

# The Story of StoryComp

## FINAL NARRATIVE EVALUATION



Compiled by  
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# Towards a theoretical framework

I was asked to come up with a theoretical framework for the StoryComp project. Among various new partners this assignment struck me as a challenge and made me feel a bit embarrassed. I am an educationalist, who works in various field of education and learning. Storytelling cannot be considered my expertise.

I might know about the methodology of teaching, but that doesn't make me a storyteller. One of the fields I work in is crisis management in which we set up exercise for politicians and authorities who must deal with disasters and crises. For that purpose, I develop scenarios. I began to realize that that comes close to storytelling, however, still without the actual performance part of it. In teaching this practical part of telling things is more dominantly present.

In a previous project, SINBAD, I was involved in outlining a model of storytelling. In a few projects on heritage education, I experienced how people including me were challenged to make a heritage context come to life, by telling stories. Somehow It began to dawn on me that I do have some background I could turn to in order to come up with ideas on storytelling.



The first idea that popped up was that telling stories and listening to stories in a project aiming at adult learning might be considered a lifelong learning project in which story telling serves learning purposes. Stories help adults accomplish things in life, develop, learn, settle, feel at home, gain perspective, feel empowered.

My first impulse as an educationalist was to turn to theories on learning and competence development, I studied a few previous projects and found out that the StoryComp had a unique focus on learning by those most in need of it, the ones in need for second chance education, and those seeking to settle, integrate, acculturate, articulate their identity, and turn that into an added value for others, and for themselves.

So, I began to think about how stories could add to that and what kinds of stories would serve those purposes. I found out that stories may be categorized in many ways. I found a typology of stories and a typology of the plots used in stories. It gave my ideas on competence development an extra dimension, but it still seemed without any content. I tried to find numerators/heading, under which I could find the themes, the emotions and the rewards stories may provide. In the end I was happy about the components I found, but still puzzled about the consistency of it all. A search for actual stories, will provide me with a set of examples from which my attempt to create a framework may be enriched, and deepened. Also, the reactions of those approaching the fundamentals of our endeavour from another angle had an enriching effect. The dialogues had helped me turn the draft document into a shared and agreed upon framework to be used as an underpinning of the project and its online course. The developed framework is included in the online resources on the StoryComp platform.

***By Jaap Van Lakerveld***

# The potential of storytelling

I am very enthusiastic about the project, which includes method of both telling and listening to stories. One of the reasons that I felt that way is, we often use this method in our adult education work in Ljudska univerza (Folk university) in Jesenice. At first, I connected this method with lifelong learning, especially in non-formal learning settings. I mostly work with vulnerable target groups of adults. They need support and help and recognition, and support in acquiring key competences to play and active role in society.

That is why vulnerable target groups are my primary focus in this project. I think that storytelling and listening to stories are great methods for all adults regardless of the content. Still, since needs of target groups differ, I asked myself how to 'pave the learning path' of all adult participants. I was spinning in a circle in the beginning. But then it occurred to me I need to rethink on how stories affect me. Stories provide me with historical, or temporary events. Others help me understand my own thinking, or the way in which I function. Some stories keep me calm and relaxed; some make me upset, even scared, others inspire me so much that

I wish they would never end. All stories leave some trace in me. Those traces form an inner resource for my own creativity, and critical thinking. Some traces empower me or make me wish to explore specific topics in more depth. Stories may make me acquire and understand foreign languages or at least part of it.

Are stories capable of all that? I believe they are.



It is essential how the story is told. How we speak and how our words reflect in those, who are listening. When an adult educator is aware of his key role as a storyteller, he concentrates on his voice tone, on emphases, tempo ... Body language and mimics with emotional components are able to elicit an incredible climate and encourage learners to react actively. Understanding and internalizing stories told by adult educators is one of key vehicles for developing an inner motivation for a further educational process.

In storytelling and listening to stories, I see a great andragogic potential. With stories we can empower, entertain, inform people and transmit cultural heritage, we can use it for learning a foreign language, natural laws... The sky is the limit. The essence of the added value of a story in adult education, for me, is that adults remember, or learn things through stories that otherwise wouldn't (or would gain the knowledge just for a limited period of time). With stories.

