LITERACIES, SKILLS AND COMPETENCES DEVELOPMENT BY DIGITAL STORIES

Josias Ricardo Hack
j.r.hack@ufsc.br
http://lattes.cnpq.br/3511773598300389

ABSTRACT

The article revises texts in English and in Portuguese about the production of digital stories for the educational context. The objective is to reflect upon the necessary characteristics for the development of experiences with audio-visual stories. The methodology used in this study is based on a bibliographical research. The results of the study indicate that the capacity to build coherent audio-visual narratives, as well as the ability to edit images and sounds, are demanded of the people involved in the educational context due to the insertion of multiple digital technologies in the daily life. Thus, it is argued that the experience with the production of digital stories in the classroom or outside the classroom may enhance the digital literacy of the students.

Keywords: digital storytelling; literacies; education; competences development

The first aim of this article was to revise articles and books on the technical fundamentals of the production of digital stories to be used in the educational context and produced by the very own partners of the learning process, such as the Digital Storytelling (DS). Another outlook intended to investigate the scope for digital literacy that can have an activity with such characteristics. After the definition of the main idea of the investigation, we began the research process of texts that would approach how to adapt the DS to the educational context. The intention was to reflect on the necessary characteristics to develop a contextualized experience with short personal audio-visual stories in the learning process of adults.

Here we will make a dialogue in paraphrase with some texts of the periodicals and books that we investigate and, for that, the article will be divided in sections which will discuss the construction of knowledge in the learning process of adults using digital technologies and techniques like the DS. The thought process will be divided in two distinct parts: a) a first section will highlight some theoretical assumptions on adult learning; b) a second subsection will debate on DS as a tool in the learning process and the matter of digital technology dominance in the educational context.

Our intention with this article is to prioritize information which can result in the enhancement of the collaborative leaning process using digital stories, as well as the digital literacy of adult students.

1. Discussion

Piaget (1990) believed that the construction of knowledge achieved by research and spontaneous effort would make the apprentice retain it with greater ownership. For the author this would enable the apprentice the acquisition of a method, built freely with its own notions, which would be useful throughout its life.

In the same vein, Rogers (1975) liked to define such experience of learning as "significant and experiential". For him, significant or experiential learning has the quality of a personal involvement, because the person creates emotional and cognitive bonds with the act of learning. Besides, it is self-initiated, because even if the initial stimulus for the construction of knowledge comes from the outside, the feeling of discovery, of reaching a goal, and understanding something comes from the inside. According to Rogers (1975), to learn in a significant and experiential manner is penetrating, because it evokes modifications in the behavior and attitudes of the apprentice, in addition to making it the center of the evaluation.

In the sequence, we want to discuss about the construction of knowledge in the learning process of adults through the use of digital technology and techniques such as DS. For this, we have divided the debate in two parts: 1) theoretical assumptions about adult learning with narratives; 2) Digital Storytelling and digital literacy.

1.1 Theoretical Assumptions about Adult Learning with Narratives

Knowles, Holton and Swanson (1998) affirm in their work that traditionally we know more about how animals learn than about how children learn, in addition, we know more about how children learn than how the process of construction of knowledge occurs in adults. The authors suppose that this occurs because the study of learning was done

initially by experimental psychologists, whose canons demanded a variable control and the conditions in which animals learn are more "controllable" than the ones where children learn, as well as the conditions in which children learn are more "controllable" than the ones in which adults learn. Knowles et. al. (1998) brought all of this forward to demonstrate the fact that many theories about learning of their period of time (between the decades 1960 and 1980) had been derived from studies with animals and children.

In their time, Knowles et. al. (1998) alerted that the lack of investigation in this area was surprising considering the fact that memorable masters of ancient times (for example, Confucius, Lao Tse, Hebrew prophets, Jesus, Aristotle, Socrates, Plato, Cicero) were not professors of children, but of adults. Moreover, the authors highlighted that these masters developed a different concept of learning since they understood it as a process of mental investigation instead of a passive reception of content. Thus, they created and adapted techniques to engage their disciples in the investigation:

1. The Chinese and the Hebrew used the case method, where one of the members of the group describes a situation (for example, a parable or a story) and together with the group they deepen the reflections on its characteristics and unfolding;

2. The Greeks used dialogical practice, where a member of the team raises a question or dilemma and the other members join in the reflection with their experiences and thoughts in the quest for an answer or solution;

3. The Romans used the confrontation technique, where challenges were presented to the members of the group to force them to show positions and then defend them.

As can be seen through the exemplifications of Knowles et. al. (1998) the use of parables, stories, and cases in the learning process of adults is old. This is because stories offer a powerful tool to promote learning and commitment. For McLellan (2006), stories speak with both parts of the human being: the mind-reason and the emotion.

