Digital storytelling: a creative writing study in the foreign language classroom

CHRISTINA TSIGANI[1], AIKATERINI NIKOLAKOPOULOU[2]

[1]Teacher of English
Patras
Greece
chritsigani@sch.gr

[2]Primary School Advisor
Patras
Greece
katnikolak@gmail.com

ABSTRACT
The utilization of digital storytelling in the English language classroom, based on the implementation of Web 2.0 tools such as Blendspace, constitutes an innovative, alternative didactic proposal aiming at the improvement of the students' production of narrative texts. The results of this study, which was conducted in the form of an action research, provide indications that the use of ICT contributed to the shaping of a technologically supported learning environment, much more attractive and motivating for the students, thus leading to a more accurate interpretation and understanding of the concepts of "narration" and "digital storytelling", whilst contributing to the students' commitment to the goal as well as to the improvement of their narrative texts.

KEYWORDS
Narration, digital storytelling, Blendspace, Web 2.0 tools

RÉSUMÉ
L'utilisation de la narration numérique en classe d'anglais, basée sur la mise en œuvre d'outils Web 2.0 tels que Blendspace, constitue une proposition didactique alternative innovante visant à améliorer la production de textes narratifs par les étudiants. Les résultats de cette étude, menée sous la forme d'une recherche-action, indiquent que l'utilisation des TIC a contribué à façonner un environnement d'apprentissage soutenu par la technologie, beaucoup plus attrayant et motivant pour les étudiants, conduisant ainsi à l'interprétation et la compréhension des concepts de «narration» et de «narration numérique», tout en contribuant à l'engagement des élèves dans l'objectif ainsi que dans l'amélioration de leurs textes narratifs.

MOTS-CLÉS
Narration, narration numérique, Blendspace, applications Web 2.0

INTRODUCTION

The Web 2.0 tool technology seems to have considerably influenced the area of learning and teaching while it appears in various services and applications. Blogs, wikis, course management and digital material production platforms constitute digital means at the teachers' disposal which provide multiple communication and interaction opportunities among peers or non-peers (teachers-students), thus helping them develop certain skills as a result of cooperation. Teaching English as a foreign language in the 21st century requires a new set of strategies that promote computer assisted collaborative learning. But how far can these strategies be effective for both teachers and students? In the following chapters you will be presented with an action research aiming at investigating the improvement of our students' creative writing skills, by motivating them through the use of digital storytelling and the exploitation of the potentials of *Blendspace*, a digital material production tool, in the planning and organization of a creative writing- storytelling course.

CREATIVE WRITING

Creative writing as a primarily creative process, closely related to the notion of creativity, comes in opposition to any attempt of defining it. "*Creative writing, above all, means creative erasing*" propounded Souliotis (2012, p. 13), which as a pedagogic activity should be "*optional*" and "*guided by the teacher instead of being unaccountably developed*". As far as the guidance is concerned, it is quite obvious that the students should be given prompting stimuli. And "*if neither the teachers nor the students are in the mood for creative writing activities, then Jean Anouilh's, the French writer's, aphorism that 'inspiration is a hoax fabricated by poets for their self-importance' is quite useful*" (Souliotis, 2012, p. 14-15). The end result, as long as the writing goal is distinctly defined, offers the students a sense of achievement which attracts their interest and engages them while at the same time motivating them in order to produce texts of a better language level than they would for more routine assignments. The pride they feel for the end product is correlated with the reading audience they are writing to which could be extended beyond the closed boundaries of the school environment towards the students' wider social surroundings or even towards anyone who has access to the published material, through the internet or the school newspaper. Consequently, creative writing through the stages of creating, evaluating and publishing the deliverable provokes to the students a kind of interactive relationship between the provided knowledge (input) and the produced result (output). The output becomes input. In other words, when a student observes how a piece of language turns out and receives feedback either from those closely involved in the learning process (teachers and students) or from the readers, this works influentially on essential language learning (Harmer, 2001). That is, it promotes what Krashen called "*acquisition*" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 181).

The use of storytelling
Storytelling constitutes the narration of a significant – i.e. appealing, unexpected, unusual – incident with a defined (justified or absurd, chronological or retrograde) series of events that comprise it. Traditionally, besides its entertaining goal, it aspired to transmit knowledge, attitudes, values, beliefs and through its hidden messages to lead to the understanding of deeper meanings thus transforming the recipients' feelings with an educational value suitable for didactic employment (Oikonomou, n. d.). Its incorporation in the foreign language classroom contributes to the development of the students' linguistic skills, fosters the growth

of empathy, imagination and creativity while, at the same time, offering a pleasant learning environment that promotes active participation and cooperation among the students.

