Meaningful Digital Storytelling Practices for Learning, Reflection, Creativity ans Social Participation

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Book review:

Carmen M. Gregori-Signes & Anna Brígido-Corachán (2015). *Appraising digital storytelling across educational contexts*. **Universitat de Valencia.**

Digital storytelling (DS) can be considered as a media genre itself. It consists in creating short stories (usually in the form of video between 2 and 5 minutes long) told in first person and using a wide range of digital media and modes of expression. More than twenty years after Joe Lambert and Dana Atchley created them in the US, the practice of DS continues to expand worldwide and in a variety of contexts.

Creating digital stories is neither a simple nor a short activity. On the contrary, it is a complex process that can take several sessions and involves the application of several skills, individually and collaboratively. In the field of education they have come to appreciate this value and have integrated digital storytelling as projects that promote significative and rich learning in people who produce them.

Despite being a book that belongs to a collection of English studies[1], *Appraising Digital Storytelling across Educational Contexts* is an essential book that contains a set of experiences about the application of digital storytelling and its value in different educational contexts and in many ways. It is not just focused on EFL or ESL[2]. Also, it is neither an introductory book on the practice of DS. The editors of this book, professors Anna M. Brígido-Corachán and Carmen Gregori-Signes of the University of Valencia, have brought together different central voices in the field of DS to build a volume that has the virtue of giving a comprehensive and global vision of relevant experiences with DS. These occur in different continents (America, Europe, Asia), in local multicultural contexts and in different educational levels. It is a varied work with meaningful knowledge emerged from real practices that should be interesting to those who integrate or want to integrate DS in their educational praxis.

The assessment of these experiences -the *appraisal*- is transversal. On one hand, it explains the historical evolution of the application of DS in different contexts and through different relevant projects. On the other hand, it includes theoretical reflections to understand the elements of DS and its impact. It also describes innovative experiences in different educational stages, emphasizing a diversity of research and study approaches of DS in education.

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[1] English in the World Series, University of Valencia Publishing

[2] Three of the twelve chapters of the book explain experiences using DS in teaching and language learning.

On a historical level, Joe Lambert's chapter perfectly summarizes the path followed by the *Center for Digital Storytelling* (CDS), a pioneering organization of the practice of DS. It describes four historical periods of the CDS up to nowadays – a creative phase, a literacy phase, a methodological phase and an ethos phase- where digital stories are understood not only from a broad and a generic point of view (neutral digital and media literacies) but especially from an affective and emotional health perspective. It is a vision of DS as a tool to promote welfare, social labour and the empowerment for social inclusion and democratic participation. It places DS as an ethical activity where the most important value resides in the stories explained by people and not in the technical or technological aspects involved in the creation process. The CDS doesn't lay the emphasis on the *digital* but in the *storytelling* part mostly because, and according to Lambert, the *analog* is not any alternative anymore.

On a more theoretical level, José Luis Rodríguez Illera's chapter analyses personal DS connecting them to autobiographical stories and specify revelation aspects of the privacy of the person who narrates, in the light of Goffman's *Theatrical metaphor* that reveals the pass from the backstage to the frontstage; from the private to the public sphere. It indicates the need to identify those markers used by the narrator as a source of expression -including the typical DS hybrid language that mixes oral and written elements of language- and indicate how to interpret the meanings of the story. This is a key theoretical contribution that sets personal DS as a *technology of the self.*

Dolors Palau-Sampio's chapter identifies and describes the progressive atomization of information in newspaper articles, increasingly lacking of stories that help to their comprehension. As a solution, the chapter recommends to provide a specific time and a space in the news so that the reader is able to identify relevant times and places and make sense of narrative journalistic pieces about facts and events.

Apart from this three more historical and theoretical chapters, the book covers different experiences with DS that provide important information about its implementation in different contexts and that appreciate their educational potential. Bernard Robin and Sara McNeil's chapter summarizes a long career at the University of Houston of work done with students in creating digital stories as learning projects, exploring and identifying their educational potential in different contexts. On the one hand they emphasize the creative potential of DS, and on the other, the digital and information literacy skills fostered, such as search, analysis, synthesis, organization and communication of information.

