

## Chapter Three

# Digital Storytelling as Didactical Approach to Encourage Multicultural Thinking

### Nada Trunk Širca

University of Primorska, International School for Social and Business Studies, and EMUNI, Slovenia  
nada.trunk@emuni.si

### Anica Novak Trunk

EMUNI, International School for Social and Business Studies, and DITR, Slovenia  
anicanovak@yahoo.co.uk

### Dorsaf Ben Malek

Virtual University of Tunis, Tunisia  
dorsaf.benmalek@uvt.tn

**Purpose** The purpose of the current chapter is to present digital storytelling as a potentially promising didactical tool to develop the multicultural mindset of local and international students.

**Study design/methodology/approach** In this chapter, we will proceed by exploring digital storytelling as a tool for learning, studying its characteristics and elements, and presenting its educational uses.

**Findings** It is believed that digital storytelling is the tool that should be put forth in order to develop local and international students as global citizens by fostering their multicultural thinking.

**Originality/value** The value of the current chapter lies in its serious endeavour to provide novel avenues to develop local and international students' 21st-century skills and multicultural thinking.

### Introduction

Despite storytelling's use in formal and informal education in the past, the application of digital technologies gains importance in modern educational technology. Digital storytelling can provide one of the most relevant learning experiences; it can be a powerful tool for creating more engaging and exciting learning experiences. Most importantly,

digital storytelling has the potential to involve learners as knowledge creators in the learning process, rather than passive receivers of information (Lugmayr et al., 2016). By incorporating digital storytelling into their lessons, educators can help students develop the skills they need to succeed in the digital age. In higher education, digital storytelling is becoming more popular. Thus, the intent of the current chapter is to present digital storytelling as a potentially promising didactical tool to develop the multicultural mindset of local and international students. Therefore, we will proceed by exploring digital storytelling as a tool for learning, studying its characteristics and elements, and presenting its educational uses, especially those in relation to 21st-century skills and multicultural thinking.

### **Digital Storytelling As a Tool for Learning**

In educational settings, teachers and students (from kindergarten through graduate school) are creating digital stories on every topic imaginable, from art to zoology and numerous content areas in between. Digital storytelling has also become a worldwide phenomenon, with practitioners from across the globe creating digital stories to integrate technology into the classroom, support language learning, facilitate discussion, increase social presence, and support the design of e-learning applications and curriculum development. In addition, in adult learning, personal stories can be used to make content more interesting (Robin, 2016; Lugmayr et al., 2016).

As discussed in Kaya & Mayis (2018), digital storytelling can bring many qualities that cannot be achieved through traditional storytelling in an educational setting, namely:

- Students are actively involved in the process of digital storytelling;
- Students discover themselves in the process of creating a digital story;
- Students use technology effectively.

Digital Storytelling has become a powerful instructional tool for both students and educators. It allows students and teachers to bring multimedia, video, painting, art, music, and sound effects together and tell their stories. Digital storytelling in education is a tool that supports learning, promotes cooperation, improves decision-making processes, brings together formal and informal learning processes, and

provides students with active participation in the learning process.

There are many definitions of what a digital story is. They all coincide in pointing out that digital stories combine traditional means of telling a story with different types of digital multimedia: images, audio, and video (graphics, text, recorded audio narration, video, and music to present information on a specific topic). These multimedia elements are blended together using computer software to tell a story that usually revolves around a specific theme or topic and often contains a particular point of view. Most digital stories are just a few minutes long and are saved in a digital format that can be viewed on a computer or other device capable of playing video files. In addition, digital stories are typically uploaded to the internet, where they may be viewed through any popular web browser (Robin, 2016). Helen Barrett (2004) defines digital storytelling as a ‘modern expression of the ancient art of storytelling.’

### Characteristics and Elements of Digital Storytelling

Lambert, 2007 and Robin, 2011 gave an overview of the main elements of digital storytelling:

1. *Point of view*: What is the perspective of the author?
2. *A dramatic question*: A question that will be answered by the end of the story.
3. *Emotional content*: Serious issues that speak to us in a personal and powerful way.
4. *The gift of your Voice*: A way to personalise the story to help the audience understand the context.
5. *The power of the soundtrack*: Music or other sounds that support the storyline.
6. *Economy*: Simply put, using just enough content to tell the story without overloading the viewer with too much information.
7. *Pacing*: Related to Economy, but specifically deals with how slowly or quickly the story progresses.

