PNI Practicum Prelude: A Taste of PNI
Activities

Week	Activity	Required?
1	Observe story sharing	No
	Modify the standard course story form	No
2	Facilitate a story-sharing exercise	VERY MUCH YES
	Add collected stories to common spreadsheet	VERY MUCH YES
3	Facilitate a sensemaking exercise	Yes
4	Prepare stories and project/course record	No

Part 1: Introduction, Fundamentals, Planning

1a. Observe conversational storytelling

Set up a conversation. Ask at least two friends, colleagues, or family members (people who are not taking the course with you) to chat. *Don't tell them you plan to listen to stories*. But do ask them if you can record or take notes on the conversation for a course you are taking. Plan to talk for at least fifteen minutes.

Observe story sharing. During the conversation, as you talk, notice stories happening. Do you hear abstracts, negotiations, reframings, evaluation statements, codas?

Elicit story sharing. See if you can slide a story-eliciting question (a request for a story abstract) into the conversation. For example, you might say something like, "So, what's up with your cat? What happened at the vet?" or something. See if you can *invite someone to tell you a story*. Notice how they respond. If they don't respond by telling a story, keep tweaking your invitation until it works.

Encourage story sharing. When someone tells a story, encourage them to continue. Notice how they respond. Then respond to the story with a related story of your own. See if you can get a chain of stories going.

Reflect on what you heard. After the conversation is over, listen to your recording or look over your notes. Think about the negotiations that took place during the conversation.

If you don't have time

You can skip this activity if you want to (or have to). It will not affect your success in the course (beyond helping you understand how stories work in conversation). Hopefully some of your fellow students will have done the activity, and you can listen as they describe their observations.

Stretch challenges

If you want to do more with this activity, listen to a few different conversations in different contexts, then compare what you hear. Listen at work and at home, for example, or at the market and at the library, or during a meeting and during a party. Do you notice different styles of story sharing? What do those styles tell you about those contexts?

1b. Modify the standard course story form

Look in your course materials to find the story form (set of questions) you will use as you gather stories for the course's shared project. Choose one of the following questions to add to your own version of the form.

1. **How important** is this story to you? (it's trivial; I guess I'll think about it for a little while; it's pretty important to me; I will remember this story for the rest of my life)
2. Among the people you know, would you say that this experience is **common or rare**? (scale from "it happens to everybody every day" to "it hardly ever happens to anybody")

3. Where do you see the **energy** in this story, positive or negative? (free text)
4. Who do you think would **benefit** most from hearing this story? What do you think they would say if they heard it? (free text)
5. Was there ever a time when the **opposite** of this story happened? What happened then? (free text)
6. Does this sort of thing happen **more or less today** than it used to? (it was rare but now it's common; it was common but now it's rare; things have not changed; I don't know)
7. Why do you think you chose **this particular story** to tell? (I remember it well; it resonated with me; it's a good memory; I learned a lot from it; it seemed like a good answer to your question; I thought you would like it; it's a funny story; other)
8. What is one thing that you think would have made this story turn out **better or worse**? (free text)

If you don't have time

I designed this activity to help you think about how you might build your own story forms eventually. But you don't have to do it. It won't affect the rest of the course.

Stretch challenges

If you are interested in doing more with this activity, you can reword the question you chose, choose a different question from the *Working with Stories Sourcebook*, or write your own question. Also, you don't have to add only one question to the standard story form; you can add two or three. Why not try out a few experiments and see what you get?

Part 2: Collection

2a. Facilitate a group story-sharing exercise

Schedule the session. Ask at least **three people** *who are not taking the course* to join you for a one-hour session of story sharing about learning. You can meet in person or online.

Get your story form ready. The story form you will be using in your collective project is the same one you used in your sandbox session. Find it in your course materials. If you chose to add a question to the form, add it to the end of the questions about each story (after the remembering question). Then:

- If you plan to facilitate your session in person, **print** a few copies of your story form for each person.
- If you plan to facilitate your session online, either:
  - o Use your story form to set up an online **survey** (on a surveying platform such as SurveyMonkey).
  - o Within a single document, copy and paste your story form so that there are **at least three copies** for each of your participants. Then upload the document to a server where you can give other people permission to edit it.

Don't give out the story form to your participants before the session.

