
Language learning through a lens: The case for digital storytelling in the second language classroom

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The art of storytelling is still a crucial component in many school library programs. By tapping into this expansive tradition and integrating web 2.0 digital story technologies, librarians are able to collaborate with English as a Second Language Teachers in order to design student-centered digital story projects. This transformative use of technology within the framework of social constructionism motivates language students to focus on the contextual use of language rather than basic vocabulary development. The case for digital storytelling is built on an intersection of secondary language acquisition theory, language learning pedagogical understandings and instructional strategies.

Introduction

"No fundo não sou literato, sou pintor. Nasci pintor, mas como nunca peguei nos pincéis a sério, arranjei, sem nenhuma premeditação, este derivativo de literatura, e nada mais tenho feito senão pintar com palavras."

-- Monteiro Lobato

"Deep inside I'm not a writer, I am a painter. I was born a painter but I never took up painting, and arranged, without premeditation, this derivative of painting which is literature, and nothing more have I done than paint with words."

-- Monteiro Lobato

In 2009, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) generated a supplemental report on the status of school library programs and services to English language learners (AASL, 2009). At the time, the report noted that English language learners (ELL) made up a significant portion of the American student population, with one in five elementary students labeled ELL, and several regions reflecting ELL populations of 25% or greater. This report revealed the explosive growth this population experienced since the late 1970's – a growth of 124% by the year 2003 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). It is now estimated that in 2030 almost half of American students (close to 40%) will comprise English language learners – students for whom English is not the primary home language and/or struggle to speak English properly (Flynn & Hill, 2005). However, the most worrisome aspect of the AASL report demonstrated a lack of librarian instructional action toward ELLs. Despite the significant presence of this population in schools,

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more than a third of school librarians stated they did not use any of the English language learning collaboration strategies listed in the report. Sadly, over 58% indicated that their collections contained little to no non-English publications. It should not be surprising then, that in 2007, only 30% of ELLs ages 10-14 tested at the most basic reading proficiency level (Blair, Brasfield, Crenshaw & Mosedale, 2011).

This hesitance on the part of librarians and school library programs to engage in collaboration with ELL students and English as a second language (ESL) teachers, may be a result of minimal preparation and education in ELL instructional strategies during educator preparation programs (Flynn & Hill, 2005). It may also reflect a difficulty in identifying English language learners, a task which is vastly complicated by the inconsistency in student characteristics, ranging from varied socio-economic status to the level of education obtained (Gibbons, 2006). Even so, although not all school librarians possess a vast background in ELL education, the art of storytelling is still very much a part of their skill-set (Naidoo, 2005). In addition, librarians' comfort with technology tools and technology integration strategies within social constructionist environments enable the development of storytelling projects which may lead to more meaningful language learning.

The school library environment supports the availability of emerging technologies and resources for promoting student creation, contribution and collaboration (Malita & Martin, 2010; Robin, 2008). Thus, we "highlight the importance of students' collaboration in using available tools and learning activities within an authentic environment in constructing and reconstructing ideas and beliefs" (Yang & Wu, 2012, p. 339). Familiarity with secondary language acquisition theories and pedagogical considerations for English language learners in the context of social constructionism is important in framing the argument for the creation of multimodal stories. Therefore, the subsequent sections will introduce the reader to the theories and pedagogical understandings relative to digital storytelling in the English as a second language classroom.

The English Language Learner as Storyteller

I am proud to count myself a former English language learner student – the motivation behind my pursuit of instructional partnership opportunities with ESL teachers and ELL students, and this present article. When I was twelve years old, I immigrated to the United States from Brazil along with my parents, younger sister and baby brother. I remember sitting in a counselor's office, going through a vast collection of flash cards to test my knowledge of the English language. When I forgot the words for "whale" and "screwdriver" in immediate succession, I began to harbor the unfounded notion that I would not be allowed to enroll at that particular American school. Thanks to caring teachers and a supportive school librarian who fed my voracious appetite for reading, my English vocabulary increased dramatically in a few short years.

