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Learning the Monuments of my City: Contemporary Teaching Approaches in Primary Education through Digital Storytelling

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Abstract
This essay explores how digital storytelling can facilitate the teaching process of modules related to history. Occasioned by a literary book and parallel activities, the first grade students of a Primary School get in touch with three different axes: the world of ICT, the love of reading and history. With the power of storytelling they approach social issues, combing at the same time their creativity with research and historical knowledge of their region. In particular, an attempt was made to find a common ground between the two seemingly incompatible languages, the magical language of literature and the scientific one of history. Throughout this endeavor, ICTs functioned as the missing link between the two, through digital storytelling. In the light of the aforementioned, the effectiveness of the exploitation of digital storytelling in the acquisition of historical knowledge was studied. A series of teaching interventions were designed and implemented, aiming to knowledge about the existence and operation of local historical monuments and the acquisition of knowledge in a playful way. Working in groups, the students freely expressed their preferences, made virtual artistic interventions in the monuments' surroundings and enriched their knowledge with a multimedia poster.
The research was completed with the creation of a poem with the contribution of the students to the level and extent to which their young age allows them as well as, their cognitive and cultural background. The poem was lined with a well-known melody, forming the basis of a digital story made using a multimedia tools. The results of the research show that the interactive approach of local history has contributed to the assimilation of knowledge, while at the same time has subsidized the engagement in this difficult field of knowledge.

Keywords: Storytelling, Digital Storytelling, History of the 1st Grade of Elementary School

1. Introduction

The ever-changing society requires the search for complex processes to help students acquire skills and knowledge and develop attitudes and behaviors as well, outside of the strict and limited framework of school learning.

More and more teachers worldwide are using storytelling as a great technique in the process of learning and comprehensive a subject. According to Jerom Bruner, knowledge is acquired in two different but interrelated ways, logical-scientific and narrative (Kotronidou & Toziou, 2011). The first way, through rational assumptions and scientific methods, aims at representing the truth, and the second at understanding it. Furthermore, Graikos and Tsilimeni (2007) refer to the dual role of storytelling, arguing that its use in the educational process on the one hand creates an appropriate learning environment and on the other hand transmits messages, perceptions, knowledge, universal values and behaviors.

Storytelling thus is among the most important means of communication. Through the exchange of personal experiences, students enrich their knowledge, recognize the values of life, interact with different cultures, understand diversity and accept it. Collaboration, discussions and negotiations are encouraged, as tactics necessary for children socialization as well as for peaceful problem solving (Mokhtar, Halim, & Kamarulzaman, 2011).They also argue that students either as narrators or as listeners have the opportunity to read, write, and hear and speak through interaction processes, which reinforces the belief that the use of

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storytelling in education, in addition to its recreational role, has positive effects on children's intellectual, social and emotional development (Mokhtar et al., 2011).

Digital storytelling is defined as the combination of traditional storytelling with new technologies, where text meets digital images, audio, video and the narrative voice of its creator (Garetty, 2008). Rapid access, instant communication, exchanging of views, ideas, information and experiences through storytelling, also contribute to social interaction. The use of digital media and sources, the combination of text, sound and images make the narrative more graphical and vivid by revealing elements of the creator's emotional world. After all, Porter (2005, as cited in Wang & Zhan, 2010) argues that the integration of digital technologies into a narrative offers a deeper dimension and more vivid colors to characters, situations, experiences and ideas.

In Sadik (2008), both Bruner and Gils argue that digital storytelling is a simple, yet effective method of helping children reach the obscure world of experiences through storytelling. In recent years, the fact that a range of technology tools has become available and easily accessible to educational institutions, has helped teachers create their own stories that enhance the teaching of various disciplines by helping to understand abstract concepts. In addition, a digital story, rich in multimedia material, can capture the interest of students, especially of those "weak readers and writers" who are reluctant to openly express their personal opinion (Kapaniaris & Papadimitriou, 2012) and make them turn to the pursue of new ideas (Yuksel-Arslan, Yildirim & Robin, 2016). On the other hand, engaging children in digital storytelling subsidizes collaboration (Alismail, 2015) and brings to the surface talents and skills related to storytelling, project development, production and material management, etc. that would otherwise remain idle. It stimulates the learning process as students, through collaboration, reflection and interpersonal processes, are actively involved and become themselves the heroes in their personal stories that are reinforced by their own voice (Ohler, 2008, cited in Smeda). , Dakich & Sharda, 2014). In essence, they create a short audiovisual work using photographs, music and recorded narration (Meliadou, Nakou, Goukos & Meimaris, 2011).

