Digital Storytelling

Georgia Gyftoula, MEd. in ELT

English language teacher

3rd Primary School of Zografou

September 2013

Because there is a natural storytelling urge and ability in all human beings, even just a little nurturing of this impulse can bring about astonishing and delightful results!

Nancy Mellon, The Art of Storytelling

Contents   Page

Chapter 1: Theoretical background

1.1 Once upon a time there was storytelling …

There is no doubt that people in the 21st century live in a technology and media suffused environment marked by various characteristics, such as the access to an abundance of information, the rapid changes in the tools used, and the increased ability to collaborate (Malita, Martin, 2010). Furthermore, no matter what the extent of exposure to this technological tornado may be for each and every one of us and how much our responses may vary, we all seem to have traveled the road from infancy to adulthood stepping on the same stones more or less. For who cannot recall moments of their childhood filled with the magic of listening to stories? Moving from the grandma's lap to the teacher's reading circle, storytelling has always been present proving its inextricable interwining with learning as all storytellers aim at invoking an emotional effect, communicating a message and subsequently attributing to the meaning-making process.

The material found on the EYL portal of the Research Centre for Language Teaching Testing and Assessment of the University of Athens (http://rcel.enl.uoa.gr/peap/training/e-training) comprises a large amount of enlightening information and data which justifies the use of storytelling while teaching a foreign language. To name but a few, stories are

● particularly enjoyed by children;

● a powerful medium for capturing attention and stimulating imagination;

● the stimulus for mental pictures and the interpretation of life;

● the vehicle for transmitting values, knowledge, cultural roots and experiences worth-spreading;

● the pedagogically appropriate way to trigger learners' willingness to express their thoughts and feelings.

Therefore, educators have understandably embraced the use of storytelling and integrated storytelling techniques into the process of teaching over the years. And as we move from the hard-cover 'Cinderella' fairytale book to the digital download version of the classic story the benefits of learning using stories as the context accumulate and justify our initial choice to include storytelling in our teaching practice.

"Story is the song line of a person's life. We need to sing it and we need someone to hear the singing. Story told. Story written. Story read creates the web of life in words."

Christina Baldwin

1.2 … and they all read digital stories ever after!

What is this new mode of passing along stories? What are the characteristics of this modern expression of the ancient art of storytelling? According to Malita & Martin (2010) "*Digital Storytelling (DST) ….is the practice of combining narrative with digital content, including images, sound and video.*" In addition, Skinner and Haggod (2008) quoting Robin (2007) define it as "… *a process of connection where teachers work with their students to help them harness the power of*

voice and imagery to connect people to their community by using technology that is relevant to the way we live today."

Kingsley and Brinkerhoff (2011) provide us with a clearer example. They include digital storytelling in their account of Web 2.0 tools along with timelines, cartoons and comics, online portfolios, quizzes and surveys used for authentic instruction, learning and assessment. *"Digital storytelling refers to the process of ordinary people utilizing digital tools to tell their own life stories through multimedia. The end product is usually a short video or a narrated slideshow about a specific topic, presented from a particular point of view."*

According to this, instead of having your pupils read or role play a dialogue at the school canteen, you could engage them in a much more motivating activity using Pixton, a tool for creating comics, and proudly enjoy with your pupils an end product like the one below.

Of course, it goes without saying that incorporating DST into your teaching routine means that you and your pupils have access to certain facilities such as a computer lab with internet connection and a projector or at least one computer and an Interactive Whiteboard in the classroom.

1.3 Why you should consider adopting it

Going through the wide variety of digital software available ranging from the simple use of slides and pictures to the complex fusion of sound, visual and transition effects, we can realize that educators use DST as a means for scaffolding fundamental literacies, such as the writing process, encoding, decoding, reading and writing fluency and content area vocabulary.

However, an experienced traditional teacher could argue that achievements in foreign language learning have been evident long before digital storytelling invaded the teaching world. So what are the reasons for making teachers willing to think of the possibility of introducing DST in their classes? Are there noticeable benefits for everyone involved? Summarizing the benefits of digital storytelling, one could claim that

● it creates the right framework for a student-centered instruction and collaborative learning, both of which are among the main principles of modern teaching theories. As such, teacher and learners work together, negotiate, identify, contribute, interact and complete a task together;

● it increases the number of opportunities for learner autonomy as each story requires students to gather and select information, assemble and organize data and achieve a result for which they are held accountable;

● it improves learners' language and ICT skills in a motivating and enjoyable manner while at the same time differentiated reading and writing instruction is made possible;

● it enables learners to share and evaluate among their peers, a fact which promotes the idea of learning as a reciprocal procedure;

● it fosters self-expression and tolerance through active listening and question asking bringing the idea of critical thinking nurturing into focus.

