Simpósios

A SNAPSHOT OF DIGITAL STORYTELLING IN EUROPEAN FORMAL AND INFORMAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

In this symposium we will showcase digital storytelling practices in both formal and informal learning across different European educational systems: Norway, Portugal and the UK.

In all these practices the developed curriculum is a duly credited re-appropriation of the methodology developed by the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS) in Berkeley by Joe Lambert, Nina Mullen, and Dana Atchley. Their methodology evolved from the tradition of Americana road shows (Lambert, 2006). Progressively, the CDS refined their approach, realizing that there was a real need for training 'packages' illustrating to educators, the value of digital stories, the digital tools available to tell these in new ways, and the importance of publishing them using new distribution platforms. For the CDS, the process of storytelling is one of empowering the individual who followed the training, and in turn, of empowering his/her community. Some scholars and practitioners have questioned the ease of turning the individual process into a communal one. In any case, if for the CDS a large part of the richness of the experience resides in the lived process, the publication aspect is no less important though the authors' right to not publish is always safeguarded.

While showcasing practices in 3 European countries, we will identify and discuss the technological trend(s) behind each project, and that are among those that we think are endemic to DST: examples of these are collaborative writing, integration with social networks, visualization, and geocoding. However, our focus will be more foundational, along the deeper threads of identity, cultural identity, interpersonal relationships in Higher Education, inclusion through media, immigration and democratic practices, 'engaged listening', and integration of ICT in formal curricula through Digital Storytelling.

Keywords: Digital Storytelling, digital stories, Europe, teachers' training, marginalized communities, digital natives, Higher Education

Resumo

Neste simpósio discutiremos as práticas em histórias digitais no ensino formal e informal em diferentes sistemas educativos europeus: Noruega, Portugal e Reino Unido. Em todas essas práticas os currícula desenvolvidos consistem na re-apropriação, devidamente creditada, da metodologia desenvolvida pelo Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS), em Berkeley por Joe Lambert, Nina Mullen, e Dana Atchley. A metodologia deste centro evoluiu a partir da tradição de 'Americana road shows' (Lambert, 2006). Progressivamente, o CDS refinou a sua abordagem, realizando a necessidade de "pacotes de formação" que ilustrassem o valor das histórias digitais, as ferramentas digitais disponíveis para contá-las em novas formas, e a importância de publicá-las através da sua distribuição em plataformas emergentes. Para o CDS, o processo de contar histórias empodera o participante na formação, e por sua vez, a comunidade. Alguns académicos e educadores têm questionado a facilidade com que o processo individual é transformado num processo em comum. Em qualquer caso, se para o CDS grande parte da riqueza da experiência reside no processo, a publicação da história não é menos importante (embora reservem sempre ao autor o direito de não publicar).

A apresentação, neste simpósio, de práticas em três países europeus, oferece-nos a oportunidade de identificar e discutir a(s) tendência(s) tecnológica(s) por detrás de cada um. Estas são parte de um conjunto de tecnologias que pensamos serem particularmente adequadas ao 'digital storytelling' como a escrita colaborativa, a integração com as redes sociais, a visualização e a geocodificação. A nossa ênfase, no entanto, será a um nível mais profundo – estrutural - do 'digital storytelling', em tópicos como os de identidade, identidade cultural, relações interpessoais no Ensino Superior, inclusão social através dos media, imigração e práticas democráticas, 'engaged listening', e integração das TIC nos currícula formal através de 'digital storytelling'.

Palavras-chave: histórias digitais, Europa, formação de professores, comunidades marginalizadas, nativos digitais, Educação Superior

1. ANA BOA-VENTURA, MEDIA SHOTS, PORTUGAL: DIGITAL STORYTELLING IN EDUCATION IN PORTUGAL AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF MEDIA SHOTS

Today, we at Media Shots are well aware that the idea – and the practice - of digital storytelling in Portugal is still very circumscribed to a handful of individuals and entities, regardless of whether we consider education, nonprofit or corporate sectors.

In our workshops we have found many teachers who cannot use information technologies effectively themselves, nor use them creatively for educational purposes with digital natives.

We have also observed that many of our trainees are not at ease with learning processes that entail an embracing of risk, trial and experimentation. This in turn jeopardizes a pro-active stance, essential to the general feeling of 'keeping up' -with technologies and strategies – that is so pivotal nowadays.

We will discuss here the ways in which we have dealt with these issues when working with teachers and digital storytelling and how, through DST, we thrive to demystify the use of technology and leverage teachers' motivation for its use.