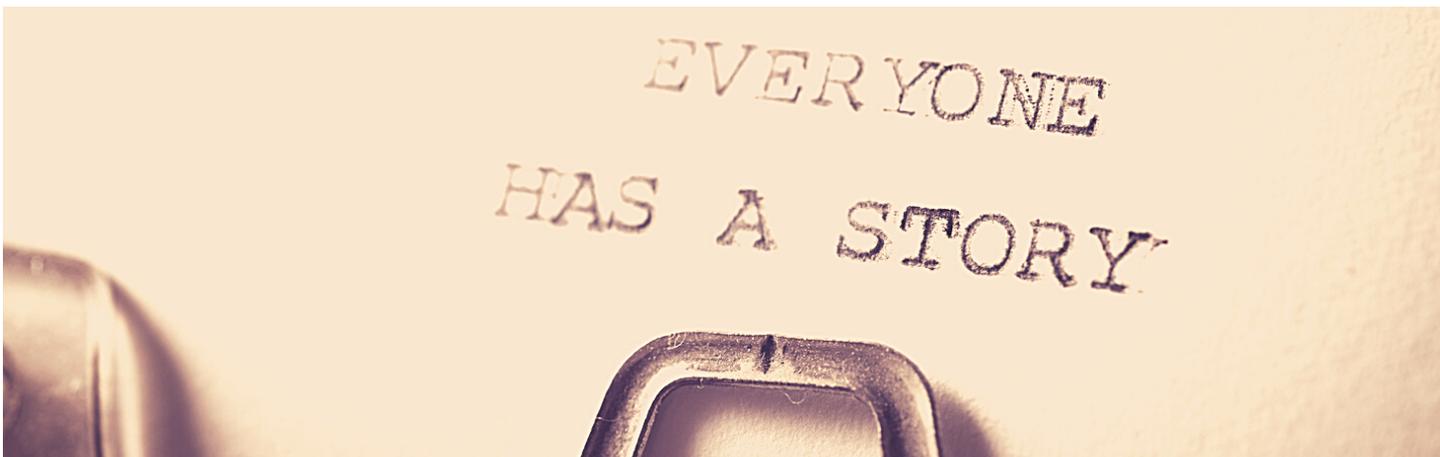
They gain images, feelings, thoughts, comparisons..., which are often linked to experiences, people have, or wish to have. The added value of storytelling in adult education concerns stimulating curiosity of learners, which creates a desire to learn, to know more. I think this awareness is a good base for further research how to bring the practice of storytelling closer to adult educators and eventually to adult learners.

***By Kaja Bertoncej***

# Stories are not just stories: Reflections on kinds of stories, media, and contexts

In my experience, the two essential categories of stories are the non-fictional and the fictional. I am intentionally not using the term true and untrue here. In my work in the context of political education, for example, there is a long tradition and experience with contemporary witnesses telling their stories. This is an invaluable and irreplaceable resource. At the same time, the stories are characterized by very personal impressions, with all the problems and distortions that this entails. Conversely, the question arises - not at least in times of "fake news" - to what extent the use of fictional stories is permissible in the context of historical or political education. I think it is also necessary to define criteria here. From my own experience, however, I am convinced of the use of films such as "La vita è bella" or "The great dictator" in education.

I myself have learned or copied storytelling as a means of political rhetoric. Bruno Kreisky, Austria's most influential politician after 1945, was a master at explaining political contexts with conversations about these very contexts that he had "coincidentally" had with a citizen just yesterday. As an additional trick, these stories were always told in slang as interpolations at press conferences, for example. It is a method that I like to use in my inputs in class - in teaching history transferred to real or fictitious, anonymous persons.



I know of particularly elaborate examples of systematized, methodical material in the sense of storytelling from Holocaust education. Here, the work is very strongly biographical - for all possible age groups and educational levels - often in parallel with the life stories of perpetrators, victims, and spectators, also in order to work out, for example, the different frames of action of Jews and non-Jews.

