



Storytelling as inclusive non-formal education tool



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Storytelling

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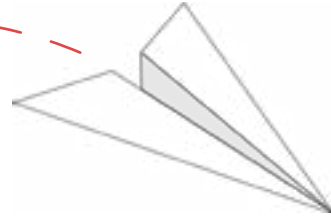
layout and graphics: Alisia Damian-Coantă

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2022 Bucharest, Romania

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National Agency for the Community Programmes in the Field of Education and Vocational Training
(Romanian NA for European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+)



Storytelling

The 7th edition of the Connector provided a space and context where people involved in learning became familiar with and practiced different non-formal learning methods to be used in inclusion and diversity contexts. A special focus was placed on how these learning methods can be applied for the integration of migrants and refugees, given the outcome of the displacement crisis that began on 24 February 2022.

CONNECTOR 2022 workshop

The goal of storytelling is not to simply tell a story and to stay in a fantasy land, but to help us transfer important elements in our real life, and thus make an impact on our day to day live, to bring some of the fairytale into our ordinary lives, as well.

Because we are all made of stories, storytelling is an international language that everybody speaks and understands.

Starting from this common ground, we create non formal learning experiences, inspirational moments, connections, and a safe space where we can easily express ourselves, approach sensitive topics and shift perspectives, communicate, reflect.

We will discover how stories can be used in facilitating learning experiences, how we can shift from telling a story to storytelling, how can storytelling help with inclusion and how a narrative or its change, affects our lives.



Daniela Stuparu

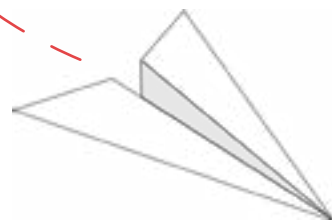
I am a German language trainer at Babel Center, vice-president of Babel Education, facilitator of the series of Workshops Learning from "Passive to Active", within Educafé - Babel Education project.

Stories are not just for the childhood years. Storytelling is a method that I used successfully in many fields, from education to the business environment.

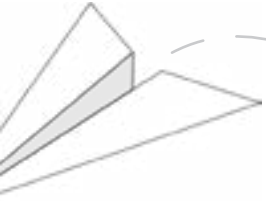
In the Storytelling session, with and about stories, we will see how we can use stories in classroom activity to achieve our goals or make learning more attractive and easy.

Cuprins

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What is it?

*The thing with stories
is that everyone gets them!
Stories are universal!*

Once upon a time there was.....

There isn't something that cannot be said after this phrase. This shows us the true power of stories. We are walking stories, a tiny universe, everybody has a story. Stories are a part of us, but are most often forgotten or isolated in a fantastic world far away from the real world, or associated only with childhood.

Because we are all made of stories, storytelling is an international language that everybody speaks and understands. Storytelling has no age limit!

Storytelling

We all know that storytelling is, as the name also says, telling a story. In history, stories were also the way how the understanding of the world was passed on, from one generation to another and it is also an ancient form of art. This art of storytelling consists of these elements:

- **Representation of a story** - so a narrative path. In a story something happens, we often have a problem that needs to be solved. There is an initial moment, a moment that triggers change, the action itself with a climax and an end.
- **Interactivity** - involves an interaction between a storyteller and listeners.
- **Verbal or semiotic language** - it contains words or symbols that communicate something.
- **Showing the story** - the storyteller adds vivid elements to the story which activate the imagination of the listener, who then creates the vivid reality of the story in her/his mind, becoming co-creator of the story.
- **Physical movement/gesture** - nonverbal language and body language come to help when telling the story.

Stories are broadly used in all domains from religious rituals to marketing and psychology and can be combined with all forms of art (dance, music, theater).

Types of stories

Storytelling starting from books - which usually occurs in libraries or at bed time, when parents read to their kids.

Storytelling on stage (as performance) - stories that are told by professionals on a real stage.

Digital Storytelling - the tradition of storytelling combined with digital technology.

Story collecting - in this case the storyteller does not know the story. He creates the story with the help of the audience, starting very often from an object. He often takes the first thing being said in connection with it and creates the story further with the audience.

Multilingual storytelling - it is the same story told in more languages and it is very suitable for raising awareness about multiculturalism and the importance of non-verbal communication.

Storytelling as a non-formal education method - starting from stories, which can be well known stories, personal stories or on the spot invented stories. The stories are used to facilitate a safe space where experiential learning occurs. It is a very good invitation to communication, self-reflection, team work. It also enhances creativity and develops the ability of active listening.