The use of digital storytelling

The progress made recently in the field of technology could not have left the narrative realm unaffected. Web 2.0 technologies enable us to search for and process information, to collaborate and participate in commenting and transmitting them, to add multimedia, to create a digital narrative and publish this material on the Internet. Digital storytelling is defined as the combination of traditional storytelling with modern technology tools (e.g. Web 2.0 applications) and it should include at least two of the following: "*text, audio, music, videos, photos or other digital media*" (Reinders, 2011, p. 2). As a genre, it is not just limited to the narration of events that are the result of fiction, but it extends to other topics such as the recounting of historical events, biographies and the exploration of life in a local community or even in the universe. There are various types of digital stories, such as digital documentaries, digital essays, electronic memoires, e-books, interactive narratives, and so on (University of Huston, College of Education, n. d.), but the classroom implementation process is quite common and, according to Reinders (2011), it goes through specific phases (student preparation, conducting the activity, concluding the activity) leading to the publishing of the final product on the Internet.

Nowadays, with the radical changes brought by ICT (Information and Communications Technology) and the need to develop the individual's / the student's ability to cope with different and diverse communication situations through both linguistic and non-linguistic texts, there is a shift from literacy to multiliteracies, i.e. the ability to construct meaning in different cultural, social contexts, as well as the ability to use not only alphabetic but also multimodal representations (Kalantzis & Cope, 2001). The creation of digital narratives contributes to the development of multiliteracies in students. The integration of digital storytelling in the foreign language classroom provides multiple benefits for the teachers themselves as a powerful teaching tool that attracts their students' attention and promotes their active participation as well as for the learners in the development of 21st century skills of the so called Transliteracy. Students as transliterate storytellers, who organize their actions, create digital stories using a variety of multimedia tools while they present, cultivate and develop multiple skills. Robin (2006) explains them in detail and refers to the skills of research, writing, organization, technology, presentation, interviewing, interpersonal interaction, problem solving and assessment, which result from the combination of various types of literacies, such as digital literacy, global literacy, technology literacy, visual literacy and information literacy (Robin, 2006). The images / photographs it uses can be deployed as an effective guided writing tool that facilitates the students' writing process in order to improve their writing proficiency (Lee, 1994). Photographs stimulate thoughts and ideas, motivate and inspire writing through which pupils become more creative, more informed about a subject and can express themselves more easily about it. It may be a picture that was "discovered" on the Internet or created by the author himself. At the outset of the writing effort it is a good idea to provide the right facilitation and to give a relevant worksheet to the students.

Pedagogy scientists report the great value of digital storytelling as it enables those who use it (students and teachers) to creatively approach a different way of written or verbal expression by incorporating information, knowledge and experiences intended to help the "writers" to better understand themselves, the world that surrounds them and to learn how to express themselves creatively by enriching their thinking (Howell & Howell, 2003). In order to develop the ability to produce digital narratives, an appropriate teaching approach is required. Digital storytelling facilitates the convergence of four student-centered learning

strategies: student engagement, reflection for deep learning, project-based learning and the effective integration of technology into instruction (Barrett, 2006). Its effectiveness lies in two main points: a) its flexibility to adapt to the students' cognitive level and level of computer literacy; and b) its applicability to a variety of school subjects by changing in any case the focus to serve the teaching objectives of each course (Gregori-Signes, 2008). Consequently, for its implementation in the foreign language classroom, more emphasis should be placed on speech production and on the development of students' writing skills than on the use of technology per se. After all, for the successful creation of a digital story, the audiovisual media are not enough. The written text (script) is the fundamental element that gives it a sense of meaning. Therefore, the implementation of the instructional approach of project-based learning is closely related to the use of technology as its integration provides an authentic, constructivist, cooperative learning environment that promotes active student participation and enhances their learning achievements (Hung, Hwang & Huang, 2012).

DESCRIBING THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this research was to investigate how far the teaching of narrative production within a technologically supported learning environment, would help improve our pupils' understanding and production of narrative texts. The research questions were: (a) Does the technologically supported learning environment motivate the students to engage in the process of producing a digital narrative text? (b) Does this environment contribute to understanding narration, and in particular: (b1) to clarifying the notion of storytelling? (b2) to understanding its structural elements? (c) Is it a tool to help students produce better narrative texts? Therefore, can it contribute to: (c1) creating their own plan and helping questions before writing their story / narrative? (c2) producing properly structured narrative texts? (d) How far can such an environment contribute to the development of student interaction and collaboration?

