



Sheherazade, 1001 stories for adult learning Theoretical background for methodology: summary

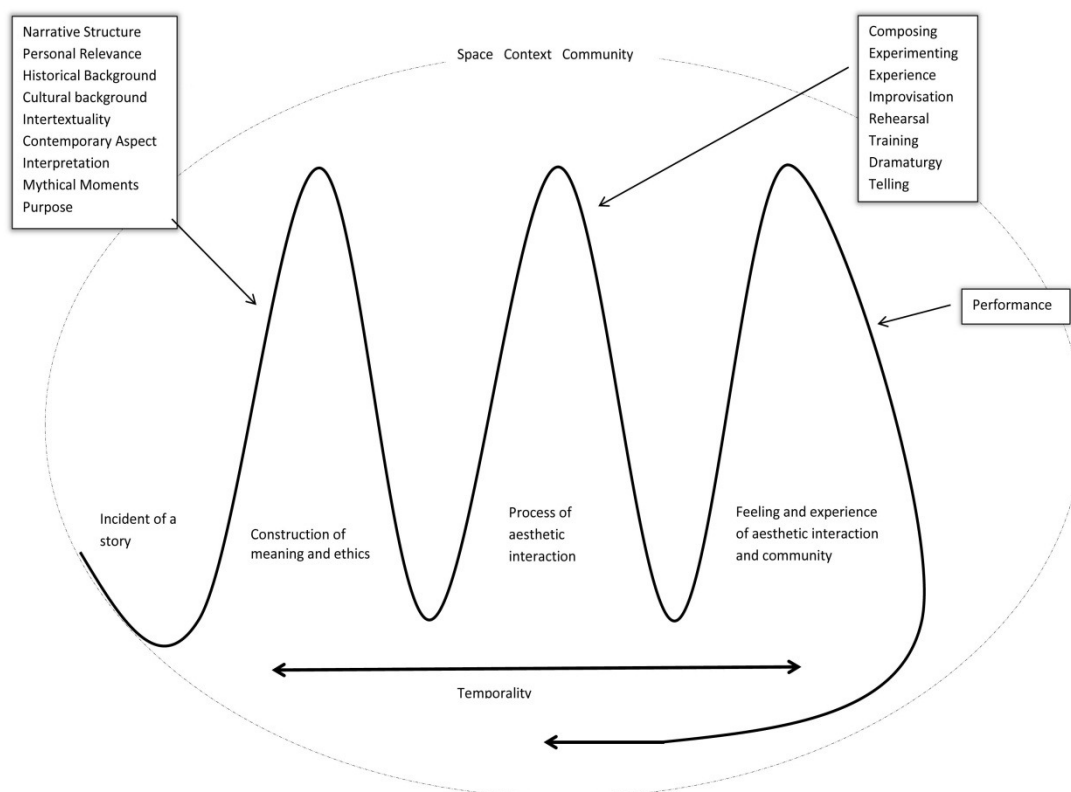
This paper offers a summary of the methodological approach for the use of storytelling as a pedagogical tool in adult education/training, developed by Sheherazade, based on the analysis of a series of theoretical texts and literature reviews and on the input of storytellers from all over Europe.

First we will give a definition of storytelling and analyse the types of stories that are used in oral storytelling. In order to develop a useful methodology we also need to understand the learning process of adults and to find out in which way storytelling responds to the unique needs of adult learners.

In a next step we demonstrate which competences for language learning and inclusion can be offered to the learners by using storytelling in adult education/training. Finally, the analysis of the interviews will enable us to distil some common approaches of the storytellers that we will use to forge our methodological approach. At the end we offer a bibliography for further reading.

A definition of storytelling

Storytelling does not occur in a vacuum. To illustrate this, we would like to propose a model of the principles of storytelling created by Norwegian storyteller Heidi Dahlsveen.



As shown in the graphic above, the process of storytelling begins with the “incident of a story.” The moment when the storyteller is first introduced to the story, can take place through oral or written communication (“incident of telling” or “incident of a written text”). Stories can also be received through experienced incidents, or can consist of fictional plots. Some storytellers use “spontaneous action” and improvise their story on the spot.

However the storyteller receives a story, there are a host of factors that influence its delivery. Before a story can be told, it must be structured in narrative sequences. The choice of what story to tell is individual and may be based on the personal relevance a storyteller gives to a particular story. The



historical and cultural background of the storyteller, the audience, and the story itself are also important to consider.

“Intertextuality” refers to how a particular story connects with other stories. There could be several versions of the same story across different cultures, for example. Whatever story is told, whether folk tale, myth or other type of tale; there must always be a link to the contemporary moment that makes the story relevant to its audience. There are, however, certain notions drawn from historic mythological tales that continue to be referred to today. The idea of the “Oedipus complex” is one such example.

The grounding of a story in the contemporary moment is achieved in part through interpretation, which a storyteller does intuitively when telling a story. The purpose of telling a particular story can also influence how it is delivered and interpreted. We emphasise that storytelling is both a creative and performing art form and not simply the oral recitation of a written story. It is an interactive activity, which can be distinguished from other types of cultural and social activities. This is illustrated in the graphic with the stage of “aesthetic interaction”. Through the telling of a story, we return to the first stage of the storytelling process, the “incident of the story.” Once told, a story lends itself to being told again or sparking the creation of further stories.