Furthermore, I experience, especially in basic skills education, that telling one's own life story is often the first and most important step in articulating oneself in front of a group. This is systematically initiated in our lessons and integrated into the teaching. Often, this results in presentations and small exhibitions, but sometimes caution and sensitivity are required. In the time when up to 70 percent people with a refugee background sat in our courses, such settings were often overwhelming for all sides.

***By John Evers***

# The approach revisited

After having made my first orientation and having shared my thoughts with the partners during online partner meetings we were having due to the Corona rules, I received feedback. Truly professional storytellers pointed out that storytelling is more than making a few rational decisions on why a story might be interesting and applicable in adult education. Storytelling is both an art and a craft. It requires a genuine interest in performing, in using your voice, in moving an audience. And it takes a lot of techniques to allow you to do it. Yet, I felt that we do not necessarily aim at turning adult educators into professional storytellers. We try to raise their awareness of and competences to make storytelling a vehicle for learning and development in adult learning. I will try to make this an issue for debate during our first face to face project meeting.

In European policies to lifelong learning the word development was added. This points in a direction where learning is not just acquiring competences but at the same time do something with it to move on in life. To me that felt as an attempt to include what Germans refer to as Bildung, so not just training but also personal development and a focus on experience and wisdom. Incidentally this hopeful move of the European Commission is again extinguished when they use words as upskilling. This seems to refer to helping people acquire skills, rather than knowledge and attitudes and values.



In my view we should stress exactly that in Story comp. Stories may be the vehicle for developing personal values, to share these values and reflect upon them to help each other better understand ourselves, each other, and the community/world we are part of. In my view is including biographies in our stories fitting perfectly in this approach. It extends the experiences of those included in adult learning groups with experiences of remarkable others one may learn from by discussing them and reflecting upon.

With these and other things in mind I further tried to elaborate the methodological framework we as a project group would be able to work with throughout the project. I presented a lot of options of categories of stories and purposes of how these stories might be useful in adult education and learning. Many suggestions were made. Eventually I tried to condense the suggestions in ten generic purposes for which stories may have added value and 7 basic plots in which stories may be categorised. Time will show whether we can work with it and whether it is helpful in conveying our project mission to our target group.

For now, I feel we have made progress, we have all been able to deliver stories and categorise them. Like in any categorisation, it is sometimes not fully satisfactory. However, we have deepened our understanding of storytelling as a vehicle for adult learning and the role of adult educators in making this happen.

***By Jaap Van Lakerveld***

# Turning the framework into a learning trajectory

From the moment the project had started it was obvious that it would have to produce a website and an online course. The challenge was to make it more than just an informative website. It rather needed to be a challenging learning environment. What I experienced as necessary was that it would be something natural, not a modern ICT like design, but something that relates to the concept of stories. It would have to offer the visitor/users/participant a sense of getting on board a journey, an itinerary with a sense of direction and discovery. It would have to include activities, demonstration, instructions on one side and background materials and a vision on the other side.

One night it all came clear to me. No matrixes, tables, no arrow nor flow charts, but a path through a natural environment, a small dust road through a field and a forest, like often happens in fairy tales and stories. This website/online course would have to radiate the atmosphere of a hike through a landscape with places to visit and things to be discovered. Enjoy the hike.

***By Katrin Echtermeyer***



# Things evolve – you just have to let them

When you're developing an online course, you've got a lot of things on your mind: how to motivate users, how to draw attention to your objective, how to demonstrate the innovation of your course design, how to show that learning objectives have been reached, and more. Often, the focus is then narrowed to too many details because you want to pack in too much. The result is often "overdidactization". The essential character gets lost - and learning becomes a really serious matter.

These also were things that went through my mind from the beginning of our project, and I often thought for myself and of course with the partners: how can we do this differently for StoryComp? Unfortunately, it was like always: the more I thought about it, the more technical and complicated it became.

Then one of those moments happened that you probably only experience in a constellation that results from Erasmus+ projects: I was sitting together with my German colleague Katrin at the project meeting in Vienna - on the train, in a café, I don't remember exactly - in any case it was a very informal situation. Of course we talked about StoryComp and were quite motivated and enthusiastic - especially because it would be our first "physical" meeting with the other partners.

