Institution: Loughborough University

Unit of Assessment: D27 English Language and Literature

Title of case study:
Transforming Educational Practices Through Digital Storytelling for Hard-to-Reach Groups across the USA and Europe

Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2015-2019

Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:

Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Antonia Liguori	Lecturer in Applied Storytelling	2014-date
Professor Michael Wilson	Professor of Drama	2014-date

Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016-2020

Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

To address issues related to the ongoing challenge, for educators, of the exclusion of variously disadvantaged groups from formal and non-formal learning environments, Loughborough University Applied Storytelling scholars conducted practice-led research across four European countries and in the USA. The research underpinned new Digital Storytelling (DS) practices and tools that have 1) **improved the inclusivity of teaching practices** in community colleges, universities, adult education centres, NGOs and the museums of the Smithsonian Institution; 2) implemented **new digital storytelling programmes** in formal and non-formal education, leading to an **enhanced curriculum for learners** in Belgium, Lithuania, Spain, Austria and the USA, and 3) led to **policy change** at regional governmental level for the implementation of a new Digital Storytelling training course for adult education in Spain.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Digital Storytelling is a practice whereby short pieces of digital media, combining voice and image, are created from personal narratives and experiences. As a pedagogical tool it can develop knowledge and is particularly effective as an inclusive teaching practice to foster mutual learning (R2). Practice-led research (PLR) conducted at Loughborough (Liguori and Wilson) set out to test and challenge the orthodox DS methodology by employing co-design and co-creation methods with communities of learners and teachers to devise workshop programmes that addressed the specific challenges that the communities had identified for themselves and allowed them to create digital stories that were meaningful to their context. The iterative process allowed for the research to develop and be modified over time, as each workshop produced fresh research questions and challenges that were addressed through subsequent workshops. Through this research process the Loughborough team successfully created a step-change to the DS 5-step method and embedded it in a real-world learning environment (R2, R3), in particular to overcome those barriers often experienced by adult learners from different cultural and economically disadvantaged backgrounds, who lack learning opportunities, and have access to limited engagement methods and tools. In addition, Loughborough University Digital Storytelling scholars have developed a DS set of tools and practices, which have enabled educators to overcome these barriers and encourage active and deep learning. This was achieved by undertaking this practice-led research, in which impact processes are embedded from the start of the research process and entwined throughout, working iteratively, as described, with several academic and non-academic partners across Europe and in the USA, co-researching with **Teachers** in community colleges, universities and adult education centres; **Museum educators** who

deliver outreach programmes in both physical and digital environments; and **Policy makers** at both institutional and regional governmental level. Two interconnected strands of research were designed around formal and non-formal education:

1. Collaborating with educators from Community Colleges, Adult Education Centres, NGOs (including co-authoring a forthcoming volume with collaborators for the Smithsonian Scholarly Press), our research showed that co-designing and implementing a set of innovative tools that could be applied in the classroom to engage both learners and teachers in the co-creative process resulted in a deeper, long-lasting and mutual learning experience. Moreover, our practice-led research demonstrated that DS relates to pedagogical forms where narratives and experiences are shared to develop new forms of knowledge, to stimulate mutual understanding within a group of learners - and between learner and teacher - and to generate a deeper level of engagement and more meaningful learning experiences. It was shown that by emphasising the emotions in the learning process and using personal stories, a greater connection with the subject and within the learning environment is facilitated [R1, R2, R3]. The co-creation research process also enabled educators to embed in their practice a cyclical dialogue with their learners, and this produced a context-tailored approach that produced a meaningful change in their practice in response to different learners' needs and learning contexts.

2. During the workshops at the **Smithsonian Institution**, DS was applied to engage at the same time museum audiences and educators, and co-design new practices for non-formal education: in particular, it was explored as a teaching strategy to make information come alive emotionally and engage participants in active and deep learning through museums' educational programmes [R1, R3]. Liguori collaborated with the Smithsonian Institution to test, both face-to-face and virtually, the effectiveness of DS to enhance the 4Cs (Creativity, Critical thinking, Collaboration, Communication). Results of a series of PLR DS programmes conducted in spring 2018 indicate how DS, as adapted and integrated into the Smithsonian Learning Lab platform, supports twenty-first century skills.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