Types of Stories for Oral Storytelling

Storytellers draw from several genres of stories. One popular type of storytelling is traditional storytelling, which may include some of the following: myths, legends, folklore, fairy tales (sometimes known as faerie tales), urban and rural myths, tales from different cultural backgrounds and many more. Some say that these stories are fictional; others hold a heartfelt and often cultural belief in these stories. These stories can often stir something deep inside the members of the audience in the same way that music does.

Another type of story is the personal story. In the context of this project, we define personal stories as stories that are particular to the individual, stories of one’s life, or stories that come from one’s family, neighbour or community. These stories can be completely anecdotal or autobiographical or, like traditional tales, they can be fictional. It is worth noting that personal stories do not necessarily need to be true stories. Whilst telling a true story can be truly cathartic, it is important that the teller feels at ease in telling a personal story.

There is another, more daring, type of story. This is often referred to as improvised storytelling or more simply put a story that has been made up on the spot. These stories can be based on traditional, fictional or absurd stories. This way of telling stories can often reveal something very deep and meaningful about the teller, the audience and/or the setting, in the moment of telling.

What is traditional storytelling?

While the Sheherazade Project incorporates several different types of stories, we are specifically interested in how these stories are told in the traditional storytelling process. When we speak of traditional storytelling, “traditional” does not necessarily mean that the stories told are traditional, but that the act in itself is traditional.

In the curricula at Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, where courses in storytelling are offered by the Department of Technology, Art and Design, traditional storytelling is described as follows:

“Traditional storytelling is an art and a form of communication that creates internal images in the listener’s imagination rather than showing or dramatising visible images. Traditional storytelling takes place as an open and direct two-way communication between the storyteller and the audience and allows for interaction between those present.”



This definition refers to a particular tradition and it might exclude a number of styles and techniques in traditional storytelling. However the definition highlights something essential for traditional storytelling, the ability to create images. This emphasises the active role of the listener in the storytelling session.

In *The World of Storytelling* by Anne Pellowski, traditional storytelling is described as follows:

“...The entire context of a moment when oral narration of stories in verse and/or prose, is performed or led by one person before a live audience; the narration may be spoken, chanted, or sung, with or without musical, pictorial and/or other accompaniment, and may be learned from oral, printed or mechanically recorded sources; one of its purposes must be that of entertainment or delight and it must have at least a small element of spontaneity in the performance.”¹

This definition might be too broad: it can just as easily apply to monologues, a teacher who communicates in the classroom and so on. Moreover, it excludes the fact that storytellers can perform as a group. Still, these two descriptions say something important about traditional storytelling: the focus is on "inner images", it happens in a "here and now" situation, the dramatic external "tools" are toned down and improvisation and spontaneity are important parts of communication. The social context i.e. where it takes place, why it is told, the narrative competence, and the public nature are all important elements in the understanding of traditional storytelling. Religion Historian Brita Pollan emphasises the importance of the social context in the book *Samiske beretninger (Sami stories)*:

“An oral narrative requires - like all communication - that the ones who are addressed have the necessary associations. Well-told stories economise on what is necessary to tell, while elaborating exciting motifs that all are happy to hear over and over again.”²

In a storytelling situation, it is assumed that there is a common language between storyteller and listener. One characteristic of a successful story is that the storyteller keeps the listener's attention and interest. The language is both verbal and non-verbal. There are words, rhythms, pauses, gestures, sounds and situational awareness. The entire storytelling vocabulary should be understood within a “unified culture.”

During the storytelling process, the listener will co-create with the storyteller. In other words, the audience will be active on an equal level with the storyteller. It is important that there is “chemistry” right from the very first meeting before the telling and it is the responsibility of the storyteller to create this chemistry. The first assumption is that the storyteller knows his or her audience. (S)he must adjust to the room – what is the room like? how is it set up? It is important to consider the location of the audience in the room. It is the storyteller who must create the community needed for the telling to happen. Anchored in this community, a story involves much more than it seems. In the end, a common understanding of the social context is necessary for the storytelling process.

In short, we can say that traditional storytelling must consist of the following parts: a story (which must have certain components), a storyteller and a listener. These elements are simultaneously present; they constitute and are influenced by the social context. This situation requires spontaneity as an important element.

Today's traditional storytelling may very generally be divided into the following categories:

- Traditional storytelling as a performing art: The storytelling concept here is aimed at performance on a stage. The storyteller works consciously with “theatricality”, not to be confused with the theatrical, i.e. a strong focus on the use of space, dramaturgy, body language and so on. All of this is to provide the listeners with a good aesthetic, reflective and entertaining experience. There are few storytellers whom only perform as storytellers.

¹ Pellowski, A. *The World of Storytelling*. Hw Wilson Company, 1990.

² Pollan, B. *Samiske beretninger*. Aschehoug, 1997.



- Corporate storytelling: uses storytelling in various types of organisations for various functions. Storytelling can be used to improve communication in a business, sharpen a message, communicate a brand, create a community, and so on.
- Healing or therapeutic storytelling: This is a popular and growing category of storytelling in Europe. The main focus is on the use of fairy tales and myth archetypes to aid different healing and/or therapeutic processes.
- Traditional storytelling as a teaching tool: Here, traditional storytelling is used in formal and non-formal education for children, youth and adults. The Sheherazade project lies within this category and we will henceforth mainly concentrate on this.

We must underline that these categories often flow into each other and are not mutually exclusive. Similarly, professional storytellers often work in several or all of these categories.

