

## TALES: the Manual

**A manual about how to introduce storytelling in the classroom.**

This manual is one of the products of TALES, a Comenius Multilateral Project (European Lifelong Learning Programme) that raises awareness and creates support material for introducing storytelling as an educational tool in school education. It deals with oral storytelling and digital storytelling.

By using stories and storytelling techniques, the teacher can introduce a great tool in the classroom. By offering subject content as a narrative, transformed into images, one improves the quality of the transfer of this content. Introducing stories and storytelling as a tool “performed” by pupils or students is a great way to improve creativity, linguistic, digital, social, emotional and artistic skills.

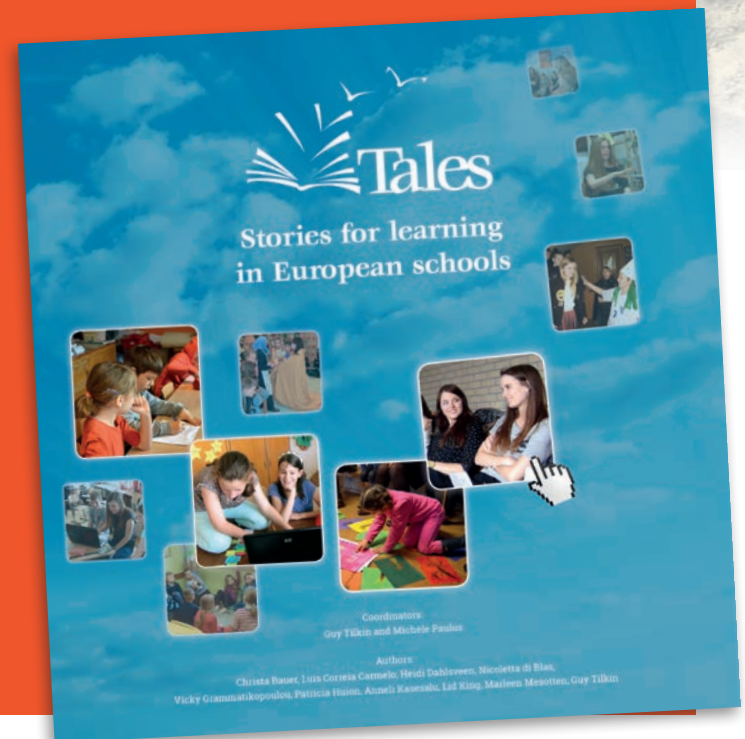
The end-target groups for the TALES approach are 6 – 18 year old pupils and students. In order to reach these groups, the TALES material and methodologies target teacher trainers, initial teacher training students and in-service teachers. We also target storytellers, to make them aware of the educational value and potential of their art and

to help them find their way to schools and teacher training organisations.

In chapter 1 we offer a general introduction to storytelling in the classroom and an overview of the actual situation concerning its use in education in the partner countries. The next chapter focuses on methodology: how can we best use oral and/or digital storytelling techniques in classroom practice. Chapter 3 reports on a large number of good practice examples, collected from all over Europe, revealing the great value of stories and storytelling in a variety of school settings. The TALES partners each piloted a small storytelling project in their respective countries. Reports on these pilots in chapter 4 offer extra ideas, motives, settings and approaches.

This manual does not read like a novel from page 1 to the end but is more a reference that can be consulted according to the needs of the reader. The project website [www.storiesforlearning.eu](http://www.storiesforlearning.eu) also offers extra material including training modules for training the trainer and material on how to integrate TALES into international school projects (Erasmus+).

TALES is available in EN, PT, NO, DE, FR, NL, EE, IT on the project website, downloadable for free and can be consulted online via [issuu.com](http://issuu.com) (all languages).



