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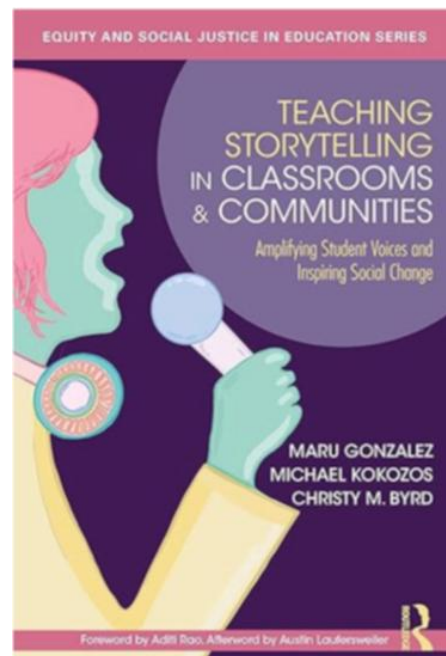
González, M., Kokozos, M., & Byrd, C. M. (2025). *Teaching storytelling in classrooms and communities: Amplifying student voices and inspiring social change*. Routledge.

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As a high school counselor, I work closely with students who bring a wide range of personal experiences into school with them everyday, some uplifting, and others deeply painful. It is these perspectives that shape how I read and respond to educational resources in an attempt to seek to empower students' voices. In U.S. schools and community programs today, many students from underrepresented backgrounds face unfair treatment and barriers to success. *Teaching Storytelling in Classrooms and Communities: Amplifying Student Voices and Inspiring Social Change* by Maru Gonzalez, Michael Kokozos, and Christy Byrd offers an



important approach to educational justice by showing how storytelling can empower these marginalized students. The book explores how storytelling can be so much more than just writing and reading stories, it can be a way for students to share their personal experiences and speak up about important issues, all while trying to create a positive change in their schools and communities. The authors argue that stories have the power to create an understanding, challenge inequities, and help students feel seen and heard.

Throughout the book, Gonzalez, Kokozos, and Byrd focus on students whose voices are often left out of education, including students of color and students from low-income families. The authors argue that storytelling gives these students a way to share their experiences and challenge the unfair systems that affect their lives. Beyond its main message, the book is carefully structured and shows how storytelling can be used as a transformative educational tool, rather than viewing storytelling as a creative exercise Gonzalez, Kokozos, and Byrd show

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how it helps students to find their voices, strengthen community, and inspire social change. They emphasize that storytelling gives a platform to those who might otherwise remain unheard, allowing personal experience to become a source of empowerment and learning.

The book is organized into three main sections, with each section focusing on a different aspect of storytelling in education and within the community, reinforcing the author's vision of narrative as both personal expression and collective action. In this review, I will examine the book's main ideas, strengths, and areas for improvement while showing why it stands as an important resource for anyone who believes in the power of student voice.

The first section is Foundations of Storytelling. This section explains the big concept behind storytelling and why it matters. The authors talk about how stories help to shape who we are, how we understand the world we live in, and how "power" works in our U.S. society. They show us how storytelling has been used in the past by communities to stand up against unfair treatment, and how it can still be powerful in classrooms today.

One of the book's biggest strengths in this section is how it connects theoretical ideas, such as identity and power, to real classroom application. Gonzalez, Kokozos, and Byrd take complicated ideas and make them easy to understand by showing how students can use their own stories and family history to learn more about themselves and the people around them. The mix of ideas and real life examples helps make storytelling feel more meaningful and useful for teachers.

However, the authors also point out that storytelling can also sometimes be emotionally difficult. When students share their personal or painful experiences, it can sometimes bring up tough memories. Many educators may feel unprepared as to how to handle strong emotional reactions or disclosures, suggesting a need for professional development or workshops surrounding trauma informed storytelling practices. The book could give more advice on how teachers could handle these moments and support students when this does happen. Even though the authors stress the importance of respect, permission, and telling stories in a careful way, more specific guidance on helping students feel safe would make this section of the book stronger.

The second section is Storytelling in Classrooms. In this section, the authors share examples and strategies for how teachers can bring storytelling into schools from kindergarten through college. They talk about ways to support students, such as using different forms of media, providing guidance, and being culturally responsive and respectful. They also stress the importance of creating a safe and welcoming environment so students feel comfortable sharing their personal stories and experiences. This section's greatest strength is its flexibility. The authors include examples from many grade levels, cultures, and storytelling formats, such as writing, speaking, and digital media, that allows teachers to adapt their approach to fit different learning contexts. This type of adaptability gives educators creative freedom and ensures that storytelling can be used across different diverse settings.

Equally strong is the book's commitment to justice and student voice. The authors highlight that students are not just recipients of knowledge, but that they are creators of it as well. They encourage teachers to examine their own identities and classroom power dynamics, particularly as these affect marginalized students who may face barriers to being heard and valued in traditional classrooms. This perspective makes storytelling not only a pedagogical tool but is also a step toward equity.

Despite the strengths, this section does have some limitations. One of the main issues is that this book does not include measurable data to back up its claims. Gonzalez, Kokozos, and Byrd give powerful stories and real life examples that show how storytelling can help students grow and feel empowered, but do not provide any clear evidence of results such as higher grades, better attendance, or improved mental health. While the personal stories and examples in the book are moving and meaningful, adding research or statistics to show the outcomes would help to make the book even stronger and more convincing.

