



PNI Practicum Level Three: A Deep Dive into PNI Course Syllabus

This document is released under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. Copyright 2026 Cynthia F. Kurtz.

Course Ground Rules

1. Before each training meeting, please skim the course readings in *Working with Stories*. If you don't want to read a lot (which is fine), you can read the same chapters and sections in *Working with Stories Simplified*.
2. Invest time and energy in your project! You will learn about PNI in this course, but only if you actually do a PNI project. **You will need to find 20+ participants and schedule six meetings (three for story-sharing and three for sensemaking).** The sooner you can get those meetings set up the better.
3. You should *try* to do each course assignment during the two weeks of each lesson, but if you fall behind, don't worry. In our support meetings we will talk about every project, whether it's on schedule or not.
4. During our meetings, please respect everyone's time and attention. Don't dominate the discussion. Give everyone time to speak.
5. Be respectfully curious about other people's projects. Ask useful questions. Don't insult or make fun of people, their projects, or their mistakes.

A Special Note on NarraFirma

To carry out your PNI project in this course, I strongly recommend that you use [NarraFirma](#), the free software I built (with my husband) to support PNI practitioners. NarraFirma is a WordPress plugin (or Node.js package) that helps with project planning and catalytic pattern exploration. You don't *have* to use it, but I will be referring to it often.

You can install NarraFirma locally or on the internet. **You should set it up before (or very soon after) you begin the course.** Read the [installation instructions on the NarraFirma web site](#) for details.

Part 1: Introduction, Fundamentals, Planning

Readings

Before the training meeting, read or skim the chapters (or parts) of *Working with Stories* or *Working with Stories Simplified* called “Introduction,” “Story Fundamentals,” and “Introducing Participatory Narrative Inquiry.”

There are some optional longer readings listed at the end of this syllabus.

Training meeting

Check in: 30 minutes

We will start our first meeting by introducing ourselves to each other with these questions:

1. Where are you, geographically speaking? Where do you live?
2. Why are you here? What brought you to this moment? What interested you in this course?
3. What do you want to get out of this course? What would you like to have at the end of it that you don't have now?
4. How much do you already know about PNI? What about story work in general? Research? Facilitation? Anything else you'd like to mention?

After that we will quickly go over the structure of the course (its meetings and assignments). Then we'll go around the circle again answering these questions:

1. Is there a particular project you plan to do in this course? Can you briefly describe it?
2. If you don't have a particular project in mind, what sort of project are you interested in doing? What are some topics you'd like to explore?
3. How do you feel about collaborating on shared projects with other students? Does that seem appealing to you? Or would you rather work on your own project?

Readings discussion: 25 minutes

We will discuss the readings for the first lesson.

Break: 5 minutes

We will take a short break.

Sandbox: 50 minutes

We will go through an exercise on observing and supporting conversational storytelling.

Check out: 10 minutes

We will end the meeting by reflecting on what just happened and what is coming up next.

Support meeting

Our first support meeting will have more structure to it than the subsequent support meetings. It will also (uniquely) have some pre-meeting readings. (This is to get your projects started quickly so you have plenty of time to schedule your story-sharing and sensemaking sessions.)

Readings

Before our first support meeting, read or skim the Project Planning chapter of *Working with Stories (or Working with Stories Simplified)*, plus the first part of the Story Collection chapter, up to “Gathering your stories.”

Check in: 10 minutes

We will start the meeting with a quick check-in to see how everyone is doing.

Answering questions about participants: 20 minutes

Each student (or collaborating group) will answer the questions in the “Describe participant groups” NarraFirma page about their project participants (right there in the meeting). Together we will discuss any difficulties or dilemmas that arise. (People who don’t have NarraFirma set up yet will write their answers in a document for later entry into NarraFirma.)

Answering the PNI Planning Questions and writing a project synopsis: 25 minutes

Each student (or collaborating group) will answer the PNI Planning Questions (in NarraFirma or a document) about their project. They will also write a brief project synopsis they can use to tell their participants about their project.

