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Chapter I

Digital Storytelling Introduction

Laura Malita

1. From Storytelling to digital storytelling/What is digital storytelling?

Over the past decade, the rapid expansion of digital technologies, the development of the Internet, and the possibilities offered by Web.2.0 for social networking, content sharing, collaboration and building knowledge communities, has also expanded access to information to an unprecedented scale. The web has to a large degree become the most important medium for many of us in order to gain information about news, company facts, organizational goals, product costs etc. We also use the web to keep in touch and to find news as well as old friends or business partners.

Taking into consideration the major technological developments, we can assume that our lives has also changed, we have changed the way we communicate, learn, research, make individual contributions, collaborate or interact each other. In this technological and media suffused environment, something has remained unchanged: people love to communicate, to express themselves in a way or another, to tell stories about everything: what is important for them, a daily experience (what is important for them – a meaning to life), a story about an important event or experience, a story about expressing values, connecting elements in one's own self, connect one to one's (individual or group) past, cultures etc.

But what was changed in this 21st technological century is the way we do that. Telling a story (aka Storytelling) has been around for thousands of years as a means of exchanging information and generating understanding. Throughout history, storytelling has been used to share knowledge, wisdom, and values.

As all of the relevant literature is emphasizing, human beings are communicative beings. Telling stories is an expression of our identity, our consciousness and our relationship with the environment. And not only individual is a communicative being, also the humankind as a whole can be

seen as a communicative organism. 'By telling we are changing the multitude of perceptions, impressions, facts, phenomenon's, and data from being contradictory, inconsistent, accidental and arbitrary to being coherent and to make sense. People are able to tell stories about things they would not be able to explain in an abstract way. Throughout history, humankind has communicated its cultural heritage by telling stories and singing songs and stories have taken many different forms. Moreover, stories have been adapted to each successive medium that has emerged².

In our technology-rich society of the twenty-first century, a new mode of passing along stories has emerged. Digital Storytelling is the modern expression of the ancient art of storytelling, being also an emerging term. Thus, the term "digital storytelling" can be used very broadly, to encompass any use of digital media to tell a story. However, it is hard to find a definition of the term, accepted in all the scientific and academic research areas. Even if there are plenty of definitions, none of them is widely accepted. I particularly like the definition created by Educause Learning Initiative³, which is comprehensive: 'digital storytelling is the practice of combining narrative with digital content, including images, sounds and video, to create a short movie, typically with a strong emotional component. Sophisticated digital stories can be interactive movies that include highly produced audio and video effects, but a set of slides with corresponding narration or music constitutes a basic digital story'.

Thus, digital storytelling is the practice of combining narrative with digital content, including images, sounds and videos. The purpose of a digital story is the same purpose as the one of the traditional stories – to invoke an emotional effect and/or to communicate a message to its audience. Digital stories can range from the simple use of slides and pictures that correspond to a narrative to the complex use of advanced sound, visual, and transition effects.

But digital storytelling is more than just using technology. It is a medium of expression, communication, integration, and imagination. Thus, in the

2 From an unpublished L@jost workpackage report, developed by Simon Heid, 2009.

3 Cf. Educause Learning Initiative (ELI), *7 Things you should know about digital storytelling*, «EDUCAUSE Review», 2, 2009, in <http://connect.educause.edu/Library/ELI/7ThingsYouShouldKnowAbout/39398>, (09/10).

case of digital storytelling as well as in storytelling, the main goal is to tell an intriguing story that will captivate the audience.

Telling a story is a process which can take place with words and other multimedia components, with direct contact to other people or via media. In any case, human beings are necessary in order to render the story, technological systems are not able to relate, but just to transfer the information. Therefore, it is compulsory to remember that the main important thing is to always focus on the story, not on the technology because 'story without digital works, but digital without story doesn't'⁴.

2. *Why is digital storytelling important?*

No matter which is the topic of the story, people tell stories in order to transmit their beliefs and values to the others. Therefore, storytelling and digital storytelling are very familiar to everybody. Even from the early childhood, the people's lives are integrated into a network of stories.

Moreover, we must keep in mind that digital storytelling is not new; it is simply an adaptation of the traditional way of telling a story that has existed for more than 6.000 years; we can even have a historical perspective of the importance and utility of digital storytelling.

