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Storytelling: Five Identity-Focused Activities for Teaching Intercultural Competence to Multilingual Learners

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Abstract: In response to the journal's call for work relating to multiliteracies as pedagogy, we share five identity-focused activities related to storytelling as a form of multiliteracy. Storytelling has emerged as a valuable tool in promoting effective communication among multilingual learners (Deardorff, 2020). It has been shown to facilitate the exploration of funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005), support identity negotiation (Lypka & De Felice, 2020), and foster meaningful interpersonal relationships (Lowe, 2002). However, to fully leverage its potential, there is a need for practical activities and techniques that engage learners in expressing their interculturality and navigating their identities. This article aims to address this need by describing five compelling activities – intercultural storytelling, paseo or circles of identity, mini-sagas and haikus, digital storytelling, and story circles – designed to delve into cultural perspectives and intercultural skill development. Detailed descriptions of each activity, including preparation, examples of students' digital recordings, post-activity debriefing notes, and other student work, are provided to empower educators to implement these techniques effectively. The results of these activities indicate that learners consistently praised these process-based techniques as positive bonding experiences. Moreover, through reflection, students gained a deeper understanding of the significance of their backgrounds in shaping their critical thinking and cultural perspectives. The pedagogical implications underscore the value of considering students' historical accumulation of abilities, knowledge, assets, and cultural interaction styles as invaluable resources in the learning journey. These activities enrich understanding of how storytelling can be utilized to enhance intercultural communication skills among learners.

Keywords: intercultural competence, funds of knowledge, storytelling

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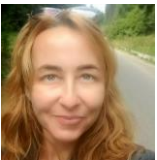
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Introduction

Humans were telling each other stories long before writing systems emerged, making storytelling an ancient form of communication. We use stories every day to explain the physical world, imaginary worlds, and our own individual worlds or realities. All humans share this ability to tell stories, regardless of culture, language, or any other identifying marker (Lucarevschi, 2016). When we become emotionally involved in a story, our brains create oxytocin which emits feelings of trust and empathy that aids social cooperation (Zak, 2015). Teachers can leverage the emotional impact of storytelling to strengthen characteristics in their students, such as curiosity and respect, which develop intercultural competence skills (Deardorff, 2020), making storytelling an adaptable and powerful classroom literacy tool.

> **"In this paper, we aim to describe the potential and adaptability of storytelling as a classroom tool to develop multiliteracy skills as well as advance intercultural competence through learner self-reflection and raised awareness.**

In response to the journal's c all for papers related to multiliteracy, we share five identity-focused storytelling activities related to multiliteracy. Multiliteracy is defined here as linguistic diversity and multimodal forms of linguistic expressions and representation (New London Group, 1996). We, the authors, are five practitioners within the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Two of us (Jennifer and Barbara) teach secondary students in Massachusetts and Italy, respectively. Three of us (Leslie, Andrea, and Josephine) teach in United States-based institutions of higher education with international multilingual language (MLs) students as English learners (ELs) or adult ELs through a community English program. Although our TESOL educational contexts vary, we share a passion to promote intercultural competence

skills. In this paper, we aim to describe the potential and adaptability of storytelling as a classroom tool to develop multiliteracy skills as well as advance intercultural competence through learner self-reflection and raised awareness.

Drawing from our teaching experiences with immigrant students and international students in both the United States and Italy, we employed elements of the Process Model of Intercultural Competence (ICC) (Deardorff, 2006, 2009) as our conceptual framework. Practicing intercultural competence is a continuous life-long journey that requires respect, openness, and curiosity to build knowledge and skills for effective communication across differing world views. Reflecting on unfamiliar experiences empowers individuals to shift their cultural frames of reference, which, in turn, enhances their ability to empathize with another individual's way of life and further reflect on how they articulate their own identities.

Identity is defined by Erikson (1968) as a dynamic and evolving construct shaped by social, cultural, and personal factors. In this sense, identity encompasses the various ways individuals and groups perceive, understand, and define themselves in relation to others and their social context. Norton (2013) further defines identity as "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 45). The goal of this paper is to explore concepts of self/identity and what identity means for immigrants/refugees as ELs. More specifically, how self and identity connect to culture and intercultural competence (ICC) (see Nieto, 2020). Our work is

important for identity and ICC because self is not innate, but is acquired in the process of communication with others. Thus, cultural identities are based on socially constructed categories that teach us a way of being and include expectations for social behavior or ways of acting.

### Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The literature review opens with an explanation of Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence, which we use to frame and consider our five storytelling activities. Then, there is an exploration of parts of the model that directly pertain to storytelling. We end with an explanation of how storytelling can be adapted to various levels of language learners.