The sample group
The study took place at a suburban state primary school in Greece and lasted for two months (April - May 2017), while the eleven pupils of graded learning abilities of the sixth grade of the school constituted our sample group. The pupils were about 11-12 years old and they were all Greek native speakers with the exception of one student, who was an Albanian native one. English was taught as a foreign language in the school 3 times a week for about 45minutes each time. The sample's level of linguistic competence in English according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) ranged from A1-B1. It is worth mentioning that these students had never been taught English in their school before, unlike other bigger schools in central areas of the country, due to the lack of English language teachers in small peripheral schools. However, some of the students had received private tutoring in foreign language schools, called *Frontistiria*, as a pastime activity in the afternoons for about 2-3years. Thus their prior contact with the language was either through a very traditional teaching model without the use of technology, that included memorization of vocabulary lists and grammar rules, controlled practice activities, translation of texts, frequent tests, and very little skills practice in homogeneous classes or none at all for those families who couldn't afford the *Frontistiria*. By introducing the English language course in this particular state school for the first time and taking into account the heterogeneity of the sample group, the teacher attempted to bridge the gap between the students who had attended some kind of private tutoring with those who hadn't. Throughout the school year she tried to follow the principles of the Unified Curriculum of Foreign Languages created by the Greek Pedagogical

Institute (n.d.), according to which multimodality is crucial and when it comes to teaching in the 21st century, the foreign language should be associated with the whole knowledge and skills necessary to communicate effectively in modern social contexts. Besides the conventional textbook, the lesson emphasized in skills development, authentic tasks and whenever deemed necessary it was conducted with the targeted aid of technology, i.e. with the use of the textbook's html enriched format which included interactive activities, quizzes and games, the use of web 2.0 tools and other applications (e.g. *Hotpotatoes*) aimed at presenting a more interesting and fun aspect of the language.

Methodology of the research

The Methodology we applied is based on an action research because, through it, the teachers can explore their professional practice to understand and diagnose problems, interpret dysfunctions and intervene to improve the conditions in which they work as professionals (Katsarou & Tsafos, 2003). Those who undertake an action research must find their path, based on the particular research questions and the particular conditions of their work. The action research we attempted features two phases which included four stages: (i) recognition of the existing situation / investigation / observation; (ii) planning / implementation of the teaching intervention; (iii) monitoring of the action; (iv) critical reflection / evaluation (ib., 2003). In addition to the teacher-researcher, this research was also attended by the school advisor of pedagogical responsibility who worked as a facilitator. As an external partner, the school advisor worked in support of the team's critical feedback and ensured the variety of tools for monitoring / evaluating the action (designing Teacher Observation Sheets, questionnaires - initial and final student assessment - data processing).

The stages of the research

At first, parents and students were briefed on the educational research-action in which the students would participate at the English course, its goal and how it would work. Then the research proceeded as follows:

i.   *Recognition of the existing situation / Investigation / Observation.* At the *first phase*, emphasis on carrying out this research was given in the context of day-to-day lessons. The co-operation between the teacher and the school's educational advisor of pedagogical responsibility facilitated the framework for designing the intervention as an action research. Specifically, the teacher observed the students' reduced interest and their weaknesses in the production of narrative texts. So, attempting to find out the truth or not of her observations, the teacher investigated the pupils' views through a questionnaire, simply structured, both closed and open-ended, and aimed at exploring the students' pre-existing knowledge of the elements of the narrative text, the common uses of ICT by students, their readiness to interact and collaborate, as well as the degree and extent of narrative understanding. Her observations were, finally, confirmed by the findings of the survey conducted to the students which helped her gather additional qualitative and quantitative data on the issue that occupied her. As a matter of fact, the qualitative analysis of the data showed that the students of our sample group use the PC: mainly (often / sometimes) to play games and less likely (rarely / never) to implement a project or to search for information. At school, they use computers mainly in English lessons, in Informatics and in Environmental Studies but almost never in Mathematics and Physics. Most of them (64%) claim they know what a narrative is. However, when they are asked to explain what it is, we see that they do not really know. Some of their common outings were: "*I say my opinion*", "*we explain the appearance of a thing or space and others*", "*a description*", "*the summary*", "*I say what I believe*" or "*I do not know*". The analysis of the data was complemented by

the critical stage, i.e. the joint realization of the necessity to modify the teaching practice by incorporating ICT.