Apart from those elements, Paul & Fiebich (2005) describe in detail five elements that are shared by all digital stories: (a) The combination of different media used to create them, (b) the type of action (content and user), (c) the open or closed relationship between the user and the

digital story, (d) the limitless context through linking to related, relevant information; and (e) the presence of multimodal communication. In sum, in view of the above, it is clear that digital storytelling is the result of a good combination of more traditional techniques of telling stories and the most innovative multimedia resources.

By using a combination of multimedia elements, voiceover, characters, emotion, and structure, digital storytellers can create engaging and compelling narratives that resonate with their audience. Much has been written regarding the personal nature of digital stories and the fact that this personal and often emotional viewpoint is an essential element of digital storytelling. Also, in education, digital stories are often personal in nature but can also refer to non-personal topics, such as those related to content-based subjects explored in the classroom.

### **Educational Uses of Digital Storytelling**

In an educational setting, digital stories can be used to enhance learning by engaging students in the creative process of developing their own stories, while also helping them to deepen their understanding of the subject matter. By creating digital stories, students can apply what they've learned in class to real-world situations, explore the topic in a more meaningful and personal way, and showcase their learning in a creative and engaging format.

### ***Digital Storytelling Pedagogy***

Digital storytelling is viewed as a pedagogical opportunity to combine traditional and creative learning methods to engage otherwise reluctant students in knowledge/skill development, allowing students to create a narrative and illustrate course content, showcase autobiographical learning, share a person's or community's point of view, as well as promote social justice (Grant & Bolin, 2016).

### ***Digital Storytelling and Diversity***

Digital storytelling projects have the potential to challenge students' understanding of diversity concepts and social justice issues and build critical educational and workforce skills. Critical and open dialogue on diversity topics can be inspiring, and multiple researchers have described digital storytelling as a tool to establish an open dialogue, create compassion, and sustain student engagement within a community of learners (Grant & Bolin, 2016).

### *Different Types of Digital Stories*

Major types of digital stories can be categorised into three categories:

- *Personal Narratives*: stories that contain accounts of significant incidents in one's life;
- *Historical Documentaries*: stories that examine dramatic events that help us understand the past;
- Stories designed to inform or instruct the viewer on a particular concept or practise.

Robin (2011) presents practical examples of how each type of digital story can be used in education:

- *Personal Narratives*. One of the most popular reasons for producing digital stories is to create a personal narrative. A good example of a digital story that uses a personal narrative is Almost Paradise.<sup>1</sup> This story provides an account of a mother bringing her children to the United States from South Korea, in search of a better life. It outlines the difficulties of coming to a new country and the clashes between a mother and daughter as they each have different feelings about their lives and their heritage. This type of story has multiple benefits in an educational setting. First, other students who view the story learn about people from diverse backgrounds other than their own, and they can gain an appreciation of the types of hardships faced by fellow classmates whose families have come from another country. A story such as this one can be used to facilitate discussions about current issues such as race, multiculturalism, and the globalisation that is taking place in today's world. In addition, a student who creates such a story can benefit from sharing that story with others and thereby use the information to eliminate some of the distance that foreign-born students feel between themselves and their peers. A personal narrative like this one can also be a positive means for dealing with some of the emotional family issues that were described in the story.
- *Digital Stories that Examine Historical Events*. Although many personal narratives can include historical information to add context

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.coe.uh.edu/digitalstorytelling/almostparadise.htm>

to the story, a different kind of digital story can be created from historical material that students might explore in a classroom. An audio recording of US President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address is used to illustrate a famous American speech. The digital story is published online<sup>2</sup> and was created by using historical photographs taken during the American Civil War and other materials found on the internet.

- *Stories that Inform or Instruct.* And while it can be argued that all digital stories inform (and perhaps instruct), the distinction here is that there is room to create a separate category for stories that reflect instructional material in content areas such as maths, science, health education, and instructional technology. Story<sup>3</sup> is an example of a digital story that was created to inform people about the ageing process and some of the things they can do to increase their health as they grow older.

And of course, stories can be created using combinations of these three methods, such as autobiographical stories that use historical material as the backdrop of a personal narrative.

