

The role of Digital and Traditional Storytelling on Teaching English to Young Learners- Detecting Gender Stereotypes in Fairy Tales

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Abstract: During the 21st century, a century of great technological and scientific progress, education and teaching should adapt to students' needs in order to make the whole process of learning more interesting, appealing, interactive and engaging for learners and motivate them to achieve their goals (Bellanca & Brandt, 2010; Griffin, McGaw & Care, 2012). English as a Second Language (ESL)/ English as a Foreign Language (EFL) can be quite challenging for Young Learners and that is the reason why ESL/ EFL teachers should always conduct a needs analysis and adapt their teaching accordingly by constructing and using creative material in their teaching, while at the same time they should employ not only traditional methods of teaching but also integrate technology, which is quite familiar to learners. A quite effective way to teach human communication is through storytelling (Chung, 2016), while technological tools can further assist storytelling and make it even more interesting in the 21st century classes. In other words, apart from the conventional- traditional storytelling, which is essential for learners' language learning, personal development and improvement of academic performance, digital storytelling can play a vital role for a learner's successful learning experience, academic performance and formation of personality (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Additionally, it is worth mentioning that fairytales can play a key role in Young Learners' development as kids have the tendency to acquire roles based on the stimuli they receive. For this reason, it is crucial to detect if there are any stereotypes (gender) in them, what effects they may have on Young Learners (YL) and how the ESL teacher of the 21st century should address them.

1. The context of the study

It is apparent that technology has managed to intrude everyone's life and be a really significant part of it. Its role is undoubtedly vital for education, learning and language learning especially in our days and age, as 21st century learners are able to learn easier and more spherically thanks to its infinite potentials (Abunowara, 2016). For the above reasons, the ESL/ EFL class should integrate the use of technology and its webtools and make learners capable of using them so as to be benefited from it (Rafiq & Hashim, 2018). So, despite the various school/ class constraints technology has and needs to transform the field of education making it more appealing, interesting and welcoming to ESL/ EFL learners (Mansor & Rahim, 2017).

2. Literature Review

The term 'Digital Storytelling' (DST) refers to an educational and technological tool (Dogan & Robin, 2009), whose purpose is to communicate a story, while at the same time it is the new version of storytelling with the aid of media (video/voice/ images) (DST Association, 2002; Robin 2018). More specifically, it is a procedure that combines audio, music, pictures and video (New Literacy Approaches) with various types of stories such as narratives or retelling of events (Traditional Approach) (Sylvester, Kent & Greenidge, 2009) leading to a coherent narrative (Ohler, 2008: 15). Its

purpose is usually to inform the audience or instruct something. There is no doubt that DST is useful in the EFL/ ESL class, as there are numerous times the teachers employ it in order to present or even explain complicated and challenging concepts (Oskoz & Elola, 2016; Sadik, 2018; Taylor, Marrone, Tayar & Mueller, 2018), while simultaneously it is quite flexible and adaptable to almost all school subjects and situations (Signes, 2007).

The use of digital storytelling in the EFL/ESL class is more the necessary as a wide range of studies have shown plenty of benefits for learners among which learners' active participation and engagement within the EFL/ ESL context (Lee, 2013), the in- depth comprehension of content (Hamilton et. al, 2019; Wu & Chen, 2020), learners' increased motivation (Bumgarner, 2012; Hung, Hwang & Huang, 2012; Yoon, 2013) the improvement of learners' academic performance (Kahraman, 2013; Demirer, 2013; Timucin & Irgin, 2015) and the development of their personality (self-esteem, confidence, empathy) (Yuksel, 2011) by expressing their own sociocultural voice and identity (Hafner, 2015; Liontas & Mannion, 2015). Moreover, DST can be a great tool for the development and improvement of learners' metacognitive, cognitive (less spelling and punctuation mistakes, reasonable flow), digital literacy, writing (Bumgarner, 2012; Kulla-Abbot, 2006; Sylvester & Greenridge, 2009; Ono, 2014) and speaking skills (Liu, Tai & Liu, 2018).