"Storytelling connects people. It connects hearts. It helps answer questions like: 'Who am I? Who are my people?' The voice is the messenger of the heart"

P. Schram

1.4 Changing roles, advantages and possible difficulties

Deciding to incorporate digital storytelling into your teaching practice implies the teacher's consent to certain changes as far as the role of the learners and the instructor are concerned. Trying to communicate my personal experience on the matter, the major challenge a teacher is asked to accept is the change from a teacher-controlled to a student-centered class. Royer and Richards (2008) mention "… *the gradual release of control from the teacher to the student*" and admit that once the teacher has modeled the task the students are given the responsibility to carry out the activity. Being used to move the baton and direct the orchestra all through the way, the traditional teacher might find it hard at first to get rid of the "expert" status and acknowledge a more active role for their learners. Accordingly, teachers will soon realize that digital storytelling means that working in pairs, in small groups or in the whole class occurs more often than working on your own or enjoying a teacher-learner encounter. Feedback will very often be provided by peers, who will support and mentor each other as they are all together developing in reading and writing.

Because of the two changes mentioned above the teacher is asked to deal with another big challenge, that of choosing the appropriate tool for digital storytelling and then integrating well-defined digital tasks in response to the learners' learning goals in their daily teaching routine (Verdugo & Belmonte, 2006). First, foreign language teachers are quite likely to feel overwhelmed by the large quantity of tools and websites that can be used. Therefore, deciding on the best option may prove time and effort demanding. Secondly, entering the English classroom without knowing in advance why and how you are going to do an activity will soon end up in failure. Digital tools are here to facilitate your teaching and guarantee better results if and only if they are carefully integrated and matched to your learners' needs.

As long as planning is done, it is time to tackle some last minute headaches. Sometimes, especially at the beginning of this effort, teachers admit interface difficulties and classroom management imperfections. Some children may need more time to adjust to the use of the tool, or having two children sharing the same computer might prove problematic and noisy. Certainly, new tools and new environments take some time to work at their best, so don't lose heart and trust your teaching expertise. Positive results will soon emerge along with numerous ideas about their exploitation.

As Skinner and Hagood (2008) suggest "... *the possibilities of digital storytelling are extensive. Students could present their digital stories to their classroom peers... teachers might... build their classroom libraries...*" I just would like to add the possibility of sharing the students' work with their parents or local community, publish it or share it online.

Chapter 2: An example of implementation

2.1 Using Storybird

Storybird is a digital storytelling tool which allows teachers and pupils create, share or print beautifully illustrated stories. After having signed up at storybird.com you have the chance to browse the site, select your favorite collection of illustrations and work with your pupils to produce a story. If you need more information on how to use this tool, you can watch the video tutorial at http://goo.gl/XKBQ5 .

Below you can find two lesson plans for the sessions during which third grade primary pupils created a collection of one-page stories on the topic "I am scared" available at http://myfacebookstories.wikispaces.com so that you have a better idea of how you can integrate this tool into your teaching.

2.2 The lesson plans

Lesson plan 1:

Topic: My facebook stories project, "I am scared"

Aims

- To develop pupils' writing skills
- To expand pupils' vocabulary
- To help pupils express and talk about their feelings

Level: Elementary

Class: C

Introduction

This session is meant to prepare pupils for writing their own one-page story based on the topic "I am scared". Pupils are expected to recall their personal experiences and see the class as a chance to express them using simple vocabulary. The overall description of the project and the preceding sessions focusing on other feelings are presented in detail at http://myfacebookstories.wikispaces.com .

Storybird, a tool for digital story-telling will be used for this purpose along with other online media such as a YouTube video and classdojo, a behavior management tool (http://classdojo.com)

Procedure:

Lead in

The class mascot, Mr. Hog, greets the children. 'Hello kids! How are you today?' After that, he invites them to watch a video together.

