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 unspeakable. 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 stressess 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 restrain of 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.

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**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 carrousels 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.

**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.

**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.

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.
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 determination of the parents 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 tell as one of the best in the class. In the end it was still the first time for all of them, but definitely a strong sense of not being alone or the first in this world with difficult problems, there was confidence, but definitely a strong sense of not being alone.

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 stick: 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 PoliCultureExpoMilano2015, 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.policulturalexpo.it/world

Nicoletta Di Blas, Politecnico di Milano, IT
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 keynotes 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+ KAI:** Schools with a KAI 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)
- keynote: “Oral Storytelling in the classroom”: Jan Blake

**Parallels workshops:**
- Parallel workshops: the Tales pilots
- Parallel workshops: oral 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

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**TALES AND LEARNING in EUROPEAN SCHOOLS**

**COURSE & FINAL CONFERENCE**

24 – 26 September 2015, Beja, Portugal

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**TALES PROJECT PARTNERS**

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University Colleges Leuven Limburg (BE)
Tallinn University Haapsalu College (EE)
Oslo and Akershus University College of applied sciences (NO)
Pädagogische Hochschule Steiermark (AT)
Ouvi e Contar, Associação de Contadores de Histórias (PT)
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