

DIGITAL STORYTELLING AS A DIDACTIC APPROACH

Lesson 1: Storytelling - the social and cultural activity of sharing stories

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Introduction into the lesson:

Humans are storytellers. We have virtually forever used stories to communicate, pass on wisdom, and spur imagination (Macdonald, 1999; Hasse, 2018).

The aim of this lesson is:

- to present what is storytelling and the role of social and cultural activity of sharing stories,
- to give a brief history of visual, oral, written and Digital Storytelling,
- to present storytelling as an essential form of communication and universal skill.

This lesson has the following chapters:

- 1) About Storytelling
- 2) History of Storytelling - the social and cultural activity of sharing stories
- 3) Storytelling as a universal skill
- 4) References

1) About Storytelling

Storytelling is the art of telling stories and consequently is a concept with three elements: narrator, story and audience. This technique organizes events logically, adequately structured and appealing, being the oldest way of transmitting knowledge through generations. Furthermore, the stories told influenced the values and behaviours of individuals (Carvalho & Noronha, 2020).

Storytelling is about using stories to engage the audience or make something more straightforward. Through stories, we learn to appreciate, recognize, and understand the experiences and opportunities we have encountered.

There are different types of storytelling:

- **Oral** (one of the oldest storytelling forms is the spoken word)
- **Visual** (story told through the use of visual media)
- **Written** (example are stories, novels, books)
- **Digital** (digital technology-based storytelling)

What Are Some Uses of Stories?

Stories can:

- give meaning to life, express values, teach the young, and convey culture
- connect elements in one's own self, experience, and life
- connect one to one's (individual and group) past and other cultures
- give one a sense of wholeness, that the pieces of one's life fit together and add up to something

What Makes a Storytelling Event Great, Entertaining, and Meaningful?

- Listeners are drawn in and feel involved and engaged.
- They relate to the teller and to what is being told.
- They forget themselves and get involved in the characters' efforts, struggles, and behavioural styles. They put themselves in the place of the characters; they relate to characters' situations and decisions on the levels of feeling (emotion) and intellect (thought).
- The story is vital to both tellers and listeners.

(Miller, 2011)

2) History of Storytelling - the social and cultural activity of sharing stories

Storytelling has been an active part of human life for thousands of years. Storytelling has managed to be a constant pillar in our societies and has fundamentally allowed us to mould our perception of right and wrong (Parkers, 2021).

Before there was writing, there was storytelling. It occurs in every culture and from every age. It exists (and existed) to entertain, inform, transfer knowledge between generations, and promulgate cultural traditions and values (National Geographic, 2021). Through the "old" people told stories, however the way to do it experienced some evolution. It started with cave paintings, then switched to oral histories. Later on, books were used and more recently emerged electronic resources. The advance of technology allowed audio-visual elements like sounds, images and videos to be digitally embedded in storytelling, thus giving rise to the concept of Digital Storytelling (Carvalho & Noronha, 2020).

Further on is presented brief history of **visual, oral, written, and Digital Storytelling**, as discussed in the work of authors Parkers, 2021; Mendoza, 2015; Peters, 2018; and in National Geographic, 2021.

Visual Storytelling – Over 36 000 Years

The historical background of visual storytelling can be pinpointed back to around 36 000 years. Early art records depicting everyday images were discovered in the Chauvet caves in southern France, demonstrating man's ability to reflect or pre-empt events.

Visual storytelling has kept evolving and become a staple in human civilization. Art has been a medium allowing humans to pass on history and legends through images and an effective way to tell others stories about survival and life.

Historical visual storytelling examples have been found in Egyptian pyramids, on ancient Greek vases and frescoes, Chinese tapestries, statues, canvases, photographs, and most recently made accessible through video.

Film and photography are the most recent evolution of visual storytelling and the ever-adapting art form we have been able to use to enhance our entertainment value.

Oral Storytelling – Over 50,000 Years

Oral storytelling is one of the oldest forms of storytelling, and it still is one of the most popular forms of storytelling. It has traditionally kept its formula and is still consciously injected into our daily lives. The need for humans to connect and understand each other is satiated with oral storytelling.

Historically, the most well-renowned and longest-standing storytellers are the aboriginal Australians, whose storytelling rituals are believed to date back between 18000 and 7000 years. Their storytelling methods describe Dreamtime, explaining how the world came to be. Still, due to the Aboriginal's specific rules on how each story could be told and passed down from generation to generation, we cannot know for sure what has been lost and what has changed. Still, we know that their use of voice and dramatization was essential in delivering the story.

The Greeks were master storytellers and introduced the world to the protagonist, antagonist, and chorus.

The oral tradition can take many forms, including epic poems, chants, rhymes, songs, etc. Not all of these stories are historically accurate or even true. Truth is less important than providing cultural cohesion. It can encompass myths, legends, fables, religion, prayers, proverbs, and instructions.

Oral storytelling is still commonly practised and highly appreciated. We have managed to keep our 21st-century lives injected with constant doses. We access them through modern podcasts such as The Moth, millions of YouTube videos binged daily, or even just when friends 'spill the tea' and share a cup of steaming hot gossip. Being a good orator and storyteller has become such a necessity that it constantly appears in our politics. People have even turned to their political leaders to bring a sense of drama into our everyday policies. Recently elected politicians seem to turn to entertain their audiences with stories to gain credibility.

Written Storytelling – Around 3,400 Years

The earliest examples of human writing come from the Sumerians and Egyptians with their hieroglyphics, estimated to date back 3400 years.

Writing is infallible, or so it is believed to be, and mixed with its ability to tell history, it is a medium that has allowed stories to retain more weight.

