Chapter 23
Digital Storytelling in Language Classes

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the chapter is to introduce an innovative technique of teaching and learning that is the combination of the art of storytelling with the benefits of technology. Digital storytelling is defined as sharing one's story through the mediums of voice, imagery, music, text, sound, video, and animation. The main underlying theoretical basis of digital storytelling is cognitive theory of multimedia learning (CTML) that focuses on how people learn more deeply from words and graphics than from words alone. The chapter deals with what digital storytelling is, the theoretical framework of digital storytelling, its role in education, and how it can be made and used in teaching and learning by teachers and students.

INTRODUCTION

Storytelling is an effective and unique way of communication that takes the listeners into an imaginary world, motivates them to think about the happenings and phenomena and sometimes even induces them to do things (Handler-Miller, 2004). Storytelling makes connections between a storyteller and the audience (Smyth, 2005) and thus lets both express and share their emotions and thoughts.

Story is an old-fashioned human experience (McDrury & Alterio, 2003) and "a natural component of society and culture" (Frazel, 2011, p. 6). Stories are made, told, read, and listened to by people with different tastes and views (Jones, 2006) for transferring knowledge and/or sharing experience. The social value of storytelling and writing lies in the fact that stories can link past, present, and future generations (Chung, 2007) of micro and macro cultures and pave the way for the nation to preserve their cultural heritage. It is believed that as the food people consume makes their bodies, the stories they hear construct their minds (Wright, 2008) and form their viewpoints on the world and life.

Recent studies on human's memory show that the brain saves the events in the form of scenarios (Schank, 1990) or chains of happenings. The human's brain is story-oriented and experiences are kept like storyboards and thus are not very easily forgotten. This feature of brain and memory has inspired

practitioners and educationist to take advantage of storytelling as a technique for training, teaching, and learning (Handler-Miller, 2004). Storytelling can improve teacher quality (McDrury & Alterio, 2003) and is an effective teaching tool that helps students understand intricate and complex experiences and concepts (Sadik, 2008). Stories prepare learners for communication; make them literate; engage them in an entertaining way (Huffaker, 2004); help them learn language forms; and expand their vocabulary stock (Wang, Li, & Dai, 2008). It is empirically verified that stories can promote students' problem solving skills (Radbakhsh, Mohammadifar, & Kianersi, 2013); increase their attention and motivation (Mostafazadeh, 2010); lower the physiological and emotional anxiety (Zarei, et al., 2013); and increase their self-esteem (Soltani, Arian, & Angoji, 2013) while making learning more joyful and less frustrating (Rahimi & Soleymani, 2015a).

Stories convey their message when they are told orally, written in words, or are drawn as images. The most primitive way of recording and transferring stories into the future was cave wall drawings. This mechanism of knowledge transferring was altered fundamentally by the invention of writing and then printing press. In the 21st century, technology and its varying forms have had a far reaching influence on the way stories are told, stored, and shared. Traditional forms of storytelling now have evolved into modern ways of storytelling called digital storytelling (Frazel, 2011), where stories are told by the combination of narration, music, images, texts, and movies. In other words, the audiences do not just listen to a story or read it, they have this opportunity to listen, read, watch, and enjoy the combination of different media in the environment of digital devices.

This type of storytelling has attracted the attention of researchers especially pedagogues to scrutinize its impact on learning different subjects. Significant characteristics of digital stories such as flexibility, universality, and interactivity have made them a practical and powerful technological tool in instruction. In this way, listening to stories can grant the opportunity for students to enhance their engagement in problem solving and deep learning as well as working collaboratively in teams.

Although digital storytelling has been found to be a valuable technique of teaching, language teachers have shown some resistance to use it in their teaching due to certain reasons including

- A lack of confidence in their ability to tell stories or read storybooks aloud.
- A feeling that the language in storybooks was too difficult.
- A feeling that the content of storybooks was sometimes too childish.
- A lack of understanding about the true value of using storybooks.
- A lack of understanding of how to use storybooks and of time to prepare a plan of work (Ellis & Brewster, 2014, p. 6).

One way to overcome these resistances is providing teachers with required resources, giving them technical and pedagogical support to develop appropriate teaching materials, and providing them with other teachers' experiences (Ellis & Brewster, 2014, p. 6). To give more guidance to language teachers, this chapter deals with basic features of digital stories, the educational values of digital stories, and how they can be made and used in teaching. The chapter thus is organized in four sections dealing with theoretical framework of digital stories, the salient features of digital stories, educational values of digital storytelling, and the making of digital stories.

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