As many internationals will attest to, however, English is a deceptively simple language. One word may have enumerable meanings, and each is determined by tone and context. These idiomatic expressions comprise a large bulk of conversational exchanges, even those in classrooms (Peregoy & Boyle, 1997). There are many incidents I remember when these language characteristics hindered my learning and social interactions. Many years later, as a classroom teacher and school librarian, I empathized with my English language learner students, admiring their efforts to learn a new language while mastering academic concepts. Like many educators who are first-generation immigrants themselves, I worked to establish rapport with my ELL students; and to bridge language barriers through the sharing of personal experiences. Colon-Vila (1997) describes this approach to rapport building:

I make a point to share my own first day of school, too – how I stuttered, mispronounced the teacher’s name and wished for the floor to swallow me. The students laugh and relate to my experience. The iceberg between us breaks and I can begin to teach (p. 58).

These experiences are what Wajnryb (2003) deems ‘the raw material of story’ (p.8). Across countries and cultures, one common characteristic is humanity’s instinct to build a collective history and sense of community through the sharing of personal stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The commonality of storytelling as a cultural social component established it as a longstanding technique for secondary language acquisition (Jones, 2001; Rinvoluceri, 2008). It has been found that second language learners acquire language skills more effectively when they are focused on using language as a way to exchange information that only the learners possess (McGroarty, 1993; Pica & Doughty, 1985; Porter, 1986). In fact, Windschitl (2002) and Edelson et al. (1999) both emphasize the importance of drawing upon students’ cultural background and previous knowledge as student interest is closely related to personal history. Furthermore, second language learners who share personal experiences through storytelling demonstrate both linguistic and metacognitive growth (Cortazzi & Jin, 2007; Nicholas, Rossiter & Abbott, 2011).

The Framework of Social Constructionism

Constructionism, a theory developed by Seymour Papert, builds on the constructivist premise that knowledge is made up of mental models that are constructed and reconstructed by the learner. It goes on to postulate that learning is most effective when people can create some kind of meaningful product, often referred to as an artifact of learning (Harel & Papert, 1991). In the introductory chapter to *Situating Constructionism*, Papert described the beginning of his ideas on learning as “soap-sculpture math” (1991, p. 6). This strange term reflected Papert’s desire to apply the learning-by-making he observed in an art classroom’s soap-sculpting project to the math classes down the hall. These artifacts of learning, created by students, are tangible representations that inform and motivate their creators to incorporate responses those representations elicit, so that learning becomes a social endeavor (Ackermann, 2009). Much importance is placed on language learning through social activities, strongly questioning the idea of language learning as an individual mental activity contextually separate from culture and society (Gibbons, 2006; Toohey, 2000). Consequently, the social facet of constructionism is threaded throughout practice and research in language learner settings.

Secondary Language Acquisition

Second languages refer to languages acquired subsequent to a learner’s first language (Mitchell & Myles, 1998). As the detailed study of the field of secondary language acquisition (SLA) is beyond the scope of this article, this section will only review the landmark theories in SLA that emphasize social interaction and contribute to the argument for digital storytelling in the English as a second language classroom. These are 1) the affective-filter hypothesis, 2) the input hypothesis and 3) acculturation theory.

The affective-filter hypothesis identifies three types of variables that can impact language acquisition: the level of anxiety in the learning environment, the level of student motivation and the level of self-confidence and self-esteem (Krashen, 1985). Its companion, the input hypothesis, frames acquisition within communicative exchange as opposed to grammar and syntax exercises. It shares a similar scaffolding approach to Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky,

1978). Acculturation theory takes a naturalistic approach to language acquisition (Schumann, 1978). It hypothesizes that a target language is acquired in direct proportion to a language learners' sense of community belonging (Mitchell & Myles, 1998). Acculturation, or developing this sense of belonging, depends on eight factors which are used to measure the amount of social distance a language learner feels from his or her target language community. The first factor, social dominance, addresses the balance of power between two groups involved in language exchange (or in the case of a classroom, peer-teacher and peer-peer). Another factor, the integration pattern, considers whether the language learner is part of a group that either assimilates new cultural influences, or preserves its culture separately. Additional factors are self-sufficiency, cultural similarities, community size, attitude, and length of stay in the target community (Long, 2007; Schumann, 1978).

