T-STORY – Storytelling Applied to Training

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Abstract

Storytelling and learning are inextricably linked, as composing a story is also a process of meaning-making, helping students and teachers to think critically and to share, interpret and analyze past and present experiences. Digital Storytelling is the modern expression of storytelling, consisting in telling stories with interactive tools such as computer-based images, recorded audio narrations, presentations, video or music. When combined with the latest technologies, Storytelling represents an innovative teaching method, with the potential to be used in all settings, including formal, non-formal and informal education settings as well as work environment.

Although future teachers may hold strong positive beliefs about technology and may be proficient with a variety of software applications, they may be unable to translate this knowledge to their teaching. This paper will report the in progress experience of the project "T-Story – Storytelling applied to Training", which intends to promote a wider use of Storytelling and Digital Storytelling in education and training at all levels (formal, non-formal and informal) throughout Europe by developing a digital course to educators, teachers and trainers. The digital format will contribute for an easier and wider dissemination and future exploitation of the results. Through an initial survey analysis to identify teachers' training needs and expectations, a framework for the Digital Storytelling use will be finalized. The ambition of the project is to foster teachers/educators/trainers knowledge and skills development by using Digital Storytelling technique – learn storytelling through storytelling. Schools and universities, vocational and adult training providers will have the possibility to experiment a new format and strategy for learning and teaching, enhancing the digital inclusion among teachers and students and contributing to reposition themselves in the emerging future learning landscape, mostly constituted by ICT key competences. Furthermore, new instruments lead to new ideas, always necessary to increase and strengthen the investment in lifelong learning.

1. Introduction

The T-Story project is financed by the Transversal Actions (Key Activity 3 – Information and Communication Technologies) under the Lifelong Learning Programme from the European Commission [1].

From November 2012 to October 2014, seven institutions from seven countries in the European Union (Italy, Portugal, Romania, The Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Greece) will intend to promote a wider use of Digital Storytelling (DST) as a pedagogical technique in education and training at all levels throughout Europe by developing a digital course for teachers and trainers.

1.2 Why the project?

Growing up with unprecedented access to technology has changed the way young people, "digital natives", communicate, interact, process information, and learn [2].

The EU states that new innovative pedagogical and didactical approaches are needed to take into account the future learning needs and changing skills and competences necessary for employment, self-development and participation in a knowledge-based, digital society.

EU traditional E&T institutions need to employ new formats and strategies for learning and teaching to be able to offer relevant, effective and high quality learning experiences in the future [3]. With the evolution of ICT, personalized learning and individual mentoring will become a reality and

teachers/trainers will need to be trained, in order to exploit the available resources and tools to support tailor-made learning pathways.

Some, if not most, of the ICT resources are unfamiliar to teachers, but today's students are using them at an ever increasing pace and in ways that are helping to define a new generation of not just information gathering, but information-creating as well. Due to the relative newness of computer technology, many teachers have not received adequate training to select appropriate technologies and the lack of courses on digital tools increases the gap among them and students.

1.3 Storytelling and Digital Storytelling

Storytelling is the conveying of events in words, images and sounds. It represents an innovative pedagogical approach that has the potential to engage learners in student-centered learning, and improve learning outcomes like knowledge, communication, reflection, critical thinking, construction and collaboration**.**

Humans are storytelling organisms and, since the most ancient cultures, they communicate with each-others through storytelling, to entertain, educate and convey the society's culture, values and history [4]; great leaders of all types have used stories as instructional tools in the form of parables, legends, myths, fables, and real life examples to convey important information [5], sometimes to convince and manipulate.

Storytelling implies an interactive process between the teller/writer and the listener/reader; together, they share and interpret past and present experiences, making a sense to the events. Additionally, Storytelling promotes expressive language development in both speech and written composition, as well as receptive language development in reading and listening. The real value of Storytelling from a cognitive perspective is that it becomes a mutual creation involving interaction and understanding between teller and listener [6].

What is new today about the telling stories is the bottom-up approach (instead of the traditional top-down approach) to achieve shared processes and manage communication, education, training and innovation.

DST involves combining narrative with digital content, including imagines, sounds and interactive video; environments and words are connected to technologies. The result is a powerful instrument to approach and engage students and trainees in a transversal way. DST can be applied to all educational levels, from kindergartens to high level specific professional training, and it is suitable for all the possible subjects of study and discipline, from the primary and STEM teaching, to humanities, arts, core skills.

DST can be used as a method to teach ethics, values, cultural norms and differences, to transfer knowledge, to create a cultural, linguistic and age-related bridge, to promote innovative problem solving, to make connections, to seek best practices, to imagine new perspectives and possibilities, to be inspired and enhance innovation. All these elements lead to a higher level of social interaction, active learning ("learning by doing"), multiliteracy and cooperative skills, interdisciplinary connection.

