Reflecting and Connecting through Stories:

A Student-Centered Framework and Guide

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"Stories are not mere flights of fantasy or instruments of political power and control. They link us to our past, provide us with critical insight into the present and enable us to envision our lives not just as they are but as they should be or might become. Imaginative knowledge is not something you have today and discard tomorrow. It is a way of perceiving the world and relating to it."

― Azar Nafisi, The Republic of Imagination: America in Three Books

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Abstract

This framework presents methods of using storytelling as a multifaceted, creative tool to foster deeper personal connections, understanding, and empathy, while supporting learning, critical thinking, and engagement. It is based on educational and storytelling research and application in the classroom and other learning environments. Included within this framework are principles, practices, methods and activities that involve storytelling as a method to engage, support, include, and connect people across difference. The themes include exploration of identity and development of personal narratives; the practice of listening, critical thinking and reflection; and engaging in multiple methods of storytelling. This framework models and aligns with a student-centered teaching approach. While designed for use in the middle school classroom, it can be modified for other age groups and learning environments, whether in-person or virtual.

Introduction

Defining storytelling, its application and the opportunities within its practice

Storytelling has been used for centuries by people as a way to share and pass on knowledge, experiences and ideas (Mello, 2001; Smeda et al., 2014; Zak, 2013). Stories are shared in many environments through multiple modalities, from spoken word to written texts, illustrations, performance art, and movies as well as through commercials, news and social media (Hibbin, 2016; Mello, 2001; Morais et al., 2019; Truong-White & McLean, 2015). According to Lewis (2014), in stories people find "a common landscape that most can access despite social, cultural, or linguistic differences. This access is based upon the notion that most everyone feels, and can articulate, at some level, what a certain emotion entails … emotions such as these evoke certain common expressions, and it is these common expressions that provide avenues that connect people of different backgrounds and experiences." (21) By engaging with a story, one is able "to enter emotionally into the lives of "'others'" (21). Thus, sharing and engaging in storytelling not only provides people with the opportunity to relay knowledge, experiences, values and ideas, but can be used to support human connection and foster empathy (Bakersville, 2011; Hibbin, 2016; Leon-Garzo & Castadena-Pena, 2018; Lucko, 2019).

There are many forms and applications of storytelling. Within schools and educational settings, storytelling has been used in a variety of ways: to support literacy, especially around language arts and English language learning (ELL); as an interdisciplinary tool to engage learners and make content more relevant and accessible for youth; for the assessment of language arts learning and development; and as a form of social emotional learning (SEL) to support self-confidence, inclusion, social skills, development of relationships, perspective taking, and empathy (Bakersville, 2011; Hibbin, 2016; Leon-Garzo & Castaneda-Pena, 2018; Lucko, 2019; Morais et al., 2019; Smeda et al., 2014).

Storytelling has been defined by some practitioners and researchers as a linguistic activity or an oral artform to relay information and experiences, whether fictional or true (Hibbin, 2016; Mello, 2001). Others have described storytelling as a practice that can involve numerous components including various forms of audio and visuals including, illustrations, videos or animations, to tell

a story (Hibbin, 2016; Lewis, 2014l Mello, 2001; Smeda et al., 2014). Within the scope of this framework, storytelling is defined as a method of communicating knowledge, experiences and values, using oral, written, visual, auditory and physical modalities (e.g, body language, gestures) to others (Smeda et al., 2014.) This broader definition provides greater accessibility, inclusion and opportunity for people to engage in the practice of storytelling and sharing, and foster opportunities to connect, reflect, understand, and learn.

Working Towards a Positive Future: Engaging and Supporting Youth

This framework was developed for the purpose of engaging and supporting students, specifically middle school adolescents, with a focus on supporting positive development of identity, creating opportunities for self-expression, reflection, understanding and connection. Adolescence is often described as a challenging time of transition and development, as well as one of great opportunity (Donovan, 2016; Eccles, 1999; OPA, 2018). Children in this age group are beginning to dive deeper into establishing their sense of identity, reflect on their lives, future, values, perceptions and relationships (Donovan, 2016; Eccles, 1999; OPA, 2018).

This framework can serve as a valuable resource for middle school educators, their students and families. The framework uses student-centered teaching practices aligned with adolescent development and interest to support critical reflection, promote discussion, and provide opportunities for collaboration, sharing, and connecting as valued community members (OPA, 2018). The framework provides opportunities for students to gain communication skills and explore new relationships with peers and adults.

Framework Goals:

There are a number of components that support the goals of this framework:

- Providing student-centered teaching
- Exploring and sharing personal narratives around identity to promote self-discovery, self-confidence and understanding of others
- Learning and practicing active listening and critical reflection
- Practicing different methods of communicating, sharing and connecting around stories
- Integrating storytelling across the content areas to support engagement and learning

The application of this framework could benefit students, teachers and families by helping support students as engaged learners, to become capable, reflective, compassionate, and empowered members of a diverse social world.