Storytelling as a nonformal education method

WHAT Starting from this common ground and their universality and using non-formal methods and experiential learning, Storytelling sessions create non-formal learning experiences, inspirational moments, connections, and a safe space where we can easily express ourselves, approach sensitive topics and shift perspectives, communicate, argue, learn and unlearn, integrate, leave old beliefs and include new attitudes. Such a storytelling session consists of a story, games, non-formal education activities, self-reflection activities, creative activities, stories creating, communication activities, multisensory activities. They are built around a story and carefully chosen to reach the learning goal of the session.

Learning through STORYTELLING helps us cross the bridge between reality and wonderland. The goal of storytelling is not to simply tell a story and to stay in a fantasy land, but to facilitate change, connection and inclusion and to help us transfer these things in our real life, and thus make an impact on our day to day life, help us make the place we live in much better, unleash potential in ourselves and our communities and to bring some of the fairytale dust into our ordinary lives as well.

OFF THE HOOK!

By moving into a world of stories, the pressure felt by being exposed in a group or too vulnerable to express one's own ideas or thoughts, is being taken off and moved in a more neutral space where the burden is borne by characters. Self-reflection and expressing values and beliefs afterwards in a group becomes easy.

Besides the fact that storytelling as a non-formal education method that helps us create this safe environment, it also ensures the joy in learning, because stories also bring entertainment to the learning process. The pleasant atmosphere created through storytelling leads to deep learning and valuable experiences that are acquired at a comfortable level.

WHO?

This method of education is spreading rapidly and it is most often used by educators, youth workers, teachers and trainers in the field of personal growth. It can be adjusted to any type of message or content, being very versatile, it works even in the marketing or financial business areas. Storytelling boosts creativity and gives inspiration and helps the pupils or training participants to hear out different perspectives on topics and thus become more tolerant.

Studies have shown that pupils and even older students assimilate ideas and new concepts easier when presented through storytelling.

This method consists of three main elements:

- *The story*
- *The storyteller*
- *The audience*

The relationship, connection and interaction of these elements give the strength of a storytelling session.

The Story - it can be a famous old story, a personal one or one invented on the spot.

The Storyteller - besides of being skilled in telling a good story, a thing that can be developed in time, he has to be authentic and to have a good connection to the story but also with the audience.

The audience - does not have an age limit, has to be willing to actively listen and to be willing to communicate afterwards.

Learning objectives

Storytelling as a nonformal education method has lately gained interest from all domains because of its multiple benefits. Here are some of the learning objectives in storytelling.

Attention Trainer

When we listen to a story we have to focus in order to understand and we learn to pay attention to details therefore, our capacity to pay attention strengthens. In the digitalised area that we live in, being able to follow words and nonverbal communication forms is essential for our inter-communication skills because our attention span has been highly affected from the digitalisation.

Storytelling develops communication and self-reflection

Communication is one of the most important things when it comes to storytelling. First of all the Storyteller must be able to tell the story in an effective way, in order to create the wanted impact. This implies a good communication with the audience.

When using Storytelling we start to reflect on things that we wouldn't otherwise think of, or to think of aspects of our lives in a different way. Self-reflection is also an important part of the process and that means that we also verbalize what we feel, what we have been through.

The fact that we go through this process with us forces us to self-reflect and to categorize in words what would otherwise remain abstract. We then become better at communicating "us" and with us and we understand ourselves better.

Through the fact that we share our beliefs, values, aha-moments in the group or to another participant in the training, we practice good communication, effective communication which helps us be understood. These communication skills are vital for every relationship and human interaction.

It is also very helpful because we have to practice talking in front of others and it helps develop vocabulary, for example when the language used is international and we are forced to talk more than in other contexts.

Boosts creativity and the learning process

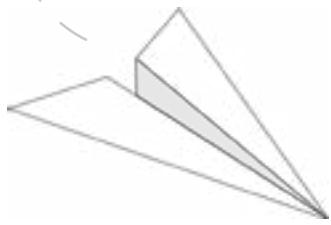
Stories place us in a fantasy wonderland where everything is possible. Most of us remember them from our childhood when we still believed that everything is possible like in fairy tales. Storytelling accesses somehow the same door.

Because we start from stories, people are prepared to act and think differently, to give up the formal rules that often prevent them from being authentic.