Adult Learning Theory

Since Malcolm Knowles' 1973 book, *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*³, was published, adult learning theory has contributed to a growing debate on what strategies are best when working with adult learners. The book includes four assumptions. First, Knowles argues that adult learners prefer self-direction when learning. Next, he asserts that experiential techniques are more useful for adult learners than passive listening. Knowles also finds that adults have specific learning needs generated by life events i.e. moving, getting a new job, marriage, etc. Finally, he states that adults are "competence-based" learners. In other words, adults want to immediately apply what they learn, whether it be a new skill or knowledge.

Like Knowles, in their article "Adult Learning: What Do We Know for Sure?," Ron and Susan Zemke⁴ explore the question of adult learning needs. They present their research as the result of a summary of the scholarship on the subject since the 1970s. They argue that for adults, learning is problem centred, allowing them to cope with life changes or difficult events. When it comes to the ideal setup to provide for the best learning atmosphere, they emphasise the importance of a safe and comfortable environment and encourage adult trainers to be mindful of adults' egos in the classroom. A good facilitator, they argue, "understands that adults have something real to lose in a classroom. Their egos are on the line when they are asked to risk trying a new behaviour in front of peers" (ibid.).

Storytelling for learning

So far, we have seen that unique learning needs are important to consider when working with adults. Interaction, independence, and experience-based learning are all shown to be important for adults, while trust is necessary to ensure the ideal learning environment. We have also examined how the storytelling process can be structured.

Our discussion now turns to how to link the worlds of adult learning and storytelling. We argue that storytelling responds to the unique needs of adult learners, providing a flexible and creative structure, which can work well in the adult training room. We agree with Marsha Rossiter⁵ that the narrative approach of storytelling carries implications for both method and content. Ultimately, when used as a pedagogical tool, storytelling can be useful to adult learners in a number of ways. Through a review of the literature on the use of storytelling in different adult training contexts, we have concluded that, when used as a pedagogical tool, storytelling:

- a) Helps learners conceptualise the learning process

³ Knowles, M. S. *The adult learner: A neglected species*. Houston: Gulf Publishing Company, 1973. Revised Edition, 1990.

⁴ Zemke, R. & Zemke, S. *Adult Learning: What Do We Know For Sure?* Training. 32, 6, 31–40, 1995.

⁵ Rossiter, M. *Narrative and stories in adult teaching and learning*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Career and Vocational Education, Columbus, OH, 2002. (Eric Reproduction Document No. ED 473147).



- b) Empowers the adult learner
- c) Facilitates communication
- d) Inspires personal growth
- e) Engages the adult learner

A closer look at each of these themes will demonstrate why storytelling is an ideal tool for courses designed for the adult learner.

a) Helping Learners Conceptualise the Learning Process

M. Carolyn Clarke and Marsha Rossiter (ibid.), proponents of “narrative learning theory,” advocate that stories are ideal for helping adults conceptualise the learning process. Similarly, Peg C. Neuhauser⁶ suggests that stories are effective as educational tools because they are “believable, ‘rememberable’, and entertaining.” With stories, abstract concepts or ideas can be communicated in understandable everyday language through the angle of human experience. Nanci M. Burk⁷, in her work with at-risk students, has found that “oral sharing” allows her students to conceptualise life experiences. “For many individuals,” she explains, “storytelling yields great insight and a deeper understanding of the world around us, a way of knowing, a search for meaning and a means of reflection.”

b) Empowering the Learner

One of the benefits of the shared experience created by using storytelling as a pedagogical tool is that this environment of confidence helps learners to recognise the value of their own experiences and knowledge. As Burk explains, sharing stories allows students to “realise the relevance, validity, and efficacy of their cultural heritage and learning abilities, regardless of cultural differences”. Because they are active participants in the storytelling process, students have a “voice” in the learning experience and can therefore be more engaged and proactive learners (ibid.). As their unique skills and experiences are given value, learners will feel that the contributions they make in the classroom are equally respected.

c) Facilitating Communication

One particularity of storytelling is that it is an interactive endeavour. While telling a story empowers learners on the individual level, it also facilitates communication within the group. This interaction contributes to the creation of a community of trust, as we discussed earlier, but it also encourages cross-cultural exchange. As Burk remarks, storytelling gives learners and trainers “the opportunity to cultivate a learning environment open to multicultural dialogues that may provide an understanding of different customs, beliefs and viewpoints.”

From a strictly pedagogical point of view, the exchange that comes when storytelling is used in the learning environment can serve as a learning tool. In a language learning setting for example, Cooper and Stewart⁸ argue that one of the ways in which teachers affect the acquisition of language skills is through modelling. This is the process in which an instructor demonstrates to students what they need to do (saying a word first to demonstrate the correct pronunciation, for example). According to Cooper and Stewart, without interaction between students and teachers, modelling has less impact. Storytelling serves as a creative way for students to participate in this process.

d) Inspiring Personal Growth

⁶ Neuhauser, P C. *Corporate Legends and Lore: The Power of Storytelling as Management Tool*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993.

⁷ Burk, N. M. *Empowering at-risk students: Storytelling as a pedagogical tool*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association, Seattle, WA., 2000.

⁸ Cooper, P. & Stewart, L. *Language skills in the classroom: What research says to the teacher*. Washington, DC: National Education Association, 1982.



Though storytelling is an interactive experience, it can also promote growth and change on an individual level. Susan E. Butcher argues that stories encourage thinking “outside the box”, which may help learners to reconsider things they may have never before questioned. According to Alterio,⁹ “Storytelling is an ideal teaching and learning tool, for it takes seriously the need for students to make sense of experience, using their own culturally generated sense-making processes.”

