
Two experiences of digital storytelling in education: read it and rights projects

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Resumen

Este documento ofrece una visión general del potencial educativo del uso de la técnica narrativa digital y se basa en los objetivos y primeros resultados de dos proyectos: READ IT “Formación de profesores para leer divirtiéndose a través de la narración digital” y RIGHTS “Promover la educación a la ciudadanía global a través la narración de cuentos”, ambos financiados con el apoyo de la Comisión Europea por el Programa de Aprendizaje Permanente Comenius. El documento quiere describir los beneficios educativos, pedagógicos, culturales y motivacionales derivados de la utilización de la técnica de DS en un entorno educativo aplicado a dos sectores diferentes. Permitir que los estudiantes tengan una voz y participen activamente en el proceso de aprendizaje es un instrumento muy eficaz para empeñarlos y para hacerlos reflexionar sobre lo que están construyendo y, por fin, aprendiendo.

Palabras Clave: educación virtual – narrativa digital – capacitación docente

Abstract

This paper gives an overview of the educational potential of the use of Digital Storytelling technique and draws on the objectives and first results of two projects: READ IT “Training teachers to make READING fun through digITal storytelling” and RIGHTS “pRomotIng Global citizensHip education Through digital Storytelling”, both funded with support of the European Commission under the Lifelong Learning Programme Comenius. The paper wants to describe the educational, pedagogical, cultural and motivational benefits deriving from the use of the DS technique in an educational setting applied to two different sectors. Allowing the students to have a voice and to actively participate in the learning process is a very powerful way to keep them engaged and to have them reflect upon what they are constructing and eventually learning.

Key Words: virtual education – digital storytelling - read it - rights.

1. Introduction

Nowadays students learn differently from those of previous generations. They are equipped with a diverse array of technological skills and different attitudes toward education (Carlson 2005). Students need more than the traditional lectures, they are seeking out more interactive, creative and fun educational experiences. The use of digital tools can give alternatives to traditional education and offer the chance to use different communication codes at the same time (Tavangarian, Ley-pold, Nölting, Röser 2004). ICT have great potential for an effective learning and for the implementation of more successful teaching approaches.

Despite rapid advance in today's technology, many educational institutions in Europe are not experimenting with digital tools in a creative or innovative way. As reported in the OECD survey (OECD 2009), almost all EU countries report short-falls in teaching skills and difficulties in updating them. Shortages relates to the lack of competence to deal with new developments in Education especially in preparing learners to make to most of ICT.

Teachers not only have to teach students about contents, they also need to acquire skills in order to explore and implement new pedagogical models to engage their students in the learning process (Johnson, Levine, Smith 2009). High-quality learning content, presented with innovative teaching methodologies can render a positive impact on the student's learning outcome.

In this context, READ IT and RIGHTS projects aim at improving teachers' skills and enhancing teaching strategies through the use of innovative pedagogical and digital tools such as Digital Storytelling (DS). Specifically, the projects aim is to identify and test a didactic methodology that can help secondary school teachers improve their skills through Digital Storytelling and involve young people in an active and collaborative learning process through the creation of digital stories in the classroom.

Digital Storytelling is the practice of using digital technologies to tell a short story (Robin 2008). Both projects focus on the use of DS, as it has proven to be a powerful and effective learning tool in stimulating creativity and critical thinking through the combination of the ancient art of telling stories with different digital tools. Over the last fifteen years DS has been applied to many different contexts and has encountered a wide range of possibilities. According to the CDS - Center for Digital Storytelling (Lambert 2003), a digital story is a short, first person video-narrative created by combining recorded voice, still and moving images,

and music or other sounds. CDS experience has largely demonstrated that the project-based learning within the context of personal narrative greatly accelerates the learning process of multimedia technologies. Such projects not only reinforce writing and research skills, but help students to work together, critique one another's work through discussion and help students gain 21st century literacy skills by utilizing today's latest technologies. In doing so, educators are not only engaging their students on multiple levels, but also preparing them with the skills for the world beyond their secondary school education. By teaching to apply the digital techniques to standard writing techniques such as narrative and screenplay, Digital storytelling allows both teachers and students to approach different subjects in a creative and interactive way, and at the same time to develop different transversal competences for lifelong learning such as digital competences, social and civic competences and cultural awareness and expression.

The present paper will give a general overview of this learning methodology intended for encouraging students participation as well as creative teaching and learning. It will show how this methodology will be applied through the READ IT "Training teachers to make READing fun through digITal storytelling" and RIGHTS "pRomotIng Global citizensHip education Through digital Storytelling" projects in the European partner schools.

