

# Articles

## If Comenius: a Traveler's Journey towards Storifying Heritage Learning

Patricia Huion

### Abstract

The article describes the unusual possibilities for the development of basic literacy and soft skills. Through storytelling, students are aware of their feelings and possibilities for their further personal development. The author mentions the seven steps for digital storytelling, other procedures for the story's preparation and refers to the theory of social constructivism.

**Key words:** Storytelling, soft skills, education, literacy, heritage, digital storytelling.

### Introduction

Imagine you set off on a boat. The weather is fine, the engine is humming, the maps are clear and the destiny is defined. You know what is expected of you and you know you are heading for success. Unfortunately a medium happens and all at once you find yourself on a forgotten island with a storm-battered boat at the shore and a tiny dwelling at the top of the mountain. You start climbing. You often lose your footing but you finally reach the cottage which proves to be one of those small eco-friendly houses. You're curious. You enter. The door locks behind you. You are almost panicking but you can still see your tiny boat and the beautiful landscape in between. So you look

around and discover a computer. It can be switched on which frankly baffles you but you decide not to ask questions at this stage in the story. Three maps are on its desktop. One is flickering continuously. Now you know better than to click on that one. The other two are labeled “Storified Heritage Learning” and “Soft Skills”. You click on the first one.

A window opens onto the Aqueduct project (502572-LLP-1-2009-1-BE-COMENIUS-CMP) showing the definition of heritage following the Council of Europe and Unesco: “heritage offers the opportunity to learners to engage in experiences that make them learn” (Aqueduct, 15). (1) (<http://portal.unesco.org>)

You cannot help yourself wondering whether there are experiences that do not make you learn. But you decide to read on:

“Exploring these (views and habits) and analyzing them across and beyond the borders of Europe may add to the mutual understanding of existing, and to the development of new rituals, norms, habits, traditions, values as well as more basic and practical ways of fulfilling our roles as citizens in our societies” (Aqueduct, 16).

You are happy to find a graphic representation of the definition of heritage education and its extending definitions (Aqueduct, p. 14).

<p>Castles Monuments Monasteries Industrial buildings Collections Sites</p>	<p>T A N G I B L E</p>	<p>Parks Agricultural sites Trees Woods Habitats Seas, lakes, rivers</p>
<p>CULTURAL</p>		<p>NATURAL</p>
<p>Traditions Expressions Rituals Skills Convictions Beliefs</p>	<p>I N T A N G I B L E</p>	<p>Natural processes Climate Smells Phenomena Atmospheres Light/sound</p>

And while you try to find some examples of heritage in your country of departure, the tiny boat below draws your attention. And you wonder whether it will ever be of “outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science”, or “from an aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view”? Will it ever have “an added instrumental value to achieve other societal goals such as a healthy and inspiring environment which serves people’s well being and adds to the quality of cultural life and the human processes which are part of it, such as learning, developing, communicating”? And will it ever strengthen “social cohesion, intercultural and intergenerational understanding”? (Aquaduct, 14, 15). You hope it might, not on its own perhaps but probably as part of a fleet, embracing little boats coming from everywhere.

You realise you are getting distracted so you click on this blue link “ways to proceed”.

A new window opens showing the storytelling approach:

Make an inventory of the current experience & knowledge of the learners	Storyline approach: Steve Bell, Sallie Harkness and Fred Rendell at Jordanhill College of education in Glasgow, Scotland
Choose a story	
Seek links with school curriculum & key competences	
Decide upon key questions or an assignment related to the story	“we consider the storyline approach to be the one which meets most of the criteria relevant to competence based heritage education” (Aquaduct, 23)
Design the learning process using the storyline format: storyline, key questions, activities, organisation, material & outcome	
Write down, compose, copy the storyline	
Elaborate key questions & supplementary questions	
Organise activities, make a timeline	
Choose objects, sources, design materials, documentation, audiovisuals	
Describe intended outcomes & identify an elaborate assessment tools	
	You can find the complete description in Aquaduct p. 24

And although you really hate hypertexts you do click on the blue assignment link as you are fully aware you are supposed to be obedient by nature and traditionalist by professional community.