The importance of “reflective dialogue” is another recurring theme in adult learning theory. According to William Isaacs, the author of *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*¹⁰, reflective dialogue is a process in which “a person becomes willing to think about the rules underlying what he or she does and the reasoning behind thoughts and action and to see more clearly what has been taken for granted.” Storytelling can facilitate this reflective dialogue process. As McDury and Alterio¹¹ put it, “our capacity to express ourselves through narrative forms not only enables us to reshape, reassess and reconstruct particular events, it allows us to learn from discussing our experiences with individuals who may raise alternative views, suggest imaginative possibilities and ask stimulating questions”.

e)Engaging the Learner

Because it is an active process, storytelling reduces the passivity of learners. Speaking from his teaching experience, Frances Miley¹² emphasises the ability of storytelling to encourage “unenthusiastic students” to become more engaged and to take responsibility for their own learning. This is possible because storytelling provides a familiar reference point that can be drawn upon in the learning of a new subject, promoting confidence in adult learners. Simply put, “interested students are engaged students”(ibid.).

After having taught accounting for years, Gary L. Kreps was having trouble keeping students interested. He found that storytelling served not only as an instructional tool to facilitate the learning process, but that it also allowed him to connect with his students;

“Stories personalise my classes, encourage a sense of camaraderie among class members, help illustrate key concepts and theories, and enliven class interactions. The stories help to build a personal bond that transcends the traditional class situation. We all become part of a very special narrative community. We become friends and confidants, as well as valued classmates. I strongly encourage other instructors to develop ways to use stories, to personalise, enrich and humanise their classes”.¹³

Storytelling thus allows adult learners to relate to their trainer and each other as human beings, and not just through the typical teacher-student relationship. Another advantage of storytelling is that it brings the human element to the learning process itself, showing that learning is not just the memorisation of facts, but that it can sometimes involve an emotional component. As Maxine Alterio affirms, storytelling encourages students to “integrate feeling and thought, the subjective and objective ways in which we make judgments about our world.”¹⁴

According to Alterio, when narrative is used in thoughtful, reflective and formalised ways, it can “encourage co-operative activity; stimulate students’ critical thinking skills; capture complexities of situations; reveal multiple perspectives; make sense of experience; encourage self-review; and construct new knowledge”(ibid.). Ultimately, she argues;

⁹ Alterio, M. G. *Using Storytelling to Enhance Student Learning*. Higher Education Academy, 2002.

¹⁰ Isaacs, W. *Dialogue and the art of thinking together*. New York: Doubleday, 1999.

¹¹ McDury, J and Alterio, M. G. *Learning through Storytelling: using reflection and experience in higher education contexts*. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2002.

¹² Miley, F. *The storytelling project: innovating to engage students in their learning*. Higher Education Research and Development, 28, No 4, August 2009, 357-369.

¹³ Kreps, G. L. *The power of story to personalize, enrich, and humanize communication education: My own story about having fun spinning tales, and illustrating key points in the classroom*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association, New York, NY., 1998.

¹⁴ Alterio, M. G. *Using Storytelling to Enhance Student Learning*. Higher Education Academy, 2002.



“To learn through storytelling is to take seriously the human need to make meaning from experience, to communicate that meaning to others, and, in the process, learn about ourselves and the worlds in which we reside. Meaningful storytelling processes and activities incorporate opportunities for reflective dialogue, foster collaborative endeavour, nurture the spirit of inquiry and contribute to the construction of new knowledge” (ibid).

Offering Competences for Language Learning and Inclusion through storytelling

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. A significant body of research has been undertaken on the role of storytelling in competence development but practically all of it refers to children or young people. Examples of reports of such research, by Will Coleman¹⁵ or Robin Mello¹⁶, can be consulted on the web. The Sheherazade team focuses on adults. Each pilot project organised by project partners, involved action research as to improve the efficiency of the learning and to better monitor the outcomes. It also provided an overview of the effects and benefits of using storytelling in an adult learning context.

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 and rhythm whilst constructing meaning through the 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 Watkins¹⁷ these skills include memory development, 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 NCTE¹⁸, 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 Kirkpatrick¹⁹ 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.” (ibid.)

The NCTE 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.”

¹⁵ Will Coleman (2001), *Literacy through storytelling*, Cornwall Learning Forum.

¹⁶ Robin Mello (2001), *The Power of Storytelling*.

¹⁷ Lucy Parker Watkins (2010), *The Educational Benefits of the Art of Storytelling*.

¹⁸ National Council of Teachers of English on: <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/teachingstorytelling>

¹⁹ Ruth Kirkpatrick (2012), *Stories Always*.



Communication Skills

According to Sean Buvala's²⁰ 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 imaginations²¹. Luke E. Yackley²² 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 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, and 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"²³.

Cultural Awareness and 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 (Martyn Barrett *et al*). "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"²⁴. 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 belonging within 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 is through ancient myths and folktales, literary short stories, modern picture books, or poems"²⁵. Through stories we also develop understanding and tolerance for differences.

Social Skills

We can again quote Ruth Kirkpatrick (ibid.) "close engagement with a story helps with the development of empathy and emotional literacy (...) by hearing another's difficulty as described in a

²⁰ Sean Buvala on www.seantells.com

²¹ Heather Forest on www.storyarts.org

²² Luke E. Yackley (2007), *Storytelling, a Key to Adult Learning*.

²³ Ruth Kirkpatrick (2012), *Stories Always*.

