DRAMATIZATION AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING

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Abstract

Researchers' interest in finding out the benefits of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in elderly people is now growing. Living conditions and communication channels has changed in the digital age and is directly influenced by the rapid development of technology. Lifelong learning provides adults with the skills they need to stay active in society and strengthens their contribution to younger generations. Intergenerational learning is a form of lifelong learning that involves the two-way transfer of knowledge - from one generation to the other. Our goal is to study the utilization of dramatization and the contribution of digital technology to experiential intergenerational communication activities. To answer our research questions, we have used qualitative research tools (*semi-structured interviews, thematic Data Analysis and Observation*) and the Educational Drama as a structured pedagogical process in order to approach and explore new knowledge. In the light of our findings, we may conclude that audiovisual expression techniques and digital technology can be effectively combined as an alternative didactic method to elderly digital literacy in the Information Society.

Keywords: *digital literacy, intergenerational learning, verbatim theatre, educational technology.*

Introduction

We have grown up on stories narrated to us by our grandparents and other elders in the family. Those were the stories that helped us learn some important lessons of our lives. Nowadays, we have seen the spread of portable digital devices such as "smart" phones and tablets that are being used to social networking, entertainment and access to information on the Internet. Mobile devices help the elderly to increase communication, avoid isolation and loneliness. The portability of these digital devices offers opportunities for their use in innovative learning environments that support both personalized and

collaborative learning (Dimitracopoulou, 2005). Lifelong learning provides adults with the skills they need to stay active in society and strengthens their contribution to younger generations. Intergenerational learning is a form of lifelong learning that involves the two-way transfer of knowledge - from one generation to the other. This kind of learning is informal, self-directed and it promotes interaction, mutual exchange of knowledge and respect between generations (Kaplan, 2002). Using digital storytelling in order to achieve intergenerational communication we redefine the concept of lifelong learning. In order to cope with all these changes, it is necessary to develop the skills that will help us adapt to the Information Society through new digital tools and web services.

Theoretical approach

Researchers' interest in finding out the benefits of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in elderly people is growing. The way we live, work, communicate and think has changed in the digital era and is directly influenced by the rapid development of technology. What is the contribution of digital technology and audiovisual expression to the cultivation of children's cultural consciousness, especially when they interact with elderly people?

Usually, children like to talk more rather than listen and this behavior is evident especially in classrooms. Storytelling is an interactive activity that enhances children's listening skills and imagination in order to visualize the story. Also, it makes them aware of their rich cultural heritage and promotes children's motivation to learn about history. A big advantage of storytelling is that, listening to stories, enhances children's vocabulary and memory's capacity. They learn new words and always find it easy to explain their meanings in the context of a narrated story (Brooks, 2011). Experts say that storytellers should encourage children to create a short story - with the characters they have been told about - in order to associate images with the story. Storytelling is an experiential communicative act in which the storyteller interacts with the listeners and externalizes his feelings (Herrington & Kervin, 2007).

Our project refers to the educational technology research field and aims to study the effects of dramatization and digital technology on intergenerational communication activities. We chose *Educational Drama* as a structured pedagogical process that adopts techniques and tools of dramatic art as a means of approaching and exploring new knowledge. Our goal was to find ways of using digital media and dramatization to improve the digital literacy of the elderly and to promote the principle of intergenerational solidarity.

We will initially identify the theoretical background of our research through the clarification of the following terms related to our project:

• *Digital storytelling* is an effective educational tool that enables us to create and publish audiovisual stories and narratives from personal experiences and memories using digital media and Web based applications. Digital culture praises storytelling through different means of communication. Movies, the news, advertising, web pages present their content in a storytelling form. Digital storytelling is used in two different meanings, as an interactive experience and also as a combination of a narrated document,

images, video and musical soundtrack (Mello, 2001). Educational digital storytelling is offering new ways to communicate ideas and examples of good practices. In that way digital storytelling works as scaffolding allowing creative interaction between old and new prospects transformed into new meanings and new constructions of knowledge (Coventry, 2008).

