Digital Storytelling as Support for Teaching Greek as FL/L2 to Adolescents A Teacher Action Research Project

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Abstract

Teaching Greek as a Foreign Language can be a challenge for every educator. Students usually lose motivation because they cannot bother to practise all skills, especially writing. This was observed from six foreign language students' academic performance which included tests on essay writing, grammar and vocabulary exercises as well as daily feedback received from the instructor. This Teacher Action Research Project aimed to investigate whether six Secondary School students who attended a Private Secondary School in Cyprus, benefited from the use of new technologies for the creation of digital stories and whether working in pairs to write their stories motivated and encouraged their experience. Data were collected during the three weeks of using Microsoft Sway, Microsoft's latest presentation tool as well as word clouds. These technologies were employed because students needed to use vocabulary they had not used before along with correct use of sentence structure. The new features that Sway provides in comparison with PowerPoint Presentation, can be used to create interactive presentations and content that enables students to write their stories in a more fun and engaging way. From the observations, semi-structured in pair interviews and follow-up questionnaires, two emergent themes were the main findings. Theme one was referring to the benefits of utilising a technology approach to create digital stories for enhancing the learning of foreign language and theme two pointed out how much students enjoyed working together. The main output of this Teacher Action Research Project is that Digital Storytelling and specifically Microsoft Sway can be used to support students' writing skills when learning Greek as a Foreign Language. In addition, when students work in pairs to create their digital stories, they learn how to work cooperatively, which is a substantial competence for the 21st Century.

Keywords: *Digital Storytelling, Microsoft Sway, Word clouds, Cooperative Learning.*

Chapter one: digital storytelling

Introduction

In the recent past, rapid changes in technology have led to many new discoveries. Education is one of the sectors positively impacted by new technological developments (Timucin, 2006). The importance of technology assisted learning as a medium of instruction for various communities throughout the world indicates demand has been increasing. Therefore, the focus in the classroom must shift from promoting technology integration to promoting technology-enabled learning, aimed at preparing students for future academic success and careers (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2013).

The technological advancements witnessed in the educational sector have resulted in gradual development of new teaching and learning methods (Park & Son, 2009). According to Shin and Son (2007), the changes have contributed to significant improvements in the field of education. Most of these modifications have been observed in technology assisted learning, where reforms have been done to curricular and pedagogical designs (Alshumaimeri, 2008). Implementation of Computer Assisted Learning in a classroom focuses on teachers and boards of education concerned with adoption of the technology to aid in the teaching and learning processes (Baskaran & Shafeeq, 2013). The process of utilising technology to create digital storytelling is one area which utilizes technology in large part.

One aspect of this digital learning is the collaborative/cooperative patterns and processes students use when working in groups creating digital stories. "Digital storytelling is the process of creating a short, emotional, and compelling story through the combination of different technological modes" (Christiansen & Koelzer, 2016, p. 2). A digital story is a "2 to 5 minutes movie-like digital production that teams create using one of several readily available software programs" (Rance-Roney, 2008, p. 29). However, for technology to be used effectively in schools to create digital stories, it must be

developed within a framework allowing technology to be used fully by students, especially in the current structure of student led learning (Prensky, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

This Teacher Action Research project is designed to investigate how the use of digital storytelling enhanced the teaching of Greek as a Foreign Language and what benefits and challenges learners experienced when creating digital stories together.

The aims of this research was to look at how using Microsoft Sway assisted students with writing their digital stories in Greek and if by working in pairs they learned how to work cooperatively, which is a significant skill for the 21st Century.

Necessity of the Study from a Teacher Action Research Perspective

This study will provide first hand experiences of students as they create digital storytelling within a Greek language classroom where non-Greek speakers are learning the language using different technological approaches. To the best of my knowledge, no specific study has been conducted on how digital storytelling works in the Greek language classroom, so this is an important contribution to the literature on digital storytelling in this area. Specifically, it examines how students used Microsoft Sway to create their digital stories in pairs and learned to work cooperatively to produce good pieces of writing in Greek; therefore, the activity framework used in this project, guided the researcher to investigate the method of teaching and to explore this method through activity in which students participated rigorously. It enabled the researcher to examine how students accomplish efficient learning experience using new technologies and working cooperatively.

Research Questions

1. What benefits did learners experience from using technology to create a story?
2. What benefits and challenges did the learners experience working cooperatively during the creation of their digital stories in the foreign language?

Chapter two: literature review

Introduction

This chapter is designed to review the relevant literature supporting this investigation. Reviewing the literature creates a platform where the reader is provided with a detailed explanation of previous research work on the topic. The primary objective of conducting a literature review is to avoid intentional as well as accidental reverberation of what has been covered by previous research. For this reason, the literature will be reviewed from the existing journals, published books, and electronic sources if any (Sabti & Chaican, 2014) and a review of relevant literature that supports this investigation of digital storytelling and its advantages. This chapter will begin with an overview of key ideas of the integration of technology along with educational integration of information technology. The chapter will then investigate the history of digital storytelling. The chapter will end with an overview of digital storytelling examples and studies of digital storytelling (L2) which have been conducted and the conclusions drawn from these studies.

Significance of DST in Language Teaching and Learning

Overall, digital storytelling is a beneficial and valuable mechanism for improving the four-skill areas of English and other foreign language competency (Brenner, 2014). It is extremely important teachers utilize digital storytelling in foreign language learning (Sadik, 2008). Moreover, with regard to technology use in today's classroom, Bryan and Brown (2005) insisted on a strong foundation of different types of literacies affects student learning: digital, global, visual, information, and most notably, technology. Therefore, digital storytelling, as a method of teaching, highly supports active engagement of the learner. This way of learning is based on independent pupil's work, gaining of experience, analysing, and interpreting them, and on this basis, the effective construction of own knowledge (Brenner, 2014). The students through the collaborative activities participate actively in the learning process and manage to direct their own learning, which is a significant skill of the learning communities (Papadopoulos & Griva, 2014).

