



ONCE UPON YOUR TIME

A METHODOLOGY BASED ON STORIES
TO INTERVENE WITH YOUNG PEOPLE
AT RISK OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION
AND SCHOOL
ABSENTEEISM

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The ONCE UPON YOUR TIME project was born as an initiative of four countries in the European context: Iceland, Scotland, Slovenia, and Spain and aims to plan and develop an innovative methodology and actions that serve to prevent, solve and understand certain disruptive, antisocial or exclusionary attitudes among children and young people from 11 to 16 years old, especially in groups at risk of social exclusion.

Currently there is a disconnection with family and cultural roots in some groups of children and young people between 11 and 16 years of age that generates situations of school dropout, harassment, discrimination, xenophobia, or psychosomatic disorders related to lack of identity and absence of role models. People united by their culture and customs show solidarity with the capacity to respond to the situations that daily life poses. A rich cultural tradition full of stories, creation stories, sagas or tales of customs, shows a path to follow and guidelines for behavior in the society it governs. Music, social customs, group relations and other cultural forms also represent an element of cohesion for the community that has generated them over the centuries.

When these roots are broken due to ignorance of traditions such as forced displacement due to challenging economic situations, armed conflicts or social isolation, the first response in the form of antisocial symptoms in the most fragile parts of society —



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children and young people— especially where there is lack of a strong cultural identity and the absence of guidance.

The ONCE UPON YOUR TIME project aims to implement a methodology and practices that allow discovering and solving the origin of the problem.

Educators today face situations in which they are overwhelmed by circumstances. There are instances of educational failure that have at their root difficult family circumstances (abandonment, displacement, social exclusion, etc.) where there is no satisfactory solution, where people cannot act accordingly, creating a permanent situation of frustration and despair. It is important for educators to understand the motives involved in these attitudes to implement the dynamics that the project contemplates. An educator will be able to know the different structures of the human psyche in the age groups with which he/she works, based on the methodology of the project and, in this way, remedy any situation that arises.

The innovative aspects of the ONCE UPON YOUR TIME project are based on:

- The study of national tales and myths has always been carried out by linguists or anthropologists but has never been used in work with groups of children and young people at risk of school dropout and social exclusion.
- The methodology used in the project considers the different artistic aspects, child and youth psychology, therapeutic narrative, and oral expression.



These are approaches that are not often used in formal teaching in combination with stories. In addition, the use of personal biography to write a story makes this project a pioneer at the European level as a methodology for working with groups of children and young people in situations of school dropout and social exclusion.

Joseph Campbell created the «Hero's Journey» model to explain the processes that each person experiences throughout their lives. This process is symbolically described in the myths and stories of each culture. Therapeutic writing based on the symbols and metaphors of the stories is the methodology that we use to discern in which vital moment the child or young person with whom we work is, why he/she behaves as he/she does and what we find in the stories they write that help us understand them.

Since the language of stories and myths is symbolic, their relationship with the child or young person is not censored by logic or reason, so their teaching is direct, without filters. This is how it has worked throughout the history of mankind and that is why stories and myths were created. When the stories are used with the biography itself, the dynamic that is established is healing, since the story generated doesn't know how things are but merely supposes what is going on inside a person as a response to an event or circumstances, creating distance from the problems suffered and giving a symbolic response to finding solutions to what has been lived.



What heals us is to change the concrete —the events that we suppose have happened— into the language of the symbolic and, in this way, move away from what hurts us by placing it inside the symbol, so that from there it relates to the world. We know ourselves through others, we feel through the feelings that others express, but to understand ourselves we need to place ourselves one step away, in the direction marked by the well-constructed symbol or metaphor of our past.



WHAT IS THIS HANDBOOK FOR?

This Manual is a specific guide for teachers/educators who want to use innovative, narrative educational tools to work with children and young people from 11 to 16 years of age at risk of social exclusion and school absenteeism. It will provide specific, theoretical, and practical content, with numerous exercises aimed at creating a creative environment that encourages participants to express, in a symbolic way, their emotional state to heal their psychic wounds.



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EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES

For Teachers:

- Use of non-formal education applied in school environments
- Storytelling techniques applied in school contexts
- Empathetic communication with students
- Storytelling strategies and tools to understand the processes experienced by students
- Development of skills related to writing stories and how to tell them for teachers

For Students:

- Development of student self-esteem
- Knowledge of their own history and the impact on their lives
- Knowledge of basic concepts of creative writing
- Development of students' self-concept



WHO IS IT ADDRESSED TO?

This Manual is aimed at teachers who work with children and young people between the ages of 11 and 16 who are at risk of social exclusion and school absenteeism. It can also be used by psychologists, educators, social workers, and all those who have a direct relationship with these age groups.

HOW IS THIS MANUAL USED?

This Manual includes different categories of exercises:

1. Introductory exercises. These are exercises in which the body is of great importance and are carried out through games and motor activities that generate intense contact between the group and prepare the environment for creative immersion. The group has fun and enjoys even though the problems of each participant may be difficult.
2. Exercises with metaphors and symbols. Through these proposals, the participants will learn the use of metaphors and their understanding from examples taken from stories and myths. Poetics, symbols, the creative writing of small texts or oral expression will make it a training for the writing of their stories in a symbolic key.
3. Writing their own story.



4. Video recording of the story narrated orally.

Once the scope of the proposal and its relationship with stories and myths are understood, the exercises can be used to generate the space that makes creative expression possible.

The teacher knows that students have internal problems that make them vulnerable. So, students must be treated with exquisite care, as people in the process of construction to facilitate access to their own internal resources. That, in this methodology, comes from the use of metaphors and symbolic writing.

GUIDLINES TO IMPLEMENT THE METHODOLOGY AND ACTIVITIES

1. SPACE

It is very important to have a space where you can play, run, write, draw, or dance without obstacles that prevent it. For the participating children or young people, it will support them to feel comfortable and welcomed by the classroom or the place where it is carried out. The general atmosphere should have bright light that animates, furnishings in soft colors, and soft sounds, interspersed with silence.

2. THE DYNAMICS

The dynamics that are proposed have different objectives, some are to invigorate and break the initial ice, others are to delve into the different aspects of the selected stories, and still others are to generate the moment of writing the personal story. The teaching staff will always choose what they consider necessary for the development of the session.

3. THE FINAL TALE

All the sessions that are carried out are aimed at writing the final story, the axis of the entire process, for that it is important to take extra care of the moment of writing. This session will be carried out when the participants are familiar with the work of the stories, the metaphors, and the symbols. Almost an entire session will be devoted to writing the story.