The third and final section is *Storytelling in Communities and for Social Change*. This section looks at how storytelling can be used outside of the classroom and in real life community settings. The authors highlight projects where young people work with local organizations to tell stories that raise awareness and promote change. They also discuss challenges, such as making sure the work is fair, respectful, and continues to make a difference over time.

Here, the authors are honest about both the good and difficult parts of using storytelling in communities. They talk about the challenges of keeping programs like these going such as not having enough money or lack of support. This type of honesty makes the book feel more real and believable. Even though they do point out these problems, they don't give many clear solutions. It would be more helpful if they shared ideas for getting funding, building partnerships, or how to gain support from school leaders. It is that kind of advice that would make the book more useful for teachers who want to keep storytelling projects going over time.

The section also highlights one of the most powerful parts of the book which is how storytelling can be used for social change. Students don't just tell their stories to share their experiences, but they use them to take action, raise awareness, and inspire others to make a difference. It is in this way that storytelling becomes more than just a classroom activity. It becomes a way for students to find their voice and create real change in their schools and in their communities.

Throughout the book, there are real world examples, classroom activities, and reflection questions to help teachers and community members use these ideas in different settings. The authors always highlight and come back to the importance of voice, equity, and justice, urging educators to think carefully about who gets to tell their story and who is really being heard. Overall, this book is a helpful guide for teachers and anyone else who wants to use storytelling to empower students, support communities, and inspire social change.

Gonzalez, Kokozos, and Byrd are not the only authors who have explored the area of storytelling. Rather, they are a part of a much larger conversation in the classroom. There have been many educators and scholars who have written about how storytelling can help students better understand themselves as well as the world around them. What makes this book stand apart, is that it doesn't treat storytelling as just another classroom activity. Instead, the authors focus on how the stories told can be used for something greater. The stories can help students use their voices to take action and create social change in the classroom as well as in their communities.

This concept fits the closest to that of culturally sustaining pedagogy which was originally developed by Paris in 2012 and further explored with Paris and Alim in 2017. This pedagogy encourages schools to honor and support the cultural backgrounds of all students, specifically those from marginalized communities. There have been other scholars that have written about similar concepts in the past. For example, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) introduced the idea of a narrative inquiry as a way of using stories that are personal to help better understand teaching and learning. Yosso (2005) also wrote about the power of storytelling through her idea of community cultural wealth, which values the lived experiences of students of different ethnicities. Along with Delgado, Bernal, Burciaga, and Flores Carmona's (2012) testimonio approach which shows how students from marginalized communities can use their stories to challenge unfair treatment, also supports the book's focus on using personal experiences as a way to learn.

In comparison to these works, *Teaching Storytelling in the Classrooms and Communities* offers more of a step by step approach for how teachers can turn these ideas into applicable classroom and community activities. Thus, this book can be a useful tool for teachers. The activities that are provided work on skills that help students beyond the classroom such as helping students to learn and build communication skills while also giving them a chance to connect with themselves including their culture, family, and identity.

This book also opens the door for more research to be done in this area in the future. These future studies could look at how storytelling impacts student growth in measurable areas such as self-confidence, school engagement, and leadership. These long term, longitudinal research, could help us see how these effects play out over time. Additionally, researchers might try using storytelling programs in different countries or communities with fewer resources to see how well these strategies work in other settings (Hull & Katz, 2006).

Teaching Storytelling in Classrooms and Communities stands as a full, practice oriented, and theoretically informed resource for all educators, specifically those committed to educational justice. The three main sections, Foundations of Storytelling, Storytelling in Classrooms, and Storytelling in Communities present a clear framework for using storytelling as both a pedagogical and social tool. The authors present a powerful vision for the use of storytelling in the classroom that comes with both strong ideas as well as some limitations.

The book's greatest strength is how it focuses on students whose voices are often ignored and provides clear, practical ways to use storytelling for fairness and social change. While the authors could give more advice on how to handle emotional topics and keep programs running long-term, their main message is clear: storytelling can help students who have been silenced in the past share their own stories and create real change in their schools and communities. This focus on equity and justice serves as a reminder to educators to be thoughtful about whose stories are being told and whose voices are truly being heard, something that should be of the utmost importance to not only school systems, but to our communities as well.

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About the Reviewer



Carrie Hoffman

Carrie Hoffman is a dedicated school counselor committed to promoting educational equity and inclusion for all students. She earned a bachelor's degree in psychology with a minor in sociology from Illinois State University and a master's degree in counseling with school certification from Bradley University. Carrie began her career as a school counselor focused on empowering students to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Having served in a socioeconomically diverse suburban high school, she has witnessed firsthand the challenges faced by students from lower-income backgrounds. She is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in teaching and learning at Illinois State University, where her research centers on educational equity.

About the Book Authors

Maru Gonzalez, EdD, is an associate professor, University Faculty Scholar, and youth development specialist in the Department of Agricultural and Human Sciences at North Carolina State University. She serves as co-director of #PassTheMicYouth, a multimedia program aimed at amplifying youth voices and providing practitioners with research-based resources for teaching social impact storytelling.

Michael Kokozos, PhD, is an associate director of teaching and learning at the University of Pennsylvania. In addition to his role at Penn, he serves as a curriculum consultant for North Carolina State University and as an instructor for Global Online Academy. With over two decades of experience across K-12 and higher education, he is dedicated to fostering global citizenship, community engagement, and belonging.

Christy M. Byrd, PhD, is an associate professor in the Department of Teacher Education and Learning Sciences at North Carolina State University who uses her research and outreach to help young people tell stories that raise awareness and inspire positive change in their communities.

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