²⁴ Heather Forest on www.storyarts.org

²⁵ National Council of Teachers of English on: <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/teachingstorytelling>



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 non-violently. Negotiation, discussion, and tact are peace making skills."²⁶²⁴

The Use of Storytelling as a Pedagogical Tool: A Methodological Approach

As we have seen, there is a strong theoretical foundation to support the application of storytelling as an educational tool. For storytelling to effectively be applied as a tool, however, a concrete methodological approach for how it can be used in an adult learning environment is necessary. Through our interviews with a number of professional storytellers, we have found several trends that stand out in the methodological approaches they use when integrating storytelling into adult training.

As we spoke with them to see how they use stories in a training context, some commonalities stood out in the methodological approaches they employed when incorporating storytelling into adult training. Below is a proposed methodological structure based on these common themes.

Preparation & Warm-Up	Technical Activities	Workshop Telling	Performance (Optional)
Establishing the goals of the training	Training on physical movement / gestures / breathing	Activities that explore specific themes / relate storytelling to goal of the course	Learners "take the stage" to tell their story
Creating the ambiance of the training	Word games / work on speaking		
Establishing confidence between participants	Techniques for delivering and remembering a story	Trainees practice telling their own stories to each other and listening to the stories of others	The performance serves as both the medium and end result of the learning process
Preparing participants to think creatively (often done by starting with a story)	Emphasis on the importance of both practical and technical activities		

The insights from the storytellers also include specific practical activities that are used within these approaches which you can find in chapter 3 of the Sheherazade manual.

Preparation/Warm-Up

Many of the storytellers we spoke with agree that a preparation phase is vital to the successful use of storytelling in an adult learning setting. They find it very important to give learners a chance to "warm up" before working with stories in a training course, especially if they are new to telling and listening to stories as an adult. "Warming up" activities need to not only prepare them for the work that will follow, but also to put them at ease and relieve any tension and nervousness they may have. Chlup and Collins conclude that the use of "warming up" is rarely used in adult education and underline the importance of warming up a group;

"Icebreakers encourage participation by all, helping a sense of connection and shared focus to develop. Re-energisers can be used as transitions or a time to 'clear the mind' encouraging vitality and enthusiasm. Both activities also lead to a free exchange of information and

²⁶ Heather Forest on www.storyarts.org



enhanced communication between group members. In addition to simply helping to learn students' names, we have found using icebreakers brings humour into the class, establishes rapport, fosters a safe learning environment, and overall assists with content learning".²⁷

"Warming up" should thus not only be done in the beginning of a course or a school year, but continuous and at each session or each day "re-energisers can be used when energy is low and class morale is lagging, when everyone is not participating, or after a break to re-focus a group" (ibid.).

Four key "warming up" steps were mentioned in our interviews:

- a) Establishing the goals of the training
- b) Creating the ambiance of the training
- c) Establishing confidence between participants
- d) Preparing participants to think creatively (often done by starting with a story)

a) Establishing Goals

The storytellers we interviewed in Ireland noted that before storytelling can be used in the classroom, trainers must first be confident in telling stories and enjoy what they are telling. It is useful, they say if the trainer knows the background of the trainees and is able to find stories that will resonate with them. Caroline Sire, a French storyteller, states that before a new training with adults, she asks each learner what they expect from the training and what needs to happen for them to feel satisfied so she can structure the training accordingly. Bulgarian storyteller Leah Davcheva has a less structured routine that changes depending on the particular training course, but she is always alert of the sensitive nature of some stories told by learners. When it is appropriate, she speaks with learners before the start of a training course to see how they feel about the issues that will potentially be addressed during the course.

b) Creating ambiance

According to Davcheva, creating the right ambiance is a crucial step to the successful use of storytelling in an adult training context. She argues that trainers need to be sure to know the context of their groups i.e. learners' backgrounds, goals, etc. and fully grasp what is required when deciding what story to tell or inviting others to tell. In other words, customising or asking for a story to be customised to the group is essential. Willingness to be vulnerable with the group is another prerequisite, she insists. Authenticity is important in engendering trust. Related to this is the congruence between the story one tells and one's behaviour. Trainers need to remember that they should elicit more stories than they themselves tell. Openness, respect and withholding judgment are also important. Finally, Davcheva adds, a trainer needs to be sure to allow enough time for story sharing when designing a training course.

c) Establishing Confidence

For storytelling to be used successfully in an adult learning context, adult learners have to feel comfortable sharing their stories with others. French storyteller Jacques Combes recommends reassuring learners of the value of what they have to say. He says adult trainers should put learners at ease and be sure to take their life experiences into account, if they have had a difficult migration experience for example. Combes also finds that a good group dynamic is very important for a successful course. In his current course with recently arrived immigrants, he focuses on creating conviviality among the students so that they are more open and trusting with each other. He does this through exercises on the body, the imagination, speaking, etc. and through group meals in which each learner brings a traditional dish from their respective countries.

Like Combes, British storyteller David Heathfield focuses on building group trust in his courses. His strategy for doing this is to start off by being sure that learners have the same goals in mind when participating in his course. He is sure to make the purpose, structure and content of the course as

²⁷ Chlup, D., & Collins, T. (2010). Breaking the ice: Using ice-breakers and re energizers with adult learners. *Adult Learning*, 21(3/4), 34-39.



clear as possible in the description people read when they sign up. He also finds out about the expectations and wishes of participants before and at the start of the course and leads regular group reflections throughout the programme. To make the environment secure for learners, Heathfield sets clear boundaries so that they are able to be playful, experiment and take risks all while feeling supported by him as a trainer and by the other participants. After a course is over, he follows up by making himself available to communicate about learners' experiences and questions.