Review your instructions. Open the sandbox instructions for this course. Find the instructions for the "stepwise landscape" story-sharing exercise. Copy the instructions into a new document. Trim each of the 30-minute story-sharing periods to 15 minutes (so the session will fit in a 50-minute time period, leaving 10 minutes for an after-party).

Facilitate your session. Use your modified agenda to run your story-sharing session. Remember to ask people to answer questions about their stories (and themselves) when the agenda calls for it. When it's time for the after-party, start it by asking a simple question like "So what was that like for you?"

If you don't have time

This activity is very important to the course. Please do it. If you don't collect any stories outside of the class, your course cohort won't have a critical mass of stories to use in the sensemaking part of the course.

Stretch challenges

Some things you could do to get more out of this activity are:

- See if you can get people to come to a 90-minute session. Expand the story-sharing periods to 30 minutes.
- Change the story-eliciting questions that start the exercise. Are there any other questions you would like to explore?
- Change the dimensions of the two-dimensional landscape. What are some other ranges across which stories might vary?
- If you want to (and you can find enough participants) you can facilitate more than one story-sharing session.

2b. Add the stories and answers you collected to a common spreadsheet

If you facilitated your session in physical space, and your class is meeting in physical space, **use a photocopier** to make a copy of each filled-out story form for each of your fellow students.

If you facilitated your session in physical space, and your class is meeting online, **enter the stories** and answers to questions from your filled-out story forms into the common spreadsheet somebody set up and gave you access to. If you added your own question to the form, create a new spreadsheet column for it and write your answers there.

If you facilitated your session online, and your class is meeting online, **copy and paste the stories** and answers you collected into the common spreadsheet. If you added your own question to the form, create a new column for it and write your answers there.

If you don't have time

This activity is important to the course. If you gathered stories, you need to make them available for everyone in the course to use them during sensemaking.

There isn't much extra you can do in this activity. Just add your stories to the collection so they can be used by everyone.

Part 3: Sensemaking

3a. Facilitate a sensemaking session

Schedule the session. Ask at least **two people** *who are not taking the course* to join you for a 90-minute discussion about learning. You can meet in person or online. These can be the same people who came to your story-sharing session, or they can be different people.

Get your stories ready. Prepare to show your spreadsheet – the one everyone in the course has been adding stories to – to the participants of your session. If you would not like to show your participants a (possibly boring) spreadsheet, you can copy the stories (and any answers to questions you want them to see) into a nicer-looking document. That's up to you.

Review your instructions. Open your sandbox instructions file. Find the instructions for the "story elements" sensemaking exercise. You will use this exercise exactly as you did it in your course meeting, with the same timings this time. But instead of using the made-up FictCo stories you used in the sandbox session, use the stories about learning that you and your fellow students told and gathered during the course.

Remember to set aside the last ten minutes of the 90-minute session for an after-party.

Facilitate your session. Use the sandbox instructions to run your story-sharing session.

Record your story elements. Copy the story elements (cluster names) your participants created during your session onto a piece of paper or a computer document. You will be using them in your next sandbox session.

If you don't have time

Facilitating this sensemaking session is **not as critical** to the course as is facilitating the story-sharing session that came before it. If you don't do it, you won't have any story elements to bring to the next sandbox session; but as long as most of your fellow students do bring some story elements to cluster, you won't break anything.

Having said that, if you want to use PNI in the future, make the time to do this activity. **Sensemaking is the heart of participatory narrative inquiry**. If you haven't facilitated a sensemaking session, you haven't learned how to do PNI.

Stretch challenges

Some things you could do to get more out of this activity are:

- Don't just facilitate this exercise: observe it as well. What parts of the session were easier or harder than you expected? What felt natural to you, and what was difficult? What did you notice about the dynamics of the group? How did the energy flow

throughout the session? What new ideas did you gain from this experience? And finally, what is your own style of facilitating narrative sensemaking?

- If you want to, and you can find more participants, hold a second sensemaking session. How did it change on your second run-through?
- Take a look at the sandbox and activity instructions for the other courses in the PNI Practicum (levels I and II). Would you like to try facilitating one of the sensemaking exercises described there? Go right ahead.

Part 4: Return

4a. Prepare a record of the course project (optional)

If you feel so inclined, you can do something with the stories everyone collected during the project. Maybe you would like to make them available (in a nice cleaned-up format) to everyone who took the course and everyone who participated in one of the outside-of-class activities. Maybe you would like to add in some of the insights you all discovered together – about learning and about PNI. Go ahead and finish the course off in any way you like.