They accept to play and trust that everything is possible.

They start creating stories, think that frogs can speak and give advice to donkeys.

This keeps us not trapped in a fantasy world, but enhances creative writing, solution finding, drawing, storytelling skills and performance abilities. Fooling around may seem childish, but it actually helps people break barriers and stereotypes and discover un-walked paths. It has been shown that pupils develop a more positive attitude towards learning if storytelling is used.



Storytelling connects - It increases empathy and team work ability

Because of its universality, Storytelling creates easily connections among people and builds bridges.

Because storytelling takes us on a journey to ourselves, we discover our own vulnerabilities and strengths but we also discover that others have similar journeys and fights and we understand better that there is unity in our humanity.

We therefore have a much higher ability to tolerate and are more likely to be empathetic to others once we reconnect authentically with our feelings.

We learn to be more compassionate to ourselves and to others.

We also have access to different stories and that raises our awareness that there is a lot of "different" happening out there and we become more aware of the diversity that exists. Storytelling also helps us deconstruct stereotypes by presenting different sides of a story, thus helping us see the bigger picture or the whole truth. They train our critical thinking and help us be more aware of the danger of a single sided story or watch more carefully to see if the source of the story is trustworthy.

Storytelling occurs from the interaction between The Audience, Story and Storyteller. That means that the basis of storytelling is relationship. In storytelling we interact with others, we communicate better, we create stories together, we learn how to better be ONE.

Storytelling helps us tackle sensitive topics

Storytelling has proven its beneficial use especially when it comes to sensitive topics that can usually lead to conflict or to someone feeling harmed. By using a story as a tool, we may prevent things from getting too personal. Opinions are easily seen as only opinions and not attacks.

Storytelling develops personal growth

Stories motivate, inspire and give us examples of heroes who have overcome what we are maybe facing right now.

Stories convey human wisdom and because they help us improve our understanding of ourselves, the relationship and communication with others, our creativity, self-empathy and tolerance to others, we can easily see why storytelling is so important to our personal development. The structure and combination of storytelling sessions that include non-formal learning activities, concepts from psychology and other powerful tools help the participants develop their personality.





Preparation *of the* method

Although storytelling can be perceived as easy to deliver, it actually needs good preparation so that the learning objectives can be reached.

AIM When choosing the story and planning the storytelling session it is crucial to think what do we want to achieve? Which values do we want to transmit? Who is our audience? What would be more suitable for them? What are their expectations? What is their personal and professional background? Is there someone with special needs in our group? Is it possible that someone feels hurt or unease by/in any of the activities? The answers to these questions will help us design the activity to the highest benefit of the listeners and create a meaningful storytelling experience.

Space

The space sets the tone for the story. It is important that everyone feels comfortable. Very often, during a storytelling session, people sit not on chairs but on comfortable pillows and blankets. The more colorful the better. You can use candles, flowers, scarfs or objects that remind of the story and help the listeners enter the story more easily.

Getting to know each other

Because sometimes Storytelling demands us to open in front of others, to share our values, beliefs or even fears, it is very important that this happens in a safe space, where everybody feels accepted and not judged. In order for that to happen, we should first of all make sure that the people in the group know each other and that everyone in the group is feeling safe to work with others.

Resources **The Story**

The most important resource that we clearly need is a good story, starting from which, we can build our session. The story has to be inspirational, easy to understand and not very long.

It is very important that we learn the story by heart, rehearse telling it a few times before the actual session to see what is necessary and what can be left out, to be able to add non-verbal elements and gestures that would make the story more vivid and, of course, to remember it.

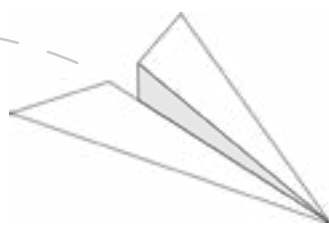
The telling of the story more than once helps the storyteller create an authentic connection to the story and this leads to involvement, which is crucial in storytelling.

The bricks

Storytelling sessions do not only consist of merely telling the story but also from non-formal learning exercises, creative writing sessions, self-reflection sessions and action points, drawing, debates. These elements should be carefully chosen and put together in order to support the whole activity and serve our purpose and aim.

The materials

A good story often is enough but, sometimes good materials could help us "show" the story. You may find colorful quotes from the story helpful, or different objects that help us bring the Audience in the story: a puppet, a wooden frog, colorful post-its. There are also some special materials that are a must in every storyteller's kit: dixit cards, puppets, story cubes, music instruments and everything that you think it might help.