Process Model of Intercultural Competence as a Conceptual Framework

The Process Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff, 2006) encompasses individual knowledge and comprehension, leading to *internal outcomes* after intercultural interactions, ultimately influencing attitudes such as respect (e.g., valuing other cultures), openness, curiosity, and discovery. This reiterative process describes an individual's attitudinal shift as they engage curiosity and openness to explore the unfamiliar. When a person approaches new interpersonal interactions with curiosity, they hone such skills as listening and observing, through which they develop cultural self-awareness. New knowledge and skills potentially lead to an internal shift in attitudes and self-awareness. This shift then translates to external outcomes such as effective and appropriate intercultural communication, which strengthens respect, openness, curiosity, and discovery. Many of these steps in the intercultural competence process have been highlighted as benefits of storytelling (Deardorff, 2020) (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

Process Model of Intercultural Competence (adapted from Deardorff, 2006)
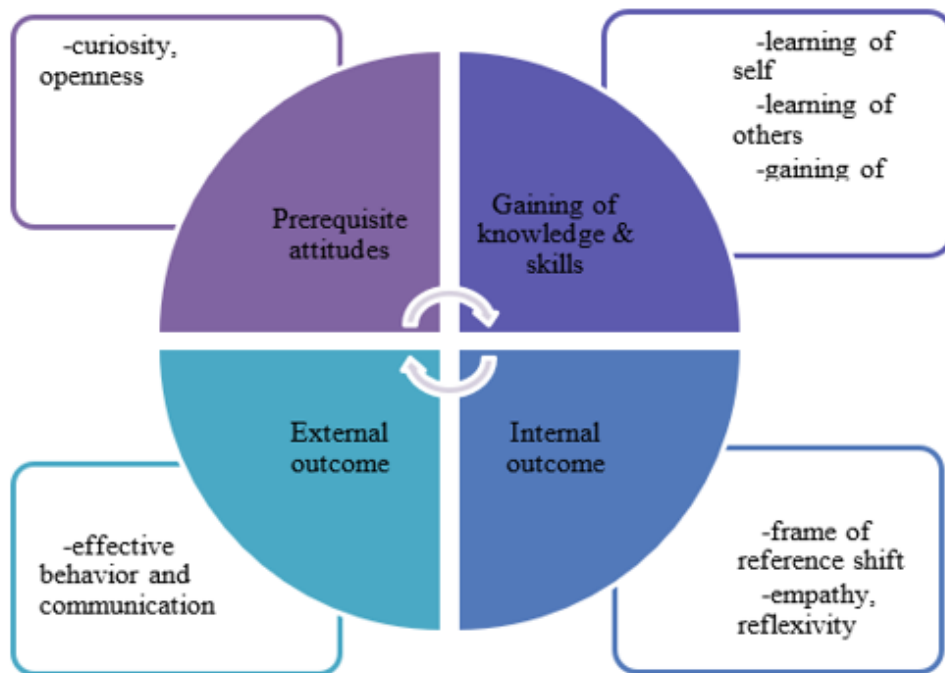
Storytelling Promotes Intercultural Competence

In this section, we highlight three aspects of Deardorff's (2006) model which directly pertain to our experiences using storytelling in our educational settings.

Promoting comprehension of self. As a first step, building intercultural competence requires exploration of self and one's own culture (Andenoro et al., 2012; Holmes & Marra, 2011; Lypka & De Felice, 2020; Storti, 2009). Lypka and De Felice (2020) found telecollaborative storytelling with international students and pre-service teachers in two universities provided a supportive environment for identity negotiation. Further exploring self via identity work, Mann (2022) used stories and a critical literacy framework to better understand how individuals make sense of their personal backgrounds and worlds. Mann found that through storytelling, three students with refugee backgrounds found "tremendous insight into their own lives" (p. 11). Through exploration of self, students learn what cultural factors have influenced their own values, identities, and beliefs.

Storytelling can also build confidence and empowerment in self via asset-based approaches, which emphasize learner strengths, and afford opportunities to create learning experiences that build upon these abilities. An asset-based approach, Funds of Knowledge (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Gonzalez et al., 1995; Gonzalez et al., 2005; Rodriguez, 2013), involves gathering, theorizing, and utilizing concepts that are familiar to students making it possible for them to freely express diverse abilities, identities, skills, and ways of interacting across language, culture, society, and academics. Validating unique student skills creates space for gardening, translating, and household caretaking to enter and enrich the academic environment, providing a more accessible and connected curriculum that resonates

with their lives beyond school (Deniz & Spies, 2021; Durham et al., 2023; Gonzalez et al., 2005). Indeed, Mann's (2022) participants "exercised power over what gets told and in which way, thereby reclaiming the power of their own narratives" (p. 13). Similarly, Piipponen and Karlsson (2019) promoted intercultural learning through storytelling for children ages 9-11 in Europe, expanding our understanding that storytelling promotes confidence in self for young English language learners as well. The young students told the stories that they wanted to tell, leading to self-awareness and promoting ownership of their voices and ideas. Asset-based approaches shift the focus from mere language acquisition to embracing each student's unique experiences and cultural backgrounds, promoting a truly inclusive and empowering learning environment, especially empowering if students find themselves at the margins of the classroom (Flint & Jaggers, 2021).

Promoting intercultural interactions. Storytelling helps individuals gain knowledge of others via learning about their lived experiences and cultures. These explorations of others' identity, lived experiences, and cultures strengthen skills such as deep listening, empathy, perspective taking, and flexibility, critical intercultural competence skills (Deardorff, 2006; Hanukaev, 2022). For example, Lin and Bransford (2010) researched the impact of personal background knowledge (PBK) on students' empathy and cross-cultural understanding. The researchers found that participants who knew about others' personal stories were empathetic to people in cross-cultural conflict. The data suggest that knowing personal background about someone helped people empathize, which aided in cross-cultural understanding. Similarly, Ribeiro (2016) found that storytelling increased listening, reflection, and empathy when used in a classroom of local and international students. The mixed group discussed cultural differences, prompting them to "reflect on

who they are and their uniqueness, and reinforce the need to respect each other's differences" (p. 77). Indeed, storytelling utilizes the process of "searching for similarities and realizing differences" (Sell, 2017, p. 223), promoting deep and reflective learning. Learning about others increases intercultural competence skills such as empathy and deep listening, which in turn triggers an internal frame of reference shift.