1.1 Our inspiration and re-appropriation

Media Shots developed a curriculum that is a duly credited re-appropriation of the methodology developed by the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS) in Berkeley. We have studied the CDS methodology and re-purposed the training material to the Portuguese audience. Broadly speaking, we follow the main steps of the CDS model but, across time and dictated by our experience with Portuguese educators, we have been changing some of those steps. As an example, we now believe that we, as facilitators, can and should have a more 'present' role in the technical and aesthetic quality of the output.

1.2 Our trajectory and the key areas of accreditation, crosspollination and internationalization

Our first project – Stories of Consumption - was financed by the Gulbenkian Foundation. Media Shots partnered with DECO, a prestigious consumer association in Portugal. Given the nature of this partnership, and the fact that the topic lent itself for interdisciplinary work, the teacher participants were open to trying innovative strategies to engage students in the classroom. For us this was the ideal 'playground' for experimental work. Since Media Shots is as much about digital storytelling as it is about social media, for this project we designed and developed a platform for the exchange of stories, ideas, comments and resources, www.historiasdoconsumo.org.

1.2.1 Accreditation

Once we completed 'Stories of Consumption', we realized the importance of having the workshop model we had developed, accredited by the national entity that in Portugal grants teachers' training accreditation (Conselho Científico-Pedagógico da Formação Contínua, University of Minho, Portugal). This happened in 2011. For Media Shots, the formal submission for this

accreditation was an intentional step towards a greater visibility and recognition of DST in Portugal.

During this new stage, we have been striving to add value to the general area of DST by targeting training to those pertinent pedagogical areas that bridge schools and their communities.

An example of this is our work with museums, notably with the Museum of Fado, where the general framework of the training was the recognition of fado (traditional Portuguese music) as one of Unesco's intangible world cultural heritage assets. In this training program, a group of 16 teachers reflected on pivotal moments of their encounter with fado, through oral story sharing later translated to digital stories. Participants, mostly over 40 years old, stressed how intimidating technology was to them. This feeling faded as we all progressed through the training, 'learning by doing'.

Lastly, we will mention another approach that we have tried during training: we ask teachers and educators to tell us a story of relevance in their careers. At times of crisis and incertitude, this approach has proved deeply engaging. It also contributes to demystifying technology and leverages perseverance as it gives participants concrete deliverables: a digital story and a class project.

1.2.2 Cross-pollination

One other area that we found important was to understand what corporate storytelling could teach us in our facilitation of workshops for educators and vice-versa. We call this bidirectional process cross-pollination as we believe that both groups can learn from each other. While we cannot materialize a project that realizes this, we as facilitators, assumed the role of abstracting insight from one group and lending it to the other. In the corporate world, storytelling is often used to inform leadership of the impact of their work, and for internal communication processes. These areas are equally pertinent in education and we have carried out some practices from one area to the other.

1.2.3 Internationalization

In our work, it has been vital to maintain a dialog with the main international actors in digital storytelling. It was with this purpose in mind that we proposed this panel to contrast and compare different national experiences in the topic of DST. It is also for this reason that we are developing a

b-learning course and on site workshops on digital storytelling for EDC under a GRUNDTVIG project.

1.3. DST in Portugal: concerning trends

Times of trial and tribulation are also times when unity and resilience are key. Some educators seem to understand this, finding in storytelling one of several ways to empower those who would otherwise be disenfranchised.

However, times of crisis are also times when the continuity of projects is at stake due to the discontinuity of funds or of the human resources involved.

We have found that a concerning trend is a distrust in the potential of storytelling to empower, re-energize, and engage. But our experience shows us that the skepticism that permeates the former should be met with short sessions showcasing examples of a positive impact of the use of storytelling in educational scenarios.

2. GRETE JAMISSEN: NARRATIVE AND MULTIMEDIA – REFLECTIONS ON IMPLEMENTING EVERYDAY CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS IN STUDENTS LEARNING PROCESSES

2.1 Background

Young students joining higher education are described as digital natives and institutions of higher education need to adapt to and explore the learning potential and challenges inherent in digital media and technologies.

At Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (HiOA) DS has been used in a number of bachelor programs since 2007, particularly within health and teacher educations. Based on the standard three day CDS workshop a model has been designed that enables scaling up to workshops with up to 100+ students producing digital stories individually or in groups. A main issue has been the adaptation of the personal story to be relevant in an institution of higher education, discussing among other things if and how theory dimensions may be included.