Break: 5 minutes

We will take a short break.

Writing a question set: 40 minutes

Each student (or collaborating group) will use *The Working with Stories Sourcebook* to choose and adapt some questions to use in their project (story-eliciting questions, follow-up questions, and questions about participants).

Writing a privacy policy: 10 minutes

Each student (or collaborating group) will write a privacy policy (in NarraFirma or a document) to use in their interview(s) and story-sharing session(s).

Check out: 10 minutes

We will end the meeting by reflecting on what just happened and what is coming up next.

Assignments

Observe a story-sharing conversation **among 2-4 people who are not taking the course**. Finish planning your project and writing your question set. If you don’t have NarraFirma set up yet, get it working.

Lesson 2: Collection Part One

Readings

Before the training meeting, read or skim the part of the Story Collection chapter (in *Working with Stories* or *Working with Stories Simplified*) on individual interviews.

Training meeting

At this point I will stop writing the redundant portions of the training meeting descriptions (check-in, readings discussion, break, check-out), since they will always be the same.

We will practice conducting one-on-one interviews.

Support meeting

We will talk about each student's (or collaborating group's) progress in their project, working through any difficulties or dilemmas people are facing. The meeting will begin with a 10-minute check-in and end with a 10-minute check-out. (Because all of the remaining support meetings will follow the same structure, I will not repeat this whole paragraph each time.)

Assignments

Gather some stories in a 30-60-minute one-on-one interview **with someone who is not taking the course**. Transcribe your collected stories. Prepare at least one story card. Enter your question set into NarraFirma.

Lesson 3: Collection Part Two

Readings

Before the training meeting, read or skim the part of the Story Collection chapter (in *Working with Stories Simplified* or *Working with Stories*) on group interviews.

Training meeting

We will go practice conducting group interviews.

Support meeting

We will talk about project progress and work to get past obstacles.

Assignments

Facilitate a 60-minute group interview **with 2+ people who are not taking the course**. Transcribe your stories and prepare more story cards. Optionally, set up a NarraFirma survey and invite people to take it.

Lesson 4: Collection Part Three

Readings

Before the training meeting, read or skim the part of the Story Collection chapter (in *Working with Stories* or *Working with Stories Simplified*) on story-sharing sessions. Also read or skim the chapter called "Group Exercises for Story Collection."

Training meeting

We will go through a story-sharing exercise.

Support meeting

We will talk about project progress and work to get past obstacles.

Assignments

Facilitate a 60-minute group story-sharing session **with 3-12 people who are not taking the course**.
Transcribe your collected stories. Finish preparing your 80+ story cards.

Lesson 5: Catalysis Part One

Readings

Before the training meeting, read or skim the first part of the Catalysis chapter (in *Working with Stories* or *Working with Stories Simplified*), up to “Write interpretations.”

Training meeting

We will work through the first part of catalysis together, using a sample project.

Support meeting

We will talk about project progress and work to get past obstacles.

Assignments

Check your data integrity. Create and answer qualitative annotation questions. Review your patterns. Mark remarkable patterns. Write at least one observation. Optionally, strengthen your patterns.

Lesson 6: Catalysis Part Two

Readings

Before the training meeting, read or skim the last part of the Catalysis chapter (in *Working with Stories* or *Working with Stories Simplified*) starting at “Write interpretations.”

Training meeting

We will work through the second part of catalysis together, using a sample project.

Support meeting

We will talk about project progress and work to get past obstacles.

Assignments

Write more observations. Write interpretations. Cluster your observations or interpretations. Prepare your catalytic material. Finish preparing your story cards.

Lesson 7: Sensemaking Part One

Readings

Before the training meeting, read or skim the first part of the Sensemaking chapter (in *Working with Stories* or *Working with Stories Simplified*), up to “Planning and facilitating the churning phase.” Also read or skim the part of the “Group Exercises for Narrative Sensemaking” chapter on contact tasks.

Training meeting

We will go through a sensemaking contact task (a pairing exercise).

