

SEMINAR

Storytelling, Popular Education, and Community Development

Chris Cavanagh

Tuesday, December 2, 2008, 3:00 p.m.
OISE, 252 Bloor Street West, Room 2-286

www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca/communitydevelopment.html

Storytelling is one of the most widespread practices of human cultures and one that serves a remarkable variety of purposes. Of course stories entertain. But they also instruct, encode knowledge, record history, negotiate understandings, bring solace. They can also lull us to sleep or stir us to war, move us to compassion and sacrifice, or rationalize genocide.

Stories are powerful and their telling is always an act of intervention in the world. Unlike “narrative,” storytelling implies performance. And everyone performs stories all the time. The exchange of stories, the telling and re-telling is always an act of knowledge-making. Stories and narratives also have the remarkable aspect of being able to contain contradictory knowledge. Stories, no less than language itself, are multivalent, containing numerous, often incommensurate, meanings.

Researchers need to know how to listen for stories, to hear the contradictory understandings, to learn how to engage narrative knowing and to be able to use these narratives justly and with respect. This session will be a dialogue about storytelling and encourage participants to engage their own storytelling traditions and practices.

Chris Cavanagh is a storyteller and popular educator who uses storytelling in education, organizing and community development. He is a co-founder of the Catalyst Centre, a Toronto-based popular education worker co-operative that offers curriculum development and design and facilitation for non-profits, educational institutions, and trade unions. He has taught an annual graduate class in popular education (Popular Education for Social Change) since 2001 at the Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University, Toronto.