Aalborg Universitet

AALBORG UNIVERSITY
DENMARK

"STORIES FROM THE NORTH" PROJECT

Digital storytelling in a youth and SoMe perspective

Henningsen, Birgitte; Lohmann, Nikoline ; Ørngreen, Rikke

Published in:
Proceedings of the International Digital Storytelling Conference "Current Trends in Digital Storytelling: Research & Practices", Zakynthos: UNESCO Club of Zakynthos, Greece

Publication date:
2018

Link to publication from Aalborg University

International Digital Storytelling Conference

Current Trends in Digital Storytelling

Research & Practices

21-23 September 2018, Zakynthos Island, Greece
Technological Educational Institute of Ionian Islands
https://dst.ntlab.gr

Perros '14

Artwork: Vassillis Perros   Graphic design: Irina Voulgari

Under the Auspices of H.E.
the President of the Hellenic Republic Mr. Prokopios Pavlopoulos

Under the Auspices of the Hellenic National Commission for UNESCO

"STORIES FROM THE NORTH" PROJECT
DIGITAL STORYTELLING IN A YOUTH AND SoMe PERSPECTIVE

Birgitte Henningsen,
Research Centre for Video, Department of Learning and Philosophy, Aalborg University, Denmark
Nikoline Lohmann,
Digital Storylab, digitalstorylab.com, Copenhagen, Denmark
Rikke Ørngreen,
Research Centre for Video, Department of Learning and Philosophy, Aalborg University, Denmark

This paper presents and discusses practical experiences from a Nordic digital storytelling project called "Stories from the North" involving researchers, facilitators and participants from Denmark, Iceland and Norway. Participants produce digital stories based on Digital Storytelling (DS) originally developed at www.storycenter.org/ and the first project phase, show us how the youth experiences with social media (SoMe), challenge the applied DS thinking and raise interesting perspectives.

1. THE PROJECT 'STORIES FROM THE NORTH'

The vision of our project "Stories from the North" is to let people create and share life stories through so called Nordic Storytelling Labs and an online digital storytelling platform. The project involves researchers, facilitators and participants from Denmark, Iceland and Norway. The participants produce digital stories based on the method Digital Storytelling originally developed at storycenter.org and further undfolded in various projects and perspectives focusing on e.g. learning and education (Haug et al., 2012; Ribeiro et al., 2014; Jamissen et al. , 2017), self-representations (Lundby, 2008), healthcare improvement (Hardy & Summer, 2017; and patientvoices.org.uk), sense of agency (Hull & Katz, 2006), among others.

The project involves from Denmark: the organisation Digital Story lab and Research centre for Video at Aalborg University. From Iceland, Reykjavíkur Akademían and from Norway the organisation World Wide Narrative and Oslo Metropolitan University. Additional information on the partners is available on our Nordic Digital Storytelling Platform at nordicstorytelling.com.

Thanks to funds from *The Nordic Culture Fund* and *The Nordics (nordiskkulturfond.org/en & thenordics.com),* we have reached our first goals in the project. Mainly young Nordic people have joined our Nordic Storytelling Labs and we have developed a version 1.0 of the Nordic Digital Storytelling Platform (nordicstorytelling.com) for personal stories. Our next goal is to enhance the Nordic Digital Storytelling Platform and create a version 2.0 focusing on: 1) supporting the interconnectedness in the online community, through various sharing options and dialogue opportunities, 2), supporting the distributing opportunities on the platform to widen knowledge around Nordic stories and issues as well as, 3) make this knowledge available both within the Nordic countries and internationally. Our analysis of the first project phase, show that the platform is being used internationally, though in a small scale, given the short time it has been online.

The overall idea behind the project 'Stories from the North' was developed at a start-up meeting in Reykjavik/Iceland, where the partners met in 2017 to develop ideas on a common Nordic project that could investigate a number of themes around the target group and also explore sharing and democratization approaches among young people.

The Nordic Storytelling Labs, and our DS inspired workshop within these labs, focuses on creating an accessible space mainly for young people to express themselves through personal digital stories. And the idea was to use the DS method as a tool to motivate young people to tell and report authentic anecdotes, experiences and life stories from their area and cultures they feel attached to.

When asking people to reflect on their own close culture, we potentially initiate an identity-reflection process where participant gets the opportunity and space to look at the everyday environments often overlooked in their truism. When we open this kind of self-reflection, there is also an enriched basis for reflection on other cultures and an ability to see the interpersonal similarities found among all cultures, wherever they may be. In this project, we have chosen a Nordic focus based on curiosity, but also on a common Nordic self-perception that we wish to preserve and enrich. Not to distance ourselves from the rest of the world, on the contrary, we see it as part of a broad identity base. One of the many communities that modern people feel attached to. Thus, the purpose of the project is to spread a common understanding and recognition, and through this contribute to a positive movement, which, in the long term hopefully creates a positive perception of Nordic culture.

