

# **Digital Storytelling to Sharpen Language Skills**

**Wan Alfida Suleiman**

**Beacon Primary School, and  
Malay Language Centre of Singapore**

## **ABSTRACTS**

This research involved Primary 1 pupils. Pupils used the Digital Storytelling strategy with the objective to sharpen their reading, listening, speaking and writing skills. Authentic activities became the source of pupils' ideas in developing their digital stories. Followed by a discussion to elicit appropriate vocabulary based on these experiences. The ultimate aim of the strategy used is to ensure pupils are able to write descriptively using appropriate vocabulary. Pupils will also be able to use checklist to check and assess their work and that of their peers. During the research, pupils used digital cameras to capture images of their experience and the environment. These images were selected and used in their own digital stories. Through these stories, pupils were able to speak and read what they wrote about the photos using the words identified by teachers. The ICT tools used were Microsoft PowerPoint and Photostory 3 for Windows. In summary, there was an improvement in pupils' language skills after participating in this research project. Teachers recorded considerable professional development after the research.

## **Key Words**

Digital Storytelling, Constructivism, Authentic, Engaging

## **INTRODUCTION**

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays a vital role in education today. From being able to understand our digital kids to bridge the gap between our world and theirs, to answering the call from our government to prepare them with adequate skills to adapt and thrive in a global IT environment, the infusion of ICT into classroom teaching has become a challenging task for teachers today.

Many of these researches highlighted the constructivism approach which believes that pupils learn by developing understanding through their own learning and knowledge. Constructivism approach believes that pupils develop their own knowledge or concept actively based on their prior knowledge and experience. In this process, pupils will learn to adapt and adjust the knowledge that they received using their prior knowledge to develop new knowledge or experience.

From my observation, most teachers preferred to conduct lessons and sharing sessions involving the use of ICT to enhance writing skill of primary 4 pupils. Malay language teachers in particular, found that it was difficult to conduct ICT based lesson involving primary 1 pupils because primary 1 student were generally considered not ready to use ICT.

It was found that primary one student had difficulties in completing their written tasks using computers.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Why do technologies foster meaningful learning? Jonassen et.al. (2008), believes that appropriate use of technologies require pupils to think and reason. The thinking that may be fostered is causal reasoning, analogical, expressive, experiential thinking and problem solving. Technology allows pupils to express their thought processes through a consolidation of images, text, animation and sound. Van Scoter (2004) advocates that digital images support language development. She adds that young learners use the images to tell stories they create. She adds that ‘any language project combining words and pictures presents a wonderful opportunity for pupils to create an image with meaning for them’ (Van Scoter, 2004:35). Project based learning involving the use of images and words could serve as platform for pupils to develop meaningful vocabularies.

The concept of digital story telling was propagated by Joe Lambert and Dana (1993). These concepts began with the assumption that every child has a story to tell. They found that technology can be manipulated and be used to express or share stories more meaningfully. The process of telling stories in a digital manner, encourage pupils to record their voices as they read the reading comprehension scripts. According to pupils, telling stories digitally empowered them to learn independently and the same time achieved the goals set or planned by teachers.

Lambert and Athehley listed 7 characteristics of telling digital stories. (<http://www.storycenter.org/>)

1. Audience	Story that caters to specific audience.
2. Purpose	Story must have purposes. (information, instructions, entertainment, etc)
3. Content	Content must be meaningful.
4. Voice	Story was presented through certain perspectives. The voice of presenter enriched the narration of story.
5. Technology	Technology was used as presentation tools.
6. Communication	Good story connects with the audience.
7. Economy	Short but comprehensive story.

In film making, music background is an important element because it provides deeper dimension and understanding about the film. In short, digital story telling consists of digital images, texts, voice narration and background music.

Sadik (2008) reported in his research that telling story digitally will enrich and enhance pupils learning in classroom, curriculum and experiences of learning among pupils because this strategy open up opportunity for pupils to design something they like using technology. In addition, he believes that pupils will be motivated and more enthusiastic to use technology to expand and elaborate their story.