“Also keep in mind that telling stories that are both personal and academic is an exciting academic frontier that most certainly will develop in the coming years” (Ohler, 28).

You might find yourself rereading this sentence. Perhaps you feel like raising your eyebrows. But there are no blues anymore so you decide to open the next map “Soft Skills”.

The first window opens and shares a definition from Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary:

Soft Skills
personal qualities that enable you to communicate well with other people
<i>Candidates should demonstrate soft skills, such as team work, enthusiasm and emotional intelligence</i>

**By now you are probably a tiny bit bewildered. You find it very hard to connect to this. You also realise you have not gone upstairs and now you wonder whether there are other people in the house or on the island. But there is this blue link and you decide to visit the next window first (/2/ <https://bemycareercoach.com/soft-skills/list-soft-skills.html>line Journal):**

Self-management	People's skills
persistence & perseverance	communication skills
self-awareness	teamwork skills
patience	interpersonal relationship skills
perceptiveness	presentation skills
stress management	meeting management skills
self-knowledge	facilitating skills
resilience	selling skills
forgive and forget	management skills
growth mindset	leadership skills
emotion regulation	mentorship skills

You feel this list is a possible definition of the key concepts in the Oxford Dictionary but you still do not have a clue where you are going to. So you click on the final link in this map to find another table:

<b>Prepare a story workshop linking storified heritage education to soft skills using the seven steps of digital storytelling (Lambert, 2010)</b>
Own your own insights
Own your own emotions
Find the moment
See your story
Hear your story
Assemble your story
Share your story

You might realise you are not sitting in your library. You might read some of your books on Icloud. Or you might “prefer it this way, confronting something and not quite knowing yet what it is” (Calvino, p. 9).

As a consequence you might experience fear. You may calm yourself down connecting to “the anxiety of influence” which is the writers’ fear not to find their own voice and remain copycats of their forefathers (Bloom, 1972); or you might even recall the plight of nineteenth century female writers struggling with “the anxiety of authorship” wondering whether it is even acceptable for women to become writers (Gilbert and Gubar, 1978); or you can think about the “overloaded memory bank”, “the editor” or “the good consumer habit” which are today’s storyteller’s stumbling blocks (Lambert, 2010). You feel relieved you are not the only one to experience this writer’s block.

## 1 Owing your own insights

Now you find yourself choosing from many insights which can be linked to the Olomouc challenge. Some are too personal; others are too banal and yet others may not seem researched enough. And you might want to reflect on your unlearn trajectory disconnecting from the informal ways of learning through grandparents’ stories, the fairy tales being read, one’s own library explorations. And you might want to consider that “stories might become the metaphor of our times of constant conflict resolutions” (Ohler, 2013). You might want to connect to deep learning which is being “willing to integrate it into her existing body of previous ideas, and understandings, reconsidering and altering her understandings if necessary. The new ideas are ‘filed’ carefully and integrated” (Moon, 2001). Finally you might want to connect storytelling and deep learning:

Link between reflective learning and storytelling (McDrury, J., Alterio, M. 2003) p. 47	
Reflective learning (Moons, 1999)	Learning through Storytelling (McDrury & Alterio, 2003)
Noticing	Story finding
Making sense	Story telling
Making meaning	Story expanding
Working with meaning	Story processing
Transformative learning	Story reconstructing

So now you know which one to select. It has a strong relevance for today’s society characterised by “information overload and conflicting perspectives” (Ohler, 2013), “distance learning and blended learning environments” (Frazel, 2010) and a need for deep learning (Moon, 1999).

