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# The use of storytelling in EFL, CLIL and EMI

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## ABSTRACT

Neuropsychological research has shown the effectiveness of storytelling as a technique to make content memorable and transformative. The present talk shall give an overview — along with practical examples — of the use of storytelling techniques in EFL (English as a foreign language) and EMI (English Medium Instruction) contexts, relating storytelling to key elements in relevant methodological frameworks.



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABBREVIATION	FULL TERM
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EMI	English-Medium Instruction
HOTS	Higher Order Thinking Skills
LOTS	Lower Order Thinking Skills
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

## INTRODUCTION

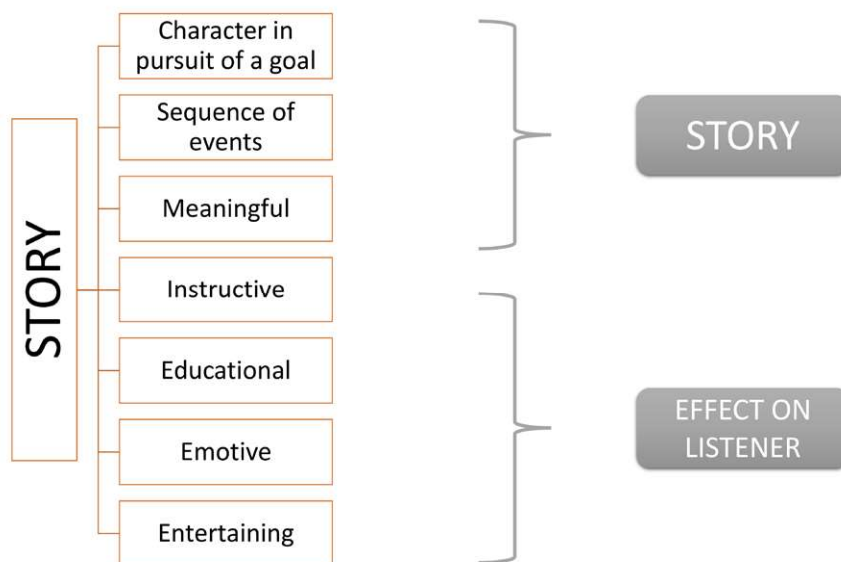
“Storytelling is a biological imperative for human beings, the psychological mechanism by which they can capture the coherent perceptions of an unknowably complex world required for survival” (Baskin, 2005, p. 32). The author of this quote, Ken Baskin, states that storytelling is the one activity that distinguishes human beings from the rest of species and thus makes us special. He argues that the fascination stories hold for humans is related to the fact that stories make an increasingly complex world seem simple and understandable. It is precisely this characteristic that has convinced the authors of this article that storytelling is an excellent classroom technique for both children and adult learners in EFL, CLIL and EMI classrooms.

This article shall provide a brief overview of neuropsychological research into storytelling, which will be applied to the educational context; more specifically, to classroom methodologies. The framework presented shall then be complemented by examples from literature, from the authors’ teaching practice, and online resources available to the interested teacher.

## CONTEXT

“Story” or “storytelling” strike the reader at first sight as simple and straightforward concepts that require little explanation. However, research into the different definitions available soon illustrates that simple though they might seem, providing a definition for them is not an easy task. The *Cambridge Online Dictionary*, for instance, defines “story” as “an ordered sequence of events from which meaning can be derived”. This broad definition fits several different fictional and non-fictional genres including legends such as *Ulysses* or *El Cid*, a news story about the launching of a new spaceship or even a repair manual for your car. A definition focussed more specifically on stories in a learning environment is provided by *ABC Education* (2012): “A story is a narration of a connected series of events involving the listener in four main ways: by instructing, educating, emoting and entertaining.” The element of interest here is the focus on the interaction between story, storyteller and listener. A definition adopting yet another angle is provided by McNett (2016): “a depiction of a real, fictional, or personified character experiencing an event or events that act as barriers to the character’s pursuit of his or her goal” (p. 185). The reference to an agent the listener can identify with has been used

by cognitive psychologists to explain the listener's immediate emotional reaction to a given story and shall be further explored in the literature review. To sum up, "story", as understood by the authors, shall encompass the following aspects (figure 1):