Pedagogical Understandings for English Language Learning

It is not possible to discuss second language learning without pedagogical understanding of culture. Culture, in the broadest sense, encompasses beliefs, norms and accepted behaviors that form a group identity (Peregoy & Boyle, 1997). Classroom culture is influenced by the explicit or implicit presence of several groups: students, teachers, school, community and so forth. These spheres of influence shape classroom culture and impact interaction efforts between teachers and students, as well as amongst the students themselves. School culture continues to contribute to communication difficulties even after students use basic language successfully, since learners may not have adjusted to sociocultural rules that also govern communication (Cazden, 1986).

This communicative hurdle is especially evident in wait time, the time a speaker waits for a response. The amount of wait time and its implied conversational rules, such as interruptions and number of speakers, differs greatly from culture to culture (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984). Wait time and other communication rules change rapidly depending on the instructional activity taking place in the classroom. When ELL students are able to decipher these sociocultural rules, maximum language learning and academic success can be achieved (Peregoy & Boyle, 1997). Other communication components to be considered are representational gestures. These do not refer to a formal system such as American Sign Language. Instead, representational gestures are individually developed from the speaker's mental picture of the term being used (Church, Noelly, & Mahootian, 2004). Gestures are powerful communication aids for ELLs because these help language learners to locate unknown vocabulary terms more rapidly. For example, a flat hand aimed at the listener while the speaker says "stop" can help an ELL mentally locate the term for "stop" in his or her native tongue, thus connecting both terms in his or her mind (Church et al., 2004).

Within this cultural learning environment, language learners should be so motivated to communicate in the second language that they put aside the fear of making mistakes and seeming foolish (Freeman & Long, 1991). Dörnyei (2002) defines motivation as a process comprised of three phases: pre-actional, actional and post-actional. The pre-actional phase involves the setting of clear and distinct language learning goals, which are meant to engender motivation. Environment stimulation and progress review help the learner to create and achieve new goals throughout the actional phase. During the post-actional phase, learners reflect on what motivates them and how these components can play a role in future activities. To engender motivation, Dörnyei suggests that instructional activities should capture the learner's desire to succeed despite growing levels of difficulty. Hence, the motivated learner stays focused on instructional goals and experiences strong feelings of success at accomplishment (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 2002).

The Case for Digital Storytelling

Language learning in the 21st Century cannot be separated from the development of transliteracy, “the ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media from signing and orality through handwriting, print, TV, radio and film, to digital social networks” (Thomas, 2009). Transliteracy represents a cross-section of traditional literacy activities, such as storytelling, with new and emerging communication tools, for example, Web 2.0 technologies. While the concept of transliteracy is relatively new, it is important to note that linguists and second language acquisition researchers have listed communication through technological mediums as part of literacy for over a decade (Crystal, 2001; Kress, 2003; Rassool, 1999).

Digitizing storytelling helps ELLs develop transliteracy as it meshes oral storytelling with images, music and audio, enhancing the storyteller’s personal voice (Porter, 2005). One of the strongest arguments for integrating technology into the art of storytelling in the form of digitization is the role of technology itself. Hughes (2005) identified three functions technology typically fulfills in the classroom: a) replacement, b) amplification, or c) transformation. Technology as replacement is observed when a teacher presents lecture notes on a Prezi versus a handout. Technology serves as amplification when, for example, its use expedites or eases a traditional task, such as co-editing a document on Google Docs. Technology as transformation “has the potential to provide innovative educational opportunities by reorganizing students’ learning content, cognitive processes, and problem solving activities” (Yang & Wu, 2012, p. 340). The school librarian who promotes student-created digital stories, implements technology-supported pedagogy that is transformative.