4. THE SAMPLE

Once the story has been written, it is recommended that it be told in front of the others in a separate session dedicated to this activity. A video of each story will be recorded as a notarial certificate of the event. The fact of having to tell (not read) in front of the camera and the rest of the group is another step in the process of elaborating the written story, since the unconscious will bring to consciousness things that the writing may have hidden.



THE DYNAMICS

Exercises to introduce the sessions

1. Dance, connection, game of getting to know each other. The teacher will give instructions on how to dance, for example: *Dance like the prettiest; The craziest; The boss's daughter...*
 - a. The body connects by playing. It will be a game of childhood; fast, fun, and agile. For example: *The old man's chair*. Each player has a chair where they sit and there is one more that belongs to the old man. The game consists of the old man going to sit in his chair, but the participants prevent him from doing so by occupying his empty chair. In this way, he will have to continue looking for another free chair left by whoever has sat in the empty one. A single condition is necessary; if someone gets up to occupy the empty chair but someone else gets ahead of them, they can no longer return to their original chair, but must look for another empty one.
2. Link a sentence with a movement. The player says a phrase of their invention while accompanying it with a movement of the whole body while also moving around the room. The sentence begins with the movement and ends with it.
3. Make different movements: jump rope, make a turn, jump with your feet together, jump as if you were jumping in length and attach phrases or invented words to each movement. This type

of exercise is about breaking normal logic to encourage creativity without fear of criticism.

4. Dance and connection with the body. Example: Rhythm and improvised singing.
5. Sing a song from your childhood. Each participant will enter the «stage» created for that moment — it can be anything from a circle drawn on the floor with chalk to a carpet or a platform — and will sing their childhood song, if the rest know it, they will sing it with him or her. They have to sing it with their whole body.



Exercises for creativity training

1. On a sheet of paper with 8 divisions, draw 8 houses. Each participant is asked to draw a house in the first square, when they have drawn it, they are asked to do the same with the second square and so on until they reach number 8. It is evident that creativity is innate and that hundreds of houses can be drawn and all different. A house can be imagined as a tureen, something abstract or perhaps inside a cell, you just have to draw them, imagine them, not live in them. When they have been told about this, they are asked to draw a house on the front of the used sheet of paper, giving free rein to their imagination.
2. The doodle. A large doodle is made on a blackboard and the group are asked to modify the drawing, without erasing anything, to see how it evolves, looking for it to be something with a story behind that can be told because it will have a story behind it that they all have to imagine.
3. Draw a self-portrait. It can be full body or just the head, each person chooses it, it can be abstract or realistic. There is no need to put any limits on the expression of the drawing. Use an A2 size cardboard for each drawing. Once finished, they must put a poetic title to the drawing. All the drawings will be exhibited in the classroom, critical comments about the art will be avoided.
4. Tell the story of your life in 6 words. For example: *«walk and play hand in hand»*.
5. «Finish the story». The participants are told: «You walk in a hot desert where it is difficult to advance. In the distance you see a

beautiful oasis with fresh water with a natural spring where you can cool off, and when you look into the water...» After that, they are asked to write the end of the story.

Exercises for introspection and the use of metaphors and symbols

1. Tell us about a very happy moment in your life or two. The participants tell an anecdote of a funny moment in their childhood, not tragic, it can be something inconsequential, the important thing is that it is fun, and that the person remembers it as something endearing.
2. Dixit letter. «The day I was born». Create a story with it. Each participant chooses a card from the Dixit game that will be the creative impulse to elaborate the story of their birth, where reality is mixed with the fantasy that the card proposes. The story is told orally, not in writing.
3. «What will the world surprise me with next?». The participants must tell what will happen in their life from that moment. It is a positive exercise of imagination; they must imagine what they would like to live in the future.
4. «Animals». The participants choose 3 animals: one for what they have been in the past; one for what they are in the present; and one for what they would like to be in the future. They write a fantastic story where the three animals appear with their characteristics.

5. What do you see yourself doing in a future where there are no limits or difficulties? There is no money shortage, no failure, no fear. They write a story in the third person about this proposal.
6. «The Inner Wise» The participants write a dialogue in which a sage who lives inside them answers their questions. She or he does not foresee the future but knows the great answers to vital questions.
7. The key. The participants will receive a key each. It is a miniature reproduction of old keys of different styles. When handing over the key, a small ritual is performed that consists of «activating» the key through fire, air, earth and water.

The ritual:

- Each participant will gently pass their key over the candle flame to activate it with the fire.
- A Tibetan bowl is used, sounding it with the key of each person, individually, for a few seconds; this is the activation of the air.
- Each one is given a card to write on one side what they want the key to open in their life. On the back, they will write what they want the key to close in their lives. Once done, the cards will be burned, and the ashes will fall on a pot with soil with which it will be mixed. This will represent the activation of the earth.
- A small tree will be planted on this land, which will then be transplanted to a definitive place, chosen by all, where it can grow freely. It is irrigated with plenty of water. This will represent the activation of water.



Visualizations

This section is important because it helps introspection and develops the imagination. It contains symbolic elements that go directly to the unconscious. They can be adapted for the corresponding ages.

To carry it out, the participants must get comfortable, lying on the floor or sitting down. The light in the classroom dims and a very soft and calm music plays that invites recollection. The teacher calmly reads the visualization.



Visualization of the well and the lotus flower with a baby

Take a deep breath. One more time. And again. Now imagine that you are walking down a deserted street on a hot summer day, it is a splendid day and you see that on one side of the street there is a high wall that seems endless. You follow it a long way until you discover an ancient door in it. It has been closed for a long time and in some inexplicable way it attracts you, you decide to open it and discover what is on the other side. You enter an abandoned garden, where you can breathe in a magical atmosphere. It is full of wild flowers of all colors and aromas, it has intense vegetation and leafy trees that offer you their shade. You hear the birds sing happily and you decide to go into the garden and walk among its ancient and majestic trees. Suddenly you discover some blue and yellow butterflies fluttering and you follow them, they want to show you something. You go deeper and deeper into the beautiful garden until you reach the bottom where there is a well. You look into it, it's very deep and dark. You discover that on its wall there is a spiral staircase that comes from the depths, and you decide to go down it.

You enter the well and go down very carefully. You feel the freshness that the stone emanates, you continue going down step by step, going deeper and deeper. You come across a cloud of fireflies that light your way for a few moments. You keep going down and at the bottom you discover a dim light coming from one side. The well is dry, you step on the ground, and you are ready to follow that light gropingly. In a small opening in the wall, there is

a passageway. You go into it. It is very low, and you must crouch down. It is very dark, but you can see the light at the other end. You keep crawling through the tunnel until you reach the exit and enter a golden beach full of light, incredibly beautiful. It is a virgin beach, no one has stepped on it before you. The sea breeze envelops you. You see an endless coastline that exudes an atmosphere of calm and tranquility. You listen to the purr of the waves and while looking closer you discover that there is a very large lotus flower floating on them. The lotus flower is gently rocked by the waves. You get closer to admire its beauty and discover that inside the lotus flower there is a beautiful baby sleeping, cradled by the waves. You find out that baby is you. You see yourself as a baby floating in the lotus cradle rocked by the waves of that immense sea.