Grete Jamissen and Kristin Holte Haug of the Oslo University College of Applied Sciences describe an iterative experience that uses DS to bridge theory and practice in a program of professional education for future early childhood teachers that reflect on practices using DS. What we find most relevant is the identification of key issues they found during the project's implementation. In such a project that is aims to scale-up in an institution of higher education it may involve significant changes and cause resistances in the organization.

Collaborative work is very useful in DS projects when searching, creating and sharing stories. Ahn Nguyen and Bernard Robin share their vision of the story as a constructivist process. In other words, it is the construction of a story as a process of negotiation of meaning to overcome challenges and the connection of oneself to the world and to social constructs. Here, this socialization process of constructing a DS is a source of learning. This social aspect can also be useful to ESL students for building stories based on other stories told by members of their community. While learning English as a second language students get immersed in their social contexts.

Following this idea of taking advantage of the collaborative work Irena Maureen of University of Surabaya (Indonesia) highlights the important role of Vygotsky's ZPD where collaboration among students can build confidence in them. She proposes several group exercises to make student's thoughts explicit. For example, making a gallery walk to have a look at the storyboards created by their peers and using social networks like Twitter, Facebook and blogs to help in the process of socialization of useful information and help-seeking.

As Lina Lee explains in her chapter, using asynchronous discussion tools can enhance the development of skills to reflect on stories. She describes the case where Spanish as a second language students had to create new stories with VoiceThread based on news related to their

community. First, results show that creating these stories enhances language learning (both speaking and content learning in Spanish) and second, it develops multi-literacy skills. In these last three experiences the use of digital storytelling in ESL and EFL is described as a good practice for enhancing language learning.

In the last chapter of the book Mark Dunford and Alison Rooke describe the *Extending Creative Practice* project. This project extends the practice of DS with a group of elderly people from different European countries and with different socioeconomic levels. As explained in Jamissen's and Holte Haug's chapter, the implementation of a DS project in an organization first needs a *train the trainers* phase to master the DS methodology so that they can work later on with the final participants: the old people. This project aimed to increase their self-confidence and, at the same time, to promote digital literacy skills so they could be able to participate in the 21st century society and reduce the digital divide. This perspective has a direct connection with the the the *Center for Digital Storytelling's* ethical vision of DS –the *ethos*-. This project understands DS as an opportunity for creativity of the elderly, to make their voices be heard, to represent their valuable experiences and to have a mutual understanding of them.

Finally, it catches our attention the case-study described in Yuksel Arslan's, Bernard Robin's and Soner Yildirim's chapter because it describes an unusual experience of DS in education: the use of DS in a Kindergarten class of nineteen 6 year-olds in a school of Ankara (Turkey). How is it possible to work with DS with children who haven't mastered the written language yet? The teacher makes stories from students' ideas, drawings, photographs, etcetera, and even curriculum related. What catches more the attention on the results section is the influence of these stories in increasing the self-confidence of children, and especially as a tool to correct unwanted behaviours. When working with these young kids it is essential the guiding role of the teacher to find the story, posing inferential questions to discuss it, to work on its comprehension with students and to create the artistic and visual materials.

The creation of digital stories involves the activation of many cognitive processes and, therefore, has great value in education. In the twelve chapters of the book there are basic theory reflections that analyse the narrative nature of DS and there is a large selection of quality experiences that set the educational potential of DS in different contexts, whether they are used as a bridge between theory and practice in the university, to enhance language learning as a second language or as a foreign language, to facilitate digital literacy processes among young people and old people or to change attitudes and behaviours in early childhood education. It gives evidence of the importance of collaborative work and facilitating spaces for dialogue to find stories, make them better, tell them and share their meaning. And it is also important to mention the strong ethical and moral side of DS. Digital storytelling lets us find connections with our communities and its stories and discover their values and has the power to give a voice to those who haven't any. This is essential for people to fully participate in society and democracy. According to Lambert in this volume, *extending democracy and extending creativity are tied. Everyone's story counts*.

Recommended citation

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