



STORYTELLING FOR GRUNDTVIG STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

INTRODUCTION

At the very beginning of the Sheherazade project, the Landcommanderij Alden Biesen, coordinator of the project, organised an international contact seminar in cooperation with the Grundtvig department of the Flemish National Agency.

The aim of this contact seminar was to generate a number of Grundtvig Learning Partnerships using stories and storytelling as a tool for international cooperation between adult education organisations and between adult learners from the different countries in the partnerships. It was also important to see how working with storytelling can contribute to meeting the different objectives of this LLP action. Meanwhile we are living in Erasmus+ conditions and the Grundtvig Learning Partnership action continues as KA1 Grundtvig strategic partnerships at staff and learners' level. This paper wants to contribute to the exploitation of Sheherazade outcomes through the Erasmus+ Grundtvig project action involving adult learners.

GRUNDTVIG KA2 Strategic Partnerships: The Action

Formal and non-formal adult education organisations willing to cooperate with similar organisations abroad can apply for a project grant within the KA2 action of the new programme Erasmus+. This action offers funding for international project work: activities in each partner organisation and travel & subsistence costs for staff and learners.

The idea is that the partner organisations learn from each other, share experience and expertise, share activities, visit each other, cooperate on common topics, pilot new approaches and techniques. Staff and learners meet and cooperate. Travelling and visiting the partner organisation is possible but virtual meetings (Skype etc.) must also be part of the communication and collaboration in the project.

In order to set up such a project one needs partners from abroad, a good project with objectives and activities meeting the needs of the target groups in the organisations and a well written project application sent in in due time to the right organisation.

Each partnership must have a coordinator. The project application should be sent to the National Agency of the country of the coordinator. You can find application forms on the website of each National Agency. There is 1 deadline per year. The first deadline is 30 April 2014. In the following years the deadline will probably be March or February.



LEARNING THROUGH STORIES

The Sheherazade manual offers a large number of teaching and learning situations involving storytelling. Here we briefly present the different competences related to language learning and social cohesion and the requirements for “competence oriented teaching and learning”. More information on this topic is available in the manual.

Competence oriented education and learning

Competence based learning and competence based education do not consist of traditional teaching situations. The idea is that learners need to be actively involved in the learning situation. They learn best in meaningful contexts, and in co-operation and interaction with others and with their environment.

The most distinctive features of this approach may be summarized as follows:

- *Meaningful contexts* - in which learners will experience the relevance and the meaning of the competences to be acquired in a natural way.
- *Multidisciplinary approach* - integrative and holistic.
- *Constructive learning* - a process of constructing one’s own knowledge in interaction with one’s environment, rather than as a process of absorbing the knowledge others try to transfer to you.
- *Cooperative, interactive learning* - with peers, coaches etc.
- *Discovery learning* – learning is not a process of receiving information, but should be embedded in a discovery based approach.
- *Reflective learning* - the process of ‘learning to learn’.
- *Personal learning* – the need of the learner to be able to identify with the contexts, the people, the situations and interests that are included in the learning domains involved.

Offering competences for inclusion

A large number of competences can be developed by engaging in storytelling. These competences are related to oracy, literacy, communication but also to cultural awareness, identity building and social skills.

Oracy and literacy: gaining verbal skills

Language lies at the root of our culture. It is important that we give adults and less advantaged groups rich experiences with words, sounds, intonation, rhythm and with constructing meaning through use of language. The ability to speak well is important to gain access to society. Adults should be encouraged to practice these skills. Sharing stories can give adults an awareness that can help them speak, listen, read and write.

Many educators and researchers claim that storytelling contributes to oracy and literacy development. According to Lucy Parker Watkins¹ these skills include memory development,

¹ Lucy Parker Watkins (2010), The Educational Benefits of the Art of Storytelling



observation skills, vocabulary development, sequencing, problem solving, engagement in language play, and making predictions.

Listening to stories is a social experience developing oral narrative. Traditional stories usually offer a more extended vocabulary and a more complex grammar than plain conversation. The NCTE², in the Position Statement from their Committee on Storytelling, states: "Listeners encounter both familiar and new language patterns through story. They learn new words or new contexts for already familiar words".