R1 Liguori, A. (2020) 'Unlocking contested stories and grassroots knowledge.' In Trifonas, P.P. (ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research in Cultural Studies and Education*, Springer, pp.465-479, ISBN: 9783319569871. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-56988-8_35.
R2 Liguori, A and Bakewell, L (2019) 'Digital Storytelling in Cultural and Heritage Education: A Pilot Study as Part of the 'DICHE' Project', in Poce, A (ed) *Advanced Studies in Museum Education*, ESI - Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, pp. 63-78, ISBN: 9788849539011. https://hdl.handle.net/2134/38037
R3 Liguori, A (2020) Contextual PDF: *Digital Storytelling to enhance active and deep learning within the Smithsonian Learning Lab* https://hdl.handle.net/2134/13604228.v1

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The impact of our research was achieved through **pathway** activity embedded within the practice-led research and occurred alongside and concurrent with the research itself. Working with groups of learners and educators across four European countries and in the USA, partnerships were developed through a series of EU projects (and the subsequent networks) and as a result of Liguori's successful AHRC International Placement Scheme Fellowship at the **Smithsonian Institution** in 2019. The impact was generated through the complex interaction of those involved in continual dialogue, debate and creative collaboration at workshops, co-designed meetings and screening events and developed shared ownership of the research and triggered change in practice and policy. The participation in the co-design process of individual learners returning to education, including those who faced challenges of integration and language barriers, those with significant trauma, and people from deprived areas and low-income neighbourhoods, was crucial in maximising the impact of this research in various locations: **USA** (District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia) and Europe (**Spain, Belgium, Austria and Lithuania**), leading to the following impacts:

1) Improved the inclusivity of teaching practices

Our research into Digital Storytelling, as a pedagogical tool, underpinned improvements in inclusive teaching practices in the following ways, thus helping our collaborators address challenges they had identified. At an individual scale, teaching practices changed via the adoption of Digital Storytelling as a pedagogical tool, at **Montgomery College** (MC) [S5] and **George Washington University** (GWU) [S6] in the USA, where DS was adopted to assess student projects. Professors Sara Ducey, Jamie Gillan and Matthew Decker from MC, said that this new way of applying digital storytelling for assessment was "grounded in inclusivity", that colleagues "have even made it a permanent fixture of their coursework" and that DS has led to a "distinct policy change for the Anthropology Curriculum" (S5). Furthermore, they said:

"We are proud to share that many of these stories come from students whose narratives have been historically marginalized or oppressed. These stories display the wide range of diversity and inclusivity on our campuses. Once again, it has been Dr. Liguori's stewardship

as a digital storytelling mentor for many **Montgomery College** faculty members that has allowed a wider, more impactful reach of this innovative pedagogy at the college." (S5)

Fig 1: Dr Antonia Liguori delivering a digital storytelling workshop at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery in Washington D.C., USA, April 2018

Further, our research underpinned two changes that occurred in the **Smithsonian Institution** educators' attitude to educational and outreach programmes and their mode of delivery. First**,** the **Smithsonian Center for Learning and Digital Access** (SCLDA) delivered Digital Storytelling training sessions, through their Learning Lab, to teachers in Public Schools as part of the "Living Through History" Global Competency DCPS (District of Colombia Public Schools) Cornerstone. The Smithsonian also adopted DS as a tool for the impact evaluation of their educational programmes as part of the programme "Exploring Latinx Artists from the Frost Art Museum Collection", delivered in Miami (Florida) with Federal support from the Latino Initiatives Pool, administered by the **Smithsonian Latino Center**. Philippa Rappoport, Manager of Community Engagement commented that our research

"served to strengthen the reach and impact of our work by introducing digital storytelling as an effective strategy to help learners to more deeply understand and

engage with museum resources, and also to add additional perspective beyond the curatorial voice for audiences hearing the stories." (S7)

Second**, The Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery** (NPG) in Washington DC hosted their first DS workshop for members of the Latinx community and a follow-on event whereby family members with Latinx background, who had previously participated in Liguori's workshop, shared their recently acquired storytelling skills and facilitated a Storyboarding workshop in the Gallery, during the month dedicated to Latinx culture. Beth Evans, Youth and Family Programs Co-ordinator at the NPG noted that DS brought new audiences into the museum (S8). Further, Micheline Lavalle, Fairfax County educator, commenting on the impact of DS for the Latino families involved in the Programme, said:

"In the ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) classroom, we observed increased energy, interest, collaboration among students and the sharing of oral stories among the students after the workshop had concluded. Many reported feeling closer to their fellow students and understanding them better after having heard their stories. Still, other students reported sharing those stories with their children and other family members, further strengthening intergenerational family bonds." (S9)