**Figure 1.** Defining characteristics of a story

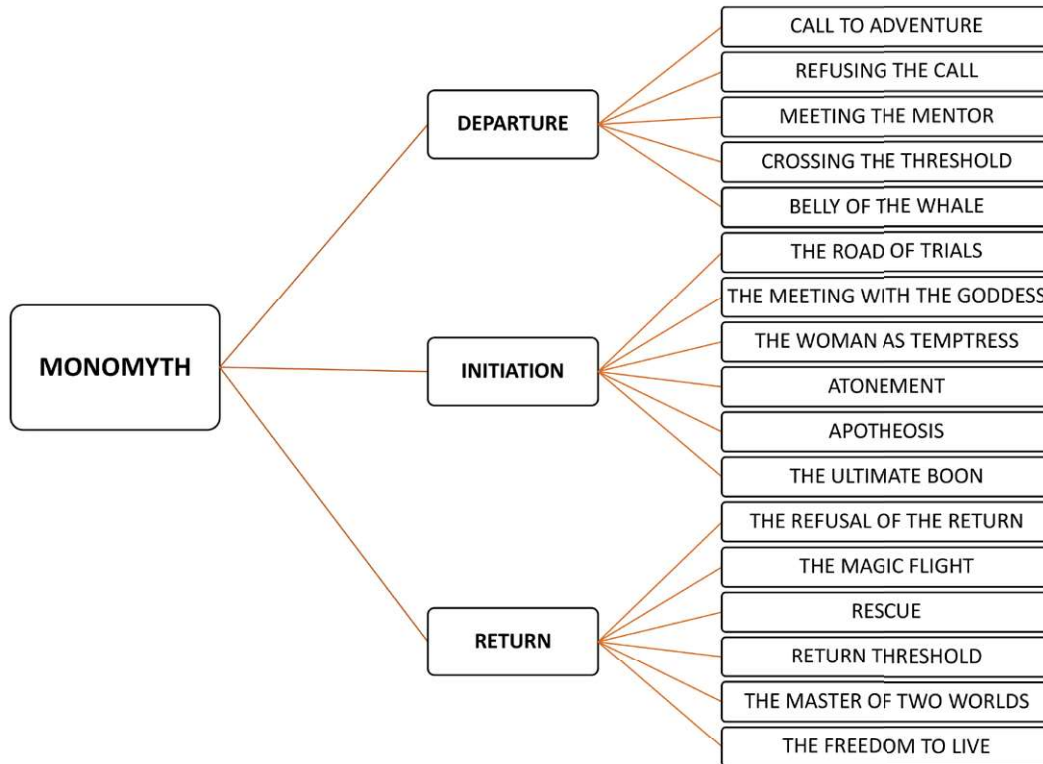
There are two well-known models describing the structure of a story which can be useful when working with adult and/or advanced learners. On the one hand, Gustav Freytag's story arc (also called "Freytag's Pyramid") and on the other hand, Joseph Campbell's monomyth. Freytag's model is based on a series of narrative events starting out with the exposition, during which the story's background is set. An incident then creates a conflict that sets off the rising action, which culminates in the climax; in other words, the point of highest tension or danger to the hero. Once this is overcome, the action falls, the conflict is resolved and the story finishes with a dénouement that leaves the listener satisfied as all mysteries have been clarified.



**Figure 2.** Freytag's story arc

Joseph Campbell's monomyth or "Hero's Journey" model is derived from his study of classical mythology and based on a slightly more sophisticated framework of 17 different steps that a hero takes when going through an adventure.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> More information can be obtained from the Joseph Campbell Foundation's website at <https://www.jcf.org/>.



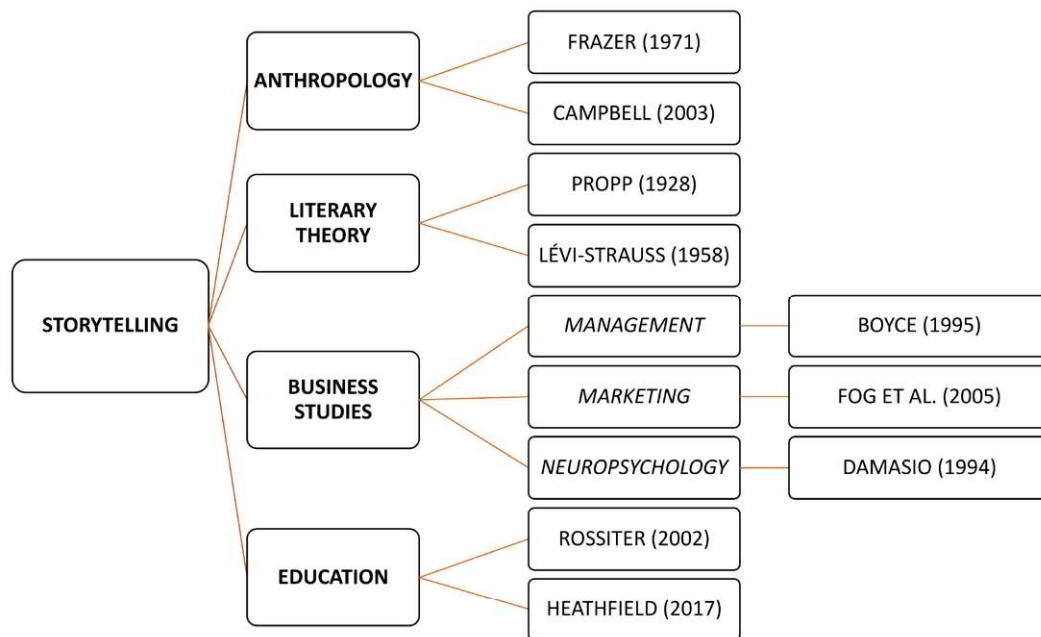
**Figure 3.** Joseph Campbell's Monomyth (adapted from Wikipedia at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hero%27s\\_journey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hero%27s_journey))