Topic presentation

Children watch Mr. Bean video. Mr. Hog asks questions trying to elicit language such as "I don't like mice", "I am scared, too". T draws the following diagram on the board and encourages pupils to fill it in with words connected with their experiences:

ghosts

mice

the dark

spiders

thunder/lightning

snakes
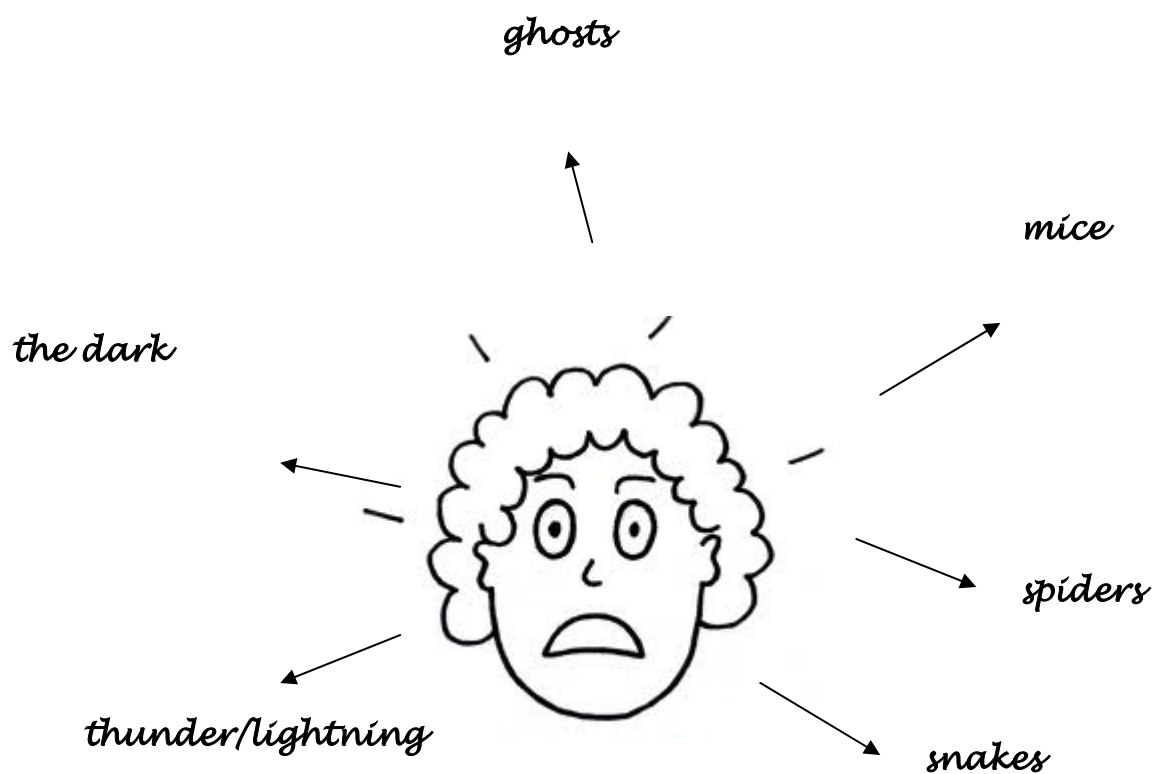
       T uses a pack of flashcards to generate vocabulary and add it to the "scared face" on the board.

TASK

       T hands out a leaflet with the "scared face" logo on top and asks kids to draw whatever makes them scared and write one or two phrases in English. This painting will be used while creating their story on Storybird and added to their personal portfolio later on. T will monitor and use classdojo (http://teach.classdojo.com/#!/teach/50a10f04594bbe592a000d67/classview) to ensure that everyone works quietly and within the time limit set. T collects the drawings. Mr. Hog says goodbye and congratulates kids on their work. Pupils leave the classroom.

Materials used:

1. A pack of flashcards available at http://esl-kids.com/flashcards

2. My facebook portfolio leaflet

Lesson plan 2:

Topic: My facebook stories project, "I am scared", part 2 the digital story

Aims

- To provide pupils with an opportunity to create in L2 and assess their own and their peers work
- To integrate a digital tool and trigger pupils' active involvement
- To develop pupils' writing skills
- To practise vocabulary

Introduction

During this session pupils will be asked to recall the knowledge they gained in the preceding class and use the relevant vocabulary in order to create their own story using Storybird. The class will make use of the IWB. Kids will take turns in choosing the illustration for their one-page story and put their lines next to it. At the end of this procedure pupils will be asked to assess their product.

