

TALES: Introducing Oral and Digital Storytelling in the Classroom

By using stories and storytelling techniques the teacher introduces a fantastic instrument in his/her courses. By 'storying' the content in images and narratives the transfer of knowledge improves considerably. Introducing storytelling by the pupils/students themselves is a great way to improve creativity, literacy, social, emotional and artistic competences.

TALES is a Comenius Multilateral Project that wants to introduce oral and digital storytelling and the use of storytelling techniques as a pedagogical tool in school education. TALES started in November 2013 and will last 2 years.

The end target groups of TALES are 6 – 18 year old pupils and students. For these groups the project focuses on the development of key competences through storytelling e.g. verbal and communication skills in the mother tongue and in a foreign language, intercultural understanding, digital competences, imagination and creativity, cultural awareness and expression, etc.

In order to reach these groups TALES targets initial teacher training students, teachers at school, teacher trainers as

well as curriculum developers, storytellers cooperating with schools.

Through good practice collection, research and pilot projects the TALES team is developing a number of tools.

Based on all these experiences the partnership will produce reports, educational materials and a manual about how to effectively introduce (digital) storytelling into the classroom. All material will be available on the project website: www.storiesforlearning.eu



What do we mean by Oral Storytelling?

It is possible to tell stories through several means: books, comics, audio books, radio, television, cinema, videogames, internet, presenting an infinite universe of alternatives as technology evolves. So what is different in Oral Storytelling? And why does the TALES Project find its application so important in the educational practice?

The answer relies on the fact that Oral Storytelling is a non-mediated way to tell a story, which implies the co-presence of teller and listener and determines the ephemeral nature of the narrative event. Oral Storytelling only exists while the story is being told and it is unrepeatable. Therefore oral storytelling is more than the story, the music, the images or the interaction with the medium. Oral Storytelling is about what happens between people while they are sharing the story.

Thus Oral Storytelling shares many features with other ways of telling a story or being together with people. As in reading a book we are engaged in imagining the characters and landscapes in our mind in a different way than in a movie for example. As in a dance ball we are invited to participate, sharing our entertainment with others. The special thing about Oral Storytelling, however, is how these elements go together.

The context is where and how storytelling takes place. It depends on the moment of the day, the nature of the space, who is present, what they were doing before and what they are going to do next, why they are gathered and what is the nature of their social interaction. In this way, oral storytelling stresses the experience of the event, where we are and with whom. From the tellers it requires the sensibility to find the opportune moment, to choose the story and how to tell it, or not to do it at all and just dialogue with their interlocutors. From the listener it demands the ability to recognize his part in the game, to listen or to participate in the terms the context

proposes, to relate to others, tellers and other listeners, in the best interest of the collective event.

The narrator is the person who tells the story. It is not necessarily a storyteller as we imagine: anyone able to share an experience can tell a story. Again, all depends on the context. The special thing about the narrator in oral storytelling is that he is a real person that we know and he is just right there! This way, Oral Storytelling demands for those who narrate a certain level of exposition, the ability to share his/her own imagery and points of view, experiencing the restraints and the freedom of affirming his/her personal and cultural identity. For those who are listening it implies acceptance of the other, willingness to engage different ideas and understandings of the shared reality. The fact that the teller and the listener are present and that they acknowledge each other as persons who are sharing experiences is one of the greatest added-value oral storytelling can offer in terms of social interaction.

The narrative is how the story is delivered through any kind of storytelling. It has to do with how the narrated events are told and organized in sequence, which point of view we are invited to follow, what is described and not, what is told and what is shown. In oral storytelling the narrative is not only delivered verbally: the gestures, the voice and the use of space also contribute to it.

How we tell the story, how we organize the narrative, can be almost entirely decided in the moment of the telling, as in the spontaneous retelling of a life experience, or more grounded on a pre-set form, as in a story that we have already heard before, or almost completely based on a fixed script, as in a memorized text. Nevertheless, there will be always a spontaneous part of the narrative that is a consequence of the context and of the relation between teller and listeners: spontaneous gestures, tones of voice, pauses and rhythms,

interactions and interruptions... However, telling stories spontaneously, finding the words and physically performing it as the story goes on will stress the importance of the context and of the social interaction, exercising narrative and oral communication skills in a particular way.

The gestures and voice are important non-verbal elements of oral storytelling. They can infer rhythm to the speech, add information or imitate characters. They can invite to closeness or demand distance. They participate entirely in the process of oral storytelling and consequently they involve body expression, an essential competence in oral communication and in social performance.

