Digital Story Telling and Second Language Teaching: A Review from the China-Taiwan-Hongkong Triangle

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ABSTRACT

Despite the importance of storytelling in second language acquisition, using storytelling faces certain difficulties in teaching in countries in Asia such as China, Taiwan, Hongkong, Thailand, Vietnam etc. Firstly, it is not easy to gain access to English story books, which need to be imported, and it usually results in huge financial costs for teachers or institutes. Secondly, how non-native teachers tell the story might become a limitation as well. Due to language barrier, second language teachers may not be as good as native teachers when telling stories, as the immaturity of storytelling technique may result from natural language barrier. Yet it is believed that young learners cannot learn like adults because their logical thinking has not reached maturity hence the adoption of cultural context story telling techniques is inimical to effective learning. This review evaluates the issue of storytelling and its importance in second language acquisition based on experiences from China, Taiwan, and Hongkong

Keywords: Second, Language, Learners, Digital, Storytelling, barrier

INTRODUCTION

It is believed young learners cannot learn like adults because their logical thinking has not reached maturity. In the early 1940’s, Piaget believed young learners have the ability to learn by themselves, to be more specific, they have two abilities: assimilation and accommodation. The first ability suggests young learners can imitate what others, most parents, are doing, whereas the other ability shows they also possess the ability to adapt to changes. Perhaps the most important viewpoint Piaget offers is that he believes children are active learners, and to put it in the context of acquiring language, children can actively make sense of the language. However, what Piaget seems to neglect is taking the external environment into consideration regarding young learners’ learning development, and this is where Vygotsky comes to fill the void. Vygotsky develops the concept of ‘Zone of Proximal Development’ (ZPD) which refers to the difference between what a young learner can do without help and what a learner can do with help. In other words, instead of simply observing what a young learn can do, he wants to know what a learner can do with external help, as he believes this is the best approach to understand the ability of a young learner, and the so called ‘help’, refers to the external environment that Piaget overlooks. Again, if putting such psychological learning theory in the context of language acquisition, it can be reasonable to assume young learners can acquire a new language from the interaction with children or adults, hence the external interaction is very essential to young learner’s learning situation. It is believed if young learners are more involved in the learning environment, then their learning effectiveness is likely to be greater. Furthermore, another psychologist, Bruner (1992) builds on the work of Vygotsky (1990) by pointing out other ideas on how children learn; he believes scaffolding and routines are the two ways children learn. Compared to the previous ideas proposed by Piaget and Vygotsky, it can be determined that Bruner is concretizing their views in another way. ‘Scaffolding’ in the original work of Vygotsky (1990)
means verbal assistance provided by teachers or parents to help children complete tasks, whereas 'Routines' means doing the same exercise with children at the same time on a regular basis. Of course the two can be combined together to achieve maximum absorption in their learning process. To sum up, children are active learners, and Scaffolding and routines help learners to develop in the Zone of Proximal Development. In effect ZPD coordinator is beneficial to student’s learning while scaffolding and routine provides space for their learning ability to Maybe better: To sum up: Although children learn differently from adult learners as their logical thinking has not matured yet, they are active learners. Scaffolding and routines provide teaching strategies that help them to analyze and solve their queries. The ZPD provides the space for their learning ability to develop. More specific studies (Allwright, 1979, Breen, 1984, Brewster et al, 1992, Cameron, 2001) have also looked at the language acquisition of young learners. The process of learning first language and foreign language is similar. Bruner (2001) believes learning language is an active process. In Taiwan, phonics rules cannot motivate students in language learning. Young learners can acquire a language well if they have related experience to the taught materials, and if they lack of it, adults are there to provide it. Young learners learn from adults, but they conduct repetition and imitating to formulate rules, through which they learn the meanings (Eyris, 2001). Pinter believes although memory structure depends on the age, young learners still need to know the knowledge of the foreign language so language acquire can be more effective.