Lead in

The class mascot welcomes kids and points at the children's portfolio drawings which are displayed on the board. Mr. Hog asks questions like "Who is scared of spiders?" Pupils revise vocabulary and

collect their drawing (this is meant to assist them while writing their lines).

TASK

T presents the illustrations for the story on Storybird and invites children to choose. After a short presentation of the images pupils work in pairs, write their short story lines on their drawings and then take turns to write their story on Storybird. T monitors and assists pupils when needed.
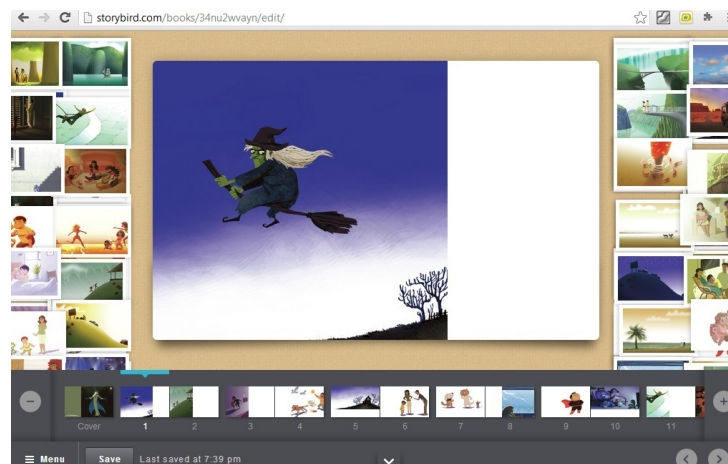

Some practical hints

• Having chosen the illustrations to work on and assigned them to the pupils saves a lot of time and facilitates the whole procedure.

• Keeping a diary after each class helps you reflect on your choices and plan things accordingly for the coming sessions.

• The way you introduce the topic guarantees the successful completion of the task. So try to prepare motivating lead-in activities.

• Don't forget to go back to the stories your class has made from time to time. Reading them or including them in activities helps pupils consolidate

vocabulary and language structures, boost their self-esteem as well as reinforce their desire to engage in new tasks!

Chapter 3: List of free digital storytelling tools

Apart from Storybird there are a number of free tools teachers and learners can use in order to produce a story. Have a look at a list of tools which are free, easy to use and promise to catch your learners' attention. Each tool is accompanied by a short description provided by the creator. It is up to you to decide which fits your class best!
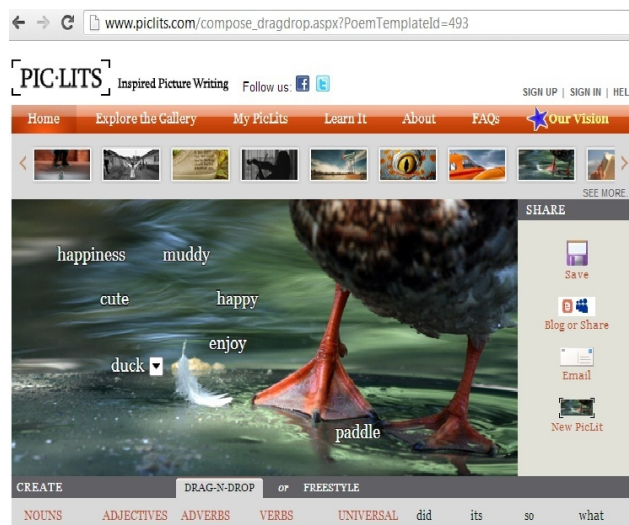
1. Photostory
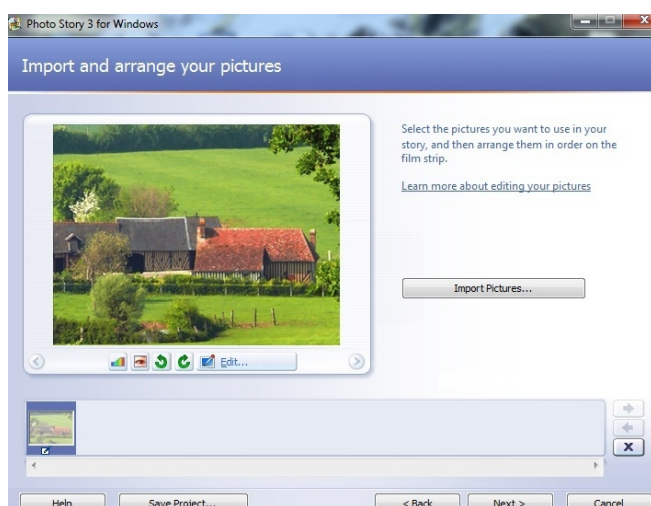
This is a free downloadable tool from Microsoft which gives you the chance to produce your own story in five easy steps using your own visual or audio material. You can just add your text or even record your narrative and add it to your story very easily. For a video tutorial, you can visit http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0oH9qE9qEY .
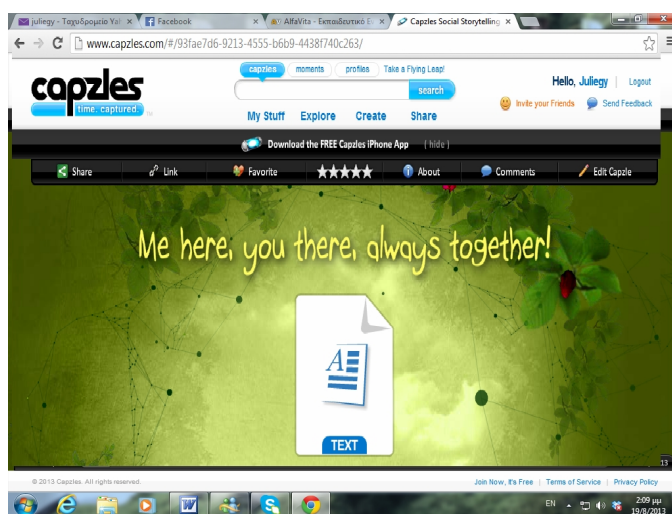
2. Piclits