McDrury and Alterio (2003) wrote a work directed to those who intend to use the technique of telling stories in education. The book does not address the use of narratives with digital tools; however, it brings some teachings worthy to be featured in our article.

The authors begin by emphasizing that stories are everywhere: we use them to motivate others, to pass on information, share experiences, entertain friends, connect with new people, etc. When we tell stories, we create opportunities to express points of view, reveal emotions and aspects of our personal and professional lives. McDrury and Alterio (2003) affirm that frequently people engage in this activity, which is exclusively human, in a creative manner and therefore, stimulate the imagination, improve their memory and capacity of visualization. Thereby, the ability to communicate experiences allows transcending personal structures and admitting broader perspectives, becoming an important learning tool.

McDrury and Alterio (2003) elicit the thinking of Vygotsky (1998) and his sociocultural theory which highlights the importance of context in relation to learning. The context provided the means in which the students will discover meanings through social gatherings. These gatherings will allow the students to familiarize with the nuances of their contexts and obtain help with the problems that are outside of their competence. Such premise, named by Vygotsky (1998) zone of proximal development (ZDP), influences the way educators see themselves, it also influences how they see their students, and the teaching and learning environment in which they interact. Vygotsky (1998) warns us to the fact that educational environments are social creations and, therefore, can be altered. He also reminds us how easily the human capacity can be underestimated.

For McDrury and Alterio (2003), designing activities that encourage students to use, enjoy, and learn with the act of telling stories demands time and creative energy. Like other learning tools, it can also be underutilized. It is imperative, therefore, for educators to consider carefully which activities can be used with a group of students so it will have the expected results. To help determine if telling stories is the most adequate tool to the teaching and learning process that is aimed for a specific curriculum topic, the authors suggest questions such as:

1. Is the methodology of telling stories the most convincing and memorable way for this group of students to learn about this topic? In an afirmative case, why?

2. How are we going to guarantee the suitability of the students to the activity, taking into consideration their different levels?

3. What forms of support are necessary for the students and educators engaged in the activity?

4. How long will the telling stories activity and everything that it involves last?

It is only after thinking successfully on the strategy that the authors recommend starting an activity or process.

McDrury and Alterio (2003) claim that if certain orientations are followed and certain traps avoided, the activities with stories will largely comply with the teaching purposes and the learning necessities of the students. Moreover, they suggest some guidelines of which we highlight the following ones:

1. Have a specific goal and an expected outcome for the activity.

2. Make sufficient time available for the activity to be fully fulfilled.

3. Consider ethical issues.

4. Provide access to ways to support the emotional needs that the activity may raise.

5. Provide resources for different learning styles: spoken, written, synesthesia, visual.

6. Take into consideration cultural differences.

7. Encourage creative interpretation.

8. Encourage active participation.

9. Guarantee the confidentiality of the subjects addressed.

10. Do not expect everyone to feel comfortable with all the activities.

11. Do not insist with an activity if it is not working. Some activities will work with certain groups but not with others.

12. Do not saturate the technique of telling stories. Just like any learning tool it can annoy.

For McDrury and Alterio (2003), to measure the appropriate level of necessary support for the students engaged in collaborating in learning processes is complex, especially when working with adults. The difference between what the student can

accomplish without help and what can be accomplished with orientation or collaboration with peers is what Vygotsky (1998) calls the zone of proximal development. To promote a mutual support for learning will create a bidirectional zone of proximal development. Thus, the information is shared, the questions are shared, and knowledge is built mutually. While one student is being introduced to new knowledge, another can be gaining a new perspective or a more refined understanding.

Being open to such learning opportunities is vital when working with adult students. Regardless of the student's and educator's level of knowledge, both can learn with one another. Nevertheless, in our interpretation, the capacity to be open to the experience of others and to dialogue will only work if there is collaboration within a constructive structure.

Here Freire's (1979) thought arises on education as a practice of freedom and not as the simple transfer or transmission of knowledge or culture. For Freire (1979), education is not the extension of technical knowledges; it is also not the act of depositing reports or facts on learners, called by him as banking education. According to the author, education cannot be transformed in a simple perpetuation of values of a culture or simply help the apprentice to adapt to its environment. In Freire's (1979) enunciation, education as a practice of freedom is the one in which the act of constructing knowledge does not end when you "know" something, because when a collaborative educational process of communication is initiated, other subjects are engaged and libertarian learning gains multiple colors, after all, each participant of the process uses its own color palette to paint its watercolor painting.

Collaboration is a keyword also for Rogers (1975) that sees the facilitation of learning, and not banking education as denounced by Freire (1979), as the ultimate objective of education. For the author, it is through the facilitation of learning and the collaboration that we will develop and learn to live as people in process, capable to sustain constructive answers, experienced and changeable to the deepest perplexities that beset us. In this process, the teacher takes on a new function: it is no longer the oracle that speaks from its platform of authority or a content depository, but instead, the guide that also participates in the learning process. In Knowles et. al. (1998) conception, which we

partake of, adult learning is a cooperative development, not authoritary, informal, and that makes education coincide with life.