Exploring Our Identities, Stories and Connections

Storytelling provides opportunities for people to share their own experiences, histories, and ideas. When we provide intentional space for people (children and adults) to explore their identities and share their stories, we create opportunities for positive personal growth, understanding of others, and through that expand our human connection (Bakersville, 2011; Hibbin, 2016; Leon-Garzo & Castadena-Pena, 2018; Lewis, 2014; Lucko, 2019).

The following guide, strategies and activities, focus on exploring ones' identity, sharing personal narratives, practicing reflective thinking and developing connections. The "*About Me Journal*" serves as a model and starting point in applying the concepts of this framework. This journal, along with the suggested instruction, practices, and activities, were developed to introduce students and teachers, support positive relationships, understanding, growth and engagement. The journal and subsequent activities can be completed online or using a physical journal, making it accessible to share and use in person or remotely. The use and application of the "*About Me Journal*" and follow up activities align with numerous educational standards, specifically within the fields of language arts and social emotional learning.

Teachers are encouraged to complete the "*About Me Journal*" to model and facilitate the process of sharing and connecting with students and their families, as well as to better understand themselves, their histories, and perspectives. A sample welcome letter for students and families introducing the use of the "*About Me Journal*," including instructions and contact information for questions or follow up, is included here. By including the "*About Me Journal*" in a welcome packet to be distributed before the start of the school year, teachers are able to introduce themselves to students and their families, begin establishing relationships, and invite incoming students and families to be involved, contributing, valued members of the classroom community. Teachers can use student responses to support them in providing relevant, accessible, and inclusive instruction and activities, thereby fostering engagement and learning. Studies have shown that students benefit from a curriculum that connects to their experiences and incorporates their interests, increasing student learning and participation (Donovan, 2016; Leon-Garzo &

Castaneda-Pena, 2018; Lewis, 2014). Additionally, the "*About Me Journal*" and its associated activities can be used to engage, support and assess student learning and development.

Providing opportunities for various means of creative expression and sharing in activities like the "*About Me Journal"* can also provide opportunities for positive personal growth, deeper understanding and connection to others (Donovan, 2016; Leon- Leon-Garzo and Castaneda-Pena, 2018; Lucko, 2019; Morais et al., 2019). When students have the chance to incorporate stories and artifacts from their family or personal history, it supports student identity development, involves families in the student's learning, promotes inclusion, provides understanding of different perspectives and experiences, and fosters relationships between students' families, teachers, and the school (Lewis, 2014; Lucko, 2019).

The "*About Me Journal*" is referenced throughout this framework as a tool to engage students in various activities and practices in developing their skills in communication, including active listening, reflection, expression, storytelling and sharing. The "*About Me Journal*" can be expanded and used as a space for creative writing, expression and self-reflection throughout the school year. Educators can use their own open-ended questions or prompts to engage further exploration of identity, reflection, and discussion. Teachers are encouraged to provide opportunities for students to continue incorporate creative forms of expression within their work whether that involves having students write a formal written response that incorporates visuals, writing poetry, creating audio or visual recordings, etc. Here are a few additional prompts that could be used in the "*About Me Journal*":
- Share a story about a time you overcame a challenge.
- Share a story from your life about an experience that you feel changed you.
- Share a story about your family.

Students and teachers could benefit from keeping their "*About Me Journal,*" and other work students created based on this framework in a physical or electronic portfolio, organized in a binder or folder(s). One possible title for the collection of work could be "*My Collection of Stories, Reflections and Connections."* This portfolio can serve as a reference and space for students to organize their stories, experiences, and learning.

As mentioned in the sample welcome letter, which includes an explanation and instructions for starting their "*About Me Journal*," various components of their journals will be shared with their peers over the course of the year. When reviewing the "*About Me Journal*" in class, it could be beneficial to remind students that many responses to prompts will be shared, and that they should be mindful about the information they include. Out of respect for students' privacy, providing the option to have some entries kept confidential would be a good practice.

The Essential Practice of Listening

Listening is an essential component in storytelling that goes beyond the mere physical act of hearing. It is the practice of engaging in receiving and understanding verbal and nonverbal messages from others (Caspersz & Stasinska, 2015; Weger et al., 2014). The practice of listening, whether auditory or visual, plays a crucial role in our lives as we grow, learn, connect, and engage. In the U.S., engaging students in the practice of listening is even included as one of the many Common Core Standards and state standards in schools throughout the country (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2021).

There are different levels of listening. The following guide and activities are meant to facilitate the practice of active, mindful listening, with the goal of improving understanding and creating opportunities for deeper connections and critical reflection. The intention of this practice is to set aside designated time and space to ensure a speaker's message is heard and understood, providing opportunities for support, validation, connection and empathy.