Support meeting

We will talk about project progress and work to get past obstacles.

Assignments

Facilitate a simple sensemaking session (with a contact task, wrap-up, and after-party) **with 2-12 people who are not taking the course.**

Lesson 8: Sensemaking Part Two

Readings

Before the training meeting, read or skim the second part of the Sensemaking chapter (in *Working with Stories* or *Working with Stories Simplified*), starting with “Planning and facilitating the churning phase.” Also read or skim the part of the “Group Exercises for Narrative Sensemaking” chapter on sensemaking exercises. Skip the sections on using catalytic material in sensemaking.

Training meeting

We will go through a sensemaking exercise.

Support meeting

We will talk about project progress and work to get past obstacles.

Assignments

Facilitate a full sensemaking workshop (with a contact task, story exercise, wrap-up task, and after-party) **with 2-12 people who are not taking the course.**

Lesson 9: Sensemaking Part Three

Readings

Before the training meeting, read or skim the part of the *Working with Stories* “Group Exercises for Narrative Sensemaking” chapter on using catalytic material. (This is the only reading selection that isn’t also available in *Working with Stories Simplified*.)

Training meeting

We will go through a more complex (though still very short) sensemaking workshop, with a contact task, a pattern-focused story exercise, and a wrap-up task.

Support meeting

We will talk about project progress and work to get past obstacles.

Assignments

Facilitate a full pattern-focused sensemaking workshop (with a contact task, a pattern-focused story exercise, a wrap-up task, and an after-party) **with 2-12 people who are not taking the course**.

Part 10: Intervention and Return

Readings

Before the training meeting, read or skim the chapters (in *Working with Stories* or *Working with Stories Simplified*) on Intervention and Return.

Training meeting

Together we will build a narrative simulation (as an example of a narrative intervention).

Support meeting

In our final support meeting, each student (or collaborating group) that has finished their project will give an **oral project report**. Students or groups who have not finished their projects will get some parting support as the course comes to an end.

We will end our last meeting by wrapping up the entire course, discussing what we learned and would like to do in the future.

Assignments

Prepare an oral project report. Return the stories you collected to your project participants. Optionally, carry out an intervention and/or write a project report.

Longer course readings

These long readings are optional. Consider them a menu rather than a checklist. Dip into whatever seems useful to you, during or after the course.

Lesson 1: Introduction, Fundamentals, Planning

From my books

On the foundations of PNI: *Miscellany*, Chapter 18 (“The Story of PNI”)

On the nuances of PNI: *Miscellany*, Chapters 8 (“PNI Opportunities”) and 9 (“PNI Dangers”)

On what it’s like to do PNI projects: *Sourcebook*, the case studies (skim through them)

From other sources

On story form:

- *Story* by Robert McKee, especially Chapter 7 (“The Substance of Story”) and Chapter 13 (“Crisis, Climax, Resolution”).
- *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction* by Michael Toolan, especially Chapter 2 (“Basic story structure”) and Chapter 4 (“The articulation of narrative text II: character, setting, suspense, film”).

On story function:

- *Tell Me a Story: Narrative and Intelligence* by Roger C. Schank, especially Chapter 1 (“Knowledge is Stories”) and Chapter 2 (“Where Stories Come From and Why We Tell Them”).
- *Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions* by Gary Klein, especially Chapter 5 (“The Power of Mental Simulation”) and Chapter 11 (“The Power of Stories”).

On story phenomenon:

- *Story, Performance, and Event* by Richard Bauman, especially Chapter 2 (“A contextual study of expressive lying”) and Chapter 3 (“The management of point of view in personal experience narratives”).
- *Memory, Identity, Community: The Idea of Narrative in the Human Sciences*, edited by Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman, Chapter 2 (“The Narrative Quality of Experience”), Chapter 4 (“Storytelling in Criminal Trials: A Model of Social Judgment”), Chapter 8 (“Narratives of the Self”), and Chapter 11 (“The Virtues, The Unity of a Human Life, and the Concept of a Tradition”).
- *On the Origin of Stories* by Brian Boyd, especially Chapter 11 (“Narrative: Representing Events”) and Chapter 12 (“Fiction: Inventing Events”).