### *Digital Storytelling As an Effective Learning Tool for Students*

Digital Storytelling can be a powerful educational tool for students of all ages and grade levels who are tasked with creating their own stories. This use of digital storytelling capitalises on the creative talents of students as they begin to research and tell stories of their own, learn to use the library and the internet to research-rich, deep content while analysing and synthesising a wide range of information and opinions. In addition, students who participate in the creation of digital stories develop enhanced communication skills by learning to organise their ideas, ask questions, express opinions, and construct narratives. Students who have the opportunity to share their work with their peers may also gain valuable experience in critiquing their own and other students' work, which can promote gains in emotional intelligence, collaboration, and social learning (Robin, 2016).

Digital storytelling is a deep learning tool. Barrett (2006), points out how digital storytelling facilitates the convergence of four student-

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.coe.uh.edu/digitalstorytelling/gettysburg.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.coe.uh.edu/digitalstorytelling/agingwell.htm>



FIGURE 3.1  
Convergence of  
Student-Centered  
Learning Strategies  
(adapted from Barrett,  
2006)

centred learning strategies: student engagement, reflection for deep learning, project-based learning, and the effective integration of technology into instruction (Figure 3.1).

For students, digital storytelling is particularly well suited to the constructivist classroom, where these students are able to construct their own meaning through the multi-faceted experience of selecting a story topic, conducting research on the topic, writing a script, collecting images, recording audio narration, and using computer-based tools to construct the final story. The result is a multimedia artefact that richly illustrates what the student has researched and brought to life and what they have learned from the experience (Robin, 2016). One of the most important features of digital storytelling practices is that students (in the classroom) need to be individuals who implement, think, and interpret, rather than passive listeners, to create and direct scenarios during the digital transition period. Activities in the procedure of digital storytelling in the classroom allow students to become narrators, writers, actors, and producers, and in this way, transform students from an inactive position into five participants of the learning process (Kaya & Mayis, 2018).

In addition to using digital stories as a distinct stand-alone activity, students might also be encouraged to develop instructional materials that can be used to support the educational topics and themes of the digital stories they produce. These educational resources can include

links to additional readings and websites, external media such as podcasts, interviews, or other videos, quizzes, lesson plans, definitions, and other materials that can be used to make the digital story the starting point for further exploration (Robin, 2016).<sup>4</sup>

Gregori-Signs (2014) and Smeda et al. (2014) stress several benefits that digital storytelling has for students:

- Digital storytelling allows students to evaluate the reality that surrounds them and produce their own interpretation of it; this contributes to the acquisition of knowledge-based skills and interaction with the physical world; social and citizen skills, and cultural skills.
- Digital storytelling can improve students' confidence and enhance their social and psychological skills.

### **Literacies, Skills, and Outcomes for the 21st Century**

As discussed in several kinds of research (Robin, 2008, 2011, 2016; Brown et. al., 2005), through the creation of digital stories, students gain valuable literacies and skills that contribute to their development:

- *Digital literacy.* The ability to communicate with an ever-expanding community to discuss issues, gather information, and seek help.
- *Global literacy.* The capacity to read, interpret, respond, and contextualise messages from a global perspective.
- *Technology literacy.* The ability to use computers and other technology to improve learning, productivity and performance.
- *Visual literacy.* The ability to understand, produce, and communicate through visual images.
- *Information literacy.* The ability to find, evaluate, and synthesise information.
- *Increase of Communication skills.* Students defend their learning and their ideas as effective communicators.
- *Increase of Research Skills.* Documenting the story, finding and analysing pertinent information; learners are looking for evidences

<sup>4</sup> An example of a digital story that includes these types of educational materials may be viewed online at [http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu/view\\_story.cfm?vid=397&categoryid=16&d\\_title=History](http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu/view_story.cfm?vid=397&categoryid=16&d_title=History).



to support their stories and have to think about how to put them together.

- *Increase of Writing Skills.* Formulating a point of view and developing a script.
- *Increase of Organization Skills.* Managing the scope of the project, the materials used and the time it takes to complete the task.
- *Increase of Technology Skills.* Learning to use a variety of tools, such as digital cameras, scanners, microphones and multimedia authoring software.
- *Increase of Presentation Skills.* Deciding how to best present the story to an audience.
- *Increase of Interview Skills.* Finding sources to interview and determining questions to ask.
- *Increase of Interpersonal Skills.* Working within a group and determining individual roles for group members.
- *Increase of Problem-Solving Skills.* Learning to make decisions and overcome obstacles at all stages of the project, from inception to completion.
- *Increase of Assessment Skills.* Gaining expertise by critiquing their own and others' work.

