BRIGHTS Project: Digital Storytelling as a useful tool for promoting Global Citizenship Education

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Abstract

The globalized and increasing connected world calls for the need to promote democratic values and to develop transversal key competences such as learning to learn, sense of initiative, social, civic and cultural competences. Teaching and learning these skills require innovative approaches that go beyond the boundaries of specific subjects and take into consideration each student through a holistic perspective, looking at his/her personal learning and social context and development. To reach this goal, BRIGHTS promotes the educational use of Digital Storytelling that has proven to be a powerful learning tool by improving creativity, digital literacy and critical thinking. The project develops through an integrated learning path aimed at enabling teachers and trainers to create digital stories on Global Citizenship Education with youngsters, both in formal and non-formal educational contexts. The primary target group is composed of secondary school teachers and youth trainers from Italy, Belgium, Greece and Croatia; the youngsters are the final beneficiaries of the whole process. Evidence of the effectiveness of this approach will be given to the wider audience through the online publication of all BRIGHTS digital stories.

Keywords: *Global Citizenship Education, Digital Storytelling;*

Introduction

In order to face the main current challenges linked to globalization in its different facets – economic, social and political - transversal key competences such as learning to learn, sense of initiative, social, civic and cultural competences are increasingly seen as vital for today's citizens. Presented under the ErasmusPlus Programme Key Action on "Social inclusion through education, training and youth", BRIGHTS Project "Boosting Global Citizenship Education using digital storytelling" contributes to promote social cohesion, intercultural dialogue and democratic values in Europe by fostering Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in formal and non-formal education (www.brights-project.eu). Thanks to a holistic approach to GCE, BRIGHTS pursues the following objectives: 1) Increase and improve teachers' and trainers' capacity to implement GCE with young people using Digital Storytelling; 2) Empower youngsters to develop social, civic and intercultural competences as well as critical thinking, media literacy, creativity and digital skills through the production of digital stories. The project is coordinated by All Digital, an association based in Brussels representing European organizations specialized in digital competences, and it involves six partners from Belgium, Italy, Croatia and Greece: MAKS vzw., Università degli Studi Guglielmo Marconi, Centro Studi Città di Foligno, Centar tehničke kulture Rijeka, Hellenic Open University and Hellenic Professionals Informatics Society. The project started in December 2016 and it is now in its crucial phase, the upcoming closure of the piloting stage. BRIGHTS is characterized by several elements of innovation, linked to both the project methodology, namely blended learning and Digital Storytelling, and its main focus, Global Citizenship Education.

1. BRIGHTS blended course and Digital Storytelling: promoting inclusiveness through innovation

BRIGHTS project tackles cutting-edge themes, like globalization and global citizenship, through an interdisciplinary approach by fostering an innovative methodology which encompasses a variety of features. Firstly, the project experimented a blended course, consisting of two main piloting phases, produced in English and delivered in partners' languages: Italian, Dutch, Greek and Croatian. The blended course *"Addressing Global Citizenship Education through Digital Storytelling"* addresses primary and secondary-schools teachers and youth trainers to enhance their global citizenship competences through the Digital Storytelling. The first piloting phase concluded with the involvement of more than 400 teachers and trainers who successfully completed the 20-hour MOOC (Massive

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Open Online Course). A part of them was selected to attend the 10-hour face to face training, a necessary step to participate in the second piloting phase: the creation of digital stories with youngsters. Since BRIGHTS teachers and youth trainers belong to formal and non-formal educational contexts and come from different countries, the use of a blended approach was implemented to meet different learning styles, collaborative learning, possibility to discuss online and face-to-face, flexible access to course material. An additional element of this blended path is the use of the Unite-IT platform (http://www.unite-it.eu), which hosts the first European GCE Online Community made of researchers, educators and stakeholders interested in Global Citizenship. Through the Community, the learning experience was enriched with a wide array of perspectives and experiences at international level. The multi-country experimentation of the blended course does not represent the sole innovative component of the BRIGHTS methodology. One of the key elements of the project is the educational use of Digital Storytelling, a technique taught through the MOOC and finally tested with the youngsters. This choice is linked to one of the main objectives of the project: the implementation of innovative ways of working with youth-at-risk. Around the 30% of young people participating in the BRIGHTS training are at risk of marginalization, especially for the place of residence and/or for their migrant background, parental socio-economic status, ethnicity, religion, etc. These factors notoriously may have an impact on social exclusion and unemployment. In order to better address youngsters at risk of exclusion, the project focuses on both strategies of formal and non-formal education, the latter conceived for those with fewer educational opportunities. Today, as revealed by the BRIGHTS initial needs analysis, several actors from the non-formal and informal sector, including non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations are implementing activities to promote citizenship, human rights or multiculturalism, and their impact on youngsters and local communities is considered as relevant [1]. By addressing both formal and non-formal sector, BRIGHTS project exploits personal digital stories as a means for everyone to be seen and heard. In *Digital Storytelling- Capturing Lives, Creating Community* [2], pioneering digital storyteller, Joe Lambert explains the importance of storytelling as a means for people to express, comprehend and articulate experiences in the everyday world. It is a technique for breaking down barriers and increasing understanding across generations, ethnicities and others divides. The added value of the BRIGHTS project, lies on the promotion of social inclusion through the educational use of Digital Storytelling, following a dual approach focused on both skills and contents :
1. The development of 21st century skills, also for those youngsters at risk of marginalization;
2. The production and publication of digital stories dealing with Global Citizenship.
Concerning the first aspect, many authors highlighted the educational potential of Digital Storytelling as a methodology capable to enhance communication skills by learning to organize ideas, make questions, express opinions and build narratives. As affirmed by Robin [3] [4], when students are able to create their own digital stories, they gain valuable skills and literacies linked to the development of 21st century skills. More in detail, he defines digital literacy as the ability to communicate with an ever-expanding community to discuss issues, gather information and seek help; global literacy as the capacity to read, interpret and contextualize messages from a global perspective; technology literacy as the ability to understand, produce, and communicate through visual images; information literacy as the ability to find, evaluate, and synthesize information. A further step, more focused on diversity and inclusiveness, is the recent research by Smeda, Dakich and Sharda [5] where they confirmed Digital Storytelling's ability to personalize students' learning experiences supporting students' diversity, improving their confidence and enhancing their social and psychological skills. The second innovative aspect of BRIGHTS use of Digital Storytelling is strictly related to the topics of the stories. Teachers, trainers and students create digital narrations about the umbrella concept of Global Citizenship, including sustainable development and lifestyle, social inclusion and cultural diversity, gender equality, peace and human rights, active citizenship and democracy. The definition of narrations on these topics implies an inner process to explore the universality of personal stories and contributes to promote inclusiveness both during the creation and publishing of stories. Throughout this process, BRIGHTS digital stories contribute to enhance the debate on inclusiveness via innovative and creative digital techniques.