ii.   *Planning / implementation of the teaching intervention.* At *a second phase*, through the advancement of consciousness offered by the previous understanding, a new concept of teaching has also been achieved, which will offer new strategies of action. Eventually, all these in addition to the teacher's attendance of a seminar on "Digital Storytelling for the Development of Productive and Collaborative Skills" contributed to the acquisition of a new perspective with a wealth of ideas for new actions, i.e. for new action strategies (Altrichter, Posch & Somekh, 2001). The contribution of technology has been substantial even at this stage since, according to Blumenfeld, technology can assist both the organization and the implementation of a project (Blumenfeld et al., 1991). Thus, with the help of *Blendspace*, the objectives of the lesson plan, the identity of the sample group, the tools deemed necessary and the process of the teaching intervention were recorded and illustrated in the form of a conceptual map. Then, based on the priority of utilization, the teacher added in this digital lesson a ready-made digital comic story from *Photodentro*, the worksheets for each group and the digital card that was meant to serve as a model for the students at the pre-writing stage. By using a projector and a laptop, the e-lesson's material was shown in the classroom for the best and most effective conducting of the lesson. *Popplet* schematically depicted the didactic intervention and functioned as an "advance organizer" for the students, to whom it was presented and analyzed before the beginning of the implementation procedure. In addition, during the design phase of the project, the teacher subscribed to the *Storybird* application, selected an artist's ready-made creations (images) and created a multi-page book, to which she added new illustrated pages in order to form the "storyboard".

At the *Pre-writing Stage*, it was deemed necessary to present the students with an already existing short digital story, a digital comic from *Photodentro*, which focused on the story of King Midas (from the 4th chapter of the interactive English textbook of the 6th grade). Studying texts and techniques of a particular genre before embarking on their own writing, helps students to produce better quality works (Harmer, 2001). Furthermore, Reinders (2011) argues that we should prepare our students for the implementation of digital storytelling in the classroom by providing them with samples and by specifying a framework for them to structure their narrative. Thus, our students observed, discussed, identified the structural elements of the story (theme, setting, characters, plot structure) and recorded them on a worksheet (2 didactic hours). Initially, the study of the model story for the recording of its structural elements was performed with the technique of cross-language mediation, both oral and written, from English into Greek in order to facilitate the pupils' participation, especially for a number of children who face learning difficulties. After all, "*Mediation practice contributes to the development of complex cognitive mechanisms and social skills as well as to the cultivation of intercultural awareness*" (Dendrinou & Karava, 2013, p. 150). The structure of the plot followed the 5 elements of Freytag's Pyramid: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, denouement (Freytag, 1900). Subsequently, moving on to structure a story of their own, the students were divided into 2 groups of 5 or 6 to study the storyboard the teacher had created for them, i.e. the images of the story, all provided in a successive order (1 didactic hour). Brainstorming followed, so each group wrote captions for their images and completed a worksheet with the structural elements of their story (in English). Organizing the class in small groups of around 5 pupils seems to be the best option when engaging in groupwork, as it provokes greater involvement, participation and

interpersonal interaction while at the same time it enables the emergence of the opinion of the group majority since these groups are not small enough to eventually lead in over-dependence on the individual (Harmer, 2001). With the help of *BigHugeLabs-trading card* application a digital question card was created by the teacher and was uploaded in *Blendspace's* digital lesson. It was intended to constitute a model, an "instructional scaffolding" that would offer the necessary guidance to the groups in the process of structuring their story / narrative. The model-card contained: (a) (in the form of a picture) the beginning (the first page) of digital story along with the corresponding text written by the teacher herself and (b) the questions of structural organization. This material was presented to the students with the aid of a projector, initially focusing on the superstructure questions and then on the text that was created by answering them (about 20 minutes). Each group was then split into pairs and each pair undertook to create ancillary questions and text in two subsequent pictures (about 1 didactic hour). The use of the digital card provided a guiding framework (superstructure) to the learners, engaged and motivated them by transforming an, under other circumstances, conventional and boring instruction into an innovative, collaborative and participatory one.

At the *Writing Stage*, the students in pairs responded to the questions they had collaboratively formed and then collectively wrote their stories (drafting) for about 2-3 didactic hours. The pictures collected from *Storybird's* gallery showed a night's adventurous journey of two kids from their beds to space and back. Based on the same sequence of pictures, each of the two groups devised its own plot which was quite different from the other. Group A created a digital story entitled "*The Lost Light*" in which the two boys, Johnny and Philip, woke up in the middle of the night when a star fell outside their window and made them fly. While hovering over the ground, they noticed that all traces of light had disappeared both from the earth and the sky. So they decided to travel to space in order to bring the light back. After great hardships they discovered that the Lord of the Moon had captured all the stars. The boys set the stars free and safely returned back to their beds. Group B created the digital story "*A Dreamy Night at the Magic Land*" in which Johnny and Philip woke up in the middle of the night when a star flew by their house. The two boys followed it in Magic Land where they met alien creatures; they played with them and explored the moon. There they saw a giant alien weaving a net and used it to return back home. In the end, it is revealed that the giant alien was the King of Dreams who wove this adventure in his net. Everything was just a dream! The students used their glossary to choose vocabulary taught in previous units of their textbook as well as online dictionaries when necessary.

