

## A DIDACTIC EXPERIENCE IN DIGITAL STORYTELLING WITH THE STUDENTS OF *TALLER DE COMUNICACIÓN EN LENGUA B*

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**Abstract.** *New technologies are an important part of everybody's lives and the university has to respond to this situation. Teachers need to be updated with the latest technologies so that they can find and create attractive activities to promote engagement and interest among the new generation of students. Web 2.0 technology is a great tool to motivate students to produce quality work in a foreign language.*

*Digital storytelling is a fantastic tool to promote students' creativity and eagerness to improve their foreign language skills. Through digital storytelling students learn to combine basic multimedia tools (e.g. Audacity and Windows Movie Maker) with writing, narrating, etc.*

*In this paper I will share a didactic experience that I recently put into practise with second-year undergraduate students of English as a B language at the Universidad Europea de Madrid – Centro Adscrito de Valencia.*

**Key words:** Digital storytelling, Teaching English as a Foreign Language, web 2.0 technology, creativity, translation students.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

New technologies are an important part of everybody's lives and the university has to respond to this situation. Teachers need to be updated with the latest technologies so that they can find and create attractive activities to promote engagement, interest and motivation among the new generation of students. Web 2.0 technology is a great tool to motivate students to produce quality work in a foreign language.

Since the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) came into force, the higher education institutions in Europe have been going through a process of redesigning and redefining of the curricula, now taking into account new educational criteria and patterns. This new system should embrace new learning models where the teacher and student's roles are redefined.

Within this framework students are expected to acquire certain skills and competences. As far as the learning of B language is concerned, teachers have in our hands the ability to provide students with learning experiences that will expand their knowledge, as well as their independence, flexibility, and confidence in new environments.

Furthermore, in order to comply with the aims of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) we need to rethink traditional formula in higher education for translation students and make a more interesting design for the e-portfolio.

Digital storytelling is a fantastic tool to promote students' creativity and eagerness to improve their foreign language skills. Through digital storytelling students learn to combine basic multimedia tools (e.g. Audacity and Windows Movie Maker) with writing, narrating, etc.

As Gregori-Signes (2008: 46) argues, «the Bologna process is promoting innovation in teaching with great emphasis on technology» and this is giving us both teachers and students to think and react differently to teaching and learning materials. With a tool like digital storytelling we can foster students' motivation, creativity and flexibility (Gregori-Signes, 2008: 46).

## **2. CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE PROJECT**

As part of their evaluation for the subject *Taller de Comunicación en Lengua B*, students are required to carry out a group project, which corresponds to 10% of the final mark.

This project was carried out with second year students enrolled on the subject *Taller de Comunicación en Lengua B* (English), which is designed for the third semester of the *Grado en Traducción y Comunicación Intercultural* at the Universidad Europea de Madrid – Centro Adscrito de Valencia.

Students at this stage of their degree are expected to acquire an advanced level of English (C1), as well as other general and specific skills throughout the semester. Group work is one of these skills that students are to acquire, so that students can develop social skills and get used to working with peers, as can be the case when working as future translation and/or interpreting professionals. Also creativity, critical, and reflective analysis is to be put into practice.

For this project, students had to watch, interpret and create a story for a short film by the California Institute of Arts student Nelson Boles, whom I asked for permission a month before the project started in order to use his video for academic purposes and who very kindly accepted.

### **3. OBJECTIVES**

#### **3.1. Objectives of the project**

The main objectives of this project to be done by students were as follows:

- To develop general and specific skills for the subject
- To interpret a story in motion pictures and create a story around them.
- To work successful in a group
- To use new technologies autonomously
- To increase their creativity
- To improve their writing skills
- To improve their communicative and social skills
- To improve their organisation and planning skills

The lecturer and tutor of this project also aimed to increase students' motivation, and promote responsibility and professionalism among students.

#### **3.2. Objectives of the subject Taller de Comunicación en Lengua B (English)**

Many of the skills that were being worked on during the project coincide with the ones students need to acquire in order to pass this subject.

##### **3.2.1. General skills**

These are the general skills foreseen for the subject:

- Self-confidence
- Teamwork
- Communicative skills
- Autonomous learning
- Analysis and synthesis
- Critical reasoning
- Organisation and planning
- Initiative and creativity
- Professionalism and responsibility

##### **3.2.2. Specific skills**

These are the specific skills foreseen for the subject:

- Instrumental command of the first foreign language (B language) at a CEFR C1 level.
- Understanding of a wide range of demanding, longer texts and recognition of implicit meaning.
- Fluent and spontaneous expression.
- Flexible and effective use of language for social, academic and professional purposes.
- Production of clear, well-structured, detailed texts on complex subjects.

- Cultural and intercultural competence.
- Ability to show respect for the traditions and cultural conventions, reflected in the foreign language and its native speakers (cultural awareness)
- Ability to explain and foresee potential conflicts arising from cultural differences.

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

##### **4.1. Project description**

The second-year translation students were challenged with a project where they had to write a story for a silent animation film. They were given 2 months to carry it out (starting date: 06/10/2011; closing date: 02/12/2011).

The project was described to students after presenting the importance of group work. The PowerPoint presentation was facilitated to students so that they could refer back to it. They were introduced to the advantages and disadvantages of group work together with possible pitfalls. Consequently, the ability to work in groups was an important part of the evaluation for this activity.