Promoting effective behavior and changed attitudes. Once individuals gain the knowledge and skills necessary to promote an internal frame of reference shift, they can use these gains to behave effectively interculturally (Deardorff, 2006). For example, as a tool for mitigating cultural misunderstandings, storytelling can create a safe and structured space for students to develop their skills to interact in effective ways interculturally (Hřebačková & Štefl, 2022). Hřebačková and Štefl's (2022) multicultural group of students in an intercultural communication course used digital storytelling to challenge and overcome intercultural discomfort through development of group storytelling projects. The storytelling process "further mitigate[s] cross-cultural discomforts when working in multicultural teams" (p. 83). As a result, the students gained knowledge of each other, prompting changed attitudes, while shaping their intercultural interactions in informed ways (Hřebačková & Štefl, 2022). Other studies indicate that storytelling not only facilitated intercultural interactions, but the strengthening of intercultural relationships. For example, one study with skilled migrant workers in the workplace suggested that personal narratives contribute in crucial ways to relationship building (Holmes & Marra, 2011). Indeed, storytelling can foster effective intercultural behavior which may lead to changed attitudes and closer personal relationships (Lowe, 2002).

Adapting Storytelling to Learner Needs

Receiving support for sustained learning affords ELs the opportunity to deeply connect with academic content. Teachers can use storytelling to embed language skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking into instructional approaches that integrate personalized stories (Lypka, 2022) and strengthen home - school connections (Johnson & Johnson, 2016) within the classroom. McDrury and Alterio (2003) asserted that stories enable individuals to comprehend and situate themselves within their worlds, as humans are inherently shaped by narratives.

Many storytelling processes include multimodality. Thus, storytelling goes beyond a single definition and incorporates multiple modes of communication, such as oral, written, and visual, leading to a multifaceted meaning-making process between the creator and the social world.

Activities, such as digital storytelling, use alternative modes of communication and multimodal narratives which allow students to position themselves within cultural and social discourses and raise awareness on issues that are significant to them (Honeyford, 2013, 2014). The widespread availability of digital photography and video, facilitated by the prevalence of cellular phones and portable devices, has made learner-produced digital media accessible to learners worldwide. This integration of technology not only enhances engagement in literacy practices but also contributes to language learning. Honeyford (2014) investigated identity negotiations and multimodal literacy practices of six ELs in a seventh-grade English as a New Language class over six months, using student-created photo essays, observations, interviews, and fieldnotes. The findings demonstrated that the photo essay served as a space for ELs to renegotiate their transcultural identities, contesting dominant discourses on immigrants and

immigration. Learner-created artwork and student-centered practices, such as discussions about learner-created projects, can further enhance communication about cultural references, catering to participants who need multimodal help/scaffolding. The incorporation of multimodal storytelling, and self-reflection can lead to a deeper understanding and broaden cultural awareness.

Just as digital literacy practices open unique learning opportunities, creative writing emerges as a powerful tool to encourage subjective views and the sharing of personal experiences, leading to heightened language awareness and increased language use confidence (Maley, 2018, 2020; Maley & Peachey, 2015). Further, creative writing activities can highlight specific narrative forms such as mini-sagas and haikus, which, through the creative use of written metaphorical language, strengthen intercultural competence skills such as curiosity. Moreover, metaphors provide a physical, often culturally bound, image of an abstract concept and thus offer ELs a glimpse into some other-language speaker's views of his own reality (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Central to our teaching practices is the value of flexibility and a focus on the transformative nature of learning. By embracing diverse voices, multiple modalities, viewpoints, and funds of knowledge, we recognize our learners' roles in enriching intercultural understanding, which is urgently needed during tumultuous times. As a response to this need, we aim to present five carefully delineated activities that explore interculturality through storytelling. These activities serve as practical tools to foster intercultural communication skills, promote empathy, and create a sense of interconnectedness among learners from diverse cultural backgrounds. By integrating storytelling into the learning process, we seek to bridge cultural gaps and cultivate a more inclusive and interconnected learning environment.

Five Activities

In our review of the literature above, we found a lack of literature that focuses on storytelling as it relates to teaching intercultural competence. Therefore, in the space below we describe five storytelling activities that can be used in any language classroom to promote intercultural competence. The five approaches to intercultural storytelling are described in terms of background, language level, age suitability, aims, class time, preparation time, resources needed, procedure, and any caveats/alternative options for the described activities.

Jennifer's Activity: A Funds of Knowledge Approach for Intercultural Storytelling

Background
The funds of knowledge concept (Llopart & Esteban-Guitart, 2018; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992) describes the historical accumulation of abilities, bodies of knowledge, assets, and cultural ways of interacting that were evident in American-Mexican households in Tucson, Arizona. In this activity, the approach is used to understand students' abilities and experiences, which can help educators draw on these skills in classrooms to enrich their understanding of academic content while also motivating learners during classroom activities. This activity places students, families and communities at the center of instruction. We have used the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to indicate suggested language levels.

Level: Beginner and above (CEFR A1-A2+ through C2).
Ages suitable for activity: Ages 14+ (secondary setting or higher).
Aims: The objective of this assignment is for learners to describe their bilingual and bicultural identities (i.e., their experience living in two different countries). These assets are drawn upon to enhance translingualism.

Class time: 2-4 hours of class time (will vary depending on length of students' responses and language abilities).