2. The READ IT project

The READ IT project is inspired by the lack of ICT use in schools throughout Europe despite the possible educational benefits and social learning opportunities they promote. The primary aim of READ IT is to enhance the quality of teaching and education in secondary schools through the introduction of novel pedagogical approaches and practices. The main objective is to develop teachers' skills and practice through the inclusion of ICT tools and DS techniques in classroom practice; specifically, to produce book trailers as a means of promoting engagement with reading and writing.

The process of creating a digital story, or authoring a digital book trailer in the classroom, provides exploratory hands-on learning, collaborative social interaction, experiential learn-led activities and active role-play that go beyond the traditional classroom setting. The unique qualities of this methods impart opportunities for collaborative learning and co-creation that can help teachers make a step closer towards the modernization and future of education. Furthermore, book trailers potentially offer a powerful way of engaging school children in reading and writing.

READ IT addresses secondary schools teachers and students from the 5 partner countries: Italy, Denmark, Romania, Turkey and Scotland. The project multi-actor partnership consists of 7 organizations among universities, publishers, secondary schools and non for profit organization.

The READ IT project specific objectives are:

- Understanding and comparing current experience and expectations of secondary school teachers and students from each partner country around ICT, digital storytelling and engagement with reading and writing through a Comparative Research;
- Training secondary school teachers on how to use digital storytelling technique and book trailer in classroom practice to engage students in reading, writing and literature.
- Involve students in a creative and collaborative learning process improving their digital competences while at the same time getting involved in reading through the production of book trailers;
- Promote in the school European system a “learning by doing” model that stimulates different learning styles and increases the level of student engagement in reading and literature;
- Create a trans-national online learning community where didactic experiences and suggestions can be shared by all participants.

The key project activities are the following:

- A *Comparative Research*, which was successfully conducted in all partner countries;
- *Technological Design & Production* of the READ IT course and e-learning platform, which is ongoing and benefits from the involvement of all partners;
- *Testing of the READ IT training course* by secondary school teachers and students in all the partner countries, which will start in February 2012.

One of the main project achievements so far has been to understand and compare current experience and expectations of secondary school teachers and students from all partner countries around ICT, DS and engagement with reading and writing: both the results of desk and fieldwork research analysis enabled the consortium to create a very much needed training course on Digital Storytelling and book trailers production, in order to fill a gap in the school curricula of the participating countries. Specifically, the READ IT Comparative Research was aimed at identifying the objectives, skills, training needs and pedagogical priorities for pro-

fessional course development for teachers and inform the development of the READ IT course topics, learning outcomes and approaches. The READ IT Research report is available on the project website (www.readitproject.eu).

READ IT course will be tested and evaluated in all project countries by a group of selected teachers with their students. At least 10 secondary school teachers from each partner country will be trained through this pilot course delivered online through an e-learning platform. This will enable course participants to acquire knowledge related to using and integrating IT tools and Web 2.0 in their teaching methods and/or habits. The course will also enable participants to share opinions and discuss issues among themselves and it will also allow for experts' advice on various situations and challenges course participants may find themselves confronted with.

Upon completion of the modules of the online course teachers will take the newly acquired skills and knowledge into their classroom. As part of their training, teachers will coordinate the production of book trailers in one of their classes. To this end they will undertake a class project involving students. Students will be introduced to all aspects of book trailer production from script writing, narrative techniques, character development and dialogue, acquiring transversal skills that can be employed to diverse jobs in the labour market (such as writing and verbal skills, technical skills, creativity, critical thinking, teambuilding etc.).

In conclusion, the READ IT project will allow secondary school teachers from the project countries to test and evaluate an innovative didactic methodology improving their skills through the use of DS techniques. At the same time READ IT will help increase students motivation and willingness to read, making learning more attractive. Allowing students to have a voice and to actively participate to the learning process is a very powerful way to keep them engaged and to have them reflect upon what they are constructing and learning.

The educational model offered by the project is based on both online and in presence learning as well as on synchronous (chat-room, virtual classrooms etc.) and asynchronous tools (forum, video lessons, etc.) with a specific focus on group activities and collaborative learning. This will offer a great opportunity for social interaction and demonstrate how cooperation and peer to peer learning can produce amazing results at school.

The project didactic methodology will also allow students to acquire different competences and transversal skills that can be applied in the labour market, such

as writing and verbal skills, technical skills, creativity, critical thinking, teambuilding etc.

