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Understanding the transformative potential of sharing personal stories: A process model of narrative storytelling

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Storytelling

Storytelling is an interpersonal exchange between a person telling a story and a person listening to the story (Riessman, 2003).

Stories have a beginning, middle and end. This temporal structure or plot of storytelling is defined as the narrative. (McAdams, 2001; Mattingly, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1996).

The relational experience of telling and sharing life experiences or stories is described as the storytelling, or the sharing of life stories or personal stories (Polkinghorne, 1996; Gergen & Gergen, 2014).

Storytelling is recognised as a meaning-making process. Through sharing stories we make sense of ourselves, integrating past experiences with the new, creating a sense of coherence (Adler, 2012; McAdams, 2001).

Telling and sharing stories can facilitate a shift to more 'agentic' narratives (Polkinghorne, 1996) creating new stories or possibilities; story making (Mattingly, 1994).

Brain injury context: emerging evidence

Scoping literature review of the use of personal narrative approaches in brain injury rehabilitation. Review retrieved 28 articles: TBI (15); ABI (13)

Variety of personal narrative approaches : visual (film, photography, digital media), spoken (storytelling, life review, biographic narrative, life thread) , written (free writing, songwriting, poetry). Variation in the implementation of approaches: individual, group, duration.

Emerging trend of the use of visual methods such as digital stories or photography shared with an audience.

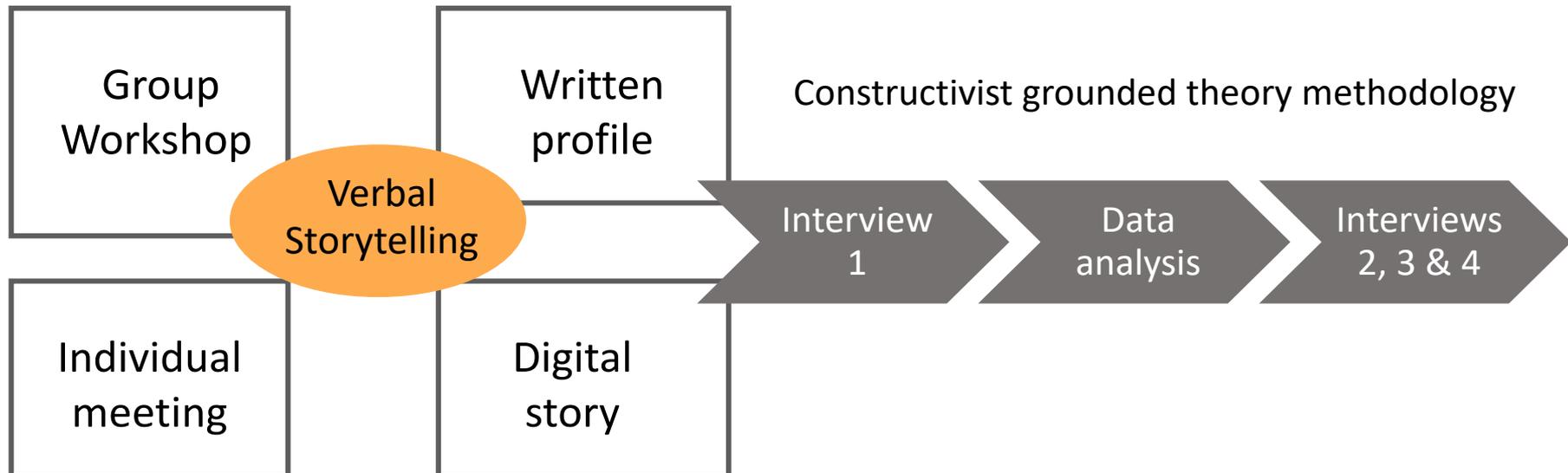
Consistent with the established view of storytelling as a meaning making process, the retrieved articles found that storytelling supported positive identity re-construction following brain injury: self expression, communication, validation.