Preparation time: 30-45 minutes

Resources needed

- Google slides for project presentation and printed handouts with detailed instructions and questions
- handouts with questions and spaces for students to think about and write down their answers beforehand and access to a digital voice recorder (e.g., Vocaroo or Flipgrid) for recording their stories
- Google document or paper for writing their short story about a person whom they admire

Procedure

1) Create a student-facing worksheet and slides with questions such as the ones provided in Table 1: *Student-Facing Questions for a Funds of Knowledge Approach to Intercultural Storytelling.*

2) Students prepare their answers to the questions by writing them down and receiving feedback from their responses.

3) Students share their intercultural experiences by digitally recording their stories using the prompts as frames. (Note: We used a free online voice recorder called "Vocaroo.")

4) Teachers use the personal details, with scholar permission, to connect students' personal stories to their academic language and content objectives.

Caveats and Options

- Adjust the languages based on your learner population. Here we used Spanish and Portuguese, but these can easily be adjusted.
- The activity has been designed for multicultural students living in the United States, but can easily be adjusted for other settings.
- Asking scholars to write about a person they admire can be a separate activity, which is

Table 1

Student-Facing Questions for a Funds of Knowledge Approach to Intercultural Storytelling

Questions:
1. Tell us your first and last name
2. Tell us your occupation (your job)
3. Identify people in your family or close friends
4. Describe your home: What language do you use at home?
5. Who in your family speaks English?
6. Who in your family doesn't speak English?
7. How often do you use English at home or work?
8. How often do you use [Spanish or Portuguese] at home or work?
9. Are the books/posters/pictures in your home in English or a different language?
10. Describe your kitchen: a) What foods are in your kitchen?; b) What foods are in [Spanish/Portuguese]? c) What foods are in English?
11. What's your favorite recipe?
12. Who is someone in your family or community whom you admire? Why?

linked to the project at the end. Using data from the person they admire can be useful for finding out what motivates them to learn English.

(See Appendix A for example student stories, which may aid in the successful implementation of the activity).

Leslie's Activity: The Paseo or Circles of Identity

Background

The Paseo is a group experience intended to examine issues of identity, diversity, beliefs, and values. It is a three-step process that begins with personal reflection, engages with storytelling in small groups, and ends with a debriefing session. The purpose is to make connections between critical parts of our identity (who we are) and how identity shapes our behavior (Laidley et al., 2001; Lin & Bransford, 2010).

Level: The English language level of participants should be intermediate and above.

Ages suitable for activity: The exercise is most likely effective for secondary students and older.

Aims: The activity examines our identity to inform our understanding of diversity and culture, make connections between who we are and how that shapes decisions, and strengthen reflection and empathy skills.

Class time: 1.5 hours if possible

Preparation time: 1 hour to prepare and to facilitate

Resources needed to implement the activity: Paper and pens, timer, whiteboard, and markers, PowerPoint if desirable.

Procedure

1) Draw a diagram that includes a circle in the middle and five connected circles around it (a little like a flower with petals).

2) In the middle circle, participants write their names. In the outer five circles, participants should write descriptors for themselves. These descriptors should capture an important aspect of their identity.

3) Participants form two circles in inner-outer circle formation. Participants are welcome to bring their diagrams with them. The facilitator will then ask a series of questions that will be answered in duos one by one in a systematic and guided fashion. Suggestions for the questions are provided by the creators (Laidley et al., 2001).

4) First, the participants are asked to think in silence about their response to the first question (this silence is to ensure that the participants will listen to their partner's response instead of formulating a response while their partner is talking).

5) At the end of the one-minute thinking time, the facilitator asks partner 1 (partner 1 of the duos) to begin responding to the question. The answer period is two minutes. If partner 1 finishes before the two minutes are over, the duo is asked to wait in silence. Partners should never interrupt each other.

6) After the first two-minute period, partner 2 (partner 2 of the duo) begins their two-minute response. When that two-minute response time is completed, the partners thank each other and the circle rotates to create new duos.

7) This process continues for about six rounds (takes approximately six minutes for each question).

8) By whole group, the participants are asked to quick-write what they saw, heard, or felt during the experience. Then, the group engages in a quick 30-second round robin sharing of what the participants observed. After the round robin, the group may engage in a more detailed discussion of the experience. The final reflection may ask participants what they will do differently after the experience, how they may process their

emotions from this experience, or how they may adapt or use this exercise.

Caveats and Options

- adaptable for online learning
- adjust questions for focus of learning (social justice, culture, etc.)
- identity and learning personal background knowledge are good tools for intercultural learning
- debriefing questions can be tweaked (i.e., what did you think of this experience? What did you learn about culture or identity from this experience?)
- use chairs for the inside-outside circle for comfort and stamina
- post questions for comprehensibility, especially for multilingual participants.
- used successfully with groups who know each other well and new acquaintances

Barbara's Activity: Mini-Sagas and Haikus for Short, Creative Intercultural Writing

Background

A mini-saga is a story of 50 words, preceded by a title of a maximum of 15 characters. It was invented by the British science fiction writer Aldiss (2001). The newspaper, *The Daily Telegraph,* has held several mini-saga competitions since 2001 as has BBC Radio 4. Having all the features of a short story, its brevity tickles the reader's emotional response and creativity (Szesztay, 2022).