Active Listening

Active listening entails effort and attention by the listener to work to understand the message being relayed through verbal and nonverbal communication and cues (Kohpeima Jahromi et al., 2016; StoryCorps, n.d.; Teniente & Guerra, 2011). The practice of active listening has been described to involve the following practices:

- Providing full attention to the speaker

- Showing interest in what is being shared using visual cues (body language)
- Following up with questions to clarify understanding, gain further insight on what was shared and articulate what the listener understood
- Being respectful, which includes refraining from interjecting
- Avoid placing judgement

We often expect that because many people have the *ability* to listen that they are listening mindfully, understanding, processing but that is not always the case. In schools, teachers and students can experience challenges in listening and fully hearing and understanding one another, which interferes with learning, engagement, and participation. One of the ways that we can help support and engage active listening is to engage students, and ourselves, in exploring and understanding the art of listening. Students and teachers can both benefit from this practice. Identifying and modeling the key components of active listening in a classroom is an important part of the process of implementing this framework.

Teachers could benefit from introducing the topic and practice of active listening by engaging students in a discussion around their understanding of listening using the following prompts:
- How do we/you listen?
- What makes a good listener?
- How do you show someone you're listening?
- How can you ensure you've heard/taken in what was shared with you?
- What benefits does listening have?
- When is it hard to listen? And how can we make listening easier in those situations?
- What do you think it means to be an "active listener"?

Students can initially work in pairs or small groups to consider these questions before engaging in a class-wide discussion. Teachers should note key points that were brought up during these discussions and display them on a white board or other location, visible to the students. Key points that should be addressed in these discussions and lessons around active listening should align with the description of active listening included above, such as: being a respectful listener, not interrupting the speaker, responding to what is being shared by either asking follow up

questions, using eye contact or other body language, avoiding judgement (Kohpeima Jahromi et al., 2016; StoryCorps, n.d.; Teniente & Guerra, 2011).

Based off this discussion, teachers can lead students in working together to collaboratively create classroom expectations around listening. It is recommended to establish these guidelines at the beginning of a school year, to set up a positive, safe, respectful and productive listening and learning the environment (Bakersville, 2011). These classroom expectations should align with the identified practices of being an active listener, as well as honoring each other's trust, privacy, and needs, especially when considering/approaching the topic of sharing stories and being active listeners (Bakersville, 2011). The agreed-upon guidelines should be posted in class and provided to students for their reference and for inclusion in their framework portfolio.

StoryCorps created a great active listening lesson guide, which suggests having students participate in a game of telephone to practice, explore and consider the practice, strategies, and challenges of listening and to then introduce active listening. Having students participate in this activity can help them consider the elements of listening and help inform/guide them in discussing and answering some of the questions above, specifically around what makes the game of telephone challenging (StoryCorps, n.d.).

To practice and introduce the concept of active listening, teachers can have the class engage in a number of fun, creative and fairly simple active listening activities, including:

- Sharing favorites: Have the class set up in a circle. One student starts by passing a ball or other object to someone else in the class and asking them what their favorite animal, color, book, food, etc. is and why. After responding, the student passes the ball (or other item) off to another classroom member, who provides a response to on the first student's answer and then gives their own favorite. Continue until all students and the teacher have shared their favorite item and provided a response.
- Group story building: Educator or a student starts a story with a beginning phrase, and then each child in the classroom adds one or more word(s) to the story in turn. Students must be active participants and follow the story closely so that when their time comes to add their word(s), the story will make sense.

- Make a sandwich: As a class or in small groups, students will compose written or provide oral directions for how to make a specific type of sandwich such as a peanut butter and jelly (or other – allergies permitting) sandwich. The "listener" will execute the directions based on the explicit directions created, with the option of asking clarifying questions. This activity could also be done by providing directions for putting on a shoe, a jacket, etc., that requires precision. This activity is fun and engaging. In addition, it can be used to support awareness of the importance of sequencing, as well as clear communication and knowing your audience.

Teachers are encouraged to participate in these activities, if possible, with the students, to model, connect, and demonstrate that they are also members of the classroom learning community. To follow up after the activity, the teacher can engage students in a discussion or have students provide written responses around the following questions:
- What was their experience with sharing their ideas/directions and/or being the listener and following directions?
- What contributed to their ability to complete the activity?
- What parts did they find challenging?

Students' responses to these questions can provide useful information for the teacher around student comprehension, assessing the need for further instruction or modifications, and gauge student reception of the process and practice.

"*About Me Journal*" Share: A practice in active listening, an introduction to story sharing and opportunity to foster connection, understanding and empathy

A great way for students to not only practice active listening but have an opportunity to connect and better understand one another would be to have them engage in an activity around sharing components from the "*About Me Journal*" with one another.

There are a number of ways to have students engage in "*About Me Journal*" sharing. One way would be to have students work together in pairs, having students in pairs alternate sharing their

completed journal prompt response. The teacher can either instruct students to share a specific prompt response or provide students with the option to choose from all or a selection of the journal questions and prompts.