• *Digital literacy* is the ability to organize, analyze, evaluate information and construct meanings through the use of digital technology. Digital literacy of the elderly is an indispensable skill of the 21st century and refers to the understanding and exploitation of a hyperlinked world (through new digital tools and web services) that make life easier. Information Technology and mobile devices help this group to increase communication, avoid isolation and loneliness (O'Brien & Scharber 2008).

• *Experiential learning* is based on the active participation of trainees in Collaborative learning activities such as research, observation, interviews, simulations, creative compositions etc. With this process knowledge is built, discovered and transformed by the trainees themselves and can be defined as shared work, on a particular subject, in such a way to promote individual learning through collaborative learning activities (Herrington & Kervin, 2007).

• *Intergenerational learning* is a kind of lifelong learning that involves the two-way transfer of knowledge - from one generation to the other - informal, self-directed and usually without   planning through discussions and collaboratives learning activities. Intergenerational learning is an experiential process that takes place through discussions and joint activities to achieve interaction, exchange of knowledge, understanding and respect among generations. Digital literacy provides the elders with the skills they need to stay active in society and strengthens their contribution to younger generations. In digital era older people can greatly benefit from ICT and social networks to interact with young people (VanderVen, 2004).

• *Dramatization* is not the performance of a theatrical work but an educational process where learners use theatre techniques (*role, movement, space*) and drama (*action, plot, conflict*) to transcribe a story into a script. *Verbatim theatre* is a form of documented theatre in which plays are constructed from the precise words spoken by people interviewed about a particular event or topic. This interactive storytelling technique enables any kind of story to be brought alive, even without prior knowledge of the characters or plot (Anderson & Wilkinson, 2007).

• *Reverse mentoring* is the training process in which reversal of roles takes place. The young person uses his knowledge to a particular object like computer applications to educate older people (Baily, 2009; Peterson, 2012).

Research methodology and Experimental approach.
In the second part, we analyzed the implementation stages of our work in order to determine the methodological context of our research. In our project we attempted to answer the following *Research Questions:*
    • What is the contribution of digital storytelling and dramatization to the cultivation of children's historical and cultural consciousness?
        • What are the benefits of using digital technology in intergenerational learning

activities?

The research was conducted with the participation of 25 pupils from Mantouki's Primary School in Corfu and 12 elderly people from the nearby school area. In order to gather research data, the pupils interviewed the group of elderly people about their past (Fig.1). Pupils also collected related photographic material and old-time objects from the elderly in school and created their own scenarios based on their narratives. At a later stage, they attempted to visualize these scenarios in a short film.

Figure 1: Interviews of the Elderly

In our project we apply *Body Theatre* techniques, self-concentration and confidence exercises to join all members in a group. We dealt with *Action Clip - Freeze frames,* a drama strategy suitable to move from images into improvisation, by bringing the scene alive with speech and movement (Anderson et al., 2007). The main goal of the project is to explore ways of exploiting dramatization and digital technology on intergenerational learning.

The axes which analyze the *objectives* of our research process are as follows:

•   Familiarization with the use of digital technology.
•   Acquaintance with the dramaturgy techniques.
•   Improvement of audiovisual production skills
•   Developing social skills of intergenerational solidarity.
•   Developing critical and creative thinking skills.
•   Cultivation of historical and cultural consciousness.

The implementation of our project, in response to the objectives, included the following stages (Fig. 2).

