# *T-STORY – Storytelling Applied to Training*

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**Abstract**
The project is financed by the Transversal Actions (Key Activity 3 – Information and Communication Technologies) under the Lifelong Learning Programme from the European Commission. Between November 2012 to October 2014, seven institutions from seven European countries (Italy, Portugal, Romania, The Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Greece) will be carry out the intent of promote a wider use of Digital Storytelling as a pedagogical technique in education and training at all levels throughout Europe by developing a digital course for educators, teachers and trainers. Digital Storytelling is an innovative teaching method which combines the learning potential of stories with the latest technologies and interactive tools. Digital storytelling has the potential to be used in all educational settings, formal and informal, as well as work environment. In the first phases of the project 381 European educators have been involved in a survey to identify their training needs regarding key Digital Storytelling competences and ICT skills. Currently, the project is working on the development of the Digital Course, which intends to learn Storytelling through the use of a story, together with the elaboration of a Learning Handbook to support trainers. The partnership will promote in all the 7 Countries Pilot Sessions of the Digital Course, in order to collect feedback and fine-tune the training materials developed. T-Story will foster the target groups (representative from kindergarten to adult training) to develop their knowledge and skills by using Digital Storytelling technique - "learn Storytelling through Storytelling".

Keywords: Digital Storytelling, Learning methodology, ICT, digital course

## Introduction

The European project "TStory – Storytelling applied to training" concerns the use of Storytelling and digital instruments as innovative learning methodology, suitable for all educational levels [1].

Growing up with unprecedented access to technology has changed the way young people, "digital natives", communicate, interact, process information, and learn [2].

The EU states that new innovative pedagogical and didactical approaches are needed to take into account the future learning needs and changing skills and competences necessary for employment, self-development and participation in a knowledge-based, digital society.

EU traditional E&T institutions need to employ new formats and strategies for learning and teaching to be able to offer relevant, effective and high quality learning experiences in the future [3]. With the evolution of ICT, personalized learning and individual mentoring will become a reality and teachers/trainers will need to be trained, in order to exploit the available resources and tools to support tailor-made learning pathways.

Some, if not most, of the ICT resources are unfamiliar to teachers, but today's students are using them at an ever increasing pace and in ways that are helping to define a new generation of not just information gathering, but information-creating as well. Due to the relative newness of computer technology, many teachers have not received adequate training to select appropriate technologies and the lack of courses on digital tools increases the gap among them and students.

## Storytelling and Digital Storytelling (DST)

Storytelling is the conveying of events in words, images and sounds. It represents an innovative pedagogical approach that has the potential to engage learners in student-centered learning, and improve learning outcomes like knowledge, communication, reflection, critical thinking, construction and collaboration**.**

Humans are storytelling organisms and, since the most ancient cultures, they communicate with each-others through Storytelling, to entertain, educate and convey the society's culture, values and history [4]; great leaders of all types have used stories as instructional tools in the form of parables, legends, myths, fables, and real life examples to convey important information [5], sometimes to convince and manipulate.

Storytelling implies an interactive process between the teller/writer and the listener/reader; together, they share and interpret past and present experiences, making a sense to the events. Additionally, Storytelling promotes expressive language development in both speech and written composition, as well as receptive language in reading and listening. The real value of Storytelling from a cognitive perspective is that it becomes a mutual creation involving interaction and understanding between teller and listener [6].

A story might be defined as a series of sentences that describe some sequence of actions, events or experiences, usually related to people as actors in the story. The characters in a story are usually presented in some human situations to which – together with the factors and changes which affect that situation from outside – they react and change [7].

The earliest documented reference to storytelling dates to 4000 B.C. and telling a story is one of the oldest method of communication. What is new today about the telling stories is the bottom-up approach (instead of the traditional top-down approach) to achieve shared processes and manage communication, education, training and innovation.

DST involves combining narrative with digital content, including imagines, sounds and interactive video; environments and words are connected to technologies. The result is a powerful instrument to approach and engage students and trainees in a transversal way. The combination of powerful, yet affordable, technology hardware and software matches perfectly the needs of many of today's classrooms, where the focus is on providing students with the skills they will need to "*thrive in increasingly media-varied environments*" [8].

DST can be applied to all educational levels, from kindergartens to high level specific professional training, and it is suitable for all the possible subjects of study and discipline, from the primary and STEM teaching, to humanities, arts, core skills. DST can be used as a method to teach ethics, values, cultural norms and differences, to transfer knowledge, to create a cultural, linguistic and age-related bridge, to promote innovative problem solving, to make connections, to seek best practices, to imagine new perspectives and possibilities, to be inspired and enhance innovation. All these elements lead to a higher level of social interaction, active learning ("learning by doing"), multiple literacy and cooperative skills, interdisciplinary connection.

Digital Storytelling in education can be used in numerous ways. Digital stories can be created by teachers, or by learners, or through a working group, using structured or free storytelling, metaphors, fairy-tales, case studies, interviews, semantic cluster mapping, horal histories. Also, there are several possible instruments: written form, audio, video, pictures, slide, drawings, theatre, music.

Despite many educationists have recognized the potential of DST, many of them still lack a cohesive plan for integrating multimedia into their instruction, and a well-designed framework for the same is still required [9].

**T-Story project: objectives and methodology**

The project intends to promote a wider use of DST in education and training at all levels throughout Europe by developing a Digital Course to teachers and trainers. Following the principle "learn Storytelling through Storytelling"**,** T-Story aims to foster teachers/trainers knowledge and skills development by using DST technique, giving the opportunity to learn and train how to implement the technique and how to engage students/trainees taking advantage of the digital potential.