Katrin said, "Actually, the online course should be a bit like a game. Users should have fun and feel like discovering something about storytelling." I liked the idea immediately: "Yes, we make the learning object - storytelling - the method, even for self-learning. The users are protagonists in their learning stories and shape it out themselves."



I couldn't help but think of the game "Sagaland" when I heard the idea. The game board shows a forest with trees under which pictures are hidden that you have to discover. The paths to these trees are winding, you have many ways to reach your goal. Of course I told Katrin about it and the amazing thing was: she had also thought of this game - she just hadn't remembered the name at that moment, and so we were able to bring our memories together - what a great experience.

On the way back from Vienna to Leipzig, Katrin showed me a first draft of "our" storytelling fairy tale forest, where there should be everything to discover about storytelling. What can I say: there was nothing left to discuss, improve or even think about - except that Katrin's colleague Thomas, who was supposed to code a navigation on the plan, would surely keep us in mind for a very very long time for just that reason. But he also accepted the challenge without batting an eye.

When I see the pre-release for the first time, I am totally thrilled. Of course, it still looks a bit experimental - but that's not the point. Our idea has been implemented, Thomas has made it his own. He understood it and internalized it and implemented and developed it in his own way.

For me, all of this - the genesis of this idea - is a metaphor for working with storytelling: it's about your own, about how "I" can express myself and what skills I can muster to do so. It's about the pleasure and joy of doing, not about working through annoying duties and expectations. And it's about shared experience, where everyone can participate and shape something from their own individual perspective.

Never before in my professional career have I been so impressed by a project. The subject matter of the project, the basic attitudes of those involved. The results we have created so far are so congruent that I sometimes can't believe it. They do not impress with endless perfectionism or spectacular features, but with their organic shape, which appreciatively represents the relationship to learning in and with our living world and - who would be surprised - encourages us to tell our very own (learning) stories.

**By Christian Soyk**

# The platform and its technical realisation

While having developed the outline of how the platform would be, a start was made with the further development of the online course. A framework had been developed but now it had to be made operational. What we felt storytelling would be about, and for which purposes it may be used, and competences to be acquired, it now was necessary to turn that into learning activities, and learning paths for participants of the online course - in the way we have laid down in our methodological framework: competence-oriented learning as constructive learning in which the learner acts as the designer and determiner of his or her learning path, discovers and tries things out and has fun along the way.

So a course was developed. Now it was time to try it out to see how it worked, whether the idea of playful discovery and learning worked in our own way. How will the partners see it?

**By Katrin Echtermeyer**

I do appreciate the game like set up of the online course. Other than in such games here the user has the freedom to choose where to start. That allows the learners to adapt the trajectory that has to be walked through, to be adapted to his/her needs. Participants in the StoryComp training explained to us that they have diverse ideas on how much freedom the game would allow them. Some said they wished to have a clear path to follow; while others claimed to appreciate the autonomy it gave to them that they could move in a direction of their own choice. That is related to the learning style of the respondent. However, to become a good storyteller and a good open minded user of storytelling in adult education, you need to develop an associative, open and divergent mind. The choice for the design supports that ambition.

**Jaap van Lakerveld**

I really like the idea! Most of the time when I track an online course that grabs my attention, after the first few steps my enthusiasm fades. I believe that the sequence of tasks makes sense to whoever designed the online course, but (only) following the instructions often becomes boring and inhibits the creativity that could be developed.

In my opinion the idea is great because it represents a great balance. On one hand, participants follows the idea that is presented and they get basis to work on. But at the same time there is a space that opens new possibilities- so they can build further by their own ideas. And good practices can be developed!

Let me not forget the essential thing. Adults (whether we admit it or not) still love to play! Quietly or out loud.

**Katarina Bertonej**

# How to approach the adult educators

Our objective was to produce the things in the most user-friendly and practical way for the target group, so they feel immediately comfortable and able to implement the activities with their adult learners.

So, we started by creating an action plan dividing the deliverables into three categories:

- A collection of concrete and detailed activities that can be used by the adult educators
- A collection of videos that each will present one of the themes of the workshops.
- A theoretical guide addressed to adult educators explaining the link between storytelling and adult education in addition to the analysis of the impact of the workshops already held in the different partner countries.