Fig.2: A workshop participant from Latin America describing his storyboard in English during a workshop at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, April 2018

2) Implemented new digital storytelling programmes in formal and non-formal education, leading to an enhanced curriculum for learners

Our research on applying digital storytelling as a tool for active and deep learning led to the implementation of new digital storytelling programmes in **Montgomery Community College** in Maryland, US (S5), in two NGOs, **Perspectives** in Belgium (S2) and **SPES** in Austria (S3), and in a **High School** in Lithuania [S4].

a) After two DS training workshops and follow-on activities led by Liguori, **the Paul Peck Humanities Institute** at Montgomery College, which uses the humanities to enrich teaching and learning across the curriculum, and SCLDA organised a new Community of Practice in Digital Storytelling for nearly 100 teachers, which supported their professional development by expanding their skillset, and a new internship programme for students at Montgomery College for ten interns, using DS to develop future leaders (S5).

b) Liguori and Wilson delivered DS training sessions and developed Open Educational Resources on DS, **Perspectives**, an NGO based in Liege (Belgium) that provides free training for jobseekers, started offering DS courses to adult unemployed learners (in particular those joining IT and French as second language courses). Bruno Schneider, Director of Perspectives, explained that DS revealed to be very effective with foreign students "because they find a way to express things beyond the difficulty of the language, using images, videos, sounds. It is very useful when you do not have other words to say something that you find important."(S2)

c) After participating in DS workshops led by Liguori as part of an EU funded project **SPES**, an Austria-based NGO that focuses on holistic education and sustainability, started using DS to communicate in a more compelling way the results of their community programmes to the funding bodies: "Our projects are now more understandable, more practical and more comprehensive." (S3)

d) After their headteacher and other educators had the opportunity to join the DS training sessions led by Liguori as part of the EU funded project Europe Of Our Lives (EOOL), a **Gymnasium** (secondary school) based in Šiauliai (Lithuania) began devising and delivering DS training to other Lithuanian teachers and running seminars and workshops to

international visitors during their annual summer school. Sigita Malinauskiene, the Principal of the School (S4) affirmed:

> "What changed, for example, in our organisation? (…) we were the first in the city of Šiauliai to organise the seminars for other teachers and so we showed them how to create in English lessons, for example, Digital Storytelling, and History teachers and teachers of Lithuanian (…), they started doing that during their lessons. And the next thing we had students and teachers from Italy, from Poland, from Greece…" (S4).

3) Policy change at regional level relating to adult education in Spain

Our research led directly to the adoption of Digital Storytelling as a new method for Adult Education and a change in Adult Education policy across Andalusia (Spain). Leading up to the regional roll-out, educators trialled the DS method in a variety of classes for adult learners (IT and English as second language), the headteacher of **CEPER Fuensanta**, an adult education provider in Cordoba, proposed to the **Regional Government of Andalusia** to include DS as one of the three core Government training courses for adult learners [S1]. The proposal was fully accepted, despite the Government normally being very wary of changes to its existing training programmes. As explained by Lola Estepa, from CEPER Fuensanta:

> "we applied for it, we justified the need, we told our government that Digital Storytelling was very good for integral learning, we were able to convince them to give us this new option. To have a new course we have to apply every two years and this is what we did to have a new Digital Storytelling course. It is very difficult to get approval for new courses, but last month the authorities gave us the option to include this new course for adult education. The authorities offer in total five plans (courses), and they do not want new plans, but we were able to convince them to take DST as a new plan". (S1)

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)
S1 Lola Estepa – CEPER Fuersanta, Spain (edited interview transcript, 9.5.19 and online media coverage)
S2 Bruno Schneider - Perspectives, Belgium (edited interview transcript, 9.5.19)
S3 Elisabeth Frommel - SPES, Austria (edited interview transcript, 9.5.19)
S4 Sigita Malinauskiene –Secondary School (Gymnasium) Principal, Lithuania (edited interview transcript, 9.5.19)
S5 Montgomery College, USA (testimonial letter, 23.11.20)
S6 George Washington University, USA (testimonial letter, 15.11.20)
S7 Smithsonian Center for Learning and Digital Access, USA (testimonial letter, 15.11.20)
S8 Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery (testimonial letter, 13.11.20)
S9 Fairfax College Public Schools (testimonial letter, 15.11.20)