Digital Storytelling and Culture

Web 2.0 technologies for digital storytelling assist ELLs in creating and sharing multimodal stories that incorporate images, text, video, music and narration (Robin, 2008). Hur & Suh (2012) claim “when students create a digital story, their roles change from passive information receivers to active knowledge developers” (p. 324). Technologies with video components, in particular, are an excellent vehicle through which students promote their own language and cultural background, developing strong identities (Reyes & Vallone, 2008). Student generated videos mirror the culture and characteristics of its creators, helping to foster understanding and a stronger sense of community (Nicholas, Rossiter & Abbot, 2011). Subjects such as oral histories, personal stories and interviews all serve to connect the backgrounds of ELLs to the novel culture of the classroom, bridging both languages and helping English language learners value their own contributions to that setting (Eckman, 1995). Maier and Fisher (2006) determined that the successful integration of digital storytelling in a middle school classroom (ages 11-13) was highly dependent on the ability of students to relate the story subjects to their own lives. ELLs who chose their digital story topics in yet another project selected topics closely tied to their history and personal struggles – ranging from dyslexia to Afghani drumming. These students, previously viewed by the school community as struggling learners, gained new status as historical and cultural informants (Smythe & Neufeld, 2010).

Digital Storytelling and Motivation

Aside from being highly interactive, digital storytelling projects can be highly motivating and personalized, an advantage from a naturalistic perspective on second language acquisition (Almeida-Soares, 2008; Van den Branden, 2006). This motivation has been attributed to a sense of

authorship and ownership – which is further emphasized by seeking an external audience through a video channel, blog or website (Lord, 2008). In a qualitative exploratory case study, Dumova (2008) identified an increase in motivation and self-esteem as students developed ownership over the digital videos they created. The interactional and personalization capacities of Web 2.0 technologies used in digital storytelling make them ideally suited for exploring language learning. Using these tasks as vehicles for language instruction allow ELLs to be engaged in language learning within an environment that lowers the affective filter (e.g. anxiety) (Reyes & Vallone, 2008). This may be because ELLs have the ability to practice their storytelling and narrations several times to address pronunciation or grammar (Hur & Suh, 2012). Goulah (2007) examined how students, ages 11-13, used digital video as a tool for foreign language learning. He found that although they struggled to use a secondary language for discussion, their development in vocabulary carried over into the videos they produced. The computer interface itself contributed to these conversations, as students translated prompts and buttons to be able to edit video footage.

Digital Storytelling and Linguistic Context

The visual component present in digital storytelling presents a distinct advantage: language use is created and viewed while embedded in context. To provide context is to demonstrate that language terms and their meanings change with the identity of the speaker and the situation in which the term is used (Eckman, 1995). In this manner, ELLs are introduced, in non-formal ways, to the process of developing social skills necessary for interaction with English-speaking peers (Gutierrez, Baguedano, Alvarez & Chiu, 1999). Other accepted practices for supporting reading skills through video are the use of representational gestures, and captioned text (Johns & Torrez, 2001). Goulah (2007) confirmed the impact of the visual medium on contextual understanding. He recorded multiple instances of students purposefully storyboarding gestures and planning for their use in digital videos. There is a general belief that language learners need several years in a target country before engaging in contextual and cultural understanding of slang and gestures (Joan-Ellis, Debski & Wigglesworth, 2005). However, Goulah's students constructed this knowledge through the visual medium after only a few weeks.