## To tell or not to tell?

Guy Tilkin - Landcommanderij Alden Biesen

The power of storytelling as an educational tool is widely recognized. Many aspects of storytelling are close to our daily life, to the way we think and (try to) understand the world. Teachers and trainers often see the benefits of the ‘technical competences’ tackled through storytelling but sometimes underestimate the social effects and the effect of the alternative thinking styles offered by storying content. It is very important to bring this into focus as well.

through a ‘narrative pattern’. Any story is a narrative and its structure reflects the way we, as a learning individual, give meaning to (or make sense out of) personal experiences. Story-shaped information is more easily absorbed by our brains, so to speak. Offering content through narratives is considered to be beneficial to the learning process in many ways. It acts as a ‘sense making tool’, supports our imagination and capacity to memorise and contributes to identity development.

A narrative or story is any report of connected events, actual or imaginary, presented in a sequence of written or spoken words, or still or moving images. (Wikipedia). J. Bruner (1986) argues that we use two ways of thinking: “a paradigmatic and a narrative one”. The first one is ‘logic’ and

looks for causal relations (deduction, induction, abduction). It deals with facts and objective truth. The narrative way of thinking deals with human intentions, feelings and personal experiences. Polkinghorne (1988) puts it this way: “*The paradigmatic mode searches for universal truth conditions whereas the narrative mode looks for particular connections between events.*” In western society (and education) the paradigmatic mode is much more valued than the narrative one.

## Storytelling as a meaning making tool

Teaching through narratives contributes to the learning process as the content is offered in a structure that relates to our personal meaning making processes. “*Narrative is a fundamental structure of human meaning making.*” (J. Bruner, 1986). Also M. Clark and M. Rossiter (2008) are convinced that “*Meaning making is a narrative process. We make sense of our everyday experiences by storying them, by constructing narratives that make things cohere. It is a matter of locating experiences within a particular narrative or by constructing a new narrative.*”

We try to mentally connect any new piece of information to an existing related thread of thoughts. The new elements are ‘wrapped’ as a narrative and connected to existing narratives. The type of relationship between new and old narratives and the place the new narrative gets in the (cultural) clusters of old ones defines its meaning(s). “*Therefore, the most effective way to reach learners with educational messages is in and through these narrative constructions. Learners connect new knowledge with lived experience and weave it into existing narratives of meaning.*” (Hopkins 1994)

*continued on page 2*

## Narrative thinking

A major argument for introducing storytelling in the classroom is the fact that stories and storytelling are offered



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## Storytelling as a memory tool

It is not only the narrative meaning making process that is enhanced by teaching through stories but also our memory profits from it. Building links with 'existing narratives' in our brain is a way to connect new content with what we already know and remember; it is constructing our memory. This process is enhanced by two factors: the imaginative element and the emotional element of storytelling.

When listening to a story people create images in their minds. Telling and listening involve creative processes. The teller introduces images and 'conducts/orchestrates' the imagination of the people in the audience. *"In the oral tradition, storytelling includes the teller and the audience. The storyteller creates the experience, while the audience perceives the message and creates personal mental images*



from the words heard and the gestures seen. The audience becomes co-creator of the art." (AskDefine.com)

The capacity to imagine is an important element in memory building. P. Harris (2000) states that *"When adults listen to a narrative they build in their mind's eye, so to speak, a mental image or a model of the situation that is being described or of the events that unfold. It is that mental model that they retain over a long period of time rather than the particular words."* He argues that *"these mental models, constructed in imagination, develop out of the early childhood engagement with narrative and pretend play"* (MIT.edu paper). Also metaphoric thinking is an aspect of imagination and creativity. Making comparisons and analogies between elements of different categories is creative thinking. A story in itself can be a metaphor or offer a number of metaphors.

But also the emotional aspect is important. Stories appeal to the heart, they engage the listener in an emotional way, raise feelings, urge to act. *"Stories are powerful precisely because they engage learners at a deeply human level. Stories draw us into an experience at more than a cognitive level; they engage our spirit, our imagination, our heart, and this engagement is complex and holistic."* (Clark and Rossiter, 2008)

## Storytelling as identity: we are our stories

*« Un homme, c'est toujours un conteur d'histoires, il vit entouré de ses histoires et des histoires d'autrui, il voit tout ce qui lui arrive à travers elles; et il cherche à vivre sa vie comme s'il la racontait. »*  
J.P. Sartre



So, according to J.P. Sartre we are surrounded by stories. Stories are in our memories, in our family history, our street, city or country. Stories come up when we meet friends, colleagues, neighbors ... They deal with daily life, happiness, grief, anger, fear or just facts divers. Stories help us build a community and gain trust.