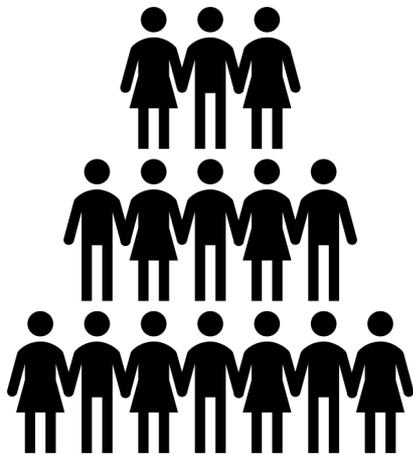
Findings of literature review are best considered in the context that survivors of brain injury frequently experience loss of sense of self, and social isolation. While holistic rehabilitation seeks to address these challenges, storytelling offers much potential.

What is the experience and impact of narrative storytelling following brain injury?

Summer Foundation storytelling program seeks to understand the lived experiences of adults with disability who are living in aged care or are at risk of entering aged care.

ADVOCACY IMPACT





Participants

Storytellers (5 Female & 3 Male)

- Adults ranging in age from 30's to early 60's
- Living in aged care (3), living independently with support (5)
- Moderate to severe brain injury
- Traumatic brain injury (2), stroke (6)
- Time post injury ranged from 3 to 18 years
- Communication impairments (dysarthria and/or used speech generating device)

Facilitators (5 Female & 1 Male)

- Range of facilitation experience: 6 months- 10 years
- Diverse backgrounds: health care (3), journalism (1), community development (2)

Findings: Storyteller & facilitator perspective

Sharing & helping

[my story] is for me to let people know... I am not the only person going through this (Robert)

Feeling heard

He [the facilitator] treated me like a human being. I think he listened well (Daniel)

Releasing emotions

I just wanted to get it out there...unburden...off my chest (Bessie)