A *haiku*, on the other hand, is an old 17th century Japanese unrhymed syllabic poetic form (Maley, 2018, 2020) composed of three lines, traditionally 5, 7, 5 syllables long and embedded in natural scenes. It has been adapted for contemporary times, contexts and different languages' features. (See e.g., The variations in Kramer, 2022). Both literary genres, the mini-saga being a prose text, the *haiku* a poetic form, have been largely used in the teaching practice, yet in our view

and experience they are also extremely well-suited for and innovatively implement interculturality-related writings (See Appendix B for samples of *haikus* and mini-sagas written by 18-year-old students).

Level: Lower intermediate to advanced (CEFRB1 to C2)

Ages suitable for activity: Ages 14+ (from secondary settings to adults)

Aims: The activity enables students to use language creatively in association with intercultural themes and experiences, to engage in relatively simpler literary forms and use metaphorical language, and to include personal experiences and considerations, imaginative leaps as well as critical reflection. The activity also aims to boost motivation, language awareness and confidence, and provide ELLs with a valuable aesthetic experience.

Class time: 2-4 hours of class time, which can vary depending on if one plans to include both mini-sagas as well as *haikus* (optional: give as a home assignment).

Preparation time: 1 hour

Resources needed

- digital slides, showing the definition, the rules and examples of mini-sagas and *haikus*, the students' assignments, the phases and timeline of the activity.
- either paper or digital and mobile tools to post students' writing online notice boards and educational apps (e.g., Google Classroom Mobile App).
- creation of a Google document to share the material and to possibly include it in a school journal/web magazine, or/and colored paper to hang the writings on walls.
- optional: the writings can be accompanied by illustrations, students' own drawings, and/or recorded or filmed.

Procedure

1) After introducing the mini-sagas and haikus with digital slides, give the assignments to the students and help them with any question they may have.
2) If some students write more than one piece, ask them to select the best one(s).
3) Allow time for the students to edit the pieces. This can be done in class or at home. They may also wish to show their pieces to their peer(s), asking for opinions and advice.
4) The production of the final version, adding of pictures, etc., using Google docs, recording or filming it.
5) Class reading, listening/watching to the pieces and whole group Q&A time, with comments and possible debates.
6) Conclusion and evaluation time by the students.

Caveats and Options

- The two writing assignments can be done together or separately, depending on the group and on the available time.
- A more precise theme/topic can be also chosen and dealt with in the students' writings: e.g. 1.The first / last/ most relevant intercultural memory; 2. A happy/ difficult/ important/ desired /meaningful moment/ journey/ encounter; 3. A short anecdote about a cultural shock or, on the contrary, about a positive cultural discovery; 4. One could also use Byram's 1997 model of intercultural competences (Byram, 2021; Bryam & Wagner, 2018) or Deardorff's (2006)'s model to stimulate ideas and memories or to help the students to recognize and identify their own experiences.
- For teachers' frame of reference for language proficiency levels and for students' after-activity self-evaluation and reflection on both their language and intercultural communicative skills, one can consult the 2017 NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements, including the statements for Intercultural Communication. (See the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements, 2017)
- This activity has been successfully proposed both for groups of students who already know each other relatively well, as for those who don't, which affects the time needed to perform it, the results of the activity and possibly the students' personal impacts.
- There is also a lot of interesting material on the web of both literary forms if one wishes to have more examples of short creative writing. (e.g. for mini sagas: Sevenhuijsen, 2023).

Andrea's Activity: Digital Storytelling to Foster Intercultural Awareness: An Engaging Language Learning Activity

Background

Digital storytelling (DS) is a compelling method that combines storytelling, technological tools, and multimodal texts (images, audio, video) to create interactive narratives (Lambert & Hessler, 2018; Lypka & De Felice, 2020). Grounded in experiential and academic understanding, DS offers an avenue for enhancing student engagement, promoting intercultural awareness, and supporting language development. In this activity, students will utilize DS to explore and celebrate diverse cultures, values, and perspectives through collaborative storytelling, reflection processes, and multimedia elements.

Level: Intermediate to Advanced (CEFR B1 – C2)
Ages: Adolescent to adult
Aims: This activity aims to:

- develop language skills through the art of storytelling,
- enhance critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, creativity, and digital literacy skills,
- facilitate relationship building, self-

expression, and personalization of learning, and

- foster intercultural awareness and empathy among students and communities.

Class time: 4 hours (can be adjusted based on the needs of the class, the scope and complexity of the task, and the availability of technology resources).

Preparation time: 1 hour (can vary depending on the familiarity of the teacher with the tools and the level of technological resources available). It may involve researching and selecting appropriate digital tools, gathering and organizing multimedia resources, and designing the project guidelines and assessment criteria.

Resources Needed

- Computers or tablets with audio/video capacity and internet access.
- Headphones/earbuds and video/audio recording devices (optional).
- Projector or large screen for showcasing digital stories.
- Digital storytelling tools (e.g., PowerPoint, Prezi, iMovie).
- Student-created DS examples (images, audio, video clips, etc.).
- Handouts or worksheets.

Procedure

1) Initiate a class discussion on the significance of intercultural awareness in fostering understanding and empathy among communities. Encourage students to share their insights on various cultures, including their values, customs, traditions, and challenges.

2) Introduce the concept of DS, showcasing examples that highlight diverse cultures and their importance. Discuss essential storytelling elements (character, setting, conflict, resolution) and analyze strengths and areas for improvement in each story.

3) Provide an overview of available DS tools, offering step-by-step instructions on how to use the selected tool for creating a digital story.