On how stories flow in conversations:

- *Conversational Narrative: Storytelling in Everyday Talk* by Neal R. Norrick, especially Chapter 3 (“Formulaicity and Repetition in Storytelling”).

On how stories flow in communities and organizations:

- *Storytelling in Organizations: Facts, Fictions, and Fantasies* by Yiannis Gabriel, especially Chapter 1 (“Same Old Story or Changing Stories?”) and Chapter 2 (“Storytelling and Sensemaking”).

- *Narrating the Organization: Dramas of Institutional Identity* by Barbara Czarniawska, especially Chapter 2 (“On Dramas and Autobiographies in the Organizational Context”).

On narrative inquiry:

Handbook of Narrative Inquiry, edited by D. Jean Clandinin, especially Chapter 6 (“Talking to Learn: The Critical Role of Conversation in Narrative Inquiry”) and Chapter 21 (“The Ethical Attitude in Narrative Research: Principles and Practicalities”)

On action research

Do It Yourself Social Research by Yoland Wadsworth

Participatory Action Research by Alice McIntyre

On oral history

The Oral History Reader, edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson

Lessons 2-4: Story Collection

From my books

On the nuances of story collection: *Miscellany*, Chapter 2 (“More on Story Collection”)

On the nuances of story facilitation: *Miscellany*, Chapter 11 (“The Trickster Role of the PNI Facilitator”)

On the ethical collection of stories: *Miscellany*, Chapter 12 (“Practical Ethics in PNI”)

On the story-listening journey: *Miscellany*, Chapter 17 (“Stories and Nonviolent Communication,” especially the last part, where it talks about “the story-listening journey”)

From other sources

On interviewing:

- *The Oral History Reader*, Chapter 10 (“Ways of Listening”), pp 114-121.
- *The Oral History Reader*, Chapter 14 (“Learning to Listen”), pp 157-171.
- *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative* by Elliot G. Mishler, Chapter 4 (“Language, Meaning, and Narrative Analysis”), pp 66-116.

On facilitating story sharing:

- *Reflections on Therapeutic Storymaking* by Alita Gersie, Chapter 5 (“The Intricacy of Listening and Responding to Stories”), pp. 113-153.

On transcribing stories:

- *The Oral History Reader*, Chapter 32 (“Perils of the Transcript”), pp 389-392.

On group story sharing:

- *Storycatcher* by Christina Baldwin
- *A Safe Place for Dangerous Truths* by Annette Simmons

Lesson 5: Catalysis

From my books

On the nuances of narrative catalysis: *Miscellany*, Chapter 3 (More on Narrative Catalysis)

From other sources

On multiple interpretations of stories:

- *The Oral History Reader*, Chapter 27 (“That’s not what I said”)

On discovering and exploring multiple perspectives:

- *Three Strands in the Braid: A Guide for Enablers of Learning* by Paula Underwood
- *Suspicious Minds* by Rob Brotherton, especially Chapter 6 (“I Want to Believe”)
- *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth, and Art* by Lewis Hyde, especially Chapters 2, 5, and 10 (though the whole book is worth reading)
- *Connecting Across Differences: Finding Common Ground with Anyone, Anywhere, Anytime* by Jane Marantz Connor and Dian Killian, especially Chapter 1 (“Another Way to See the World”) and Chapter 3 (“Really Listening”)

On narrative inquiry:

- *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences* by Catherine Kohler Reissman, especially Chapter 3 (“Thematic Analysis”) and Chapter 4 (“Structural Analysis”)
- *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry*, edited by D. Jean Clandinin, especially Chapter 4 (“Talking to Learn”) and Chapter 21 (“The Ethical Attitude in Narrative Research”)
- *Using Narrative in Social Research* by Jane Elliott, especially Chapter 3 (“Interpreting people’s stories: narrative approaches to the analysis of qualitative data”)