Pedagogical Considerations for Digital Storytelling with ELL Students

Storytelling Structure in Current Cultural Settings

At its most basic level, digital storytelling still builds on the traditional structures and conventions of stories and their typical narrative forms. Nicholas, Rossiter and Abbott (2011) warn that unless language learners are introduced and instructed in the story conventions of the target language, their stories run the risk of being misrepresented and misunderstood by the intended audience. This is because, although the presence of personal stories is ubiquitous across different cultures, narrative structures and story formats vary widely. Riddle (2009) described the process a school librarian and a high school ESL teacher developed in order to help ELLs (ages 16-18) create digital stories of their immigration experiences: "students are required to write their stories from a personal point of view, using resources such as the dictionary and the thesaurus to help punch up their vocabulary" (p. 23). Hadaway, Vardell and Young (2002) point out that such an approach allows ELLs to practice and "assimilate the concept of story structure – introduction, plot episodes, elaborative details, climax, resolution, and conclusion" (p. 97). Introducing storytelling structure in the current cultural setting leads to intentional planning and repetition – which may be time-consuming. However, research strongly supports the combination of repetition and increased

planning time, investments that lead to greater vocabulary acquisition; linguistic accuracy and fluency in story (Essig, 2005; Nicholas, Rossiter & Abbott, 2011; Willis & Willis, 2007)

English as the Language of Production

It has been established that digital storytelling allows students to be engaged with content and language learning while experiencing lower levels of anxiety and embarrassment (Reyes & Vallone, 2008). Even so, it is important to remember that while ELLs may choose their language of planning, the language of production is determined by the school librarian or classroom teacher. Considering the instructional goal of an ESL classroom, it is not unreasonable to assume that the language of production will be English. As a result, a willingness to engage with English for production needs to be fostered. Green, Inan & Maushak (2010) identified three characteristics of digital storytelling that contribute to students embracing English as the language of production: a) the presence of a visual component, b) the ability to edit out mistakes and c) student awareness of a larger audience.

A target language is acquired in direct proportion to a language learner's sense of community belonging (Mitchell & Myles, 1998; Schumann, 1978). An important factor in establishing acculturation is a language learner's attitude towards the target language itself. If an ELL has a positive attitude towards the English language, he or she is more likely to 'acquire' it. The presence of a visual component in digital storytelling allows ELLs to develop a more accurate picture of their own linguistic abilities, as well as the linguistic abilities of others. This *leveling of the playing field*, so to speak, is encouraging to students and helps them to understand and accept the commonality of learning struggles (Green, Inan & Maushak, 2010). Another component of student buy-in for English as the language of production, the ability to edit out language mistakes, minimizes negative feelings students may have after viewing linguistic or performance mistakes. By treating mistakes and setbacks as necessary steps in the learning process, students are more motivated to acculturate, using English in production despite growing levels of difficulty (Dörnyei, 2002, Hur & Suh, 2012). The presence and student awareness of an authentic external audience is a key factor in ELL willingness to use English in digital story production. Gregory, Steelman and Caverly (2009) describe how students view the role of movie producer as more authentic and empowering as opposed to the role of a student writer. When considering the audience's perspective, "students are challenged with thinking critically about effective combinations of content and multimedia elements...they are asked to meticulously select and edit artifacts...to meaningfully support the story" (Yang & Wu, 2012, p. 340). They are asked to consider how their story is conveyed in the English language to an English speaking audience.

The Role of Continuous Feedback

Studies on designing instruction for constructionist learning recommend that teachers provide students with on time and continuous feedback throughout the construction process, in this case, the process of building a digital story (Edelson, Gordon & Pea, 1999). This social interaction is a pillar of constructionism, which calls for learners to wrestle with and incorporate the responses that their representations of learning elicit (Harel & Papert, 1991). Feedback formalizes the response ELLs receive from teachers, as well as from peers. Thus, class members are able to collect ideas for improvement through instructional conversations and class discussion (Tharp & Dalton, 2007). Additionally, students should be able to use the loop of continuous feedback to revise projects throughout the construction process (Krajcik et al., 1998). The outside audience, discussed in the previous section, adds another layer of feedback. Grant and Branch (2005) found that

students are strongly motivated to carefully prepare and revise work for external audiences, a process which voices feedback from different viewpoints and concerns.