*You take a deep breath and formulate your insight: education should become a story space where both learners and educators learn through storytelling as reflecting. Due to the Internet which stores all information, we need more storytelling to connect these data.*

## 2 Finding the moment

You time-travel through your personal history to pinpoint the moments when this concept of storytelling as deep learning tool emerged. You did learn, of course, about Aristotle and his concept of story as the only valid representation of ideas in action. You have also been teaching about narratives in different media quoting McLuhan, Ong, Janet Murray, Bolter & Grusin, Ryan, 2004 to create this table from a media perspective.

oral	print	digital
Right side of the brain	Left side of the brain	Right side of the brain (McLuhan)
Acoustic space	Vision: reading linearly	Hyperlinked space (Murray)
All senses create information: artistic, holistic, metaphorical, or musical types of imagination	Logical, abstract, and controlled thought	All senses: immersive
Use stories of human action to store, organize, and communicate much of what they know (Ong, 140)	Drama, novel	Platform of stories
Multiform: each performance creates a different plot within a frame (Murray)	A crafted structure: Freytag Triangle	Remediation (Bolter & Grusin)

And you have researched how reading groups read novels as equipment for living (Burke, 1969): novels offer a lens to look through and thus help you decide how to act.

Yet after careful reflection you realise there is one dominant thinker who gave you the courage to formulate and validate your insight: the centenarian Jerome Bruner. Bruner argued that there were two modes of thinking. The paradigmatic mode uses causality to explain human experiences. Its logical statements are verifiable. The narrative mode, on the other hand creates meanings through stories creating verisimilitude.

And then you remember reading Sontag's approach:

*"There is an essential – as I see it – distinction between stories, on the one hand, which have, as their goal, an end, completeness, closure, and, on the other hand, information, which is always, by definition, partial, incomplete, fragmentary"* (Sontag, 223).

You remember how she explained how time existed so that everything does not happen at once and space existed so that everything does not happen to you. For Sontag *"to tell a story is to say: this is the important story. It is to reduce the spread and simultaneity of everything to something linear, a path."* (Sontag, 225).

And you remember how you defined Moon's definition of reflection as a story:

"Reflection is a form of mental processing – like a form of thinking – that we use to fulfil a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome. It is applied to relatively complicated or unstructured ideas for which there is not an obvious solution and is largely based on the further processing of knowledge and understanding and possibly emotions that we already possess" (based on Moon, 1999).

And you remember thinking how you both as a teacher as well as a learner, could use storytelling to create this path for deeper learning.

### 3 Owning your own emotions

You do not have to think for a very long time about the emotional layer of your workshop: stories for learning create flow. Csikszentmihalyi describes flow as "being completely involved in an activity for its own sake. The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one, like playing jazz. Your whole being is involved, and you're using your skills to the utmost." (3) (<http://www.brainchannels.com/thinker/mihaly.html>). To create flow you need tasks which are both challenging and feasible.

You use Rory's story cubes to initiate the journey from logical-analytical to narrative thinking and to bypass any fears of incapability. At the same time the cubes allow you to explain the major difference between a lesson plan and a story because in stories the unexpected is expected.

You adopt the constructivist paradigm of learning and stick post-its to the surrounding walls, rules of thumbs for creating stories on heritage. And just to make sure you add a description of story:

Scene: time and place	Narrative according to Burke (Bruner, 2004)
Agent: individual or group	
Act: what causes the story to move forward?	friction
Agency: what are the "powers" of the Agents that allow them to act?	
Purpose: why do Agents act in this scene?	

You might want to elaborate on the Act or plot. You might want to include surprise and new information that "causes tension or cognitive dissonance" either between "what you expect, and what happens" or between "what is already known and the new information" (Moon, 2010).

You allow your storytellers to choose the order in story, heritage and story approach thus stressing again the unpredictability within stories.

To create their stories the Voices teachers' soft skills will be tapped into. They have to team-up, communicate with each other, connect with each other, sell their idea, meet about creating the group story, deciding who will tell it and how it will be told.

As they only get a limited amount of time their stress management, growth mindset and forgive and forget attitude will be tested. You want them to experience self-confidence while embracing a new method; excitement and anxiety at the same time while trying something new and risking making mistakes. You want them to be the hero of their story of resilience embracing a new approach to enhance their practice rather than blaming the system or media for anything that might go wrong wrong.

### 3.1 Seeing your story

While trying to see this workshop teacher's narratives might come to mind: from *The Breakfast Club*, to *Teacher Man*, from *Dead Poet Society* to *Monsieur Lazhar*, from *Detached* to the TV-series *Rita*.