This model will be discussed in more depth in the *Applications* section. Having defined what a story is, to what purpose it can be used and what forms it frequently takes, the following section shall give an overview of the relevant literature available on the use of storytelling in education.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### ***Storytelling as a recurrent tool in different fields***

According to Maggio (2014), storytelling can be defined as the 'act of telling a story'. Despite this seemingly simple definition, storytelling has been present among us since memorial times. In recent decades storytelling has increasingly become a matter of interest in the fields of anthropology (Frazer, 1971; Campbell, 2003), literary studies (Propp, 1968; Levi-Strauss, 1958), business –in the fields of management (Boyce, 1995) and marketing (Hsiao *et. al.* 2013; Fog *et. al.*, 2005) –, neuropsychology (Damasio, 1994; Immordino-Yang, M.H. & Damasio, A., 2007) and education (Rossiter, 2002; Heathfield, 2017), among others.



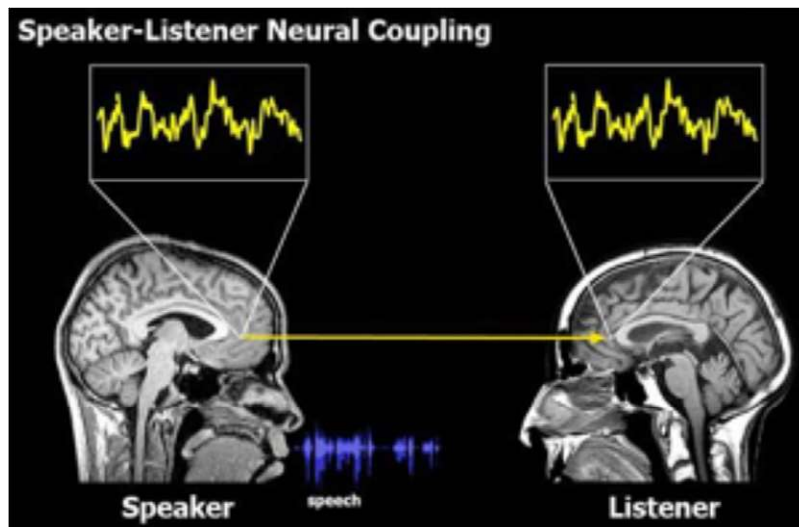
**Figure 4.** Examples of how storytelling has been used in different fields in the last decades

In this article, the authors shall focus mainly on the neuropsychological findings on storytelling and its effects on the listener, as well as their application to the educational context.

### ***Neuropsychological research***

When listening to a story, our brain is activated in an identical manner to when we have a real-life experience. In a study conducted by Rizzolatti et al. (1996a) with Macaque monkeys, it was observed how the brain area that was activated when the animals were reaching for their food was also lit up when they observed a researcher grasping for his own food. As stated by Rizzolatti and Craighero (2004), when we see someone performing an action, the so-called mirror neurons in the premotor cortex of our brain are activated in the same way as if we ourselves were performing an action. Other studies have shown that mirror neurons are also lit up when we use our imagination and observation and it is suggested that this brain system permits us to develop empathy (Hsiao et. al., 2013, as cited in Akgün *et al.*, 2015).

As stated earlier, our element of interest taken from the definition of ‘story’ by ABC Education (2012) is the interaction between story, storyteller and listener. The result of this interaction is that empathy is created between the listener and the teller of the story. A study carried out at Princeton University by Stephens et al., (2010) showed that when a story is told, both speaker and listener’s same brain areas are illuminated, in a similar way to in the Macaque monkey’s study described above (see image 1).



**Image 1.** Image courtesy of Uri Hasson. Retrieved from <https://www.princeton.edu/news/2011/12/05/hasson-brings-real-life-lab-examine-cognitive-processing?section=science>

Brain connectivity occurs, therefore, by synchronizing the brains of speaker and listener when listening to stories (Stephens et al., 2010). In other words, the reaction in the listener's brain is immediate and almost no time passes between the telling of the story and their reaction. This fact gives the speaker considerable power over the reactions of the listener, and fields such as marketing, advertising and political discourse have all discovered storytelling as a technique to influence and manipulate audiences (Zak, 2014). In conclusion, what happens in a story is reproduced in our brain as if it were actually happening to us.

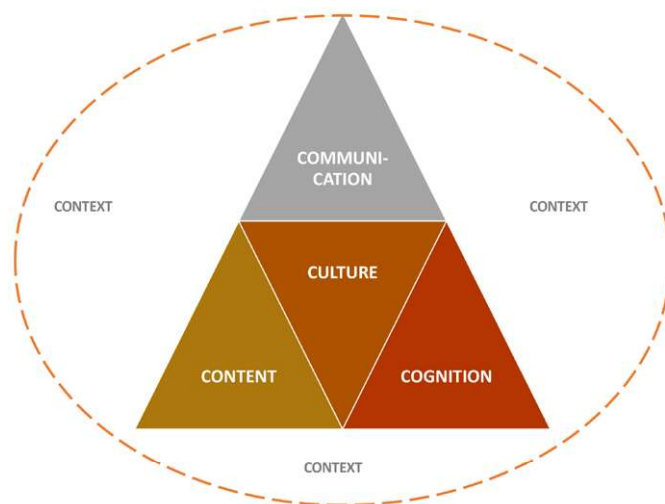
Following this line of thought, listeners tend to empathize or identify with one or several of the characters in a given story, which creates emotional connection. Research has demonstrated the key role of emotion in language learning and speaking (Dewaele et al., 2018), which leads the authors to hypothesize that storytelling is a tool that can further learning in contexts such as EFL, EMI or CLIL.