You breathe deeply with the feeling of fullness that watching the baby gives you, and as you watch the baby, slowly, little by little, you return to your body... Now you can move your feet, your arms and open your eyes. You are back again.



Visualization of the forest and the treasure

You are in this room, and you are going to follow my words to take a walk in the woods. You open the door of the room and go outside. You find a dirt road that leads you to a large and very old forest. You follow it. You walk slowly enjoying what you find along the way; the smells, the song of the birds and the breeze that caresses your face. After a while you find yourself at the entrance to the forest; the path you were taking enters the forest between two large ancient trees. You keep walking with curiosity. The freshness and the comfort that the walk conveys is pleasant. You walk deeper and deeper into the forest among a multitude of trees of different species. The songs of the birds attract your attention; you even hear the murmur of the water of some distant stream.

When you have been absorbed inside the forest for a long time, you see a clearing with a huge oak in the center; it is the largest tree you have ever seen in your life. Beneath it, there is an entrance to a grotto. You peek into it curious about what's down there. You go down some old stone stairs, which are covered with moss. The humidity wets your face. You reach the bottom of the stairs and follow a passageway that goes into the ground, into the very heart of the forest. You descend, walking slowly. There is a dim light that filters from the entrance and that allows you to see where you are going. When you have walked a long way, you arrive at a large grotto; its walls ooze water and give the grotto a special shine. In the center you see a small mound with a very old and beautifully carved chest. You approach and open it with the



key you carry. Inside there, there is a treasure. You take it and you keep it. Then you close the chest and leave. You retrace the path you made before; go up the stairs and come out at the foot of the great oak. You walk out of the forest with the well-guarded treasure, out and back into the room where we're doing this visualization. Little by little and each at their own pace, you move your body and open your eyes, rejoining the room.

EXERCISE: Write in detail the treasure you have found.



THE STORY

It is well known that stories are tools, literary monuments created by humanity for the transmission of knowledge. Stories have the extraordinary ability to "entertain" our mind, always judging, sneaking in through the back door, with the language of symbols, with the teaching we need to build our lives. The stories live in a space of fantasy where any reality is possible, and when we listen to one of those stories, we open imperceptible channels for the mind that, if it realised the move, would submit the content to a summary judgment, removing its value and relegating it to the category of unreal fantasy or children's stories. The act of playing posed by stories, funny or profound, makes us lean towards playing or reflecting rather than judging.

This section is the final objective of the entire process. Here the participants will write their story, the longest and most important story, which will symbolically contain their past, their present and their future.

It is important to note that the stories must be written in symbolic language, such as the many stories that will have been read or used throughout the workshop, and that it must be written in the third person.

Once the classroom is prepared so that the participants can have their moment of encounter with the story, they proceed to write it. The teacher will verify that the writing is fulfilling the

established premises and will guide to redirect it if necessary. It has to be written in one go, in a single session, which may need to be longer than the previous ones. It should be written by hand and until it is finished, it should not be transferred to the computer or have spelling corrections by the teacher.



THE VIDEO

At a certain point in the journey, when the story has already been created, it must be told in front of the camera. This turns into a great battle against the last dragon, a fierce fight against inner fears because the video is like a mirror that returns our own dialogue, a projection of what we believe others think of us, which is nothing more than the distorted self-image we have when we judge ourselves.

The proposal is that each participant tells their story in front of the camera to be recorded. It should not exceed 5 minutes. The story is not read; it is told from memory, without memorizing every sentence. Each participant will have rehearsed before, so that their story fits the requested time and to avoid memorization, as it would lose spontaneity. In this way the unconscious can express what needs to be expressed without the censorship of the mind. The recorded stories can be viewed in a later session so that each one can observe the distance imposed by the recording.



SESSION MODEL

Day 1

1. Introduction of attendees and expectations.
 - a. Explanation by the teacher/educator of the content of the course and its objectives.
2. Questions and doubts.
3. Dance, connection, game of getting to know each other.
Dancing like the prettiest, the craziest, the boss's daughter, the tackiest...
4. The body - connect with playing
 - a. The old man's chair.
5. Link a sentence with a movement. Make different movements, jump rope, make a turn, jump with your feet together, jump as if you were jumping in length and add phrases, words... nonsense to each movement. Break normal logic.
6. On a sheet of paper with 8 divisions, draw 8 houses.
7. The doodle.
8. Draw an abstract self-portrait, choose colors or be chosen.
Look at the self-portrait and respond with metaphors or comparisons. Describe yourself with metaphors.
 - a. Title the drawing (poetic).
9. Tell us about a very happy moment or two in your life'.
10. Dixit letter. The day I was born. Create a story with it.
11. Farewell final goes around.



Day 2

1. Initial go around of how they are from the previous session.
2. Free dance.
3. Play. Group tries to count to 10 in turns without repeating.
4. Dance movement exercise. Tai Chi - The princess combs her hair; the skirt is smoothed; he looks in the mirror.
5. Diction exercises.
 - i. Read alternatively given texts of stories.
 - ii. Volume (high, low)
 - iii. Pitch (high, low)
6. Each season of life can have a different metaphor. Write three sentences of 6 words each for each moment: Childhood, Youth and Maturity.
 - i. Example 1: Everything was an endless game.
 - ii. Example 2: They tried to break my passion for living.
 - iii. Example 3: The fullness was shown with a smile.
7. Building metaphors.
 - i. Write a text based on the following expression:
What will the world surprise me with next? Use classic story style.
8. Preparing possible endings. You walk in a hot desert where it is difficult to move forward, in the distance you can see a beautiful oasis with fresh water with a natural spring where you can cool off, and when you look into the water... write the ending.

9. Key Ritual.
10. End go around.

Day 3

1. Warm-up games. Say the name and make a rhyme with it.
2. Sing a song from your childhood.
3. Body and vocal rhythms. Improvisation melodies.
4. Body machines with sounds.
5. Write your story.
6. End go around.

Day 4

1. Recording video stories. Depending on the number of young people in the group, it might be necessary to record them in different sessions.
2. Finally, go around to assess the entire process with the attendees. Do this after all the stories have been recorded.



