**A Story-Based Reflection** (75+ minutes, depending on closing)

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Originally created for the Concordia College women’s soccer team’s 2011 international trip to Thailand and Cambodia, the primary goal behind this approach to group reflection is to encourage individuals to use personal narrative to reflect on a shared experience. This grounding in narrative is intended to aid individuals in recognizing their own points-of-view. Further reflection can deepen understanding of service, diversity, vocation, etc. Feel free to adapt in any way you see fit!

**A Suggested Process (Outline):**

1. The group starts with a moment of silence, stillness and breath. (2-3 minutes)
2. The reflection facilitator shares a “factual” outline of the shared experience. (2-3 minutes)
3. Idea of personal narrative is introduced. (1 minute)
4. Participants are asked to consider narrative questions in silence (providing structure for sharing personal narratives). (5-8 minutes)
5. Participants are encouraged to remember their story’s title, its beginning, its key character/s, its key moment/s of insight or change and its ending. (1 minute)
6. The group gets into partnerships consisting of a storyteller and a listener/questioner. (15-20 minutes)
7. Partners switch telling/listening-asking roles. (15-20 minutes)
8. (Optional) Unique perspectives are named and affirmed. (2-3 minutes)
9. The reconvened group names compassionate questions. (10-15 minutes)
10. The group either spends time with compassionate questions or finds closure in naming them out loud.
11. The facilitator has a chance to name an overarching question, reminder or reflection. (2-3 minutes)
12. The group ends with a moment of silence, stillness and breath. (2-3 minutes)
13. The facilitator thanks the participants for their contribution to the conversation.

**A Suggested Process (Detailed Facilitator Guide):**

1. Start with a moment of silence, stillness and breath.
2. The reflection facilitator shares a “factual” outline of the shared experience.

🡪Keep it simple and as “objective” as possible.

🡪Do not comment on the action of the experience (i.e. naming the “best”

part of the experience).

🡪Keep the events in chronological order.

🡪Focus on the shared events but acknowledge times when the whole group

was not together (i.e. “And then we went for lunch in our small groups.”).

🡪Consider your power to shape where people’s attention is drawn based on where you start and end the events.

1. Suggest that each individual’s experience was unique. Introduce the idea of narrative, that we tell stories in order to make meaning of our experiences.
2. Ask the following questions as everyone considers their answers (silently):
   1. In your own telling of this shared story, what is the key moment or moments?
      1. This is a moment of *insight* or *change*. (Note: My shift away from a conflict/resolution storytelling framework here is purposeful.)
   2. In your telling of this story, which character or characters are involved in this insight or change?
      1. How are they involved with the insight or change?
      2. How do the involved characters relate to one another?
   3. In your telling of this story, at what point does it begin? At which moment does it end?
   4. In your telling of this story, what is its title?
3. Invite participants to remember their own story’s title, its beginning, its key character/s, its key moment/s of insight or change and its ending.
4. Ask the group to get into partners. Each duo will consist of a storyteller and a listener/questioner.
   1. Give the storyteller the following encouragements:
      1. Remember the elements of your story: title, beginning, key characters, key moment/s of insight or change and ending.
      2. Tell your story *as if you are back in the moment of its happening*. If you did something or saw something or wondered something *at that time* it can be part of your story. If you did, saw or wondered something *later*…that’s not part of the story that you’re telling now.
   2. Once the listener/questioner has heard their partner’s story they are to ask two kinds of questions in order to more fully understand it. Both should be asked and in this order:
      1. Story questions (aka archaeological dig) ask for clarity within the time and place of the story’s happening. Here are some examples:
         1. Was there anyone else there in that moment? How did they respond?
         2. How did that cause you to feel at that time?
         3. In that moment, how did you think the story would end?
      2. Reflection questions ask the storyteller to consider how they are experiencing the story *now*, after it’s already happened. Here are some examples:
         1. If you could now ask one character any question you wanted, what question would you ask her/him?
         2. What does your story make you curious about?
         3. Does this story relate to any of your other lifestories? How?
5. Ask the partners to switch telling/listening-asking roles.
6. A possible next step is for each partner to consider and name one unique characteristic of how their partner experienced and/or shared her/his story. Here are some examples: “You described with a lot of detail. I could picture things that I didn’t even see when I was there.” Or, “This experience caused you to feel a lot of different strong emotions.”
7. Reconvene as a whole group.
   1. A moment of silence, stillness and breath.
   2. What compassionate question emerged from this experience? Remind the group of Parker Palmer’s compassionate question, including…
      1. It is brief and to the point
      2. It expands rather than restricts

🡪Instead of, Is she an orphan? Try, What did we learn about the lives of the team members?

* + 1. It does not presume a “right” answer

🡪Instead of, How could this country become more democratic? Try, How could this group of people have more voice speak on behalf of their well-being?

* + 1. It is motivated by care and genuine curiosity

🡪Instead of, Why can’t she just pick herself up and get herself out of that stupid situation? Try, What could be involved in causing her to remain in her situation?

* 1. Encourage each participant to come up with a compassionate question in silence.
  2. Ask the group to share their questions out loud. A suggestion is to thank each individual for her/his question and then repeat it, using the individual’s name (i.e. Jon’s question is, What could be involved in causing her to remain in her situation?). Encourage simply listening to each question. Continue to share questions without discussing or attempting answers. (You could write the questions down, too, if that works well for you and your group. Writing may lead to better retention of more questions but I think it will also change the quality of listening.)

1. Once the questions have been shared you have at least three possible avenues for navigating this conversation towards closure:
   * 1. Ask everyone to choose one question to write down for further reflection later. This is the question that draws the strongest personal response or the question that keeps coming back, etc. Journals or further partner reflection could be used.
     2. Choose one question to discuss as a group. This could be the question that has the most energy around it or is most developmentally fitting or is the most urgent, etc.
     3. Take a break. During the break you (facilitator) consider the questions and look for common themes. Organize some or all of the questions in such a way that a group discussion can weave in most of the major themes. Further discussion will take time!
2. If you have a central realization, reminder, encouragement or question to share, share it (i.e. We’ve been spending time with our stories in order to recognize our own unique points-of-view).
3. End with a moment of silence, stillness and breath.
4. Thank the participants for their contribution.