**IMPORTANT OF STORYTELLING IN EDUCATING YOUNG PEOPLE**

Having understood how young learners learn it has become quite clear that story telling may have an important role to play in the effective delivery of educating young people. The TPR was developed by Blaine (1992), a high school Spanish teacher in California, during the 1990swas an important step in consolidating earlier attempts at making the most of storytelling. The latter sought to highlight the role that the traditional story telling could play in effective learning especially of a second language but if only it was adjusted to suit the peculiarities of language learning (Banaszewska, 2005).

According to Blaine (1992) although it is possible to achieve a greater deal of success by employing the other prose style methods of teaching, students after a long exposure to the practice may stop finding this technique to be interesting and this inertia on the part of the students will require the adoption of an approach that will give them enough comprehensible input and perpetually sustain their interest in the studies (Banaszewski, 2005). For this reason Blaine (1992) combines story telling with the old Total Physical Response in five different ways and this is what is serving as the often used concept of Total Physical Response Storytelling.

The importance of using story telling is also highlighted in the work of Malkina (2010) who asserts that stories are able to meet “the emotional, cognitive and psychological demands of pre-school children: their need to belong; to act; to share; to feel protected, etc. Stories and fairy tales are inherently interesting to children. They speak to the "I" of the child” (Malkina, 2010, p2). This position is also consistent with another study by Bruno (2008) who indicated in his book “The Uses of Enchantment” that by using stories to present language to children, they are able to recall information and then based on that continue to recount even outside the classroom. According to the latter students appreciate stories better than direct grammar and construction because the content of stories is equally important and emotionally attaching as the process of learning the language itself.

Further to this Bruno (2008) has also explained that from experience storytelling can offer both a personal experience, and also a universal experience that encompasses world cultures. Every story which is narrated in the classroom offers some level of cultural experience. This is because fairy tales forms a substantial part of the “lore of ordinary folk and modern stories mirror personal and/or national experience” (Center for Digital Storytelling, 2010, p19). Considering the fact those things which attract the emotional attention of the participants gives them an some unusual effect storytelling can be a very good opportunity through which communication can be improved especially when young people are those using it to learn a foreign language. This is what is explained by Ermolayev (2005) when she said they said that “my impression is that most people relate pretty strongly to stories experienced in early childhood” (Ermolayev, 2005)

In the opinion of Garvie (1928) stories are most useful in teaching methodologies of both language and other forms of teaching because of the structured nature. All stories usually follow a course of development that is predictable. In stories the child or the individual is able to see the beginning of event and the end of another and the subsequent ones which are likely to come and sometimes affords them
the opportunity to predict the likely end of the story when they have been given a reasonable portion of it. In developing a predictive capability they are forced to develop mastery over the language in which they develop the story (Garvie, 2000).

Putting all of the above together it comes out that story telling as an approach to teaching is very good because students understand stories better since it is like a live action with visual aids that is always on their mind.

This helps him or her to acquire the target vocabulary because it is repeated a lot of times within the daily stories and also in the mind of the individual when he or she is even away from the books or the school environments (Dick, Carey & Carey, 2005). In that way stories are able to fill the vacuum which is created for second language students who mostly live in an environment where there are few people who actually understand or are willing to learn the language which they are learning. For example with stories to students in Taiwan who are learning English, it fills the vacuum of having predominantly non-English parents and siblings with whom they can do further communication. By constantly recalling and retelling the stories in mind, the child is engaged and pick up the vocabularies along the way. This is why Hester (2003) says that story telling is the best way by which sentence structure, vocabulary and grammar are acquired because non-stop comprehensible input is provided by the teacher. Further it also means that the power of story telling lies in the fact that the teacher gets the opportunity to be involved in direct communication with the class.

The teacher does not deal with 'third person' text but by the process of storytelling he or she personalizes the story and allows each of the students to follow same. An example is given by Heo (2009) when she was teaching a micro-group of three businessmen in America who wanted to learn the English language at the elementary level. Initially she adopted a system that followed the normal academic teaching methodology for presenting grammar and construction due to a warning she had received from the director not to engage the senior executives with childish stories so that they do not go back home feeling treated as children. After trying out for a couple of weeks, she became aware that her students liked stories and introduced the next week the story of Little Red Riding Hood in order to teach the past tense (Heo, 2009)

She narrates that “I was well into the story, at the point where the wolf is about to eat the little girl up, [ What big teeth you’ve got granny! when the Italian marketing manager, a man in his early 30s, shouted: 'Fermati!' (Stop!) I asked why he’d interrupted me and he said that this was the point at which his three year old daughter always begged him to stop the story. She could not bear the next bit! From the above it is obvious that the Italian marketing manager was reacting to the girl and wolf story simultaneously, to his own telling to his little daughter”.

