DIGITAL STORYTELLING IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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Abstract
Communicative language teaching has emerged in second and foreign language pedagogy due to the inadequacy of previous language teaching methods to enhance English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' communicative competence. However, old language teaching methods, mainly, grammar-translation and audio-lingual, are still prevalent in EFL contexts. One of the reasons behind EFL teachers' hesitance to shift entirely to communicative language teaching (CLT) is the absence of clear guidance, including examples for classroom activities appropriate for this approach. Thus, the aim of this study is, first, to bridge this gap by suggesting digital storytelling as a classroom activity that is well aligned with the principles of the communicative language approach. Second, to assess the effectiveness of digital storytelling activity on improving some linguistic aspects of students' communicative competence.

Keywords: storytelling, definitions of "Digital Storytelling, education, literacy skills, pedagogical framework for DS projects.

Introduction

People of all ages and abilities make Digital Stories and many have testified how rewarding the experience is for, when their story is shared with friends and family or posted on the web, they find they have discovered a new voice. From ancient times to the present, storytelling has served as a popular education tool, utilized to pass knowledge from one generation to another. Over the past few years drastic changes have been experienced in the processes used for creating stories, the variety of media used to convey the message, and the target audience. Storytelling, in general, is a powerful pedagogical approach that can be used to enhance learning outcomes for general, scientific and technical education (Sharda [2007]). Stories have been told as a way of passing on traditions, heritage and history to future generations. Even today people continue to tell stories through new digital media

tools. A digital story can be viewed as a merger between traditional storytelling and the use of multimedia technology (Norman [2011]). Technological advances, such as digital cameras, editing software and authoring tools, have increased the use of technology in the classroom to help students in constructing their own knowledge and ideas to present and share them more effectively (Stanley [2003]).

Storytelling

Throughout the history of human and social development, storytelling has been used as a tool for the transmission and sharing of knowledge and values, because it is a natural and yet powerful technique to communicate and exchange knowledge and experiences. Its application in the classroom is also not new; and in relation to the use of storytelling in the classroom Behmer stated, "Storytelling is a process where students personalize what they learn and construct their own meaning and knowledge from the stories they hear and tell" (Behmer [2005]).

Over the last two decades, however, much has changed in how stories can be planned and created; and, as a result, how multimedia can be used to facilitate the dissemination of stories. With the increased use of computers to tell stories, by using a variety of hardware and software systems, there has been a significant improvement in the way stories can be created and presented (Van Gils [2005]). According to Norman, "People have always told stories. It has been part of our tradition and heritage since the time we gathered around the fire to share our stories. Today people still tell stories, but now we have new media tools with which to share them. A digital story can hence be seen as a merger between the old storytelling tradition and the use of new technology" (Norman [2011]). To some extent, traditional storytelling and the application of computer technology in education have followed different paths to date (Banaszewski [2005]). Thus, there is a need to further increase the convergence of storytelling and the use of computers in the classroom. It has been argued that technology is more useful when it is used as part of a broader educational improvement agenda (Pitler [2006]).

What is Digital storytelling

There are many different definitions of "Digital Storytelling," but in general, they all revolve around the idea of combining the art of telling stories with a variety of digital multimedia, such as images, audio, and video. Just about all digital stories bring together some mixture of digital graphics, text, recorded audio narration, video and music to present information on a specific topic. As is the case with traditional storytelling, digital stories revolve around a chosen theme and often contain a particular viewpoint. The stories are typically just a few minutes long and have a variety of uses, including the telling of personal tales, the recounting of historical events, or as a means to inform or instruct on a particular topic. In this increasingly technological world, keeping kids interested in both reading, writing, and the processes of storytelling can sometimes use a bit of an upgrade. So what, exactly, is digital storytelling or a digital story? The website for the Center for Digital Storytelling

(www.storycenter .org/index1.html) defines it as "a short, first person video narrative created by combining recorded voice, still and moving images, and music or other sounds." You combine the recorded voice with the visual elements of photos or pictures with other elements, such as music or sound effects, to create a unique multimedia piece that is more than the sum of its parts. There are many reasons for sharing digital stories with patrons. It encourages children and adolescents to think about how stories are created. We read stories to children, but how do we go about telling our own stories? Many children watch YouTube clips, but giving them the opportunity to create their own content and stories is a powerful tool—it helps them consider the elements of stories as well as increasing their awareness of the elements of the media they see around them. It also allows them to express themselves. As so many of us know, children have amazing stories to tell. Whether they are stories of personal struggles or achievements, or some fantastic story they have dreamt up, digital storytelling gives them another avenue for self-expression.

