

The pedagogical journey of digital storytelling: an innovative teaching and learning procedure using non /-formal education method through Digital Story Telling (DST). Case study: 5th Vocational evening School of Thessaloniki was introduced the method through an Erasmus+ project (DIG IT 2015-2017)

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Abstract

This study focuses on cooperation for innovation and exchange of good practices between educators, schools and organizations. It covers a variety of topics which link to labor market issues, youth unemployment, early school leaving, combating failure in education, entrepreneurial learning, implementing ICT technologies, digital tools and social media into education, enhancing both teachers' and students' digital competences. It specifically targeted students and introduced a new innovative teaching and learning method using non /-formal education methods through Digital Story Telling (DST) used in terms of an Erasmus+ project DIG IT (2015-2017). The key element of the project was the method of Digital Storytelling used as a way to reflect and document the workplace visits students attended during the transnational events of the Erasmus+ project. Students gained knowledge about the labor market skills and entrepreneurship through interviews and discussions with professionals and high-profile decision makers in Europe. These experiences have been shared by Digital Stories, which combined the art of telling stories with a variety of digital multimedia, such as images, audio and video. The project aimed to empower students and teachers, raise students' awareness of their character and abilities, to improve their IT and digital skills while working on Digital Storytelling, to raise attainment of underachieving students, to increase the knowledge of the labor market and broaden their horizons about the variety of jobs available. Participating VET staff, cooperated in adapting DST method into lessons, shifting their traditional teachers' role into coaches, integrating entrepreneurship and other important issues in their teaching, reaching today's students, engaging them in their own learning and inspiring them to become lifelong learners. Digital Storytelling Method enhanced on both students and teachers literacies as Digital literacy, Global literacy, Visual literacy, Technological literacy, Information literacy, Social and cultural skills, Collaborative skills, Critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making. In this context and in order to be used for teaching in the classroom, the teachers of the 5th evening vocational school were introduced the method in order to make digital stories. On the other hand, students with the help of their teachers and by using digital storytelling tools prepared and presented 2-3 minute stories, in relation to what they learned through the visits in terms of entrepreneurship, inspiration and innovation, cultivating their digital skills and soft skills. The project involved vocational partner schools from 5 countries, 100 students and 20 teachers. It continued through DIGIT 2 Erasmus+ project, aiming to exchanging good practices in matters related to (a) team coaching, (b) career guidance, (c) youth entrepreneurship and (d) digital storytelling.

Keywords: European Program, Erasmus+ programs, Digital Storytelling, Skills, Teacher Professional Development, Vocational Education.



1. Introduction

The European dimension in education is a concept that has been under debate through the academic community and for which there are various approaches and concerns, as it has been connected to the concept of EU (Philippou, 2007: 58).

European dimension is becoming more and more significant at every level and type of education, while in school level the main key point is to improve the EU integration (European Parliament, 2016: 59) by visible and various integrated extracurricular activities of school life.

Erasmus+ Program aims to contribute to the achievement of European values (European Parliament and Council, 2013: 57). By Erasmus+ program, EU tends to focus specifically on personal skills of learners in order to respond to macro-economic challenges. At the same time, it is noted that in Higher school education, European programs still prioritize their ideological goals (upgraded teaching level and learning outcomes, widening learners' horizons), compared to the area of Academic Studies. However, the connection of EU with schools through Erasmus+ Program surpasses the implementation of funded Mobility Programs for teachers and students.

EU by Erasmus+ program aims not only to bring Europe to school but also school to Europe. As EU cannot determine the content of the curricula followed by member states, EU through educational programs seeks to "find a place", in the "heart" of education, i.e. schools, teachers and students (Moniou, 2019).

DIG IT has been a two-year (2015-2017) Erasmus+ KA2 project Cooperation for Innovation and Exchange of Good Practices concentrated on early school leaving, combating failure in education, ICT - new technologies/digital competences/new innovative educational methods, managed by the Finnish National Agency for Education and Implemented in European level. Targets group – beneficiaries, have been Students in the risk of early school leaving, Educators, Vocational Educational Institutions and labor market.