In our project, we chose a *qualitative research method* to describe life experiences of the elderly in order to understand the social phenomena and their subjective meaning. *Research tools* that we have used are semi-structured interviews, on-site participatory observation and thematic data analysis (Flick, Kardoff & Steinke, 2004).
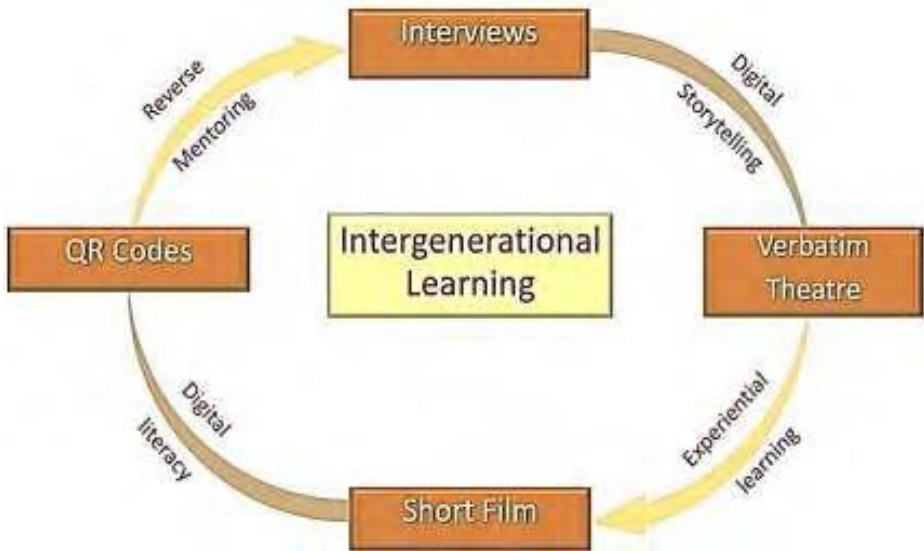
Figure 2: Implementation stages of our project

Here are some of the collaborative activities that we had prepared for the elderly

- They narrated their experiences from their childhood *(school years and 2nd World war),*
- They discussed old-time *living and working conditions*
- They told the children *customs* and the *local history of the region.*
- They showed them *photographic material* from their youth.
- They showed them the *old-time objects* they had in their collection and explained their use.
- They explained them the story of some *old games* of their childhood.

The produced audiovisual material (*interviews, storytelling, photographs etc.)* was digitized and uploaded to a collaborative website (Wiki) in order to carry out Collaborative Digital Literacy Activities with the elderly (Coutinho & Bottentuit, 2007).

Afterwards, offering everyone the opportunity to travel in time, we created an *Interactive Map* of Corfu port (Mantouki) with Hotspots that we created from the previous stages of our research (Fig. 3).

Figure 3: Intergenerational learning WIKI

Reverse Mentoring and QR Codes generation.
The digital literacy approach of the elderly took place in the Computer Science course. We invited the elderly to attend a class with the pupils. We had digitized our research material and then we created QR Codes (Quick Response Codes). At each workstation, two students trained an elder to use the computer in order to create a QR Code from their personal storytelling (Reverse Mentoring). The QR Codes created by the elderly - as part of their training - were placed on old buildings. So, if a smartphone or tablet is available, visitors can decode the information we stored in QR Codes, listen to stories and watch old photos and videos about the history of the area as they walk along Mantouki's narrow streets. Finally, we created a short film from the collective memory of the area, using the QR Codes technology. Our short film "Mantouki… *an Open Museum of Local History*" refers to their experiences from their childhood (school years and second world war), the old-time living and working conditions, customs and the local history of the region

Conclusion
The evaluation of the project was formative throughout its duration. In light of our findings, we can conclude that dramatization combined with digital technology can be effectively used as an alternative method for adults' digital literacy. We found out that dramatization and audiovisual expression techniques can be effectively used as alternative teaching techniques that enhance the students' critical approach, especially in Linguistic and Local History subjects.

Collaborative learning activities gave to the elderly the opportunity to discuss with

young people and to exchange views, while young people develop their sociability and acquire a positive attitude towards old age. Teachers noticed that the participation in our project had a positive impact on pupils' school performance. At the same time, children learned to work effectively together, they made great progress in the way of expression and argumentation, developed their social skills and gain a positive attitude towards old age.

On the other hand, the elderly had beautiful touching moments when they returned to school classes, after many years, and saw their stories visualized on mobile screens. Our project has changed their attitude toward new ICT and has enhanced their motivation to use digital technology, to learn, to remain active, to feel useful in society and less isolated from the new generation. Finally, strengthening intergenerational solidarity has reduced incidents of school violence and bullying. In general, intergenerational programs strengthen the links of learning, cooperation, communication, respect and understanding between generations.

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