THE MAKING OF DIGITAL STORYTELLING AS A TOOL FOR PROMOTING THE LEARNING PROCESS IN THE CLASSROOM

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Abstract:
This paper is the product of the reflexive work carried out during my academic interaction with college students, where I have incorporated the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as a way to foster students' expression and creativity. This is part of a research project that works on the mode of action research and which aims at exploring and understanding college students' inner life through digital storytelling, as a means to construct meaning inside the classroom.

Key Words: Digital storytelling, learning, classroom

> *How to produce innovative images and untold stories? How should they be?*
> *As those stories are untold yet, the answers will derive from making use of communication.*

Omar Rincón.

Introduction

It is a well-known fact that nowadays young people produce and create their own messages through ICT. This ability to produce diverse digital products is what Castells has coined as mass self-communication (2009). College students' digital storytelling is an essential means of communication used to express their points of view and to establish on-line communication with others in their everyday life, which is something fundamental for their participation in social and political life in times when sending and receiving messages has become an immediate and endless activity.

Despite of what has been mentioned above, it seems that inside the classroom there is no such communicative function. Students' proficiency in using ICT is denied, or at least it is not officially recognized. Thus, in broad terms, communications technology is neither fostered by teachers nor by schools seeing that, according to Ignacio Pozo (Cfr. 2009), college education is still centered on discourse and speech.

Storytelling is a way to construct meaning through the overt use of imagination, which in turn fills the gaps in students' learning, in order to articulate diverse content that is expressed in the constitution of an original and meaningful organizing structure. Hence the importance of storytelling, as it reinforces a particular section from the syllabus and at the same time allows students to freely express themselves through a digital production.

It is fundamental to emphasize the importance of storytelling, that is to say, the making of sense that students build up, articulating each individual's imagination with collective imagination by means of team work.

The type of digital storytelling that is considered in the present paper implies creating a digital material, either a photo sequence, a recording (which can be an audio book, a radio serial, a news report, a news bulletin, etc.) or even the making of an audio-visual production or a video (with a usual length of 3 to 10 minutes).

The central point of this paper is a reflection upon different learning approaches (appropriation modes) through the use of ICT, where there is a blended integration of reason and subjectivity, and where students' experiences have a privileged place, their worries, their hopes, their wishes, their fantasies, and this meaningful complex is the basis of the construction of meaning, and thus, it becomes the learning process itself.

The pedagogical proposal that we hold here has to do with moving from the teacher's central role to the experience of students' self-communication in the classroom. Our scheme lies on fostering college students' productive skills, to have them turn into self-communicators inside the classroom, through the teacher's design of activities that incorporate the use of ICT to the syllabus content by means of the production of digital storytelling. It is worth mentioning that in order to create stories, students need to write a script in teams. This collective production requires a reflexive process that can be inter-subjective, that is, the relationship established between peers, and intra-subjective, or the relation with the self. Both have an effect on imagination and the construction of meaning through the interaction of individual and collective work.

There is a traditional image of professors guiding the teaching-learning process that makes it difficult to be aware that as teachers we are not in charge of producing materials or directing the style, the form and content of the materials students produce. Along this teacher-oriented vision there is no place for students' practice for self-communication and the use of ICT, there is neither space for storytelling to become the guiding principle of the learning process. Such a pedagogical proposal lies on the fact that teachers, in a deliberate way, and after programming the task or design of the storytelling class, have to restrict themselves to being a guide or a mere coordinator whose only goal is to promote the planning of the script and to have a reflexive attitude towards it for its later implementation.

It is essential to make it clear that teachers will deliberately have a secondary role, as they will not control the content of the script and will respect the group's independence at all times. The teacher's role is that of nurturing creative and productive work, which in turn will allow for manifold perspectives, trying out different planes and angles, in the case of pictures or audiovisual expression, and as for aural expression, teachers should care about the different voice expressions, styles, effects, the use of silence, which are all part of the aural or language universe.

A very important aspect in the making of a script is that its planning should be based on the aural, visual and audiovisual communication, according to each particular case. Otherwise, a planned reflexive work around digital storytelling would never be done.