In this case the listener has the opportunity to follow the story, understand it and retell it and thereby picking up the systems and construction in manner that makes it easier to learn.

Digital Story Telling and its Use in Second Language Teaching

From the above discussion which has been made of the process of using story telling as an instrument for teaching language to students, it comes out quite clearly that the teacher and the student would all have to rely heavily on memorizing the materials rather than using them regularly. This system therefore requires that the teachers use story books to enhance or overcome such problems in adopting story telling but this brings out several new challenges (Board of education, 1997). In the first place the teachers who use storytelling technique usually have to be native speakers or else telling stories in English poses a large challenge.

In the second place it is also noted that teachers need a lot of time to sufficiently deliver all the planned teaching materials to students (Garvie, 1928, p24; Verdugo and Belmonte, 2007) as storytelling usually takes a lot of time. Considering the fact that students and teachers do not have this luxury of time at their disposal, there was an urgent need to employ or provide alternatives that can make the study more interactive and faster. This is where the digital approach is becoming increasingly important.

Boyle (2007) explains that within an environment where technologies are evolving at a rapid pace, digital devices such as digital cameras, multi-functional cell phones, and personal computers, have increasingly become useful in education because it can facilitate the learning process. In the opinion of Pierson (2008) digital storytelling (DS) can be a good method for where some of these digital devices and platforms can support the educational process. Ng (2004) has provided some definition of digital storytelling where he explains it to be a process of storytelling and information sharing by employing multimedia tools and resources (Ohler’s, 2008).
Further in the study of Ohler’s (2008) which he entitled digital Storytelling in the Classroom, he describes a view of digital storytelling which is largely a creative process in which the traditional story can be combined with personal digital technology, such as a computer, video camera, and sound recorder. This view is further elaborated by the Digital Storytelling Association (2002) by saying that it is “…the modern expression of the ancient art of storytelling… using digital media to create media-rich stories to tell, to share, and to preserve”. Another explanation has been done by SZE (2008) who explains that the Digital story is a short and simple personal story told with the use of graphics, audio, and video in order to promote easy comprehension. These are the values which are presented by The Center for Digital Storytelling (2010) which identifies the major components of a digital story by seven creative processes or elements of digital storytelling. These includes the point of view which shows the purpose and perspective with which the story is authored, a dramatic question which is expected to arouse the curiosity of the audience and is explained at the end of the story, the emotional content that involves the audiences in the story, the gift of voice that helps the audience understand the story through personalization of the narration, the power of soundtrack which supports the story with the most appropriate music, the economy that helps in avoiding an overload of the viewer with excessive use of visuals and/or audio as well as pacing that provides a rhythm to the story and deals with the speed with which the story is told. (Lambert 2002). Finally in the opinion of Morris (2005) digital storytelling involves a series of practices where there is a combination of narratives that has digital contents like images, sound, and video, to create a short movie, typically with a strong emotional component. It is further explained by the latter that the power of digital stories lies in the fact that it is instructional, persuasive, historical, or reflective and these are very important ingredients which are needed in educational studies especially when one is dealing with second language studies. In the opinion of Zaporozhets (2008) the power of digital stories is derived from the ability to “weave images, music, narrative, and voice together and this gives deep dimension and vivid color to characters, situations, and insights.” (Zaporozhets, 2008, p24) In the studies of Robin (2009) whenever digital storytelling are employed as a teaching instrument it helps the teacher in creating short stories which allows students and teachers improve their ability and process of gathering information to solve a problem in a collaborative team. In concluding this section it is important to restate some peculiar advantages which have been recorded when it comes to the use of multimedia and digital formats to enhance reading and listening in a foreign language. For example, argued by Robin (2009) that the combination of word and sound supports understanding better than others. Further to this Robin (2009) also explains that interactivity is the main hallmark of digital learning technologies. He explains that it allows content to be explored by providing images for observation, correlation and conclusion. In digital technologies presentation and design of the content ensures that by viewing and exploring it, the class gets ‘interactive’. For example, while teaching the concept of Projectile Motion one could play various media clips to generate discussions in the classroom, like a cricket match with a batsman hitting for a six, a gardener watering plants in the garden with a hosepipe. Getting children to observe, apply principles and arrive at conclusions will enhance understanding of concepts. It has also been noted by Bruno (2008) that digital technology in education enables active and constructive learning that focuses on exploration. The student user interacts with the content, explores objects in the defined environment, observes effects of the exploration and concludes from the experience. Bendt and the Bow (2000) lists ten reasons why the digital storying should be given more attention, it inspires dedication and encourages creativity in learning, promotes self directed problem solving, embraces diversity, captivates attention, piques interest in writing, fosters group dynamics, addresses different learning styles, creates a positive classroom climate, incorporates the multiple intelligences. According to Lambert (2007) The Center for Digital Storytelling has identified 7 elements which must be present in all digital stories in order to make it more effective as especially when students want to build on their reading and listening comprehension skills. This is also partially in agreement with earlier assertions by Labov and Waletsky (1967) for oral narratives of personal experience: the point of view, dramatic question, emotional content and the essence of your voice, the strength of the soundtrack, the economy and stimulating. In addition to these elements, Paul and Fiebich (2005) describe in detail the five elements that are common to all digital stories which are a combination of various media used to create them, the type of action (the content and users), open or closed relationship between user and the digital story, unlimited context with links to
related, relevant information and the presence of multimodal communication.

