



LESSON TWO: USING *P.O.V.'S BORDERS: LEAVING ELSA* IN THE CLASSROOM POWER OF STORYTELLING

BACKGROUND

Cecilia Garza, Gilberto Perales, and Kate Gándara are teenagers from border towns in the Rio Grande Valley of south Texas. Cecilia and Gilbert were raised in a rural community and have experienced the struggles and triumphs of small town life along the Texas Mexican border, while Kate's experience is grounded in the bigger border town of McAllen, Texas. Cecilia and Kate have recently left their rural homes for college, while Gilbert is in the process of applying to college.

The three Valley youths are filled with rich life experiences. Cecilia's life in the colonias (unincorporated rural community) has been characterized by economic struggle, though supported by an expansive family network that has helped Cecilia through every turn in life. She is supported by family, friends, and by the Llano Grande Center (www.llanogrande.org), a nonprofit organization she has worked with since she was a sophomore in high school. A 2001 graduate of Edcouch-Elsa High School, Cecilia is now a sophomore at Columbia University in New York City.

Gilbert's life is similar to Cecilia's. He is a senior at Edcouch-Elsa High School and works out of the Llano Grande Center. Gilbert thrives on the strength of his family network and uses many family stories to give shape to his own personal identity. Like Cecilia, Gilbert has also become very public about his role as a student leader. He has presented at conferences in Little Rock, Houston, and Boston.

Kate is also a youth whose personality and character have been shaped by border life, but she is also unique in many ways. Born in Ireland to a Mexican American father and an Irish mother, Kate came to the Texas Mexican border while a toddler. From the age of three, she has honed her craft as a ballerina and was the principal ballerina for the South Texas Dance Theatre while as a high school student at a McAllen high school. Kate has danced in Cuba, Orlando, Florida, and is now beginning her freshman year at Emerson College in Boston.

Cecilia, Gilbert, and Kate have rich stories to share about their lives along the border and about their own development as students, leaders, and citizens of this country. The following plans focus on issues that are central to the lives of these three youths: (1) the power of their stories, (2) and the strengths/assets that define and support their lives.

On Story

When students at the Llano Grande Center engaged in a community based research project five years ago, they initiated an intensive process where they began to look inward. The process of self reflection and a search for identity became important exercises for youths, teachers, and other community members. The process of looking inward and understanding the self was a critical stage in beginning to understand the world around them. After several years of research, the youth researchers found that the two most important assets in our rural south Texas community were (1) story, and (2) the Spanish language.

On Assets

Story emerged as a strong asset principally because of the appreciation that youth researchers found in the incredibly rich experiences elders shared with the youth through the Llano Grande Oral History Project (see appendix for explanation of oral history project). After more than 350 oral histories between 1997 and 2002, the youth researchers built strong relationships with their grandparents, elderly family members, neighbors, and others in the community. Consequently, they felt connected to the storytellers and to their community, and the researchers became convinced that the stories of people and the larger narrative story of the community were important assets. Perhaps as importantly, the researchers also felt a clear sense of personal and community identity. "I now feel like I know who I am, where I come from, and where I can go..." remarked a youth researcher.

LESSON A (ON STORY)

OBJECTIVES

- Understand the stories of the youths through viewing their web cast
- Create your own personal story

STANDARDS

This lesson addresses the following national Language Arts content standard established at <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>:

- Understands that technology, especially in transportation and communication, is increasingly important in spreading ideas, values, and behavior patterns within a society and among different societies;
- Understands that the way a person views an incident reflects personal beliefs, experiences, and attitudes;
- Understands that heredity, culture, and personal experience interact in shaping human behavior, and that the relative importance of these influences is not clear in most circumstances;
- Understands that people often take differences (e.g., in speech, dress, behavior, physical features) to be signs of social class;

- Understands that family, gender, ethnicity, nationality, institutional affiliations, socioeconomic status, and other group and cultural influences contribute to the shaping of a person's identity;
- Uses precise and descriptive language that clarifies and enhances ideas and supports different purposes (e.g., to stimulate the imagination of the reader, to translate concepts into simpler or more easily understood terms, to achieve a specific tone, to explain concepts in literature);
- Uses a variety of techniques to convey a personal style and voice (e.g., stream of consciousness, multiple viewpoints).

MATERIALS

For this lesson students need access to Internet. If no access is available, then teacher will need to print out the text transcripts ahead of time. Exercise #1 requires the ability to stream video (realvideo player or quicktime plug-in required).

Prerequisite Knowledge: Find the Narratives

- An introduction to narrative form and the historical importance of such forms is useful to explain to students; here, a teacher can cite narrative forms from Scripture and the historic value of such stories to people across the world; teachers can also refer to the powerful narratives of Frederick Douglass, Anne Frank, and others as a way to give context, and as a way to inspire.