Combes and Heathfield are not the only storytellers to emphasise the importance of establishing confidence when using storytelling in adult training. Eirwen Malin, a storyteller based in the United Kingdom, finds it necessary to ensure that a rapport between the trainer and students is built quickly. Malin suggests a comfortable quiet environment and if possible, having a small number of students. Similarly, Suse Weisse thinks that relaxation is crucial to forming a group identity. She recommends giving learners the opportunity to listen to a story at the beginning of a training course. Johan Einar Bjerkem, on the other hand, has a holistic perspective on teaching. The German storyteller always starts his courses by telling an initial story to give students an idea of what they will be learning and of the context of the course. This story serves as a backdrop for the activities that will follow.

d) Preparing participants to think creatively

Preparation activities could include physical movement, games to encourage trust and creativity, name games, voice warm-up activities and concentration exercises, among others. Telling a story is also a great way to start a course because it gives learners the opportunity to just listen and enjoy while conveying the simple joy of telling a story. Afterwards, they can share feedback on what they liked about the story.

Physical activities could include having learners walk around in the learning space. The trainer first tells them to walk as if different parts of their body are leading them (nose, chest, hips, etc.). Then, he or she encourages them to exchange simple sentences with each other such as "what are you doing here?". They should practice saying the same sentence in different ways: speaking through their teeth, full-lips, wide-open mouth, etc. to give the same words very different meanings.

Finally, to create the right atmosphere for story sharing, it is a good idea to adjust the learning space before the course begins. The typical classroom setup of rows of desks facing the front may not be conducive to encouraging sharing, so it may be better to have learners sit in a circle and to light candles or to have some other "ritual" to set the scene.

Technical Activities

Technical activities are the "meat and bones" of the storytelling process. These activities allow students to improve their storytelling skills while also working on skills more closely related to the main goals of the course. In a language course, for example, speaking exercises can make for a better story and also improve language skills. Our storytellers find the following types of activities important:

- Training on physical movement/gestures/breathing
- Word games/work on speaking
- Techniques for delivering and remembering a story
- Emphasis on the importance of both practical and technical activities
- Importance of Dialogue

One of the challenges inherit in storytelling is the process of going from the written language to conveying ideas orally. Caroline Sire emphasises the importance of working with learners so that they are able to listen to words not only for their meaning, but also their sound (rhythm, word choice, etc.).

Storyteller Fred Versonnen argues that it is important to familiarise learners with the concept of "natural storytelling." The trainer should show learners "the door" that leads them to the way of storytelling by opening it just a crack and allowing them to go through it themselves, he explains. In addition to technical language and communication skills, Suse Weisse emphasises that there are also



emotional level skills that can be developed in a course involving storytelling such as self-confidence and openness.

According to Diane Sophie Geerts, 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, she argues. The capacities of every participant should be valued so that they can use the proposed tools freely and without fear. Like Weisse, she emphasises both technical and emotional elements of storytelling, highlighting that a training involving storytelling should allow learners to discover not only the richness of storytelling, but also the more technical aspects of oral expression.

The importance of dialogue is emphasised by a number of storytellers. One related theme in adult learning theory is the notion that facilitation by definition should be collaborative. Storyteller Margaret Wenzel incorporates this notion into her work with adults, highlighting that learners bring their own expertise and experience to a course. "I say, 'I am the storyteller and you are guides. Let's meet in the middle,'" she says. "They notice that they are appreciated in what they already know, and through this training, they get the possibility to reflect upon their work". This collaborative approach has yielded results for Wenzel and her students. "They use the theory, which is the conclusion of our work together, in their profession and practice," she explains.

A number of storytelling activities focus on improving technical skills. One helpful skill for learners to develop is being able to remember a story by learning it according to a basic "skeleton" of the plot (description of setting, conflict, resolution, etc.). To develop more elaborate storytelling skills, trainers can use the "guided tour" activity with their learners. In this activity, after listening to a story, learners, working with a partner, will walk around the room. One partner will serve as a tour guide and give a detailed description of what he or she sees, drawing on details from the story (the castle and its shining minarets, the dark forest, the hermit's cave, etc.). The person that is being guided asks questions and always wants to know more.

Other activities focus on promoting dialogue. Games such as "Gossiping", "Interrupter" and "Fortunately/Unfortunately," all have this purpose. Gossiping, for example, is a humorous exercise where people sit in duos and elaborate on a story they have all listened to, filling the gaps by gossiping (ex: "Have you heard what that Snow White was up to recently? Living in a commune with these seven strange men, apparently they were in the diamond trade...").

In the activity, "Interrupter," there is one main storyteller who improvises a story and several interrupters who occasionally interject with an unrelated word that has to be incorporated into the story, often changing the direction of the story.

Similarly, "Fortunately/Unfortunately" is a group storytelling activity. One person starts improvising a story and speaks for about a minute. He ends his part of the story with "fortunately..." or "unfortunately..." and the next person takes over the story from this point.

Workshop

Fred Versonnen argues that storytelling is an essential part of the teaching process. He links the characteristics of a good storyteller with those of a good educator: knowing your audience and being interesting, etc. He explains: "When I give courses training teachers, I always ask: 'Who are the teachers that you remember from your youth? They typically describe two categories of teachers: the ones who were very bad and the ones who were very good. We won't talk about the first category but about the second. When I ask them why they think these teachers were very good, they give two reasons. The first reason is their ability to be very human and the second reason is their capacity to teach their subjects in a passionate way, in a narrative way."