Piclits, available at http://www.piclits.com, is a free tool for creative writing which allows learners to experiment with words and sentences, create short stories or rhymes and share them online. A tutorial for this tool can be found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eABQPhHidSM .

3. Capzles

Capzles is an interactive timeline maker. With Capzles, teachers and students can add photos, videos, audio, and text to their timeline. Themes, colors, backgrounds, and background music can be added to the timeline making it unique and personalized. Capzles also provides options when sharing: your Capzle, can be private with a specific list of subscribers who can view the Capzle, or made public for the world to see. Watch a video tutorial at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hR_21MeVeqQ .

4. Domo Animate

'Domo Animate' is a free animation tool created deliberately for educators by the team behind 'Go Animate'! Domo Animate allows users to build up a story over up to 11 scenes, including using music, sound effects and visual effects. Characters and scenes are deliberately pupil-friendly and there is no access to inappropriate content.

What can you use Domo Animate for? Create an animation to: 1. Describe things in a bedroom; 2. Present a weather forecast; 3. Develop a fairytale in space or woodland.   For more, watch the video at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lz2DYL83r8E .

5. Creaza

Creaza is the perfect toolbox for enabling students to develop their 21st
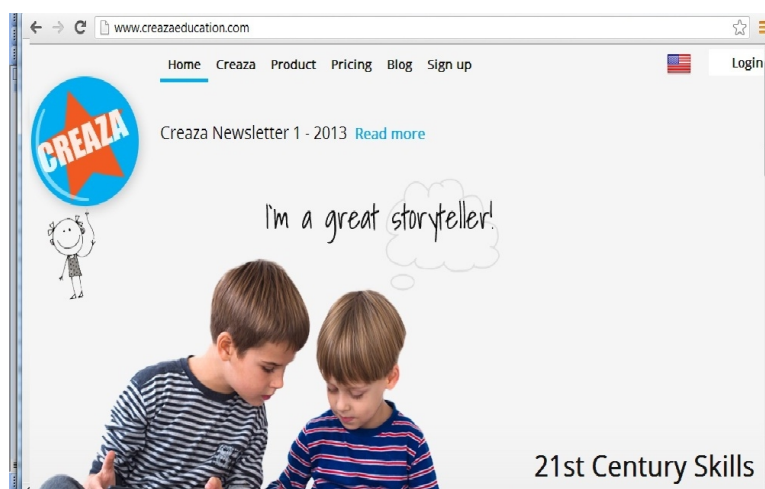
Century Skills. With powerful tools and an extensive, built-in media library, Creaza combines reading, writing and multimedia

with critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity. For Creaza Cartoonist tutorial, please visit http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1-wNtwN0jc .
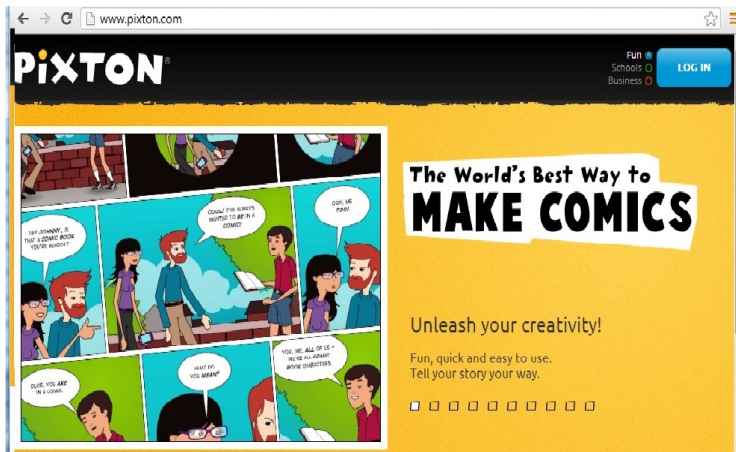
6. Pixton

Pixton is an amazing digital tool for students to create digital stories and cartoons. Students can easily create, share, remix and publish comics. For more information, watch the video at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ULgrjjj4VzA .

7. Picture Book maker

Create your own story book with Picture Book maker under activities at http://www.artisancam.org.uk/. See how you can create your story books at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9a7mqiTY2A .

8. ZooBurst

ZooBurst is a digital storytelling tool that lets anyone easily create his or her own 3D pop-up books. Using ZooBurst, storytellers of any age can create their own rich worlds in which their stories can come to life. ZooBurst books "live" online and can be experienced on your desktop or laptop computer, or on your iPad via the free ZooBurst mobile app. Authors can arrange characters and props within a 3D world that can be customized using uploaded artwork or items found in a built-in database of over 10,000 free images and materials. Tutorial available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKeMv61hljw .
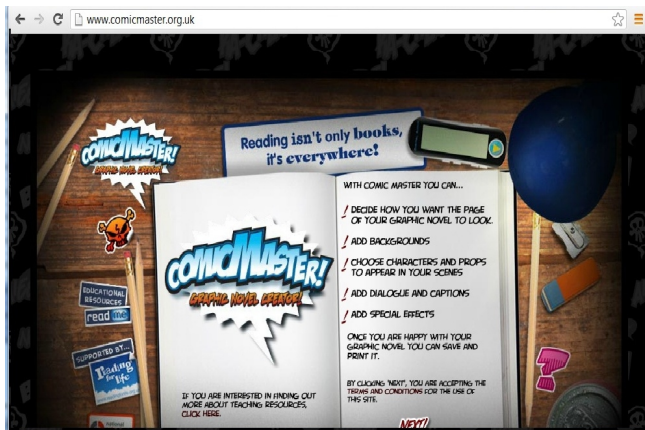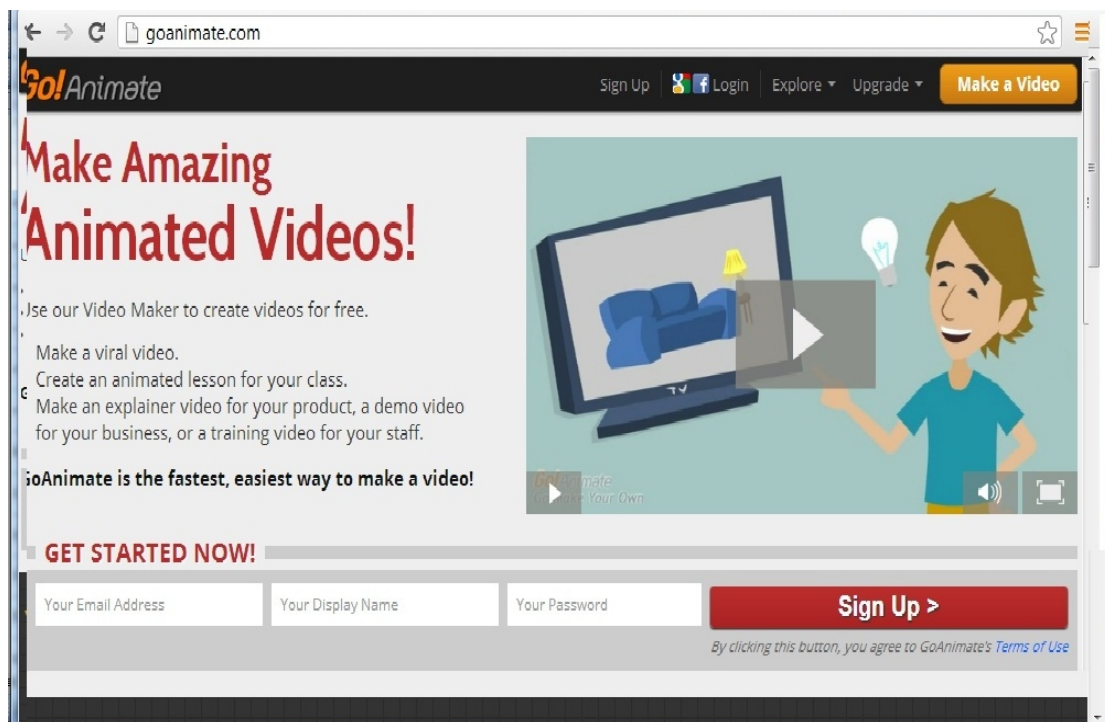
9. Comic Master