Re-visiting the story

Strengths-based advocacy

Collaborative partnership

Investing in storytelling relationship

We give ourselves time to build relationships

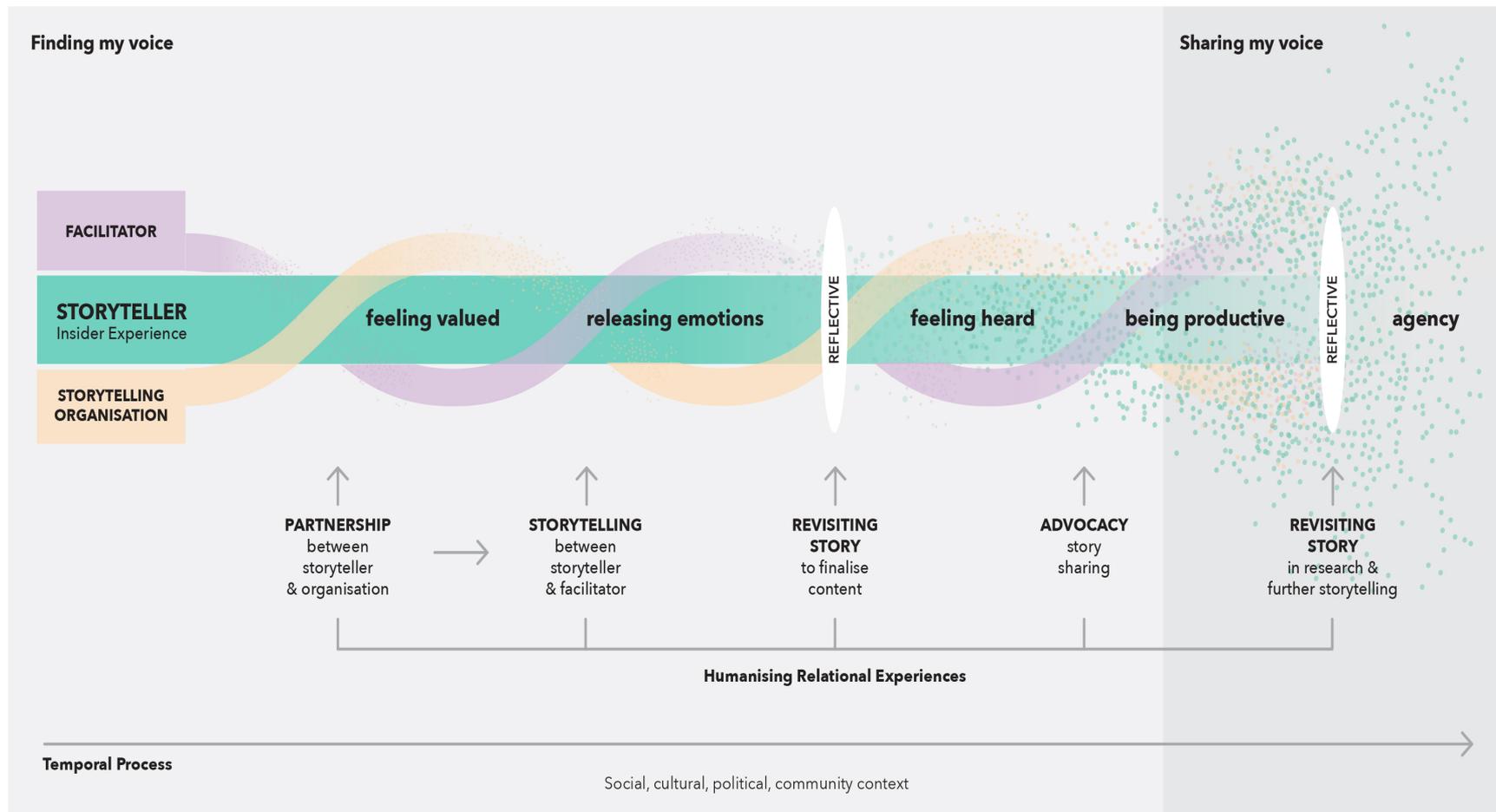
Finding the authentic story

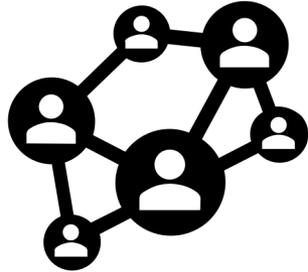
It is a genuine sense of wanting to know ... we really care where people are at...curiosity...compassion...need to listen and reflect...and self awareness

Honoring the story

I am trying to stay true to the person

A process model of narrative storytelling





Key learnings: the essence of storytelling

- Storytelling is a humanising relational experience
- Storytelling is an opportunity for meaningful and productive occupational engagement
- Storytelling enables personal reflection and learning about self

D'Cruz, K., Douglas, J., & Serry, T. (2020). Sharing stories of lived experience: A qualitative analysis of the intersection of experiences between storytellers with acquired brain injury and storytelling facilitators. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, doi: 10.1111/0308022619898085

Storytelling is a humanising relational experience

Findings

- Storytelling positions the storyteller at the centre of their story
- Storytelling builds relationship experiences
- Storytelling enables entry into the insider experience
- Storytelling fosters emotional sharing

Recommendations

- Create a comfortable and safe story sharing environment
- Ensure storytelling end products reflect the person with authenticity
- Take time to listen & invest in relationship
- Sharing stories builds community connections
- Listen authentically and be curious about past, present and future story
- Be prepared to attend to emotional work
- Show care and compassion
- Find strengths and potential in challenging emotional experiences

Storytelling as meaningful & productive occupation

Findings

- Talking about lived experiences is meaningful for storyteller
- Listening to stories about lived experiences, values these experiences
- Sharing stories with the community empowers storytellers and enables meaningful, productive contribution to society

Recommendations

- Embed storytelling opportunities into rehabilitation
- Privilege storytelling from other roles that alter nature of relationship
- Frame listening as gathering information about values, preferences and needs
- Be strengths-focused
- Create end products to be shared ie/ digital stories
- Identify with storytellers a meaningful aim and audience for sharing stories