This overall purpose has been developed according the following specific objectives:

- involve European teachers/trainers in a survey to identify their training needs regarding key DST competences and ICT skills;
- identify good practices from successful Storytelling educational projects, through a desk research activity;
- elaborate a Learning Handbook in order to support trainers delivering training through Storytelling and promote, in the 7 countries, a Digital Training Course through Pilot Sessions, so thus to collect feedback and fine-tune the training materials developed.

The target groups are teachers/trainers from kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, vocational schools, universities, adult education entities, education policy maker and authorities institutions, training and coaching agencies.

T-Story is based on a structured work programme which maximises the individual areas of expertise of each partner while encouraging a high level of collaboration, communication and generation of innovation.

The project began with a research that aimed to develop a need analysis of teachers/trainers regarding Storytelling and DST skills, which constituted the basis for the development of the learning contents. The research was carried out through a survey based on data collection and 381 questionnaires were collected among the partners' national surveys. Although 1/3 of teachers/trainers/educators does not know what storytelling is and 2/3 of them does not know what digital storytelling is, 90% of them declares to be strongly interested in learning this new methodology. Therefore, the transnational analysis shows that educators from all the questioned countries, are interested in applying Storytelling and Digital Storytelling methods in an educational context.

In a second phase, all partners conducted a desk research at national and global level to identify successful DST educational projects, analysing at least one best practice per Country.

Findings and results supported the consortium in defining the learning contents to be developed, namely for a Learning Handbook and for the Digital Training Course.

The Learning Handbook supports the Digital Course. It contains three chapters respectively on Storytelling, ICT& digital tools and Digital Storytelling, with proposed exercises, activities, examples and in depth analysis. The Digital Course is divided in three phases as well, with 10 online lessons, connected to the handbook. The first phase is on Storytelling and shows how to create a story from its main elements. The second phase guides learners to ICT and the use of the existing digital tools. Finally, the third phase lets to combine narrative with digital tools, to create a digital story. Following the purpose to "learn Storytelling through Storytelling", all the contents have been developed into a story which will foster learners during the whole course.

The learning material – both the Handbook and the Digital Course - will be tested and validated among representatives of the target-group in pilot training sessions

implemented in 7 countries. Teachers, trainers and educators will have the opportunity to follow the online lessons and work on the handbook, creating their own digital story. The aim of this phase is to validate the efficacy of the learning contents and collect feedback from participants, which will be at the basis of the last part of the project, dedicated to refining the digital storytelling course.

**Expected results**

"*Digital story and storytelling is more than just a technology or an art form, it is about engaging community, promoting intergenerational communication, as well as providing an innovative method of historical research*." (Cho, 2009) [10].

As a result of the project, the consortium expects to effectively map and disseminate at national and European level teachers/trainers' needs regarding key DST competences and ICT skills, and it aims to support the target groups to empower their skills to create and develop innovative courses using Storytelling and digital support.

Furthermore:
- the adoption of innovative learners-centered methodologies in education/training can contribute for the development of key transversal competences such as critical thinking, creativity and innovation;
- using ICT in education can empower the target group's digital skills development and foster digital inclusion;
- addressing the needs of the learners/trainees through personalization, collaboration and informal learning will increase their motivation, strengthen their links to training and education institutions and increase their investment in lifelong learning;
- the valorisation activities will allow for a wider awareness of the methodology and will foster new applications in professional contexts outside education.

All the solutions developed in this project are available for 7 countries which will test the practical suitability in their national environment. The benefit is considerably higher than with national solution-strategies. T-Story project's development and implementation can contribute to the reposition of the E&T institutions, and by consequence contribute to help Europe achieve its goals.

As it is stated by the EU: "The promotion of ICT for learning is a priority of the 'transversal' part of the EU's Lifelong Learning Programme. Effective integration of ICT into education must go beyond replacing, streamlining or accelerating current practices. Actions are not about developing technology itself, but about its use to enhance learning environments and experiences." [11].

Supported by an appropriate framework, teachers/trainers can experiment some practical uses of DST, like explaining concept and theories, evaluating teaching instruments, answering questions and problems, stimulating working groups and students' personalization of the learning process.

When students are able to participate in the multiple steps of designing, creating and presenting their own digital stories, they increase a full complement of literacy skills, including: research; writing; technology; presentation; problem-solving skills. The project contributes to improve the effectiveness of education, allowing for more

personalised learning, a better learning experience, and an improved use of resources integrating creativity and innovation. Storytelling also facilitates the development of innovative practices in adult education, motivating them through more flexible learning solutions.

Interest in Storytelling as instruction continues to build for at least two reasons: high-fidelity and media rich learning environments are becoming more and more common [12] and research into learning continues to indicate the value and effectiveness of the methods of Storytelling in general.

The combination of powerful, yet affordable, technology hardware and software meshes perfectly with the needs of many of today's classrooms, where the focus is on providing students, in a protective environment like school, with the skills they will need to "thrive in increasingly media-varied environments" [13]. With an estimated 90% of jobs requiring digital skills in the near future, it is thus essential that education and training systems provide individuals with the required skills [14].

While there is still some disagreement [15], many are finding that learners embedded in contextual, authentic, real world problems are more engaged, draw on more resources, and transfer learning more effectively [16].

The future role of schools will be to guide students in identifying and selecting the learning opportunities that best fit their learning styles and objectives; to monitor progress, realign learning objectives and choices and intervene when difficulties arise. For that reason, guidance is needed for educators and learners on how to best use and exploit technology's and new media potentialities [17].

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