Ruth Kirkpatrick³, in "Stories Always" (2012), claims that storytelling encourages listening skills. "Listeners are motivated to hear what will happen next ... Attentiveness is won partly by the alchemy of telling, the rapport between teller and listener, and partly by the story itself." Storytelling also encourages talking. "This is partly because the synergy of telling and listening have already set up a 'conversation', however one-sided it may seem on the surface while the tale is being told."³

From oracy to literacy.

The NCTE² also claims that: "Students who search their memories for details about an event as they are telling it orally will later find those details easier to capture in writing. Writing theorists value the rehearsal, or prewriting, stage of composing. Those who regularly hear stories subconsciously acquire familiarity with narrative patterns and begin to predict upcoming events. Both beginning and experienced readers call on their understanding of patterns as they tackle unfamiliar texts. Then they re-create those patterns in both oral and written compositions. Learners who regularly tell stories become aware of how an audience affects a telling, and they carry that awareness into their writing."

Communication skills

According to Sean Buvala's⁴ website, storytelling is the "mother" of all communications. Every art form relies on story to convey meaning. He presents three foundational reasons that storytelling helps to improve presentation skills:

1. Storytelling teaches you to think on your feet. When you learn to be a good storyteller you must learn to adjust your energy and pace to match the audience reaction.
2. Storytelling teaches you to be spontaneous. As a storyteller, you learn to rely on your ability to "see" a story as it happens.
3. Storytelling helps you to think about the deeper meanings of your content. As you adapt personal and world stories to your presentations, you will start thinking deeper about the meaning of your communications.

Imagination, creativity and learning to learn

Storytelling involves imagination and the use of language and gestures to create scenes in the mind of the listener. Both telling a story and listening to a well-told tale encourage adults to use their imaginations⁶. Luke E. Yackley⁵ (2007), puts it nicely: "As we hear a story, the brain actively fabricates the scene and character and acts them out on the stage in our

² National Council of Teachers of English on: <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/teachingstorytelling>

³ Ruth Kirkpatrick (2012), Stories Always

⁴ Sean Buvala on www.seantells.com

⁵ Luke E. Yackley (2007), Storytelling, a Key to Adult Learning



brains. Obviously, each person constructs a different stage and our characters will probably look different, but we construct the scene that will be meaningful and relevant to each of us in a highly personal way.” Developing imagination contributes to self-confidence and personal motivation, it empowers adults to consider new and inventive ideas. “Through engagement with an imagined world, the listener also develops crucial skills in problem solving, and in considering options and consequences”³.

Cultural awareness & identity

The term identity denotes a person’s sense of who he/she is and the self-descriptions to which a person attributes significance and value. Most people use a range of different identities to describe themselves, including both *personal* and *social* identities. “Storytelling can be an interesting pathway to discover how we came to be who we are as people, as families, and as sub-cultures within the larger society”⁶. Stories offer a window into the culture from which they come, as well as a mirror of humanity. Storytelling provides adults with a sense of history, a sense of community, a sense of generations, a sense of heritage.

Storytelling is a way of expressing individual and cultural identity, inviting the listener to identify with “the other”. Anyone who gets to tell his/her story and is heard finds a sense of being part of the group. Being heard and hearing others creates bonds of understanding and respect. “Both tellers and listeners find a reflection of themselves in stories. Through the language of symbol, children and adults can act out through a story the fears and understandings not so easily expressed in everyday talk. Story characters represent the best and worst in humans. By exploring story territory orally, we explore ourselves—whether it be through ancient myths and folktales, literary short stories, modern picture books, or poems.”² Through stories we also develop understanding and tolerance for differences.

Social skills

We can again quote Ruth Kirkpatrick: “Close engagement with a story helps with the development of empathy and emotional literacy. ... By hearing another’s difficulty as described in a story, the listener can empathise, and see the results of the protagonist’s actions. The process enhances self-reflection and self-expression, besides providing potential role models.”

“Storytelling based on traditional folktales is a gentle way to guide young people toward constructive personal values by presenting imaginative situations in which the outcome of both wise and unwise actions and decisions can be seen. Becoming verbally proficient can contribute to a student’s ability to resolve interpersonal conflict nonviolently. Negotiation, discussion, and tact are peacemaking skills.”