Storytelling enables personal reflection & learning

Findings

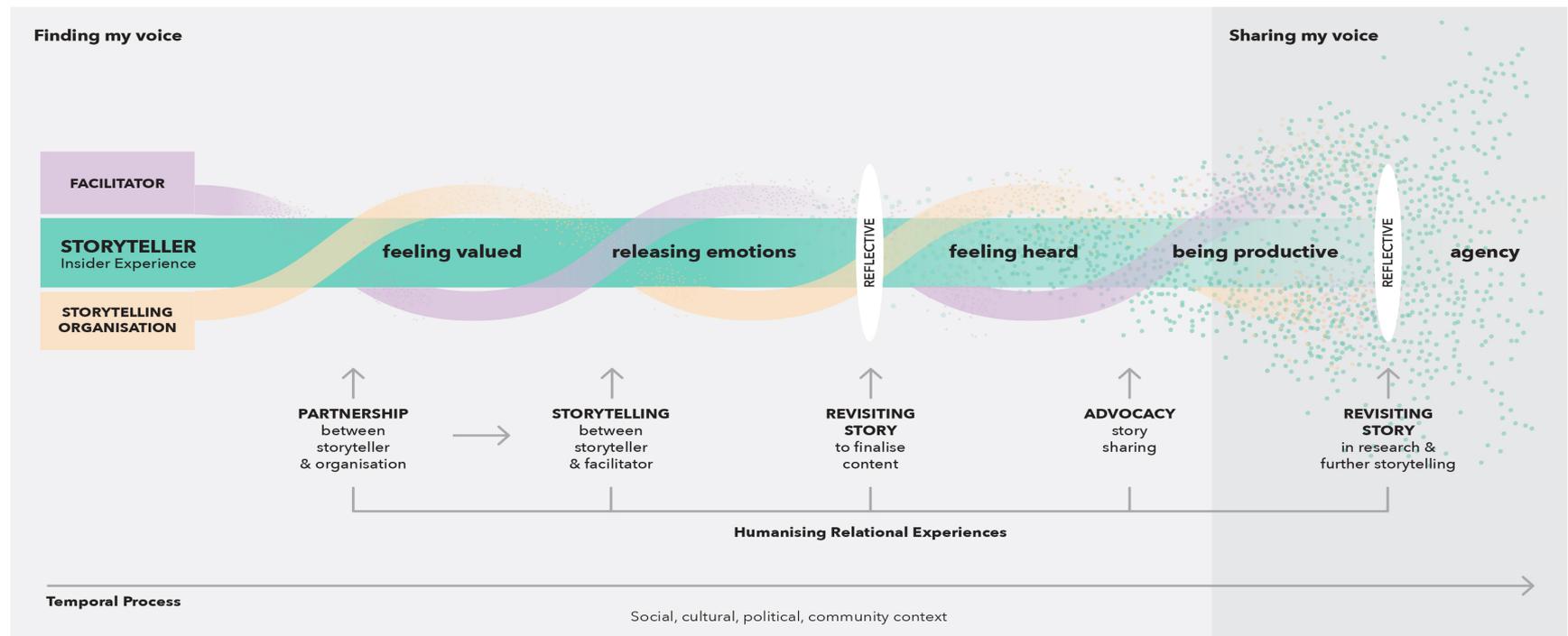
- Narrative structure of personal stories fosters personal reflection
- Reflecting through storytelling can be scaffolded for people with cognitive and communication impairments
- Revisiting stories magnifies the therapeutic impact of storytelling

Recommendations

- Support reflection with active and agile facilitation skills
- Take time and offer repeated opportunities for shorter storytelling sessions
- Consider best modality of storytelling for each person
- Find ways to hear stories of people with brain injury and not only close others
- Embed opportunities to revisit stories
- Enable opportunities for storytellers to update stories in line with recovery, goal attainment and life changes
- Read or view stories together

Transformative potential of narrative storytelling: reconstructing a positive and agentic sense of self

A process model of
narrative storytelling



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