### ***Constructivist approach to learning***

Human beings make meaning of experiences through stories, as pointed out by Fisher (1987), who labelled us as *homo narrans*. This idea relates well to the connection between experiential and narrative learning, as stated by Clark & Rossiter (2008). According to the latter authors, a narrative is not only a tool to promote learning, but also to conceptualize the learning process. We narrate our experiences to respond to and deal with them, but also to form our identity. This is not only an individual process; it is also social in nature. Learning through stories according to Clark and Rossiter (2008) involves stories being heard, told and recognized. This implies the *hearing* of stories, which must be received and interpreted and must engage the learner both cognitively and emotionally. When teaching a foreign language, EMI or CLIL, the listener will receive the story and transform it based on his/her previous

knowledge and experience of the world. Students will receive rich input, which will help them to make sense of meaning and apply it to their life experience. In the *telling* of stories the learner is the actor; the one who links the concept being learned from a collection of personal experiences, which ultimately leads to transformative learning taking place. At this stage of telling the story, the learner contributes personally to his/her own learning, which makes it more significant. Finally, *recognizing* stories implies that learners begin to understand the narrative character of stories and their cultural intricacies. For example, Spanish learners might become aware that they are positioned within a particular cultural narrative; one that prioritizes community over the individual, which in turn conditions the actions of community members accordingly.

In addition to personalising the learning experience, stories also fit the 4C framework for CLIL perfectly.



**Figure 5.** The 4Cs framework. Adapted from *Content and Language Integrated Learning* (p. 41), by D. Coyle, P. Hood, and D. Marsh, 2010, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

As observed in Figure 5, the 4Cs framework by Coyle et al. works on the idea of the individual being influenced by society when constructing meanings and making sense of experience. If we analyse each of the aspects in the framework, firstly we should refer to *content* as relating storytelling to class content such as the *Brown Bear* story and a natural science class on bears and their habitats; stories are a magnificent tool to transmit knowledge and work on the content of interest. Secondly, *communication* is established between listener and teller. The third component is *community*, which refers to the immediate environment of the learner, not only within class but also outside school with family and other members of the community. For instance, storytelling sessions can be offered by the local library, thus allowing learning to transcend the confines of the classroom walls. Stories can be told at and about everyday scenarios, which makes learning real and significant. Finally, *cognition* is developed through stories when learners are asked to listen, summarise, analyse, interpret information or create their own stories, which parallels Bloom's taxonomy of learning, as will be explained further on.

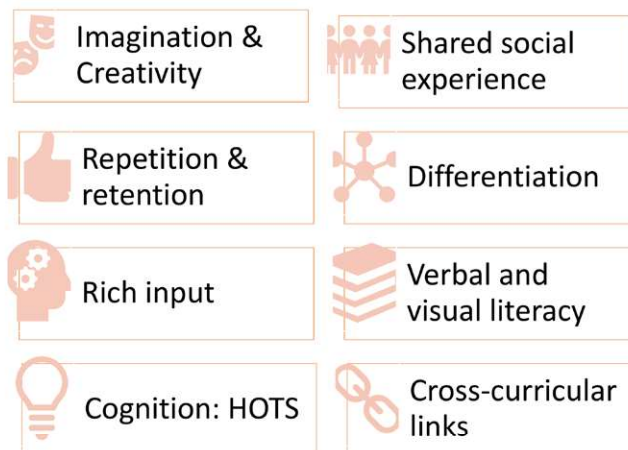


Therefore, storytelling is definitely a powerful tool to captivate our students' imagination and make them actors in their own learning process.

## APPLICATION TO EMI, CLIL AND EFL

### *Methodological aspects of storytelling*

As mentioned above, stories provide a safe learning environment for foreign language, CLIL and EMI students, since they simulate events and emotions that allow learners to express themselves without losing “face” and without any negative real-life repercussions. According to Ellis and Brewster (2014), stories offer an important series of advantages (figure 6).