The actual method digital storytelling is in short, is a process where participants create a 2-3 minute authentic digital story. Everyone can participate regardless of cultural and social background, IT skills or age. The process of telling something personally experienced, expressing it visually and finally sharing it with others potentially provides a space for change processes, empowerment and development in various arenas.

As presented earlier the Nordic Digital Storytelling *Platform* and the version 2.0 of this platform, is designed to support an interactive space for sharing stories and an online community with room diverse stories and perspectives, and thereby potentially support a sense of interconnectedness and dialogue across generations and across "outskirts" and central arenas. In the development of the platform and in the designing phase, we involved volunteering graduate students, who came up with a concept called "message in the bottle", for sending stories and providing incentives for others to create their story, through visual communication at the platform. Later on in this paper this design suggestion will be discussed.

In the project, the Nordic perspective is part of an exploratory process, where the project explores and identifies different place-based topics and themes that are then part of the phase of settlement, where Nordic Storytelling Labs are established and used by mainly young people. The long-term strategy is that the anchoring phase will result in a sustainable strategy to integrate the method of the various local partners. This will be done by establishing a network of ambassadors from the target group and by making different actors familiar with the method and its potential for further development in future Nordic Storytelling Labs.

The partners in this project identified a common curiosity around the authentic dimension in DS approaches in relation to SoMe and the seemingly lack of authentic expressions in general. Looking at a societal level, digital media, and especially video, rapidly is evolving within all forms of communication and organizations increasingly use user-generated videos as part of their communication strategy. Young people are often front-runners when it comes to creating content online, however the stories they distribute online have a tendency to be produced without a, what some would categorise as, genuine reflection process. Furthermore, the stories young people distribute online often presents a "one sided" and glorified version of themselves (Seidman, 2013; Alloway et al., 2014; Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). We wanted to explore the potential within DS in relation to support sharing authentic, more holistic and "two sided" stories.

The partners in this project also identified a common curiosity around the lack of stories from outskirts in the Nordic region. And here our understanding of *outskirts* is a manifolded. It includes both geographical outskirts, as well as an approach to "living on the outskirts" in the sense of experiencing oneself as being on the outskirts of influential cultures, fields of interest and lifestyles.

The following is an overview over participants in the project:

- Two groups are our main focus in this project:
    - Those who partake in workshops and produce stories for the platform
    - Those who interact with the stories at the platform, comment, share etc.

- Workshop participants:
    - People living in Denmark, Iceland and Norway and in order to get in touch with the participants, the project identifies relevant environments and institutions, both formal and informal organisations and gathering places.

- Users of the platform:
    - Both citizens of the Nordic countries and internationally. This group interacts with the digital storytelling participants though the platform. Interesting is, how users of the platform find their way to the platform and how willingly they will interact.

- The Nordic Digital Storytelling platform:
    - The aim is to design, develop and implement a digital platform for sharing stories at https://nordicstorytelling.com. The online platform will be used during the project's lifetime and most likely also after the project has ended due to the partners' interest in an continuing exchange and distribution channel for their stories, and due to the partners interest in an ongoing dialogue around their creative processes and experiences. The platform will be used in an exhibition, and after the project, it should still be available as a presentation tool for courses in Nordic schools and cultural institutions, such as museums, libraries, etc. Furthermore, the platform may be valuable as a showcase for the Nordics partners, displayed at activities at the embassies or at other Nordic organisational events.

The potential outcomes of this project are:

- Involving people using the Digital Storytelling method, which allows them to express themselves through authentic digital stories
- Establish and support an online network with a Nordic perspective
- Cultural exchange and co-creation focusing on varied cultural approaches
- To support democratic dialogue processes through insight into various cultures and lives
- Dissemination of the project and stories via a social media strategy and on different conferences and public events via the partners existing network.

2. EXPERIENCES, REFLECTIONS AND PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

First experiences from a "Stories from the North" project show how the involved youth reconfigures parts of the DS mindset among other through their experiences with social media.