There are several applications or software that can be used to promote digital story telling such as *Apple's iMovie, iBook and Microsoft Windows Moviemaker, Microsoft PowerPoint* and *Photostory 3 for Windoware* other examples of software that can be used to create digital story telling.

To enhance learning among pupils, Beacon Primary School uses Microsoft PowerPoint and Photostory 3 for Windows in teaching and learning. The applications were used as these softwares were user friendly and easily accessible from home.

## EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

### Research Question

1. Will digital story telling sharpen pupils' Malay language skills?

### Subject

40 Primary 1 Malay Language pupils from Beacon Primary School were involved in this research project.

The following ICT tools were used.

Terms	Topics	Tools
2	To the zoo	Microsoft PowerPoint
3	Our robot	Photostory 3 for Windows
4	Visit To Jacob Ballas Garden	Photostory 3 for Windows



*Primary 1 students making robot*



*Visit to Jacob Ballas' Children's Garden*

## **Research Methods**

### Pupils' Performance

A diagnostic test was conducted at the start of the academic term to assess reading, listening and level of language proficiency of the pupils.

Pupils' performance was examined using alternative assessment on reading, speaking, content and language. The components assessed in alternative assessment included oral communication (i.e. reading, listening and speaking). Pupils' digital stories provided good means to gauge the progress of their speaking skill. It was a good way to synthesize images and ideas appropriately.

### Teachers' Reflection Notes and Observations

Monitoring of pupils was carried out from time to time by teachers. Teachers observed and recorded pupils' progress in learning in their journals such as their level of confidence when the tasks were completed. The entries also included anecdotes and reflections.

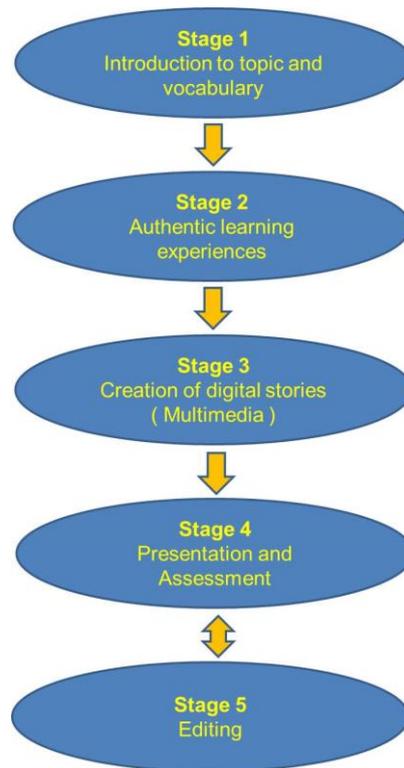
Teachers also recorded if pupils required help from teachers or friends.

### Pupils' and Parents' Surveys and Interviews

Parents were also actively engaged in their child's learning. Questionnaires were administered to parents so that parents can record their children's level of confidence in using Malay language at home as they interact with their children.

Pupils wrote their feedback on the activities they enjoyed best throughout the year. Pupils were also interviewed on the impact of these activities on their oral skills.

## Lesson Design Flow



### *Lesson Design Flow of Digital Storytelling in Beacon Primary School*

#### Stage 1: Introduction to topic and vocabulary

The teachers provide a platform to enrich vocabulary by tying literacy with context using ICT tools. Teachers guide pupils in the discussion of the topic. PowerPoint slides and Interactive White Board are used to engage pupils in the initial stage of this lesson design.

#### Stage 2: Authentic Learning Experiences

Pupils go through an authentic experience or go for a learning journey. This learning experience helps them to internalize the information they gather and serve as a platform for forming meaningful ideas or concepts. Peer interaction is means for the pupils to articulate their experiences and thought processes.