Teacher - created digital stories may also be used to enhance current lessons within a larger unit, as a way to facilitate discussion about the topics presented a story and as a way of making abstract or conceptual content more understandable. While many educators still lack a cohesive plan for integrating multimedia into their instruction, a growing number of teachers are interested in exploring ways to engage their students by including images, audio and video elements in their instruction. Researchers such as Hibbing and Rankin-Erikson (2003) and Boster, Meyer, Toberto, & Inge (2002) have shown that the use of multimedia in teaching helps students retain new information as well as aids in the comprehension of difficult material. And Digital Storytelling can provide educators with a powerful tool to use in their classrooms.

when students are able to participate in the multiple steps of designing, creating and presenting their own digital stories, they increase a full complement of literacy skills, including:

· **Research Skills:** Documenting the story, finding and analyzing pertinent information;

· **Writing Skills:** Formulating a point of view and developing a script;

· **Organization Skills:** Managing the scope of the project, the materials used and the time it takes to complete the task;

· **Technology Skills:** learning to use a variety of tools, such as digital cameras, scanners, microphones and multimedia authoring software;

· **Presentation Skills:** Deciding how to best present the story to an audience;

· **InterviewSkills:** Finding sources to interview and determining questions to ask;

· **Interpersonal Skills:** Working within a group and determining individual roles for group members;

· **Problem-Solving Skills:** Learning to make decisions and overcome obstacles at all stages of the project, from inception to completion; and

· **Assessment Skills:** Gaining expertise analyzing their own and others' work.

Pedagogical framework for Digital Storytelling project

Project-based Language Learning (PBLL) forms the main pedagogical framework for our DS projects. The benefits of PBLL are discussed by various researchers (Dooly and Sadler; Gibbes and Carson; Greenier; Stoller and Myers; Seidlhofer and Widdowson; Thomas). PBLL is based on the philosophy of "learning by doing" and using the language in the process of working towards the end product. It promotes content learning and facilitates authentic language use. It allows learners to negotiate the content and develop skills such as designing, researching, collaborating, and reporting. In other words, it takes learners beyond the idea of learning purely as knowledge transmission from teachers or books. Instead, it views learning more holistically and promotes learner-centeredness. Learners are given responsibility for their own learning, such as choosing their own goal and process to reach it and hence, promoting learner autonomy (Holec). In the instructed L2 teaching, language use is limited to the classroom environment and learning content such as topics and grammar structures may be prescribed by the syllabus. In this context, allowing learners to take responsibility for their own learning by having control over the content they learn for real communicative purposes is especially important. SLA research is also a necessary framework for this pedagogical project. According to Swain's output hypothesis, input alone is not enough for language learning. What leads to overall acquisition is also outputs well as learner awareness of the importance of structuring theirL2correctly to make them comprehensible to others. This is because only L2 production (i.e., output) forces learners to undertake complete grammatical processing, thus driving the development of L2 grammar(Swain). Thus, it is important for foreign language educators to create meaningful output opportunities through which learners strive to make their linguistic output comprehensible.

Helen Barrett (2005) has proposed a research design to collect data about Digital Storytelling in education. In part, Barrett suggests that if Digital Storytelling is to become an accepted practice in today's schools, it will be necessary to collect data about its impact on student learning, motivation and engagement as well as teaching practices and strategies. She suggests that the following key research questions be investigated: · How do digital stories provide evidence of deep learning? · Under what conditions can digital stories be used to support assessment for learning? · Under what conditions do students take ownership of their digital stories? · What are the benefits of developing digital stories as perceived by students, teachers, administrators, and/or parents? · What are perceived obstacles to implementing digital storytelling with P-12 students and how can they be overcome? · How does the quality of paper-based reflection differ from digital stories? There is no doubt that more needs to be learned about Digital Storytelling as a teaching and learning tool. The field is undergoing a tremendous growth spurt in education as more educators are learning about it and are finding ways to integrate it in their classroom activities. The research opportunities in this area are just beginning to be seen and new investigations will surely provide greater insights and understanding in how Digital

Storytelling can engage, inform and enlighten new generations of students and educators to come.

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