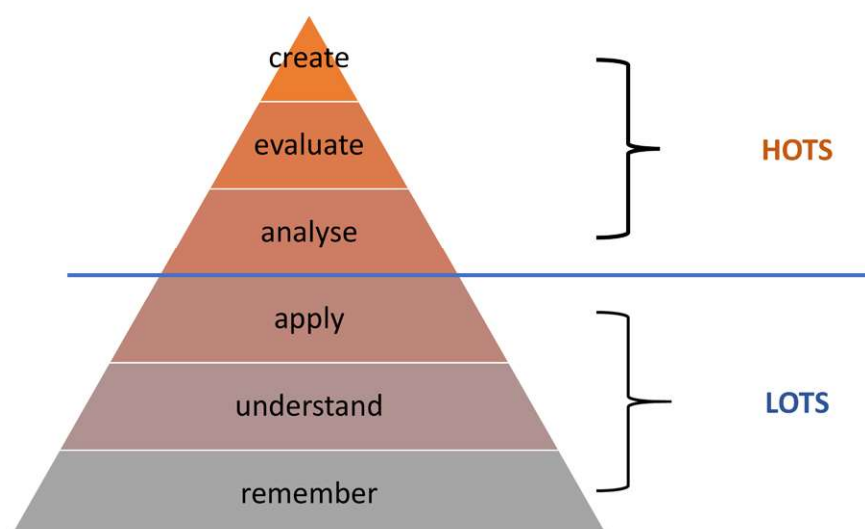
**Figure 6.** Advantages of storytelling (adapted from *Tell it Again! The New Storytelling Handbook for Primary Teachers*, by Ellis, G., & Brewster, J., 2014)

Firstly, stories require imagination, as learners relive, retell and adapt stories to their own life experience. As a result, stories encourage creativity, which is an important 21<sup>st</sup> century skill. Secondly, listening to stories in class is carried out in a group, and needs at least two participants: the storyteller, and the listener. Consequently, it is a shared social experience. The acquisition of social skills is especially important for young learners and is mentioned in the pre-primary curriculum; in addition, social interaction is also an important motivating factor in adult learning. Thirdly, stories provide an opportunity for repetition and retention, as learners can listen to them again and again, read and re-read or tell and re-tell them. This repetition helps drill certain language chunks and makes it easier for learners to move from the passive activity of listening to a more active one of participating in the story through activities such as repeating, retelling, chorusing, or clapping.

Another important opportunity offered by stories is their capacity for differentiation according to learner profiles, as students can join in at different moments and in different ways. For example, kinaesthetic learners can clap, mimic or act a story, while visual learners can

interact with the pictures in a storybook. Stories provide rich input — they often contain conceptual and cultural information that can be exploited in follow-up activities. For young learners, picture stories assist in acquiring verbal and visual literacy. Especially in pre-school education, visual literacy is a very important learning objective, as children might not have mastered the skill of reading text. Concerning learners of all ages, stories can prompt a variety of cognitive activities like listening for general meaning, predicting, guessing meaning or hypothesizing. Many of these are higher order thinking skills (HOTS), which makes them particularly valuable for CLIL environments. Finally, stories can create cross-curricular links. A story about animals like the *Brown Bear* in Ellis and Brewster (2014) can be exploited for natural science, geography, art, civic awareness and so on.

As described, stories are very versatile classroom tools and can cover a wide range of skills. In particular, they span the whole range of Bloom's revised taxonomy for learning, teaching and assessing.



**Figure 7.** Bloom's revised taxonomy (adapted from *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, by L. W. Anderson et al. Eds., 2001)

Figure 7 shows the taxonomy in the form a pyramid, depicting bottom – up the lower order thinking skills (LOTS) and the higher order thinking skills (HOTS). LOTS are related to remembering, understanding and applying, while HOTS include analysing, evaluating and creating. Teachers' precious lesson time should be dedicated to making students exercise their HOTS rather than their LOTS, which will serve to keep the lesson challenging and motivating. LOTS can be dealt with during warm-up, revision or as autonomous work outside of class. Stories allow the teacher to tailor HOTS and LOTS time to the classroom needs. For instance, listening to a story and understanding it would be at the very bottom of Bloom's



pyramid. However, the teacher might decide to involve learners in a variety of additional, more active ways; for example, by instructing them to clap their hands or chorus a refrain at certain moments (which would correspond to the activity “apply” in Bloom’s taxonomy). Students might be asked to answer questions about what is going to happen next, or even to retell the story – this type of activity would be at the very top of the pyramid, since it is an activity that “re-creates”. It is important for teachers to exploit these interactive opportunities stories offer and to make sure to include cognitive activities from the upper end of Bloom’s taxonomy.

To conclude, stories are valuable tools for learner differentiation, motivation and creativity, and as such have a place in any classroom. In the following section, ideas and resources for storytelling in different classroom contexts will be presented.