Following the pair share, have students record a reflection to prompt deeper thought about their sharing experience, using questions framed around hearing their peer's shared answer as well as how it was to share their own answer. Additionally, teachers can give students the option to share with their partner afterward in the form of a drawing, poem, shared connection they found, follow up question, or "thank you". Teachers could have students come back as a group after their share and reflection to discuss their experience. This would also be a good time to invite students to review the guidelines that they developed around listening to see if they think any changes need to be made.

Providing students with an opportunity to reflect and share their responses to the exercise, creates space for deeper understanding around the practice of reflection, promotes understanding oneself and others, creates opportunity to foster relationships, and helps inform future instruction by assessing students' learning and needs based on their responses to the activities.

Included are some prompts to engage students this reflective practice:
- What did you hear, see, feel based on what was shared with you?
- Do you have any additional questions do you have for this person?
- What did you learn?
- What are you interested in?
- What did you find challenging about this process?
- What did you enjoy about this exchange?
- What similarities or connections, if any, did you find with what was shared and your life, experiences or other stories you've heard?

Students could have a section in their "*About Me Journal*" or portfolio dedicated to these responses and reflections. It would be great to have teachers included in this practice as well,

both to model engagement and participation and to facilitate deeper understanding and connection.

Providing multiple opportunities for students to share parts of their "*About Me Journal*" and stories with their peers not only enables them to continue honing their skills in active listening, it provides them with opportunities for connection, exposes them to different perspectives, allows them to reflect on their experience, and their understanding of others. Students can keep track of which question were shared, and who they shared them with in their journal using a spreadsheet or graphic organizer. Teachers can use new or different questions or prompts based on student needs, abilities, topic, interest, and goals.

For these activities, ensure that students understand the expectations and the questions/answers they will be sharing with their partner. In most cases, it would be helpful to have students share questions and prompts to which they have already responded.

As mentioned in the Exploring Our Identities, Stories and Connections section, it could be helpful and considerate of the students if the teacher provided the option to keep certain elements of their journal private and not require students to share them. Depending on what was being shared amongst students, it could be helpful to discuss and review agreements about maintaining confidentiality, and keeping what is shared, between the two partners or within the classroom. This would model respect, consideration and empathy and foster a safe, supportive environment (Bakersville, 2011).

Stories: A tool for Learning, Engaging, Reflecting, Creating, Sharing & Connecting

Storytelling has been used as a successful method to support literacy for years, both at home and in schools (Mello, 2001). The very nature of storytelling engages literacy skills and practice. In schools, teachers have used storytelling to support and assess language arts learning and development, and to engage students in applying their knowledge and skills across the curricula

creatively, making content more relevant, relatable, accessible and engaging (Bakersville, 2011; Hibbin, 2016; Leon-Garzo & Castaneda-Pena, 2018; Lucko, 2019; Morais et al., 2019). By integrating stories and storytelling activities into the curriculum, students are able to engage, reflect, and relate their experience to the subject(s) in class (Leon-Garzo & Castadena-Pena, 2018; Smeda et al., 2014).

Storytelling can be used to "humanize" topics such as the sciences other content areas, facilitating learning by making the topic more accessible to a variety of audiences (Leon-Garzo & Castadena-Pena, 2018; Morais et al., 2019; Smeda et al., 2014).

Lewis (2014) articulated that:

> "Story provides a structure on which to "make sense" of the circumstances, events, and relationships   of one's life. Narrative also affords opportunities for interpretation of life … one can use fictional stories in order to expand upon one's lived stories—to elucidate the fuzzy edges of the map, so to speak—in a way that helps one to consider alternative possibilities for how life might be, and for how one's relationships might unfold." (19)

Storytelling provides opportunities for people to share their own experiences, histories, and ideas, giving participants a sense of validation, confidence, inspiration, and empowerment (Bakersville, 2011; Hibbin, 2016; Isay, 2008; Leon-Garzo & Castadena-Pena, 2018; Lewis, 2014; Lucko, 2019). According to Lucko, "storytelling in a supportive environment allowed the students to begin to develop public speaking skills necessary to articulate these experiences to peers coming from different backgrounds." (22)

The skills learned through the process of practicing storytelling and sharing can help guide students in connecting with others across difference and developing positive relationships (Leon-Garzo and Castaneda-Pena, 2018; Hibbin, 2016). The process of engaging in storytelling and sharing requires participants to be active listeners, respectful, and reflective (Bakersville, 2011; Hibbin, 2016; Leon-Garzo and Castaneda-Pena, 2018; Lucko, 2019; Mello, 2001; Morais et al., 2019; Schijf et al., 2020; Zak, 2013). These fall under the SEL skills listed by Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL). CASEL has identified these skills in order

to help provide a guideline for schools to support students in achieving the most complete and positive outcomes in their learning and lives.

Before stepping into instruction around storytelling and sharing, it is important to create a safe, supportive, inclusive space for learning (Bakersville, 2011). The Listening Guide and activities included in this framework provide support in setting up a safe space for active listening (see pages 9-14). The skills addressed in these activities connect to CASEL's guidelines for student SEL and remain relevant throughout a child's time in school, supporting their continued development as they grow to become capable, informed, and positively contributing members of a diverse social world.