On the other side, traditional storytelling has been used extensively in the school background aiming at improving learners' literacy skills that is reading, writing, listening and speaking and that is the reason why the combination of both digital and conventional storytelling can be more than advantageous for them, as they will be given the chance to use numerous digital tools creatively, improving plenty of their skills (traditional literacy skills, digital literacy, problem-solving, critical thinking, cognitive) (Ohler, 2013), developing the skills of the 21st century (research, presentation) (Dogan & Robin, 2009; Dogan, 2012; Dogan, 2007) and forming sociocultural identities (Skinner & Hagood, 2008; Wang & Zhan, 2010). Digital Storytelling also maintains Young Learners' concentration and attention, as it engages them actively in an enjoyable and entertaining environment (Simsek, 2020) and they are able to learn how to organize their thoughts, order them and produce meaningful output after the input they received (Lisenbee & Ford, 2018). Additionally, it offers learners the opportunity to employ their personal style when creating (Lee, 2014), using their own life experiences, while they are able to fully understand the whole writing process through ongoing reflections, multiple drafting, editing and constructive peer feedback (Kulla- Abbot, 2006). Last but not least, through DST projects learners can develop their communicative skills (Zarnecki, 2009) and collaborate both with their peers and teachers (Gubrium, 2009; Robin, 2008). In this way, Digital Storytelling provides learners the chance to participate actively in the learning process, employ technologically advanced resources and produce well- structured stories (La France & Blizzard, 2013). All in all, DST is quite promising to develop learners' skills (Yvang & Wu, 2012), as it contributes significantly to the construction of a supportive, student- friendly and effective learning environment (Bromberg, Techatassanasoontorn & Andrade, 2013), where both learners and teachers are active learners and participants (Quigley, 2013), sharing real knowledge. At the same time, Young Learners are given the chance to learn by doing or experiencing (Robin, 2006; Dogan, 2007). In other words, learning outcomes are the result of learners' own, independent and autonomous creations, which is supported by numerous constructivist theories, such as Collaborative Learning (Slavin, 1995) and Constructionism (Paper, 1980).

So, despite the various school / classroom constraints, such as the packed school curriculum, the emphasis on conventional teaching using only a coursebook and focusing on drilling, the lack of teachers' confidence, experience and knowledge in using webtools in class, the insufficient time to work in class using technology, DST is considered to be vital as an alternative, while according to studies, it should be integrated in the school setting (Yang, Chen & Hung, 2020) as it can lead to vocabulary building, maximize learners' motivation, build and boost sociocultural identity. Finally, it has been found in recent studies that DST is a quite effective and useful tool in the EFL classroom (Gregori- Signes, 2008a, 2019; Bend & Bowe, 2000).

Apart from digital storytelling, Fairy Tales play a fundamental role in learners' lives for many reasons. It is worth mentioning that in every culture, most of the values are transmitted from generation to generation through stories. According to Ashliman (2004) and Zipes (1979; 1992), fairytales were called the stories including fairy characters, but in fact they may not include any at all, but rather some fantasy elements. They were originally made for adult readers, while then they were intended for much younger ones. Their importance for Young Learner's life is well known for plenty of reasons among which the fact that they bring hope and justice in everyone's life, while at the same time they motivate learners to read texts critically, developing thus many of their skills. However, research has indicated that there are gender stereotypes in numerous well-known fairytales addressed to Young learners (Collins, Ingoldsby & Dellman, 1984; Nilsen, 1971; Peterson & Lach, 1990; St. Peter, 1979; Stewig & Higgs, 1973; Weitzman, Eifler, Hokada, & Ross, 1972) among which Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Rapunzel, Beauty and the Beast and the Little Red Riding Hood (Dahl, 2003). According to these stereotypes, female characters are seen as good, beautiful (beauty is usually their only asset), delicate and sweet (Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003: 722), while at the same time they are passive, helpless, obedient, submissive, fragile and vulnerable (Ernst, 1995; Simpson, 1993). This passive behavior is always a female trait as female protagonists spend their time singing, dancing, sleeping, doing nothing even when they are in great danger. In such cases, a male character usually portrayed as a strong, smart and wealthy man finds the solution in any possible problem and saves them. Thus, male characters are heroes, while females are simply helpless creatures waiting for someone to rescue them (Parsons, 2004:137) get married with and become the 'Good wife' (Lieberman, 1972: 394). Furthermore, they did not seem to possess any special skills or knowledge, while domesticity has a central role and depicts society's reality for women. In addition to this, any attempt to step out from the house is against the prescribed rules and it is not welcomed (e.g., the Snow White should stay home doing nothing but the chores, avoiding thus the risk of being fooled by her stepmother in case she went out).