The space is another important element of oral storytelling, also strictly connected to the context. What is the difference between telling a story in the classroom and taking the class to another place? What changes when the group is seated in lines or organized in a circle? The space element determines a great deal of the oral storytelling experience and it cannot be overlooked.

Despite all these elements, and others, oral storytelling is really about human relation. The way it entails communication makes it a special way of transmitting knowledge, connecting generations and building communities, a pleasant entertainment at work breaks and in social events and even an intimate performing art to enjoy in pubs, theatres and festivals. Nevertheless, no matter where we are and why we are telling stories it always implies a moment shared by people, an opportunity to exchange experiences and ideas, to dream awake side by side, to imagine a possible world. This element of oral storytelling is only achievable because of the co-presence of someone telling a story through a narrative voice and someone who is listening.

Luis Correia Carmelo, Ouvir e Contar, PT

Tales

Good practices

So far, the TALES partners collected 20 good storytelling practices in primary and secondary education, in teacher training and special needs: 2 Austrian, 5 Belgian, 1 Estonian, 3 Italian, 2 Norwegian, 2 Polish, 2 Portuguese, 1 Swedish and 2 British.

These good practices prove that storytelling contributes to the acquisition of the European key competences:

STORYTELLING FESTIVAL, BELGIUM

Every year the UCLL Hasselt organizes a Creative Spring Module (CREOS) in which teacher trainees from all over Europe take part. This module includes an international storytelling festival in a primary school. The students attend the annual storytelling festival in Alden Biesen and take a storytelling workshop. Every student chooses a folktale of his/her own region/country. They present their folktales to each other and decide which folktales will be told to the 10-12 year old primary school children. The students are divided in 6 groups, as there are 2 carousels of 3 stories each. All stories are told in English. Prior to their performance the students introduce themselves and connect with the children. After the story is told, the children participate actively in the follow-up activities and learn more about the storytellers' background. Finally the students reflect on their performance and on the use of stories as a didactic tool.



Through this storytelling festival, the teacher trainees and/or children acquire several key competences: communication skills in a foreign language (English); learning to learn; social



and civic competences; digital competence (powerpoints to illustrate place of action, clarify notions); sense of initiative; cultural awareness and expression.



8 good practices focus on oral storytelling: CASA DAS HISTÓRIAS (story house), PORTUGAL

Young boys between 14 and 18 years old, integrated into the prison system to fulfill an educational guardianship emitted by the Juvenile Court, are involved in this project that aims at contributing to the process of taking those young individuals out of delinquency.

The use of storytelling aims at enriching the young men's imagination, cultural references and values by the passive act of listening. It also aims at improving communication skills by actively telling stories. Storytelling as a tool proves to be a spontaneous way of sharing imagination and ideas.

12 good practices contain a digital component: UNDER THE SAME SKY, ITALY

Politecnico di Milano (Italy) promotes a digital storytelling competition for Italian schools. In the school year 2013-14, an international version was made available, on the topic of the forthcoming EXPO2015 fair: "Feeding the planet, energy for life". The target group of this competition are groups of students under the guidance of their teacher(s), aged between 4 and 18.

One example is the cooperation between two primary schools, one located in Italy and one in a refugee camp in Somalia. Both schools created a digital story.

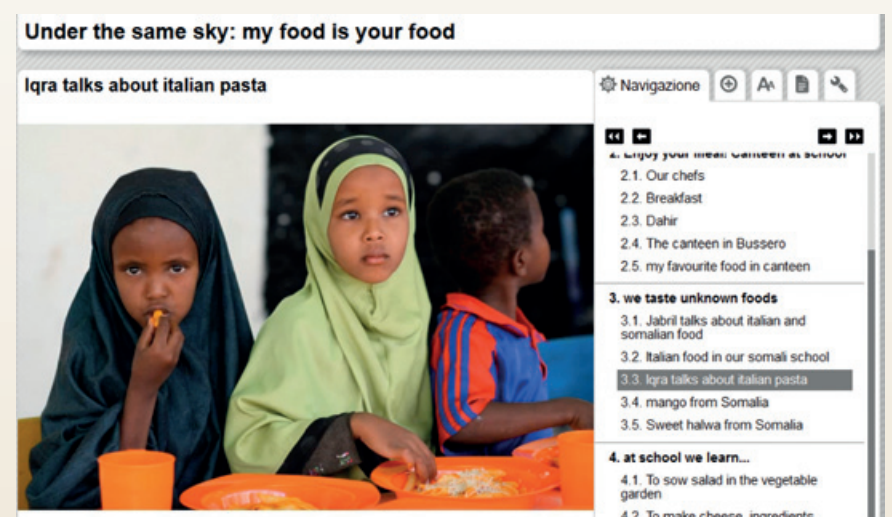
The goal: comparison between Italian and Somalian food traditions and habits; making children understand and accept cultural diversities.