Assessment and Products of Thinking

When producing learning artifacts, students develop metacognitive knowledge as well as the ability to consider how multiple literacies might best be used to communicate ideas to a specific audience (Yang & Wu, 2012). Grant and Branch (2005) warn that such growth might be overlooked if school librarians and teachers simply assess the final product rather than assessing materials (products of thinking) generated during the process of construction. Windschitl (2002) also calls for the assessment of products of thinking in addition to final projects so that teachers can determine how student ideas and understanding evolve through phases of learning. In addition, Blair et al. (2011) encourage school librarians to help classroom teachers differentiate assessment for ELLs by “obtaining and using dialogue journals, learning logs, or portfolios as alternatives to traditional testing” (p. 36). Differentiating assessment is especially critical for English language learners that are new to the classroom community and may not feel as comfortable speaking the target language aloud (Nicholas, Rossiter & Abbott, 2011; Norton, 2001). Hur and Suh (2012) found that students with the lowest speaking proficiency were assessed more successfully, and able to earn higher scores on digital storytelling projects as compared to other traditional assignment scores on their final report cards.

Fortunately, creating digital stories generates copious amounts of materials which can be reviewed and assessed. The process of digital storytelling is divided into four phases: 1) pre-production, 2) production, 3) post-production and 4) distribution (Kearney, 2009; Robin, 2008; Yang & Wu, 2012). Pre-production is further broken down into five different events: a) developing a scenario, b) gathering background information, c) script development, d) rehearsing oral storytelling, and e) storyboarding and mapping. Yu and Wang (2012) go on to detail production, which involves student creation of multimedia elements; post-production, which entails editing of the digital story and finally, distribution, where peer and external audience review are elicited. Within these processes and phases, artifacts of learning such as scripts, storyboards, story maps and oral presentations can be immediately assessed for clarity, interest, correct structure, vocabulary and grammar.

Designing Digital Storytelling Units for English Language Learning: A Brief Example

Collaboratively planning, designing and co-teaching a digital storytelling unit with your ESL classroom teacher can result in a rich and rewarding learning experience for ELL students. The following description of this type of collaborative project hopefully highlights how research and pedagogical considerations discussed earlier in this article should be integrated. See Table 1.

Instructional Focus

In this example, a school librarian and a 6th grade ESL Reading teacher collaborated on a digital storytelling instructional unit so as to enrich student interaction with and understanding of a novel’s complex vocabulary. The novel chosen, *When Zachary Beaver Came to Town*, by Kimberly Willis Holt, takes place in a small West Texas town and is usually very popular with students at Ash 6th Grade Center in Plainview, Texas. It comprises twenty chapters across two hundred and twenty seven pages and, at the time of this project, was a curricular selection for sixth grade reading. With its backdrop of an unpopular war, broken families and rural West Texas living, the

school librarian and teacher both felt that this novel might easily connect with students and help generate real-world applications of new vocabulary in peer conversations.

Table 1. How research informed design of a collaborative lesson

Design	Reason	Research
Workshop	Scaffold technology skills	Grant & Branch, 2005
Cemented Groups	Collaboration and friendship	Krajcik et al., 1998
Job Aids	Products of thinking Authentic and metacognitive	Grant & Branch, 2005 Edelson et al., 1998
Multiple Digital Stories	Feedback and revision	Tharp & Dalton, 2007
Publishing	Outside audience Reflection	Grant & Branch, 2005 Harel & Papert, 1991 Tharp & Dalton, 2007

Technology Integration

The technology tools used in this digital storytelling project were Flip cameras for filming and Movie Maker video editing software. Before any filming began, students participated in a 90-minute workshop on Movie Maker presented by the school librarian. The workshop was intentionally scheduled to help students overcome any issues with the technology used in this project, including translation of English terms in the Movie Maker software. This approach helped students maintain focus on academic goals without becoming cognitively overwhelmed by the technology itself. During the workshop, the librarian walked students through the procedure for producing a small digital story, practicing the steps involved in brain storming, scripting and storyboarding that would make up the rest of the instructional unit. The workshop also served as a platform for the librarian and teacher to identify any technology, resource or student issues that needed to be addressed before the unit began.