But you opt for a story space rather than a school or classroom. A story space is "calm, with as little background noise (television, radio, other conversation) as possible; circular, so that the speaker and listeners can see each other, with space in the center where the words may come to rest" (Baldwin, 45). You can envision a talking stick and people taking turns in telling the story. You can see applauding people sharing their joy of having been given a story.

As Jan Blake (2012) explains storytelling is not a spectator's sport but it is about creating a story together. It is about community. So you might see a cosy room with warm colours and comfortable chairs. And just to be sure that we stay out of the academic debate we might place some "light (candles) and significant objects in the middle to remind us we are setting our words down in neutral space. Nobody has to pick them up; we can listen without having to agree" (Baldwin, 47).

### 3.2 Hearing your story

You might focus on the voice of a storycatcher. "Storycatchers become the librarian, taking care of the stories that are already there, adding stories to the shelves, and ensuring that the stories remain available for the future" (Baldwin, 71). Storycatchers make us "conscious of the story just beneath the surface of our talk and invite us to speak it" (Baldwin, 30).

Or you might focus on the buzz of conversation, "no opinions, just story; no attempts to change minds, just listening" (Baldwin, 46). This platform of stories might be your favourite soundtrack to convey the feeling of connectedness.

### 3.3 Assembling your story

In assembling your story you might want to experience the workshop from your Voices' teachers' perspective. There will be activists who prefer doing and experiencing something new. So you leave out strict criteria and only share rule of thumbs for them to tinker with. There will be reflectors who prefer to observe and reflect. So you create team activities in which not everybody has to have an active role and you end with a reflective moment. What allowed me to start? Other suggestions? What made me continue? Other inspirations? What is new? New questions? What is challenging? There will be theorists who want to understand reasons, concepts and relationships. So you make sure your theoretical concepts are clear and you send them the Aqueduct manual. You even share the Tales manual for more theoretical approaches on stories for learning. There will be pragmatists who like trying out things and seeing whether they work. So you focus on clearly defined activities and as much of learner time to do the activities as possible (based on Honey and Mumfordt in Aqueduct, 2011).

But above all you adopt an upbeat pace to allow the New European Teachers to experience flow.

### 3.4 Sharing your story

Now that you might want to save your document, you might be tempted to open the flickering map on your desktop. Perhaps you could save your copy first on the memory stick you happen to have brought along.

You click with excitement and trepidation on the map. It reads "Omnes omnia omnino, J. A. Comenius". You probably might have to look up what this example of intangible heritage means.

You read about the terrible life of this 17th century refugee who managed to create a didactics of inclusive education: everybody should be able to learn everything in a thorough way both inside and outside school during all stages of their life. You might think I should have a picture of Comenius in my story space.

Then you continue reading:

"Let the main object of our Didactic, be as follows: to seek and to find a method of instruction, by which teachers may teach less, but learners may learn more; by which schools may be the scene of less noise, aversion, and useless labor, but of more leisure, enjoyment, and solid progress" (Comenius, 1961; therefore see the reprint in: Keatinge, 1907/2012).

And you might think it a good idea to include this in your finding-the-moment trajectory.

And then, then there is this passage:

“Everything is presented to all the sensations as much as possible: the visual phenomena to the sight, the sounds to ear, the smells to nose, the tastes to tongue, the tangible phenomena to the touch. If something can be perceived by more senses, let it be that way. Nothing is in the mind that hasn’t been sensed before.” (Comenius, 1658).

And you know you have to include it into your insight as it is about deep learning, about story and about the extended definition of heritage as having a value of its own but also as being a tool that allows us to increase the quality of our life in general and of learning in particular.

Now it is time to look up. You have saved your document and even sent it to your friend in Olomouc. You have to go. Perhaps you want to have a lie down or freshen up a tiny bit. You climb the stairs to discover another window showing a new harbour. You are not sure of what you are seeing. Are they using boats or trains or tiny planes? But you do see there are a lot of people arriving and leaving. And you can see there is a lot going on. So you rush down, switch off the computer, and look through the peephole. The door opens and you enjoy the fresh air, the earthly scent of the ferns, the warmth on your skin, the wind through your hair.