Our main focus has been more and more on DS as a tool for reflection, building explicitly on the personal characteristic of a classic digital story. Students preparing for professional practice study academic disciplines but they must also develop personal competences and skills – as a basis for a personal professional identity. What is the learning potential of Digital Storytelling (DS) as a tool for working with experience based learning and the emotional and relational aspects?

2.2 A promising new approach to learning

In questionnaires and interviews students and teachers confirm that DS contribute to learning and to students reflecting in a different and valuable way. Based on our research (e.g Jamissen & Skou 2010) three dimensions have been identified as cornerstones of DS for learning; the *narrative approach*, the use of *multimedia* and not least the *creative process* of the story circle as described by CDS (Lambert, 2009). A large majority say making the DS helped them reflect more deeply on the experience from practice and that they learned something new about themselves. Students also say the use of images contributed in a positive way to creative thinking and that images are better suited to communicate emotional dimensions. The technological trend enabling this approach is the broad distribution of technological devices and easily accessible editing software, and our students in Norway are quite well equipped with personal devices. There has been few technological issues, but making a quality voice-over constitute some challenges, both relating to low quality headsets and finding a quiet enough spot.

While all students managed to produce a multi-modal digital narrative the notion of the *digitally native student,* in our experience, need to be questioned or modified, particularly on one point. A large number of students, even the younger ones, struggle when it comes to what we might call *visual literacy* including skills like analyzing a multi-modal text and expressing themselves by images and other visual means.

The question we ask ourselves is whether it is a paradox that we ask students to reflect on personal professional identity using a language that they are not fully familiar with? And how can we, as representatives of the digital immigrants, help them overcome this hinder?

3. TRICIA JENKINS, DIRECTOR, DIGITALES LTD., UK – BRIDGING GENERATIONS E- PARTICIPATION FOR E-NARRATIVE NUGGETS

Digitales is an independent, not-for-profit digital storytelling company hosted by Goldsmiths College, University of London. Digitales was piloted between 2005 and 2007 as a transnational digital storytelling project across 6 European countries, funded through the European Union's EQUAL programme. The partnership worked with marginalised communities, including a Roma community in Slovakia, migrants and ethnic minorities in Finland, Greece and Germany and young people 'at risk' in the UK and the Netherlands. The pilot used Digital Storytelling as a means to develop ICT skills and combat social exclusion through providing opportunities not only to 'skill up', but also develop 'soft skills' such as deeper listening, collaboration and communication – and

to provide an opportunity for people whose voices are not heard to share their stories. We tested the method in both formal and informal education and training environments.

In 2007, Digitales became a company and has since delivered digital storytelling workshops across Europe and in Australia, supported by EU Lifelong learning programmes, commissions and the British Council. In our recently completed Digital Inclusion project, 'DiGem', Digitales led on producing a Digital Storytelling manual which not only provided a guide to the 'story circle' methodology and trainers' toolkit, but also went some way to mapping the skills and competencies that could be evidenced through participation in digital storytelling against, for example, the European Framework of Key Competences.

Digitales recently completed a European pilot project, *Extending Creative Practice* with partners in Finland, Romania and Slovenia, using Digital Storytelling to make ICT accessible to marginalised communities, particularly elderly people and isolated people from rural communities. During this project, older people used Digital Storytelling to make short films using their own photographic archives to tell personal life stories.. At the same time, the project provided an accessible route into ICT learning for older people. From a starting point of having no IT knowledge, participants were soon sharing their stories on YouTube, chatting to distant relatives on Skype and e-mailing.

The Evaluation of *Extending Creative Practice*, undertaken by the Centre for Urban and Community Research (CUCR) and the positive ambition of the partners to take this work further, has led Digitales to focus on starting to develop a range of action research projects with a focus on older people. Clearly, access to digital technologies by older people is a policy concern within the e-inclusion agenda. There are many initiatives that enable older people to participate in society through access to the digital world – independent living, active community membership and active ageing are key pillars of these policy drivers.

However the CUCR's research also demonstrated that the intervention was able 'to address the social, economic and geographical isolation of older people whilst simultaneously gathering a vibrant social history which tells us about the personal, social and historical changes older people have lived through. An added benefit of (the) work through ECP was scope to consider the potential for digital storytelling in work with older people who are often discursively positioned as oriented in the 'past' through 'reminiscence' narrative formats to explore how this method extends the opportunities for autobiographical storytelling by older people whilst simultaneously placing them in the digital present and future as contemporary voices commenting on issues or subjects of immediate relevance'. (www.extendingcreativepractice.eu)

What is interesting about Digital Storytelling is not only the educational impact on the individual, who gains valuable skills to enable active participation in society and at work, but also the impact of the participants' generation of narrative content that can be shared, analysed, interpreted, archived and enjoyed by many different audiences. And when learners know that their stories can be shared in this wider context, the knowledge transfer between trainer and learner is a different transaction: it is collaborative and produces digital content that is relevant in a wider context: the input of the learner is as important as the input of the trainer to the production of an e-nugget of narrative.