Comic Master is an easy to use Web 2.0 teaching tool for creating original graphic novels and comic books. It will appeal to students in all grade levels and can be used across the curriculum. Stories can be saved and printed out. Find more details at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjCIF5kHmlc .

10.   Go Animate

Create your own animated videos quickly and easily and then share them with the world. This is more than sewing images together into a slideshow, or narrating over existing material. The tool libraries contain tens of thousands of characters, backgrounds and props - with more

being added all the time. There are Character Creators which allow users to create custom characters, and the import tools allow for the integration of external audio, image, video and flash files. See how you can start creating at http://goanimate.com/video-maker-tips/how-to-make-a-video/ .

Conclusion

Whatever your choice of tool is just remember that storytelling is an activity especially enjoyed by children and teachers alike. Digital storytelling comes as a natural development of a way of learning which has proved its value over the years. There are so much for your learners and you, the teacher, to be explored: new technology, new roles, innovative activities and learning experiences, moments of sharing knowledge, opportunities for discovering and creating amazing stories! May your adventure in the digital storytelling world be successful and your stories happy-ending!

Bibliography

Johnson, L., Levine A., Smith R. (2009). The 2009 Horizon Report, The New Media Consortium, retrieved on August 3, 2013 from http://eskillslearning.net/uploads/2009-Horizon-Report-K12%20with%20summary.pdf

Kingsley K. V., Brinkerhoff J. (2011). *Web 2.0 Tools for Authentic Instruction, Learning, and Assessment*, in **Social Studies and the Young Learner 23** (3), pp. 9-12, retrieved on August 3, 2013 from http://ncss.metapress.com/content/n147w2024pw04764/

Malita L., Martin C. (2010). *Digital Storytelling as web passport to success in the 21st Century*, in **Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences** Vol.2 (2) pp. 3060-3064, retrieved on August 3, 2013 from http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042810005057

Royer R., Richards P. (2008). *Digital Storytelling* in **Learning and Leading with Technology**, retrieved on August 2, 2013 from http://keystone-training.pbworks.com/f/DigitalStorytelling_connections.pdf

Skinner E. N., Hagood M. C. (2008). *Developing Literate Identities with English Language Learners through Digital Storytelling*, in **The Reading Matrix**, Vol.8, No 2, retrieved on August 3, 2013 from http://www.readingmatrix.com/articles/skinner_hagood/article.pdf

Verdugo D. R., Belmonte I. A. (2006). *Learning English with the internet: A digital Syllabus of stories for Spanish Young Learners*, in **IATEFL**

Young Learner Publication, retrieved on August 3, 2013 from http://www.countryschool.com/ylsig/members/articles/CATSAutumn06/ Digital.pdf

"Digital storytelling" booklet includes a presentation of some educational web tools used by the author while teaching English in the Greek State Primary School. A reference to the theoretical background of their use is also made available for other colleagues who would like to incorporate digital storytelling in their teaching practice.