<u>Introducing and exploring the concept of a story and storytelling</u>

Using an inquiry-based approach to introduce the topic of stories and storytelling can help engage students in sharing and thinking about stories, informing the teacher about student needs, knowledge, and how to guide and support them in their learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Tatum-Tobin, 2012).

The following prompts can be used to engage students in a discussion about what stories are, how they are shared, and their impact:

- How do you learn things?
- How are ideas, experiences, knowledge shared?
- What is a story, in your eyes?
- How have stories been shared with you? How have you shared stories?
- How do stories make you feel?
- What qualities/elements/components does a story have/need?

These questions can help students start to think about their understanding of stories and provide space for engagement. Guide students in exploring the idea that stories can come in many forms: written in verse, such as poetry or song; as a traditional story, shared orally or through other nonverbal communications (writing, signing, etc.); in art or multimedia including commercials, TV shows, movies; recorded interviews; and more. Students should understand that stories can

be fictional or true. Ensure students understand the difference between fiction and nonfiction and the different forms that stories can take. Stories can range from personal narratives that recount events and experiences, to fictional stories, myths, fables and more.

Depending on the class and students' needs, knowledge and understanding of stories, it would be valuable to identify and review what the components of a story are, including narrator, point of view, characters, setting, plot, theme, etc. This could also be a good place to ensure students understand that one story usually represents only one perspective, told by the narrator, and is therefore not representative of an entire group of individuals. Highlighting this point can help students refrain from stereotyping or making assumptions about a group of people based on one person's experience, behavior and story and providing opportunities to question and explore the narrator's purpose and perspective (Truong-White & McLean, 2015).

Matt Brisbin provides a fun, creative exercise for students around thinking about, sharing and developing stories based on personal narratives. Students (and the teacher) draw a map of the neighborhood they grew up in and marking stars around areas that they have some of their best memories. Brisbin's teaching poetry blog post could also be used to engage students in this process. As modeling provides an excellent tool to support student learning and comprehension, teachers are encouraged to display a sample map of their own, and to model sharing stories from their map with the class (Brisbin, 2019). Brisbin suggests giving students about 5 minutes to create their maps and label them with stars for their memories (2019). Students are then instructed to pick a star from their map and share their story with a peer or a small group of peers. The process is repeated so that students share story stars from their map with different peers or small groups, while the teacher circulates the classroom, listens, and shares a story from a star on their own map as well (Brisbin, 2019).

Prompts and responses from students' "*About Me Journal*" could also be used as a practice activity, to share and build off of what they have created and included and share it in an identified, structured story format. Following an introductory story sharing activity, the teacher can have students come back together as a group to discuss their experience in this process, check to see if students have any questions. This practice provides various levels of assessment,

informing the teacher about what the students learned, how they felt about the activity, and where they need additional guidance, helping teachers improve future lessons and activities.

Students should now have the foundational understanding from these discussions and activities to learn about and practice developing various types of stories. Teachers can have students produce a formally written and structured story, a comic strip, a narrative poem, a digital story, or other creative piece. Teachers are encouraged to provide students with opportunities to incorporate images whether illustrated, captured in photographs, found online or in magazines, newspapers, or other printed materials to help them tell their story and engage them to express their ideas and messages creatively. Remind students to about think about their audience, who the narrator is, what is the purpose of the story, identify the story structure (whether formally written, comic strip, poem, digital), how or if they can relate to it as they begin to develop their story. Students could benefit from using a graphic organizer to help them formulate and draft their story. Some examples of graphic organizers that can be used for this purpose might include fill in the blank story maps, outlines, drafting guides. Modeling and providing these types of tools can support students in their process of composing their stories (Bakersville, 2011; Morais et al., 2019).

There are numerous strategies in which students can engage in storytelling and development across the curriculum. It is a great way to have students not only explore and share their experiences, but demonstrate their knowledge, understanding, practice perspective taking as well as developing their voice and self-confidence.

The following are some examples of strategies and applications in which teachers can integrate storytelling across the curriculum:

- Engage students in writing stories to relay and teach various concepts and ideas to different audiences. Morais, et al. (2019) found great success using this strategy to support understanding and learning of chemistry concepts amongst middle school and preschool in their study. In this study, middle school students developed stories for preschoolers to help them learn about and understand various age-appropriate chemistry concepts. This kind of practice not only helps engage students in applying and

understanding content, but supports their literacy skills development, perspective taking in terms of target audience, and fosters their confidence in their learning, knowledge and understanding within this subject. Teachers can apply this strategy to have students develop stories to demonstrate their knowledge and teach others about other areas of science, math, history, literature and more! Lessons could be tailored to fit different students' needs and goals, whether having students work on the stories independently or in small groups.

- Students can engage in an exercise in retelling a fairytale, fable or other story from another character's perspective. Here's an example from PBS Learning Media that has been used in the classroom. This is an excellent activity to engage students understanding different perspectives as well as story structure, different forms of literature, and more.