Organizing Students

The classroom teacher divided students into four groups of four – groups that remained unchanged throughout the entirety of the unit. This choice was informed by Barron (2003) who conducted a study of group dynamics among sixth grade students and found that communication and collaboration were more effective amongst students with developed relationships. Cementing group assignments also helped the teacher track students' ability to participate in group discussions and planning so that she and the students could more easily keep communication focused on academic goals. Although, roles and responsibilities were not officially assigned in this unit, students were encouraged to switch video editing duties with a kitchen timer. The timer clocked computer time in ten minute increments. When the kitchen timer went off, a new group member would sit in front of the group's assigned laptop.

Organization of Instruction

The instructional unit was made up of three digital storytelling projects divided into four sections each. During the first section, overseen by the classroom teacher, students read an assigned portion of the novel together as a class. While reading, students used index cards to collect words and ideas that they would like to explore in their group stories. The second section of each project, overseen by the school librarian, involved the use of an anticipation guide or discussion session in which students brainstormed ideas for scripts that would highlight character conflicts in the novel. These discussions served as student “think-alouds,” detailing their assumptions and use of contextual clues to define new vocabulary terms.

In the third section, supervised by both the teacher and librarian, students used their answers and findings to write a script, storyboard and create any visuals. These elements were included for two reasons. First, since student groups that create learning artifacts need to organize and interact with large amounts of information, they will also need job aids that mimic real-world tools for task organization and completion (Grant & Branch, 2005). Second, the use of storyboards and scripting reflected expert activity and added authenticity to the design of this project (Erstad, 2002). In the fourth and final section, students shot and edited their videos, adding effects, transitions and credits. The digital stories were then posted to a blog that was accessible to students, parents and school personnel. Throughout the course of the unit, students were able to comment on other groups’ stories so as to establish an environment in which continuous suggestions for improvement could be incorporated into the design of the next story. The steps in the projects are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Steps in a collaborative digital story project.

Project Section	Digital Story 1	Digital Story 2	Digital Story 3
Reading	First set of chapters	Second set of chapters	Third set of chapters
Discussion	Anticipation guide: Character conflict	Anticipation guide: Setting conflict	Anticipation guide: Reader’s Theatre (group’s selected favorite passage)
Planning	Scripting/ Storyboarding/ Creating desired visuals or costumes		
Production	Shooting/ Editing/ Publishing to project blog		

Assessment

Throughout the length of the unit, the school librarian and classroom teacher worked together to assess all student products of thinking: anticipation guides, scripts, storyboards, group notes, raw video footage and published videos. By working together, the burden of grading was minimized, and both the librarian and teacher were able to determine how student understandings and linguistic growth evolved over time. Jointly grading student products also allowed the librarian and teacher to determine which students needed more encouragement to participate, when groups

switched from their native languages to English in language of planning, and which vocabulary terms needed revisiting before any formal testing.

Conclusion

School librarians may not possess detailed knowledge of second language acquisition theories and language learning instructional strategies. However, the art of storytelling is a treasure our profession holds dear. By tapping into this expansive tradition, librarians are able to collaborate with English as a Second Language teachers in order to design student-centered digital story projects. This transformative use of technology within the framework of social constructionism motivates language students to focus on the use of language rather than vocabulary development (Van den Branden, 2006). Thus, "learning English [becomes] a useful and valuable activity to students" (Yang & Wu, 2012, p. 349). Monteiro Lobato, a Brazilian writer who frequently showcased storytelling characters in his novels, described himself as one who had done nothing more than "paint with words." When, as school librarians, we introduce English language learners to digital storytelling, we expand their tools for artistry, adding to the paints and brushes transliterate students use to create and share rich, multimodal and personal stories.

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