A woman with short brown hair, wearing a white t-shirt and a watch, is speaking to a group of people outdoors. She is gesturing with her hands as she speaks. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in white t-shirts.

Delivering *the* method

When we talk about storytelling especially as a non-formal education method, we talk about the whole learning experience that happens around the story. In order to get it right we have to follow some steps when crossing in the land of stories.

I. Entering the story

*Once you heard a story,
you cannot unhear it so
it is very important that
we come to this prepared.*

The storyteller is the one who takes the Audience on a journey in a fantasy land therefore he is responsible for making this journey as pleasant and as memorable as possible. For this to happen we need a preparation stage for the audience in which they get ready for the story and adventure that lies ahead.

After the first step has been taken by getting to know each other activities and developing trust through team building activities, we can now come to the storytelling activity and the first phase is entering the story.

The role of this stage is to familiarize the Audience with elements of the story and to facilitate an openness to the story yet to be delivered. Through this activity we make sure that everyone involved is present and that we can leave together the day-to-day fuss behind and fully participate in our session.

A very suitable entering activity would be a theme related activity in which the audience communicates something about themselves. It can also be a group activity, a theme related game, multisensory activity, a non-formal education exercise, a brainstorming and so on.

For a story in which we talk about dreams and how to follow them a good entering activity for the participants could be talking about their dream job as kids or to challenge them, in a creative way, to make a portrait of a dream.

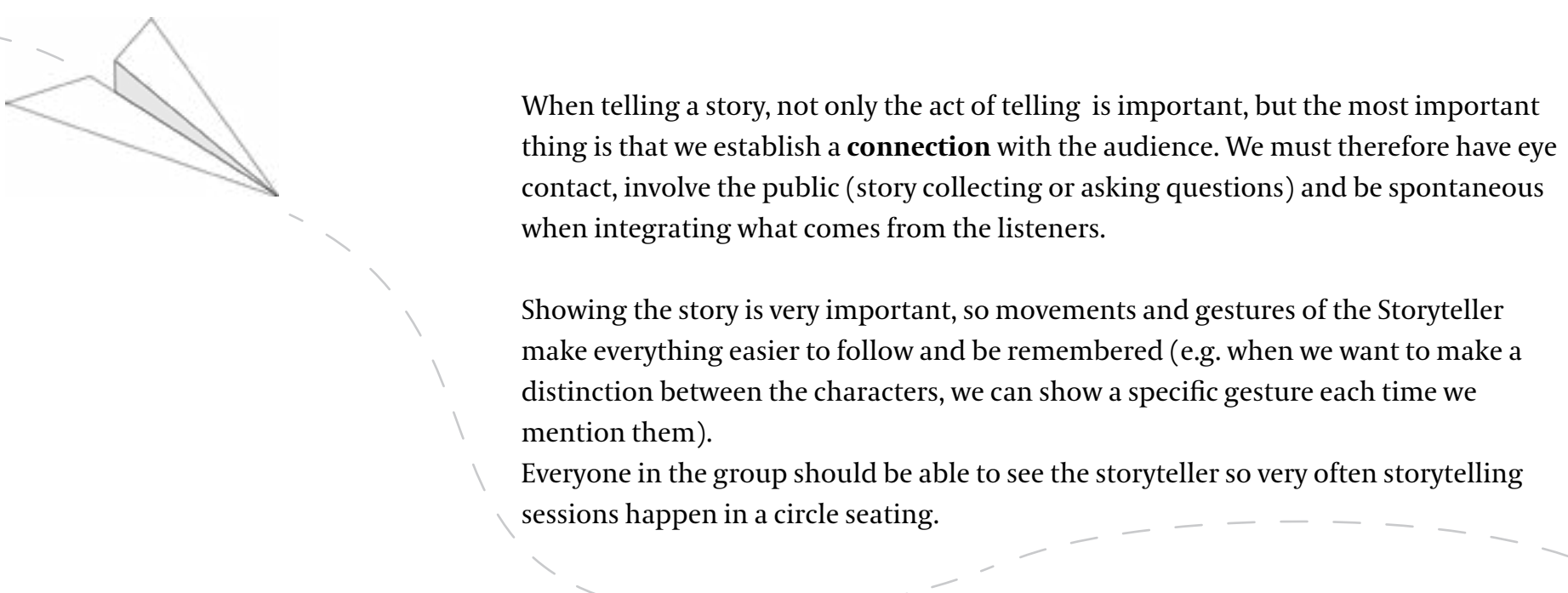
II. Telling the Story-Storytelling

*The focus lies on
telling a story
not on reading it!*

It is very important that we **remember** the narrative and its chronological order. This along with the involvement of the Storyteller gives authenticity to the experience.