- Have students develop and share a story around a local and/or globally relevant issue and identify solutions. Through this process students would identify and research a chosen issue, and either develop their own solutions and/or highlight existing solutions. Developing and sharing these stories could not only provide awareness and support around the identified issue(s) but help empower the students as capable, valued advocates and community members. Digital storytelling can be an effective, engaging and beneficial way to develop and share these kinds of stories. For example, in Truong-White and McLean's study, which followed the Transformative Global Citizenship Education (TGCE) framework, students in the U.S. and India developed digital stories around the topic of a climate change that they identified within their lives, articulating the scale of its impact, and actions that could be taken on a personal, local level to help address the problem (2015). Students created digital stories using text from research and personal reflection as well as images (Truong-White & McLean, 2015). In this type of program students can connect and share their stories and ideas with others across the globe.

- Using lessons and activities around interviewing can provide opportunities to support learning around specific topics from incorporating activities in which students interview experts in various fields, or for social studies, as well as other topics, in which students can interview family members, friends, staff, and community members. Teaching students interviewing skills and integrating these activities could not only promote student learning and engagement, but support their communication skills, expand their

connections and relationships within the community and provide them with a sense of empowerment. An introductory guide on teaching and integrating interviewing into the curriculum has been included in the following section, focusing specifically on using interviewing as storytelling and sharing tool, as well as a method to foster connection and support empathy.

As noted throughout this framework, teachers are encouraged to solicit feedback from students about their experience with lessons and activities to see if or how it could be changed or improved and identify areas in which students need additional support. This practice also further demonstrates that the teachers are interested in and value their students' opinions and experiences, solidifying their role as contributing members to the classroom learning experience.

Incorporating Interviewing into the Curriculum: Fostering communication, critical thinking, understanding and story sharing

Interviews are one of the many ways in which stories are gathered and shared. Interviews are among the methods that people use to learn about different perspectives and experiences, as well as find connections. Providing students with opportunities to learn about and practice interviewing can further enhance their skills in communication, active listening, and critical thinking skills. Students can continue to develop connections to others and learn about different perspectives through the practice and process of interviewing (Lucko, 2019; The Ed Factory, LLC, n.d.; Wallace et al., 2014). Through this practice students can become empowered to ask questions, share knowledge, experience and stories (Isay, 2008). In schools, interviewing can be used as a tool to support learning across the curriculum, from language arts to humanities and social studies, as well as STEAM (Kahn, 2019; Lucko, 2019).

There are numerous ways in which teachers can help guide students in learning about and practicing interviewing. Within this framework, the focus is on engaging students in interviewing as a method for thinking about how and where our stories come from; practice critical thinking, especially through questioning; consider different perspectives; creating space to share people's stories; and to connect.

Introducing Interviewing

Teachers can begin instruction around interviews by first having students think about and discuss how information is exchanged, how people learn about others, share news, etc. Here are some questions teachers can use to prompt this discussion:

- How do you learn about other people, their experiences, thoughts, and/or history?
- What might you do to get to know someone or understand them?
- What do you think helps people feel comfortable about sharing their ideas, stories, experiences, or feelings?

As mentioned in previous sections, students can initially discuss their responses in pairs or small groups before coming together for a whole class discussion around these questions. Teachers should take note of key components that are articulated in the discussion as these points could be useful as students move forward in learning about interviewing. Follow this discussion by introducing interviewing and exploring how interviews tie into the practice of storytelling and sharing. The following questions can be used to facilitate this discussion:

- What is an interview?
- What is the purpose of an interview?
- How can interviews be used to help us better understand one another or share stories?

Student responses to these questions can help inform and guide the teacher in their lesson and instruction around interviewing.

Teaching tools and techniques for interviewing

Mock interviews provide a fun and engaging way to teach students about interview practices. In this practice, the teacher will have students observe and respond to a series of mock interviews. This can be done by the teacher, taking the role as the interviewer, and having a staff member or student volunteer to be interviewed in front of the class. For the first mock interview, the teacher would use closed questions, which provide limited, one-word answers. This practice would show students the value of using open-ended questions in an interview, to obtain more information from the narrator. As the interviewer, the teacher would have the option of seeming prepared for

the interview with a copy of closed questions or they could model coming to the interview unprepared, distracted or uninterested. Teachers are encouraged to have fun with the process and develop a series of mock interviews that are best suited for their class and purpose. Following the closed question mock interview teachers can prompt students to reflect on and assess the interview in a discussion using the following questions:

- Can you identify the purpose of the interview? If so, what was it?
- Was the interview engaging? What made it engaging, or not?
- What kind of questions were asked?
- Did you feel like the interview told a story about the narrator? Why or why not?
- Did the interviewer seem prepared for the interview?
- What would you change about the interview to get more information from the narrator and tell their story?

