



AI-powered Writing Skills to Help Aspiring Authors Turn into Skilled Story Editors. An Editorial Project

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Abstract

Writing well, telling stories, and creating interest in the readers are techniques everyone can learn, provided rules from successful narratives are followed. This editorial project describes how a group of twenty 10th graders has honed and poured their creativity within an original volume of stories, using Artificial Intelligence. In the "preliminary phase," a local editor instructed the students on the most important techniques governing the narration phases, he also illustrated a set of successful editing mechanisms alongside the tough paths to publication. In the "engaging phase", the Italian and the English teachers provided learners with the foundations of storytelling (plots, settings, characters, conflicts, resolution, points of view) through a range of examples from various works of literature, cinema, and TV series, carefully selected from customized AI prompts. In the "workshop phase", the students' creative sparks were collaboratively guided into a collection of twenty stories, purposefully titled "Twenty Worlds, by Storytellers" (Italian and English Language). The "performance phase" involved all classmates in the final presentation of their manuscript to relatives and friends followed by a copy-sign event in a local bookshop spent convincing new readers to buy the remaining copies, after signing them. Digital, literacy, and communication competences increased together with teamwork, entrepreneurship, and multilingual skills and contributed to the volumes sold-out.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, storytelling, writing skills, action-oriented, ICT

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Literature Review

Since the dawn of time, narration has been part of man's history as an intrinsic need to tell and create ideas, pass on values, and stimulate sensations. The effectiveness of storytelling is demonstrated by the fact that even today, in its modern digital guise with the combined use of codes, sounds, and images, storytelling still maintains all its charm and informative power, essentially making it the most used medium in social media and communication. There have been significant changes in the last 20 years in the planning and creation of stories, as well as in the use of multimedia to help spread those stories. Narratives can now be created and presented in a much better way thanks to the growing use of computers for storytelling and a range of hardware and software systems (Van Gils 2005). Traditional storytelling and the use of computers in the classroom have, to some degree, taken different routes thus far (Banaszewski 2005). Therefore, it is necessary to further integrate computer use and storytelling in the classroom. Pitler (2006) argued that technology is more beneficial when it is incorporated into a larger plan for educational advancement. The new frontier is in fact precisely the one that sees digital storytelling increasingly used in the field of teaching. This is both for the now consolidated effectiveness of the storytelling tool for learning purposes, and for the new, infinite potential generated by the combination with the macrocosm of the web. Not only does multimedia storytelling foster students' learning abilities, but it also generates new skills, which are essential both in the school environment and for dealing with the challenges of the world of work and the various aspects of everyday life in general. Thus, "digital storytelling gives students a strong foundation in what are being called '21st Century Skills'" (Miller, 2009)

This study aims to describe how a group of twenty 10th graders honed and poured their creativity into writing a volume of personal stories exploiting technologies and Artificial Intelligence not for the creation of stories -that have remained genuinely authentic and personal- but rather for the organization of the foundations of the narrative itself, namely: plots, settings, characters, conflicts, resolutions and points of view.



1.2 Central Theme, Learning Objectives and Research Questions

This project can be defined as innovative because we have tried to combine all the stimuli to which the learning and teaching processes have been subjected in the last decade. At an international level, the United Nations Agenda 2030 with Goal n.4 “Quality Education” urges discovering the world’s greatest lesson and a wide range of activities and digital materials, all designed to motivate students and inspire them to become informed and active citizens while providing safe, non-violent, inclusive, and effective learning environments for all. Moving down to the European context, we tried to follow the European Commission’s Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning supporting educational staff in implementing competence-based teaching and learning approaches; encouraging a variety of learning contexts and methodologies, and, exploring new strategies to assess and validate key competences needed for pupils’ personal fulfilment, development, employability and social inclusion and active citizenship. Also, the indications from the Italian Ministry of Education whose National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) promotes a new educational system that places young people at the forefront, to guarantee them the skills and abilities necessary to meet the challenges of the future thanks to innovative classrooms, equipped with ICT networks and laboratories.

Also, it is an action-oriented study since, albeit with distinct objectives, the twenty students were engaged in task-based storytelling activities originating from contingent needs analysis: how to actively engage students with L1 and L2 language (Italian and English) in meaningful contexts, safely using AI and technologies? How to foster storytelling and learner-centeredness while complying with the National Ministerial guidelines for teaching? How to get students to maximize L1 and L2 written and oral interaction by narrating experiences, constructing meanings, and unlocking imagination?

2. Needs Analysis: the Birth of “The Storyteller” Editorial Project

With a careful analysis of the students’ needs and considering all the coordinates at our disposal it was decided to join the two disciplines, namely Italian literature and English literature in a collaborative attempt to find a convincing and innovative solution to motivate learners. An editorial project purposefully called “The Storyteller” was devised with the collaboration of a local book editor and owner of a small editing company (“Linee Infinite”) who voluntarily lent himself to instruct the students on the most important techniques governing the narration phases. It is important to underline that the project is purposefully “editorial” and not exclusively storytelling-related because the four working groups did not limit themselves to telling stories but, following the meaning of “editor” as someone who edits the words, punctuation, overall story, and/or formatting in a manuscript, the students needed to be good at fact-checking and paying attention to details. Their editor’s responsibilities generally required that they also kept up with deadlines, tweaked content so that it was error-free and easy to read for the intended audience, verified facts, proofread and checked that the final formatting looked clean and professional, and finally worked all together to properly develop the stories, prose, dialogues, writing style and voice.