MULTI LINGUAL DIGITAL STORYTELLING, UK

11-17 year old girls and boys from an Arabic and non-Arabic background create films and tell stories in the Arabic language using digital media. The aim is to steer away from traditional teaching methods which focus heavily on text books that come from 'back home' countries. Such books have little relevance to the culture and creativity of students brought up in western societies. Increasingly, many young adults are refusing to take the Arabic language further. Digital storytelling is used as an alternative learning method and linked with mainstream subjects like History and film studies. The goals: developing language skills and enhance creativity, cultural awareness and critical thinking.

All good practices are described on the TALES website www.storiesforlearning.eu

Marleen Mesotten, UCLL, BE - Patricia Huion, UCLL, BE



Lifting the Treasure or Flying the Carpet

Austrian Pilot Project, Praxis-NMS. PHSt, Graz

"Once there was a sultan who dreamed of a big star and a small star, and the big star bowed to the small star..." - 27 pairs of eyes are following the storyteller's every movement. They are 13 year-olds and they are listening in a kind of concentration that is very rare, according to their teachers. But isn't it that difficult age where storytelling and especially traditional stories are not considered 'cool' anymore?

That was one of the questions the teachers and the storyteller were pondering about at the start of this project. And on the other hand there was a need in these young people their teachers felt, this want for something to make them feel special, to raise their self-esteem, help them concentrate and express themselves better. And storytelling was chosen as the means to achieve this. Lots of high expectations for the storyteller, for the stories.

Were they fulfilled? - Not in the sense that all of these young people all of a sudden turned into princesses and princes full of self-esteem, brilliant in their self-expression and academically excellent. The change was subtle, visible sometimes for moments in the sparkle in the eyes of a boy with autistic features who told a story in his own words to a small subgroup, or in the demands for more stories from the group, or in moments when everyone was engaged in warm-up games and trying on costumes and the school environment was totally forgotten. It was visible also in the determined resistance to present their newly acquired storytelling skills to parents and the general public. Some agreed to show their skills to a group of primary school children using a mixture of telling and acting, some did a radio report and others brought stories from their own cultural and language background to class. In the radio report one girl said that she enjoyed doing it, was proud to have taken part against her anxieties, but would not want to do it again. One said they felt awkward in doing this in the presence of their teachers.

The storyteller also wondered in how far it was this difficult age when you yourself are not sure whether you want something or not.

An intervention into a social system is never predictable

by definition, so steering is an illusion and producing expected results, even more so according to systems theory (e.g. Willke, 2005). So why go to all this trouble and shuffle "normal" lessons out of the way to make room for storytelling? - Storytelling appeals to every individual in a different way while at the same time providing a strong group experience. The carefully chosen stories talk about problems of a deeply felt and shared human condition and share images of solutions. So "the stories are not true in the sense of historical truth but real in the sense that one day you might wake up and feel like you were the hero in this story" as Frederik, the storyteller in this project, responded to a question by the youngsters.

Frederik brought in his large experience with children and adults. His idea was to bring in a variety of methods besides storytelling. So the children did warm-up games, used different prompts for telling, drama techniques, costumes, props. They were split into two groups and told different stories to create a situation that made students' telling necessary. After the first storytelling morning Frederik was honoured with the word "chillig" (a new German adjective popular with young people in Austria at the moment replacing cool) for a feedback - more than expected.

But storytelling is not only about listening or telling stories. The aim was also to improve children's literary skills.



The class were taking part in a nationwide programme to enforce reading skills. So the storytelling was connected to the daily reading time and children could choose books from a preselected choice of storybooks. They were asked to find a favourite story which they would like to tell others in a small group. Also they were asked to write their own stories. One of these stories - The Black Rose - was voted for as a class favourite and later acted out in the presentation.