Storytelling and learning are inextricably linked because the process of composing a story is also a process of meaning-making and reflection. By developing a story, the author will develop and acquire a plethora of skills. First of all, the digital storyteller must think and reflect in order to find a valuable story. In order to do that, every digital storyteller must *research* through a variety of places, from history or person's past to their imagination. The process of finding a digital story forces storytellers to choose a topic that can be appropriately conveyed to a particular audience or purpose. This dynamic creates an opportunity to *reflect* on life and find deep connections with either subject-matter.

After choosing a proper subject's story, the digital storytelling begins with writing. Based on the outcomes of their initial research and reflection,

the digital storytellers begin to write and assemble the needed components of their story. The digital storyteller writes, rewrites and continues the writing process through multiple drafts. It is important to note that the most effective digital stories have their genesis in sound writing, so it is important to emphasize the value of multiple drafts. Within the writing, it is important to remember that the story has a central theme. The importance of this theme is for the viewer of the story, even if the story is about another person's experience, the viewer relates to the story because they have experienced similar types of events in their lives or because they are interested or captivated by the theme. Thus, during this process, the digital storytellers will develop communication skills, represented by writing. Through the writing, the digital storytellers can increase their retention and promote meaning as well as bring clarity and understanding to complex topics.

After the draft is completed and the process of collecting the different components is also finished, a transformation of the essential components of the digital story into a script would be necessary. At this stage, it is important to remember the final goal of processing the digital story: a digital story between 2-3 minutes in length, which is composed of about 20-25 images and has a narrative length of about three-four pages, double spaced. Thus, it is important to understand that the digital story must be clear, precise, but concise, in order to assure that the message is correctly broadcasted and understood, in the given and proper time. Taking those into consideration, the digital storytellers will rewrite and rebuild the stories; assembling also the multimedia elements conveyed, in order to really contribute to the meaning of the story, rather than being included only to make the story more "interesting". Thus, through digital storytelling, students begin to comprehend how all the elements of writing a narrative work together and how to manipulate them for the best effects in readers and viewers⁵, so they are developing and increasing the digital and technological skills, too. They will also learn to choose the most appropriate software for their purposes and how to use it in order to get the best solutions and effects so that they can captivate the audience. Moreover,

5 Cf. Jonassen D., Howland J., Marra R., Crismond D., *Meaningful Learning with Technology*, Columbus, Pearson, 2008.

Chapter II

How to Create a Digital Story? The Digital Story Process

Gema Diaz Dominguez
Javier Farto López

1. *Stories' shorts according to the message expected to appear*

In order to begin the storytelling process, a basic approach which provides sense to our story is required. Each story should be structured and should have a main goal. Asking ourselves several questions is necessary in order to achieve a clear one and to successfully develop the whole process.

- Who am I?

Storytelling is based mainly upon direct personal communication between the storyteller and the audience. To ensure the successful development of this communication, the storyteller should assign him/herself a credible role in the story, related to the other components of the storytelling process: the atmosphere, the aims, the framework, the events or the happenings.

- Why am I here?

Another noteworthy aspect is the desirability to establish a clear link between the person who tells a story and the purpose. The main goal of storytelling is to move, not just to communicate, but to communicate by transmitting something, up to the point of reaching move or move to a hearing so as to keep attention. Therefore, the storyteller has to convey something attractive enough to maintain the audience's interest.

- Visionary Story

The choice of a theme which allows a certain route is highly recommended; the story starts with an initial situation and it continues with a series of positive and negative events; towards the end of the story, the negative events and problems are gradually solved and often a teaching or a moral is present in the conclusion.

- Working values

One of the objectives that have to be present in the wording of the cartoon is intended to transfer a clear message to the audience, message accompanied by a set of values and principles which we are engaged to transmit.

2. *Theme*

In order to connect with the audience, it is essential to find a topic of general interest. The subject can be of interest for the audience depending on multiple factors such as the expression, the staging, coherence and cohesion of the message, and the type of theme. The choice of a subject is often conditioned by the type of receptor, being much more difficult to connect to a public heterogeneous in age, interests, economic status, and language than with a homogeneous one. That is the reason why finding the right theme can become a complicated undertaking, especially for those with less imagination.