The process of creating the output went very smoothly. The partners were creative in developing the activities that suits the different themes and delivered a qualitative content for the workshops' implementation.

During a meeting in Slovenia in March 2022, Pistes Solidaires proposed to engage a French video maker during our course in Sweden in June in order to create videos in a harmonious way. And it was really an excellent idea! Antoine (the video man) came to Stockholm and could film the different workshops implemented there, and he created a beautiful series of videos, that explain very well how the workshops could be set on a local level.



Then, once ready, the videos have been uploaded on the website as well as the YouTube channel of the project. After the learning mobility in Sweden, each partner had to implement local workshops with adult educators. And it was a huge success! Most of the feedbacks received from the participants validated our choice of themes, that we considered important in order to implement the StoryComp concept within adult education frame.

The only negative thing to be mentioned was the timeline of workshops' implementation. Most of the participants in the local workshops considered the duration of the training workshop too short, and wanted to have more time to discover more activities and practice in storytelling.

But we can also take this feedback as a very positive one because it shows us that the tools created are interesting and trigger a high level of motivation among adult educators to use them within their educational activities. This result is really rewarding because it shows it answers to a real need of adult educators and it could bring specific and tangible methods, ready-to-be used by our target group.

The local implementation in the different countries showed adult educators have a genuine interest to use the material produced within the teaching processes they are facilitate.

***By Soha El Jammal***

# Three days in Sweden: European StoryComp training with adult educators

The preparation of the three days training with adult educators from all partner countries took quite a long time and needed a lot of planning like the food, the accomodation, the social and cultural activities .... Added to this is the actual storytelling, theory and practice as well as selecting suitable stories. Fabula has done many storytelling workshops with participants of different ages and backgrounds. But usually only for one day or shorter. Now it would be three days.

I had the main responsibility, but already on Monday I fell ill and had to hand over most of the work to Ida. I ended up in hospital for a couple of days and returned on Thursday. The good atmosphere and enthusiasm that prevailed among the participants showed that it went very well!

This is the usual experience when we have had practically oriented storytelling courses. When the courses are a little longer, one or a couple of days, it has always produced an extraordinary result. The participants have learned, understood and told, they have realized that it is easier than they ever dared to believe. If you want to use storytelling in teaching, you as a teacher need to tell stories yourself. Liking and daring the key. Using the foundation stones for oral storytelling, whether it is one's own experiences or traditional stories, is the basis for developing this in adult learning.

**By Tomas Carlsson**



Since Tomas fell ill and was admitted to Södersjukhuset, I was with him quite a lot and missed part of the conference. But I kept the morning surprises. I led drama exercises, among other things we played *The Vampire*, which is a get together game with name training. We also made a big machine together where everyone contributed sounds and movements. In the evenings I led walking tours in Stockholm, one on Södermalm along Monteliusvägen, with a view of Stockholm. It led to restaurant Kvarnen, which has a genuine Swedish menu. Another walk went through Gamla Stan, up to the square Brända Tomten, where the Stockholm storytellers have long had a street scene in the summers. There we visited the restaurant Under the Chestnut tree and got a chambre separee. On the last day, by popular demand, I went to a bakery and bought everyone cinnamon buns. The atmosphere at the conference was very good: friendly, goal-oriented and creative.

***By Ida Junker***

On a Tuesday in June, I came as workshop leader to Tollare Folkhögskola and to StoryComps participants gathered there. The premises and the environment in which we worked were fantastic, the atmosphere warm and welcoming. We started with warm-up and association games. Then followed a block about life stories. They had to interview each other on some themes and then present one of their partners' stories in small groups. An exercise that gets social interaction started in the best way. After a round of reflections on life stories, we moved on to a more theoretical section. We analysed which basic components are needed in a story. The participants were given the task of creating each a new fictional story based on personal experiences. The last block of the day was about learning an existing story, editing and performing it. It was an intense and fun course day that ended with tips on how to do research and how to orient yourself within today's oral storytelling culture.

***By Mats Rehnman***

After the workshop, many participants were eager to test their skills by leading their own workshops. When we later discussed their experiences, they had received very positive feedback and praise from their participants in various adult courses where they use storytelling. So you can say that the Workshop in Tollare turned out well and spread like ripples on the water.