DIG IT focused on cooperation for innovation and exchange of good practices between educators, schools and organizations. The project covered a variety of topics which link to labor market issues, youth unemployment, early school leaving, combating failure in education, entrepreneurial learning, implementing ICT technologies and digital tools and social media into education, enhancing both teachers' and students' digital competences. DIG IT project specifically targeted students and continued the "Repérer-Réparer-Raccrocher" (RRR) Project (2013-2015) which aimed to prevent dropout. RRR project trained teachers in Finland, Greece, Romania and other countries with innovative teaching and learning methods focused on the theory of multiple intelligences.

The objectives of DIG IT project were linked with different strategic frameworks such as Education & Training 2020: Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality, improving the quality and efficiency of education and training, promoting equity, social cohesion, and active citizenship and enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

Coordinating organization: North Karelia Municipal Education and Training Consortium, Finland.

Participating organizations:

- 5th Vocational evening School of Thessaloniki, Greece,
- Colegiul Tehnic de Electronica si Telecomunicatii "Gheorghe Marzescu" Iasi, Romania,
- Istituto Istruzione Superiore M. Pagano - Liceo Artistico "G.Manzu", Campobasso, Italy,
- Agrupamento de Escolas de Mangualde, (Teacher Training Center EduFor), Portugal.



2. The European project - Detailed description

- Fostering access to continuing VET, including groups at risk.
- Addressing low achievement in basic skills through more effective teaching methods.
- Enhancing digital integration in learning, teaching and training in various levels.
- Using non- formal education methods DIG IT boosts students and teachers labor market knowledge and entrepreneurial competences in European context.
- Using non /-formal education methods enhances their digital skills and introduce new innovative teaching and learning methods.
- Enhance social dialogue and partnership between education and employment by providing teachers, students and the representatives of work world & social partners an opportunity to meet and discuss and exchange information.
- Shifts the traditional role of the teacher in the classroom by placing learning procedure in the hands of students to reach their full potential and by empowering them to take ownership in their education.
- Enhance learning for employability and with Digital Storytelling method to increase students' intellectual skills for diagnosis and analysis, synthesis, innovation and learning to learn.

The key element of the project was the method of Digital Storytelling which was used as a way to reflect and document the workplace visits students executed during the transnational events. Students gained knowledge about the labor market skills and entrepreneurship through interviews and discussions with professionals and high-profile decision makers in Europe. These experiences were shared with Digital Stories. Digital Storytelling combines the art of telling stories with a variety of digital multimedia, such as images, audio and video. DIG IT activities can be divided into five phases:

1. Planning and training for the mobilities in home school. Use of social media and digital tools to connect with the partners.
2. Company visits and social partner organizations. Interviews and discussions with professionals and high-profile decision makers in Europe.
3. Digital Storytelling workshops for reflecting and documenting the visits. Editing the recorded interviews.
4. Evaluation, feedback, reflection at the home institution with the use of social media, digital tools etc.
5. Dissemination.

Educators' activities also included: project meetings, hands-on workshops on Digital Storytelling and social media tools & virtual worlds in education, group discussions etc. During the visits to work places students and teachers had an insight in the life of entrepreneurs. Conversations and the material gathered for the digital stories made the experiences deep and lead the students and teachers into a profound understanding of the skills needed in labor market. This has affected the way DIG IT teachers teach and to the updating of the contents of our vocational studies. Representatives of the labor market have had influence in many positive ways to students' attitude towards studies and teachers' way of approaching vocational subjects. The cooperation between students, teachers and representatives has been genuine and rewarding.

Approximately 170 students and 50 teachers from five countries worked together in four transnational training events and in two transnational meetings. A kick off meeting with an



educators' workshop in Finland in October 2015 started the activities and an evaluation & dissemination meeting in Thessaloniki, Greece in May 2017 closed the project. Two teachers from each participating organization took part in these meetings.

DIG IT ensured access to the transnational training events on an equal basis, especially for individuals at risk of being excluded and from disadvantaged backgrounds. The opportunity to participate in the project workshops and mobilities was especially given to those students that had challenges in staying at school, had less opportunities to participate in multicultural activities, had economical challenges to participate or felt insecure to travel alone.

DIG IT – project aimed to empower students and teachers, raise students' awareness of their character and abilities, to improve their IT and digital skills while working on Digital Storytelling, to raise attainment of underachieving students, to increase the knowledge of the labor market and broaden their horizons about the variety of jobs available. Participating VET staff, cooperated in adapting this method into lessons and schools' projects because

3. Digital Story Telling Method in education

3.1. Theoretical approach

Story telling is an ancient habit that helps people express themselves, identify and create a bridge from past to present, envision the future and reflect their experience onto it. It is an ancient art used nowadays in various ways supported by technology.