For this type of people, Gilly Adams says “If you are stuck for a topic, think of something about which you feel passionate or focus on an event in your life which provoked a strong emotion – happiness, anger or sadness”. One of the characteristics of digital storytelling is its conciseness, so that a narrative pertaining to this type of stories with a length between 250 and 300 words is considered an ideal one. This aspect is important when choosing a theme - it has to be something important for you, as you feel involved to convey passion, but it is not necessary to choose a theme to "change the world,"; indeed it is better and more suitable to choose a simple topic, without too many complications.

There are a great variety of themes appropriated for storytelling;

- Events (adventure, risk, overcoming)
- Location stories.
- Sentimental story.
- Characters story.
- Discovery or knowledge story.
- Routine or process story.

Thus, the storyteller should pay attention and should avoid themes such as violence, terrorism, sexuality, health problems and disability, issues which affect the security and privacy matters of outsiders, especially when working with children or groups at risk of exclusion.

3. *Aspects to consider before writing the composition*

As important as the actual content of the story is the organization of all

the aspects that revolve around it. For this reason, we propose the follow-up of a series of steps before moving on to write the story. Firstly, we should specify the general objectives of the story; secondly, the narrator's point of view must be included; after this, questions are to be added in order to facilitate the success of the narrative; then, specifying the content as well as defining the style and rhythm is necessary (including all sentences to be read). Finally, we have to select the digital input, audios and videos appropriate for the plot, images, multimedia presentations and other resources that may be of interest; last, but not least, the grammar and the spelling have to be reviewed in order to have a qualitative piece of writing. In order to convey a clear message, not one of the above mentioned steps should be skipped.

- Definition of the global aims of the story

Before writing the narrative text, one must clearly have in mind the message that is to be transmitted and the purpose to be achieved. One of the characteristics of digital storytelling is simplicity, so that unnecessary details and complex descriptions should be avoided in order to maintain clear the idea to be transmitted. In case of a personal experience, it must be one year prior to evoke memory. Otherwise, we must conduct a research process, and later (in both cases), synthesize contents and leave well-defined the most relevant contents.

- Narrator's point of view incorporated

This is a personal account, so the narrator has to endorse the story, saving profuse details and descriptions that can disperse the hearing. It is a question of telling a story, not of exposing a succession of events.

- Addition of one or more key questions

In Storytelling, it is necessary to incorporate into the narrative process a number of techniques in order to introduce new elements in the plot. These elements, well used, can help overcome the possible loss of focus of the audience, taking a nap, or it can diminish or increase the dramatic tension, depending on the case. Such tools may be represented by rhetorical questions, puns or by urging the audience to contribute with reminiscent elements of story's beginning, playing with the space etc.

Chapter IV

Digital Storytelling as an Innovative Pedagogy for the 21st Century Students

Laura Malita

1. Digital storytelling as 21st century skills and multiple literacies development

According to Kajder¹⁰ when digital stories are created, the digital storytellers not only become more technologically literate, but they also become designers, listeners, interpreters, readers, writers, communicators, artists and thinkers. But what exactly does it mean to be technologically literate?

The concept of literacy can be interpreted in different ways¹¹ and the notion of literacy has changed in response to the rise in popularity of the digital media.

Literacy provision is increasingly important in education, within the context of the knowledge economy and of the technological based society. Therefore, most important organisms and institutions widely represented place literacy skills high on their agenda and between their strategies.

Thus, at a European level, the 8 key components included in The Lifelong Learning Strategy are well known. They are represented by: communication in the mother tongue; communication in foreign languages; basic skills in mathematics, science and technology; *digital skills*, learning to learn; interpersonal, intercultural, civic or social skills; entrepreneurial skills and skills for cultural expression.

From the perspective of UNESCO, skills and competencies are gathered around the following components: learning to know; learning to do; learning to live together and learning to be.

From the point of view of UNICEF, skills and competencies are gathered around the following elements: interpersonal communication; decision making and critical thinking; self-organization and management.

