

## How an Improvised Story by Children of Preschool Age Is Being Turned Into a Multimodal Movie

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**Abstract:** Can children of preschool age create a multimodal movie; A movie which its script takes shape in three different ways. Constant education, regarding the modern tendencies in preschool age, since the ICT (information and communication technology) have brought in the educational process as an individual aspect of it, can answer the above question.

Children of preschool age need the intermediation of cognitive tools in the educational process. The ICT possess the appropriate dynamic and can be used as “object to think with” (Papert, 1980).

The design was based in two sectors: the educational and the technological. As far as the educational sector, the basic aim was that children learn to work in groups (3 work-groups: narration, black theatre, and animation) to contribute in the realization and completion of the final result-product (meaning the multimodal movie, which its beginning is being presented with narration, its middle part with the use of black theatre and its end with animation). Meanwhile, the individual aims concern sections of language, maths, physical expression and arts.

As far as the technological sector, the main aim was that the children were involved, by using the appropriate educational software, such as photostory 3 and movie maker, to create the multimodal movie. It was also pursued learning of expression in a creative way, using software of sketching and processing, playing and recording of sound, image and video. Children had to comprehend the function of visual and sound means (camera, video-camera).

The present assignment took place and applied in an all-day kindergarten school of Drama, in Greece. The topic “winter”, and how Vivaldi musically expresses it through his “4 seasons”, was the intensive for the creation of an improvised story by the children with heroes of their choice. The story was put into paper abiding to the correct order of the facts. Then, the improvised story became a multimodal movie.

Lastly, an interesting part for the children was a) how the digital narration takes place, b) the presentation of heroes in the black theatre c) making the heroes move and come alive in the animation.

**Key words:** preschool, mitrou, soultanidou

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## 1. Introduction

“Only what you have accepted with your soul, only that you can learn and embrace in your life and your personality”.

— Dewey

According to the European Reference Frame for the instruction and education (2007), the digital ability is intergrated in the basic abilities that all people need for their personal completion and growth, the active attribute the social incorporation and finally employment.

It is important that the choice for using technology should motivate creativity and the need for learning by providing pleasant experiences.

Therefore the cultivation of this creativity inside a kindergarten class requires some conditions in which the child can act on its own, take up initiatives, communicate solve problem, make decisions, discover new ideas and overall think in a creative way (Xanthakou, 1998).

How does creativity relate to education in general; This question was the requirement and also the trigger-point to think how we can use the techniques of digital storytelling, the black theatre and animation as means of expression and creativity within the frame of preschool education.

More specifically, we present in our paper the creative process that we followed, both in the aesthetics part as well as in the educational, with the help of the TIC (Technologies of Information and Communication). Additionally, our goal was to familiarize children with the creative aspect of the audiovisual means, in addition to modern technology within a larger frame. This would make them capable “judges” and viewers of the products of contemporary culture and not simply young narrators, actors, directors and animators.

## 2. Work Groups

The present work draft began at the 8<sup>th</sup> kindergarten of Drama in the late January of 2017 and was completed within a month, in the beginning of February of 2017 and was the result of the productive co-operation among the teachers.

The groups of children that worked in the multiform movie were three: group of digital narration (storytelling) black theatre and animation. The groups worked on the part of the multiform movie that they had chosen, giving ideas at the same time to the other groups, depending on the needs that rose each time. The groups were mixed, toddlers and pre-schoolers, 6 or 7 members each.

According to the rules that govern the creation of the work-groups, three kids of sub-groups were created. The first one was the “leader-co-ordinators” whose aim was to organize both their group and the others, in order to complete their task. The second one was the “collectors” of the material that both their group provided and also by personally gathering it from different corners of the class. Lastly, the third one was the “registers-analyzers” of the work that had been done within the team registering what had took place and what was left to do. All the toddlers had an important role in the team and at the same time interconnected to the other roles.

## 3. Way of Expressing

### 3.1 Digital Narration

It is a digital tool that provides people with the aptitudes to tell their own story through a two-minute movie.

The participants are trained so that they can use digital technology. It is also a very powerful means of personal expression.

Robin and Pierson (2005) define digital narration as the combination of traditional oral narration through 21<sup>st</sup> century multimedia. At the same time the last few years it is viewed as a new form of art that uses image, video and narration.

### **3.2 Black Theatre**

In the black theatre with muppets, the muppet-players wear black clothes and become invisible in the black background. Many children's dream is to become invisible, so through black theatre they can live this dream (Walter, 1997). The children through their hands-on participation in the muppet-show, by using the technique of the black theatre they bring the dolls to life and therefore feel safe because they themselves don't appear at all.

Lastly, the black light technique creates an imaginery frame, by isolating reality. In this way the children feel reality in an intense way depending on the feelings and the messages that each time the play tries to promote. The fairytale element dominates, and while the show is short, so it doesn't make the children feel tired, the images are imprinted in their memory and last a lifetime (Diamond, 2001).

