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Using Microsoft Photo Story for Digital Storytelling in the Language Classroom

Title	Microsoft Photo Story
Publisher	Microsoft
Contact Information	http://www.microsoft.com/download/en/confirmation.aspx?id=11132
Type of product	Software for creating digital stories
Platform	Windows XP
Minimum hardware required	<p>Processor required: Intel P3 700-megahertz (MHz) or equivalent processor, an Intel P4 1.7-gigahertz (GHz) or equivalent</p> <p>Memory: 256 megabytes (MB) or RAM, 512 MB of RAM or more recommended</p> <p>Disk space: 400 MB of available hard disk space</p> <p>Monitor: Super VGA (800×600) or higher-resolution video adapter and monitor</p>
Supplementary software required	Microsoft Windows Media Player 10
Price	Free

Introduction

Digital storytelling, simply speaking, is the use of digital technology to tell stories (Ohler, 2008; The University of Houston, 2011). It combines traditional storytelling with modern technology (Lowenthal, 2009). To be more specific, digital storytelling uses digital video, animation, recorded narration, music, and/or any other media which help to tell a story (Bitter & Legacy, 2008; The University of Houston, 2011). Instead of using advanced technology, low-end technology which is commonly available to students is

usually used in education, and the product involved is usually in the form of a short movie that audiences can watch using a computer.

There are a number of educational benefits of digital storytelling. First, digital storytelling benefits both visual and auditory learners (The University of Houston, 2011) because of its use of different media. It is also motivating to students as digital storytelling allows them to publish their work on the Internet for others to see. These others are not only the students' classmates but also a global audience (Lowenthal, 2009). What's more, it is an effective instructional strategy which is not limited by time and space (Bitter & Legacy, 2008). Students can create their digital stories anytime and anywhere at their convenience. Lastly, digital storytelling can develop students' multiple literacies. As suggested by Lowenthal (2009), in the twenty-first century, literacy no longer simply includes reading and writing but also the capability to employ a number of different literacies. Digital storytelling can help students develop such capability.

One major element of a digital story that can facilitate learning in an English Language classroom is the learner's voice. In order to incorporate learners' voices, students have to record themselves narrating the scripts of their stories. They are the "storytellers" who tell or read their own stories to audiences (Kajder, 2006, p. 18).

The purpose of this media review is to introduce Microsoft Photo Story 3, a free and user-friendly software program, for creating digital stories. Windows Movie Maker, another freeware which is included in Windows XP, can also be used to create digital (video) stories. However, the major limitation of Windows Movie Maker is that, as mentioned by Ohler (2008), it is difficult to mix two different audio tracks (for example, background music and narration). By using Microsoft Photo Story 3, the key features of digital storytelling can be easily achieved. An overview of how Microsoft Photo Story 3 can be used is presented in the following sections.

An Overview of Microsoft Photo Story 3

Microsoft Photo Story 3 is a software program that can be used to create digital stories using digital photos, special effects, sound tracks, and recorded narration. Users can start creating their own video stories by simply choosing "Begin a new story" (Figure 1 below).



Figure 1. *Begin a new story*

Importing Pictures

In “Import and arrange your pictures,” select the pictures you want to use in the story and arrange them in the correct order on the film strip (Figure 2). To edit a picture, select the picture and click “Edit.” Then, select “Add Effect” in the Edit Pictures dialog box and choose one of the effects to apply to that picture. Check “Apply the selected effect to all of the pictures in your story” if desired.



Figure 2. *Import and arrange pictures*

Adding a Title

After importing the pictures, the next step is to add a title or texts to each picture in “Add a title to your pictures.” Simply select a picture and then type in text to add a title. The font, font style, size, color, position, and orientation of the title or text (left, center horizontally, right, top, center vertically, or bottom) can be changed in this step (Figure 3).



Figure 3. *Add a title to pictures*

Narrating Pictures and Customizing Motion

The activity that can develop students’ speaking skills in digital storytelling is to narrate their stories. In “Narrate your pictures and customize motion,” we can narrate our stories by clicking the record button. Users move through the pictures by clicking each of them on the film strip as they narrate.