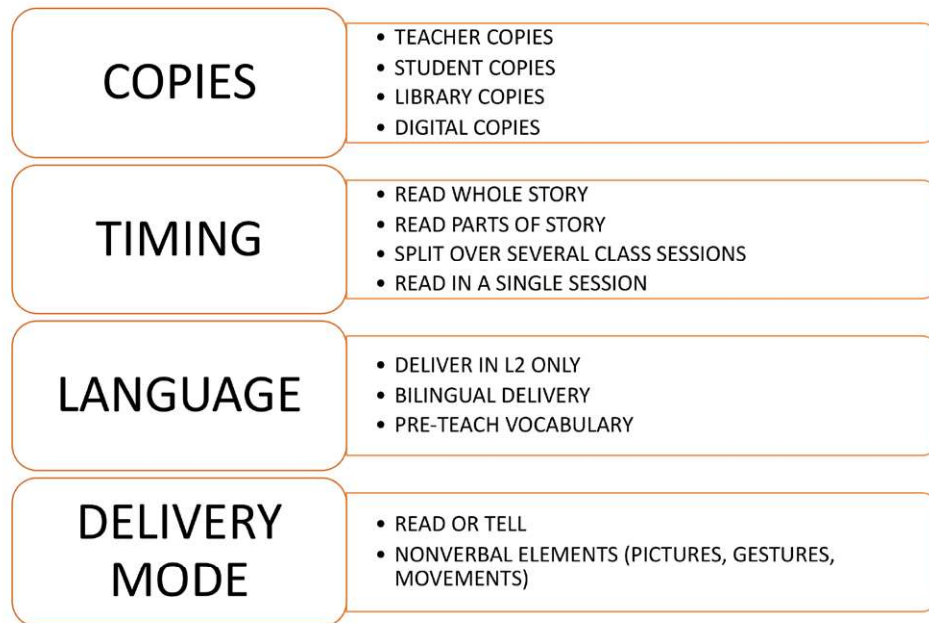
### ***Choosing the right story***

Teachers need to dedicate much thought and time to choosing the right story in order to make sure it is appropriate not only for the learning objectives to be achieved but also for the age group, language level and student interests. There are several aspects to be considered when making this choice.

Frequently you can choose between adaptations of popular fairy tales or legends and “real” storybooks on the general market. The latter offer the advantage of providing very rich and authentic input, with respect to both language and content. Even if learners do not know all the language used, visual, aural and kinesthetic clues help them grasp the general meaning. Using an authentic story can, as a result, be very motivating. However, two aspects need to be considered when making your choice: (1) linguistic and (2) cognitive complexity. How appropriate is the story for the age-group or language level you are teaching? How much above or below learners’ current language level can it be without violating Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (ZPD), which refers to whether or not the learner is able to understand the story either with the help of the teacher, the help of peers, on his/her own or not at all? If the story is too difficult, it will end up being frustrating. If it is too easy, it will be boring. In an ideal case, the story should be accessible in peer collaboration.

### ***Aspects of delivery***

Once the teacher has selected the story to be used, a series of practical considerations before delivery should be taken into account. Figure 7 represents decisions that need to be made by the teacher before the actual classroom session.



**Figure 8.** Classroom delivery of stories (adapted from *Tell it Again! The New Storytelling Handbook for Primary Teachers*, by Ellis, G., & Brewster, J., 2014)

During delivery, aspects such as seating arrangements, visibility of pictures, props and visual support (e.g. puppets, flashcards, masks), use of sound effects (like knocking, tapping, imitating animal voices) need to be considered. Teachers should aim to create an inclusive learning environment in which children feel safe when collaborating because nobody laughs at other's mistakes. Corrective feedback needs to be given in a sensitive way, demonstrating that the teacher values every student's achievement and that the classroom is gender and culturally inclusive.

## TYPES OF STORIES

**Stories with “withheld images”:** These are stories that engage learners' imagination because there is one important element that students do not discover until the very last page. An example of this is the story called *Susan Laughs*.



The fact that the protagonist is in a wheelchair — which is only revealed at the very end — is a way to raise awareness that a disability does not make a child different in anything except that one disability, and that we should not limit our concept of a disabled person by only



focusing on what they cannot do rather than on what they actually can do. This is a story for young learners at the pre-literacy stage and can be used for vocabulary-building (antonyms), to practice the third person “s” in the present simple, or to drill pronunciation by means of the rhyme of the difficult “sp” and “sw” sounds. In CLIL classes, it can be used to relate to the cultural component (one of the 4 Cs) by raising awareness about disabilities. Last but not least, it offers great opportunities for kinesthetic learning due to the wealth of movement and gestures it provides.

**Picture stories:** These stories contain hardly any text and are excellent resources for low-level or very young learners who do not yet have the ability to either read or recognize large chunks of text. The Paul Stickland website, though commercial, offers a series of free resources, such as the full story with pictures of *Ten Terrible Dinosaurs*.

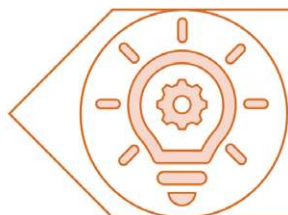
 **Paul Stickland website**  
<http://paulstickland.co.uk/>

This story can be used to practice basic mathematical literacy skills like counting from 1 to 10, and allows kinesthetic learners to enact the sequence.

Another excellent example of this type of story is Byron Barton’s *I want to be an Astronaut*.