ANNEXES

The language of stories and dreams

When we read or listen to a story, our task is to immerse ourselves and let ourselves be carried away by that current full of symbols and metaphors that cradles us. It is like when we wake up and remember a particularly significant dream that has left us overwhelmed by those images so foreign to the mind. We try to remember them, and we find ourselves involved in their cadence, they possess us, we remember them with the delight of being halfway between two worlds. The images unfold one after another in no apparent order, flooding the consciousness with beauty or surprise, depending on the dream. We relive it again, that is, we live it again, we experience it again. Now we are those characters with the same emotional density as when we dreamed it. Well, that state is the same as in a story, in the attitude with which we launch ourselves into its interior, letting it be the one that possesses us and unfolds within us. Boys and girls do it automatically, they are still far from the dictatorship of the rational mind.

All the characters in the story —like the ones in the dream— are us; we embody each one of them and they show us a facet of who we really are.

Much has been said and written about the language that relates dreams and stories, about how both categories can be related and



follow a common pattern. There are recurring dreams of psychiatry patients that have to do with mythology, where they find meaning beyond the apparent meaning.

Hypnos and Thanatos were twin brothers from ancient Greek mythology. Hypnos was the personification of sleep, Thanatos that of death without violence. They lived in a dark and deep cave where the sun did not enter, poppies and other hypnotic plants grew at the door. Hypnos had a thousand children, the Oniros, who appeared in the dreams of humans. Thanatos acted fulfilling the destiny that the three Moiras —personifications of destiny— dictated for each mortal.

«To die, to sleep... perhaps to dream». Shakespeare would have Hamlet say in his famous monologue. This condition of uniting sleep and death makes the myth reach an incalculable value. We speak of waking up the sleeper, of getting him out of the death of the senses and ignorance, and we are referring to the idea that underlies the myths of making the person remember who he is. A Sufi master uses certain stories with the intention of making you remember who you are and where you came from. The different mystical traditions have the mission of awakening the human being from his heavy sleep, from his drunkenness, abandonment, fear, absence, forgetfulness... And stories are a great tool.

The state of wonder is the natural state of the child and of many elderly people. It is similar to the state of sleep where we give control to something that we do not know very well what it is, but that is in charge of recomposing what was damaged during the day and providing a solution and answers to so many worries as



our mind insists on having. We all become childish and innocent when we sleep and in the first minutes of waking up, and if we maintained that state during the day, perhaps our life experiences would have a different character, we would have a different way of being in the world, healthier and with more presence. «Fortress of great nature, mainstay of life's feast», said Shakespeare, referring to the dream, through the mouth of Macbeth. The language of stories has a lot to do with that of dreams, they share symbolic spaces and are nourished by the same source.

Boys and girls have a way of thinking in which they do not rationalize what they hear. That age allows them to accept the codes that the stories suggest to them without questioning them. It is the same thing we do with dreams, nobody questions that language because it has been with us since we were born, although we do not understand it with reason, we know that it operates in another way, like stories. Children have a mythical thought, like the inhabitants of prehistory, or some isolated tribes even today, and this thought leads them to enter the realm of myth with great ease without losing sight of the reality that surrounds them.



Storytelling and the unconscious

Human beings are hardwired for storytelling. It is through storytelling that our mind becomes a knitted network of symbolic meanings. With them we learn how to extract, gather, transform, and integrate shared experiences into common knowledge, social cultures, and personal values, from the vast ocean of human experience and consciousness evolution, our collective wealth of psychic life. Reality is a story the mind tells itself; a structure conjured into being by the calcium ion exchange of a million synaptic firings. A truth so strange it can only be lied into existence.

According to psychoanalysis and Jung's psychology, the psychological life of humanity is a vast field of potentials and energy patterns embedded in images and symbols, plural flows of energy and information that form a great ocean in our psychospace, within which our personal psyche is just a single drop. This single drop is a drop of awareness that is open and in constant interaction with the ocean that pervades and contains it. Of all this psychic water, only a fraction of what is contained within the drop is partially known, and it is called the conscious, a mixture of memory and habits of thought and attention. The psyche has many secrets in reserve, and with this conscious part of ourselves we learn to navigate in life in a more or less coherent and semi-safe manner, but always in risk of experiencing events, feelings, intuitions and thoughts that we cannot understand or don't have clues on how to make sense of them. These are unconscious contents, which may have influence on our lives in different degrees of intensity.



Therefore, this vast field of psychic life can be divided between what we are aware of in a given moment —the conscious— and what we are not —unconscious—, either because we cannot perceive it with our limited perceptual capacities at a given moment (including the intellect), or we cannot comprehend it because its complexity just blurs our minds. But the ocean is always there, and we are always immersed in it. And as we swim through and through, we can become aware of other things and our personal consciousness can grow and unfold, embracing more complexity and awareness.

Following our story, we can guess that storytelling is the craft and art of building up a boat and sailing it across the great waters. Perhaps it is more like a submarine experience. Because it is only through the voyage across the ocean that we may become able to grow some wings and tail to raise through the waters towards the sky in a bird's flight.

In this context, storytelling prepares the personal psyche, the drop of awareness, to build up a structure of energetics, a submarine, to recognize and cultivate certain patterns of feeling, thinking, imagining, and doing. Perhaps our modern world has focused too much on thinking and doing, relegating feeling, and imagining —more feminine qualities— to an ephemeral world for its impermanent character, which for the rational mind can even be perceived as a weakness or a shame.

Nevertheless, storytelling was designed precisely to cultivate and enhance the feeling and imagining capacities of human beings, unfolding our relational intelligence, and harvesting a taste for quality of character and human values. These relational

intelligence and taste constitute the helm and compass of our submarine. What is important in all this is that our submarine, our self-awareness, might acquire increasing consistency and coherence, a sense of balance and growth. That is why it is so important to explore the unconscious with some strategy and good lighting, so we can illuminate and fearlessly explore all those aspects of our psyche that might control how we live and experience life.

What we may call the unconscious can mean different things:

1. Unconscious refers to those forces and energetics —psychic material— inside of us that we can neither recognize nor give meaning, remaining in the darkness but influencing how we live this life. A wise man once said that «our preferences were our ancestors' prejudices».

Those feelings, thoughts, and deep experiences that we do not understand and don't know how to approach greatly influence our perception of the world and our behaviors. Stories give form and context to that energetics that flow through us and that is why we need stories and their characters, to make sense of the senselessness —unconscious— that affects us so deeply.

2. Unconscious also are knowledge and experiences that have been already integrated within our lives and that our awareness does not need to pay attention to any longer, because they are already active and functional (example: once we learn to ride a bike, we don't need any longer to be aware of every step of the process, the body has already embodied that knowledge, it has

become unconscious, fluid, totally operational, integrated, but can *become conscious* at will if necessary).