3. “The Storyteller” Editorial Project: Methodology and Phases

3.1 Preliminary Phase

“The Storyteller” editorial project began with a general introduction of storytelling as a dynamic and engaging experience, not just about entertainment but also about communication, empathy, and understanding different perspectives. The twenty students were then divided into five groups, each of which was well-balanced to include both linguistic, technological, and creative skills as well as some weaknesses that could be addressed through peer-to-peer and collaborative instruction.

Then, a book editor was invited as a guest speaker to give a presentation about effective writing. Along with illustrating a series of effective editing mechanisms and the challenging routes to publication, the specialist editor taught the students the most crucial techniques governing the narrative phases and styles. The expert reinforced the values and importance of writing, explained that storytelling is hard work and, shared with students the struggles in grappling with difficult topics. Importantly, significant examples were provided displaying the chronology of one of his published works: first ideas, successive drafts, submitted manuscript, reviewers’ suggested changes, revised



version, galley proofs, and final published version. In so doing he reinforced the idea that writing takes effort, and learners, working together, were not to be discouraged by their own pace or progress.

3.2 Engaging Phase

In the “engaging phase”, the Italian and the English teachers provided learners with the foundations of storytelling through a range of examples from various works of literature, cinema, and TV series, carefully selected from customized AI prompts. Specifically, students were framed with modern and old examples of storytelling from English literature (*The LandLady* by Roald Dahl) and Italian literature (*Il Decamerone* by Giovanni Boccaccio). *Chat GPT* proved beneficial because it helped gain practical knowledge and strategies for breaking down the key elements of a story, including plots, settings, characters, conflicts, resolution, points of view. Properly tailored AI cues assisted both teachers and students to implement the time and place settings (where and when stories take place) offering a variety of choices in terms of time frame (past, present, future) and the locations (city, countryside, another planet). AI tools (*Text.cortex*; *DeepL Translate*; *Google Synonyms*) were also used to develop original and differentiated materials, which gave students the support to realize their full potential regardless of their language level. This allowed them to create characters (people, animals or *sci-fi* beings) with strengths, weaknesses, desires, and fears. In AI-powered characters not just their physical traits and backgrounds were outlined but also their motivations, conflicts, and archetypes. These details helped groups understand how characters should interact (dialogues, actions, and thoughts), change, grow and evolve throughout the narration including sensorial experiences (sights, sounds, smells, and atmosphere description).

3.3 The Workshop Phase

During the “workshop phase,” students were urged to generate ideas, create story outlines, ensure that their plots were organized to keep readers interested, and edit and revise their writings to make them more coherent and clearer. They were also continuously reminded that writing is a process and that making mistakes and growing from them is implicitly acceptable. Finally, they were taught different techniques for resolving conflicts and achieving satisfying conclusions. Given the laboratory approach of this phase, the students’ creative sparks were thus collaboratively guided into a collection of twenty individual stories (L1) plus five group stories (L2), purposefully titled “Twenty Worlds, by Storytellers”. Common themes include love, friendship, courage, betrayal, justice, and overcoming obstacles, masterly interwoven throughout the plots, through the characters’ actions and decisions. Skilled in story writing, students also managed conflicts as driving forces inside the narrations, discriminating between internal conflict (struggles within a character’s mind or heart) and external conflict (struggles between a character and an outside force, such as another character, nature, society, or fate). By introducing inciting incidents and making conflicts compelling, tensions and challenges escalated as their stories progressed, leading to unexpected climaxes, falling actions, and resolutions keeping readers eager to find out what happened next.

3.4 The Performance Phase

In this phase, the students had the opportunity to develop other digital skills, beyond the mere narration, because collaboratively they shared their writings, proofread them, adjusted imperfections, improved styles, and made the whole texts cohesive. As often happens with properly edited manuscripts, they also had to add acknowledgments, dedications, thank-you notes, and citations from expert scholars. To complete the editing work, the publishing house which had collaborated in the drafting and management along all the manuscripts’ phases, then took care of making a publication of 100 copies that the students then presented in an official evening in front of relatives, friends, citizens as well as other students from the school. This involved interviews, reviews, personal hints related to their commitment, and summaries of their entire productions thus displaying competent mastery of public speaking skills. The event was followed by a copy-sign event in a nearby bookstore where new readers were persuaded to purchase the unsold copies, after signing them.

4. Conclusions

This innovative editorial project has shown that not only is storytelling a real skill, but it also generates Communication, Collaboration, Critical Thinking, and Creativity (4Cs) which are critical skills to



navigate this new present where AI is part of our daily lives. The combination of storytelling and AI has equipped students with novel and unexpected competences other than fostering collaboration and active learning. Monitoring students employing observation grids throughout the different phases, has highlighted that the use of digital storytelling in teaching creates a valuable bridge between today's high-tech world and that of traditional school, generating interest, attention, and motivation for students, who now belong to the category of "digital natives". With the advent of AI, storytelling has never been so effective, so simple, accessible to everyone, and above all immediate, thanks to the speed and spontaneity of sharing content for educational, informative, recreational, artistic, and even commercial purposes. Students, finally involved in the creation of digital stories, can thus develop advanced communication skills, learning to organize ideas, ask questions, express opinions, and construct narratives, thus promoting the possibility of personalising learning, improving the technical aspects of language, and the development of critical thinking. Furthermore, there is greater involvement on the part of students with reading or writing difficulties or with relational difficulties, since the creation of an editorial project with digital storytelling activities has proved particularly suited to being carried out in groups. This provides the opportunity to work through cooperative activities and peer tutoring, further enhancing the various technological skills, linguistic (L1 and L2), descriptive skills, and reinforcing relational skills.

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