DIGITAL STORYTELLING FOR READING AND LISTENING COMPREHENSIONS

According to Bracey (2003) an important attribute of reading and comprehension is that it is cultivated through a process of constant engagement with reading and attraction to find out new words and understand them. In that regard any approach that facilitates better reading and comprehension skills will have to be an approach which engages students, stimulate their interest in order for them to constantly read and write. This is position has been consolidated as an advantage which digital storytelling has when it comes to promoting reading and listening comprehension among young people. In a study in Taiwan itself Boone & Hauwkins (2005) found out among other things that because of the interactivity nature of digital storytelling, it continuously attract the attention of young people (Boone & Hauwkins, 2005) or has a “grabbing value” which does not only elicit initial interest but is able to retain the interest of the young people. According to the students who were interview in that study, it was noted that when information or a reading is in the digital form they watch it over and over again and not just to see. This important quality of digital story telling means that children will be constantly engaged in reading and on digital platforms as opposed to the traditional book and that continuous reading becomes an important step in enhancing their comprehension and other language skills. Secondly the information which the digital story gives to the pupil is also retained better than those which they read in the books due to the interactivity nature of the system. With this process they will better develop their reading and comprehension skills.

Another important issue which affect the reading and comprehension of children when it comes to using digital storytelling is the fact that pupil are able to remember the information better and can easily retell the story anytime he or she is called upon to repeat it. This means that digital storytelling does not have only the capacity to elicit attention and retain attention but also has a better recall and recognition rate. For words and stories and these are very essential for student or pupils to develop not only reading and listening comprehension skills but also develop vocabulary and their narrative skills.

There is evidence of this in a study entitled Kajde (2006) which she titled Bringing the Outside In: Visual Ways to Engage Reluctant Readers, Kajder ((2006) found out a striking relationship between digital storytelling and the success of helping reluctant readers which is one of the main factors that affect reading and comprehension. Kajde (2006) explains that when digital storytelling was employed in schools in culturally diverse, socio-economically challenged suburban schools around Washington, the pupils found out a strong effect on implementing digital storytelling in a unit on their personal narrative skills. The reason the pupils provided was that the digital story provided an opportunity for them to share their stories in a different way and that demonstrated the interest which had been sparked in them.