3. Unconscious refers also to the psychic ocean of consciousness that is more-than-human. It is the potential awareness that pervades the whole of creation, called *Chit* in Sanskrit, the conscious awareness that makes integration of experience into knowledge possible, a vast territory called by Jung the «Collective Unconscious». It appears to be the infrastructure of human psychology crossing throughout cultures and spacetimes, manifesting universal symbolic patterns «Archetypes» of information —organized energy into signs and symbols— and other energetics like «mammal memories», relations with the elements (fire, water, earth, air, space), and more, which are the common heritage of our species, providing us with so much content and opportunities for self-knowledge and knowledge of humanity's destiny and roles on the more-than-human world, which is the greater Earth community.

Therefore, we invite participants to play with images and archetypes, opening the doors to the unconscious —personal, transpersonal, and collective— in order to allow it to manifest through us, bringing on symbolic elements that can be then organized by storytelling and explored in conscious and integrative ways.

Storytelling allows us to put some distance from challenging unconscious contents, bringing them to light in symbolic manners that can be approached with care and taste.

Such a process makes us better navigators of the psychic ocean and better prepared to deal with all kinds of experiences, becoming masters of the meaning of our lives in every given moment.



The stories we tell

The real author of the story of our life?

Many will have heard the first sentence of the well-known monologue found in William Shakespeare's «As You Like It»:

*All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts...*

Our life is a story, the story of our life. And, yes in a sense, we are merely players, actors with different roles. We are particularly proud actors, proud of our free will and the ability to apply our will to achieve goals or change our circumstances, but little we know that the story of our life is written somewhere else, somewhere where awareness hardly ever enters, there in the foundation of our being, where there is a hidden, magical world of infinite content and possibilities.

So, if we want to read the real story of our life, we have to go deeper, beyond the everyday situations and circumstances that appear to be happening randomly or seem to impose themselves on us. Yes, those circumstances happen, but how we react and process them, and even the way those reactions shape us, follows a meticulously written script that comes from the mysterious depths of our subconscious mind.

The subconscious mind is the author and the director of the story of our life. Most of our behavior, which consists of all the

decisions, actions, thoughts, responses and emotions, is governed by 95% of the brain activity that is somehow beyond our conscious mind. The programming that is hidden there is the script of our life, and even though we believe that the 5% of our awareness has everything under control, those 5% are only a reflection of what is going on in the mind of the hidden author.

The subconscious mind is the director that runs everything in our life, it is a vast library of everything beyond our conscious mind. Beliefs and programming that mostly were formed from age 0 to 7, and then labels and stories we were told about ourselves, then memories of lived experiences, acquired knowledge and skills, everything that the five senses have ever picked up, but not just that, programs and cultural shaping that run in our family, community, country, all the way to the broadness of humanity, all dwell there as a magical ink ready to be poured into the writing of the story of your life.

As fascinating as this is, it also makes one think, «If I don't know what is going on down there, how can I know who I really am? If I am 95% of information that I am not aware of, who am I really?» If understanding is that power button that makes personal growth possible, how can we really understand ourselves to grow from experience and not fall victim to the ups and downs of life if we don't know what the director down there is up to?

There are tell-tale signs that reveal what is going on in our subconscious mind. Stories we tell ourselves. «I want to be a successful entrepreneur, but no matter what I do, I always come to an impasse... I work so hard, do everything right... I'm probably too honest to be successful...» Maybe the subconscious mind

believes that to succeed one must be a dishonest person, and if being dishonest is something unacceptable for that person, the subconscious mind will sabotage every effort, honest or dishonest, towards success. The subconscious mind is complex, but it works in simple terms. It generalizes and spills over beliefs to multiple areas of life, preventing or encouraging certain actions and outcomes in accordance with its programming.

It operates at the level of symbolic language that can be found in tales and myths. Like the tyrannical king who manipulates to determine if the young man is worthy of his daughter's hand. The rich are rarely honest, and the poor are rarely successful, but they are often lucky – help comes from afar and brings great joy and until-death-do-us-part happiness. Such beliefs are embedded in our subconscious mind, so that is why human life always runs by a script. It rarely steps out of the box. It rarely disobeys the rules. Even the freest of the spirits have the limits of collective experience within their hearts. They might differ but they are still within the outermost limits of society where they can experience the contrast of their freedom, maybe even be admired by that same society they try to run away from. There is no escape to being human, one might say.

And what a joy that it isn't. If you can't beat them, join them, goes the saying. Meaning that understanding and acceptance is the key to a meaningful life. Understanding motivations; what in the great scheme of things was the meaning of certain events, even painful events, is what gives meaning to life, it is what eventually brings peace and closure.

So, if we are to seek such meaning in life, we have to embark on the quest of inner discovery, the discovery of the hidden magical world that awaits us patiently, but nonetheless eagerly, to take us on the exciting ride of our life. But first we must learn the mystical language of the subconscious mind. We must learn to quiet the analytical mind and enter the world where meaning is perceived with the heart and not the mind. Where the right emotion is triggered by a seemingly unrelated sequence of symbolic events that appear to have no connection with our life, but if we close our eyes, the heart knows and it recognizes the deep meaning and value of those words, because they are the perfect expression of the depths of our hearts. We don't have to know to understand. We don't have to know for the alchemy to take place. We just must trust and surrender to the process.

And the Once Upon Your Time process offers exactly that, as it holds space for a person to gradually sink deep within and following specific symbols that mark the path of discovery eventually finding that magic door that connects the conscious with the vast expanse of the hidden realms of the subconscious mind where the treasure, our story, is stored. The process involves all aspects of the self; the body, which is encouraged to relax through dance and play, the mind, which is encouraged to let go of control, and the heart, which is encouraged to open and allow the purest expression of our innermost self to be revealed.

After this process, all the stories we consciously tell the world about us have a deeper meaning. They are imbedded with the energy of understanding and our true essence, because down there in that brief moment we stood face to face with our true self,



and it all made sense. Who we are, who we are to become, who we will always be and why. Compassion for that true self, that us inside, becomes a small inkling that hardly ever goes away. Because that true self has a reason to be as it is. We have a story, and that story is real and it is significant, no matter how well hidden it seems to be.

It is there and after this journey, we will never forget it.



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Show example of keys used in the ritual



STORYTELLING FOR HUMAN GROWTH AND WELLBEING

Prelude

*«Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?» (T. S. Eliot, 1934, *The Rock*, lines 12-13)*

The present essay aims to share the results of an investigation on the praxis of storytelling for children and teenagers in formal schooling in 4 countries: Iceland, Spain, Slovenia, and the UK.