 ***I want to be an Astronaut* (read by Erik Velasquez)**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WzdFxDY9Ev0>

First of all, please notice the way sound and visuals are used to make understanding easy: Sentences are simple and repetitive. For example, they repeat structures like (“I want to...”). Images represent visual support of what is said, and sounds underline the message through the aural channel (the sound of eating when rations are shown; the sound of snoring when astronauts sleep). This multimodal approach is apt for the variety of learning styles you might find in diverse group of learners. It can also be used in CLIL contexts since content input regarding space is transmitted. The story mentions “zero gravity”, the name of the profession of “astronaut”, the name of the group of people in the spaceship (“crew”), as well as expressions like “shuttle”, “outer space”, “space suit”, “satellite”, and “orbit”. The language used in the story is elementary: Sentences are simple (generally subject – verb – object), they use the first person singular only, and verbs are in the present simple. The functional language to be practiced are the phrase “I want to be”, and the spatial adverbs “up” and “down”. The story gives rich input with regard to follow-up projects (professions, planets, vehicles, etc.) as well as an option to explore culture by gaining “knowledge and understanding of the world”; relating the concept of “space” to Earth and protecting our environment, for instance. A full lesson plan and a wealth of additional materials can be found here:



**Currículo integrado hispano-británico para educación infantil y orientaciones para su desarrollo**

<http://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/dam/jcr:e67e2e92-6ad8-44aa-be7c-ecb2e09ae59c/integrated-curriculum-infants.pdf>

A type of picture story to be used with older age groups in EFL, CLIL and EMI contexts could be cartoons, where learners might be asked to order the sequence of the vignettes or to fill in empty speech bubbles.

**Lapbooks:** Stories can be made tangible in the form of lapbooks, which are file folders that contain a variety of “mini books”, foldables, and other material that cover detailed information about the lapbook’s central topic. Below you can find a brief video explanation.



**What is a Lapbook**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFVJ2OBMICM>

Lapbooks are great resources for CLIL classrooms, since they allow students to divide up larger chunks of information into manageable units.

**Rhyming stories:** Rhyming stories are a great tool for practicing pronunciation, intonation and stress. Paul Stickland’s *Swamp Stomp* rhyming monster pop-up book can serve as an example here.



**Paul Stickland website**

<http://paulstickland.co.uk/filter/books/Swamp-Stomp>

**Cumulative stories:** These are stories that repeat information several times over, varying small parts of the narrative. *Brown Bear Brown Bear* is a story in which the same question is repeated over and over again:

“Brown bear brown bear what do you see?  
I see a [colour] [animal] looking at me.”

Repetition helps retention and vocabulary acquisition. For multimodal approaches, the teacher might consider the two different versions of the story displayed in the YouTube videos below.



**Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? Read Aloud**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WST-B8zQleM&t=40s>



**Children's Song/Book: Brown Bear Rap**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c091xxY1xZE>

The *Brown Bear* story clearly presents concepts and language related to animals and colours, in a simple, repetitive and rhyming text. Both the reader and the rapper have added the sounds made by the different animals to their rendition of the story to give it more authenticity and enrich language and cultural content. The rhyme (“...what do you see? ...looking at me.”) helps learners with stress, intonation and pronunciation, while the repetition of the question “What do you see?” drills question formation with “do”. Both strategies make it easier for children to join in the story.



**Tell it Again! The New Storytelling Handbook for Primary Teachers**

[https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/pub\\_D467\\_Storytelling\\_handbook\\_FINAL\\_web.pdf](https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/pub_D467_Storytelling_handbook_FINAL_web.pdf)

In the British Council storytelling handbook authored by Gail Ellis and Jean Brewster, lesson plans are provided for this and several other stories. Within the lesson plans offered, there are a few that form part of a “Bears around the world” project and illustrate how a story can be used for project-based learning.

**Concept stories:** Concept stories are short stories that have been written to teach a specific scientific idea. Because the scientific concept is at the core of the story, the characters, settings and plots may not be fully developed. Below you can find an example of a concept story.



***Using stories and storytelling to teach environmental issues***

[http://www.tess-india.edu.in/sites/default/files/ES\\_10\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.tess-india.edu.in/sites/default/files/ES_10_pdf.pdf)

This story describes the growth of a seedling and the process of photosynthesis. It can help make content information more memorable and can lead to creative student writing if teachers assign tasks related to subject content in the form of a concept story to be written by the student.

An example of an audiovisual concept story is the TV series “Once Upon a Time...Life”, which many teachers might have watched as children.



***Once upon a time... Life - The vaccination***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geu3d1khdQM>

In this video fragment, a child has cut his hand and the wound has become infected. The workings of the tetanus bacillus are being presented in the form of a story, with the bacilli represented as blue-spotted monsters. Concepts and expressions such as “toxins”,

“bloodstream”, “nerves”, “brainstem”, “spinal cord” are introduced in the narrative of a boy’s body in which the white blood cells are personified as policemen fighting the attack from the blue monsters.

**Stories for adults:** This is a type of story to be used with older learners or even adults. With adult EFL and EMI learners, an awareness-raising activity based on research might be used as a warm-up. Ask learners to watch the Youtube video recreating a real experiment by German researchers Heider and Simmel (1944).



#### The Heider and Simmel experiment

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTNmLt7QX8E>

Teachers should tell learners they will be asked to describe what they saw. It will become apparent that the observers, rather than describing movements of geometrical shapes, tell a story about the shapes, attributing intentions, actions, relationships to the geometrical shapes involved. They will consider questions such as: Is the bigger shape threatening the smaller ones? Is the circle a prisoner, the rectangle a room or a prison cell? Are the triangles men fighting over the circle, which is a woman? Is the diagonal opening of the long line in the rectangle actually a door? The experiment demonstrates that we as human beings try to see meaning in happenings and use stories to interpret them; as a result, conducting this experiment can serve as a great awareness-raising opening activity.