When Frederik came for the second workshop there was plenty of material to work with. This time the focus was on telling. The children worked with lots of different material and in varying settings. They were encouraged to use their own words when telling which sometimes amounted to sounding like a different language altogether -and not because of the seven different mother tongues in the class! In this respect the class is like any other city NMS (reform lower secondary) in Austria. It is also featuring social inclusion of children with learning or other handicaps. The children are doing really well regarding their social skills which became also obvious during this project.

In a next meeting Frederik asked the children for feedback. All of them mentioned that they loved listening to the stories. It also turned out that they did not like the idea of a big affair presentation. So negotiations with the teachers started with the above- mentioned results.

What did the children gain?- Maybe no wonders in self-confidence, but definitely a strong sense of not being alone or the first in this world with difficult problems, there was a treasure of wisdom they had found, lifted and taken on board. Will they be able to fly away on a carpet? - We do not know yet.

Contact: Mag. Andrea Völkl, Mag. Christa Bauer, Frederik Mellak (christa.bauer@phst.at)

Willke, H.(2005): (Un)Möglichkeit der Intervention. Studienmaterial des Fernstudiums „Systemisches Management" Kaiserslautern, (Technische Universität)

Christa Bauer, PHST Graz, AT

The TALES international digital storytelling competition

The TALES project also explores the meeting point of two fascinating realms that may seem to stand on opposite sides of the sticks: the art of oral storytelling, which probably dates back to the very beginning of humanity, and the extraordinary affordances of digital communication. Within this frame, the TALES competition is launched, inviting schools from all over Europe to create digital stories.

Benefits

Collaborative Digital storytelling is an effective way for having students gain substantial educational benefits of various kinds. First of all, students get cognitive benefits in terms of enhanced curiosity towards the subject-matter, capacity of reformulating knowledge and deeper understanding. Students also improve their social skills: they learn how to work in groups, to take initiative and to negotiate with their peers. Third and very important, creating a digital story is a communication exercise with new technologies that dramatically increases the students' media literacy: they learn how to organize a multimedia, interactive artifact, how to combine audio and images, how

to blend music and videos, how to envisage an interactive fruition of their work by a final "reader". And much more can be achieved!

Roughly speaking, the main steps to collaboratively create a digital story are: (1) Choice of the topic; (2) Content gathering; (3) Story organization; (4) (Multimedia) content creation; (5) Content upload in the tool and (6) Evaluation. Typically, classes are split into groups after step 3, i.e. once the story organization (into chapters and possibly sub-chapters) is settled: each group is charged with a specific part of the story. Groups can provide mutual help and the final evaluation is done together. The teacher supervises the whole work.

The competition

For school year 2014-15, TALES has partnered with PoliCulturaExpoMilano2015, a world-wide initiative of digital storytelling on the theme of the upcoming Universal Exposition: "Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life". The TALES competition is framed within this larger contest, thus offering European schools the chance of taking part in a

world-wide educational experience.

Classes/groups of students of all school levels can take part in the competition. They are expected to create an interactive multimedia story with an easy-to-use authoring tool made available to all registered participants. Minimum effort: a "short story" (~5 minutes long); maximum effort: a "complete story" (20-25 min long). Stories must be in English, to allow for mutual sharing across Europe (and the world).

The stories created can deal with any topic, provided it is somehow related to the Universal Exposition themes ranging from sustainability to biodiversity, from local traditions (food, agriculture...) to legends and stories about food, from world hunger to health problems, etc. Participants are provided with plenty of resources and support to link their subject to the Exposition theme.

If you want to create a digital story with your class group just ask for access to the online authoring tool by mail to: nicoletta.diblas@polimi.it. More info on the competition can be found at: www.storiesforlearning.eu -> competition; www.policulturaexpo.it/world

Nicoletta Di Blas, Politecnico di Milano, IT

Narrative thinking

In the 1930s, Walter Benjamin wrote that the story was doomed, it would be lost in the flow of information: "Every morning brings us the news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information. Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it. (Benjamin, 1975, p.184)"

Information has not diminished with time and is structured so that it lives a short time just to be filled with new info. The story is based on experiences that become the experiences of the receiver. The story has long life because it is supposed to be retold. This touches something of what we perceive as important in our project when it comes to storytelling. According to Jerome Bruner (Jamissen & Dahlsveen, 2012, p. 47) there are two ways to acknowledge the world: the narrative and the paradigmatic (logical and scientific). These are two forms of knowledge that exist in all societies, but the western world has prioritized the last. The narrative attitude is not so keen to explain but to understand and gives room for different interpretations. The philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre says that it is through the stories we learn our societal roles to know, and they give

shape and direction to our actions. (Hovland, 2002, p. 67) This means that the story is central to understand how the world is arranged. According to the American philosopher Mark Johnsen we encounter the story through our parents as a young child. These stories explain our experiences and we soon use the same tool when we attempt to describe what happens to us. Therefore the story is the most widespread rational explanation (Hovland, 2002). The story is a grip we use throughout life because we seek answers to who, what, when and so on.