At the *Post-writing Stage*, each group read the text that came out of the pairs and based on the question cards, made the necessary structural, grammatical and syntactic corrections (revising-editing) so that the narrative text would gain cohesion and coherence (2-3 didactic hours). The final draft writing was followed by typing the text in the *Storybird* application, and after relative guidance, the students made the necessary publication settings so as to convert their final draft into a published digital book (2 didactic hours). Finally, the two groups presented their digital stories to their fellow classmates (1 didactic hour).

The methodology followed for the development of the students' writing skills as well as for the writing and configuration of their story was the *Process Approach*, which, according to Harmer, focuses on the stages from which a written text passes until it reaches its final form. The White and Arndt model diagrammatically represents these

stages and shows that their progression is not linear as there is often regression in previous stages until the writing process is complete (Harmer, 2001).

FIGURE
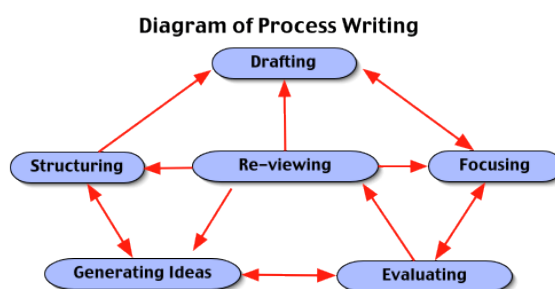
The writing process (White & Arndt, 1991)

iii. *Monitoring of the action.* The monitoring of the action was achieved: (a) through correlation of evidence, i.e. the production of narrative texts by the sample group before and after the intervention, and their assessment as far as their superstructure elements and linguistic means are concerned, (b) through analytical observations recorded by the teacher in the Teacher Observation Sheet throughout the implementation stage and (c) through questionnaires which, as already previously described, were given to students before and after the didactic intervention. The answers to specific questions (fixed answers 4 or 5 different types or Yes/No, 2 categories) were given numbers between 1 to 4 or 5 (depending on the strength of activity) or 0 to 1 (for the simple answer Yes/No). Then the different populations (each now carrying certain numbers) were examined with t-test. As a matter of fact a paired t-test was used before and after the new didactic practice implementation on the same sample group. Statistically significant results were considered <0.05.

iv. *Critical reflection / Evaluation.* The evaluation and reflection on the action was achieved by collecting, processing and comparing the final results with the initial qualitative and quantitative data obtained by monitoring the action. Using this combinatorial method, of student questionnaires, Teacher-researcher's Observation Sheet (hereafter referred to as T.O.S.), and written student documentation, an attempt was made to collect data of three different "perspectives" or "angles" (Bernstein, 1999), both qualitative and quantitative, of open and free techniques, or even strict ones, which allow the comparison and contrast of different descriptions over the same situation throughout the implementation of the action research (Altrichter, Posch & Somekh, 2001), ensure the interdependence of the research and provide a more comprehensive look on the situation.

The employment of Web 2.0 tools and Internet applications in designing, organizing and implementing this didactic proposal

The tools we utilized in this didactic proposal for the planning and implementation of teaching the production of digital narrative texts in English are: (a) *Digital Lessons on Blendspace*: *Blendspace* (https://www.tes.com/lessons) is a free digital platform for creating multimodal interactive lessons with the integration of multiple digital content, from the Internet or not, easily accessible to the students. The lessons are structured in the form of tiles, each of which contains a variety of digital resources such as pictures, videos, links, texts, questions and many more. Every digital resource appears in the order that it is intended to be

