EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES (EiE) COMMUNITY

# EiE Storytelling: Amplifying Voices in Crisis Contexts

*Monthly Call | 9 April, 2024*

### About the Education in Emergencies (EiE) Community Calls

Staff, alumni and fellows from across the Teach For All network come together regularly to share ideas, solutions and resources to support students and communities impacted by emergency situations. If you'd like to become a Member of the EiE Community, receive the monthly EiE Newsletter and be invited for future calls, please complete this short form!

### Community resources

- Insights from the last EiE Community call
- Register for the next EiE Community call
- Join the EiE Facebook Community

## Key insights from this call



**MINDSETS**

- Why Tell Stories
- Internal Barriers
- External Barriers
- Overcoming These Roadblocks



**STRUCTURE**

- Emotional Impact
- Cause and Effect
- Personal Narration
- Ending with Reflection and Hope
- Centring Voices of Communities



**COMMS PLANNING**

- Why storytelling is important to EiE work
- Storytelling Platforms
- In Bound vs Out Bound

## Insights on Mindsets

**Why Tell Stories**

A story is the use of narratives to explore identities, share values and build connection. Stories are powerful sense-making mechanisms. But they are only as powerful as the clarity we bring, powered by our core values, our identities and journey of our communities. We tell stories to make sense of ourselves: to ask questions of our identity; to contemplate change within ourselves; to expand our view of the world. We also tell stories to make sense of the world: the world as we see it; the world as we live it; the world as we want it to be. We also tell stories as an act of leadership; to question the status quo and reimagine the world around us. Storytelling is a generous and courageous act, standing up for injustices, living into our values. The Ghanaian proverb of Sankofa 'we can only move forward if we look back'.

The job of a storyteller is to make a difference in the world - and so this act doesn't happen when everything is fine, it happens in times of dread, when things are broken down. People who have changed the world didn't tell stories from a place of comfort,

but from prison cells, hospital beds, exile, etc. Huge possibility that comes from it, by inspiring others.

Way to make your voice heard and raise awareness of a forgotten crisis. Helping students and teachers be and feel heard. Stories are a way to help our organisation achieve its vision and goals, by bringing more stakeholders closer to our work. Storytelling is not for experts, it is a natural human activity - children are the best storytellers! We often record stories in our hearts and minds, but usually forget the source. But the stories remain with us, their roots grow in us and they create havoc within us or ignite a transformation. *'Until The Lion Learns How To Write, Every Story Will Glorify The Hunter.'*

**Internal Barriers**

Storytelling is inherently a scary venture. Especially as the types of stories we tell for social impact often involve vulnerability. It's opening ourselves up to others. Wondering what people would say about you. I haven't got an important story to tell, what would I share? I'm not good enough. Hard to put ourselves out into the world. Storytelling opens us up for criticism. Not liking appearing in public. Fear of rejection, judgment or misunderstanding. Not feeling like the right person to share a story about an emergency that others are impacted by. Concern that a story doesn't victimize, label, or romanticize the impact of an emergency. Finding your voice as authenticity is key, instead of imitating someone else.

**External Barriers**

Cultural barriers of it not seeming modest to telling personal narratives about your work or it being seen as self-promotion. I don't have the skills to tell the stories in an engaging way, or how to make narrative one of empowerment. I don't know how to use the platforms or technology. I don't have good images or videos to accompany the words. I don't have the time to tell stories, I'm too busy. Countries which have a history of civil war or regional conflicts, may have deep scars and intergenerational trauma, which may make people hesitant to revisit or share such stories, especially if they fear retraumatization or retaliation. Might be dangerous to share certain stories in some contexts (e.g. why certain groups block girls' education). Censorship where the storyteller lives, or fear of political repercussions. Concern that putting crisis-affected communities at the center of a story could lead to their revictimization.

**Overcoming These Roadblocks**

Focus on the positive outcome and what will be achieved if particular stories are shared - impact on students, teachers, or people who aren't steeped in our mission. Helping the storyteller to navigate any reactions that come from their act of storytelling. Focus on the message and practice being vulnerable, rather than telling the story perfectly. By acknowledging people's stories, they become more confident, let go of their limiting mindsets and become storytellers on their own. Nurture a culture where people feel safe to share their voices. Remember we don't tell stories for ourselves, it's not for self-promotion or personal progression, but for improving our communities. Fear is our compass when telling stories - maybe the things we're afraid of the most are the things we should be doing. Remembering that your message is more important than the perceptions and fears you have!

## Insights on Structure

**Emotional Impact**

Choice of words that set a strong emotional tone, draws people into your world. Make the readers think and feel a certain way. Communicate the rawest parts of yourself, authentically and effectively. This can all be conveyed through sentence structure, sentence length, word choice, vivid descriptions, punctuation, syntax, story flow, etc. Don't just describe what has happened without saying what was felt. Slow down and be intentional to bring readers into your world.

**Cause and Effect**

Every story needs cause and effect. If you introduce an event that's happened, you have to talk about the response. Often events cause three levels of change - internal (e.g. sense of resilience; personal challenges faced by students), external (e.g. people running, being displaced; closure of schools) and existential (e.g. home is lost).

