



STORY BEHIND THE STORY

A STRATEGY FOR GETTING AT THE WHOLE TRUTH

A fundamental part of our vision of community problem-solving is based on the idea that there is always a lot more going on in any situation than we might think. Often, especially where urban community members are concerned, the surface is all that is attended to: urban men and women are judged for the jobs they hold, the way they talk, etc. From our research with writers in communities, we have developed a strategy that helps get at the deeper level of what's going on in a situation. It helps people tell the story behind the story so that others will understand.

The story that no one hears

You've seen the media images of low income workers—lack of work ethic, tardiness, and high turnover. But where are the positive stories of urban workers and their communities? Where is the story about how trying to find child care and transportation on a limited budget adds to the stresses of low-income work? These are the stories behind the story urban workers in at-risk communities that no one hears. But if no one hears these stories, then how will the problems be solved?

Getting the story behind the story is a strategy for going beyond merely telling WHAT happened, to telling WHY and HOW. It lets people see how you read that situation, what was going on in your mind, and what it meant to you.

Telling more

Here are some techniques and questions that you can ask to get the story behind the story about urban workers' ideas and experiences:

Ask yourself how your or others' experiences contrast with the popular images, ideas, and opinions about people in your community. Is what the media thinks about you the same thing that you *know* about yourself and your neighborhood?

Add revealing, specific details that tell how the situation looked or felt from your perspective.

Go into the minds of different people in your stories, and as they are talking, show what they are thinking to themselves as well.

Show the evidence behind your ideas -- just like you were cooking a special recipe: what are the *ingredients* behind your opinions, ideas, and knowledge?