After narrating the story, the motion of the digital story can be changed by clicking “Customize Motion” (Figure 4).

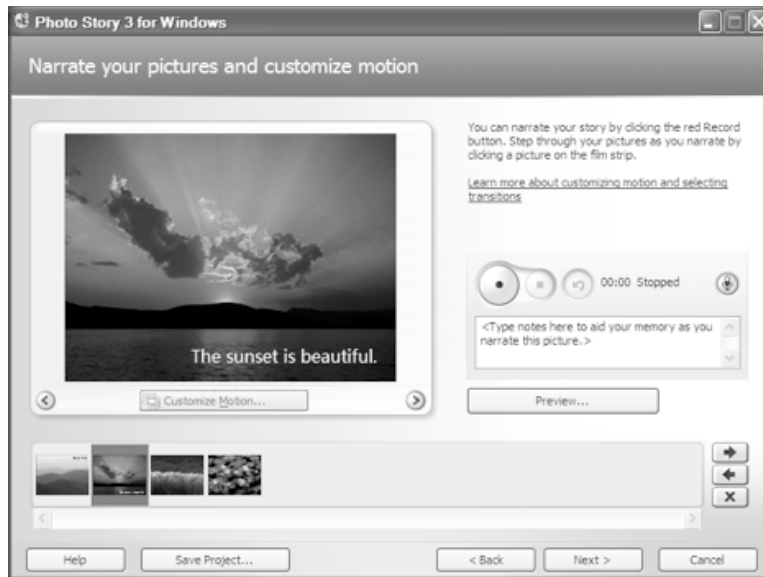


Figure 4. *Narrate pictures and customize motion*

In the “Customize Motion” dialog box, select “Motion and Duration” to specify the start and end position of motion, and to set its duration (Figure 5). Also, the transition between pictures and the duration of the transition can be added by selecting “Transition” (Figure 6).