In one workshop with young participants, we identified a resistance towards *writing* a manuscript among some of the participants. Participants who could be characterized as troublemakers in some degree, however not severe troublemakers. Their resistance towards writing a manuscript could be because the workshop was framed within a school and educational context and participants therefore did not participate voluntarily. However, the participants who resisted writing a manuscript choose to continue in the workshop even when it became possible leave the workshop after the introduction processes. Their continuation points towards a willingness and interest in the processes and the workshop, even though not voluntarily initially. These participants actually succeeded with producing their own personal story and did this without manuscript. Observing their process from our perspective on DS, we could easily judge their process as sloppy and careless. However, they

managed to produce intriguing stories with a personal dimension. This production process, working without a manifested manuscript and working 'on the fly, could be mirrored in the social media and productions made by youtubers, where some productions seem spontaneous and as a dialogue evolving during the recording. In our project 'Stories from the North' we reflect on possible ways to incorporate this 'on the fly' production mode.

In another workshop, a participant expressed in the evaluation how her experiences from the workshop had changed a behavioural aspect in her daily routine. She had begun to register and log her daily life through images on her phone and she stated that this logging of her daily life felt good. The images were not glorified versions and she did not distribute her images. Mirrored in a SoMe context, the logging by this particular participant through authentic images, can be seen as an interesting opposition to the often one-sided versions on the social media and maybe in the long run DS approaches can support young (and old) people to share authentic and 'two-sided' stories in the social media arena.

In our workshops with young participants, we noticed a thought-awakening pattern as we facilitated drawing sessions were the exercise was to draw a place they were especially fond of staying at. We noticed that a majority draw a place where they were by-them-selves and without company, either in person nor online. We found this thought awakening in times were SoMe is being used extensively by young people which on a large-scale focuses on relating to other people.

In our development of an extended version 2.0 of the online platform we invited graduate students (who all initially themselves took part in a 2-day-DS-workshop) to come up with design suggestions. As presented earlier in this paper, they among other developed a "message in the bottle" concept for sending stories and providing incentives by constructively challenging and encouragely asking others to create their story e.g. focusing on a specific theme. With the "message in the bottle" concept the person sending the challenge and request, does not know the person receiving the message. Mirrored in a SoMe context this concept point towards how youth experiences with social media, constructively can challenge DS thinking and develop online DS interchanging 'dialogues' and distribution approaches.

Pitfalls can also be identified in this linkage between SoMe approaches and Digital Storytelling. E.g., in relation to the concept "message in the bottle", it could easily become a challenge and probably experienced as a restrainment, when creators of stories have to accept "message in the bottle", create and especially share their personal authentic story on the online platform without any familiarity between the two persons (or familiarity with Digital Storytelling). A possible handling of this challenge could be to introduce the "message in the bottle" concept during workshops by letting former participants provide and offer a "pool" of messages to the new workshop participants who then can be inspired be these.

As illustrated in this paper, we are in a process of exploring various possible approaches and developments around Digital Storytelling. Our curiosity includes both individual and collective based processes, as well as online collective processes.

3. REFERENCES

Alloway, T., Runac, R., Qureshi, M. and Kemp, G. (2014) Is Facebook Linked to Selfishness? Investigating the Relationships among Social Media Use, Empathy, and Narcissism. Social Networking, 3, 150-158.

Hardy, P. & Summer, T. (2014): Our stories, ourselves: exploring identities, sharing experiences and building relationships through Patient Voices. I Pleasants, H.M. and Salter, D.E. Community-Based multiliteracies and digital media projects: Questioning assumptions and exploring realities.

Haug, K.; Jamissen, G.; Ohlmann, C. (eds.) (2012). Digitalt fortalte historier: refleksjon for læring. [translation: digital told stories: reflection for learning], Cappelen Damm AS

Hull, G. & Katz, M. L. (2006). Crafting an Agentive Self: Case Studies on Digital Storytelling. Research in the Teaching of English, 40(1), 43-81.

Jamissen, G., Hardy, P., Nordkvelle, Y., & Pleasants, H. (Eds.). (2017). Digital Storytelling in Higher Education: International Perspectives. Springer.

Lundby, K. (Ed.) (2008). Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories: Self-representations in New Media. New York, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt am Main, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang. (Digital Formations)

Nadkarni, A. & Hofmann, S.G. (2012). Why do people use Facebook? Personality and Individual Differences, 52, pp. 243-249,

Ribeiro, S., Moreira, A. & Pinto da Silva, C. (2014). Digital storytelling: Emotions in higher education, 11th International Conference on Cognition and Exploratory Learning in Digital Age (CELDA 2014)

Seidman, G. (2013). Self-presentation and belonging on Facebook: How personality influences social media use and motivations. Personality and individual differences, 54(3), 402-407.