Making meaning and making sense out of what we experience every day is not only an individual learning process but it is also a social constructivist learning process. As such it is also grounded in a cultural and social context. We build our narratives together with our peers, our building blocks are offered by our social environment, we cluster our narratives according to the models offered.

So clearly there are a number of good arguments to introduce teaching and learning through stories. If you want to know more please go to [www.storiesforlearning.eu](http://www.storiesforlearning.eu)

## Digital storytelling in seven steps

Patricia Huion, UCLL

It is not always easy to think up a story. Even when you recall a funny memory or an amazing anecdote, you still don't have a story. And sometimes you do have a story but you do not know how to tell it. This is the question Greg struggles with in the coming-of-age film "Me and Earl and the Dying Girl" (Gomez-Rejon, 2015).

Of course you could start with a quote as he tried: "it was the best of times, it was the worst of times". Then you can stare at your computer screen or try out some clay-animations just to figure out what the sentence means. But the protagonist of this film chooses to create a digital story with film fragments. He already mastered the digital skills as he creates short parodies of classic films with his "co-worker" Earl. "Digital storytelling takes the ancient art of oral storytelling and engages a palette of technical tools to weave personal tales using images, graphics, music and sound mixed together with the author's own story voice" (Porter, 2004).

Yet finding a story for his ill friend proved to be more challenging. These seven steps of digital storytelling developed by Joe Lambert (2010) might have helped him.

### 1. Which insight do you want to share?

Why do you want to tell this story? Why now? Why is it today's version of the story? To whom do you want to tell the story? For whom did you write it? How does this story reveal who you are? How does it explain why you have become who you are? In answering these questions your story gets body.

Linking these questions to Greg's challenge, we see how an adolescent travels from detached kid with no friends (he calls Earl his co-worker) and no interest in "the menu of the future" (university manual) to this caring friend who has found his priorities.

On a storytelling level Greg shares how he travels from a tinkering film-maker for his own divertimento to an engaged filmer to help his friend.

### 2. Which emotions do you want to share?

While creating your story which emotions did you experience? Do you recall which story elements caused the emotions? Did you experience contradicting emotions?

On a second level we focus on the emotional experiences of the audience. Which emotions help the audience to understand the journey in your story? Which emotional tone fits the central theme of the story? How can you convey these emotions without using "feeling" words?

Uncertainty and humor play an important role in Greg's search. Yet I would say coming to terms with losing a friend is the focal experience. He shares his disbelief with the audience even referring to it explicitly stating his friend will live after the story.

### 3. Which is the pivotal moment?

When did you realise things have changed? Did you realise it at once or later? How many moments of change are there in your story? Do they convey the same meaning or do they create contradictory interpretations? Which moment of change can be linked to the main insight? Can you describe this in detail? According to Lambert digital storytellers create a river of meaning for the audience to jump in and fill the void. For instance one of the more important changes happen when Greg discusses ways of "passive resistance" and the dying girl applies it. Both protagonists and audience realise the change which is immediately contradicted by the voice-over.

### 4. Which is the visual layer of your story?

You also have to think about the interaction between the visual narrative and the story. Which pictures do you see



when thinking about these moments of change? Which pictures do you see for the whole story? What kind of pictures are they: explicit illustrating the story, implicit adding another layer of meaning, metaphorical creating new interpretations or juxtaposing ones creating space for opposite views. Some examples in "Me and Earl and the Dying Girl" are the university manual, the moose, cushions, wall paper, scissors.

### 5. Which is the auditive layer of your story?

Music and the voice-over are powerful tools to convey the emotional experiences. In fact a recorded voice telling while showing pictures or film fragments is the discerning characteristic of digital storytelling.

The voice-over also reveals the character of the narrator and how he relates to the lived experience.