THE EUROPEAN ADDED VALUE

From the applications created during the contact seminar we can derive a number of objectives and activities suitable for this type of European projects.

⁶ Heather Forest on www.storyarts.org



Objectives:

- to promote intercultural learning and social inclusion through story
- to enable dialogue, enhance understanding of cultural diversity, and support acceptance of cultural differences.
- to find, share and implement methods and teaching strategies that enable learners to successfully engage in story telling activities and motivates the learners to increase communication skills.
- to become more mindful, concerned citizens within a very diverse Europe
- to increase cohesion (learners-teachers-local community-international contacts) and empathy towards your fellow-citizens
- to improve foreign language skills and computer skills.
- to empower all our learners
- to work together in innovative ways, to try out different approaches
- to share philosophies, thoughts, techniques and pedagogical practices with our project partners from different European countries
- to improve our pedagogical skills and extend our professional horizon
- to create an intercultural environment open to dialogue during the partnership
- to exchange knowledge and experiences about oral history
- to provide motivation & therapeutic benefits through self-narrative and active participation
- to develop ICT multimedia skills
- to empower technical and mnemonic skills
- to receive new input of methodology about ICT basics
- to make the seniors active in the collection and sharing of the stories
- to further personal growth of the persons involved by the direct integration with different cultural and intergenerational learning groups
- to increase seniors' self-awareness about their own value as living actors of the past, feeling themselves useful to the society, raising own self-esteem
- increase of the consciousness of being Europe citizens by an international exchange of experiences
- to develop personal growth of the persons involved by the direct integration with different cultural and intergenerational learning groups
- to increase the social awareness about the value of the seniors in the society as repository of experience
- to increase the consciousness of being Europe citizens by an international exchange of knowledge
- to raise awareness for cultural differences
- to enhance language skills and intercultural competences
- to build up awareness and understanding for European processes through project work
- to create a more relevant learning experience practicing languages to implement new training methodology for oral history in own organisation by the contact with other partner organisations
- to stimulate the local research on the issue of oral history, ICT, seniors relationship



- to benefit in the involvement of the institutions in an European project in terms of social image and contribution that opens the scope of itself in a more international perspective
- to increase consciousness of being Europe citizens by an international exchange of good practices in the international partnership.

Proposed activities are:

- developing and sharing materials such as text productions, photo stories and digital stories.
- describing storytelling as a teaching method at a language school based on observations
- storytelling by means of board games, such as 'Snakes and Ladders' because they provide the structure, a safe setting, so it encourages participants easily to tell their own stories.
- using handicrafts as a successful tool in storytelling.
- exchanging tools and methods for teaching and learning a foreign language
- exchanging stories: e.g. a short overview of daily life activities, small anecdotes, experiences, travel stories, comments on a photo, folktales, etc.
- communication via e-mail and on set times via a common chat room or Skype.
- mobilities by partnership meetings to develop the project itself and to exchange experiences
- sharing modules from the partners with their different concepts and methodologies on oral history and ICT
- international reflections and workshops about oral history by the common analysis of different multilateral important social and cultural themes (volunteering, work, travel, family and the seniors' role)
- video/audio interviews of seniors related to certain themes (common values, historical experiences and culture, awareness on the 'European Identity' and an international reflection on the EU cultural diversity, awareness of a collective European memory).
- development of small thematic projects about oral history in each partner organisation
- promotion of the project in partners' sites and publication of a stock of interviews of memories of people +60.

CONCLUSION

Storytelling is extremely well fit to lower the threshold to education and to create innovative and attractive pathways to the development of key competences: literacy, foreign languages, cultural awareness, social and civic competences. Storytelling is a complementary language, other than the more abstract language which is usually used in educational programs, in which many adults of our target groups have not been successful. Therefore storytelling has a great potential to attract and motivate the adults belonging to our specific target groups to learn.



Grundtvig partnerships offer the unique opportunity to add a European dimension to all the learning as described in the Sheherazade manual. The action offers international contacts of all kinds and fosters international cooperation and learning. A number of additional objectives, activities and application fields are possible in this context.

More info on and examples of Grundtvig partnerships on the European Shared Treasure website: <http://www.europeansharedtreasure.eu/>