Like Versonnen, we feel that storytelling can be a part of almost any curriculum. The workshop portion of an adult training involving storytelling thus focuses on the specific goal of the course and how storytelling can be used to achieve it. Some examples of course topics that would be ideal for



storytelling include language learning and courses promoting the integration of at-risk groups. The possibilities for incorporating storytelling into adult learning are endless.

Storyteller Aideen McBride gives the example of how storytelling could benefit adult learners with low literacy levels to learn a new language. McBride believes that storytelling could be a way for them to expand their vocabulary and become comfortable with the language before they even have to open a book. She explains that storytelling is a “very honest and informal way of teaching where you can ‘slip the message in’ without intimidating your trainees. If you have people who are nervous or scared by the formality of learning,” McBride continues, “all that can be left aside while the story is being told.” Erwen Malin asserts that exploring similarities and differences among stories from different cultures can provide a starting point for discussion and could thus be used as a tool to enhance inclusion and intercultural dialogue.

Incorporating storytelling can liven up learning activities. Rien Van Meensel suggests, for example, that storytelling could be used in a language learning context. “If you use stories in a classroom in a language course, you can introduce expressions such as ‘she is as beautiful as ...’ Van Meensel explains. “Learners can retell the story from another point of view. The teacher can create a situation in which the learners are interested in the story, so they will broaden their vocabulary in the language they are learning.”

Telling

In the performance step of a training involving storytelling, learners have the opportunity to tell their own stories to each other and listen to the stories of others. Choosing the right story is very important. Veronnenen says that when trainers are telling their own stories, they need to learn how to do three things: tell a story in images, share their passion, and create excitement, suspense and tension when telling a story. Nick Bilbrough typically ends a weeklong course with the participants giving a performance of a story that they had been working on all week.

Performance

Because telling a story alone in front of an audience can be intimidating for some learners, it is helpful to allow them to prepare ahead of time. Trainers can have learners form trios. Each trio would be told a different short story. They would then re-tell the story to each other, dividing the story into beginning, middle and end. Then, the trainer would mix the trios up so that there would be three different stories in each trio. Each person would tell his or her story to the two other members of their trio. In the end, everyone would have told a full story to an audience and have learned three new stories.

Doris Reiningger suggests that a preparation activity that could be useful for smaller groups would be to allow learners to work on dialogue exercises in pairs to give them more confidence before passing on to the monologue phase. She emphasises the importance of giving the narrator time to tell his story, even if it is not linguistically perfect and encouraging the other learners to be patient as well.

Caroline Sire uses the performance period of her trainings to encourage self-reflection. She likes to work with biographical accounts by approaching them from different angles, having the students participate in memory activities in which they tell the stories of others and are able to take a step back from their own experiences as they share their story with others.

Through a review of the literature on adult learning needs and a reflection on the principles of storytelling, we have endeavoured to create a methodological approach for using storytelling as a pedagogical tool. The scholarship on the use of storytelling in an adult learning setting has highlighted its multi-functionality and strength in fostering learning, esteem and cross-cultural communication among adult learners. Ultimately we can say that storytelling is a powerful tool when applied to the adult learning context.



518365-LLP-1-2011-1-BE-GRUNDTVIG-GMP



More information and an online version of the manual on:
www.sheherazade.eu



REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

General Bibliography

- Alterio, M. G. "Using Storytelling to Enhance Student Learning". *Higher Education Academy* 2002.
- Barrett, M. (et ál.). "Developing Intercultural Competences through Education". *Council of Europe DG 2* 2013.
- Bateson, M. C. *Peripheral Visions: Learning Along the Way*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc., 1994.
- Bruner, J. *Making Stories*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Burk, N. M. "Empowering At-Risk Students: Storytelling as a Pedagogical Tool". Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association. Seattle: 2000.
- Butcher, S. E. "Narrative as a Teaching Strategy". *The Journal of Correctional Education* 57 2006: 195-208.
- Chlup, D. & T. Collins. "Breaking the Ice: Using Ice-Breakers and Re Energizers With Adult Learners". *Adult Learning* 21 (3-4) 2010: 34-39.
- Clarke, M. C. & M. Rossiter. "Narrative Learning in Adulthood". *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 119 2008: 61 – 92.
- Coleman, W. "Literacy through Storytelling. A CPR Success Zone Action Research Project". *Cornwall Learning Forum* 2001.
- Cooper, P. & L. Stewart. *Language Skills in the Classroom: What Research Says to the Teacher*. Washington: National Education Association, 1982.
- Cox, A. M. & D. H. Albert (eds). *The Healing Heart for Communities: Storytelling for Strong and Healthy Communities*. New Society Publishers, 2003.
- Hamilton, R. *The Last Storytellers: Tales from the Heart of Morocco, s. 1 - 31*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011.
- Horsdal, M. *Telling Lives Exploring Dimensions of Narratives*. London: Routledge, 2011.
- Isaacs, W. *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*. New York: Doubleday, 1999.
- Johnstone, K. *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre*. Routledge, 1987.
- Kirkpatrick, R. *Stories Always*. 2012.
- Knowles, M. S. [*The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*](#). [Houston: Gulf Publishing Company](#), 1973 (Revised Edition: 1990).
- Kreps, G. L. "The Power of Story to Personalize, Enrich, and Humanize Communication Education: My Own Story About Having Fun Spinning Tales, and Illustrating Key Points in the Classroom". Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association. New York: 1998.
- Livo, N. J. & S. A. Reitz. *Storytelling, Process & Practice*. Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, 1993.
- McDrury, J & M. G. Alterio. *Learning Through Storytelling: Using Reflection and Experience in Higher Education Contexts*. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2002.