There are many definitions concerning Digital Storytelling. Putting it in simple words, it is mainly the art of telling stories using technology. They are small digital stories made by everyday people, allowing them to gain a voice and share experiences. These are stories based on authenticity and humanity or emotional content, intended to sensitize, challenge and mobilize. Despite the emphasis on technology, digital storytelling is not a new practice.

Since 1990, the Center for Digital Storytelling, a nonprofit community in Berkeley, California, has helped children and adults create and share personal narratives by combining writing skills and digital tools. Another pioneer of this practice was the British photographer, writer and educator, Daniel Meadows, who defined it as "small, personal, multimedia stories, taken from the heart."

Digital culture researcher and business consultant John Seely Brown described it this way: Digital storytelling is a new way for a story to be told using multimedia by children growing up in a digital world. These children have the ability to define the relationship between "context and content" and this relationship is the key to creating communication products.

The DST method is used in community support centers, in schools, libraries and businesses, from beginners to technologically experienced people. In the field of education, teachers and students of all levels use digital storytelling for a multitude of teaching subjects.

What do digital stories include? As in traditional storytelling, so in digital storytelling, most stories focus on a specific topic that they approach with a particular perspective. Their main elements are:

- Digital images
- Text
- Recorded narration
- Video
- Music



Digital stories differ in duration and are told for all subjects in education (mathematics, geometry, history, music, tradition), for some important person in my life, an important event in my life, something that I achieved, that I managed. Stories about what I do - what I have experienced. They give people a voice - another way to express themselves authentically. Digital Storytelling puts the technology in their hands and uses technology based on defined instructions, enhancing empathy and creativity. The skills enhanced through this method are Digital Literacy, Visual literacy, Global Literacy, Technology Literacy and Information Literacy.

Digital Story Telling Method in education:

- Is a proven practice,
- Is method of reflection,
- Is a method of empowerment: Gives students a voice,
- Is a way for students to use cross-subject skills and knowledge,
- Brings the classroom into the 21st century,
- Boosts entrepreneurial skills and mindset with the workplace visit, discussions.

Digital Story Telling Method enhances:

- Digital literacy,
- Global literacy,
- Visual literacy,
- Technological literacy,
- Information literacy,
- Social and cultural skills,
- Collaborative skills,
- Critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making.

The advantages for students are:

- Promotes leadership,
- Promotes team learning,
- Promotes out of the box thinking,
- Develops high self esteem,
- Motivates and engages them in the learning process,
- Is an alternative way of learning and reporting back the acquisition of knowledge.

The specific advantages for teachers are:

- Shifts their traditional teachers' role into coaches.
- Helps to integrate entrepreneurship and other important issues in their teaching.
- Reaches today's students, engaged them in their own learning and inspires them to become lifelong learners.

3.2. Different types of digital stories

Personal narratives - stories that contain accounts of significant incidents in one's life. These stories can be about a remembrance, relationships, about one's challenges in life, about of an adventure, a journey or an experience.

Historical documentaries – stories that examine dramatic events that help us understand the past. These stories can include historical photographs, newspaper headlines, speeches, and other materials to create a story that adds depth and meaning to events from the past.

Stories designed to inform or instruct the viewer on a particular concept or practice. It can be anything from public service announcement on an important local or world issue to



digital stories that have an instructional content on many different topics such as math, science, language, arts, medicine, etc.

3.3. Digital Story telling Method - The process and the elements

- Warming up activities
- Brainstorming and distribution of roles and responsibilities
- Assembling an initial script
- Planning an accompanying storyboard
- Sequencing the images in the video editor
- Adding the narrative track
- Adding special effects and transitions if needed
- Adding a soundtrack if needed
- Screening

Digital Storytelling was created by Joe Lambert in the StoryCenter (Center for Digital Storytelling 2005, StoryCenter 2015), a non-profit, community arts organization in Berkeley, California. Since the early 1990s, Lambert and the CDS have provided training and assistance to people interested in creating and sharing their personal narratives. The StoryCenter is also known for developing and disseminating the Seven Elements of Digital Storytelling:

- Point of View.
What is the main point of the story and what is the perspective of the author?
- A Dramatic Question.
The key question that keeps the viewer's attention and will be answered by the end of the story.
- Emotional Content.
Serious issues that come alive in a personal and powerful way and connect the audience to the story.
- The Gift of Your Voice.
A way to personalize the story to help the audience understand the context.
- The Power of the Soundtrack.
Music or other sounds that support and embellish the story.
- Economy.
Using just enough content to tell the story without overloading the viewer.
Pacing. The rhythm of the story and how slowly or quickly it progresses.
Step-by-step guide: Define, Collect, Decide, Write, Create, Record, Finalize, Demonstrate, Evaluate
- Select the topic for your digital story.
- Search, create or take photos or video for your story.
- Search audio resources (soundtrack) for your story such as music, speeches, interviews and sound effects.
- Do research work about your topic. Interview people, search the Internet, read books and articles.
- Clear the purpose of your story. Is your goal to inform, convince, provoke, raise questions, tell a meaningful story?
- Decide on the purpose and point of view of your digital story.



- Select the images and audio you will use for your digital story.
- Write a script that will be used as narration in your digital story. The script should be about 250 words long.
- Import images and soundtrack into the editing program.
- Record the narration and import it to the editing program.
- Edit.
- Show your digital story to an audience and ask for feedback.

Digital Storytelling is a “low-threshold” method; making use of simple and cheap technology. You can use whatever is available to record and edit. In the ideal situation you have a good digital camera, a field recorder, a microphone, headphones and editing software. The quality of sound and video are important but technology is not the main issue. The context is more critical and the idea is to use technology in a meaningful way in the classroom.

Tips for teachers:

- Do not skip warming up activities! You have to get students’ minds set in a creative mode!
Show your own enthusiasm. Encourage your students to go wild. Go wild! Smile, have fun - FUN is contagious!
- Throw yourself in the process. Show feelings and spread good mood around. Insist also the other teachers to be inspiring and encouraging.
- Do not give straight answers to students’ questions, make them think and give them time to come up with their own answers.
- Trust them!
- Encourage your students to look around and see. To open their eyes and become aware of what surrounds us and see things in a different way!
- Your students might learn faster than you do. They know their medium and the technology.
Use their aptitude to your advantage by letting students teach each other and letting them teach you. They will show their strengths quickly.
- Within a class, you’ll have great writers, editors, camera operators, and technicians. Give your students freedom, but also ask for responsibility.
- Emphasize good planning and a schedule!
- Encourage your students to learn from what they watch.
- Why do some movies have a greater effect on us than others?
- Learn the storytelling techniques by watching and analyzing movies.
- Be conscious of the copyrights and the intellectual property of others and teach your students to do also so.
- Encourage your students to create their own content.
- Discuss plagiarism and copyright.
- Learn about Creative Commons license and teach how to share photos with your students.

There are also many websites providing content in the public domain which offer a lot of interesting material. A note on copyrights - Copyrights of the materials used for digital stories are not an issue as long as:



- all the photos or video clips haven been shot by storytellers themselves, and music (or sound effects) are from the media library of the video editing application (and the digital story will not be used for commercial purposes) or from loyalty free music websites

If storytellers want to use photos or music of someone else, they need to request a permission from the copyright holder, or make sure the material has been published online with a Creative Commons or similar license, or make sure the material is not protected by copyrights ("Public access" materials).

4. Results

A guide, in 4 languages, has been developed for teachers and students available in our project web page and in DIG IT Youtube channel.

The results can be seen in changes in individuals; in the way they work, collaborate in everyday life and also being able work in an international environment. The process of empowerment in individuals included encouraging and developing the skills for self-sufficiency, independent decision making and in the way how students approach learning. The project benefited advanced use of digital tools and adaptation of the use Digital Storytelling model, which has been maintained and spread in the partner network as well as outside the network. Handbook of Digital Storytelling has created sustainability.

DIG IT videos will be found in:

- Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSSIFQC52u0EFgiacbgN1AA>
- DIG IT FB: https://www.facebook.com/pg/digiterasmus/about/?ref=page_internal
- DIG IT animation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hVJvOe2WIA&t=36s>
- DIG IT photos and descriptions of workshops: <http://digit-erasmus.tumblr.com>
- DIG IT guide in different languages & guide videos and information about DIG IT- project will be found in project web page: <http://digitproject.weebly.com>

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