## Basic principles

There are some basic principles when you start working with a story:

1. Choose a story you want to tell. It may be there are elements in the story you will recognize from your own life or speak to you with views on topics such as social issues and the like.
2. Use your own dialect when you tell. A story is perceived as "authentic" when the storyteller has a distinct identity in the story, our language is about identity .
3. If you forget something, this is natural. Do not hang on what you have forgotten, what you remember is the important thing.
- 4 Practice, tell out loud to yourself so that you get used to hearing your own voice.

First, read through the story a few times. Then put the text away and tell the story through a few times on the basis of what you remember. Once this is done you can see through written story one more time in the case there are some essential elements you've forgotten. It is important that you do not begin to memorize the story, then the next thing you can do is to draw down the action in the story as a comic.

The thing to remember the story and that also makes the story come alive is the ability to create images. Practice now to look through the story as a movie for your inner eye, it can help you to let one color control images. That is control images, a color that recurs constantly in the various scenes of the story.

The last thing you do is tell the story over and over again, usually while doing something else like chores or while going for a walk.

Last is telling the story to someone else, someone you live with, children, or the like. It is important to remember that the story changes when others listen to it, this is quite natural because the oral story is being shaped in the meeting between people.



## The storytelling situation

When you are telling a story, be yourself and use your natural body language. Try to avoid private movements like fiddling with your hands, correcting your sweater or swipe away your hair. This has nothing to do with the story or situation and takes away focus from mediation and the story. To avoid this, it helps to practice with someone who speaks up when they see these movements .

When you tell have eye contact with your listeners, in that way they feel involved and you have more control over the situation.

Before telling you should prepare the room and make sure to be positioned so that you see anyone and everyone sees and not least hears you.

Make sure to control the area behind you, you should for example not stand in front of a window, then the listeners start to glance that way. And finally, although not all meet your eyes this does not mean that they are not listening. If the listeners are restless, focus primarily on those who listen. This causes a concentration that allows everyone to become listeners. Remember that your uncertainty influences the listener and if you miss some words or similar, this is not dangerous. Should you fall out of the story, use the listeners by asking where you were in the story, in that way you can confirm that they are with you.

In Greg's case I would say he tries to tell a very personal story covering how upset he is.

## 6. How are you assembling your story creating structure, tension and pace?

In assembling your story you focus on the audience's experiences. You choose their peak moment of interest, the moments of feeling lost, the moments when you journey together with them. You select clues for them to find the major insights and you use pace to highlight the moments of change.

Greg alternates between showing film fragments and telling the story. The voice-over passages convey the change moments and in a way seem to slow down the narrative giving the audience time to reflect.

## 7. How will you be sharing your story?

Who is your audience, why did you create this story? Has the purpose changed while creating the story. How is your story being shown and how will it continue "to live" after its initial showing?

Lambert always invites his digital storytellers to introduce themselves, tell something about why they want to tell this story and how the telling has changed them.

In the beginning of the film Greg does not want anybody to see his home-made films. Nobody is even supposed to know he is making them. Earl and he create these to have fun. Later they change the purpose of their parodies.

"Me and Earl and the Dying Girl" is a film about adolescents using media to cope with life. Although it is not a digital story, I chose the film because it allowed us to illustrate the seven steps of digital storytelling. In the Tales manual you can find other examples of digital storytelling.

## What do we mean by introducing stories and storytelling in the classroom?

Guy Tilkin - Landcommanderij Alden Biesen

Based on the title of the TALES manual many teachers and teacher trainers will 'see the image' of a teacher telling a story at the beginning or at the end of a lesson and, if appropriate, link the theme of the story to the content of the lesson. This is one of the many possibilities and, probably a very positive experience for the pupils. But, much more can be done.

Probably we should better be talking about 'introducing a narrative approach to teaching and learning'. *"Given the centrality of narrative in human experience, we can begin to appreciate the power of stories in teaching and learning. We can also see that the application of a narrative perspective to education involves much more than storytelling in the classroom."* (M. Rossiter, 2002)

This narrative approach to teaching and learning can be introduced through oral storytelling or digital storytelling. Both can be seen as teacher centered or pupil/student centered.