Garcia and Rossiter (2010) suggest adding to this list three other learning outcomes that result when students share digital stories. These are important for today's learners who will become 'tomorrow's citizens:'

- *Empathy and perspective-taking.* Shared digital stories allow viewers to share their experiences of the storyteller and enlarge their own perspectives.
- *Self-understanding.* Shared digital stories invite self-reflection and allow the storytellers to see themselves in new ways.
- *Community-building.* Shared digital stories facilitate connections with others and through shared experiences.

### **Digital Storytelling As an Effective Teaching Tool for Teachers**

Digital Storytelling can provide educators with a powerful tool to use in their classrooms. There are numerous ways in which digital storytelling can be used in education.

One of the first decisions to be made when deciding to use this tool in the curriculum is whether an instructor will create the Digital Stories or have their students do it. Some educators may decide to create their own stories and show them to their students as a way to present new material. Teacher-created digital stories may also be used to enhance current lessons within a larger unit, as a way to facilitate discussion about the topics presented in a story, and as a way of making abstract or conceptual content more understandable (Robin, 2011).

### ***How Can Educators Support Students in the Production of Their Stories?***

Educators can support students in the production of the stories in the following ways, as discussed in Robin (2016), Jakes & Brennan (2005), Lambert (2007), Morra (2013), and Ohler (2008):

- *Analysis Phase.* Educators help students identify an instructional goal and analyse aspects of the digital story related to the topic and script, as well as consider the potential audience for the story.
- *Design Phase.* Educators help students complete the script and storyboard for the design of the story as well as collect and organise appropriate media such as images, audio and video.
- *Development Phase.* Educators help students use technology, hardware and software to build the story.
- *Implementation Phase.* Educators help students plan how the story will be used and create additional resources, including lesson plans, handouts, and other supporting materials.
- *Evaluation Phase.* Educators use a variety of measures to determine if the students achieved the goal for the digital story project or need to revise the story and supplemental materials based on this input.

### **Digital Storytelling in the Project ME21aH**

Creating digital stories was also part of the project Mediterranean Countries Towards Internationalization at Home (MED21aH) held in the period from 2020 to 2023, in cooperation with four Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and one NGO from Programme Countries in Europe (2 from Slovenia, one from France, one from Spain, one from Italy) and twelve Partner HEIs from Mediterranean Partner Countries (3 from Morocco, three from Tunisia, two from Egypt, two from Jordan,

two from Lebanon). Students from 12 partner countries created digital stories on interculturalism in the period between February and March 2022. In this process, they were guided by their mentors in their digital storytelling training. Mentors themselves were guided by the instructional resources provided on the MED2IAH e-learning platform.<sup>5</sup>

Some of the North Mediterranean universities opted for totally online or hybrid training sessions; others chose the face-to-face mode to accompany their students along the process of digital story production. Students from Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Egypt created around 150 digital stories with the main goal of promoting intercultural awareness, cultural diversity, and open dialogue. The best videos were selected according to specific criteria, namely:

- *Creativity and Originality of the Design (20%)*. Creativity is the original, fresh, and external expression of the maker's imagination by using the medium to convey an idea, message, or thought. A compelling essay evokes laughter, sadness, anger, pride, wonder, or another intense emotion. The use and control of light to create dimension, shape, and roundness in an image or how the creator uses words to express thoughts and feelings can be considered.
- *Impact and Content of the Storytelling (20%)*. Storytelling refers to the essay's ability to evoke imagination, create a feeling, tell a story, or visually illustrate an idea. Message clarity is solid and able to motivate as well as inspire the audience.
- *Editing & Cinematography (20%)*. Videography and audiography include technical excellence, composition, lighting, style, colour, sound, music, editing, and Storytelling. The images, sound, and content should provide variety, exciting angles, imagination, and adequately convey the story, which enhances the story.
- *Structure and Navigation (20%)*. Structure and navigation include the comprehensive organisation of the content, proper technique and mechanics, prioritisation of information, and the manner in which users navigate through the story. The story should evoke the emotion and wonder of the audience, leaving them wanting more by the time they reach the end. On camera, subjects are presented in a manner consistent with and supportive of the story.
- *Engagement and Motivation for Intercultural/International Activi-*

<sup>5</sup> <https://elearningproject.eu/course-category/med2iah/>

*ties (20%).* Engagement of students in creating the video – attitude towards the training, cooperation with mentors and other students, dedication to the work.