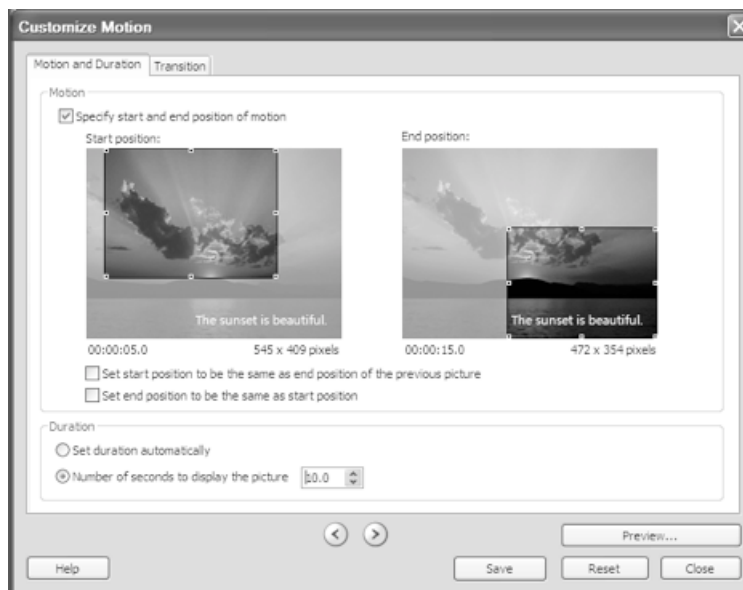


Figure 5. *Customize motion and duration*

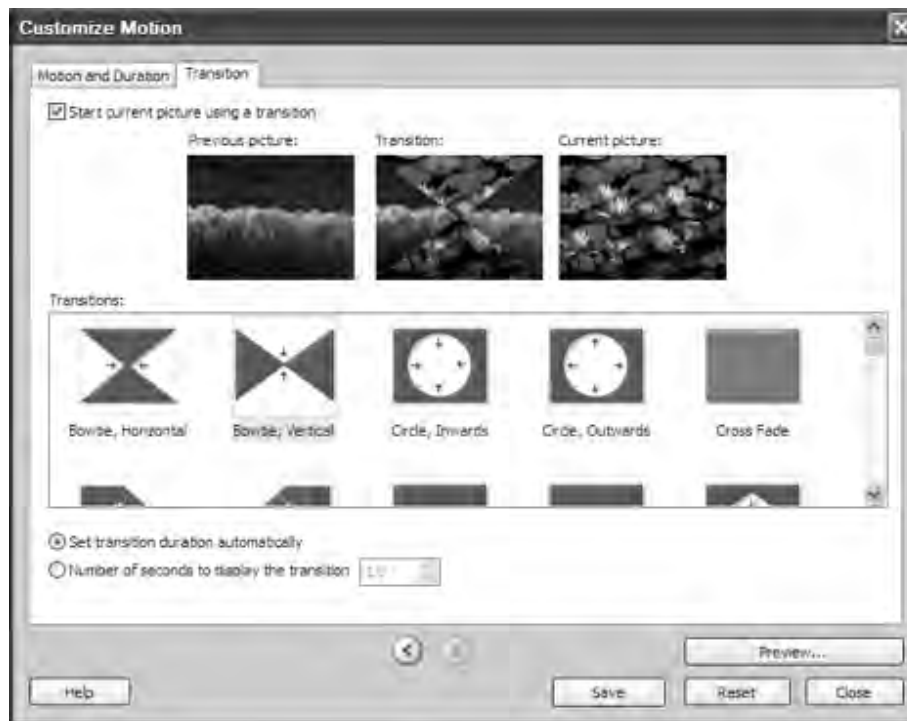


Figure 6. *Customize transition*

Adding Background Music

After narrating the pictures and customizing their motion, the next step is to add background music to the digital story. Users can select the picture they want the music to accompany and then click either “Select Music” or “Create Music” (refer to Figure 7). We choose “Select Music” if we want to select a saved music file from our computer. One interesting feature of Microsoft Photo Story 3 is that we can add customized music to our story by selecting our preferred music properties in terms of its genre, style, band, mood, tempo and intensity. To customize the music, choose “Create Music” in the “Add background music” dialog box (Figure 8).



Figure 7. Add background music



Figure 8. Create music

Saving the Story

The final step in creating a digital story with Microsoft Photo Story 3 is to save the story. Choose one of the options in “Activities” (e.g. “Save your storybook for playback on your computer”). Then, specify the location and file name for the story. After that, clicking “Next” takes the user to a screen titled “Completing Photo Story 3 for Windows.” From here, to see the completed product, the user clicks “View your story” (Figure 9).



Figure 9. *Completing Photo Story 3*

Evaluation of Microsoft Photo Story 3

Microsoft Photo Story 3 is a software program which is suitable for use in an English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom for learners of diverse language proficiencies, in particular for elementary-level learners. It is freeware, which means that students can download and use it both at school or at home. In addition, it is so user-friendly that even those learners who have limited computer knowledge can use it to create their digital stories without much difficulty, as users are guided by the software in a step-by-step manner. Students may have a sense of achievement once they have created their own digital stories which look professional, have picture effects, sound effects, and narration, all without the need for advanced computer skills.

Apart from these, digital storytelling with Microsoft Photo Story 3 can be used as a post-reading activity in an ESL or EFL classroom. Through creating digital stories, students' creativity can be developed. In language learning, the students' writing and speaking

skills can be enhanced through writing the texts of their digital stories and narrating the stories.

Conclusion

Digital storytelling engages reluctant readers and writers and different types of learners (e.g. visual and auditory learners), and makes every learner want to write (Miller, 2010). In this article, Microsoft Photo Story 3 is reviewed and recommended to ESL/EFL teachers for digital storytelling in the classroom because it is free and easy to use. Through creating digital stories in a fun way, it is believed that learners, including lower achievers and those who are reluctant to learn, can be motivated and their reading and writing abilities can be developed.

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About the Reviewer

Chi Cheung Ruby Yang is a Ph.D. Candidate at Lancaster University, UK. Her research areas include integrating IT into English language teaching and learning, gender and language, and corpus linguistics. She has published a number of articles in both Asian and international journals.

<hkrubyyang@gmail.com>

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