### **3.3 Animation**

Animation is a vivid art, a form of art that was born prior to cinema. In Greek we use the term animation to describe this process.

By using the term animation we define every film that has created using image to image or in cinema terminology frame by frame. In line action films, the frame that will produce the continuous motion, when broadcasted in a fast pace, automatically photographs in pace 25 images per second. While in animation they are created one by one and then are combined to create a form of continuous motion.

Piaget tried to approach the meaning of animation with great accuracy. The term that he introduces is the "creative game". Within the same content, he uses symbols on the screen to represent something. In fact, he reassures that one of the aptitudes of the prefunctional stage is animism, which is the attribution of real-life abilities to soul-less objects.

Children usually give soul to objects that represent live characters in real life, like animals, people etc. (Beoree C., 1999).

The above element is one of the basic features of animation, since it transforms soul-less objects to live ones. All the above, digital narration, black theatre and animation could be used for and from children of pre-school age.

According to Robin and Pierson (2005) digital narration can be used as a learning strategy in all sectors of education and can be combined with other learning strategies like role-play (Tsilimeni, 2004) something that is especially adored by children of pre-school age.

The child learns to co-operate, cave in, respect and put himself in someone else's shoes. It overcomes its inhibitions, evolves its creative imagination and is guided toward more complex cognitive functions (Alkistis, 1998).

Moreover, animation has as key element the transformation of lifeless objects to living ones, which attracts the attention and the interest of young children. This happens because it is common feature of pre-school age to give real-life aptitudes to soul-less objects.

Furthermore, a key element of animation is that stimulates children and it is based on the theory of multiple

intelligences (Gardner, 1983) that characterise a person. More specifically, for pre-school children we can achieve better teaching results when we aim, always within the boundaries of the educational process, at activating (through animation) more than one intelligence. Especially animation can easily activate visual, vocal and motion intelligence, through both stimulation and actions (Whitebread D., 2000).

Therefore animation, as an application for the school environment follows a different design, in relation to the commercial productive process.

The young age of the creators and the time needed reforms the process of the production and it is revived from the overturn itself that the pupils decide within the course of the whole process

#### **4. Realization of the Work-Project Multiform Movie**

The method of a work project was applied “because it emphasizes intersectionality, in holistic perception of knowledge and in making the most of the interest, idea and live experiences of children within the process of learning” (Δ.Ε.Π.Π.Σ., 2011) as part of a plan of a widely intersectional with the topic “Winter”.

The children were called to observe images of Winter landscapes, through the internet or by observing works of great Greek and foreign painters. Based on the emotion that a Winter landscape creates we chose to listen to three music pieces from Vivaldi’s 4 seasons (from the theme Winter) with a difference in their tone and music intensity. Each of them created different emotions about the Winter.

The children were divided into three groups. Each group painted Winter landscape according to the music piece that was listening to. The diversity of music piece was also imprinted in the drawings of the children.

The snowflake was chosen to become the star and main heroine of an improvised story of the children. The cubic of narration was used for this (it has the shape of a dice and it is used to re-narrate a story). The improvise story was created using the method of “gradual building”. One child began the story with the phrase “Once upon a time...” And the next child continued the story gradually (but with its personal choice as to how) until the last child provided the ending of the story.

It was given the title “The journey of Whitey, the snowflake”.

#### **5. Stages of Work Project (Katz, 2004)**

The stages were the following:

- Discussion-inducement: introduction to the subject, exchange experiences
- Field work: seeking information, evaluating and classifying it
- Elaborating: search within specific objects
- Representation: connection to the cognitive part, choosing activities.
- Presentation of the final product: by exhibition, broadcasting

#### **6. Course of the Work Project**

##### **6.1 Discussion-Inducement**

When the children had an improvised story ready, the following question needed to be answered: How could we use that story or what could we do with it? Brainstorming was amazing and we came up with many solution full of imagination, as the following:

Question: What can we do to our improvised story?

- A) Make it beautiful
- B) Make it look a play
- C) Adapt it to black theatre philosophy
- D) “Act” it as a real play
- E) Retell it... (Re-narration)

Therefore three different forms of expression were chosen with the accompaniment of Vivaldi’s Music “Winter” (from the 4 seasons). More specifically the beginning of the movie would become the electronic narration, the middle (its plot) with black puppet theatre, and the end with animation.

Question: How does the improvised story “The journey of Whitey, the Snowflake” become a movie?

- A) It can have colours
- B) It should evolve hero-characters
- C) The characters must be included
- D) The characters must have a voice
- E) Motion is necessary too

### **6.2 Field Work**

The children were divided into 3 basic groups. The first one took over the beginning of the story, with the digital narration, the second one the middle, with the black puppet theatre, and the third one the ending, with the animation.

