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## Online Interactive Storytelling as a strategy for learning music and for integrating pupils with hearing disorders into Early Childhood Education (ECE).

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### Abstract

The aim of the present study is to find a solution to a situation that we have observed during our teaching careers, namely the exclusion of pupils with hearing disorders from musical education. To this end we decided to make use of online storytelling as a way of approaching the issue of social and peer integration, as storytelling and new technology are both elements that hold a great appeal for such pupils. Results were assessed by carrying out a study into a group from the third year of ECE, which had recently seen the admission of a pupil with hearing difficulty. The study concluded that the use of online digital storytelling led to an enhanced level of musical appreciation in the entire group and especially in the pupil who was the focus of the study, who became better integrated in the class and whose self-esteem increased notably.

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### 1. Introduction

It was not until the Salamanca Declaration (UNESCO 1994) that it was generally recognized that all students have the right to develop their potential and set of skills so they can take a more active part in our society. To effectively ensure the right to education we have to guarantee that everybody has access to quality education with equal

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opportunities (Domínguez 2009). Yet for a teaching staff that is untrained and not specialized, dealing on a daily basis with children with hearing disorders can be a really challenging task (Castro Rojas, 2008).

In fact, it was only relatively recently that it was still quite normal to exclude deaf pupils from the classroom on the grounds that such a disorder affected learning and communicative ability. Also, it was believed that it caused disruption to behavioral patterns, linguistic ability and academic progress, besides having a highly negative effect on self-esteem. Numerous studies have testified to the fact that pupils with hearing disorders suffer from retarded maturity and development, as well as difficulties to integrate socially (Fernandez & Villalba, 1996; García & Herrero, 2008; Domínguez, 2009). Yet deafness does not affect intellectual capacity (Alvarez, Mollá & Estébanez, (2009), and recent research has demonstrated that if hard-of-hearing pupils are admitted to “normal” classes, their performance improves (Hyde, 2004).

Historically, not only has the education of the pupil with a hearing disorder been significantly disadvantaged, so has their access to traditional culture. It is impossible to overlook the fact that these pupils are unfamiliar with the traditional children’s tales that are common currency among children with normal hearing. Moreover they are traditionally deprived of the benefits of a musical education as they have been excluded from the music classroom, with the justification that deafness or impaired hearing would make it impossible to engage in other normal educational processes. However, according to García and Herrero (2008:37), “even in cases of acute deafness we can make use of the body’s sensitivity to low frequencies to work with rhythmic sequences that can develop responses to intonation and melody through games involving use of the body”.

We agree with Alvarez, Mollá and Estébanez (2009:15) when they state that “musical education encourages development of emotional responses and the capacity to create and express. It also cultivates the esthetic sense and general sensitivity, as well as an agility of mind and the ability to organize temporally. All these things facilitate integration into society. For deaf people, music has therapeutic value because it helps to correct certain physiological deficiencies linked to their condition. So although the deaf child lacks body rhythm since this is acquired through hearing, (s) he can perceive rhythmic vibrations through different channels, via the skin and the bone structure”. We believe then that those aspects that can be appreciated by other senses, like rhythm and metrics, should receive special attention. To this end it is necessary to establish realistic objectives that can be fulfilled in the short and/or long term according to the communicative capacity of the child (Segovia, 2010). In this way children can learn to express themselves, increase their self-esteem and to integrate with other children who hear normally. Despite being deprived of one of the fundamental senses and while aware that results will never be the same as in children with normal hearing, we fully support the integration of people with this handicap so that they can take part in and enjoy the numerous benefits that a musical education can bring (Molpeceres, 2015). According to Pérez and Leganés (2012), a lot of research has shown that educating through music enhances the learning experience as a whole. One example of this is found in studies carried out by Professor Levitin (2011), who claims that music enables the brain to undergo a more rapid and meaningful learning process.

Furthermore we cannot ignore the fact that IT is of great help to people with hearing difficulties and to the teaching of music (Savage, 2005; 2007). This is a resource normally used in schools by teachers involved in educating pupils with hearing disorders (García & Herrero, 2008). It is clear that Information and Communications Technology (ICT) plays a major and positive role in transforming traditional learning environments into others more diverse and interactive where knowledge can be generated through active and cooperative learning techniques that promote teacher-pupil interaction and interaction among peers. Proper use of these technological resources in the classroom allows the creation of new teaching models and management of methodological tools. In this sense ICT creates a scenario that favors the development of innovative and relevant projects that are ongoing at different levels of teaching. It is the “emerging education” referred to by Adel and Castañeda (2012).

After much thought, we have come to the conclusion that our objective, the integration of pupils with hearing disorders into the classroom, could best be achieved by using online storytelling as a teaching strategy, as this is one of the techniques that appeals the most to pupils in primary education. And let us not forget the importance of socialization; as Rodríguez et al (2012) point out, at this level of learning teachers prioritize factors concerning social integration as much as or more than the contents of what is learnt. We must remember that the social class with which we are working has difficulties precisely of integration into society, which is one of the reasons for this study.

Thus the need to take into account this group of pupils led us to consider new strategies that might contribute to greater success for the learning and teaching processes that were adopted explicitly for the pupil in question, although

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