4) Divide students into pairs and instruct them to research and choose a cultural perspective they wish to explore further. Encourage them to delve into the values, traditions, and challenges associated with their chosen culture.

5) Guide students through the process of planning a digital story, emphasizing the importance of storytelling elements. Facilitate brainstorming sessions, topic selection, and storyline development, ensuring their stories reflect the cultural perspective they have chosen. Encourage the incorporation of multimedia elements, such as interviews and personal anecdotes.

6) Assist students in gathering images, audio clips, and videos that support their narratives.

7) Allow students to create their digital stories, providing guidance as needed. Remind them to maintain respectful and accurate portrayals of the cultures they represent.

8) Encourage students to share their scripts, storyboards, and digital stories with peers for constructive feedback.

9) Facilitate the finalization of students' digital stories to meet language and content objectives.

10) Provide opportunities for students to present their projects to the class or a wider audience. Encourage feedback on the effectiveness of digital stories in promoting intercultural awareness. Lead a reflection discussion on the impact of digital storytelling in fostering empathy and understanding among diverse cultures.

Caveats and Options
- Ensure students have access to necessary technology resources, especially if limited outside class.
- Be prepared to address technical issues, such as software glitches or slow internet connections, and have alternative tools available.
- Provide support to students with limited experience or confidence in using digital tools.
- Educate students about copyright laws and proper attribution when using external multimedia resources, encouraging the use of royalty-free or Creative Commons-licensed materials.
- Optional: Organize a screening event for students to showcase their digital stories to a broader audience, promoting intercultural awareness and appreciation beyond the classroom.

Josephine's Activity: Circling through Lives and Languages: Story Circles Build Community

Background

Deardorff (2020) expand the cross-cultural concept of Story Circles, also known as Talking Circles or Peacemaking Circles as part of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) sustainability series. Three premises ground Story Circles: 1) we are all connected through human rights, 2) we can all learn from each other; 3) listening for understanding is transformational Deardorff (2020).

Story Circles help participants fortify intercultural competence skills and resolve conflicts through respect, curiosity, self-awareness, critical reflection, and empathy. As a speaking activity, Story Circles affords language learners opportunities to practice fluency, and stress or intonation patterns. As a listening activity, Story Circles challenges learners to gather both the main idea and relevant details of each story (Fast, 2023). Listening for understanding is an additional and significant layer that requires participants to remain open and curious about the stories they hear, and to deepen their self-awareness as to how they attach meaning to someone else's story.

Level: Intermediate to Advanced (CEFR B1 – C2)
Age Suitability: adolescent to adult
Aims: The activity aims to build community, enrich celebrations, resolve conflicts, and improve speaking and listening skills.
Class time: 90 – 120 minutes for 20 – 25 participants
Preparation Time: 45 minutes
Resources Needed
- *1-2 facilitators* (co-facilitators recommended) who model story prompts and move through the groups to ensure that all members feel heard and valued.
- *Adequate physical space* for participants to sit comfortably in circles of 4-5.
- *Sufficient time* to complete all components of the Story Circle Activity.

Procedure
Preparing for Story Circles:
1) Choose a goal related to intercultural competence, such as developing empathy or practice listening for understanding skills.
2) Include only participants who have chosen to tell their stories.
3) Intentionally maximize diversity of participants in preselected groups of 4 – 5.
4) Prepare a prompt for story 1, story 2, and 1-2 debriefing questions that connect stories with learning goals.
During Story Circles (90-minutes):
1) **Activity Introduction** (10-minutes) Create a safe space by including poetry, music, or mindfulness exercises, and state the intercultural competence goal and language

learning skill. While explaining the purpose of the activity, remind participants that everyone has a story and that all participants are equal as peers.

2) **Story One Set-Up** (5-minutes) Model the first story for participants with a general prompt, such as "Please tell us your name and your favorite food from childhood." Give participants 1-2 minutes to think of a story. Explain that the person to the right of the storyteller acts as a timekeeper.

3) **Story One** (15-minutes) Participants tell their stories within a strict time frame one by one without interruptions or questions. Then participants practice listening for understanding. For each story, every listener offers a 15- second reaction to the story.

4) **Story Two Set-Up** (10-minutes) This prompt addresses the intercultural competence goal stated earlier, such as "What is a memorable cultural misunderstanding you had? What did you learn from it?" When modeling the second story, you also reveal your own vulnerability. Participants need 1 - 3 minutes to generate a story that addresses the prompt. The person to the right of the storyteller acts as timekeeper.

5) **Story Two** (30-minutes) Participants tell their stories one by one without interruptions or questions. Then participants practice listening for understanding. For each story, every listener offers a 15- second reaction or asks a clarifying question.

After Story Circles (20-minutes):

1) Distribute discussion questions, such as, "How has this experience helped you practice (respect, empathy, listening for understanding, etc.)" or "Complete this statement: Before I used to think... Now I think..."

2) Discussion begins at the small group level and moves to the large group.

Caveats and Options

- Story Circles requires at least 90 minutes to complete.
- To manage time constraints, divide activities into 2 or more class periods. For example, Class 1) introduce the concept and purpose of Story Circles and complete the first story cycle. Class 2 complete story 2 and debrief.
- Another option for saving time is to eliminate the listening for understanding section after each story session.
- Adequate physical space is needed for comfortably seating small groups.
- For small spaces, participants can stand in circles or walk together in groups of 3.
- For online instruction:
  a. Introduce the purpose and procedure of Story Circles in a 2-3 min video.
  b. In a video chat, place students in breakout rooms or small groups to practice the first story cycle.
  c. Complete the second story cycle, asynchronously/given the prompt, students video their stories/placed in small groups, students respond either in video, or audio or written.