For this project they were given the chance to choose the members for each group (from 3 to 4 members). For this purpose, they were told to take into account the following things:

- Availability of the different members to meet
- Individual strengths and weakness
- Diversity
- Commitment

Once the groups were created, they were asked to write a personal inventory for their group to start working and dividing the tasks. They discussed within their group what each member could bring to it and organised themselves to divide the tasks. They also agreed on the next meeting format, constructed rules for discussions, constructed a timeline and discussed possible penalties for missing meetings and deadlines.

#### 4.1.1. Stages of the project

<b>TABLE 1: PHASES OF THE PROJECT</b>	
<b>Phases</b>	<b>Tasks</b>
Phase 1	Group making
Phase 2	Group meetings for inspiration
Phase 3	Creating the story
Phase 4	Script writing
Phase 5	Proofreading
Phase 6	Time-Image script writing
Phase 7	Voice Recording and Adjustments
Phase 8	Synchronising voice and images
Phase 9	Final revision
Phase 10	Submission via Moodle

#### 4.1.2. Submissions

Together with the actual project (to be handed in by 02/12/2011), they were given further tasks directly related to the project itself:

1. The writing of the minutes for each group meeting (to be handed in by 02/12/2011)
2. The writing of a document (signed by all group members and to be handed in by 17/10/2011) where every group included the following items:
  - What each member brings to the group
  - Tasks to be carried out by each member
  - First meeting format (face-to-face, virtual, etc.)
  - Rules and regulations for teamwork and discussions
  - Penalties for missing meetings and deadlines
  - A first draft of the timeline (meetings, deadlines for particular tasks, etc.)

## 4.2. Project tools

<b>TABLE 2: 2.0. TOOLS USED FOR THE PROJECT</b>				
<b>Audio Recorder / Editor</b>	<b>Video Editor</b>	<b>Hardware</b>	<b>File sharing software</b>	<b>Virtual Learning Environment</b>
Audacity (open source)	Windows Movie Maker	Microphone	Dropbox	Moodle

## 4.3. Project Assessment

This is the assessment grid that I used in order to assess the outcome of this project.

<b>TABLE 3: ASSESSMENT GRID</b>								
<b>Video</b>						<b>Minutes</b>	<b>Rules</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
80%						10%	10%	100%
Narration (15%)	Story (15%)	Creativity (15%)	Sound quality (15%)	Cohesion (10%)	Autonomy (10%)			

## 5. RESULTS

The outcome of this project was very satisfying, as all objectives were accomplished and students very successfully developed the skills required. Students used their talents and strengths to complete the tasks in the project and were able to produce a high quality outcome.

The findings from the study show that:

1. Digital storytelling is a good tool to motivate students in their learning process.
2. Digital storytelling engages students and stimulates their creative imagination.
3. This project helped all group members to commit themselves to this activity and create collaborative learning.

It is worthwhile mentioning that this particular project was carried out by 90 % of the students enrolled in the subject, which was not always the case for other assignments.

The students also learned autonomously how to use the two programmes proposed for the project, Audacity and Windows Movie Maker and they even innovated and discovered interesting functions they finally used for the project.

The author of the video was sent the outcome of the students and he was very impressed with the interpretations the students made of his piece of work (Boles, 2011).

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

The conclusions I drew from this experience are that, even though students initially felt anxious about this project, they welcomed this new challenge.

Moreover, I could observe that they had the feeling they were learning and producing interesting and useful work.

An audiovisual project like this is ideal to be added in the e-portfolio and it is something students will usually feel proud of and, consequently, they would be ready to show what they did for a university subject to their peers and, possibly, future employers. The fact that this is accessible online makes it possible for students to have their work on Internet platforms such as You Tube, as well as in our Department's blog (<http://comunidad.uem.es/babel-world/2011/12/23/episode-thirty-nine-erase-vez->).

I would say that challenging them and giving them the freedom to create a project of these characteristics keeps them motivated and makes them have more confidence in their own skills.

## **CITATIONS**

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UEM-CAV students – Group 1 (2012), Little Boat 1 - A story inspired by Nelson Boles' animation film Little Story (Academic project), Tutored by León Pinilla, Ruth. [Internet video available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KPEgoXn9xkM>]

UEM-CAV students – Group 2 (2012), Little Boat 2 - A story inspired by Nelson Boles' animation film Little Story (Academic project), Tutored by León Pinilla, Ruth. [Internet video available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKi3y2pa85E>]

UEM-CAV students – Group 3 (2012), Little Boat 3 - A story inspired by Nelson Boles' animation film Little Story (Academic project), Tutored by León Pinilla, Ruth. [Internet video available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2taaqRfIMM8>]

UEM-CAV students – Group 4 (2012), Little Boat 4 (Dreaming of Paradise) - A story inspired by Nelson Boles' animation film Little Story (Academic project), Tutored by León Pinilla, Ruth. [Internet video available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0tqsUSiSJA>]

## **SOFTWARE REQUIEREMENT**

Audacity [Available at <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>]

Windows Movie Maker [Available at <http://windows-movie-maker.softonic.com/>]

Dropbox [Available at [www.dropbox.com](http://www.dropbox.com)]

Moodle [Available at <http://download.moodle.org/>]