McLean and Pasupathi claim that we have a narrative identity and that this identity is based on how we create meaning out of life events. The narrative identity is our life story, selected events in our lives and by telling them we create a connection between these events. (McLean & Pasupathi, 2011, p. 136) How we reconstruct the past in interaction with others is important to develop narrative skills.

Marianne Horsdal also believes that in our modern society the identity is a narrative construction, a story that is being created in meeting others. The stories are being created in our practice areas like in families, among colleagues and so on. (Horsdal, 2011)

According to Lundby (2003, p. 27) the use of the term

narrative implies that there is a relation: someone tells something to someone. This relationship is important because it forms the narrative. This is an important key factor that points to the social aspect. All speech has an intention of a listener even though he/she is not present there and then, so every word expresses a relationship.

The story has some characteristics that make it a story. In ancient times Aristotle described a story as something that has a beginning, a middle and an end. Many people define the story based on a plot, the plot is perhaps the theme or intrigue of a story, that governs how we put the story together and gives it a sense of wholeness. The often used example to describe what a plot in a story is, is taken from Chatman (Chatman, 1989): "the king died and the queen died" is not a story, although two actions are put together in a sequence. The events lack context. However, if you say: "The king died and the queen died of grief," you create a plot that gives the events causality or a sense of wholeness.

The TALES project assumes that storytelling is something basically human and the project wishes to emphasize the importance of using storytelling in creating and disseminating knowledge.

Heidi Dahlsveen, HiOA, NO

Introducing Oral and Digital Storytelling in the Classroom

You are kindly invited to the TALES final conference & course that will take place in Beja, Portugal. The "course & conference" starts on 24 September at 13.00 and ends on Saturday 26 September at 16.30.

At the conference we will present the results and material of the project. There will be key notes and workshops by educationalists and professional storytellers. In the evenings participants will also have the opportunity to attend the international storytelling festival, organised by the city of Beja.

Target groups: active teachers, teacher trainers, storytellers, educational policy makers ... interested in introducing oral or digital storytelling in the classroom.

Costs: There is no conference or course fee, participation is free of charge. Participants only pay their travel costs and accommodation & subsistence.

ERASMUS+ KA1: Schools with a KA1 grant and a European Development Plan including staff development on education through storytelling, innovative didactics,

cultural competences, ... can use their grant for attending the course & conference.

Venue: Beja city hotels and rooms. The conference will take place at the Municipal Theatre (Teatro Municipal Pax Julia) in the historic centre of Beja.

Travel: Beja is situated in the Alentejo region in Portugal, about 180 km south east of Lisbon. International participants can arrive on the evening of the 23rd or the morning of the 24th September. International participants can travel via Lisbon International airport. There are train and bus connections to Beja (time tables on the project website).

PROGRAMME ELEMENTS:

- workshop: Oral storytelling in the classroom: Jan Blake, storyteller (UK)
- presentation: TALES: Key Competence development & Storytelling in the Classroom: Guy Tilkin, TALES coordinator, Landcommanderij Alden Biesen (BE).
- Keynote: "Oral Storytelling in the classroom": Jan Blake
- Keynote: "Using Story in education and professional development": Jennifer A. Moon, UK,

- Parallel workshops: the Tales pilots
- Keynote: Digital storytelling in the classroom (speaker to be confirmed)
- Parallel workshops on storytelling and digital storytelling in the classroom: Jan Blake, Nicoletta di Blas, Patricia Huion & Marleen Mesotten, Heidi Dahlsveen

More info: www.storiesforlearning.eu

Registration of non-Portuguese participants ONLY via: myriam.swinnen@cjsm.vlaanderen.be



TALES AND LEARNING in EUROPEAN SCHOOLS COURSE & FINAL CONFERENCE

24 – 26 September 2015, Beja, Portugal

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