PROCEDURE

EXERCISE 1: On Story

Watch streaming video journals on P.O.V.'s Borders website. These are accessible at:
<http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2002/borders/stories/index.html>

Reflect upon what was viewed; summarize web cast.

In Gilbert's story what do you see as context? What's the environment that surrounds him? Are there images, symbols, or landscapes that may help you understand Gilbert's story? Gilbert explores issues of self-identity. Do you think about your own identity? Do you talk about this issue with your friends, parents, or others?

In Cecilia's story, what economic, social, or cultural issues help explain her life? Why is Cecilia's mother organizing a benefit *carne guisada* plate sale, for what purpose?

In Kate's story, how do you see her story as a person taking shape? Like Gilbert and Cecilia, Kate is also from the border. But she also has a much different story to tell about the path her life has taken to get to the border. How do you see her story as similar? How do you see her story as different from the others?

Analyze elements of story

What do you see as the beginning to Kate's, Gilbert's and Cecilia's story?

What do you see as the climax of each story? Or, can you anticipate or predict what the climax may be?

What do you see as an ending to each of the stories, if an ending can be predicted?

Reflect upon your own personal story.

What is the context that defines your story? What social, cultural, political, and economic factors contribute to the creation of your story and personal identity?

What's your story? Exercise can be:

- 15 minute writing assignment
- Oral presentations where students relate, create, or recreate their a person (or other) story
- Class-long lesson, week-long lesson, or even six week lesson, where each student explores and crafts his/her own narrative

EXERCISE #2 : On oral histories and community research (see appendix)

Research family, neighborhood, community, events.

Requires:

- Development of interviewing, listening, note taking, and other research skills
- At least several days of research
- Can take the shape of oral history research or other interviewing activity (see lesson on assets)

Construct your own narratives/story

Each student can find his/her own narrative and voice that they each distinctly own. this exercise can be the most powerful learning experience; some students must be deliberately and patiently brought to this point of self-realization and production; caution, care, and patience required.

ASSESSMENT

Outputs

- Who participated? How many people participated? You can quantify this aspect of the assessment fairly expeditiously.

Outcomes

- What did people learn from exercises? What are the specific lessons learned? Students and teachers may learn how to interview each other, or their relatives, or others in the community. Learners could learn how to use technology as part of their story collecting work. Learners can also gain a clear sense of the concept of story, as it relates to themselves, to others, and to their community.
- Learners can produce a written document, a video product a story, or a representation of a story through another medium.
- Acknowledge outcomes; be careful with anticipating outcomes, and thus respect the organic nature of asset identification, building, and just work in general.

Impact

- How did processes on asset building change people? Did learners become transformed as a product of understanding and learning about their own stories, the stories of their relatives, peers, others in the community, or their community in general? And how did the institution change...Are we educating students in a different way? Are we creating a new power dynamic as we privilege the knowledge of people who are not in the traditional text books?, and are those who share their story different for doing so?

LESSON B (ON ASSETS)

OBJECTIVES

- Define and understand the concept of personal, familial, and community assets
- Map your own assets

MATERIALS

For this lesson students need access to Internet. If no access is available, then teacher will need to print out the text transcripts ahead of time. Exercise #1 requires the ability to stream video (realvideo player or quicktime plug-in required).

Prerequisite Knowledge: Find the Narratives

- Finding the narratives of family members and/or others in the community can be a rich learning experience for anyone—youth or adult—but as important, it allows students to begin with a familiar terrain.
- Identifying and processing narratives can take different forms; the traditional paper-pencil form requires the basic task of note taking; other forms such as video taping, or capturing narratives through other media technology may require gaining formal permission from interview subjects.

PROCEDURE

Watch streaming video journals on P.O.V.'s Borders website. These are accessible at:
<http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2002/borders/stories/index.html>

After viewing web cast, engage in reflective exercise in order to define and understand the concept of assets; can use your own reflective strategies... see appendix for additional exercises.

Discussion Questions

Definition: Strengths/assets are valuable resources we have within ourselves, our families, or our community.

In Cecilia's webcast, you see family, financial, and emotional support. Each of those types of supports is an asset for Cecilia, particularly as she progresses through her schooling. What assets do you have at your disposal?

What do you see as assets in Gilbert's webcast? In Kate's?

ACTIVITIES

- Personal/individual; start with yourself: What do you bring as assets and strengths to the school environment, or simply to life in general; what do you have that makes you strong; this is about building an assets-based personal identity

--Family assets: What are the assets or special sources of strength in your family? Someone may be good with carpentry, or someone may be talented artistically, or someone may be particularly book smart. Consider that people have many different kinds of intelligences as you count the assets in your family.

