

Guiding Question Reflection:

Storytelling as a Tool for Global Understanding

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My guiding question heading into this Fulbright Teachers for Global Classrooms experience was simple but layered: *How can storytelling help build cross-cultural understanding and support inclusive education?* I wasn't looking for a neat framework or a turnkey strategy; I just wanted to see how narrative shows up in systems different from my own.

Three weeks later, after classroom visits, policy sessions, cultural immersion, and a few unplanned surprises, I'm leaving with a much broader understanding of what storytelling means in a national context like Uruguay's and where I might take it from here.

Storytelling Isn't Always a Story

One of my first real moments of reflection came during our early meetings in Montevideo, particularly the session with the team at Ceibal. Like many educators, I'd heard of Uruguay's one-to-one laptop program, but I hadn't understood how deeply integrated Ceibal is into the national education strategy.

What struck me wasn't just the tech, it was the story they were telling through it. Equity wasn't a slogan; it was the frame. Devices weren't about novelty; they were about access. Uruguay has managed to turn its national commitment to digital learning into a kind of narrative scaffold, one that allows students, even in rural areas, to be part of something larger than their zip code.

In that moment, I realized that **storytelling isn't always verbal or artistic**. Sometimes, it's structural. Sometimes, it's policy. And sometimes, it's baked into how a country decides what every child should have a right to, like bandwidth, language access, and digital agency.

Small Schools, Big Stories

Later, while visiting Escuela Rural N°88, I saw the other side of the narrative spectrum: a small multigrade school with just one teacher and a group of students who welcomed us like old friends. They offered us merienda, showed off their classrooms, and casually told us about their daily lives, what they were learning, what they loved, what they wished for.

It wasn't presented as a "project" or framed around any theme. But it was storytelling in the purest form, grounded, personal, and unfiltered. The kind of sharing that happens when a place is small enough for everyone to know each other's rhythms.

As someone who teaches in a much larger, faster-moving context, it reminded me that sometimes, stories don't need a platform; they just need time and trust. And that's something we can create, regardless of system size or resources.

"Sí, Prometo": The Story of Belonging

One of the most powerful narrative moments I witnessed wasn't in a classroom at all; it was in the town square. On a national holiday, I watched as dozens of students from nearby schools gathered in full uniform to say the civic pledge: "*Sí, prometo.*"

This wasn't a performance. It was quiet, structured, and deeply cultural. These students weren't just reciting something; they were being welcomed into national belonging. One teacher told me this moment marks a formal transition in their schooling and civic identity. For the students, it's serious, memorable, and deeply felt.

It reminded me that **storytelling also happens through ceremony**, and that collective identity is built one moment, one ritual, one shared phrase at a time. In my context, we often rush past those opportunities. Uruguay reminded me to slow down and pay attention to the meaning behind the moment.

So, What Am I Bringing Back?

This experience has changed how I think about storytelling in education. It's not just a way to elevate student voice or check a creativity box. It's a tool for building context, bridging gaps, and making space for belonging.

I'm leaving with a few clear intentions:

- To develop lessons that use personal, local, and national storytelling, mirroring what I saw embedded in Uruguay's civic and educational fabric
- To advocate for more storytelling tools in digital spaces, especially ones that support multilingual learners and students with disabilities
- And to reframe narrative work in my classroom, not as an "add-on," but as a core practice that supports deeper engagement and connection

Final Thoughts

Storytelling isn't always a polished product. Sometimes, it's a conversation over mate. Sometimes, it's a national policy about who gets access to learning. And sometimes, it's a flag ceremony in a windswept town square.

Uruguay helped me see that stories are everywhere if I'm willing to listen—and that as educators, we don't just teach content. We shape narratives. We curate context. We help students make sense of the world and their place in it. And that, more than anything, is what global education is about.