Five Activities Summarized

All five teaching activities discussed above aim to facilitate the learner's self-transformation and enhance their communication skills across diverse contexts and perspectives (Liddicoat et al., 2003). These activities are built upon the research of others, showcasing the benefits that emerge when ELLs consider viewpoints within and across cultures through storytelling (Deardorff, 2006; Lucheshevchi, 2016). They also emphasize the value of connecting learners' multifaceted funds of knowledge from their out-of-school experiences to academic content (Johnson & Johnson, 2016; Rodriguez, 2013). Moreover, the activities acknowledge that students'

personal narratives serve as valuable assets, contributing to and enriching their understanding of diverse perspectives (Deardorff, 2020; Moll et al., 1992). By incorporating these activities into the classroom, educators can promote intercultural competence, encourage empathy, and create a more inclusive and enriched learning environment for ELLs.

Discussion and Implications for Teaching

If you recall, our conceptual framework embraces Deardorff's (2006) model, which encircles **comprehension of self** (i.e. individual identities), **intercultural interactions**, and **changed attitudes and intercultural behavior** (e.g., valuing other cultures, openness, curiosity, and building relationships). We have centered the practice of intercultural competence as a life-long journey that embraces multiple world views. In the following, we reflect on how our students, who participated in our various storytelling activities, voiced their empowerment, shifted their cultural frames of reference, and enhanced their ability to empathize with other ontological view s of the world.

First, we found that when given the opportunity to share their complex identities, students included their multilingual and multicultural lived experiences, as we saw in Jennifer's activity, and then we started to see the value of self via sharing personal background knowledge. As findings from previous studies have underscored, drawing from personal background knowledge (Lin & Bransford, 2010), out-of-school knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), and asset perspectives (Lypka, 2022) creates spaces for teachers and students to engage new perspectives with curiosity, and to initiate intercultural learning and development. In this student's writing, complex identities emerged as the adolescent described feelings of respect and gratitude for his mother, who lives in Guatemala, even while the writer had lived 14 years in the U.S. apart from his mother.

> *My mother is from Guatemala, she has lived in Guatemala since she was little. she has 100% Guatemalan blood. She has been a mother and father to me before I came to this country since she is totally in charge of me and I am very grateful for everything she has done for me today, not only for me but also for my family. For example, she sent me to the United States so I can have more opportunities, she also sent me to the U.S. for security so I can be safe. I moved to the U.S. without her when I was 2 now I am 16. I hope she can live with me in the U.S. in 2 years. When she can secure a visa.*

Likewise, students commented favorably on the opportunity to freely describe skills such as *translating, household caretaking,* and *providing funds for family healthcare* as part of their identity. These aspects of identity became part of the ecology of the academic environment and made a curriculum more accessible, enriching, and more connected with students' lives outside of school (González et al., 2005). In the following, the writer emphasized the importance of doing what was needed to support their mother's faltering health.

> *In My Family is composed of 13 brothers who are divided 10 man and 3 women adding My mother was diagnosed with thyroid, a disease that makes the person lose a lot in a short time the treatments of her are a bit expensive, but we can pay them in order to hear it every day that is fine.*

By including stories and everyday-lived experiences within the curriculum, teachers afford students an opportunity to communicate skills and abilities that did not derive solely from the school environment, such as with Barbara's creative writing activity. Due to curriculum constraints, creative writing becomes an enjoyable out-of-the-daily-routine activity, and builds on students' personal observations,

explorations, and understandings, allowing freedom of expression. As with the example mini-sagas that follow, the writers found unique ways to describe societal limitations. Both Activities 1 and 3 promote learner self-awareness, which is a significant characteristic needed for developing intercultural competence.

> ### Born in rainbow-hued India
>
> *She was born in rainbow-hued India, raised in the sober UK. She felt torn between two worlds. Her parents wanted her to marry a nice Indian boy. She wanted to marry her British girlfriend. She decided to follow her heart: lost her family but gained herself.*
>
> ### There was a man.
>
> *There was a man. There was a man who was too skinny, too little, too light. Usually when the wind blows he starts to fly. Because of that, some experts started to search for a way to keep him on the ground. But nobody thought of building him two wings.*

Secondly, since hearing a compelling story can trigger positive chemical reactions that contribute to empathy and social cooperation (Zak, 2015), teachers can leverage this shared human reaction in the language learning classroom to engage students. More importantly, teachers can use storytelling to make visible the ways in which language can persuade, evoke certain emotions, or communicate traditions and beliefs in order to change attitudes, just as Andrea experienced with the digital storytelling activity for fostering intercultural awareness. Furthermore, storytelling dispels the idea of a deficit model (Lea & Street, 1998), in other words, that English language learners can be perceived as deficient in skills that they need to succeed. Instead, storytelling focuses on what experiences participants and colleagues contribute; thus, storytelling serves as an additive model.

Third, the skill of empathy and deep listening are critical for developing intercultural competence. Story-telling strengthens both of these skills. Lin and Bransford (2010) support this claim through their work with background knowledge. Both Circle Paseo (Leslie's activity) and Story Circles (Josephine's activity) help participants fortify intercultural competence skills and resolve conflicts through respect, curiosity, self-awareness, critical reflection, and empathy. For example, feedback from students participating in Circle Paseo communicated that reflection helped students realize how important background is to their thinking, viewpoint, and identity. Furthermore, participation and discussion strengthened recognition of cultural values and influences in everyday behavior.