On mixed-methods research:

- *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* by John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, especially Chapter 3 (“Choosing a Mixed Methods Design”) and Chapter 7 (“Analyzing and Interpreting Data in Mixed Methods Research”)

On grounded theory:

- *Constructing Grounded Theory* by Kathy Charmaz, especially Chapter 3 (“Coding in Grounded Theory Practice”) and Chapter 5 (“Theoretical Sampling, Saturation, and Sorting”)

On basic statistics:

- *Statistics for Research Students* by Erich C. Fein et al, available at <https://usq.pressbooks.pub/statisticsforresearchstudents> (the whole book is good)
- *Introductory Statistics* by Barbara Illowsky and Susan Dean (available at <https://openstax.org/books/introductory-statistics/pages/1-introduction>), especially Chapter 2 (2.1, Histograms, Frequency Polygons, and Time Series Graphs, and 2.6, Skewness and the Mean, Median, and Mode), Chapter 3 (Contingency Tables), Chapter 12 (Scatter Plots), and Chapter 12 (Testing the Significance of the Correlation Coefficient)
- *Introduction to Statistics* by David Lane et al. (available at the Open Textbook Library at <https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/textbooks/459>), especially Chapter 1 (Distributions), Chapter 3 (Measures of Central Tendency), Chapter 4 (Introduction to Bivariate Data), and Chapter 17 (Contingency Tables)

Lessons 7-9: Sensemaking

From my books

On the nuances of sensemaking: *Miscellany*, Chapter 4 (“More on Sensemaking”)

From other sources

On sensemaking:

- *Sensemaking in Organizations* by Karl E. Weick, especially Chapter 2 (“Seven Properties of Sensemaking”)
- *Sense-Making Methodology Reader: Selected Writings of Brenda Dervin* by Brenda Dervin and Lois Foreman-Wernet, especially Chapter 8 (“Sense-Making’s Journey from Metatheory to Methodology to Method”)
- “The cost structure of sense making” by Daniel M. Russell et al, *ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (1993), accessible at <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235961374> *The cost structure of sense making*

On narrative sensemaking:

- *Three Native American Learning Stories: Who Speaks for Wolf, Winter White and Summer Gold, Many Circles* by Paula Underwood
- *Narrative Life: Democratic Curriculum and Indigenous Learning* by Neil Hooley, especially Chapter 11 (“Participatory Narrative Inquiry”)
- *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* by Augusto Boal

On facilitation:

- *Participatory Workshops: A Sourcebook of 21 Ideas & Activities* by Robert Chambers
- *Small Groups as Complex Systems* by Holly Arrow, Joseph E. McGrath, and Jennifer L. Berdahl, especially Chapter 3 (“Groups as Complex Systems: Overview of the Theory”)
- *Using Conflict in Organizations*, edited by Carsten De Dreu and Evert Van De Vliert, especially Chapter 4 (“Mitigating Groupthink by Stimulating Constructive Conflict”) and Chapter 10 (“Productive Conflict: Negotiation as Implicit Coordination”)

Lesson 10: Intervention and Return

From my books

On the nuances of intervention: *Miscellany*, Chapter 5 (“More on Intervention”)

On community story sharing: *Miscellany*, Chapter 6 (“More on Conversational and Community Story Sharing”)

From other sources

On narrative therapy:

- *Narrative Therapy in Practice: The Archaeology of Hope* by Gerald Monk et al., especially Chapter 1 (“How Narrative Therapy Works”)
- *Maps of Narrative Practice* by Michael White, especially Chapter 2 (“Re-Authoring Conversations”)

On participatory theatre:

- *The Applied Theatre Reader*, edited by Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston, especially Chapter 6 (“Provoking Intervention”), Chapter 18 (“Introduction to Participation”), and Chapter 24 (“The Complexity and Challenge of Participation”)
- *Telling Stories to Change the World*, edited by Rickie Solinger et al. (read the chapter titles of this book and find an example that connects to what you want to do)