We must speak clearly, our **voice** is very important. It should adapt to the moments of the story and follow it accordingly (e.g. whisper when we want to emphasize a stronger feeling). Pauses are also very important when we want to underline a moment.

The **repetition** of short, easy to remember, phrases assures the bigger impact of the story and makes the interaction with the audience more easy (e.g. He was sad and he cried a lot).



When telling a story, not only the act of telling is important, but the most important thing is that we establish a **connection** with the audience. We must therefore have eye contact, involve the public (story collecting or asking questions) and be spontaneous when integrating what comes from the listeners.

Showing the story is very important, so movements and gestures of the Storyteller make everything easier to follow and be remembered (e.g. when we want to make a distinction between the characters, we can show a specific gesture each time we mention them).

Everyone in the group should be able to see the storyteller so very often storytelling sessions happen in a circle seating.

III. Leaving the story

The main reason why we use the magic of stories is because of the inspiration and wisdom they bring to our daily life. As Storytellers, we have to give the Audience trust that they can embark with us on a journey and also that they can trust us to bring them back to the real world and help them put in practice what they gained from the story.

At this point the Audience owns the story. They have added their feelings and imagination to the story and they experienced it in a very personal way. It is time for some follow up activities that bring to surface the inspiration from the story and help the Audience to bring some fairytale dust in their real life, so to have a real impact on lives. These activities can be debates, or group activities in which they have to share what they have learned from the story, it can be a self-reflection with action points or creating a different version of the story from the point of view of another character or a theater play. It can also be something creative such as painting or creative writing. For the same story about following your dreams a good leaving activity would be to tell the Audience to identify a dream of theirs and to make an action point of how they can accomplish it.

Participants should have a list of the fears that prevent them from achieving, a list of the resources they have or need and to identify some clear actions they can do this month for it. After creating them, they should share what they wrote to another participant.

Why do we use *this* method

*"The shortest distance
between two people
is a story."
- Terrence Gargiulo -*



Stories build bridges - They connect

Stories go straight to the heart.

The easiest answer would be that: everybody loves a good story. It is quite true because when we talk about deep learning and meaningful learning experiences we know they are linked to high involvement of the participants and this desired involvement is acquired in a pleasant and safe atmosphere.

Storytelling does that because it is entertaining, inspirational and it motivates.

The structure of storytelling with its phases is also a guided learning experience which helps the listener transfer the information from abstract ideas into practice in activities, actions and changes in life.

Storytelling demands self-reflection and initiates a process of a better understanding of self and humanity. A person who is in contact with her own feelings and understands them without judgment is able to be more empathetic to others and consequently more tolerant.

Storytelling, as a non-formal education method, helps us experience things rather than just learn about them and thus activates an authentic understanding of things. The experiential learning dimension assures, for example, a deeper understanding of what inclusion and diversity feel, look, are, rather than just to discuss them only at the informational and rational level. The more aspects of the personality are involved in the learning, the complexer the outcome, the learning points. Once you experience how exclusion and inclusion feel, or connect to some moments in your life when you felt them, you understand the value of inclusion better and are more likely to facilitate it to others.

Because stories are a way of sharing values and beliefs, the listener becomes more aware of the diversity that exists, he is granted access through stories to a universe in which he wouldn't usually have access to. Because the sessions of storytelling involve communication with other peers, storytelling helps people expand their horizon, accept different points of view, deconstruct prejudice and stereotypes and be more aware of how different things can be or how differently they can be perceived.

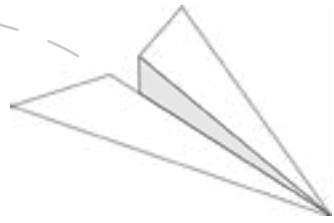
Personal stories of someone from a discriminated minority will always provide powerful insight of why inclusion is a must.

Storytelling sessions also connect people from very different backgrounds in a way in which they identify similarities between them in spite of the differences. This helps one become more compassionate about others and helps in gaining a more positive attitude towards what diversity means.