The investigation is the basis for a theoretical framework that constitutes the Intellectual Output 1 of an Erasmus Plus project in Strategic Partnership KA2: “Once Upon Your Time”.

We wish to emphasize the importance of storytelling’s therapeutic potential to assist the psychosocial development of young people, especially those in vulnerable situations of marginalization and isolation, and who might be prone to dropping out of school.

Storytelling constitutes the process through which a young person gets access to the collective consciousness of a given community, growing psychological roots to get nourishment of values, regulation



of emotions, strength of imagination, expansion of memory, and a sense of belonging and meaning of life.

In this sense, storytelling is neither about information nor rationalization, but about symbolic meaning and building up the corresponding network of feelings and emotions which make possible an involvement with the higher dimension of transpersonal life, that is, a human life interconnected within the socio natural and intercultural environment.

Introduction

ONCE UPON YOUR TIME (2020-2022) is an international project funded by Erasmus+ involving four organizations for youth development: Youth Reach Centers of Reykjavik (Iceland); The Surefoot Effect (Scotland); Institute for Research and Training in Education (Slovenia); YOMN network (Spain).

The ONCE UPON YOUR TIME project aims at providing a professional development opportunity for teachers in supporting their students' and pupils' mental health and identity formation process through storytelling-based methodologies and biographical work. The project focuses especially on young pupils and students with fewer opportunities or at risk of social exclusion. The project aims to use

personal biography to understand the processes that make our life meaningful, whatever the circumstances lived.

The first Intellectual output (IO1) puts together a set of theories, methodologies and best practices adapted to the specific target groups of pre-adolescents and adolescents (and their intense process of self-discovery and personality building) to be exploited in their educational and therapeutic potential in the specific setting of formal education in each of the partners' countries.

Objectives

1. Exploring and systematizing relevant theories, methodologies and best practices in the field of storytelling as a pedagogical tool.
2. Exchanging best practices and promoting mutual learning, based on partners' experiences and best practices.
3. Building a shared consensus on the reference framework that will be used in the further steps of the project in the development of the Manual and Pedagogical Curriculum.
4. Promoting storytelling as a pedagogical tool in formal education, its efficacy and relevance for the stakeholders in the field (teachers, headmasters, educators, practitioners, parents and caregivers).



For the selection of storytelling methodologies we used the following guidelines:

1. Telling stories as a pedagogical tool: how is it used? What criteria must be taken into account for this practice to be pedagogical?

2. Storytelling for Mental Health: What is the power of such practices to help heal or regenerate the mind? What is the relationship between storytelling and overcoming childhood trauma?

3. Storytelling and personal development in preadolescence and adolescence: What types of stories promote the development of young people? Why? What scientific bases explain this process?

4. Storytelling in the formal education setting: How are these techniques used in the formal setting, what could be their impact for the relationships between teachers and students?

I. The natural growth of human consciousness

«Know thyself». Sócrates

From a biopsychosocial perspective of human development, children grow to adolescence and maturity passing through a series of defined stages in which they become capable of thinking and feeling in new and different ways, evolving from simpler modes of awareness towards more complex ways of engaging with the world within and without. The process of human “becoming” occurs as an unfolding of an individual's inherent potentials and the task of parenting and education should be to assist this process of growth as best as possible.

«The child is a holistic organism that possesses an innate wisdom that guides and powers his ‘unfoldment’; therefore, a human ‘unfolds’ according to an individual pace that is necessary for his appropriate development» (Marshak, 1997, p. 10).

The methodology developed through the international project «Once Upon Your Time» aims to assist this process of unfolding of a self-reflective personality with a potential for self-creation and auto-responsibility, as well as capable of weaving nourishing relationships with their socio natural environment.



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Our storytelling methodology is based on the understanding that storytelling constitutes the process of transmission of transpersonal human experience—a collective source of knowledge— contained in stories, myths, fairy tales and folktales for the growth and deepening of human consciousness. It is indeed through such a transmission and assimilation of stories during childhood and adolescence that a foundational structure of consciousness is formed, like a psychic soil infrastructure made of multiple symbiotic networks of meaning, enabling human beings to have psychological agency, intellectual clarity and emotional self-regulation.

According to cultural philosopher Jean Gebser (1905-1973), human consciousness is a sophisticated form of «wakeful awareness» that undergoes different stages of transformation towards increasing complexity, inclusiveness and intensity/profundity.

Through a comparative study of different cultures' and peoples experiences, Gebser discovered a map of five different dynamic structures of consciousness, which activate whole and distinct realms of experience, potentially available to every human and partially operative during a lifetime. These dynamic structures unfold in a progression similar to the unfolding of the whole psychobiosocial self, including, transcending and differentiating new experiences within multiple degrees of complexity. We think that the map of

consciousness' frameworks can be really useful for our understanding of a more holistic model of education. Thus, the five dynamic structures of consciousness proposed by Gebser are:

- **Archaic:** this dynamic structure and the realm it opens is commonly shared by all animals in different degrees and modes of perception. It includes instinctive gut feelings, survival skills, bonding to caring adults, natural movement, basic needs and drives, and vital functions.
- **Magic:** this dynamic structure and the realm it opens corresponds to the world of images and interconnected things experienced during childhood, where playfulness and immersion in the world around mark the birth of human imagination.
- **Mythic:** Access to the transpersonal collective wealth of meaning and experience, the knowledge of a given cultural milieu through language. Through the integration of this new awareness, humans learn to auto regulate emotions and develop emotional and relational intelligence, mainly through *storytelling*.

- **Mental rational:** development of individuality and perspective, rational and intellectual abstract thinking.
- **Integrative:** transcendence and integration of the other four modes of consciousness into a wholesome intelligence able to use all of them for a harmonious living on earth.

Gebser argues that it is important that teachers do not rush children through the stages but honor each one. So much of education today is about thrusting an academic curriculum on young children and denying who they are as children (Gebser, 1949-1990) .

«The thrust of these theories is that, while we may be inclined to identify with our ability to think rationally and logically, there are other minds or ‘structures of consciousness’ alive in us of which our rational minds may be scarcely aware, in spite of the fact that they may dominate a great deal of our behavior. Some of these minds are older and simpler, in an evolutionary sense, than our ‘rational’ minds, and operate on very different rules from the rules of rational decision-making». (Neville, 2013, p. 37)

In the context of this essay, we are concerned with the function of storytelling as crucial in the process of cultivation and growth of

human consciousness through its mythical process of exploring the collective unconscious, bringing light to their journey. It is through the immersion in an ocean of stories and human experiences told and retold with joy, love and responsibility, that young people are able to transition and evolve, transcending and including previous ways of perceiving and relating, learning to name and distinguish feelings, emotions, values, relations, and all the contradictions that are embedded in a human life...