**Personal Narration**

Stories told from personal perspectives are more relatable and engaging. Share your own experiences, thoughts and emotions so the reader feels like they're going through the events alongside the storyteller. What does it look, smell, feel like? This takes courage, not easy to put yourself out into the world, but the impact is so powerful. Images are another powerful way to elevate personal narratives.

**Ending with Reflection and Hope**

Despite the story being about an emergency situation, it's important to still give a sense of hope, and talk about the actions that lead to that hope in the future. Important to end a story with a resolution. E.g. Reflecting on your journey, the growth of the solution despite the adversity, hope for a better future. Resolve some of the questions that will have come to readers' minds. This reflective aspect adds depth to the narrative and leaves the reader with a sense of optimism, despite the challenging circumstances. Stories are about the creation and resolution of tensions.

**Centring Voices of Communities**

People who've been directly affected by crises can provide the world with firsthand accounts and insights into their experiences, offering a more accurate portrayal of the challenges they face. Their perspectives add authenticity, depth and nuance to the narrative, helping to avoid misinterpretations or misrepresentations that may occur when outsiders speak on their behalf. Amplifying the voices of affected communities empowers them to reclaim their narratives and assert their agency. It acknowledges their expertise and resilience, fostering a sense of dignity and respect. It also shifts the power dynamics, allowing them to speak for themselves rather than being spoken for by external parties. Perspectives from lived experience of an emergency provide valuable context and understanding of the various dynamics at play during emergencies. This helps readers, policymakers, and practitioners grasp the complexities of the situation. When stories center the voices of those directly impacted, they tend to resonate more deeply with audiences, fostering empathy, understanding, and a sense of shared humanity. This can lead to increased engagement, support, and solidarity for addressing the challenges faced by crisis-affected communities.

## Insights on Comms Planning

**Why storytelling is important to EiE work**

Storytelling on EiE work helps to bring visibility to forgotten crises that need a light shining on them, as well as dignity, voice and agency to the impacted communities. Storytelling also helps to also provide a different narrative to what is portrayed in the mainstream media, which is often through a deficit lens. Using the 'TAP' approach can help you enter existing EiE global conversations or topics. T stands for topic - listen out and scan the ecosystem for what topics are most present for people in the humanitarian sector. A stands for activity - use your storytelling to show the world what is your unique take on that topic, what different view you bring to the table. P stands for product - how your idea can help solve the issue, or look at it from a better angle.

**Storytelling Platforms**

With the rise of social media we've seen the democratization of storytelling. We no longer need an Editor-in-Chief to give permission and platforms to tell certain stories. People can now use their own spaces (e.g. own websites, podcasts, blog, social media channels) without a gatekeeper limiting their voice. But with this, comes the competition with many voices around the world. It's important to remember that authentic stories always capture the attention and hearts of people. The place you choose to tell your story defines who you're trying to speak and connect to - the container is part of the message, and the medium through which you choose to tell your story colours it and gives it a unique character.

For example, Twitter/X is most often used for breaking news, opinions and short conversations. It's a platform that thrives on brevity and immediacy, which is great for EiE - sharing what crises are happening right now, and centring voices of the impacted community members. Whereas Linkedin is more of a professional networking space, a place for thought-leadership and for building valuable connections, community and recognition. There is a focus on conversations where people can engage with you on topics you care about. Users 'provide value' through their stories, which inform, inspire or entertain. On the other hand, Instagram and Tik Tok are more visual storytelling platforms which thrive on creative or entertaining expressions. EiE storytelling here can focus on sharing images or videos that tell stories, with compelling captions or context. This is an informal platform to capture the Gen Z audience.

More formal written pieces can help create trust for EiE topics we talk about - for example, the act of writing for a newspaper can be symbolic as they are trusted, credible spaces, which can influence others. Podcasts are another way to reach a wider audience. They can be deeply reflective which require us to reflect on our own experiences and work, and give you access to a specific audience who are already interested in what you have to say.

**In-Bound vs Out-Bound**

If you're consistent with your EiE storytelling, people can rely on you to speak. If through storytelling you build a reputation for having ideas and insights on a topic, in-bound invitations will start coming through to you to speak on panels or write pieces. When sending out-bound requests and pitching your storytelling ideas, you can share with organisers that you know they have an event or publication coming up on a certain topic, and that you think your voice could bring useful insights to the audience. You can share a draft blog post or session plan with them. By hooking your

pitch onto their event or upcoming Global Day, you can show how your story is timely.

## Key Resources

1. Workshop slidedeck
2. Padlet for 'What holds us back from telling stories?' and 'How do we overcome these limiting mindsets or roadblocks that hold us back from telling stories?'

**Attendees dialed in from:**

Enseña Ecuador; Enseña Perú; Enseña por Colombia; Enseña por Guatemala; Enseña por México; Teach First; Teach For Afghanistan; Teach For Armenia; Teach For Austria; Teach For Bangladesh; Teach For Burkina Faso; Teach For India; Teach for Kenya; Teach For Lebanon; Teach For Liberia; Teach For Nigeria; Teach For Pakistan; Teach For The Philippines; Teach For Poland; Teach For Uganda; Teach For Ukraine; Teach For Viet Nam; Teach For Zimbabwe;