shown and can be presented successively. (b) *The action plan on Popplet*: *Popplet* (http://popplet.com/) is a free Internet educational tool for the creation of mind-maps. It includes the "popples", little boxes that are created just by clicking in the program's colourful canvas and which are able to host text, drawings or even images and videos, either from our pc or from Internet locations such as Youtube and Vimeo. The popples can be linked to each other thus creating a graphic representation of relationships among the meanings we choose to link. It provides us with the opportunity of adding collaborators for the cooperative configuration of the mind-map as well as of exporting it in .pdf, .jpeg or .png form for further sharing. (c) *Photodentro – Digital School Interactive eBooks*: *Photodentro* (http://photodentro.edu.gr/aggregator/) is the "National Educational Content Accumulator" which aims both at promoting the use of open educational resources for schools and at functioning as a digital repository of interactive stories, quizzes, games, videos, comics and so on that make teaching more playful, thus facilitating the learning process. Its accumulated material is organized in categories. The "Interactive eBooks" platform contains all the school textbooks in enriched html format with embedded digital resources from *Photodentro*. Enriching each unit with a variety of interactive activities allows for the escape from conventional textbooks. (d) *BigHugeLabs – Trading card*: *BigHugeLabs* (https://bighugelabs.com/deck.php) free digital photo editing application, offers the potential of finding ideas, storylines, providing online word processing tools and adding effects to images, such as creating posters, wallpapers, calendars, magazine covers, etc. After the editing the user may share his creation via email, Facebook, Flickr or even download it. It is a simple and user-friendly tool, especially for language lessons, since it provides authentic material to students as a stimulus for speaking or writing activities. (e) *Digital Storytelling on Storybird*: *Storybird* (https://storybird.com/) allows the creation of digital eBooks professionally illustrated with ready-made artistic works selected from a wide range of choices from the program's gallery. The digital stories or the poems created with this application can be published either on the public library of the program or privately. Most of its services are provided free of charge, with the exception of downloading and printing the creations. Furthermore, it does not allow uploading images from the user's personal collection, recording narration or uploading an audio file and text formatting. (f) *Evaluation via GoogleForms*: This is one of the free online services provided by Google and its usefulness lies in the creation of online questionnaires that can be administered electronically for automatic collection of results.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY AND DISCUSSION

In order to measure the effectiveness of teaching using digital storytelling and Web 2.0 tools, a statistical study (of the pupils' questionnaires) was carried out, which was quite extensive, and therefore we have only included in this text the statistically significant results. All other correlations that were investigated but were beyond the statistical significance are not presented here for reasons of clarity and length of the manuscript.

In particular, the analysis of the student responses provides strong indications about our intervention (i.e. the use of ICT and digital storytelling in teaching) and provides useful answers to our research questions as follows:

1. It helped the students to *improve their understanding of the notion of narration* ($p = 0.0268$, paired t-test). This result can, also, be confirmed by the clear way in which the students answered to the next open-ended question about what does "storytelling" mean for them ($p = 0.0011$, paired t-test), as all of them (100%) declare it as known and define it as "*NARRATION*", "*when I tell a story*", "*When you make a plan for a*

story", "*The narrative means that I read a story*", "*When we tell a story*", "*a story*", "*Narration is a story*", "*story*".

2. Furthermore, it significantly facilitated the understanding of the concept of "digital storytelling" (p = 0.0011, paired t-test). The students appear to *define more clearly what a digital narrative* **is** after this didactic intervention. As they defined it, it is: "*When you have some pictures on the internet you make a story*", "*Digital narrative in the digital world*", "*Digital Narration*" "*I think it is a narrative through the internet*", "*it is a story I made with the computer*", "*a story telling through the computer*", "*Digital Narration is a digital story*", "*an e-story*". These findings are in line with the international literature, according to which multimedia teaching tools change the way students learn, while their specific applications (such as digital stories here) can trigger student motivation for learning and often lead to a better understanding of the topics under consideration (Philpot et al., 2005).

3. This innovative lesson led to the *motivation and commitment of the students to their work*, as they claim they like digital stories (p = 0.0082, paired t-test). This is also apparent from the qualitative analysis of the T.O.S. data, in which the teacher notes that: "*Student participation was almost total*" with the exception of one student who refused to work with her team and that "*I have noticed a great interest in the whole process even by the weakest and the most unwilling students, as opposed to conventional teaching methods*". Research shows that pupils' views on the pleasure they will derive (intrinsic value beliefs) influence their choice of learning activities, as well as the intensity and quality of effort they make (Jacobs et al., 1998; Wigfield & Eccels, 2000). When dealing with issues within their interests, it is a natural consequence for students to follow with great interest and attention and to commit themselves to the completion of their work.

4. If we rank the students' five possible answers in relation to their "comfort in writing" a narrative text from "*too difficult*" giving the value 1 to "*very easy*" giving the value 5, the answers of the children show an *increase of their writing comfort in storytelling after our didactic intervention*, which is statistically significant (P = 0.0001, paired t-test). Therefore, there are important indications that our students were greatly helped to write narrative texts with ease after attending this lesson using digital storytelling, plan making, ancillary questions and web 2.0 technologies. The learning motivations that were created seem to have a positive relation to learning (Gardner, 1985), and they are considered the second most important factor in foreign language performance after the students' cognitive abilities (Skehan, 1989). The qualitative analysis of the T.O.S. data, also, confirms that the "learning scaffolding" created to help our students write better narrative texts has worked with significant, beneficial results. As she notes, "*observing the written products of each stage, I realized that, eventually, this organization of their writing based on the stages that were designed, worked only positively to create a well-structured story. Meanwhile, the creation of ancillary questions has been a catalyst for the quick and complete writing of the text of each image*".