2.2 Digital Storytelling and Digital Literacy

Garcia-Lorenzo (2010) enunciates that when we tell a story we intend to organize our experiences along the plot that explains and orders it. For her, this order help us make sense of our present actions, as well as orienting us in our future expectations. To summarize, it is through narratives that we generate and transmit our values, norms, and knowledge. The author even uses Freud's work to highlight that stories are an efficient way to reframe, comprehend and manage emotions, in addition to allowing the catharsis for the launching and reformulation of feelings. According to Garcia-Lorenzo (2010), since stories allow the expression and reconstruction of emotions within a limit, they provide us a safe space to explore different ways to be and see the world.

In the wake of Garcia-Lorenzo (2010), we understand that by characterizing itself as an act of telling stories in a digital format, DS can be a tool to organize our experiences in the learning process. Such a conception is strengthened even more if we remember that the act of telling personal digital stories can be a strategy to promote learning referenced by Vygotsky (1998) which presupposes a specific social nature and a process through which apprentices enter the intellectual life of those who surround them. Lambert (2010) highlights that an experience with DS can be seen as an extension of the kind of daily narrative which occurs around the dining table, in the living room, at the cafeteria, or around a bonfire.

Jamissen (2010) developed experiences with DS in the educational context of adults for programs in the field of Health and highlights that the technique has the potential to leverage student's reflections on practical experiences for the development of the professional identity. For the author, the students participating of the experience express satisfaction with the opportunity to share their learning in a reflexive narrative, instead of an analytical-rational report. This occurs because digital stories are developed in the interaction between the apprentice and its colleagues, through listening and giving

feedback. DSs are elaborated on a process where both (the storyteller and the listener) are engaged in interpreting and constructing meaning. In other words, somebody creates a script, produces a digital story, and share it with colleagues and, when doing so, gets engaged in the content as well as the social relationship.

It is still important to highlight that the balance in using audio-visual resources is essential when producing a DS as a tool of the learning process. After all, even though a storyteller is able to use many multimedia elements in its creations, according to Rossiter and Garcia (2010), the key issue to take into consideration when choosing images, sounds, and texts is always: will the multimedia element enrich the story or will it deviate the attention from the story?

In short, everything we have discussed here corroborates the understanding that there are multiple possibilities of using digital audio-visual products in the learning process which occurs in the context of adult education. Furthermore, such possibilities will certainly continue to grow, because each instant we are surprised by the introduction of new technological tools in our daily life. Nevertheless, as we have highlighted in a previous study (HACK, 2009), the techniques and technologies must always be the means and not the end of the process of construction of knowledge. That is why, the teacher and the apprentice need to master the technology, subjecting it to their objective. A use which should be based on criticality, on creativity, and on a contextualized practice.

Ohler (2008) is one of the authors which points out the importance of the act of telling digital stories as a tool to help students develop technological literacy abilities. Reis, Moura and Ribas (2007) partake of the same comprehension and enunciate that people break milestones and create opportunities to exercise citizenship when articulating between different knowledge through narratives, as well as when translating them in a digital technological production.

Based on the premises highlighted in the above paragraph, we start looking at DS not only as a technique to enhance learning processes in higher education, but also as a strategy for digital literacy. According to Ohler (2008), DS can help people develop a set of traditional and emerging literacies engaged in the process of telling stories.

We believe it is important here to report an experience that happened in the United Kingdom and which serves as an example of how DS can enhance the use of digital technologies by those who had not previously mastered them.

The project Capture Wales was a partnership between the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) of Wales and the University of Cardiff. The objective of the proposal was to allow for people to tell their stories digitally. Therefore, monthly workshop toke place between the years of 2001 and 2008. According to Thumim and Chouliaraki (2010), in the United Kingdom the Project was considered a pioneer in the training of ordinary citizens for the use of digital technologies with the intention to tell their own stories that were later published on the website created by BBC from Wales (Capture Wales, 2017). For Thumim and Chouliaraki (2010), the Project must be looked at from the standpoint of a double manifestation of legitimacy: 1) on one side, it provided space for public education, in the form of training, which generated public value in the form of participation and self-expression; 2) on the other side, it predicted the production of artifacts, in the form of digital content, which may even become objects of evaluation along the lines of a test of public value.