This paper draws on the results of the EU project READ IT co-funded with support by the European Commission under the Lifelong Learning Programme Comenius Multilateral Project (agreement number: 2010-4200/001-001) and coordinated by USGM. The project started in December 2010 and will finish in November 2012. We especially thank the project partners University College Lillebaelt (Denmark), Marsilio Editori (Italy), Liceul Teoretic "Ovidius" Constanta and Curtea Veche Publishing (Romania), Rütü Akin Kız Teknik Meslek Lisesi (Turkey) and Scottish Book Trust (Scotland) for their significant and essential contributions and their hard work in conceptualizing, designing, and implementing the project.

3. The RIGHTS project

RIGHTS "Promoting Global citizenship education Through digital Storytelling" is a two-year Comenius project co-funded by the EU Lifelong Learning Program. The project started in October 2011 and will finish in September 2013. It is addressed to high schools in the seven partner countries involved in the initiative: Italy, Bulgaria, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Switzerland and Norway. The project's specific target groups are teachers and students.

The current global scenario, marked by social, political and environmental crisis which become more and more frequent, requires Education to assume a greater responsibility than ever in forming new citizens, with a strong focus on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). School, as a social institution, is always called to contribute significantly to the continual re-foundation of social cohesion and teachers must be prepared to help their students developing the global consciousness. Currently the Education system in many of the EU countries has to improve the tools and methodologies to reach this goal. The Council of Europe indicates as the primal goal of Democratic Citizenship Education as "not just equipping learners with knowledge, understanding and skills, but also empowering them with the readiness to take action in society in the defense and promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law" (GDV/EDU/CIT 2003).

RIGHTS addresses this specific need, promoting the Education for Global Citizenship (EGC) by enhancing interactive teaching in secondary schools in Europe through the use of Digital Storytelling (DS). EGC is a comprehensive approach to

the challenges of the present globalized world, with an emphasis on individual and social responsibility and consequent capacity of action. It points out to the empowering of the individual, not only to the transmission of notions. RIGHTS focuses on the use of DS, as it has proven to be very powerful as a tool that is effective in stimulating creativity and critical thinking through the combination of the ancient art of telling stories with different digital tools.

RIGHTS will allow both teachers and students to approach EGC in a creative and interactive way, and at the same time to develop transversal key competences: civic competences and cultural awareness thanks to the topic treated i.e. EGC; digital competences thanks to the use of multimedia materials and tools.

RIGHTS didactic methodology will be firstly tested through the delivery of an online training course to teachers, and secondly through the organization of workshops with students and teachers. They will be supported by facilitators in producing their personal digital stories. This will enhance interactive teaching on EGC and will empower EU students with the readiness to take action in society in defense and in promotion of human rights and democracy.

The main project result is the RIGHTS pilot course delivered in two parts:

- E-learning course for teachers, focussing on Education for Global Citizenship issues and digital storytelling techniques
- Workshops where teachers and students produce their digital stories on Global Citizenship Education.

The following main activities will be carried out throughout the project:

Research: aimed at understanding and comparing current experiences and expectations around ICT, Digital Storytelling and EGC from an EU wide perspective. The research phase will be split in 2 parts: a documentary research phase (literature review) to identify and compare the state of the art of Global Citizenship Education (EGC) and the current methodologies using innovative digital tools, specifically Digital Storytelling (DS), for teaching and learning in partner countries secondary schools. Field work research to analyse data gathered from the use of a social network. The network will be moderated at National level and will involve the relevant target group on discussions.

Course content development: aimed at designing and producing the syllabus and contents of the online training course addressed to high school teachers and

focused on Global Citizenship Education and the use of Digital Storytelling as learning tool in secondary schools of the partners involved.

Experimentation phase: aimed at testing the RIGHTS didactic methodology in secondary schools of all the seven partner countries. In order to effectively test and assess the project's didactic methodology, at least 10 teachers will be selected to partake in the e-learning training course in each country; workshops will be organized involving teacher trainees and at least 15 students in each country, supported by a facilitator in order to produce at least two digital stories.

In conclusion RIGHTS project wants to embrace the best of the new possibilities offered by modern multimedia tools as a support to education in order to break down the barriers between formal and informal education. The DS technique can facilitate the process of awareness raising, through practical experience, of the issues related to Global Citizenship Education. The pedagogical model provides the students with inputs and tools: the students are then called to be actively engaged giving voice to their own perceptions and feelings about the chosen topic. In doing so they have to work together, respect each other and allow space for others.

The current global situation requires new ways of thinking and: the key competences needed in the future have to reflect more than before, flexibility, risk-taking, creativity and innovation. This is a challenge for formal education in general and lifelong learning in particular.

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