Mello, R. *The Power of Storytelling*. 2001.

Miley, F. "The Storytelling Project: Innovating to Engage Students in Their Learning". *Higher Education Research & Development* 28 (4) 2009: 357-369.

Myerhoff, B. *Stories as Equipment for Living: Last Talks and Tales of Barbara Myerhoff*. University of Michigan Press, 2007.

Neuhauser, P. C. *Corporate Legends and Lore: The Power of Storytelling as Management Tool*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993.

Parker Watkins, L. "The Educational Benefits of the Art of Storytelling". 2010.

Pellowski, A. *The World of Storytelling*. Hw Wilson Company, 1990.

Pfhal, N. L. & C.A. Wiessner. "Creating New Directions with Story: Narrating Life Experience as Story in Community Adult Education Contexts". *Adult Learning* 18 (3-4) 2007: 9-13.

Pollan, B. *Samiske beretninger*. Oslo: Aschehoug, 1997.

Read, M.M. *Traditional Storytelling Today. An International Sourcebook*. Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1999.

Rodari, G. *The Grammar of Fantasy: An Introduction to the Art of Inventing Stories*. New York: Teachers and Writers Collaborative, 1996.

Rossiter, M. "Narrative and Stories in Adult Teaching and Learning". *ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Career and Vocational Education, Columbus OH* 2002 (Eric reproduction document number: ED 473147).

Stockton, F. R. "The Lady, or the Tiger?". *The Century* 1882.

Van Lakerveld (et ál.). *AQUEDUCT, Acquiring Key Competences through Heritage Education*. Alden Biesen: 2011.

Yackley, L. E. "Storytelling: A Key to Adult Learning". *Dissertation Abstract International* 67 (12) 2006, 4415A (UMI No. 3247568).

Zemke, R. & S. Zemke. "Adult Learning: What Do We Know for Sure?". *Training* 32 (6) 1995: 31-40.

Zipes, J. *Creative Storytelling: Building Community/Changing Lives*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Recommendations from the Storytellers

Bakhtin, M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

Bettelheim, B. *Psychanalyse des contes de fées*. Paris: Editions, 1976.

Bjerkem, J. *Forteljingas pedagogikk: folkedikting før og no*. Oslo: Gyldendal akademisk, 2004.

Boal, A. *Theater of the Oppressed*. London: Pluto Press, 2000.

Boyer, Dennis. *Initiation et sagesse des contes de fées*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1988.

de Smedt, M. *Nouvelles clés 42: Guérir par les contes*. 2004.



De Vos, G. *Storytelling for Young Adults: A Guide to Tales for Teens*. Westport: Libraries Unlimited, 2003.

De Vos, G., Harris M. & C. Barker Lottridge (eds). *Telling Tales: Storytelling in the Family*. Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 2003.

Duborgel, B. *Imaginaire et pédagogie*. Toulouse: Privat, 1992.

Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press, 1968.

Gargiulo, T.L. *Once Upon a Time*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer, 2007.

Gersie, A. *Earthtales: Storytelling in Times of Change*. Green Print, 1992.

—. *Storymaking in Bereavement. Dragons Fight in the Meadow*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1991.

Gersie, A. & N. King. *Storymaking in Education and Therapy*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1990.

Heath, C. & D. Heath. *Made to Stick*. New York: Random House, 2007.

Holmer, M. *Professioneel vertellen*. Zoetermeer: Free Musketeers, 2009.

Jean, G. *Le pouvoir des contes*. Paris: Casterman, 1990.

—. *Pour une pédagogie de l'imaginaire*. Doornik: Casterman, 1991.

King, N. *Memory, Narrative, Identity: Remembering the Self*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000.

Lipman, D. *Improving Your Storytelling: Beyond Basics for All Who Tell Stories in Work or Play*. Little Rock: August House Publishers, 1999.

Loiseau, S. *Les pouvoirs du conte*. PUF, 1992.

Mateo, P. *Le conteur et l'imaginaire*. Edisud, 2005.

McCourt, F. *Teacher Man: A Memoir*. New York: Scribner, 2005.

McDrury, J. & M. Alterio. *Learning through Storytelling in Higher Education*. London: Kogan Page, 2003.

Morgan, J. & M. Rinvoluceri. *Once Upon a Time: Using stories in the Language Classroom*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Sawyer, R. *The Way of the Storyteller*. London: The Bodley Head, 1962.

Seung, O. *Psychopédagogie du conte*. Paris: Fleurus, 1971.

Spiro, J. *Storybuilding*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Online Resources

FEST: Federation for European Storytelling
www.fest-network.eu



Norwegian suggestopedy organization's webpage (www.norsksuggestopediforening.no)

Homepage of Georgi Lozanov (the founder of Suggestopedy):
<http://dr-lozanov.com/en/en1.htm>

Digital library of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France:
<http://gallica.bnf.fr/>

The internet archive:
<http://www.archive.org/details/texts>

The Key Competences for Lifelong Learning:
http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/pdf/ll-learning/keycomp_en.pdf

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

Heather Forest:
www.storyarts.org

Sean Buvala:
www.seantells.com