Besides BBC's experience with a partnership with the University of Cardiff, we would like to remember another example of using DS for digital literacy: the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS), created in 1998. This organization develops workshops to explore techniques with the participants, as well as offers services to public and private organizations mainly in the United States and Canada. Ideologically, according to the authors' proposal (CDS, 2017), the technique prioritize individual learning styles instead of uniformed methods, because there are many ways to make media and many reasons to do it. CDS's job is guided by the emphasis to understand how and why the stories are being produced, and how to share such stories can promote an individual or collective change.

According to Beeson and Miskelly (2005) who evaluated the works with DS presented above (the practice developed at Capture Wales of BBC and at CDS), it is possible to see that such experiences are very effective in mobilizing individuals for the participation in a workshop and the production of coherent stories of the life of the

participant. Nevertheless, Beeson and Miskelly (2005) understand that the workshops do not mobilize the sense of community because of the focus on individual stories, as well as because of the brevity of the experience. The authors identified that the main actor of these workshops is a complex, yet efficient, mix of machines and software, some specialists, the participants and their local headquarters, and a charismatic leader of the workshop. However, they point out that in both cases, digital stories are not vital in the creation of a network, as well as provide no continuity in the broader storytelling Project. In other words, the stories are simply the individualized results of the workshops.

Beeson and Miskelly (2005) still look critically at the fact that the two workshops (Capture Wales and CDS) are short term ones and consequently the network set up for the purpose to be dismantled when digital stories are produced. Thereby, even if the stories have been skillful achievements for the digital literacy of the individuals who produced them, there is no continuity once the network is interrupted. According to the authors, the workshops help people introduce digital cameras in their lives, but it seems that to reach the desired outcome of creating a community, the attention must be refocused to connect the stories and build a more lasting network through the workshop and find ways to maintain the reflection that the digital stories may bring for the future.

Finally, we still want to emphasize here that the search for digital literacy in the context of adult learning also brings the urgency to rethink the affective nuances of educational communication. In our interpretation, such urgency can foster the creation of motivating and welcoming environments where affective balance helps the student overcome the fear of communicating or presenting its ideas with multiple technologies, exposing them with freedom for interpretation and for questioning from other participants of the course, in order to constitute collaborative learning. However, as we pointed out in another study (HACK, 2015), it must be emphasized that the balance in the affective relations that involve the educational communication demands responsibility and each person needs to understand what their role in the collaborative construction of knowledge is.

2. Conclusion

For us, it is shown in this brief review of literature that certain abilities (for instance, the capacity to build a narrative and edit image, video, and sound) are required to the ones engaged in adult learning due to the inclusion of multiple digital technologies in the daily life. Therefore, as was previously identified, the practical experience of educational audio-visual production can be inspiring, because besides allowing the perspective of multidisciplinary readings on the subject, it may bring the possibility of digital literacy through the achievement of audio-visual pieces like the DS.

Now, the results of this bibliographical study lead us to the necessity of investigating with more depth the affection involved in the learning processes via multiple technologies. After all, the expectation of affecting all the students in a certain way with an audio-visual and instigate the same result in all spectators will always be a fantasy and, consequently, will be frustrating, because we do not know exactly how a proposed learning activity will affect the other or which action will result from affection, because not even in the face-to-face teaching it is possible to clearly identify these things. Therefore, our current study proposal, in partnership with the Psychology Center of the Universidade do Porto (Portugal), will aim at looking at audio-visual in the learning context going beyond the words spoken by the protagonists and ask: 1) are there physical signs and virtual attitudes which enhance the learning process via audio-visual resources?; 2) how are these physical signs and virtual attitudes represented or can be represented in audio-visuals?; 3) Is there a correlation between a certain mental/physical and a certain affection represented in a physical sign or virtual attitude? But, these are other subjects for future articles.

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SOBRE O AUTOR:

Josias Ricardo HACK é comunicólogo e psicoterapeuta com formação em Gestalt-Terapia Hipnoterapia e Psicanálise. Professor associado e pesquisador no Departamento de Artes da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina. Mestre e doutor em Comunicação Social. Atualmente reside na cidade do Porto (Portugal) onde realiza um Estágio Sênior no Centro de Psicologia da Universidade do Porto sobre Gestalt e aprendizagem com recurso audiovisual. Realizou outros dois estágios de pós-doutorado: 1) em 2011 no polo CETAC.MEDIA (Centro de Estudos das Tecnologias e Ciências da Comunicação) da Universidade de Aveiro, em Portugal; 2) em 2012 no ICAn (Institute for Cultural Analysis) da Nottingham Trent University, na Inglaterra. Membro da Ordem Nacional dos Psicanalistas e da Sociedade Brasileira de Estudos Interdisciplinares da Comunicação. Linhas de pesquisa e áreas de interesse: Gestalt; audiovisual educativo; processos hipnóticos; comunicação corporal; cognição, motivação e emoção; Psicanálise; comunicação dialógica e afetividade; literacia digital; aprendizagem de adultos; digital storytelling.