Stories, as a starting point, help create a safe distance from themselves that ensures that the people engaged in the process are more able to be objective and to see more clearly some aspects of their life too. It is also a great way to tackle sensitive topics and to help people understand and debate more abstract messages objectively.

It is a very effective tool for children because their learning is still very fond of stories and them, according to science, are much more motivated to learn through stories.





Evaluation

It is pretty hard to evaluate the impact of a story because the Audience also has a big part in interpreting the story in a very personal way. Each individual can take something else from a story. But we also need to be able to understand the benefits of Storytelling and, in this case, here are some ways in which we can do it.

A. Feedback


Whether it is at the end of each session of storytelling or at the end of the training week, in group or frontal, each time the participants in a storytelling session say what they learned from the story, their AHA moments and how they can apply it to their life. It provides us meaningful insight to see if our learning objectives and aim of the workshop were met.

B. Dynamics and progress

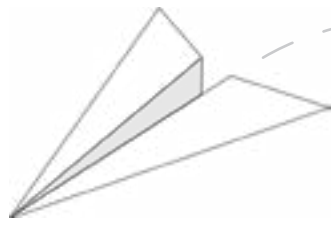
Even if not said very clearly, we can still evaluate how the storytelling impacts our group and our participants when we observe the dynamics of the group and the change in attitude and behavior.

Are they involved? Is the atmosphere friendly, are they more able to communicate and to understand each other? Are they working better in the group? Do they dare to express themselves? Are they expressing creative ideas more easily? Are they smiling? Even if these are very simple things, if the answer is yes, we may say that the storytelling session has been effective.

Beside measuring if the learning objectives were met, we must be vigilant and keep an eye on evaluating benefits and objectives that occur during the process and which weren't planned. For e.g. a participant manages to verbalize very good what he is thankful for or is able to show gratitude in a palpable way, especially if, before this, the person was rather shy and closed - this could be the case in a session where we work on finding own resources and practicing gratitude.



How can it
be used
in E+/ESC
context?



Storytelling, as a non-formal method of education, is very versatile and can be used in learning and facilitating sessions in each field (science, communication, personal development, etc.). This happens because stories bring entertainment, motivation and inspiration in every process.

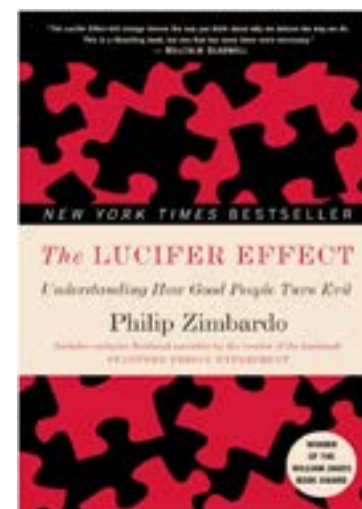
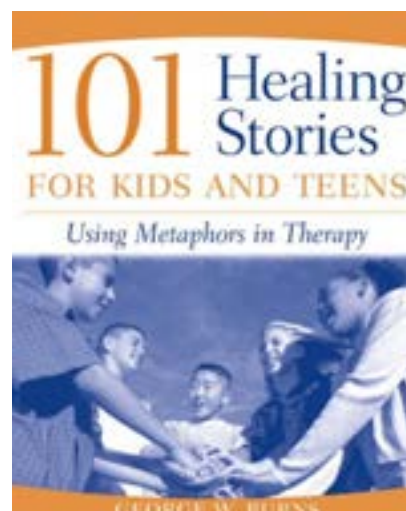
In Erasmus+ and ESC context it can be used for very many purposes some of which are:

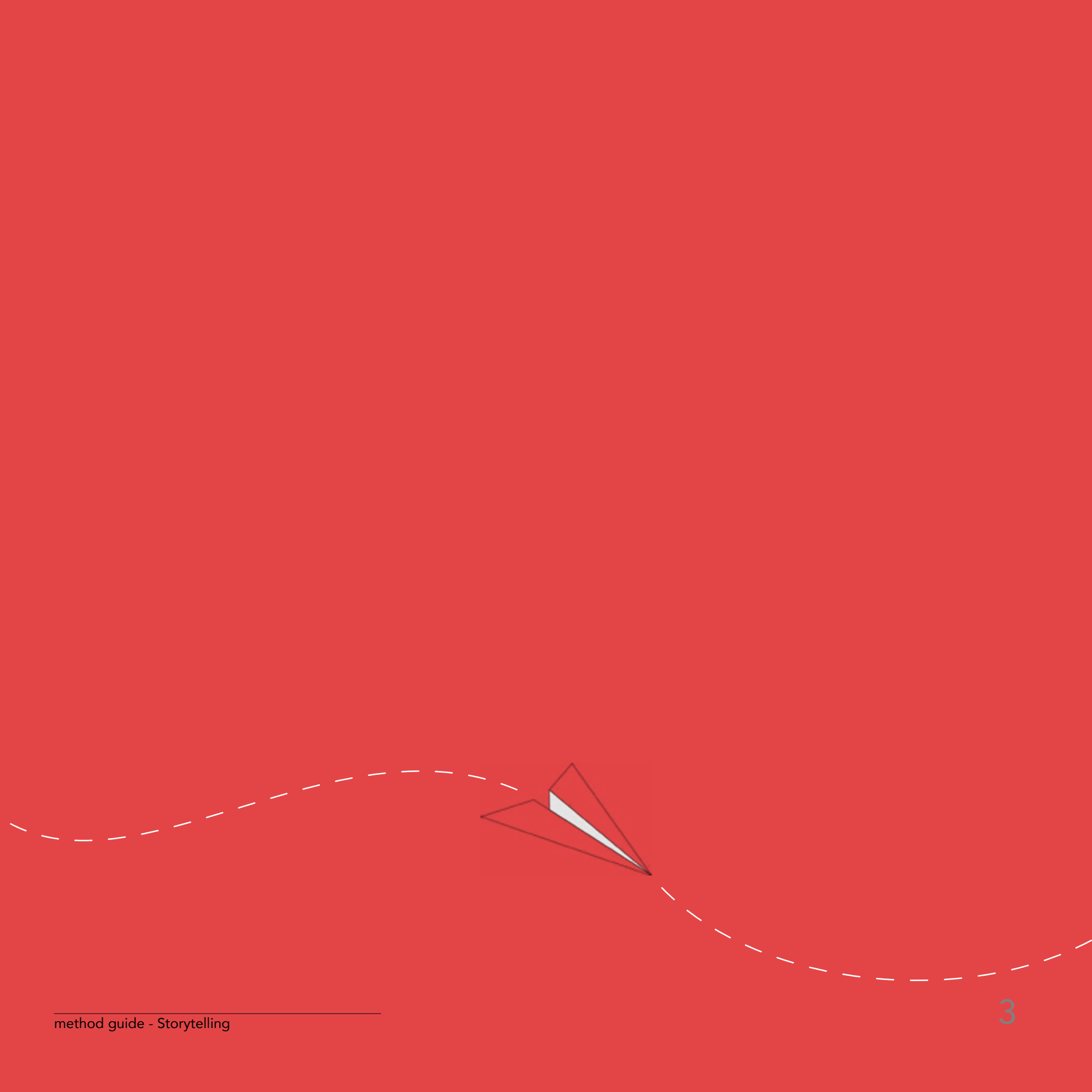
- Facilitating non-formal experiential learning sessions which lead to deep learning and meaningful experiences. The facilitating of a storytelling session is structured in enjoyable phases and exercises that are interesting and engage effectively.
- To foster awareness about diversity, multiculturalism and to value the importance of tolerance and empathy. Stories help us improve solidarity and team work, because we meet different people with different stories containing totally different beliefs and values and we get access to a universe we wouldn't otherwise have access to. Storytelling uses a lot of group communication and peer learning to train these things.
- Creating valuable creative contexts - they help participants get out of the box and engage in creative activities like: creative writing, storytelling, poetry and role play - they wouldn't do in another place or time in their life.
- Personal development projects - Storytelling takes you on a transformational process and it facilitates changes in attitudes and behavior, improves communication, helps acquire a positive attitude to learning. It can generate self-reflection, help tackle fear, and make you take clear steps for future developments. It is a wonderful tool to facilitate context in which the participants take time to think and draw conclusions about their life but also take action to pursue what they really want.
- Stories make every session memorable and enhance their long-time learning effect. A story and what you experienced and learned stays with us way longer than just a pdf with information. It can be life changing and lasting!

Communities of practices and resources

1. [The Heros Journey](#)
2. [The Danger of a single story](#)
3. [How to tell a story](#)
4. [Storytelling](#)

Books







CONNECTOR

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