In the stories we can find the tools for accessing in original ways the collective consciousness —both conscious and unconscious— becoming aware of the multidimensionality of our existence, recognising that our *persona* is not separated but rather it is a knot in a network of relationships. This is very important in education, because children and young people need to connect with the world through feelings and intersubjective experiences from multiple types of relations. That is why stories and fairy tales are supremely useful, and the way they are told is fundamental in the assimilation of their powers.

«In my work of listening to others telling about the many images and ideas that colonize them, stories, regardless of the forms they are given, are the only medium on earth that can clearly and easily mirror every aspect of the psyche—the cruel, the cold and deceptive, the

redemptive, salvific, desirous, the tenacious aspects, and so much more. If one did not know oneself, one could listen to a dozen profound stories that detail the pathos of the hero's or heroine's failures and victories. Then, with some guidance, a person would soon be far better able to name, in oneself and others, those critical and resonant elements and facts that compose a human being». (Joseph Campbell, 2004, p. 18).



II. Storytelling's function in human biopsychosocial development

Human beings are hardwired for storytelling, it is through storytelling that our mind becomes a knitted network of symbolic meanings. With them we learn how to extract, gather, transform and integrate shared experiences into common knowledge, social cultures and personal values from the vast ocean of human experience and consciousness evolution.

When we look at the way in which human consciousness grows from the primary impulses of instincts, through the playfulness of childhood immersed in an egoless universe, we reach the stage in which children are initiated into society and become aware of their individuality as singular entities connected to the world through a net of relationships. The approximate age frame for this process to begin occurs around the age of seven years old and goes through preadolescence reaching its peak in the adolescent years between 14-16 years old (Wright, 2006). It is during this period that the mythical structure of consciousness becomes well developed and will keep functioning and actualising itself during the complete lifespan of a person (Gebser, 1949), primarily through the plurality of storytelling processes (conversations, theater, books, tv, movies, media, etc.).



The most important are those stories shared in physical presence between caring adults and youngsters which become the threads that make the living carpet of our psyche, the symbolic soil structure that sustains and makes possible the creation of meanings and therefore, they form and sustain our relationships between and within the socio natural and intercultural environment which is much more than the manmade world. Depending on how rich this psychic soil can be in nutrients and microlife the flourishing of an imaginative, trustworthy and wholesome intelligence can be cultivated and this is one of the principal reasons for implementing storytelling in formal education...

Furthermore, fairytales and folktales, the mythologies of places and peoples —humans and more than human— and the practice of sharing these stories as a core routine, telling, retelling and catching them, learning how experience becomes embedded in the body of language for the cultivation of collective knowledge and wisdom, interconnection, embracing love and beauty, that is what we suggest should be incorporated into formal schooling. Because, it is mainly by connecting and identifying with the characters of stories —which symbolize the plurality of the human being journeying the earth— and learning about their struggles to grow in consciousness and spirit, that children receive a multiplicity of perspectives on how to cope with and learn to tackle common and extraordinary challenges in creative and original ways.



«It seems that the ‘natural’ mode of learning for children is through story, that for them life is story, not a lot of ‘facts’. They uncritically accept the picture of the world that they inherit from those who care for them. In adolescence they may gain the capacity to reflect objectively on the evidence and decide what is ‘true’, but even then it is not guaranteed. And even if teachers are successful in their task of teaching adolescents to observe objectively and think rationally, their students never leave behind their reliance on story to express what is important in their lives. Story is not just a way of entertaining: it is a powerful way of teaching» (Neville, 2013, p. 61).

Indeed, it is during this stage of growth during pre and adolescence that children and young people need to have the opportunity to understand by themselves who they are and what possible meanings their lives may have in this complex world. They also need to have the opportunity to learn from others’ experiences how to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity, and how to give coherence and consistency to the chaos of feelings that they may experience in different moments and situations during their lives. Children also need to have the opportunity to learn to distinguish right from wrong, not as an imposition or abstraction, but from concrete examples like fairy tales and other meaningful stories which become food for thought and



nourishment for the cultivation of emotional intelligence by learning how to integrate feelings into meanings (Bettelheim, 1989).

«Through the acquisition of nourishing knowledge, children possess the capability of developing more imaginative, creative thought, richer feelings, and a stronger will. Teachers must not only educate children's thinking and imagination, but also their feelings; the cultivation of feelings bridges thought and action» (Moffat, 1987, p. 21).

From a broader perspective, looking at the function of storytelling in the evolution of mankind, some studies suggest that it is *sensemaking* which constitutes the specific adaptive benefit of storytelling. «Sensemaking can enable the establishment of causal links or the attribution of responsibility for actions and events which promotes understanding, enabling groups to build, use, and update knowledge structures to respond to unexpected situations» (Bietti, Tilston and Bangerter, 2018, p. 11).

Therefore, it is through the capacity of experiencing a shared reality that humans are able to foster social bonds and feelings of belonging and community between individuals. Sensemaking is the process by which people give meaning to experience by organizing it in symbolic structures with the potential of becoming experiential knowledge.

Sensemaking is both individual and collective, where individual sensemaking happens through the integration of information in our minds—embodied in our nervous system and embedded in a web of relationships—, while collective sensemaking happens through communication and active listening. Then, social cultures can flourish in an organic synergistic way where connection between people is real wealth and young people can grow within a collective psychic soil that nourishes body, mind and soul.



III. Youth problematics regarding education and adaptation to social world

When we try to consider the problematics that young people are experiencing nowadays —at least within the European community where a general degree of quality of life and fulfillment of basic needs have been reached— we can identify an increasing distress due to the psychobiosocial pressures of living and growing up within the stream of an undergoing global crisis (environmental, socio-cultural and politico-economic) (Gidley, 2005). Of course, depending on social and environmentally local and particular conditions, the level of distress varies from lower to higher, manifested through different types of maladies, like anxiety, isolation, depression, obesity, drug addiction and many more.

From a youth perspective, we could suggest that the global crisis is a crisis of «disconnection» and «loss of meaning». Disconnection crisis because it is clear that there has been considerable degradation of the sense of community and belonging in all layers of society due to the exploitative character of capitalist civilization. On the other hand, there is an increasing «loss of meaning» crisis because the connection with the values and knowledge of previous generations has deteriorated; and a loss of meaningful relationships between people,

nature and with the inner self of a person, has become a trademark of a materialistic and consumerist society.