***By Thomas Carlsson***

# An example of how the workshops were received by adult educators

Our colleagues from the language school come into our room for our storytelling workshop with writing materials and want to sit down facing the blackboard. But nothing is prepared there. Everything we need is at the other end of the room in the cozy sofa corner: something to drink and something to snack on. It's 6 o'clock in the evening, we've all had a day at work and are a little tired. But then I tell the first story ... and the tiredness is forgotten. Mine anyway because I am a little excited. But the faces of the others are also concentrated, completely with me or rather: completely with the story.

We continue with the first activity, "The four squares", which we do in pairs in a modified form. In this exercise there are two real challenges for the participants: to tell the first story themselves knowing that the protagonist of the story is listening. But the bigger challenge is to listen to their own story told by a colleague without correcting, commenting, or adding to it. Along the way, we learn surprising and unexpected things about our colleagues - a wonderful activity for team spirit. Too often we perceive each other only as work people, but there is so much more. So much more inspiring!



At the end of the workshop, creativity is called upon once again: we divide the characters from the fairy tale Little Red Riding Hood among us and reinvent the story - from the perspectives of the other characters. All by itself, current issues creep into this new story: the multiple burdens on women as family managers, entrepreneurs and as responsible for the care of their parents, in this case their mother (Red Riding Hood's grandma). The discussion about shooting quotas of wolves in (German) forests. The tabooing of new relationships and love in old age (because the grandmother and the hunter maintain a secret relationship). An exciting approach to accommodate and/or take up topics that are socially or personally relevant.

Unfortunately, we don't really have time to discuss it further in detail. The two hours fly by. The tiredness too. By now it is dark outside, but the energy in the room is still palpable. One of the language teachers jumps up and down on a sofa and says enthusiastically, "I actually want to use this in class tomorrow. How can I fit it in? I'll find a way!" There is almost no better proof that the StoryComp idea works. It didn't feel like a workshop, but we all go into the evening inspired and satisfied.

***By Katrin Echtermeyer***

# How to spread the story?

## The dissemination part

It is essential to identify the target groups of the project right from the beginning. A project never targets the widest possible audience, but rather one specific target group. To know if a potential audience is a target group of your project you have to ask yourself: could these persons use the results of the project?

When we started our project, Pistes Solidaires, as the coordinator of the dissemination, presented a strategy of dissemination to the partners including the target groups that we needed to tackle, the indicators that we should measure, and the tools that we might use to promote our project.

Every 6 months, all partners had to provide a dissemination report to Pistes Solidaires with the different proofs of the dissemination activities like photos, videos, webpages links, etc. This regular reporting helped us in Pistes Solidaires to monitor the dissemination and to deliver 2 reports to the project coordinator to be sure that the project was being well promoted and reaching the target groups identified.



At the start, it was complicated to communicate about the project, but once we got the results available online, it was much easier to disseminate, and to reach the indicators that we set out together. It was interesting to see the improvement of the different partners on this task, and to see how the amount of people reached increased over time.

The multiplier event, part of the dissemination process of the project, were very successful in the different partner countries and helped a lot in spreading the tools created to the right target groups. Finally, we can say that the dissemination of StoryComp project was a nice journey starting like a small candle and ending up with firework!

***By Soha El Jammal***

# The evaluator's perspective

The StoryComp project has evolved in a way that was based in academic knowledge, that was managed strategically, professionally and collegially. In the time available the plans made have been achieved and on the way the enthusiasm has grown. It is not evaluators dream to write evaluations like this. A genuine evaluator like me likes it to be critical and notice discrepancies where things deviate for the plans made, or obstacles where views collide, or where partners underperform.

However, things went as described. We worked a lot, we discussed but never experienced anger, we had different backgrounds, but managed to make them complementary rather than conflicting. In a friendly atmosphere synthesized the inputs every partner had into something we all are happy about, and which on top of that is also well received. I have been an evaluator in many, many projects. Against that background I think I am entitled to conclude that this was a very successful project.

***By Jaap Van Lakerveld***





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