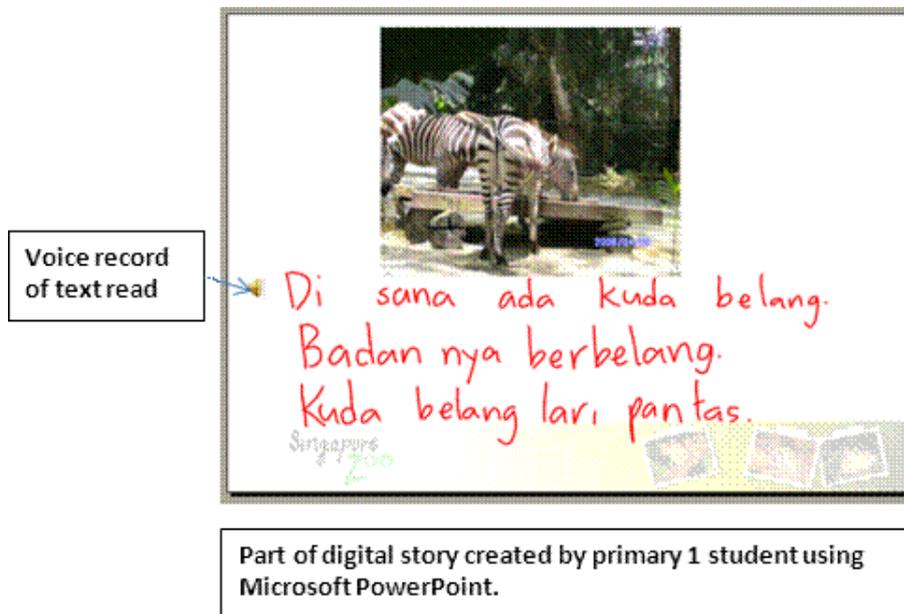
#### Stage 3: Creation of Digital Story ( Multimedia )

Using the information and resources gathered during the authentic activities, pupils proceed to create digital stories. These stories are the outputs of their learning experience.

#### Stage 4: Presentation and Assessment

- i) Pupils save their creations in the computer network shared folder for their peers to assess based on a checklist. Peers to provide feedback by ticking or crossing appropriate boxes with the criteria listed and write comments for their classmates.
- ii) Pupils save their work in the computer network shared folder for teacher to assess the digital story based on a set of rubrics. Teachers provide feedback for improvement.
- iii) Pupils present their digital storied to class. Teacher facilitates learning by asking

questions to elicit response from the creators on the reasons behind the text, images or audio recorded. Teacher and peers to give feedback for further improvements to the stories based on a checklist provided.



### Stage 5: Editing

Pupils take ownership in their learning by editing their digital stories incorporating the feedback given by peers or teachers. Depending on the time frame, pupils may edit their creations as many times as they want (which brings them to stage 4 again)

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **Reading Skill**

In the beginning of the year 2008, a diagnostic test was conducted and 40% of primary 1 student was found not able to read fluently. In November 2009, pupils' reading showed that 10% of primary 1 student was not able to read fluently. In term 3, through the 'Our Robot' project, 75% of primary 1 pupils cannot read fluently. In term 4, through the project visit 'To Jacob Ballas Garden', 90% of primary 1 pupils was able to read with appropriate intonation and used standard pronunciation in Malay language.

### **Speaking Skill**

In term 2, pupils recorded their conversation on the visit 'To the zoo'. There were able to articulate a few ideas in short and simple sentences. In term 4, these pupils were able to articulate in several sentences about their visit to the Jacob Ballas Children's Interactive Garden. Their stories included more reflection such as what they have learnt on care for the environment during their visit. The sentences went beyond 3 to 4 words. In general, all pupils' oral skills were enhanced and improved in term 4.

## **Content**

More contents were presented by pupils during the completion of project 'To Jacob Ballas' Garden' as compared to project 'To the zoo'. Pupils showed a better understanding of teacher's expectations. They understood the use of checklists and worked on their digital stories based on these checklists.