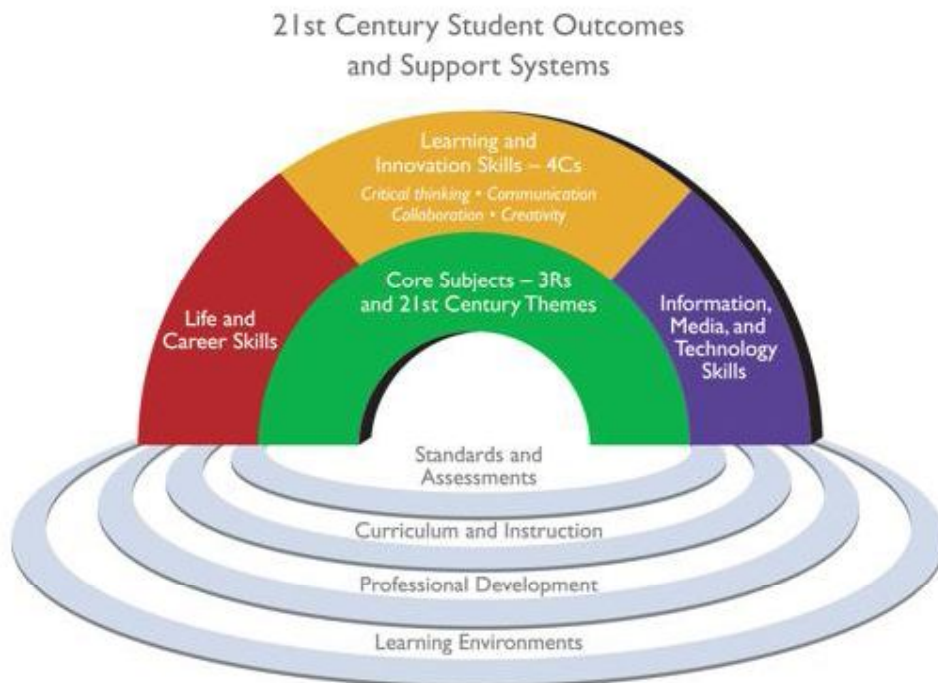
10 Cf. Kajder, S., *Enter here: Personal narrative and digital storytelling*, 'The English Journal', 93, 2004, pp. 64-68.

11 Cf. Martin, A., *Literacies for the Digital Age*, in Martin A., Madigan D. (Eds.), *Digital Literacies for Learning*, London, Facet, 2006, pp. 3-25,

According to OECD, skills and key competencies are identified by: using various interactive tools (language, symbols, texts, knowledge, *information, technology*); interaction within heterogeneous groups; independent interaction; structuring life plans (projects, resources evaluation, setting priorities, monitoring the progress, etc.).

Perhaps the 21stCenturySkills project, undertaken in the U.S., manages to squeeze better the key competencies necessary for one person in order to be effective and competitive in this century; they are presented in the following figure:

Figure 4.1. *The 21st century skills in view of the 21stCenturySkills project*



Source: <http://www.p21.org>¹²

¹² Cf. <http://www.p21.org> (09/10)

Thus, the 21stCenturySkills project includes the following key competencies: skills for life and career; flexibility and adaptability; initiative and self-targeting; social and cross-cultural skills; productivity, coordination & project management and responsibility; skills for learning and innovation; creativity and innovation; critical thinking and problem solving; communication & collaboration; *digital skills* and *competences* and *media, ICT and computer skills*.

No matter to which of them one refers, it could be seen that in the above mentioned examples, skills and competencies are related in a certain way to technological literacy. In addition, there can also be observed other skills (which could as well have a related technological implication), as developing critical thinking, problem solving opportunity, innovation and creativity, flexibility and adaptability or productivity and entrepreneurship spirit.

However, Beetham¹³ in their review of learning literacies for a digital age, contrast literacy with terms such as skill or competence, as mentioned in the following:

- I. A foundational knowledge or capability upon which other more specific skills depend, such as writing;
- II. A cultural entitlement, without which individuals could be argued to be impoverished in relation to cultural values;
- III. Communication, with the use of a variety of media for significant communications;
- IV. The need for practice, requiring development and refinement for different contexts;
- V. A socially and culturally situated practice, being context-dependent;
- VI. Self-transformation, with literacies having a life-wide impact.

