

ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES

Source

This activity was developed by Oana Nestian Sandu and Isabelle Tibi.

Themes

- ▶ Culture
- ▶ Social and political context
- ▶ Differences in perspectives
- ▶ Stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination

Other topics addressed: narratives, storytelling, non-dominant groups

Competences addressed

- ▶ Attitudes: openness and curiosity towards diversity; tolerance of ambiguity
- ▶ Knowledge of culture, history and politics; knowledge of human rights; knowledge of stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination
- ▶ Skills: critical thinking

Complexity : Level 4

Group size : 12 to 30 people

Time : 120 minutes

Objectives

- ▶ To develop participants' understanding of stereotypes, how they are perpetuated and how they can be broken
- ▶ To reflect upon the way in which various groups are (re)presented in the public discourse
- ▶ To develop participants' understanding of dominant narratives and skills for developing alternative narratives.

Materials

Handout "A framework for the creation of alternative narratives", flip charts and/or projector for the presentation of the group work.

Preparation

Familiarise yourself with the storytelling model presented briefly in the handout below.

Choose a newspaper article or a TV news story, a documentary or other media product (recording, etc.) that presents a stock story (see definition in handout below) about a group of people relevant to the topic of your training, such as migrants.

This activity can be preceded by the activity "Every picture tells a story". Understanding how our perception is shaped by the (limited) information we have helps participants understand the relevance of different story types and the importance of developing alternative narratives to break down stereotypes.

Instructions

1. Tell participants that you will work together to identify different types of stories presented in our societies, which either promote or combat stereotypes.
2. Briefly present the storytelling project model described in the handout below.
3. Ask participants to read the article or to watch the video you selected, which presents a stock story about (for example) migrants.

4. Ask participants to identify what type of story the article or video presents. Ask them to identify specific aspects that make them think it is a stock story. Engage participants in a brief discussion about the main stereotypes presented in the story and how stereotypes are, in general, promoted in public and private spaces through the stories we tell.
5. Distribute the handouts and ask participants to form groups of 4-5 people and discuss what other stories on migration exist in our societies.
 - What are the concealed stories of migration? What do we learn from these stories?
 - What are the resistance stories of migration? What are people (and young people) doing to challenge the stock story?
 - Can you produce a transformational story on migration?
6. Bring participants back into a big group and ask them to share their stories. They can present the transformational story in a role play, a sketch, a manifesto or any other creative way they envisage.
7. Proceed with the debriefing.

Debriefing and evaluation

- ▶ Was it easy to agree on what the stock story was? What about concealed and resistance stories?
- ▶ How did you come up with the transformational story? Did everyone agree?
- ▶ How can these stories help us understand discrimination and injustice?
- ▶ What can we do to challenge the stock stories and to rebalance power in societies, to make them more inclusive and respectful of everyone's dignity?
- ▶ What can be the role of young people in developing stories that challenge the dominant narrative? What about the role of politicians and the media?

Tips for facilitators

Be prepared to give more examples from each category of story, in case participants need them to better understand the concepts.

You might consider presenting the pyramid of hate as part of this activity, either in the beginning or at the end, in order to highlight the importance of challenging stereotypes and addressing situations of injustice whenever they occur and in relation to any group.

During the group work you can check on participants and see if they have questions regarding the different types of stories.

Variations

You can choose a different group, which might be more relevant to your participants, such as Roma, sexual minorities, Muslims, etc.

Alternatively, you can start by presenting a resistance story to participants and then ask them to identify the stock story, concealed story and transformational story.

You could also ask participants to find online news videos and analyse them according to the various stories, or recreate the news video in different versions, focusing on other types of stories from the one presented in the original video.

If the transformational stories are presented on paper they can be collected on posters and exhibited in the room.

Suggestions for follow-up

This activity can be followed by the activity "In other words", which focuses on rewriting biased media articles. In this flow, after analysing different types of stories, participants can engage more actively in combining the stories and discussing how an unbiased, diverse and intercultural perspective can be presented in the media.

Handouts



A framework for the creation of alternative narratives

According to the storytelling project model (Bell 2010), there are four types of stories we can find when analysing issues such as exclusion and social injustice.

- ▶ **Stock stories (or dominant narratives)** are told by the dominant group(s) and they are common in public life, they explain how things are or should be. They could include generalisations, stereotypes and judgments about different groups and tend to simplify reality. They also avoid reflection on structural or systemic factors in a situation.

Example – An article on prisons may present inmates of a certain ethnicity as more prone to violence once they are out of prison and as a risk to society.

- ▶ **Concealed stories** are not stories we hear often in public life. They challenge the stock stories, and offer different explanations for certain situations. They may include critical analyses of historical and social science data to illustrate how oppression shapes experience and lack of opportunities in society.

Example – An article on prisons may include different examples of life paths after prison. The article may make an analysis of how prison life affects chances in life after prison. It explains how discrimination may affect access to services after prison.

- ▶ **Resistance stories** demonstrate how groups resisted oppression and call into question the images we often find in the media. For example, stories of people who have challenged and resisted an unjust status quo.

Example – A report involving testimonies of former and current prison inmates, community workers and employers, all trying to remove barriers to inmates' access to jobs or educational programmes, could be an example of a resistance story.

- ▶ **Transformational stories** devise new ways of acting, and invite people to think of inclusive and just alternatives. They energise change and enable the imagining of new possibilities.

Example – An article on how a prison was redesigned to support life after prison, involving the inmates in the process themselves, could be a transformational story. The article could offer a new perspective on the problem, which respects the dignity of inmates and leads to just solutions.