Many narrative methods are at disposal: structured or free storytelling, methaphors, fairy-tales, case studies, interviews, semantic cluster mapping, horal histories. Also, there are several possible instruments: written form, audio, video, pictures, slide, drawings, theatre, music. There are different techniques, but the crucial thing is that all the stories have to be taken seriously.

Despite many educationists have recognized the potential of DST, a well-designed framework for the same is still required [7].

2. T-Story project: objectives and methodology

The project intends to promote a wider use of DST in education and training at all levels throughout Europe by developing a digital course to teachers and trainers. Following the principle "learn Storytelling through Storytelling"**,** T-Story aims to foster teachers/trainers knowledge and skills development by using DST technique, giving the opportunity to learn and train how to implement the technique and how to engage students/trainees taking advantage of the digital potential.

This overall purpose will be developed according the following specific objectives:

- involve European teachers/trainers in a survey to identify their training needs regarding key DST competences and ICT skills;
- identify good practices from successful Storytelling educational projects, through a desk research

activity;
- elaborate a Learning Handbook in order to support trainers delivering training through Storytelling and promote, in the 7 countries, a Digital Training Course through Pilot Sessions, so thus to generate feedback and fine-tune the training materials developed.

The target groups are teachers/trainers from kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, vocational schools, universities, adult education entities, education policy maker and authorities institutions, training and coaching agencies.
T-Story is based on a structured work programme which maximises the individual areas of expertise of each partner while encouraging a high level of collaboration, communication and generation of innovation.
The project begins with a research that aims to develop a need analysis of teachers/trainers regarding Storytelling and DST skills, which will constitute the basis for the following activities in the project. The research will be carried out through a survey based on data collection. Each project partner will conduct a national survey and will apply 50 questionnaires, resulting in a total of 350 answers.
In a second phase, all partners will conduct a desk research at national and global level to identify successful DST educational projects, analysing one case study per country.
As a result, the consortium will present a Need Analysis Report describing the key conclusions of the survey carried out, identifying the skills and knowledge that are most important to develop among teachers/trainers, as well as, describing the methodology and the best practices found on Storytelling projects already implemented.
Findings and results will support partners defining the learning contents to be developed, namely for a Learning Handbook and for the Digital Training Course. The digital course will be validated among representatives of the target-group in pilot training sessions implemented in 7 countries.

3. Expected results and innovative character
As a result of the project, the consortium expects that teachers/trainers needs regarding key DST competences and ICT skills will be mapped and disseminated at national and European level, and the target groups will be able to empower their skills to create and develop innovative courses using Storytelling and digital support. Furthermore:
- the adoption of innovative learners centered methodologies in education/training can contribute for the development of key transversal competences such as critical thinking, creativity and innovation;
- using ICT in education can empower the target group's digital skills development and foster digital inclusion;
- addressing the needs of the learners/trainees through personalization, collaboration and informal learning will increase their motivation, strengthen their links to training and education institutions and increase their investment in lifelong learning;
- the valorisation activities will allow for a wider awareness of the methodology and will foster new applications in professional contexts outside education.

All the solutions developed in this project are available for 7 countries which will test the practical suitability in their national environment. The benefit is considerably higher than with national solution-strategies. T-Story project's development and implementation can contribute to the reposition of the E&T institutions, and by consequence contribute to help Europe achieve its goals.
As it is stated by the EU: "The promotion of ICT for learning is a priority of the 'transversal' part of the EU's Lifelong Learning Programme. Effective integration of ICT into education must go beyond replacing, streamlining or accelerating current practices. Actions are not about developing technology itself, but about its use to enhance learning environments and experiences."
Supported by an appropriate framework, teachers/trainers can experiment some practical uses of DST, like explaining concept and theories, evaluating teaching instruments, answering questions and problems, stimulating working groups and students' personalization of the learning process.
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; writing; technology; presentation; interpersonal; problem-solving skills. The project contributes to improve the quality and relevance of teaching and the use of innovative teaching methods and by improvement of

teacher skills to allow integrating creativity and innovation in their teaching. Storytelling also facilitates the development of innovative practices in adult education, motivating them through more flexible learning solutions.

Interest in Storytelling as instruction continues to build for at least two reasons: high-fidelity and media rich learning environments are becoming more and more common [8] and research into learning continues to indicate the value and effectiveness of the methods of Storytelling in general.

The combination of powerful, yet affordable, technology hardware and software meshes perfectly with the needs of many of today's classrooms, where the focus is on providing students, in a protective environment like school, with the skills they will need to "thrive in increasingly media-varied environments" [9].

While there is still some disagreement [10], many are finding that learners embedded in contextual, authentic, real world problems are more engaged, draw on more resources, and transfer learning more effectively [11].

The future role of schools will be to guide students in identifying and selecting the learning opportunities that best fit their learning styles and objectives; to monitor progress, realign learning objectives and choices and intervene when difficulties arise. For that reason, guidance is needed for educators and learners on how to best use and exploit technology's and new media potentialities [12].

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