The teacher can facilitate a discussion with students and based on their responses, highlighting the importance of asking opening ended questions and coming prepared for an interview. The teacher can also guide students in thinking about how to ask follow-up questions to support deeper understanding about their narrator's story and perspective, using questioning methods starting with how, when, what, and why, with the intention of being mindful, considerate and limiting judgement. Teachers should record, display and share the key points that are identified in the discussion.

This brief interview and discussion can then be followed with a second mock interview, this time modeling better interview practices, with the interviewer prepared with open-ended questions. In this mock interview, the teacher can carry out an interview in which they follow best practices for interviewing including, asking the listed question(s), using open ended follow up questions, taking notes, being a respectful, active listener. Alternatively, they could have their open-ended questions prepared but during the interview interrupt the narrator by talking about themselves, their opinions and/or experiences. The strategy of modeling an interview in which the interviewer interrupts their narrator could help remind students to practice their active listening skills when conducting an interview. Following this mock interview engage student responses by asking questions such as:

- What did you notice in this interview?

- What kind of question(s) were asked?

- How did the interviewer engage with the narrator?

- How do you think an interviewer prepared for the interview?

- What practices do you think are important when conducting an interview?

- What would be the benefits of interviewing someone?

- What might be the challenges of interviewing someone?

- How do you think the practice of active listening ties in with interviewing?

Following this discussion, the teacher can help students work together to collaboratively develop an interview guide. Some essential elements that should be included are:

- Identify the purpose of your interview

- Come to your interview prepared with open-ended, appropriate questions (written or typed)

- Practice active listening, including not interrupting the narrator and being respectful of their feelings and experiences

- Practicing patience (providing the narrator with time to answer questions)

- Be aware of your environment, try to conduct your interview in a quiet space, with limited distractions/interruptions, especially if they're conducting recorded interviews (Isay, 2008)

The expectations and interview guide should be distributed to students, for them to include in their framework portfolio, and displayed during subsequent interview lessons and activities. Depending on the class and student needs it could be beneficial to review and post the definition of a narrator (who will be telling/sharing their story) versus interviewer – the person asking the questions.

If recording devices are available and recording interviews inside or outside of class is a feasible option, teachers are encouraged to review, model and distribute instructions on how to record interviews with students as well. Students could benefit from practicing setting up and recording interviews in class themselves whether in pairs or independently, following group instruction.

StoryCorps created a helpful [interview video guide](#) with tips that teachers could share with their class (transcript for the recorded video can be found [here](#)). This video as well as StoryCrops' [lesson on teaching interviewing](#) could also serve as a helpful instructional tool. If using recordings of other interviews, provide both a recorded and printed transcript of the interview for students to follow and reference. Teachers could also invite an experienced interviewer such as a reporter, journalist or other professional, to lead students in a lesson about interviewing techniques and practices.

Interviews: Collecting and Sharing Stories

Students can practice interviewing their peers or school staff using select questions or prompts from their "*About Me Journal.*" Alternatively, here are a number of questions that could be used:

- What is a challenge you have worked to overcome?
- What is one of your favorite memories?
- Can you tell me about a journey, adventure or trip you have been on?
- What is the history of your name?

Follow up with students after their practice interviews, asking them about their experience and checking to see if they think any changes need to be made in their interview guide. This would also be a good time to remind students that the stories of their interview partners are based on their partner's personal perspectives and experiences, and do not represent all individuals from their associated group (racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, ability, age, state/country/town of origin) (Truong-White & McLean, 2015). This could also be added to their guide as a reminder for students as they continue to consider different perspectives and develop their own values and sense of identity.

There are many benefits to incorporating interviewing into the curriculum. Interviews can be used to engage families and community members, creating opportunities for connection and deeper understanding of others as well as our history. For example, students could interview a family member or adult in their household or community to learn more about their history,

including migration, social movements, and historical events. This practice can bring voice, attention, and representation for different community members, fostering the practice of sharing perspectives and promoting understanding across difference.

Interviewing can also be used to help connect learning across content areas. In research projects, students can use interviews to supplement texts and other sources to further their understanding of a topic or issue. In Kahn's study, a group of adolescent youth participated in a summer program through a local library in which they created family geobiographies, a "multigenerational history that traces how one's family came to be where they live today" (2). In Kahn's study, participants applied concepts of scientific analysis, sociology, and economics in the creation and sharing of a geographic storyline of their family's history. To create their geobiographies, the participants used a set of questions to record oral histories of family members, employed data and visualization tools such as GIS mapping to support statistical and data literacy, and reviewed historical records and evidence to connect all of these concepts to their own lives. A similar project could be carried out in the classroom to support student learning, development, and application of skills across content areas.

Richland School District Two, High School Arts teacher, Lane Laney, describes a creative story sharing activity in [The Teachers Guild – Empathy In Your Classroom](#) in which students choose an "interviewee whose story they think particularly needs to be told (i.e., homeless, veterans, residents in a nursing home)" and create a sculpture to depict what they learned from the interview (2017). This activity could be completed in pairs or individually. Teachers could also give students the option to present their interviewee's story through other means, such as a newspaper interview article, a digital story, an audio recording or other form of art.