Each group separately collected the information/ material according to its field work. It collected photos, material from the internet, books from the school’s library and filed it. They had two concrete elements to handle: the music piece and the way they would present their work. Keeping this in mind, the first group presented the beginning of the story by choosing the lowest in tonality music piece (from the three taken from Vivaldi’s collection) for the digital narration. The second group presented the middle of the story, the plot, by choosing the music piece which was high in tonality for the black muppet theatre. The third group completed the story by choosing the average in tonality music piece for the animation.

### **6.3 Investigation**

In this stage since each group separately collected and classified its material, designed its final sketch for the project (spider-sketch) (Figures 3-5).

### **6.4 Representation-Choice of Activities (Connection of the Educational With the Technological Sector)**

In this stage it will be analyzed how each group (depending on its own work-project) completed the work towards the realization of the final stage of the multi-form movie.

#### **6.4.1 1<sup>st</sup> Group: Digital Narration-Beginning of the Story**

The children prepared five images. They placed them in a sequence and retold the story. However, it was noticed by the members of the group that one image was missing, the one with the title, so they created it too.

Then the camera was used to take pictures of the six images. Those images became a file in the P/C so that they could be used in the digital narration. Lastly they also solved the issue of the intensity of their voices, meaning how loud or not they could speak to the microphone so that their voice is clearly and beautifully listened to.

When a picture archive from the desktop was used, the microphone, which was also connected to the P/C and

the educational software “photo story 3”, the digital narration of the 1st group was finally completed.



Figures 1-6 Children's Paintings – 1<sup>st</sup> Group

#### 6.4.2 2<sup>nd</sup> Group: Black Muppet Theatre, Plot of the Story

First of all we need to make the muppets we were going to use, as well as the stage.

We had to use the bluelight bulb (from the black theatre) in order for the children to see which material were apparent and which not. The muppet- house was covered in black material and was used as the stage for the black muppet theatre.

Meanwhile, the children started rehearsing the voices of the play's characters and made some trial videos-shots. When the videoshooting was about to start, the lights were turned off, the camera was at place, the CD player with the high in tonality music piece ready to play and the children muppet-players dressed in black clothes, glove, beanies and hoods also ready.



Figure 7 Stage-for the Muppet Theatre



Figures 8-9 Muppets Made of Childrens: 2<sup>nd</sup> Group

#### 6.4.3 3<sup>rd</sup> Group: The End of the Story-Animation

The stage had to be built. Then white or soft blue were chosen as colours so that the characters made of play-doh to be distinctive. Simultaneously, other children began making the characters out of play-doh according to the script of the children's improvised story. After trials and activities concerning measurements of the character's height, they ended up at the appropriate size of the play-doh characters and of the stage's too.

The children were puzzled about the motion of the characters. Therefore several trials also took place concerning the models made of play-doh. The models were photographed in different position by barely moving their body and mouth each time. Then those photos were quickly broadcasted using the Windows image showing programme, in order to give the illusion of motion. One stage followed the other even more clearly, producing in this way the successive stages of animation so that the children can understand a basic element of animation

which is the “mitikasma” (when watching images follow each other on a fast pace, we get the sense of motion).

Continuing, we took photos and filed them on the PC. The PC was plugged and the video-shooting began. When the third group completed its work and by using the results of the first and the second work-group, the movie was completed. The multiform movie titled “The journey of Whitey the Snowflake” was ready after using the “Movie-Maker” the educational software and of course the proper editing took place.



Figure 10 Muppets Made of Play-doh: 3<sup>rd</sup> Group



Figures 11-12 Stage Props

As far as the educational sector was concerned: the main goal was to teach children to work in groups for creating and completing a final product (multiform movies). At the same time we also try to achieve other goals as well, linguistic-related (enrich vocabulary, learn how to narrate, speak, enrich oral skills) physical expression, arts (building stage and characters).

As far as the technological sector was concerned: the main goal was to evolve children in making the movie by using the proper educational software (photostory 3, movie maker). Also, they learned to express creatively through software of sketching, processing, playing and recording of sound, image and video. Also, they learned to understand audiovisual means (such as the camera and videocamera).

The result of all the above effort was to present to the parents the work of their children through a presentation that took place in the kindergarten.

## 7. Observations-Evaluation

Eventhough this project was realized in a short period of time (about a month) the children with the of the teachers, where it was heeded, managed to achieve their goal. Through this process we observed that: In every work-project each team that had to carry out a task, was created based on friendships among the pupils or the interest and curiosity they showed that specific time for that specific activity.

There were some problems and difficulties as far as some mean’s-tool’s use (i.e., the microphone during narration, the camera during the photoshooting stage by stage). Even the fact that the whole work was done inside the small and restrictive space of the school class, during shool-hours, created many times anger, anxiety, stress not only to children but to teachers as well. However, with good co-operation and feelings of duty and respect every obstacle was overtaken.

The process that was followed was a unique experience and the “creative product” filled the children, parents and teachers with immense joy.

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