

Example

Here is an example of how the Story-Telling method is used in UCLL as part of the “Teachers of the world” module which is taught by Mieke Van Ingelghem, Jo Van Dessel and Karine Hindrix. This module is part of the Bachelor of Education: Primary Education, 3rd year course which is taken by about 80 Teacher Education students.

This part of the module is focused on the European integration process. In it the major European institutions (OECD, Council of Europe and the European Union) are elaborated with a focus on education and culture. Students are expected to know the history of Europe when they finish secondary education. Often this is not (sufficiently) the case. After years of spending more than an hour of teaching on the European integration process, we decided to try the storytelling method. To do this, the teacher has ‘translated’ the history of European integration and supranational and intergovernmental decision making into a more recognisable real life situation at local level. Telling this story is how we start work on helping students familiarise themselves with the three European institutions.

This year, we will do it in a flipped classroom-way: The story will be delivered via video that students have to watch beforehand with some questions to answer during the video to check how the story connects with reality and key elements of the history of European integration.

Here are the steps we take when implementing this method:

The teacher tells the story, which follows in summarised form.

Once, in a beautiful country, there was a small community where neighbours lived peacefully together. Neighbours came and went, some stayed for generations. At a certain moment the son of well-respected neighbours buys a big house. He does major renovations. In the garden he constructs a pool, a wellness centre, a bar, tree houses etc. He often invites friends and friends of friends over to have a good time and to enjoy his wealth.

After a while neighbours start to be harassed by this neighbour who gets richer and richer and more arrogant. Parties become louder and many cars are parked wildly in the streets.... soon his property is too small. He starts to appropriate the streets and, then even neighbours’ gardens. The neighbours start to resist and the arrogant neighbour become more brutal and starts to annex neighbour and home spaces. There are many fights, some give up and give in, others resist and other neighbours decide to be on the side of the arrogant neighbour. Chaos ensues and economic activities are shut down (like shops because the neighbours cannot leave their houses, etc...). Neighbouring communities get involved.

A big city (cf. USA) nearby suffers economic consequences and fears further spill over of the conflict and decides to intervene to stop the arrogant neighbour and his loyal friends. After fierce battles they succeed. The neighbour loses a lot and leaves... the community is broken and there is destruction everywhere. It is in the neighbouring big city’s advantage for economic activities to start up again. They tell the community that they will support reconstruction with resources but ask to have an organisation in which they will cooperate to rebuild the neighbourhood in which cooperation among neighbours is key. The big city participates in this organisation (cf. OECD). Initially, this works well.

The community grows stronger again: people work together, have councils, and even organise parties and barbecues. But they feel a little bit patronised by the big city and they decide to have their own organisation. All the neighbours decide to found an organisation taking decisions for the neighbourhood by consensus (cf. Council of Europe). Because they are so many, few decisions are taken. Some neighbours become increasingly frustrated because they cannot move on with building and innovating their living together and economic activities.

They come together and brainstorm about how they could force a breakthrough without offending any neighbours.

They decide to start a new organisation with members giving away some of their private property in order to be supervised for development by this community organisation. Decision-making within this organisation is through majority voting (cf. EU) etc.

After the story, a brief discussion takes place with the students to make the connections with reality.

We told this story during the class with a few slides from reality (a picture of a European city in all its beauty, a slide of a ruined city, a slide of the Marshall Plan/OEED, a slide of the Council of Europe and one of the EU). We only used pictures in the slides. We present the slide in the background to support the analogy with the European integration process for the students. We dimmed the lights a little to create a cosy story telling atmosphere.