Moreover, as it seems, the term literacy is now applied to many sets of abilities, increasingly so within the digital world. Therefore, Martin¹⁴ identifies a range of digitally-related literacies:

- VII. *ICT literacy* – it has developed through three phases of

13 Cf. Beetham, H., McGill, L., and Littlejohn, A., *Thriving in the 21st Century: Learning Literacies for a Digital Age (LLiDA) project*, in <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/projects/llidaexecsumjune2009.pdf>, 2009 (09/10).

14 Cf. Martin, A., *Literacies for the Digital Age*, in Martin A., Madigan D. (Eds.), *Digital Literacies for Learning*, London, Facet, 2006, pp. 3-25,

understanding: mastery, application and reflective. The focus now on reflective is indicative of an understanding of how ICT can be used in learning.

- VIII. *Technological literacy* – it is a focus on being able to use, manage and understand technology. It is not unsurprisingly that this overlaps with ICT literacy and it often has a focus on computers.
- IX. *Information literacy* – it has gained urgency together with the development of the Internet, but it is not media-dependent.
- X. *Media literacy* – it overlaps with information literacy and it has developed from a critical evaluation of the mass media.
- XI. *Visual literacy* – it has developed out of art criticism and education.
- XII. *New and multiple literacies* – this recognizes the impact of the digital in shaping the context for understanding literacies which are continually changing and how there is a need for multiple overlapping literacies.

Taking into consideration the above mentioned issues from this chapter, it should be understood that digital literacy can therefore be identified as an overarching concept which focuses on the digital, but not exclusively on the computer.

When referring to digital storytelling in terms of digital literacy, digital storytelling has an amazing potential to be, amongst many other tools in helping students to develop literacies, a productive one, easy to use and easy to understand, affordable to many of them.

Robin (2008) sees the act of creating a digital story as drawing upon a range of literacies, such as:

- XIII. *Digital literacy*: the ability to communicate, discuss issues, gather information and be able to seek help in a digital world.
- XIV. *Global literacy*: having a global perspective in information gathering and interpretation.
- XV. *Technology literacy*: the ability to use technology effectively for learning and improving performance and productivity.
- XVI. *Visual literacy*: the ability to communicate, including the production of visual images.
- XVII. *Information literacy*: the ability to locate, evaluate and synthesize information.

Nevertheless, Ohler¹⁵ discusses the multiple literacies associated with digital storytelling: digital, art (visual), oral and written. Processes such as evaluating, selecting, rejecting, structuring, ordering, presenting, synthesizing, assessing the message to be conveyed, and appreciation of the audience, apply not only to the story narrative itself, but also to the other aspects of the production, such as the images and sound. It is true that many of these processes are involved in the development of other teaching, learning and assessment strategies, such as the development of poster or oral presentations, but digital storytelling has yet to be considered by many as one of the tools that can be used to support students to develop these skills. Moreover, according to Malita and Martin¹⁶, engagement with a wide range of media is now a norm rather than the realm of educational areas. Current generations of students (which have been assigned distinct labels: millennial, digital natives, or Generation Y) are those who know about the existence of Google ever since they entered the school. For them, Google is omnipresent, being a kind of second nature for all people who want to search or to get informed about something related to their daily current activities. In order to better connect with those students, highly digital skills literate, but even with their educational needs & expectations, educators should integrate the new technologies in everyday-educational activities, both for teaching and learning. Taking into consideration the above presented issues related the multiple literacies associated with digital storytelling, a short conclusion is obvious by now: digital storytelling has the potential to be a productive tool, amongst many others, in helping students to develop literacies.

- *Digital storytelling as a deep learning tool*

Digital storytelling was introduced as a technique to encourage and embed student reflection on the activities in which they were engaged, recognising that reflection can be enhanced as a collaborative process¹⁷. Thus, by using digital stories, students have the possibility to express

15 Cf. Ohler J., *Digital Storytelling in the Classroom. New Media Pathways to Literacy, Learning, and Creativity*, Thousand Oaks, Corwin Press, 2008.

16 Cf., Malita L., Martin C., *Approaching the labour market in the european educational environment. recommendations, trends and comparative examples identified in L@jost research project*, in <http://iec.psih.uaic.ro/ciea/file/2%20Malita.pdf>, 2010, (09/10).

17 Cf. McDruy J, Alterio M.G., *Learning through storytelling in higher education: using reflection and experience to improve learning*, London, Kogan Page, 2003.