Chapter 23

Should Pre-Service Language Teachers Develop Digital Stories?

Engagement With Digital Storytelling

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated pre-service language teachers’ experiences and capabilities in DST as well as their views on the use of DST in language teaching. A case study design was adopted in the current study. Eighty-three pre-service teachers participated in the study, and they created 25 digital stories. Data of this study came from the evaluation of digital stories and open-ended questionnaire. Pre-service teachers’ digital stories were analyzed using rubrics and subjected to descriptive statistics. Data from an open-ended questionnaire on pre-service teachers’ perceptions regarding the DST in language teaching were analyzed using content analysis. The results revealed that despite being novice DST-developers, pre-service teachers were capable of creating digital stories. They reported that DST had the potential to enhance students’ learning outcomes. In addition, they were eager to adopt DST in their future teaching. However, they complained that DST required too much time and effort, and sophisticated information and communication technology skills.

INTRODUCTION

Storytelling is one of the oldest forms of communication and has widely been used by teachers at all levels of education, from preschool to adult education. It has also been reported as an effective instructional method to facilitate learning outcomes in language, science, math, and technical education (Sharda, 2007). With the advances in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), today a variety of educational tools, such as Web 2.0 or mobile applications are available. Such improvements have also affected the way teachers design, develop, and use stories for teaching purposes and promoted the emergence of concepts such as digital storytelling (DST).

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-0119-1.ch023
Digital Storytelling Association (2011, para. 1) provides a comprehensive description of this new concept: “Digital Storytelling is the modern expression of the ancient art of storytelling. Digital stories derive their power by weaving images, music, narrative and voice together, thereby giving deep dimension and vivid color to characters, situations, experiences, and insights”. DST is regarded as the combination of traditional storytelling with digital technologies. With today’s technology, it is possible to create DST by combining text, images, digital camera video, or audio with non-linear authoring tools, Web 2.0 applications, and computers. Digital storytellers publish their products in the forms of web pages, interactive web sites, digital audio, digital videos, online games, or virtual reality worlds (Xu, Park, & Baek, 2011).

With respect to their content and key features, digital stories (DS) can be classified in various ways. Based on content, Robin (2008) offers three types of DS: personal or narrative stories, stories that inform or instruct (the type focused on in this study), and stories that re-tell historical events. According to Park and Seo (2009), DST encompasses certain characteristics including flexibility, universality, interactivity, and community formation. DSs include point of view (the main point in the story and the author’s perspective), a dramatic question (a question that keeps the audience motivated), emotional content (establishing a powerful personal connection between the audience and the story), the gift of the narrators’ voice (personalization of the story for the audience), the power of the soundtrack (the music embedded), economy (presenting the content in a concise manner avoiding cognitive or sensory overload), and pacing (the rhythm of the story) (CDS, 2005).

**DST in Teaching and Learning**

Previous research has indicated that although DST has been seen as a complex, comprehensive, and difficult process by teachers and students (Sadik, 2008; Sancar-Tokmak & Yanpar-Yelken, 2015), it has had positive influences on students' learning, motivation and engagement, attitudes towards lesson, and thinking skills (Hung, Hwang, & Huang, 2012; Schmoelz, 2018). It is asserted that DST facilitates the convergence of four student-centered learning strategies i.e., student engagement, reflection for deep-learning, project-based learning, and effective integration of technology into instruction (Barrett, 2006). Much of the research on DST has explored the effectiveness of using this tool on student learning outcomes. Sadik’s (2008) study showed that DST projects could increase students’ comprehension of the course content. In addition, Hung et al. (2011) proposed that a project-based DST approach could enhance students’ motivation to learn, problem-solving competencies, and academic achievement. Similarly, Robin (2016) stated that DST provided students with 21st-century skills including digital, global, technology, visual, and information literacies. DST is considered to be aligned with constructivist learning. It provides open-ended, creative, and motivating tools (Sadik, 2008), encourages creative problem solving via peer interaction in a collaborative learning environment (Smeda, Dakich, & Sharda, 2014), and helps learners in creating and discovering knowledge, and in understanding ways to apply new information effectively (Nam, 2017).

As DST is a deep reflective process feeding on the imagination of its creators (Nelson & Hull, 2008), students engage in researching, playwriting, designing, media producing, and educating all at the same time (Chung, 2006). Furthermore, students are considered to improve their narrative styles, writing structures, visual literacy skills, media literacy skills, and understanding of film conventions (Banaszewski, 2005). Students organize and present their findings and conceptions in a clear and lucid manner. Students can also convey their own messages, think deeply, evaluate their ideas, appreciate their thinking, build communication, and criticize their knowledge and ideas (Valkanova & Watts, 2007).
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