

You are kindly invited to the public defense to obtain the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES
of drs. Mary-Ann Elizabeth Isaacs Bornand

Which will take place on

February 18, 2026 at 2 PM CET

Promotiezaal – D.2.01 ([building D](#)) – [VUB Main Campus Brussels](#)

Pleinlaan 2 – 1050 Brussel

Or if you wish to attend online, a link will be added later.

**DIGITAL STORYTELLING AS A STRATEGY TO PREPARE
STUDENTS FOR 21ST CENTURY LEARNING**

JURY

INTERNAL:

Prof. Dr. Ingeborg Placklé
Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Prof. Dr. Geert Vandermeersch
Vrije Universiteit Brussel

EXTERNAL:

Prof. Dr. Natalie Pareja
Universiteit Van Amsterdam

Prof. Dr. Fredrik Mørk Røkenes
University of Oslo

PROMOTOR

Prof. Dr. Jo Tondeur
Vrije Universiteit Brussel

CHAIR

Prof. Dr. Gustaaf Cornelis
Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Coming by car? Please [register your licence plate in advance](#) to have access to the campus.

You are also invited to the reception afterwards.

Please confirm your attendance before 11/0/2026 by filling out [this form](#).

SUMMARY

Title: *Digital Storytelling as a Strategy to Prepare Students for 21st Century Learning.*

Although there is a global consensus on the importance of 21st-century skills, a persistent gap remains between educational policy and classroom practice, leaving educators without clear strategies to develop skills such as critical thinking, communication, and collaboration. This dissertation addresses this challenge by investigating digital storytelling as a promising pedagogical strategy to bridge this gap, examining the relationship between the actions in producing digital stories and the development of essential skills. The dissertation is structured across three studies. First, a systematic meta-aggregative review (Study 1) established a robust connection between digital storytelling and skills development, with critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration as the most consistently reported outcomes. Building on this, a qualitative study with pre-service teachers (Study 2) revealed how the creative process, specifically planning, problem-solving, and constructing arguments, activates different types of critical thinking skills. A broader subsequent qualitative study (Study 3) expanded this analysis to a wider range of 21st-century skills, identifying 13 distinct creative actions that directly promote these competencies.

The primary contribution of this dissertation is the Digital Storytelling Skills Ecosystem model (DiSE), an outcome of Study 3 that synthesises the research from all three studies. The DiSE Model provides educators with a practical, evidence-based framework for integrating digital storytelling into their pedagogy to intentionally and effectively foster the skills required for today's 21st-century learners, offering a tangible solution to a critical educational challenge.

References: [references Isaacs 2025.docx](#)

CURRICULUM VITAE

Selected Publications

Isaacs, M. A., Tondeur, J., & Vaesen, J. (2024). Digital storytelling in teacher education: Developing pre-service teachers' critical thinking. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 40(3), 92-109.
<https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.9258>

Isaacs, M. A., Tondeur, J., Howard, S., Claro, M., & van Braak, J. (2024). Digital storytelling as a strategy for developing 21st-century skills: a systematic review of qualitative evidence. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education*, 33(5), 573-593.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1475939X.2024.2343929>

Isaacs, M. A., & Tondeur, J. (2020, Mar 02-04). Digital storytelling as a strategy to prepare students for 21st century learning: a systematic review of qualitative evidence. *INTED Proceedings 14th International Technology, Education and Development Conference*, Valencia, Spain.
<https://doi.org/10.21125/inted.2020.1340>

For full CV, go to the link: <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:EU:997dc8a2-0fa1-4fcf-8802-2e93079e1878>

Educational Background

2018

**Diploma in Curriculum Design
2011-2013**

Master in Psychology, Universidad de La Frontera, Chile.

2008-2012

Psychologist, Universidad de La Frontera

Work Experience

10/2013 – 08/2019

Teachers Digital Competence Coordinator, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile.

03/2013 – 10/2013

Educational Projects Coordinator

04/2011 – 04/2013

Research assistant in TechEd projects