Finally, it is true that literature teaches Young Learners various things that can affect the way they perceive the world and it contributes significantly to a child's socialization. In other words, it can have a significant impact on how kids understand gender relations in our society, how they feel about themselves and how they treat others by comparing and contrasting themselves to the fairy tales' protagonists and characters. Thus, it is an imperative to explore the existence of gender stereotypes in Fairy Tales and investigate their impact on Young Learner's personality and academic performance. So, the EFL/ ESL teacher along with his/her learner's assistance should try to avoid focusing extensively on the masculinity or femininity of the characters, but rather on the equality of the two sexes that are able to accomplish anything if they just try.

3. Purpose and methodology of study

Therefore, there is need for further research. The sample will be Young Learners, aged 9-11 years old attending the fourth and the fifth grade of a Greek Public school. More specifically, the students of this age attend English three times a week for 45 minutes each time, while they will have access to the school lab in order to use computers when necessary.

The particular research will develop into two shorter parts. In the first part, the purpose of the research will be to determine the role of traditional and digital storytelling on teaching English to Young learners and examine which are the benefits of their use in the ESL/ EFL class for learners.

In particular, it aims to answer the following research questions:

1. Do traditional and digital storytelling affect EFL/ESL learners?
2. How does traditional/digital storytelling affect Young Learners?
3. What are the benefits of traditional and digital storytelling (cognitive, metacognitive, affective, social) for Young Learners?

The above research questions will be answered with the help of students' diaries, students' products, such as their portfolios and any piece of their work and exchanges of meaningful constructive feedback (qualitative data).

The second part of the research will be to detect gender stereotypes in well-known Fairy Tales read by and taught to Young Learners in the ESL class and investigate how these stereotypes can influence learners' personal development and academic performance, both in the present and in the future.

It will be thus imperative of the particular research to answer the following questions:

1. Are there any gender stereotypes in the Fairytales taught in the ESL classes of Greek Public schools?
2. How can the gender stereotypes found in these Fairy Tales affect learners' personal and academic development?

The above questions will be answered with the assistance of audio- video recordings, interviews with learners and teachers, group interviews and learners' own work. During the whole research, students will be given the chance to work both individually and collaboratively on well-known Fairy Tales, such as Cinderella, The Beauty and the Beast, The Little Red Riding Hood, the Snow White and Rapunzel, enjoy both traditional and digital storytelling and finally draw conclusions regarding gender stereotypes in fairytales and their impact on them.

4. Conclusions Implications and significance of the study

Finally we underline the digital technologies' role in education practices that is very productive and successful, facilitates and improves the assessment, the intervention and the educational procedures via Mobiles [27-31], various ICTs applications [32-52], AI & STEM ROBOTICS [53-67], and games [68-71]. Additionally the combination of ICTs with theories and models of metacognition, mindfulness, meditation and emotional intelligence cultivation [72-109] as well as with environmental factors and nutrition [23-26], accelerates and improves more over the educational practices and results, especially in the language learning domain via storytelling and for gender equality issues.

More specifically, the proposed research and its results will contribute significantly to the previous studies and improve EFL/ ESL classes dramatically with the integration of digital storytelling and various webtools in the 21st century class.

The investigation of the digital storytelling's role on Young Learners' personality and academic performance is expected to yield valuable information around the benefits it can have for them, the necessity to be employed in the ESL class and the need to be integrated in the Greek school curriculum.

Last but not least, the second part of the investigation focusing on the existence of gender stereotypes in well-known Fairy Tales taught to/ read by Young Learners will offer teachers the chance to realize their impact on them. In other words, Young Learners tend to adopt particular roles and behave based on the stimuli they receive, during the socialization process which plays a significant role for their self-identification and future life. Thus, it is vital for them to receive positive stimuli during this process. So, after this research teachers will obtain all the necessary knowledge, adapt these stories to their learners' needs and use them to teach equality, dignity, moral values and what finally constitutes gender appropriate behavior, as Fairy Tales can be a great educational tool if used properly.

So, apart from research development, the particular study holds a special significance for a successful and interesting ESL/ EFL teaching and learning with the assistance of technology (digital storytelling) and the adaptation of Fairy Tales to both learners' and society's needs, prerequisites and ideals.

5. References

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