- *Digital Storytelling Follow-up within MED21aH.* Following the digital storytelling contest, the students who produced the best videos in relation to their intercultural experiences and attitudes towards diversity were shortlisted to participate in a two-week-academic boot camp in June 2022 at the premises of EMUNI, Piran, Slovenia. During the boot camp, 23 students from Partner Countries' HEIS attended lectures and workshops delivered by teachers from the Mediterranean region. When they returned home, these same students were actively engaged in the next intercultural activities organised within Work Package 4 of the MED21aH project. Their engagement was first shown in their contribution to the handbook of intercultural activities, then in their organisation of small intercultural events within their institutions' friends' tea houses.

## Conclusion

As presented in the current chapter, digital storytelling is a tool that can serve many purposes, from educating and inspiring to entertaining and preserving history. Digital storytelling uses multimedia tools and platforms to tell stories and share information, which can enhance the impact and reach of the storytelling. Therefore, digital storytelling is a valuable instrument for teachers and students in higher education to enhance engagement, creativity, collaboration, digital literacy skills, and assessment opportunities. By providing students with the necessary resources and guidance, teachers can help students develop their storytelling skills and create engaging and meaningful stories. Digital storytelling can also be a powerful method for intercultural learning, as experienced in the MED21aH project.

## References

- Barrett, H. (2004). *Electronic portfolios as digital stories of deep learning*. <https://sites.google.com/view/electronicportfolios/storytelling>
- Barrett, H. C. (2006, 17 March). *Researching and evaluating digital storytelling as a deep learning tool* [Conference presentation]. Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education International Conference, Orlando, Florida.
- Brown, J., Bryan, J., & Brown, T. (2005). Twenty-first century literacy and

- technology in K-8 classrooms. *Innovate*, 1(3). <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/innovate/vol1/iss3/2>
- Garcia, P., & Rossiter, M. (2010). Digital storytelling as narrative pedagogy. In D. Gibson & B. Dodge (Eds.), *Proceedings of SITE 2010: Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education International Conference* (pp. 1091–1097). Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education.
- Grant, N., & Bolin, B. L. (2016). Digital storytelling: A method for engaging students and increasing cultural competency. *Journal of Effective Teaching*, 16(3), 44–61.
- Gregori-Signes, C. (2014). Digital storytelling and multimodal literacy in education. *Porta Linguarum*, 22, 237–250.
- Jakes, D.S., & Brennan, J. (2005). *Capturing stories, capturing lives: An introduction to digital storytelling*. [http://www.jakesonline.org/dstory\\_ice.pdf](http://www.jakesonline.org/dstory_ice.pdf)
- Kaya, S., & Mayis, o. (2018). Digital storytelling as a self-regulated learning tool. In R. Yilmaz, M. N. Erdem, & F. Resulolu, (Eds.), *Handbook of research on transmedia storytelling and narrative strategies* (pp. 209–232). IGI Global.
- Lambert, J. (2007). *Digital storytelling cookbook*. Digital Diner Press.
- Lugmayr, A., Sutinen, E., Suhonen, J., Sedano C. I., Hlavacs, H., & Montero, C. S. (2016). Serious storytelling: A first definition and review. *Multimedia Tools and Applications*, 76, 15707–15733.
- Morra, S. (2013, 30 May). *8 Steps to great digital storytelling*. <http://edtechteacher.org/8-steps-to-great-digital-storytelling-from-samantha-on-edudemic/>
- Ohler, J. (2008). *Digital storytelling in the classroom: New media pathways to literacy, learning, and creativity*. Corwin Press.
- Paul, N., & C. Fiebich. (2005). *The elements of digital storytelling*. <http://www.inms.umn.edu/elements/>
- Robin, B. (2008). Digital storytelling: A powerful technology tool for the 21st century classroom. *Theory into Practice*, 47(3), 220–228.
- Robin, B. R. (2011). *The educational uses of digital storytelling*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228342171>
- Robin, B. R. (2016). The power of digital storytelling to support teaching and learning. *Digital Education Review*, (30), 17–29.
- Smeda, N., Dakich, E., & Sharda, N. (2014). The effectiveness of digital storytelling in the classrooms: A comprehensive study. *Smart Learning Environments*, 1(1), 1–21.