This of course raises questions about the 'use' of these narratives in, say, a research context. But if the example of the Museu da Pessoa, an international network of life stories, developed to collect a million people's stories and meta-tag the data to facilitate, for example, narrative trends research, then each contributor has a valuable part to play.

Another strand that we are developing in our work with older people is to use Digital Storytelling with people who are in the early stages of Dementia. Projects engaging people with dementia are not usually positioned within an education context, and are more often located within the 'therapy' agenda. There are already excellent examples of the uses of Digital Storytelling in health settings including working with people with dementia, such as the work of Pip Harding through Patient Voices 'Dangling Conversations' workshops.

There are many benefits to be identified for using Digital Storytelling with people with early onset dementia. For the individual: an opportunity to collaborate, perhaps with carers or family, to produce their own stories, told in their own voices, even when their condition renders them no longer capable of relaying their histories in person is empowering. To share those stories as part of a wider archive of social history enables these storytellers to become producers rather than patients - a sharing of e-wisdom. The challenge is – as with many Digital Storytelling projects – will the storytellers keep telling their stories? Or does the project-driven nature of such interventions limit them to one-off experiences?

The American artist William Utermohlen was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease at the age of 62. Encouraged by the clinicians in whose care he was placed, he continued to draw and paint for 7 years after his diagnosis. The work has proved to be an invaluable source of insight for neuroscientific study and has been widely exhibited at institutions particularly within the 'art/science' realm. Inspired by Utermohlen's recent retrospective, Digitales is working towards developing a partnership project across education, arts and science to explore the benefits of

Digital Storytelling through a longer study, over a period of years, that will both create a peer network for carers and people with dementia to share experiences, feelings, problems and solutions but also to create a digital, narrative-based resource for clinicians. Thus, we are exploring the practice of Digital Storytelling as a tool in non-formal education settings and simultaneously as a research tool within higher education and clinical/neurological research.

We are at the early stages of our work with dementia– developing the partnerships, considering ethical questions and sourcing funding for future research. For Digitales, the key to digital storytelling is its ability to engage, develop skills, and encourage participation **and** its capacity to enable every participant to be digital storyteller – a content producer – contributing to a dynamic, colourful patchwork quilt of key moments from ordinary lives across the globe: a user-generated social history.

4. SANDRA RIBEIRO, UNIVERSITY OF AVEIRO, PORTUGAL: DIGITAL STORYTELLING IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN PORTUGAL - AN INTEGRATED APPROACH.

Since the 1990's Digital Storytelling has spread and influenced teachers and students from all grade levels across the world. In Portugal, namely in Higher Education, Digital Storytelling is still looked upon with skepticism mainly due to its emotional content, which many teachers argue, does not suit our university culture (see Hartley and McWilliam, 2009).

We concur that Digital Storytelling is rich in emotional content, nonetheless we defend it is this emotional content that brings forth innovative learning environments which can humanize our mass education system. Furthermore, although it is widely believed Higher Education students have good Information and Communication Technology skills, our case studies reveal that is not always true. In fact, most students are not digitally literate.

We argue, based on our studies in a polytechnic school, that the Digital Storytelling process, as originally conceived by the Center for Digital Storytelling at Berkeley University (see Lambert, 2006), can in fact foster higher-order thinking skills, develops digital literacy and foments closer interpersonal relationships. As such, we defend the integration of Digital Storytelling in formal Higher Education Curricula as:

1. it is able to combine reflexive learning (see McDrury and Alterio, 2003) in different subject areas;

2. the creation process implies not only the manipulation of different software, but it also confronts students with authoring and copyright issues, more often than not ignored by our society;

3. the final viewing of the stories has implications on students and teachers that, as they are publically confronted with the final stories, inevitably become integrated members of the community (classroom). Teachers and students who go through the Digital Storytelling process create lasting bonds that benefit, not hinder, the learning process.

It is therefore our stance that Digital Storytelling is the aggregating element capable of turning our students into true 21st Century Learners.

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