Teachers can work with students in developing interview questions and reviewing interviewing practices. Interview questions should be reviewed and approved by teachers before interviews are conducted to ensure they are appropriate and relevant to the assignment. Students should be reminded to have their interview guide with them for their interviews.

Teachers should continue to engage students following these activities in reflecting on their experience by providing them with prompts that elicit thoughtful responses, which can then be used to assess their learning and guide future instruction.

Students could benefit from having access to a portable electronic device with internet access, such as a tablet, Chromebook, or laptop, that has recording capabilities and ideally applications for video and audio editing. This would facilitate the interview process and enable students to learn about using different tools as platforms to tell stories based on their interviews, from creating edited audio recordings, videos, digital stories or other creative pieces. Electronic devices could also provide opportunities for students to work on their projects and share stories remotely, as well as connect with others globally.

At the end of the year, students will have a portfolio of stories, reflections, interviews, and instructional guides from the storytelling activities they have completed. This will serve as a keepsake of memories and experiences, showcasing the growth and connections they have made throughout the year.
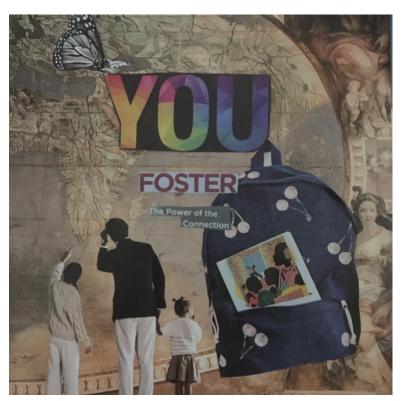
Final Thoughts

This framework was created to help support teachers, students, and others to engage in this valuable practice, of exploring ones-self, sharing our stories, listening with respect and intention to understand, collaborating, communicating, and connecting across difference. Humans have the ability to communicate with one another in so many amazing, powerful ways, through language, whether verbal(oral), written or signed, creatively through various forms of art, as well as social cues. If we can create space to communicate and share our stories and listen, we provide opportunities for growth, connection, and positive change, for not only people but for all species. Many of the practices included within this framework can be applied across the content areas to support teachers, students, staff and families. These practices can support participants in their growth to become active, invested, included, capable, empowered, valuable members of a

learning community and society, to achieve their dreams and create a more united, understanding world and sustainable future.

This framework may be edited and updated following application, use and responses to support further engagement, practice and achievement of its goals.

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Additional Resources and Activities

Supporting student identity development and sharing personal narratives:

https://www.edutopia.org/article/6-exercises-get-know-your-students-better-and-increase-their-engagement

https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/identity-and-community

https://theedfactory.org/ypa/#/about-ypa/

https://thelinkingnetwork.org.uk/resource/identity-activities/

https://www.apictureisworth.org/#%21curriculum/c1n0f (Note: geared towards high school students)

Storytelling lessons and activities:

https://s3.amazonaws.com/diy.storycorps.org-assets/uploads/2020/03/SC.WhyDoStoriesMatter.CommonCoreStandards.pdf

https://www.envisionexperience.com/blog/the-art-of-storytelling-with-free-classroom-activity-ideas

https://www.edutopia.org/article/project-every-kid-has-story-tell

http://www.storyarts.org/lessonplans/lessonideas/index.html

https://www.nationalgeographic.com/family/article/tell-your-story-the-power-of-poetry-to-help-kids-cope-coronavirus?cmpid=org=ngp::mc=social::src=facebook::cmp=editorial::add=fbp20210225family-powerofpoetryforkids::rid=&sf243354939=1&fbclid=IwAR0c6b7LMo33y1xUF1B8rtPx8J6mpRfTEHkS4fjZSwKR8ywZ-5tHt8MGIAg

Using digital storytelling:

https://www.edutopia.org/digital-storytelling-helping-students-find-their-voice

https://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu/page.cfm?id=23&cid=23

https://www.storycenter.org/

Resources to support your practice in using interviewing into your teaching curriculum:

https://www.theschoolrun.com/interviewing-to-write-a-biography

https://educators.brainpop.com/lesson-plan/conducting-interview-lesson-plan-interview-expert/

http://www.readwritethink.org/resources/resource-print.html?id=17

https://www.edutopia.org/service-learning-center-urban-pedagogy-interviewing

https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/40376/personal-stories-how-teens-connect-with-storycorps-and-podcasts

For students 13+: StoryCorps app & The Great Thanksgiving Listen:
https://storycorpsme.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2015/09/SC-GTL-toolkit_FINAL-9.9.2015-release.pdf

You can also participate in a free online training through StoryCorps or request to join their Facebook Group for educators.

Obtaining student feedback:
https://www.edutopia.org/practice/student-surveys-using-student-voice-improve-teaching-and-learning

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