Written storytelling, in its beginning, was an elitist art that required literacy. However, the way we consume written storytelling massively shifted with the invention of the printing press in 1440 and the first newspaper printed in 1690. Little by little, written stories became more accessible to the average person, particularly as of the last hundred years when literacy rates increased rapidly. We have since added more and more literature to our archives and are bombarded with novels, scholarly journals, news articles, constant family WhatsApp's, and millions of emails daily. Fundamentally, written storytelling has become indispensable within our modern societies.

200 bc – beginnings of 'art of written word'
 "The Iliad" by Homer is considered the oldest surviving work in the Greek language that originated from oral tradition.
 printing press - 15th century (Johannes Gutenberg)
 17th century – the idea of fairy tales comes out of France
 1700s – modern newspapers
 Late 20th century – modern magazines became one of the major mass media for storytelling

Digital Storytelling – Around 70 Years

The most recent and fast-evolving form of storytelling is digital storytelling, first developed with the invention of individual computers in 1948. Digital Storytelling is simply using a digital medium to tell a story. It can combine still images, moving images, sound, text and essentially enriches the experience for the viewer.

Storytelling has evolved, and this shift has increased how interactive and accessible the medium can be. Digital Storytelling is used in sales, advertising, entertainment and is now a crucial tool in education. As a format, it has allowed human contact and the knowledge to be brought directly to a screen near you. It is both the comfort and the enjoyment all at once and undeniably powerful combination.

1939 - network TV is born
 1972 – interactive storytelling: the first commercial video game console
 1980 – music videos become a thing showing the story that goes with music (mixture of audio and visual)
 21 century - media platforms like blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram

In the table below, you can find some definitions of digital storytelling, as research in the publication of Carvalho & Noronha, 2020:

Author	Definition
Mellon (1999)	"(...) application of multimedia software techniques to the telling of stories."
Digital Storytelling Association (2002)	"Digital Storytelling is the modern expression of the ancient art of storytelling (...) using digital media to create media-rich stories to tell, share, and preserve. Digital stories derive their power through weaving images, music, narrative, and voice together, thereby giving deep dimension and vivid colour to characters, situations, and insights."
Meadows (2003)	"(...) short, personal multimedia tales told from the heart."
Armstrong (2003)	"(...) telling stories and sharing information through multimedia."

Porter (2005)	"Digital storytelling takes the ancient art of oral storytelling and engages a palette of technical tools to weave personal tales using images, graphics, music and sound mixed with the author's story voice."
Robin (2006)	"(...) combining the art of telling stories with various digital multimedia, such as images, audio, and video."
Lambert (2009, 2013)	"... refers to a 2 to 5-minute audio-visual clip combining photographs, voice-over narration, and other audio2

Main conclusions

Traditional storytelling is how history was created and how it was developed. In the new generation of 'virtual reality, we are taking bigger steps into the modern world and are making a social aspect of storytelling.

Due to advancing technologies such as the printing press, the camera and the internet and its social media platforms, the way we tell others stories and keep ourselves informed about current topics has shifted to a more all-encompassing experience. Technology has allowed humans to utilize all forms of storytelling through the years: **visual stories** in photographs, **spoken stories** in videos and recordings and **written words** on blogs and statuses. <https://reporter.rit.edu/tech/evolution-storytelling> (Mendoza, 2015; Peters, 2018).

Although the mediums have changed through history, the core concept of using a sequence of events in an exciting narrative has remained the same.

3) Storytelling as a universal skill

Today, storytelling is one of our most important communication and universal skill forms. We need it to share our perspectives, negotiate, and create empathy. In other words, we need stories for life and work.

Everyone remembers a good story. Whether they heard it on the radio, read about it in a newspaper, or saw it unfold on live television, good stories tend to stick with us. As a result, storytelling can be used in speeches, presentations, workshops and even board meetings (All good tales, 2021).

The basic characteristics of a good story, as discussed in McWilliams, 1998, are:

- A single theme, clearly defined
- A well-developed plot
- Style: vivid word pictures, pleasing sounds and rhythm
- Characterization
- Faithful to source
- Dramatic appeal
- Appropriateness to listeners

Further on, we present an example of an elevator speech as a form of storytelling that can be used for different purposes: e.g. to present your organization, convince clients of a product, present yourself to a potential employer, et.

Elevator Pitch – ‘story’ through which you can present your skills, product, organization, service, or an idea

You've just bumped into a former client at the airport. After exchanging pleasantries, he asks you what your new company does. You open your mouth and then pause. Where on earth do you start? Then, as you try to organize your thoughts, his flight is called, and he's on his way. If you'd been better prepared, you're sure that he'd have stayed long enough to schedule a meeting.

This is one situation where it helps to have an "elevator pitch." This short, pre-prepared speech clearly and succinctly explains your skills, organization, product, and service.
(Mind Tools Content Team, 2021)

An elevator pitch is a short statement in writing or speech. It is a mini-story of 30 seconds or in about 50 words. It is a ‘story’ through which you can present yourself (your skills), organization, product, service, or an idea. The Elevator pitch should be interesting, engaging, memorable and concise. The name comes from the idea that you might take the opportunity to present yourself, your business or your plan to someone you find yourself in an elevator with

The elevator pitch can be used in many situations (not only in elevators), and some examples are listed (Woodward, 2021) below:

- during sales phone calls and emails
- at conferences, events and networking situations
- in marketing, especially on landing pages for websites
- when trying to secure investment in an idea, product or service
- at high-level meetings, such as a board or executive-committee level
- for job-hunting, job interviews and career profiles, including your CV, covering letter and LinkedIn profile.

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