--Community assets: Map out the assets of business/private sector institutions in your community

--Map the assets of public sector: Assets of schools, other government entities

--Map assets of the service sector: Churches, nonprofits

ASSESSMENT

Outputs

--Who participated? How many people participated, how many assets were identified?

Outcomes

- Did learners learn the meaning of asset mapping, asset building, and utilizing assets?

- Learners can create an abbreviated or an elaborate map of their personal, school, or community assets. See McKnight for ideas.

- Acknowledge outcomes you did not anticipate.

Impact

- How did learners change as a result of this exercise on asset mapping and how did processes on asset building change people?

Appendix: On Oral Histories

Mission

The Llano Grande Center's Oral History Project's mission is to reconstruct the history, as told by the people who lived through that history. Through a focus on local history, the elders of our community become valued historians, and our children learn a history that is relevant to their lives. Through a focus on local history, we also study local economy, culture, and the formation and development of institutions such as schools.

A learning process

Teachers and students who work at the Llano Grande Center are trained on how to tell their stories and on how to use those stories as fundamental assets on which to base our community and capacity building program. Sharing stories also encourages cultivating relationships that are intergenerational. Through this work, teachers and students learning a wide range of skills, including about the history of the community, about the interviewing process, about the use of technology, and other skills learned through social interaction and other communicative processes.

Preparing for the interview: Finding an interviewee

Identify an interview candidate

- ❖ Call interviewee and establish a relationship before you interview them. Conduct research on interviewee and time period. You want to go to the interviewee with knowledge that will lead your questions.
- ❖ Meetings between students and mentors will be held for interviewee approval.

Interview tips:

- ❖ If the interviewee is a relative, make sure that you do not make logical jumps in your interview. It would be easy for you to leave important information out because of your familiarity with the interviewee.
- ❖ It's a good idea to conduct the interviews in teams and to have your classmate help you ask questions that you might miss.
- ❖ Prepare questions and practice interviewing in your teams.
- ❖ Interviews that are conducted with a certain theme in mind should not be confined to the themes.
- ❖ Make sure you have a firm grasp of how to use the necessary equipment, such as the tape recorder or video camera.
- ❖ Use 60-minute audio tapes; 90-minute tapes wear out faster.

At the interview:

- ❖ Try to avoid background noise while conducting the interview.
- ❖ Make sure you clearly introduce everyone involved in the interview.
- ❖ Speak clearly and slowly. Your clarity will make the transcription process easier and set the interview's pace.
- ❖ Be considerate. Notice when the interviewee becomes uncomfortable. If the interviewee avoids a question, do not force a response. If you can tell that he/she is getting tired, do not pressure the interviewee to continue; you can continue the interview on another day if necessary.

Ethical & Legal Guidelines / Responsibilities to the Interviewee:

- A. The interviewee needs to be aware of the goals of the oral history project. You need to let them know what will become of their interview and for what purpose it will be used.
- B. The interviewee is given the opportunity to respond to questions as freely as possible and is not subjected to stereotyped assumptions based on race, ethnicity, gender, class, or any other social/cultural characteristic.
- C. The interviewee understands his/her right to refuse to discuss certain subjects, to seal portions of the interview, or in extremely sensitive circumstances even to choose to remain anonymous.

The Interview Agreement must be signed either before or after the interview. Clearly inform the interviewee that they have the option to sign the agreement after they have had a chance to review either the unedited or summarized transcript, or the video and/or audiocassette. If they are unhappy with portions of their transcript, make it clear to them that they have the option to remove portions of the text. They can omit segments of the conversation if they delved into sensitive issues, however they should not change the conversation too dramatically. If there is more than one person being interviewed at the same time, be sure to get interview agreements from each.

After the interview:

- ❖ Take time to thank the interviewee for his/her time.
- ❖ Label tapes carefully. On the tape cover and tape write the date of the interview, the name of the interviewer/s and interviewee/s. If there is more than one tape per interview, make sure the label indicates that there is more than one tape. For example, if there are two tapes in an interview the first tape should read: Tape 1 of 2.
- ❖ For archiving purposes a new numbering system needs to emerge

Transcribing:

Take an active role in transcribing. The interview should be transcribed as soon as possible while the interview remains fresh in your mind. If you do not transcribe the interview yourself, make sure that you review the transcript because there may be slight errors.

Transcripts should have the following heading:

- ❖ Interview with *interviewee name*
- ❖ # (after a numbering system has been determined)
- ❖ Date of interview
- ❖ Location of interview
- ❖ Interviewed by:
- ❖ Transcribed by:

Each speaker should be identified by his/her last name. If there is more than one person with the same last name, then use first names.

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Find more lesson plans and classroom activities at P.O.V.'s website.

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/classroom.php>