This proposal is based on the difference that Pozo (2009) pointed out between knowing how-to-say things and knowing how-to-do them. The making of digital storytelling is framed in the knowing of the how-to-do, it implies an inner process of articulating through imagination, knowledge and content that eventually will turn into a story. In the creation of a digital story the knowing of how-to-say things is involved, yet it is a type of knowledge that is expressed in pictures, sounds or a combination of both, which necessarily implies the incorporation of the subjective in an intentional way, emotions and feelings in close relationship with their social context, as this is a work that has been planned to be done in teamwork. Similarly, the how-to-do is closely linked to generating an original work around a certain thematic content on a digital story (aural, photo sequence or video).

Digital storytelling is based on comprehensive knowledge:
a) "To comprehend something means in a way to say something in your own words and with your own ideas" (Pozo and Mateos, 2009, p.34), so transferring concepts and ideas to visual or aural representations, or both, promotes the construction of meaning to the learner.
b) "If we want students to manage their own learning, we have to make them more and more independent when it comes to making decisions about learning, so that they can plan, supervise and evaluate their own development" (Pozo and Mateos, 2009:63). According to what has been said, the presentation of digital storytelling is done with the whole group. The first stage is to analyze and evaluate the work in a critical way by all the students who did not participate in the specific storytelling project, that is, for those who are spectators; then, the second stage is to do the same with those students directly involved in the making of the storytelling. The rationale of this reflexive stage is that of avoiding interference on the interpretation and reception of the story. Eventually, authors and spectators are involved in the discussion and reflection about the story.
The collective discussion has a fundamental role in the critical evaluation of the digital stories where students have a central role, which allows them to become aware of their

own narrative work and to understand the interplay between the particular and the social context.

c) "If we want students to develop autonomy and control over their own learning, we as teachers need to let go most of our power" (Pozo and Mateos, 2009: 64).

It is necessary to break with the traditional hierarchy established inside schools and to become facilitators and coordinators of a process where students have control over their own learning process.

Conclusion

Despite the institutionalized learning processes, it is possible to generate changes and new teaching practices that shall turn the teaching-learning process into an imaginative and ludic exercise with the help of ICT.

Teachers have to step down from their empowerment place in order to become "liberal" guides, promoters and coordinators of independent study, where students have to develop a central role, where they become self-managers of their own learning, and the only way to build this up is by expressing themselves in an individual and collective way. In conclusion, digital stories will have a fundamental role in the construction of meaning.

It is important to give feedback to students so as to go beyond the classroom and as far as possible, by means of having students present their work to other students and to other schools, or at least, teachers can show their work to different students in order to promote reflection inside the classroom. Obviously, uploading their work on the internet goes without saying, as it is something that students do intensively and extensively with ICT in their everyday lives.

It is of the utmost importance to foster creative processes, that is, the incorporation of imagination as a vital element in students' production and to acknowledge that, the construction of knowledge requires without a doubt the presence of imagination as a driving force that enhances creativity.

Digital storytelling promotes and multiplies the ways in which we see, listen, read, write, signify, relate and, above all, become aware of the innate capacity for creativity common to each and every human being, and which is not an exclusive attribute of what is traditionally called an *artist*.

College students have learnt and incorporated the use of ICT and they show it by using them in their digital stories through photos, sounds and audiovisuals, which makes students feel proud, since they perform a double function: they learn and have fun at the same time.

Similarly, it is important to say that digital story making for the construction of meaning implies a new way of conceptualizing knowledge, as Pozo and Mateos (2009) truly stated it, in which students become their own learning managers, through an intra-subjective and inter-subjective process, by sharing interpretations and displacing individual subjects as the sole creators of meaning. In this pedagogical proposal we highlight the singularity and originality of the narrative stories, where it is evident that there is not a sole outcome towards which we will inevitably arrive.

Finally, there is a growing need for avoiding the fossilization of models and institutional roles in order to generate new schooling proposals to meet the needs, characteristics and interests of students so that we can start to explore new ways based on our cultural heritage, and the special characteristics inherent to us and that require the shaping force of human creativity: "it is not what there is, but what could and should exist, what is demanded from us" (Castoriadis, 1989:99).

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