5. Nevertheless, the students' answers to more general questions about "*the use of a plan when writing essays in English*" (p = 0.6687, paired t-test), their "*belief in the usefulness of the plan for the creation of a narrative / story writing*" (p = 1, paired t-test) and the creation of "*ancillary questions on the theme of the narration, to help them write their story*" (p=0.290, paired t-test), do not provide statistically significant indications of improvement in their original beliefs about the use of a plan and ancillary questions in speech production. The teacher notes in the T.O.S. that: "*at first there was nagging about the process by some students who thought that writing*

ancillary questions or creating a structured plan before writing their story would be confusing. I had to argue in order to convince them to experiment with these techniques and then to evaluate their effectiveness by expressing their opinion in the final questionnaire". It seems that *the students being unaccustomed and discordant to the use of a plan and ancillary questions, finally, accepted the challenge due to the originality and innovation entailed in the production of an e-book.* The good organization of the course, combined with the well-planned assistance it provided and the multimodality of the media it included, contributed to the creation of a "learning scaffold" and to the successful completion of the production activity. Yet, it never led to the ability of independent narrative text production for each one of the students separately. This comes as a result from the students' answers to a case study question ($p = 0.8218$, paired t-test), where they should note the structural elements of the narrative story: "*You are going to write a story about a classmate who suffered an accident during the school break. What will you include in the plan you are going to make before you start writing your story?*". No child marks more than two or three of the structural elements and their plan is incomplete. Therefore, just one intervention of this kind is not sufficient enough for students to understand how to configure their writing plan; something that can be expected and is, also, highlighted by the teacher in the T.O.S.: "*I think that besides storytelling improving their writing skills in general, takes time and practice*".

6. The students' responses indicate *a relative persistence in autonomous work and a difficulty in changing attitudes towards cooperation.* Thus, after the intervention, only 18.2% of our pupils want to "*cooperate*", while 27.3% of them say they prefer to "*work alone*" and 54.5% "*sometimes on their own and sometimes with others*". This instruction does not seem to have influenced in a statistically significant manner the pupils' attitude towards collaboration ($p=0.7527$, paired t-test). They give various reasons to justify the avoidance of cooperation with their classmates, such as difficulties in managing diversity, contradictions and pluralism, e.g. "*It makes it hard for me that we have different characters*", "*To gather all the views in order to make a story*", "*Someone wanted to write whatever he liked*", "*Everyone had a different opinion*", "*We had different opinions and we had to record them all*". The existence of these anticipated difficulties contributes to the element of competition that is inherent in every school environment (Kagan, 1995) as well as in the Greek elementary school, which appears to be slightly more competitive than the others (Matsagouras, 1999), just like the Greek society is in general (Varnava-Skoura, 1978).

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the research provide strong indications that with the design and implementation of this innovative teaching of narrative text production in English using Web 2.0 applications, our students were motivated, activated, and completed their narrative eBooks. They seem to have thoroughly comprehended the concept of narration and digital storytelling; they expressed their pleasure for their involvement in the creation of a digital narrative, and were greatly helped by the guidance they received throughout the course in order to write an effective narrative text that contained the necessary structural elements, cohesion and coherence. However, there was no statistically significant improvement in students' perceptions of the process, i.e. the use of plan / ancillary questions in the writing process of their texts and the development of cooperation between them. By all means, these are generally considered quite difficult skills and require the continuation of such innovative

interventions. The effective completion of the narrative writing activity by our pupils is of particular importance, especially after their strong initial objections, their almost total participation, their clear commitment to a painstaking and demanding task, such as speech production, and the pleasure they eventually derived from it. Meadows & Kidd (2009) argue that the beauty of digital expression lies in the fact that digital stories can be created by people anywhere, on any subject and can be shared electronically around the world, while characterizing them as "multimedia sonnets created by common people". In our opinion, the use of Web 2.0 digital tools may contribute to a dynamic learning and teaching environment that can trigger the students' interest and commitment, develop their collaboration and achieve the methodological work required by school learning; elements which, according to shared view, are considered necessary in today's school classes as well as in modern life in general.

REFERENCES

Altrichter, H., Posch, P., & Somekh, B. (2001). *Teachers investigate their work: an introduction to methods of action research*. Athens: Metaixmio (in Greek).

Barrett, H. (2006). Researching and evaluating digital storytelling as a deep learning tool. In C. Crawford, R. Carlsen, K. McFerrin, J. Price, R. Weber & D. Willis (Eds), *Proceedings of SITE 2006--Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education International Conference* (pp. 647-654). Orlando, Florida, USA: Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE). Retrieved from http://electronicportfolios.org/portfolios/SITEStorytelling2006.pdf.