## **Language**

Pupils were required to follow the examples and sentences provided by teachers using the standardized templates in their oral presentation. Teachers checked the additional sentences wrote by pupils in their drafts. The level of language proficiency of the pupils needed more monitoring for a more conclusive observation. However, the use of the vocabulary discussed during each project was evident in most of the digital stories created.

## **Monitoring and Feedback from Parents and Pupils**

Teacher observed that all pupils felt more confident when speaking in Malay language in class in term 4 as compared to before. 75% of parents agreed that their child has become more confident and more conversant in Malay language at home.

Almost all ML pupils responded that they enjoyed their Malay Language lessons. 80% indicated that they speak their Mother Tongue language more often as compared to the year before. A few parents commented that they children were more conscious in using the right form of the language at home. These findings tallied with the engagement of pupils observed by the teachers.

## **The Advantages of 'Digital Story Telling' Strategy**

The process of digital story telling included recording pupils' own voices as they narrated their own scripts. Thus, the technology was placed in the hands of the learner and allowed them to control its use within objectives that were set by the teacher. Presentation and writing required skills like deciding on the goals, sequencing ideas, composition of messages, construction of sentences and editing.

Simple software applications such as Microsoft PowerPoint and Photostory 3 for Windows were chosen for ease of accessibility and widely used in school. Pupils were observed to be motivated and excited in the use of ICT tools to develop their stories which they could relate to.

## **CHALLENGES**

### **Teachers:**

1. Teachers need to spend more time in trying out the new ICT tools and identify effectiveness of the tools before teacher can assess the abilities of pupils to use the application.
2. Pupils' ability to use technology varied from one student to another. Some pupils required a longer time to complete their ICT based project while others did not. Teachers

- need extra planning time for technology integrated lessons.
3. Due to the different functions found in the software used, at times, pupils spent too much time in beautifying their presentation rather than focusing on the language and content of their stories
  4. At times, teachers could not run away from problems resulted from technical aspects such as no connection to network. Teacher-student ratio of 1 teacher to 30 pupils in each class became a problem when about 25% of the pupils in the class needed teacher's assistance at the computers.
  5. Teachers faced a problem of keeping pupils' drafts. Teachers are advised to keep their works in a file or thumb drive' when the shared network folder was down or have reached maximum capacity.
  6. Due to the authentic nature of the activities, creating rubrics to measure their learning was also a challenge. At this stage, many skills that they are being assessed are at a basic level. Thus, the assessment rubrics may lack reliability.

### **Pupils:**

At least 25% pupils found it was difficult to complete their individual projects. Some pupils had difficulties in reading and writing sentences.

Teachers faced some form of difficulties to get Primary 1 pupils on task at the computers. The initial phase of introduction to hardware and software was challenging and time consuming. However, the pervasiveness of the ICT-mediated lessons soon paid off when the pupils acquired the skills.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study hopes to provide a start to further studies in relation to the effectiveness of digital story telling in enhancing the learning of Malay Language skills. The pupils were observed to be more engaged and participated more actively in activities in the different stages of lesson design.

Teachers should relinquish some their intellectual and management authority by allowing pupils to choose what they want and how to learn. Jonassen, et. al, (2008) suggested that teachers should assume new roles, but so should pupils. Through digital storytelling, learners have ownership of learning as they learn to become knowledge builders.

What is more important is that, technology is just one of the tools of teaching and learning. According to Long (2002):

"Good teaching and effective learning, can be achieved anywhere there is drive, enthusiasm and dedication. Computers can expand and enrich the potential for learning, but technology is no substitute for creative teaching and for a commitment to families, communities and school systems."

The positive results were triangulated with the teachers' notes and observations, parents' and pupils' survey and reflection sheets by the pupils. However, there is also a need to take into consideration the possible implementation issues and challenges to better pre-

empt the potential challenges with the use of ICT in classrooms.

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