Moreover, digital storytelling is directly related to what many educators define as 21st century literacy and is about children acquiring skills that combine digital and global literacy, technology literacy, visual literacy, and information literacy.

2. Content of the research
The content of the research concerned the role of digital storytelling in the learning process and in particular, the teaching of local history in primary education through activities based on constructivism and collaborative learning. In this context, an educational scenario was created to answer the following research questions:

- How can students research and collect information about the history of their place using ICTs?
- How is positive attitude subsidized through teaching interventions that adopt digital storytelling?
- To what extent is the teaching of history courses aided by digital storytelling?

- To what extent can students contribute to the creation of a digital storytelling with focusing on their area's historical monuments?

These questions were linked to the objectives of an educational scenario as well as to the tools used to draw conclusions from the qualitative research.

3. Subject of the research
This particular this essay has attempted to explore whether the use of ICTs, through digital storytelling, helps by substituting the role of the mediator in the acquisition of historical knowledge by students, especially young ones. It was investigated whether their role was significantly useful and necessary and whether the multimedia approach to knowledge ultimately helps children get carried away from simple storytelling to digital, turning it into a valuable educational creation and learning tool.

4. Innovation of the research
The innovation of this proposal lays on the fact that it is aimed at children of the first grade of Elementary School, i.e. 6-7 years old. This is the first time that these children interact with the history of their place, with storytelling and digital storytelling, with activities that enrich the teaching of different disciplines such as Literature, History and I.C.T. In particular, the study of local history through the prism of an interdisciplinary approach, has helped young children acquire new knowledge in a playful way and outside of traditional stereotypes, and develop skills, values and attitudes as well, in a way that will transform them from mere receivers of information to researchers, laying the foundations for their future engagement with the difficult field of History.

5. Aim and objectives of the research
The purpose of this research was to show that ICT, through digital storytelling, can function as the missing link between the scientific element of History and the fantastic of Literature. Digital storytelling, as a new form of art, has been the vehicle for young students to travel through their historical past in an amusing way that will help them give sense to their historical knowledge much more pleasantly and effectively. The combination of oral storytelling with multimedia eliminated the danger of sterile learning of the subject and subsidized a positive attitude for the subsequent contact of children with the world of History, laying firm foundations for the formation of historical consciousness.

Among the aims of the present research, was to familiarize students with the use of computers and specific free software, to enable their dynamic participation and action through a variety of ways of seeking, retrieving and appropriating their historical knowledge of their place in an experiential way, developing imagination, creativity, critical thinking and finally nurturing a spirit of collaboration and interaction, by sharing their experiences, to achieve a common goal, such as creating a digital story.

6. Methodology
For the purpose of the research, an educational scenario was created based on the theories of constructivism and socio-cultural theories of Vygotsky, where the fundamental role that social interaction plays in the creation of knowledge, learning and the development of the individual,

is clearly stated. The children actively 'constructed' knowledge using their previous knowledge. A literary book was the starting point for the children's engagement with the historical monuments of their place.

The teaching method followed was "collaborative guided discovery" whereby children were divided into groups and through various programs and worksheets the students explored, interacted with respect to diversity and built new knowledge.

The free online software used is touching children's interests and is easy to use, e.g. Revelation Natural Art, puzzles and memory game. With the help of Thinglink, kids have discovered that a simple poster, when a video, sound, text or other image is added to it, is transformed into a multimedia, thus making it more functional and attractive. Specially designed Power Points helped to the acquisition of knowledge that was later translated into poetry. Finally, the digital storytelling was completed with the help of Movie Maker.

During the survey, ethical principles were followed, such as respect for the dignity of the participants, their culturally diverse backgrounds, their privacy, respect for anonymity, full respect for community principles, confidentiality.

7. Implementation of the research "From the South to the North with a suitcase full of history"

The implementation of the research was based on the educational scenario created "From the South to the North with a suitcase full of history" and was based on 9 teaching interventions lasting 14 teaching hours in total, in the context of the Flexible Zone from November 2019 to February 2019. 2020. The teaching interventions were implemented with the participation of 18 first grade students of an Elementary School, by the teacher and researcher Maria Panoria, under the scientific supervision of Dr. Alexandros Kapaniaris, Post Doc Researcher, Department of History and Ethnology Democritus University of Thrace, Professor at the Open Hellenic University.

The sequence of the teaching interventions followed was:
1) Reading a literary book - Reference to the structure of a story (beginning, middle, end) – Filling in of the first activity sheet related to the narrative structure, 2) Searching for historical monuments through the Google search engine and collecting material, 3) Grouping and processing of material, 4) Acquisition of historical knowledge (Power Point) – Filling in of the 2nd activity sheet (placing historical monuments on the map), 5) Creation of a multimedia poster using the Thinglink program, 6) Landscape Composition with Revelation Natural Art, 7) Poem composition – set to music - recording, 8) Familiarization with memory games - puzzle games, 9) Presentation of the digital story.

