

DIGITAL STORYTELLING TO PROMOTE READING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: THE READ IT PROJECT

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Università degli Studi “Guglielmo Marconi” presented the READ IT project “*Training teachers to make READING fun through digITal storytelling*” during the 4th International Conference on Digital Storytelling “CREATE-SHARE-LISTEN” held in Lillehammer, Norway, on 5-7 February 2011.

READ IT project focuses on the use of Digital Storytelling, as it has proven to be a powerful and effective learning tool for both teachers and students in stimulating creativity and critical thinking through the combination of the ancient art of telling stories with different digital tools.

A digital story is a short, first person video-narrative created by combining recorded voice, still and moving images, and music or other sounds. The “short narrated films” definition of Digital Storytelling comes from a production workshop by Dana Atchley at the American Film Institute in 1993 that was adapted and refined by Joe Lambert in the mid-1990s into a method of training promoted by the San Francisco Bay Area-based Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS). Over the last fifteen years Digital Storytelling has been applied to many different contexts and has encountered a wide range of possibilities.

At the “CREATE-SHARE-LISTEN” conference more than 200 delegates met many of the leading researchers and practitioners in the field of Digital Storytelling worldwide and explored with them the increasing diversity of practices. Both practical and theoretical perspectives of Digital Storytelling were presented and an increasing diversity of purposes covered, such as education, health, leisure, recreation, activism, community building and professional communication. More specifically the different presentations highlighted the challenges and the opportunities of the media revolution and in particular of the use of Digital Storytelling across different fields. The organizers consisted of a network from higher education, research, administration and private enterprise in close cooperation with Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS). In particular, the conference was structured in the following sessions:

- Place based stories, cultural heritage
- Innovation, environment, influence
- Young learners
- Narratives, identity and learning
- The potential of Digital Storytelling in Democracy
- Methods, projects, development
- Digital Storytelling connecting education and community
- Identity
- Participation, community development
- Social media, genre
- Narrative knowing and personal experience in higher education
- Integration and intercultural communication

The READ IT project was presented by Ilaria Mascitti and Barbara Quarta from Università degli Studi “Guglielmo Marconi” during the session “Narratives, Identity and Learning – multimodality and the ambiguity of new literacies”. The presentation was focused on the description of the READ IT project background, aims and objectives, activities and methodology.

READ IT (www.readitproject.eu) is a two-year Comenius project co-funded by the EU Lifelong Learning Program, started in December 2010 and addressed to secondary schools teachers and students in the five partner countries involved in the initiative. The project is coordinated by the Università degli Studi “Guglielmo Marconi” based in Italy and its multi-actor partnership is composed of the following partners among universities, secondary schools and publishing houses: University College Lillebaelt (Denmark), Marsilio Editori (Italy), Liceul Teoretic “Ovidius” Constanta (Romania), Curtea Veche Publishing (Romania), RATEK (Turkey) and Scottish Book Trust (United Kingdom).

The READ IT project aims to identify, implement and test a didactic methodology that can help teachers acquire new skills through video production using Digital Storytelling and help motivate new generations of young readers through the book trailer production. The innovative aspect of the project didactic methodology is to combine the technology in terms of Digital Storytelling and book trailer production with writing techniques

such as narrative and screenplay to reinforce teaching of reading and writing in an interactive, creative and authentic way.

Despite rapid advance in today's technology, many educational institutions in Europe are not experimenting with digital tools in a creative or innovative way as many EU countries report shortfalls in teaching skills and difficulties in updating them. Shortages relates to the lack of competence to deal with new developments in education especially in preparing learners to make the most of ICT. Therefore, teachers need to acquire skills to implement new educational methods combining existing didactic approaches and digital skills and European schools need to adapt to current students needs and identify new learning models that are engaging to younger generations.

In response to this needs, the READ IT project aims at improving teachers' digital and pedagogical competences to revive their lesson plans, enhance teaching strategies and incorporate new technology to stimulate their students with a new interactive approach towards learning, especially reading. Thus, the project deals with teachers' needs by training secondary school teachers through an e-course on using Digital Storytelling, applying this to any educational sector and learning how to transfer this knowledge to their students. Teachers and students will have the chance to develop multimedia skills through the production of book trailers which will ultimately help students transmit the narrative process in a hands-on, creative manner.

The main project result is the READ IT pilot course, that will be delivered in two parts:

- E-learning course addressed to teachers focused on Digital Storytelling techniques, video and book trailer production.
- Face-to-face workshops where teachers and students will produce book trailers working together by using Digital Storytelling techniques.

In this way, teachers will learn and test a new educational approach based on digital technology that can help motivate students to read. In fact, teachers will have the opportunity to apply what they learned in the READ IT e-course with their students. Through the different steps and procedures required to produce book trailers, students will learn hands-on this

novel and creative use of ICT technologies, while at the same time getting involved in reading. They will also be introduced to all aspects of a Digital Storytelling from writing, narrative techniques, character development and dialogue, acquire transferable skills that can be employed to diverse jobs in the labor market.

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