The teacher can start from existing stories. He/she tells a story and works with the content, the theme, the values, the characters ... of the story. The pupils/students do activities related to the story and its content. The story and the activities depend on the objectives and theme of the session.

Another approach is 'storying content': offering content in a 'story way'. "Educators not only tell stories about the subject, they story the subject knowledge itself." (Gudmundsdottir, 1995). "Stories make information more memorable because they involve us in the actions and intentions of the characters." (Bruner 1986)

The teacher looks at the content and material of the lesson and tries to find out what parts can be offered as (or in) a small story. This means adding elements



like place, time, actions, emotions and intentions of characters, sensory details, plots, metaphors ... in order to create images and atmosphere. One can think of teaching about physics and using stories like Archimedes in his bath crying out "Eureka" or Newton witnessing the apple dropping to the ground in his mother's garden. All this can be done orally or digitally. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRQauOtEyBs>)

Both approaches can also be envisaged from the pupils'/ students' angle. They can start from existing stories and work with content, values ... and practice performing skills. They can also 'story' their content e.g. creating an oral or digital story on a theme or piece of knowledge they have chosen.

In the Tales manual you will find a number of good practices and pilot projects illustrating these approaches.



# TALES In-service Training Courses: the Beja Experience

The TALES team also scanned the school curricula and teacher training curricula in their respective countries in order to find out whether stories and storytelling are part of it. You can find the full reports for Flanders (FL/BE), Norway (NO), Portugal (PT), England (EN/GB), Italy (IT), Austria (AT) and Estonia (EE) on the project website.

Regarding the curricula in primary and secondary education the situation is quite deploring. In spite of the fact that mother tongue, reading, writing, listening ... are considered most important in all the partner countries there is no mentioning

of storytelling as such in the curricula of BE, EE, PT, AT and IT. Only in Norway and England there are direct references to storytelling. Most countries though have 'indirect references' to elements of storytelling but sometimes linked to drama or social sciences, intercultural development etc.

Although the power of storytelling as an educational tool is widely recognised, storytelling as such is hardly ever included in initial teacher training curricula throughout Europe. For the primary education sector music has a place in the curricula, storytelling is mentioned as a technique

but it is hardly present as a course, a course module or as course material. For secondary education there is nothing of the kind. Many teachers though feel the need for training in this field.

The TALES consortium has plans to organise Erasmus+ KA1 in-service training courses for teachers on the use of digital and oral storytelling in school education. In fact the final TALES conference and annex course in Beja, Portugal (23-26/09/15) were conceived as an in-service training event.

## An overview of TALES course elements to be expected in the future:



**Tools for Telling in the Classroom**  
*workshop by Jan Blake, storyteller, United Kingdom*



**Why storytelling in the classroom? Introducing narratives in teaching** by Guy Tilkin, TALES coordinator, Landcommanderij Alden Biesen, Belgium



**Examples of good practice, overview of Tales pilots,** Lid King, The Languages Company, United Kingdom



**Seven Steps for digital storytelling,** by Patricia Huion, University Colleges Leuven Limburg, Belgium



**Stories to take home,** by Luis Correia Carmelo, Ouvir e Contar, Portugal



**Collaborative digital storytelling** by Nicoletta Di Blas, Aldo Torrebruno, Politecnico di Milano, Italy



**"Do dreams come true?" Good practice from Estonia",** by Anneli Kasesalu, Tallin University Haapsalu College and Piret Päär, storyteller, Estonia



**"Stories, Storytelling and European Key Competences. The Austrian Pilot.",** by Christa Bauer, Pädagogische Hochschule Steiermark, Austria



**"StoryCircle",** by Heidi Dahlsveen, storyteller, Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, Norway



**"Digital stories for learning",** by Patricia Huion & Marleen Mesotten, University Colleges Leuven Limburg, Belgium



**Storytelling for Language Learning,** by Vicky Grammatikopoulou, Goldsmiths, University of London, United Kingdom



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Lifelong Learning Programme

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This communication reflects the views only of the TALES consortium, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information therein.