Another storytelling activity for adult learners is based on the “monomyth” or “Hero’s Journey” model developed by American anthropologist Joseph Campbell, who analyzed many myths, legends, and folk stories and identified an underlying pattern that all of them seem to share, which he called “The hero’s journey”. A series of explanations and classroom applications of this model are available online and shall be demonstrated by means of two examples for the teenage classroom.

The first example applies Campbell’s model to the *Star Wars Saga*, which can serve as a model of how to interpret almost any movie, novel or series according to the monomyth model. The hero’s adventure begins with the hero in his normal surroundings, carrying out his routines. In the case of Luke Skywalker, this is him helping his uncle and aunt on their farm. Then the call to adventure arrives in the form of R2D2’s message from Princess Leia, who has been captured by the evil empire. However, Luke does not directly pass the threshold to adventure but rather refuses to help Ben (Obi Wan Kenobi). Only after the stormtroopers kill Luke’s family does he accept the adventure, start training with Ben as his mentor and Han Solo as his helper, and the monomyth develops.



#### Star Wars in the Classroom

<http://www.starwarsintheclassroom.com/content/hj/index.asp?sw=2>

Another application of this model to current adolescent literature can be seen in a TedEd video lesson using *The Hunger Games* as an example.



**What makes a hero?**

<https://ed.ted.com/lessons/what-makes-a-hero-matthew-winkler>

Learners can be asked to analyze movies and novels they have read according to this format, can write their own stories following the monomyth model, or can use historical events and rework them as a hero's journey story. Storycubes can help provide prompts related to the class content.

Another option of using stories in adult teaching is changing the context of a story. This activity can raise awareness of how discourse structures vary according to context and audience. Students are given a choice of one of five well-known fairy tales (figure 8).



**The 3 Little Pigs**

- Tell the story as if it were the transmission of a football match.

**Snow White**

- Snow White has just received an Oscar. Write her acceptance speech.



**The Ugly Duckling**

- The Ugly Duckling tells his story to his psychiatrist.

**Hansel and Gretel**

Hansel and Gretel have to declare as eye-witnesses/defendants in court.



**Little Red Ridinghood**

- Prepare a news report for the late evening news.

**Figure 9.** Story conversion exercise (based on an activity by Dolores Rodríguez Melchor, Universidad Pontificia Comillas, Spain)

Students first tell their classmates the original tales and are then instructed to choose one and adapt it to a 2-minute rendition in a new context. After initial online research to identify specific discourse markers for each context, they are then given time to prepare their speech and deliver it in small groups.

**Stories in English-Medium Instruction (EMI):** EMI professors increasingly demand support in finding appropriate narratives that allow them to teach concepts in a meaningful context that students can relate to. This has become a field of interest, particularly in the Health Sciences, and a number of publications are available in this context.



**Medical Students Learn to Tell Stories about Their Patients and Themselves**  
<https://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/article/medical-students-learn-tell-stories-about-their-patients-and-themselves/2011-07>

Activities such as the one described in the article above, where students are being asked to turn case presentations into patient stories, are expressions of the belief that medicine needs to become more humane and doctors need to look at patients as unique human beings. For the EMI teacher, this type of story is a great resource, as it allows students to work with concepts from two different points of view while alternating between somewhat technical and non-technical use of language.

Wayne Cherry (2017) gives another example of using stories in EMI or CLIL, specifically in the field of history, by instructing his students to choose a *conquistador* and write a series of tweets representing both the historical facts and the protagonist's feelings and perceptions. Cherry states that students submitted well-constructed narratives about, for example, the voyage of Magellan. The constraint to a maximum number of characters per tweet forced students to think, synthesize and produce concise language.



**Our Place in the Universe**  
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1159445.pdf>

**Culture through stories:** It is not possible to publish an article on storytelling without making reference to one of the masters of this art: David Heathfield – storyteller, teacher, author.



**David Heathfield – storyteller, teacher, author**  
<https://davidheathfieldblog.wordpress.com/>

On his website, David Heathfield generously shares texts and recordings of the many, many stories he has collected and (re) told, but in this context the authors would like to focus on one specific storytelling publication in which he outlines how stories can be told to bridge gaps between cultures and foster values such as empathy or solidarity. The publication indicated below includes the stories themselves with lesson plans and follow-up activities for the classroom.



**Storytelling for a Better World**  
[http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/PUB\\_29200\\_Creativity\\_UN\\_SDG\\_v4S\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/PUB_29200_Creativity_UN_SDG_v4S_WEB.pdf)



## CONCLUSION

To conclude, storytelling should be part of any communicative classroom methodology, so as to personalize learning through empathy. This article has presented some relevant research to this effect as well as some practical advice on how to incorporate stories into different teaching contexts by referring to a series of materials available to the teacher. To finish on a personal note, stories to the authors are a vivid reminder of the fact that in teaching and learning the process is just as important as the final product and that stories make us prioritise creating a positive classroom experience over cramming our students' heads with a measurable number of grammar structures or lexical chunks. As Buddha says: "It is better to travel well than to arrive."

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