In an interaction which the students had with Kajder (2006) some of the students who had shown little interest in reading or writing became indicated that they have been more motivated to make choices of particular digital stories. They described how they "dove into the bookcases and read actively in the library after school" and notes that "more students" completed this assignment than any other. In addition, Kajder’s (2006) study also noted a sharp increase in the numbers of students that were engaged in the class during and after the digital storytelling project. As a result, she was able to challenge the students beyond what they thought they were capable of especially in learning reading and listening comprehension and this was attested to by the students themselves. The most striking factor which was observed in that study in was the extent to which the students indicated that how digital storytelling had facilitated greater comprehension of texts. One student indicated that she was not reading for information but was able to read, relate, to connect, and to understand. Students could not tell their stories with pictures, music, and words without relating to it and engaging it in a new way (Bendt & Bowe, 2000).

Similar improvement in comprehension abilities and skills which students gain from the application of digital story telling which has been provided by Kajder's work is also reported in another study among second language students in Iran who were learning English at the elementary level. This was a study conducted by Farmer (2006) where the pupils themselves confessed that the requirements of digital storytelling "improves or reinforces their reading comprehension skills tremendously. It was noted in that study that when children search for visual representations of the story they link the story with that visual representation and demonstrate understanding of the story itself. The visual representations in digital storytelling included found objects or objects that the students created.
themselves as a representation of the setting, character, an object, or a symbol. As a result, it forces students to think critically about the story and express what it means using their own words and visual representations.

In another study, Kajder and Swenson (2004) demonstrated that digital storytelling improved reading comprehension when using a technique called "visual think aloud" in which students use traditional think aloud methods in a digital environment. Kajder and Swenson note, "Good readers often visualize the action of a story, creating a mental movie of images evoked by the story. Struggling readers often lack this skill (Bransford & Cocking, 2000). Through visual think aloud, students were encouraged to develop images to illustrate the story and "select images that represent the mental images the printed text evokes. Kajder and Swenson (2006) found that upon completion of the digital story developed using the visual think aloud method, students had improved their reading comprehension ability.

**BENEFITS OF DIGITAL STORYTELLING FOR STUDENTS**

Many studies have been done on the important role that digital storytelling can play in the classroom if it is used as the approach to teaching second language. In study of 500 language students in Germany it was noted that about 55 percent of the respondents did say that digital storytelling helps students to improve their understanding of subject area knowledge and their writing skills. They also indicated that when it is used the technical skills and even the student’s presentation skills are all improved.

Another research has been done by Ellis and Brewester (2001) in Turkey where English is also used as a second language. It is explained by the latter that 38 respondents who were made to answer open ended questions identified five themes that constitutes series of importance which they get from adopting digital storytelling in the classroom if it is used as the approach to teaching second language. Some of these included improvement in reflection skills, language skills, higher level thinking skills, social skills, and artistic skills. In Singapore Brumfit et al (2001) noted that 39 percent o the students indicated that digital storytelling allowed their students to develop their reflection abilities. The main skills which they pointed out here were reflection on experience in practical studies but in another group of respondents their admiration for the digital storytelling is in the sense that it was helping to improve the reflection skills of their students by “integrating personal stories in an academic context (Bruno, 2008)

A high point in the research of Bieva (2004) was when they noticed that students were improving their ability to reflect on experiences and learn from them as a result of the adoption of digital storytelling in the classroom as the approach to teaching second language. In that same study five of the respondents said that by making use of the digital storytelling, they have been able to improve students’ “self-reflections.” It was noted in healthcare education, the digital stories helped the students to reflect on the difficult (threshold) concepts, and then developed empathy, reflected on practice, considered challenging issues from a very human perspective.

The use of digital storytelling to improve language skills is one of the most important issues which come up in the work of Sadik (2008) where it came to the fore that seven teachers have seen digital storytelling helping their students to improve their language skills. They recorded among other things in their responses that students have improved dramatically over their listening and speaking skills, narrative skills (both written and oral), and pronunciation skills for foreign language. Based on this they noticed that digital storytelling can play very important role if it is used as the approach to teaching second language. This is not the only area where they have found support of the digital story telling but also in relation to developing higher level thinking skills which is also important for people who are also learning a second language. In this particular instance, Sadik (2008) points out in his studies that the when fifteen teachers were interviewed in Bahrain on the strengths of digital storytelling when it is used in the classroom as the approach to teaching second language, all of the respondents did say that that digital storytelling has helped their students to develop some high level thinking (Robin & Pierson, 2005).