Implementation of Digital Storytelling in the Classroom

Teachers should consider the integration of technology, pedagogy, and content leads to "a deeper understanding of the different and more powerful roles digital media can play in both teaching and learning" (Robin, 2008, p. 227). Furthermore, as Iannotti (2005) suggested, having fewer projects to manage would make it more feasible for the instructor to provide substantial feedback to students. When there is relevance to students' lives and their interests, students can actively engage in the creating, understanding, and connecting with the attainment of knowledge (McCombs & Whisler, 1997). Storytelling in the classroom can be a beneficial and valuable mechanism for improving the four-skills area of L2 language competency (Trondheim, 2011). The benefit of the digital nature of the story cannot be forgotten as well. The use of IT tools allows an affordable and easy way (using the Internet) to reach an unlimited audience for stories (Sapanro, 2014). But what is more important from an educational point of view, this makes it possible to work together on a project for students from different countries, speaking different languages, raised in different cultures. In consequence of direct contact, they exchange not only their stories, but also the experiences, thoughts, ideas (Picardo, 2012).

Digital storytelling has been found to be beneficial for improving the four-skill areas of English and other foreign language competency (Brenner, 2014). "Digital literacy is an emergent form of a literary practice in which learners draw on different technological resources to interpret, research, analyse, and produce information critically (Koltay, 2011, as cited in Christensen & Koelzer, 2016, p. 1). Christensen and Koelzer (2016) insisted "digital storytelling (DST) is a great tool to help EFL students develop language and literacy skills through authentic and meaningful ways as well as help them master the skills they need to effectively interact and communicate with other speakers in online and offline contexts" (p.2). "In the EFL classroom, teachers do not only face the challenge to help their students develop the necessary reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills in their second language (L2) but they also face the challenge to provide learners with meaningful and authentic opportunities to apply and practice such skills. . ." (Christensen & Koelzer, 2016, p.2). According to the research conducted so far, there is evidence to support the effects of digital storytelling on the development of writing skills among second language learners through collaboration and teamwork (Sarıca & Usluel, 2016). Collaborative writing very often involves collective authorship (Sevilla-Pavón, 2015). What really matters is the actual collective effort toward meeting a common goal or toward achieving a final product. Shared digital stories facilitate connections with others through shared experiences (Robin, 2016).

The opportunities to write collaboratively and to benefit from collaborative autonomous language learning are enhanced by the use of technology and multimodality, which allow students to develop their creativity, linguistic skills, and 21st century literacies (Castañeda, 2013) when producing, adapting, and combining different elements such as audio, images, video, sound or visual effects, textual materials, etc. These elements are put together to create stories from a very personal and in-depth perspective, the creation of which requires the students to work collaboratively while developing a set of linguistic and non-linguistic literacies. In Castañeda's (2013) words, the different elements are combined to create a "compelling, emotional, and in depth story" which helps students "build 21st century literacy skills in the foreign language" (p.1).

Tolisano (2015) discussed what she believes digital storytelling is and what it is not. She outlined digital storytelling writing it:

- is NOT about the tools… but IS about the skills…
- is NOT about creating media, but IS about creating meaning…
- is NOT only about telling a story, but IS about contributing and collaborating…
- is NOT about telling an isolated story... but IS about sharing and connecting…
- is NOT only about the transfer of knowledge... but IS about the amplification…
- is NOT about substituting analog stories... but IS about transforming stories. (p.18, 19)

Digitally collaborative writing has been found to empower students to write together regardless of time limitation and restriction of in-class communication (Hewitt & Scardamalia, 1998). Using collaborative online story-writing platforms (e.g. Storybird) promotes students' imagination, literacy, and self-confidence (Menezes, 2012). Similarly, using other multimedia-authoring software, including PowerPoint and HyperStudio provide instruction and support from teachers and peers and help language learners become more successful in writing, especially in planning and presenting digital stories (Rahimi, 2017).

More importantly, including digital storytelling as a part of literacy instruction assists students in experiencing discovery learning in which they use their personal experiences toconstruct knowledge through meaningful learning (Mayer, 2003). As students create a context to practise using

language meaningfully, they practise intermediate and advanced level language functions by narrating stories in a second language and engaging in the presentational mode of communication as their project is presented to an audience of peers. Moreover, with the use of technology to create a final product, digital storytelling gives learners the opportunity to advance in what Davis (2004) and Sadik (2008) term self-authoring and identity construction while at the same time practising second language in a L2 classroom.

Significance of the Research
This Teacher Action Research Project is aligned with previous research conducted on the use of technology in an L2 classroom but this project unlike the previous research was focused on the teaching of Greek in an L2 classroom. In addition, this Teacher Action Research Project added the specific use of Microsoft Sway and added to the literature because it utilised a specific program which proved to be an incentive for the students. Microsoft Sway can be used to support students' writing skills in Greek as a Foreign Language or in any other L2.
Ultimately, this Teacher Action Research Project aligned to the previous research conducted in terms of the importance of students collaborating and using cooperative learning to create work together.

Results
The main output of this Teacher Action Research Project is Digital Storytelling and specifically Microsoft Sway can be used to support students' writing skills when learning Greek as a Foreign Language. In addition, when students work in pairs to create their digital stories, they learn how to work cooperatively, which is a substantial competence for the 21st Century.

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