The implementation of the educational scenario was completed with the creation of a digital story based on children's artistic creations using as sound background, the poem they composed accompanied by a well-known melody.

7.1. Aim of the program

The purpose of the program was for students to recognize the importance of the history and culture of the place they live and understand that their behavior and their own actions, as well as that of all people, are directly related to and interact with the place they live. The selection of a familiar environment was not accidental as the ultimate aim was to help children discover its value, learn to respect and appreciate the collective efforts of the past, while perceiving themselves to be the continuation of the history of their country, making tomorrow's citizens responsible. The students, being put at the center of the learning process, approached the historical past in an experiential way that withstands the passage of time, cultivated historical and critical thinking, and acquired positive emotions towards the lesson of History, forming a more complete personal, social and national identity.

7.2. Methodology of the program

First grade students of an Elementary School participated in the implementation of the educational scenario entitled "From the South to the North with a Suitcase Full of History" with teaching interventions conducted either in the classroom or in the computer lab. Both classrooms had internet access, a desk, a projector, a printer and speakers. The scenario was in the broader context of the Environmental Study and more specifically under the general theme "Our Culture" with a special focus on the chapter "How Do I Discover the History of My Country?", a topic suitable for reflection and investigation.

The research was qualitative. The general education teacher and researcher kept observation diaries, in which she wrote details regarding the process flow of each teaching intervention, recorded any problems encountered, the level of participation of the children and the learning outcomes achieved.

7.3. Evaluation of the program

During the implementation of the program, all children, regardless of their gender, learning and cultural background, participated enthusiastically.

It may have been difficult for them, but at the same time they were impressed by the Google search engine used to collect material, and with the fast and voluminous variant of images and information. Moreover, since it was their first time working in groups, the faced some difficulties in sharing roles (mouse handling, keyboard, image scrolling) as well as in agreeing on the selection and utilization of the material. Besides their intense disagreements, they found a code of communication and managed to complete their respective tasks. The whole interactive approach of the story of their place excited the children, because through exploration and collaboration, they expressed their preferences, their objections, they were led to new knowledge and came up with their own creation that they wanted to present to others. In addition, they got in touch with educational games which they deemed equally fun.

The role of the teacher-researcher was mainly guiding. Even though, the teacher was the one who used Thinglink web software to create the multimedia poster with historical monuments and Movie Maker to complete the digital story, all the material used was a result of the collaborative work of the children.

8. Conclusion

The students having little experience of the history of their place, through teaching interventions and the use of appropriate tools, became familiar with unknown aspects of local history with personal involvement and cooperation

with their peers.

The right/wrong questions, the material selection process, the creation of the multimedia poster, the design of the monument surroundings, the composition of the puzzle, the memory games, have all contributed positively to the creation of a pleasant, creative and collaborative learning environment, where everyone was involved according to their ability, both individually and collectively, to achieve a common goal. The different interactive ways of approaching the historical past have attracted the interest of children, who, outside the sealed strict order and sterile information citation, did not hesitate to experiment and make mistakes by effortlessly and experimentally acquiring new knowledge. Their cognitive development was evident as they were able to recall their acquired knowledge at any time.

At the same time, the groups, although heterogeneous, worked harmoniously. Any disagreements arisen, were creative. Differences in learning and skill background were not an inhibitory factor. On the contrary, there was a climate of mutual assistance and cooperation between the members of each team.

The composition of the poem by the children and its musical accompaniment, imaginatively linked the past with the present and the final result that was the creation of digital storytelling, helped to impress elements of the past in a fun and entertaining way, thus assisting in the teaching of History.

The students were involved in the creation of the digital storytelling as the images that accompanied the story were their own creations. In addition, the composition of the lyrics and the version of the song that frames the digital narrative, were the result of a collective and collaborative effort

In conclusion, although the research was qualitative, thus to a degree subjective, and was carried out on a very small number of children, the whole project is considered successful, since the way the educational scenario was designed has captured the interest of children and ensured their involvement and co-operation in the learning process.

Students acquired new knowledge in a creative and innovative way. The exploitation of ICTs and the creation of digital storytelling positively reinforced students' knowledge- building and attitudes towards History lessons. Furthermore, the desire expressed on their behalf, was not only to visit all of these monuments one day, but also to be involved with other monuments in the future, declaring in this way their positive attitude towards the subject of history and their interest for further engagement.

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