Ten teachers specifically indicated that digital storytelling has improved higher level thinking especially in the area of creative thinking while other respondents said that the level of thinks which is needed for problem solving, motivation for learning, metacognitive skills of learning, empathy, self-evaluation, analysis and synthesis, creativity, finding one's own voice, and critical thinking skills are all areas which their students have developed and it has become very essential in learning a language which is not that of the students (Strauss & Corbin, 2000). The responses also included the observation that
digital storytelling “gives them a outlet for expressing themselves, thoughts and ideas specific to their personalities.” Another respondent said that since they he started using digital storytelling, the students are able to “think more deeply about a topic and personal resonance.”

In that study he also noticed that social skills was also being developed by the students in that they have improve their ability to connect to their community and small work groups The respondents indicated that they have noticed that there is a better disposition among the students to know other people, and understand their identities which are connected within a social context. In another study by Robin & Pierson (2005) in Saudi Arabia among students they noticed that by using digital storytelling they were improving their sense of community, empathy, and collaboration. Students were found to have developed skills in effective social interaction and communication skills which are very important in studying a second language. It was indicated specifically by three respondents that by adopting digital storytelling it has allowed their students a sense of community membership in class and school and for the majority of them it was the first chance for the students to declare self-value.

Another respondent also did indicate that it is important to adopt digital story telling because it also supports the students to develop confidence. Resulting from this, Robin & Pierson (2005) has found out that in dozens of schools in the United Arab Emirates have started implementing digital media approaches to learning where already prepared documents and stories are offered to the students and they follow it to learning phrase and vocabularies as much as possible. In this way audio and visual to graphics, animation and web techniques have all been found to be very much appreciated by students and introduces new dimension to language studies. The final issue which was disclosed in the study of Robin (2008) as an important attribute of adopting digital skills has to do with artistic skills but in the case it has to do with the ability of digital storytelling to support or permit students to improve their artistic ability and this is equally important in developing an effective language capacity.

WEAKNESSES

The gains that have been recorded of the benefit of adopting digital story telling notwithstanding there are also a lot of areas where weaknesses do exist and these include two very important ones which are pointed out by Meadows (2003). It is explained that when digital storytelling is used in education depending on the purpose and how digital storytelling is used it can be distorted and and make it lose the gains which must be gotten. Secondly it has a critique about time barriers because sometimes the small amount of improvement is not worth the time that the student spends to acquire it. This means that the benefits are not immediate.

Other people have also has indicated that sometimes some of the teachers and students they work with and know about who are not currently using digital storytelling in their classes would be interested in learning more about how to use this educational tools. On another hand it is also observed that sometimes all the teachers and students are interested adopting digital storytelling as an educational tool if there is a suitable condition for educational uses of digital storytelling (Meadows, 2003).

Generally the digital story is the result of good combination between more traditional methods of storytelling and the most innovative multimedia resources, the most radical differences between them, yet is interactivity (Berenguer, 1998 Handler –Miller, 2008), as well as the digital environment, which certainly makes the story unique digital genre. What is worth considering is that digital narrative has opened up new ways of working as a discourse, and with new technologies, which can certainly create all kinds of activities that may be useful, attractive and motivating for students.

CONCLUSIONS

If one is to compare the gains which have been seen or noted in the adoption of digital story telling in education. It is noted that it is perfect for an education system but when it comes to learning a second language by a students from a country like Taiwan, the role of the digital story telling approach when it comes to developing language and communication skills. The reason is that the student are aided by the technique to improve on dramatically over their listening and speaking skills, narrative skills (both written and oral), and pronunciation skills for foreign language. If this is compared with the other benefits which comes from it then it is an important factor and technique for education.

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