill, value or belief. How did you learn this? Who did you learn it from? Or who did you learn it with?
4. Is this linked in some way to any particular groups, family, communities or cultural histories of which you are a part?

Rescue people's particular words and phrases. Listen for metaphors, word pictures, and descriptions that relate to all the senses (sound, touch, taste, sight).

To richly describe the influence of music and song

- Think of a song or piece of music that sustains you through difficult times, spurs you to action, or is a holder of significant treasured memory
- What does this song or music offer in your life?
- What is the history of this? What is the history of your relationship with this song/music?
- Which particular aspects of this song / music are significant (melody, lyrics, sentiment, rhythm etc)?
- What does this song resonate with in your life? What treasured values, sentiments, aesthetics does it resonate with? Have these always been important to you? Where did they come from?
- What images does this music / song set off in your mind?
- What sensations does this music / song evoke in your body?
- Are any of the other senses relevant to you when you listen or think about this song/music?
- Does this song /music evoke any significant people or places?
- Does it transport you in time or place? If so, how?
- How and when do you turn to this song? What skills have you developed in turning to it, in listening to it? Do you listen to it differently at different times?

Or

Linking hopes and values to music and song

- Identify a particular hope or value that is important to you, that you wish to carry forth in your life.
- Share a short story about why this hope or value is significant to you.
- Are there any songs or pieces of music that could represent this hope or value? What would be the soundtrack to this particular hope or value?
- Why would you choose this as the soundtrack?
- Which particular aspects of this song / music are significant in your choice (melody, lyrics, sentiment, rhythm, your history of connection to the song /music etc)? Why?
- How long has this particular hope or value been important to you? Where/whom/what experience did it come from?
- Would you have chosen the same soundtrack when it first became important to you? If not, what might you have chosen then?
- If you were to make a film clip to represent this hope or value, what images would accompany the music? Where would you film it?

Some key themes of collective narrative practice

1. As we listen to and seek to respond to the stories that individuals and groups share with us, we can conceive of these stories as representing not only personal experience, but also the effects of broader social issues.
2. No matter the degree of hardship, trauma or desolation, individuals, groups and communities will be *responding* to the situations they are in. There will be initiatives they are taking to try to reduce or redress the harm and/or to care for and protect others.
3. Rather than bringing our own initiatives to work within these communities, our role instead can be to create contexts in which people's own initiatives and healing knowledges are noticed and more richly described. This includes unearthing the skills, values, hopes and dreams that are implicit in people's responses to hardship, and the histories of these in the lives of individuals, cultures and communities.
4. Once these local initiatives, skills and values are acknowledged, we can seek out a relevant audience to whom these will be resonant. Usually, this involves other individuals/groups who are experiencing similar or related hardship - others who are affected by similar social issues.
5. It then becomes possible to enable those who are struggling with the effects of hardship to make meaningful contributions to the lives of others who are also struggling. In turn, this experience of making a contribution to others can lead to an increased sense of personal/collective agency.
6. People's responses to hardship and trauma are forms of local social action. By acknowledging these, by more richly describing them, and by creating an ever increasing sense of personal/collective agency, this makes it possible for people's initiatives to become linked, and for further actions to be taken. These actions may be in relation to reclaiming their lives from effects of trauma/hardship and/or in relation to preventing further harm or injustice to themselves, their community or others.
7. The generation and performance of 'local folk culture' can reinvigorate local healing knowledges and local social action. If rich descriptions of people's skills and knowledges in dealing with hardship can be transformed into local cultural mediums (written word, spoken word, song, film, dance, poetry, celebration) this makes many things possible. It can enable people to perform, witness and share within ceremonies of re-definition of identity. This process of cultural creativity can also contribute to the sustenance and reinvigoration of the language of inner life. When engaged with collectively, this process can be sustaining of what Victor Turner described as 'communitas' and importantly, of local social action.
8. Throughout this process, we can deliberately work for what Paulo Freire referred to as 'the invention of unity in diversity'. There is a constant responsibility to ensure that the generation of connectedness or 'communitas' is not accompanied by the development of new forms of normalising judgement. These approaches seek to resurrect diversity in everyday life by consistently acknowledging the rich diversity of people's skills, knowledges, values and hopes for life.
9. Following Freire we can approach this work with a broad view and a long timeline. Our task becomes to generate possibilities for those affected by social issues to make meaningful contributions to others also affected by these social issues, in ways that provide relief from the effects of trauma *and* that build both personal and collective agency.

Further reading

Denborough, D. (2008) *Collective narrative practice: responding to individuals, groups and communities who have experienced trauma*. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications

Denborough, D. (2002) 'Community song writing and narrative practice' *Clinical Psychology* Issue 17 September Available c/o <http://www.dulwichcentre.com.au/Community%20song%20writing.htm>