

Interview Diane Sophie Geerts

1. How long have you been a professional story teller, and what has induced you to start with it?

I have been a story teller since 2001. But I have the feeling that I have always had this love for stories, and this desire to share them. When I was a child, it happened quite a lot that I took refuge in a book, or in the arms of any adult person eager to tell me a story. Becoming a story teller is a rather particular odyssey. It is important to nourish yourself with stories and tales, and one day you will feel a desire to share these with others. A tale is a matter of sharing, giving and being generous. To have a strong desire to share a tale, and to give it just the way it pleases you and to see the reactions of your audience, that is how I would describe my way of storytelling.

I was so lucky as to have to grandmothers who were full of small and big tales and stories, and moreover, they still came from a world where 'devils' still existed. I didn't need much more to tickle my imagination. I am now living in the house of one of them, and I have always the impression I hear her tell the story of this man who entered into a pact with the devil.... doubtless to say that this has brought me to tell stories myself.

2. Could story telling also be a pedagogical tool? If yes, how?

I think that before I answer this question, I should first give you a definition of the word story the way I use it. When I use the word 'story', I talk about 'a tale in prose of fictitious events that are transmitted orally.' The story is being built while being transmitted, but still sticking to a stable narrative structure. So it is a quite traditional definition of a story.

Besides the performance that most of the story tellers give, the story and the art of storytelling can be turned in valuable pedagogical tools. This is obvious in the small stories told to toddlers that help them in learning new words. A story can be used as a means to learn a language. But not only that, it can also be used as an interesting pedagogical support in a lot of other cases: to learn how to handle conflicts by means of stories, as a means of integration for the diversity in welcoming groups, ...

Next to the already mentioned aspects, relating to both the art of storytelling and the story itself, it should also be said that a story intrinsically is a real pedagogical tool. It carries social and cultural values. It helps in understanding how a society functions. It assures the transmission of folk tradition and serves as the 'cement' of a society.

3. Have you, as a story teller, every contributed to a workshop for adults?

I have often proposed trainings in the context of professional trainings. Stories were being taught there because they were a support for routine professional practice (training for nursery schools, teachers, librarians, ...)

We have also given trainings in courses for professional reintegration.

All these trainings, whoever they were given to, had one principal objective: to give tools for using the story in the professional routine.

4. If you had the opportunity, in the context of an adult training program, to propose a story telling workshop as pedagogical tool, how would you organize it?

A workshop should always be a subtle mix of theoretical contribution and practical applications. Every workshop should take into consideration respect and integration of each person. The capacities of every participant should be valorized so that he can use the proposed tools blithely and without fear. I also think that the goals of the workshop should be clearly explained before the start of the workshop.

This workshop would consist of a part where stories and their richness are discovered, and also of a more technical part on oral storytelling.

5. The integration of stories in adult education: What needs could storytelling respond to and how?

I think it is evident that it will reinforce the mastering of a foreign language. This mastering then will be mostly oral. The most beneficial contribution then can be measured in the extension of vocabulary and the mastering of oral speech. This oral dimension of storytelling is really an important element. It ensures that cognitive and language strategies will be deployed. Memory and anticipation play a considerable role in the practice of storytelling.

Moreover, the oral practice of tales establishes a link with the language that is based on the pleasure of playing with words. And this pleasure is an important factor of success for any sort of learning.

6. In which way could you promote stories as a pedagogical tool in adult education?

Maybe you could just do some research work on the existing practices and show they are well-established.

7. In the art of storytelling there are different cultural traditions, different methods and different techniques. Are you familiar with them? How have you mastered them?

Actually, the art of storytelling in different cultures doesn't differ that much. Even if the contents seem different, you only have to get a closer look to the different stories and you will see that the branches are very similar. Every culture nourishes a type of hero, prefers the good epic stories, and preserves its tales for a younger audience, but the practice of oral telling remains the same. I met a lot of storytellers of different cultures, so I see what unites and separates us. Rather than focusing on what is different, I prefer to see what binds us all. Every storyteller uses his own personality to bring his story.