

GETTING STARTED: A DANGEROUS IDEAS WORKSHEET

“Curiouser and curiouser!” cried Alice
(Lewis Carroll)

GETTING STARTED

It is hard not to be *curious* when working in General Practice. Whether it is something a patient says, a colleague notices, or the system asks us to do. But how do we turn our thoughts and reflections into ideas that we can work with, learn from and use to stimulate improvement and change?

The first step is often to *focus* what we have seen, heard or thought into an *idea or question* that we can look at more closely.

Getting the question right is one of the hardest bits of scholarship – of being a WISE GP. One way to get started is to get other people on board.

To do this, we first need to share our thinking and *tell a story*. A good story is a hook – that helps other people to be interested in, curious about, bothered by the things that we are bothered by. By sharing stories, we welcome other people to help us develop ideas and so turn curiosity in to action.

Getting started means learning to tell stories.

INTRODUCING SAPC DANGEROUS IDEAS SOAPBOX

At its annual conference, the Society for Academic Primary Care (SAPC) has invited people to tell their stories of being curious¹ through its Dangerous Ideas Soapbox.²

SAPC describe a Dangerous Idea as one that challenges current thinking and includes a commitment to doing something. An idea isn’t dangerous if it stays in your head...

Many WISE ideas have been put forward – with topics that have ranged from antibiotic resistance to medical school training, from crowd-funding research to championing palliative care. You can read more on the SAPC website.²

¹ Or frustrated, amused, annoyed, excited... ideas that spur us on to what to do something different.

² <https://sapc.ac.uk/article/sapc-dangerous-ideas-soapbox>

Each speaker gets just two minutes to pitch their idea to an SAPC conference audience. There is an opportunity to ask some questions. But essentially people need to quickly hook the audience and convince them they have the best dangerous idea for the academic community to take forward.

Telling a strong story in a short time is a real skill. SAPC encourages presenters to use their Dangerous Ideas worksheet to help prepare their story.³

The worksheet is based on the work of an American sociologist, Marshall Ganz.⁴ His goal is to help us tell stories that make people sit up and listen. If you read his work and then listen to almost any politician speaking at the moment, you will notice elements of this technique in the way they put together speeches. Essentially, he argues that every story must have 3 elements: a description of a problem, an outline of a solution, and a clear statement of what we need to do now. These are the steps we would encourage you to use to start writing your story.

THE WORKSHEET

The audience

This worksheet is designed to help you tell your story to an audience. So we need to start by working out who is your audience? Who needs to know about your idea – and who can help you turn your idea into an action. Will it be patients, other health professionals, policy makers, funders? Decide who you are trying to engage.

Getting in the lift

Now imagine you have just a brief spell of time with your audience. You have two minutes in the lift with the person you need to 'hook'. Or perhaps you might want to imagine that you have been asked to present a press briefing...

The key issue is that you have just a short time.

And the challenge is to use that short time to convince your audience that your idea matters.

When running workshops for SAPC members, we often use the example of: *You find yourself in a lift with Bill Gates travelling to the top floor... In two minutes, how would you persuade him to give you £1million to kick start your idea?*

Writing the story

Essentially involves answering the 3 questions posed by Marshall Ganz (see below). Start by writing a few notes under each heading:

³ And also runs workshops to help people develop ideas at a more leisurely pace.

⁴ <https://workingnarratives.org/article/public-narrative/>.

What is the problem?

What have you noticed that makes you curious (frustrated, excited etc) . And why does this matter?

What is your solution?

So how do we need to think or do things differently to start to address the problem...make changes?

What do we need to do now to take this forward?

And how can the audience be part of making this happen? How can I get involved with this...how is your problem now my problem too?

Developing the story

Once you've started to shape your ideas, try them out on a willing audience. Ask someone to listen to your pitch. Then get them to feedback to you – what did they hear? What was the key message they heard? Is this what you wanted them to hear? How do you need to amend your story to get your message across?

Remember, we are aiming for a clear story, which means having a focused message. And one that interests/is relevant to other people, so that they will come and work with us on our problem.

There is a lot of thinking work that goes in to getting a clear and engaging story. It will probably need several versions – tested on a range of people.

WHAT NEXT?

Once you have a focused story, you have a tool that can help you plan a project, build a team, apply for the resources you need to put plans in to action.

You might want to start by sharing thoughts with your local team and exploring ideas with them. Have a look at the other resources on the WISE GP website that might help with the next steps:

- Writing a Research Question worksheet: *how you can turn a story into a research project*
- Engaging with experts: *the WISE GP resources page has links through to Topic Experts as well as details of your local Ambassador – a contact in your local academic department who can help put you in touch. Or you might want to look at the list of Special Interest Groups within SAPC: <https://sapc.ac.uk/special-interest-groups>. Groups cover a wide range of topics with contact details for the group leads listed on the site. All of these people would be delighted to hear from you!*
- Sharing your ideas worksheet: *encourages you to think about different ways of telling your stories to a wider audience.*