2. Global Citizenship: a transversal subject to shape future aware, sensitive and active citizens

An additional element of innovation in BRIGHTS lies on the main topic taught throughout the project: Global Citizenship is a subject that crosses different crucial issues, like human rights, democracy, peace, environment, cultural differences, economic and social justice. It is an extremely relevant subject, not officially recognized in schools' curricula, that equips learners with essential skills to tackle

current and future challenges and that strengthens their perception of citizenship in a global dimension.

The primary aim of GCE is nurturing respect for all, building a sense of belonging to a common humanity and helping learners become responsible and active global citizens. GCE aims to empower learners to assume active roles to face global challenges and to become proactive contributors to a more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and secure world. Education for global citizenship helps young people develop the core competencies which allow them to actively engage with the world, and help to make it a more just and sustainable place.

The UN's Global Education First Initiative notes: "It is not enough for education to produce individuals who can read, write and count. Education must fully assume its central role in helping people to forge more just, peaceful, tolerant and inclusive societies."[6] According to the UN, GCE provides the understanding, skills and values students need to adopt in resolving the interconnected 21st century challenges, including climate change, conflict, poverty, hunger, equity and sustainability.

The BRIGHTS project, through an engaging, creative digital methodology, contributes to address the pivotal challenge of shaping together a shared civic ethos, starting from the dialogue among different cultures that makes possible living together in a cohesive society. In order to address teachers and trainers needs raised during the BRIGHTS research [1], five main topics have been selected to be investigated in the MOOC and as subjects of the digital stories; specifically they are sustainable development and lifestyle, social inclusion and cultural diversity, gender equality, peace and human rights, active citizenship and democracy.

UNESCO's work in this field is guided by the Education 2030 Agenda and Framework for Action, notably Target 4.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4 on Education), which calls on countries to "ensure that all learners are provided with the knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development" [7].

Also at a European level, the need of training new generations, equipping them with the necessary skills to tackle future challenges and to deeply understand common values, is clearly stated in several documents and initiatives. The 2015 Paris Declaration calls for actions at all levels to reinforce the role of education in promoting citizenship and common values, strengthening social cohesion and helping young people become responsible, open-minded and active members of the current diverse and inclusive societies [8]. These common values are the base of our democracies and they are crucial for fighting current threats like populism, discrimination, divisive nationalism, xenophobia, the risk of violent radicalization and misinformation. The European Commission proposed in January 2018 a *Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching,* with the objective of fostering inclusive education, promoting common values and supporting teachers [9]. In fact, within this compelling and complex quest, teachers play a pivotal role. In the framework of the third UNESCO Forum on Global Citizenship Education that had place in March 2017 in Ottawa, the UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education, Qian Tang, stated: "Teachers are on the frontlines of bringing GCE into learning environments. Without confident, qualified and well-prepared teachers, we cannot advance GCE". Teachers are not only the transmitters of knowledge, they are the agents of change who can ensure the achievement of fundamental skills for addressing 21st century challenges.

With the support of engaging technologies, BRIGHTS wants to help teachers in conveying to students important and complex issues related to Global Citizenship, which is an extremely topical and necessary subject.

BRIGHTS contributes to innovative teaching and learning by giving great emphasis and space to Global Citizenship Education, addressing both formal and non-formal educational sectors, highlighting the central responsibility of the teachers and the active role of the students, as future aware citizens.

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