Bernstein, B. (1999). Vertical and horizontal discourse: an essay. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *20*(2), 157-173.

Blumenfeld, P. C., Soloway, E., Marx, R. W., Krajcik, J. S., Guzdial, M., & Palincsar, A. (1991). Motivating project-based learning: sustaining the doing, supporting the learning. *Educational Psychologist, 26*(3&4) 369-398.

Dendrinou, V., & Karava, E. (2013). *Foreign language education to promote multilingualism in Greece today: teaching approaches and practices.* Athens: National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. Retrieved from http://rcel.enl.uoa.gr/files/rcel/texts/ODHGOS_TOMOS.pdf (in Greek).

Freytag, G. (1900). *Technique of drama. An exposition of dramatic composition and art*. Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company.

Gardner, R. (1985). *Social Psychology and second language learning: the role of attitude and motivation.* London: Edward Arnold.

Greek Pedagogical Institute (n.d.). *Unified curriculum of foreign languages.* Retrieved from http://rcel.enl.uoa.gr/xenesglosses/docs/EPS_content.pdf (in Greek).

Gregori-Signes, C. (2008). Practical uses of digital storytelling. *INTED2007 Proceedings.* Retrieved from http://www.academia.edu/360869/2008._ Practical_uses_of_Digital_Storytelling.

Harmer, J. (2001). *The practice of English language teaching*. Essex, England: Longman.

Howell, D. D., & Howell, D. K. (2003). *Digital storytelling: creating an eStory.* Worthington, OH: Linworth Publishing. Retrieved from: http://www.schrockguide.net/digital-storytelling.html.

Hung, C.-M., Hwang, G.-J., & Huang, I. (2012). A project-based digital storytelling approach for improving students' learning motivation. Problem-Solving competence and learning achievement. *Educational Technology & Society, 15*(4), 368-379.

Jacobs, J. E., Finken, L. L., Griffin, N. L., & Wright, J. D. (1998). The career plans of science-talented rural adolescent girls. *American Educational Research Journal*, *35*(4), 681-704.

Kagan, S., (1995). *Cooperative learning*. San Juan Capistrano: Kagan Cooperative Learning.

Kalantzis, M., & Cope, B. (2001). "Multiliteracies" a framework for action. In M. Kalantzis & B. Cope (Eds), *Transformations in language and learning: perspectives on Multiliteracies*. Australia: Common Ground Publishing.

Katsarou, H., & Tsafos, B. (2003). *From research to teaching: the educational action research*. Athens: Savvalas (in Greek).

Lee, L., (1994). L2 writing: using pictures as a guided writing environment. Paper presented at the *Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association Conference*. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED386951.pdf.

Matsagouras, I. (1999). *The school classroom*. Athens: Grigoris (in Greek).

Meadows, D., & Kidd, J. (2009). Capture Wales. The BBC digital storytelling project. In J. Hartley & K. McWilliam (Eds), *Story circle: digital storytelling around the world* (pp. 91-117). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Oikonomou, B. (n.d.). Storytelling. Retrieved from Technology in education website: https://economu.wordpress.com/εκπαιδευτικό-υλικό/αφήγηση-storytelling/ (in Greek).

Philpot, T. A., Hall, R. H., Hubing, N., & Flori, R. E. (2005). Using games to teach statics calculation procedures: application and assessment. *Computer Applications in Engineering Education, 13*(3), 222-232.

Reinders, H. (2011). Digital storytelling in the foreign language classroom. *ELTWorldOnline.com, 3*, 5-6. Retrieved from http://blog.nus.edu.sg/eltwo/2011/04/12/digital-storytelling-in-the-foreign-language-classroom-2/.

Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Robin, B. (2006). The educational uses of digital storytelling. *Technology and teacher education annual, 1*. Retrieved from http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu/articles/Educ-Uses-DS.pdf.

Skehan, P. (1989). *Individual differences in second language learning*. London: Edward Arnold.

Souliotis, M. (2012). *Creative writing*. Athens: Ministry of Education and Culture (in Greek).

University of Huston, College of Education. (n. d.). What is digital storytelling? Retrieved from the *Educational uses of digital storytellin*g website: http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu/page.cfm?id=27&cid=27&sublinkid=29.

Varnava-Skoura, J. (1978). Children's conceptions of the social division of labor. *Contemporary Issues*, *2*, 69-82 (in Greek).

White, R., & Arndt, V. (1991). *Process writing*. Essex: Addison Wesley Longman Ltd.

Wigfield, A., & Eccles, J. S. (2000). Expectancy-value theory of achievement motivation. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *25*, 68-81.