## References

- Aqueduct (2011): *Acquiring Key Competences through Heritage Education*. Retrieved from [www.the-aqueduct.eu](http://www.the-aqueduct.eu)
- Barrett, H. (2005). “Digital Story Research Design”. Kean University Digital Storytelling Conference. Retrieved from <http://electronicportfolios.org/digistory/ResearchDesign.pdf>
- Blake, J. (2012). What Is a Storyteller? Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/attribution\\_link?a=v6sekBF\\_IKw&u=%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DhPBjbW4L3ko%26feature%3Dshare](https://www.youtube.com/attribution_link?a=v6sekBF_IKw&u=%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DhPBjbW4L3ko%26feature%3Dshare)
- Baldwin, C. (2005). *Storycatcher: Making Sense of Our Lives through the Power and Practice of Story*. Canada: New World Library.
- Bloom, H. (1973). *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bolter J. & Grusin R. (1998). *Remediation. Understanding New Media*. USA: MIT.
- Burke, K. (1969). *A Grammar of Motives*. Berkeley: UP of California.
- Bruner, J. (2004). Life as Narrative. in social research Vol 71: No 3: Fall 2004 pp. 691–710
- Calvino, I. (1998). *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*. London: Random House.
- Gilbert, S. & Gubar, S. (1979). *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale: University Press.
- Frazel, M. (2010). *Digital Storytelling Guide for Educators*. ISTE.
- Golz, R. (2015). *The Foundation of Peace Education by Jan Amos Comenius (1592–1670) and its Topicality* in International Dialogue on Education: Past and Present. IDE- Retrieved from <http://www.ide-journal.org/article/2015-volume-2-number-2-the-foundation-of-peace-education-by-jan-amos-comenius-1592-1670-and-its-topicality/>
- Lambert, J. (2010). *Digital Storytelling Cookbook*. Berkeley: Center for Digital Storytelling. Retrieved from [http://static.squarespace.com/static/505a3ab2e4b0f1416c7df69a/51684d92e4b0cbd5dcd53812/51684d92e4b0cbd5dcd53814/1332882649367/cookbook\\_fce.pdf](http://static.squarespace.com/static/505a3ab2e4b0f1416c7df69a/51684d92e4b0cbd5dcd53812/51684d92e4b0cbd5dcd53814/1332882649367/cookbook_fce.pdf)
- McDrury, J., Alterio, M. (2003). *Learning through Storytelling in Higher Education*. London: Kogan.
- Moon, J. (1999). *Reflection in Learning and Professional Development*. London: Kogan.

- Moon, J. (2001). Reflection in Higher Education Learning. LTSN Generic Centre: PDP working paper.
- Moon, J. (2010). *The Uses of Story in Higher Education and Professional Development*. UK: Routledge.
- Murray, J. (1997). *Hamlet on the Holodeck. The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. USA: MIT.
- Ohler, J. (2013). *Digital Storytelling in the Classroom. New Media Pathways to Literacy, Learning and Creativity*. California: Corwin.
- Porter, B. (2004). *DigiTales. The Art of Digital Stories*. USA: Bernajeane Porter Consulting.
- Ryan, M. (ed.) (2004). *Narrative across Media. The Languages of Storytelling*. USA: University of Nebraska printing.
- Sontag, S. (2007). *At the SAame time. Essays and Speeches*. London: Penguin.
- Tales: [www.storiesforlearning.eu](http://www.storiesforlearning.eu)

## Acknowledgement

*The Article is dedicated to Project The VOICE of European TeacherS (VOICES), 526613-LLP-2012-NL-Comenius-CNW.*

### Contact:

Patricia Huion  
UC Leuven-Limburg  
Campus Diepenbeek  
Agoralaan gebouw B bus 1, 3590 Diepenbeek  
Phone: +3211180936  
E-mail: [patricia.huion@ucll.be](mailto:patricia.huion@ucll.be)