«*Youth problematic* refers to the increasing mental health problems, and growing sense of hopelessness, fear of the future and disempowerment among many young people who ‘sense a spiritual vacuum in their society’ and the litany of psychological distress reflects for many a “disenchantment with the world they are inheriting from their elders» (Gidley, 2005).

We must understand that when children grow up within a nurturing and loving community of caring and responsible adults who are actively engaged in supporting youth’s natural development, children and youth have the best chance to become well equipped to cope with the challenges of life and might become functional and responsible participants in their communities and beyond.

Nevertheless, there are groups of young people, everywhere in Europe, who are lacking certain psychic nutrients and present symptoms of mental health struggles, who have not been able to develop a sound emotional intelligence and do not count with networks of response and connection with a community of caring adults, that can provide guidance and support to different events and circumstances in their lives. There is an increasing number of children who haven’t had the chance of receiving full access to the process of

growth and unfoldment of consciousness because of lack of connections and appropriate nourishing environments like the ones genuine storytelling can provide, enabling a human being to become aware of their socio natural-cultural world as different but complementary to the growing ego, a world founded and sustained by multiple relationships and values.

Values have to be approached as complex psychological feelings, involving somatic, emotional, intellectual and spiritual dimensions of experience, understanding and motivation, will and comprehension. The great feelings and the processes for acquiring and cultivating them in the world are given to us during the process of growth from childhood to adolescence mainly through storytelling: that ritual sharing of transpersonal human experience which sets up the psychological framework for emotional regulation and the symbolic soil of meaning for the later functions of intellectual and spiritual awareness to operate in a wholesome manner.

Furthermore, some studies suggest that a considerable number of young people who quit schooling have found other things more interesting to do with their lives than wasting their time in a meaningless schooling process that cannot fulfill their inner self aspirations (OECD, 2012).



A few young people are lucky enough to be able to learn different types of trades early in life, some become artists, exploring other kinds of free-lance professions, designers, musicians, storytellers and so on. On the other hand, others will perform badly in school and will suffer different types of shaming and isolation, experiencing one of the biggest maladies of our times, the human sense of separation and non belonging, the costly illusion of the «separated self». And there also may be a group of «invisible» kids who have been isolated since early childhood and who require special care and pedagogic therapy to assist the regeneration and unfoldment of their psychic life.

Thus, we can contemplate two main approaches to education: on one hand education can be seen as the transmission of essential knowledge that has been gathered by previous generations and which responsible adults consider important for children to withhold in order to preserve society's values and culture. In our present supermodern societies such transmission of values and wisdom has been dismembered in many forms and cannot offer many young people a consistent ground for sensemaking. Our methodology of «Once Upon Your Time» aims to regenerate this process of transmission and provide tools for approaching their personal and collective history critically and with mythical intelligence.



On the other hand, education can be seen as providing children and young people with processes and tools for learning and thinking by themselves, learning to learn and to engage with society's challenges in original and responsible ways. Our methodology of «Once Upon Your Time» aims to contribute to the process of unfolding an authentic self that can accept its weaknesses and strengths in peace, with good sensemaking, and with empathy and love. These two ways of education must be seen as complementary for a successful education to be realized and for new generations to be capable of adapting to new realities.

«Schooling should be concerned with the growth of the individual child, which will occur if the child is fortunate enough to be placed in a supportive, nourishing, stimulating, resource-rich environment. What is fully human in society's value system will be learned as it needs to be learned. The teacher has only to be there, to respond authentically to the child's needs and questionings as they arise from moment to moment. Education understood in this way enables every child to be different: the child as creator of its own life and, perhaps even, of a new society» (Neville, 2013, p. 15).

IV. Once Upon Your Time: Giving meaning to personal narratives

The «Once Upon Your Time» project focuses on enabling teachers, educators, and trainers to work on introducing an intervention that takes into consideration the therapeutic potential of storytelling to recover the capacity of sensemaking, providing human beings with a rich soil of symbolic meanings guarded in stories and fairytales. This intervention is based on a methodology that brings together stories, storytelling and sense making knowledge, in an engaging approach to storytelling that gives young people the possibility to establish a firm connection between what most of them experience in daily life and the deeper elements of their inner self, which sometimes is an unknown world that affect how we experience life. Young people need to be able to make sense of their reality and their personal history and we aim to provide them with tools and self empowerment for their personal process of growth within a social reality that is challenging in many ways. During the process they become the protagonists —not just in an imaginary way, but real protagonists with real episodes and insertions of their life camouflaged in mythological language of symbols and magic. And while they are living this personal transformation of their living experience through the magical language of tales and stories, teachers as facilitators of this process can relax into their authentic selves, becoming Mentors

on the Heroes' path, because they have this clear system of activities that they can rely on to help them guide the process in original directions, towards healing catharsis and personal acceptance (Trunkl, 2021).

It is well known that stories are tools, literary monuments created by humanity for the transmission of knowledge. Stories have the extraordinary ability to «entertain» our mind, always judging, to slip through the back door, with the language of symbols, the teaching we need to build our lives. The stories inhabit a fantasy space where any reality is possible, and when we listen to one of those stories we open imperceptible channels for the mind that, if it realized the move, would subject the content to a summary judgment, reducing its value and relegating it to the category of unreal fantasy or children's stories. But the game that the stories pose with their frame, funny or profound, make us inclined to play or reflect rather than judge. And that is one of the great strengths of the «Once Upon Your Time» project, which combines play with reflection and passion to create a non-judgmental look at our past. The story is the support of our workshop, the canvas where the portrait of our life is painted. But it is not the objective, it is one more task together with sharing in the group, counting in front of the camera, editing a book or painting your self-portrait. What matters is the process, the journey.



When we understand the process of the hero's journey and apply it in our lives, we realize that we are like heroes, that what we have lived is so important as what the heroes and heroines of stories and myths have experienced, which are expressed with metaphors and that now, once we understand this, we can face writing the story of our life with the distance that the language of symbols gives us (Romera, 2021).

Therefore, It is important to appreciate storytelling as a process of initiation into the collective memory of a given community and more-than-human collective, giving every new generation the opportunity for learning the basic tools for adaptation, sensemaking and empathy for others' stories within a socio natural and intercultural environment. Young people will be receiving great resources to enrich their different minds, emotional, intellectual, instinctive, sexual, intuitive with collective experience that is already in the unconscious but that can be brought to light and reveal its powers. Meanwhile, young people will be recovering a sense of growing organically into consciousness, transcending and including new modalities of awareness in a more simpler complexity.

«If we want to change our students self-destructive or anti-social attitudes and assumptions, we need to stop arguing with them or forcing them to comply and instead devote our energies to telling



them a different story and providing an experience from which they pick up a different message» (Neville, 2013, p. 61).



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