Chapter 13
Exploring Alternative Assessments to Support Digital Storytelling for Creative Thinking in Primary School Classrooms

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ABSTRACT
This chapter documents the use of digital storytelling as a teaching approach to facilitate the learning of creative thinking among students (aged 7 and 8) in a primary school setting. A constructive teaching approach is adopted to allow students to create their own digital stories based on an authentic experience and express their thoughts. The focus of this chapter is to show how a shift from traditional classroom assessment to more flexible, alternative assessment format facilitates higher level thought processes (e.g., creative thinking) and range of skills. Several issues and challenges of using alternative assessment in digital storytelling are explored and discussed. Findings suggest that digital storytelling may be effectively used as an approach to foster creative thinking. They also suggest that refinements to the assessment process are needed to make it more formative in nature.

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INTRODUCTION

Research studies in education have shown that information and communication technologies (ICT) coupled with the necessary pedagogical strategies could engage students in critical, creative, and higher-order type of thinking (Hollingworth & McLoughlin, 2001; Jonassen & Carr, 2000; Jonassen, Peck, & Wilson, 1999; Kearney & Treagust, 2001). However, whether these ICT tools could be used to engage students in such higher-order type of thinking depends on how they were being used in the classrooms (Lim & Tay, 2003). Like any tool in the learning environment, ICT may be used well or poorly, and care and experience are needed when using it (Healy, 2001).

In the recent years, there has been a shift from traditional methods of classroom assessment to more flexible, alternative assessment formats that capture higher level thought processes (e.g., creative thinking), range of skills, and capabilities. This chapter is our preliminary exploration (from 2008 to 2009) on the use of digital storytelling (Lambert, 2006) as a constructive tool to engage and facilitate the learning of language skills and the acquisition of creative thinking skills for the lower primary students. It focuses on how alternative assessments have been employed to support its use and discusses the challenges faced in the implementation of such assessments in English Language primary classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Storytelling

“Clearly we are increasingly visual in our orientation towards communications. Reading and writing literacies are adversely affected, as each generation sees the screen as a preferable expressive medium. However, the inherent values of textual communication begin to become stronger by contrast, just as the strength of recitation and musical orality became stronger with the dissemination of literacy” (Lambert, 2007, p. 27).

Bull and Kajder (2005) and Lambert (2006, 2007) propose the use of digital storytelling as a strategy to engage learners in writing. According to Bull and Kajder (2005), a digital story consists of a series of still images combined with a narrated soundtrack to tell a story. They reiterate that the focus in the language arts classroom should be on the writing and communication process rather than technical effects. Digital storytelling could be used as a constructive tool to engage students in higher order type of thinking skills as it could help students to ‘visualise’ and ‘verbalise’ their writing, develop creativity, and facilitate the learning of technological literacy, including the embedding of the voices of the students. In this creation process, students need to synthesise their writing and personal thoughts with clarity and organisation. However, it would also be necessary to design an appropriate approach to assess students’ learning and acquisition of higher order thinking skills through the use of digital storytelling. The major components of creative thinking are synthesising, imagining, and elaborating (Jonassen, 2000).

Synthesising involves skills such as analogical thinking, summarising, hypothesising, and planning. Imagining, as the name implies, is something that is less concrete and not as easily taught as other skills but it is important for the generation of new ideas. It also involves intuition and fluency of thinking, and requires students to visualize some form of objects or actions. Elaborating includes skills such as fluency, predicting, speculating, visualising, and intuition. Elaborating on information involves adding personal meaning and information by relating it to personal experiences or building on an idea. Elaborating includes