Likewise, the Story Circles activity affords language learners opportunities to practice fluency, and stress or intonation patterns while simultaneously challenging learners to gather both the main idea and relevant details of each story (Fast, 2023). Listening for understanding is an additional and significant layer that requires participants to remain open and curious about the stories they hear, and to deepen their self-awareness as to how they attach meaning to someone else's story. Both Activities 2 and 5 may promote effective behavior and changed attitudes as a result of increased intercultural competence.

Finally, storytelling activities go beyond building English language skills and intercultural competence. Students learn additional skills such as creativity, which implies that other teachers, not just language teachers, may want to use these activities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the pedagogical practices we have described in this work clearly relate to multiliteracies, our special theme for this issue. Our work suggests that hearing personal stories breaks stereotypes and

increases cross-cultural understanding and multiliteracy levels. Integrating students' personal stories as a means of intercultural communication is a powerful approach that benefits all students. In this article, we have described five pedagogically-sound activities aimed at helping teachers foster their students' intercultural competence, recognizing that this development is a lifelong process. By valuing learners' background knowledge, out-of-school experiences, and personal strengths they bring to the classroom, teachers can challenge the hegemony of academic and linguistic standardization (Johnson & Johnson, 2016) and cultivate a learning environment that promotes openness and curiosity towards self and others. Thus, we support multilingualism and multiliteracy skills.

As TESOL educators, we have embraced these techniques and integrated them into our instructional practices. Although our educational contexts vary, the activities themselves have created opportunities for meaningful learning experiences that foster a sense of inclusion among students. By incorporating diverse perspectives and cultural backgrounds into the curriculum, teachers can empower their students to engage with intercultural communication, leading students to enriched relationships and a deeper understanding of the world around them by focusing on how storytelling can advance feelings of trust and empathy during times of discord.

During challenging times, when so much divides our global societies, storytelling remains a skill that we all still share, making it an adaptable and powerful classroom tool because every student is capable of telling stories, regardless of culture, language, or any other identifying marker (Lucarevschi, 2016). By recognizing the value of students' lived experiences and identities, teachers can bridge the gap between their classrooms and students' realities, promoting a sense of belonging and fostering intercultural

competence among all learners. Through such efforts, educators can play a crucial role in nurturing global citizens who are equipped to thrive in an interconnected and diverse world.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Sample Student Stories

My Mother

My mother is from Guatemala, she has lived in Guatemala since she was little. she has 100% Guatemalan blood. She has been a mother and father to me before I came to this country since she is totally in charge of me and I am very grateful for everything she has done for me today, not only for me but also for my family. For example she sent me to the United states so I can have more opportunities, she also sent me to the U.S. for security so I can be safe. I moved to the U.S. without her when I was 2 now I am 16. I hope she can live with me in the U.S. in 2 years. When she can secure a visa.

Untitled

This is the story of my mother, and father they are descendants of different countries for example, my mother is descendant of El Salvador she is 56 years old and married my father at 25 years of age by the church because they are very believers in God and are believers in him. About my father he have 60 years old, he is a very strong man whom I admire very much, because he has been in charge of 13 brothers and we never lack a single thing he is a farmer we have our own crops he is descendant of Italy for part of my ancestor. In My Family is composed of 13 brothers who are divided 10 man and 3 women adding My mother was diagnosed with thyroid, a disease that makes the person lose a lot in a short time the treatments of her are a bit expensive but we can pay them in order to hear it every day that is fine.

APPENDIX B: Mini-sagas and haikus

Examples of mini-sagas, written in March 2023 by some of our students:

Born in rainbow-hued India

She was born in rainbow-hued India, raised in the sober UK. She felt torn between two worlds. Her parents wanted her to marry a nice Indian boy. She wanted to marry her British girlfriend. She decided to follow her heart: lost her family but gained herself. Peter Z.

The black girl

She was the only black girl in the class. They took on her for her hair, her skin, her accent. She cried every night, wishing she could fit in. One day, she brought a cake to school. It was chocolate, vanilla and strawberry. She smiled and said: this is me. Leo R.

There was a man.

There was a man. There was a man who was too skinny, too little, too light. Usually when the wind blows he starts to fly. Because of that, some experts started to search for a way to keep him on the ground. But nobody thought of building him two wings. Maks S.

A guest student

He was a guest student in Japan. He loved the food, the temples, the people. He wanted to show his full appreciation. He joyfully hugged a waitress at a sushi bar. She screamed and slapped him. He learned a hard lesson: not all gestures are universal.　Gabriel M.

Where are you from?

When they ask me where I'm from, it's really easy to say my country's name but they can't imagine the richness I have in my mind, in my tongue, in my soul. Such a small community in such a big world can fill so much space in my thoughts. Lara B.

Haiku Examples:

Black smoke rises,

a bird flies by the building.

A beak that won't sing.　　　Gabriel A.

The more I read,

the less I'd like to know.

Alas, the world's a cruel show. Marko F.

words upon words,

numbers upon numbers,

deaths upon deaths.　Julian M.

Ears listen.

Eyes look.

Heart suffers.　　Peter Z.

No matter how much you have,

your biggest richness

will be the others.　　Simon S.

Goosebumps.

When the last letter

Burns quietly. Maja Z.