

Digital Storytelling: The Arts and Preservice Teachers

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ABSTRACT

In this presentation, the authors describe a journey of teachers in a graduate Fine Arts Methods course. The journey began with conversations about what art is and the nature of collections in exploring this question. Elements of visual literacy, storytelling and music were investigated. The final product was a Digital Story incorporating all of these elements into a teaching artifact that integrated the Arts into other content areas for K-8 students.

Keywords: visual literacy; digital storytelling; fine arts.

INTRODUCTION

Digital storytelling is not new [1] but how does a preservice teacher educator introduce this 21st century skill along with some kind of content to graduate students in an MAT program? We will describe the journey of students taking a Fine Arts Methods Course.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Joe Lambert [2], the executive director of the Center for Digital Storytelling, counters arguments that visual media have been a factor in the decline of written literacy and comprehension. One of the goals of the Center is to bring people back into the language of the written word. Digital storytelling has been criticized because traditional stories of indigenous peoples may become lost in translation by the use of graphic effects and outside perspectives [3]. Kunuk, an Inuit filmmaker, declares that, rather than threatening storytelling traditions, digital storytelling enriches the oral tradition of indigenous people since they are doing what they have always done: making things their own.

Experience design focuses on creating memorable experiences as a foundation of any educational endeavor. McLellan [4] uses the experience design model to integrate technology into the classroom. Inherent in her model is the need for educators to shift their thinking from notions of delivering instruction to one of staging an educational experience. Dramatic storytelling itself is designed to induce naturally specific actions essential to the experience design process. Storytelling is interactive,

including and entertaining a specific audience, and providing closure both emotionally and cognitively. In conjunction with technology, storytelling is not an end unto itself; it is an all-encompassing approach to deliberate design through experience.

Chung [5] explores the impact on teachers of designing digital stories for teaching art. Chung's students use a traditional approach to design electronic stories. Students examine and critique intact stories, develop a story that focused on art, research information, write a script, storyboard the digital story, and produce it. In this model, students perform multiple tasks as researchers, playwrights, designers, media producers, and educators; this enables them to implement the methodology in their own classrooms. However, this is a linear product-based approach. In contrast, the work described herein takes a nonlinear, aesthetically more abstract approach that engages the imagination. The final digital story, although important, is not the goal of the project. Nor is the essential objective doing digital storytelling with K-8 students.

Maxine Greene [6] declares that if we can enable more young persons to make sense of what they see and hear and to attend to works [of art] in their particularity, they may begin to experience art as a way of understanding a way of knowing. She observes that the experience and knowledge gained by this way of knowing opens new modalities for us in the lived world; it brings us in touch with our primordial landscape, our original act of perceiving. Greene challenges us to enable young people to realize that they have the right to find works of art meaningful against their own lived lives. To do this teachers must experience this first themselves. Digital Storytelling: The Arts and Preservice Teachers is a beginning.

INTER-DISCIPLINARY ANALOGY

This required course attempts, in five sessions, to provide both content and pedagogy for preservice teachers to learn how to integrate the arts into other content areas. This would be a daunting task over a semester or even a year; however, we believe we have established a good foundation from which these future teachers can grow. The presentation will include examples of students' digital stories along with excerpts from their reflections upon this experience.

The question becomes: how to begin?

I have always found monochromatic art interesting and I wanted to focus my project on telling a story-one color at a time. I think that students typically see art that is full of color. I thought focusing in on each color would help students see a new perspective and art that they may have never seen before. I would start with a picture that has multiple colors (maybe even a rainbow) and then go through red, yellow, blue, etc. I wanted to use a combination of professional photography and well-known paintings. Is this a good beginning? Jennifer

EXPRESSIONAL METAPHOR

A Collection

The first element in good digital storytelling is developing the concept of a collection. All artists are collectors. Keri Smith [7] gives us a practical way to become artistic collectors and the methods to do it. The students began their collections that then became the themes for their digital stories.

I had been intrigued by his artwork. Besides his characteristic large-scale heavy pieces of sculptures that grace the open public spaces in many cities around the world, Alexander Calder also is renowned for the magical moving sculptures hanging in delicate balance in many art museums and buildings. *Carol*

Vito Dipinto is an artist: actually a performance artist. His longest running performance piece is something he calls teaching. He is also a collector. The students explored how they could use his collections to help their future students to answer the questions:

What is art? What should students know about the arts? And why should they care?

This is the type of assignment that taught me a lot about art and how it is used in every aspect of life. From the perspective of a teacher, it would help me to learn what is important to my students and where their creative minds lead them. *Franny*

ANALOGICAL INFERENCE

Visual Literacy

Knowledge of visual literacy is the second element in good digital storytelling. Just as we need to teach our students how to read and understand what they are reading, we need to teach them to how to read, understand, and use visual images. The Black Square Problem [8] introduced students to concepts in visual literacy and design. The Magic Square Activity [9] provided a practical template for designing a story in discrete pieces.

I used a lot of Dali and Munch, some Matisse and Cezanne. The two hardest stanzas were "Shape without form, shade without colour/Paralysed force, gesture without motion." Shape without form and shade without color? No picture is going to capture that. That is almost the antithesis of a visual image. I knew I needed abstract art for that one. The final

stanza was tricky, because that's the big punch of the poem. While I used very powerful images throughout, I knew that to stay with the meaning of the poem, I needed something simple, almost elegant. *Rose*

COMMUNICATIONAL ANALOGIES

The Story

Of course, the story itself is critical in digital storytelling. Vito Dipinto is a professional storyteller among other things. Storytellers collect stories. He has a collection of objects that are story starters. These form a cognitive template for storytelling.

For the digital story, I thought about what I think what makes a good story and I came up with a beginning, middle and an end. But then I thought, well, what about the seasons and nature? They have beginnings, middles, and ends, but then they repeat! And I liked the repetition because Mother Nature never truly repeats, each season our weather is different. *Martina*

Music

Students also need to understand the importance of a musical background for good storytelling. Vito and Kaki Dipinto have used music in variety ways in teaching students. Each student selected one piece of music that their students might not have on their iPods. They presented the history of this musical piece, some interesting information about the artist, and some personal account of the impact of this music on their lives.

I let the music tell a story to me, the music sounded to me like the ocean. That got me thinking about all the various paintings of ocean scenes and I wondered if I could find a painting of all five oceans, it became a little challenge I gave myself. *Justin*

DESIGN PROPOSAL

Each student was required to visit the Center for Digital Storytelling [10]. Then they designed and produced a digital story in class. What they produce is not a virtual field trip. Students are telling stories with a collection of still images.

As a learner this assignment taught me to think outside of the box--to explore my creative side and interests in art. I wanted to find and use artwork that meant something to me, that was more than just a painting on the wall. *Krista*

The students could choose to introduce some of world's famous art museums, or choose an artist and provide a collection of his/her work displayed around the world, or look at indigenous peoples' art, or some other creative theme. However, they needed to select at least 15 images and note the URL for each image. In addition, they needed a piece of music 2.5-3.5 minutes long. Using iMovie, each student produced a final product in less than two hours [11].

This assignment has impacted me as a learner because it helped to awaken my creative side and allowed me to view and use things in a way that I would have not normally been able to. While doing the assignment, I started thinking of other ways that I can use such an

idea in the classroom to help students like myself begin to think more creatively. The thinking process of new ideas has allowed me to grow as a teacher. I now will feel more comfortable trying new things in the classroom. *Narissa*

CONCLUSION

Most of the students had no previous experience in visual literacy or in using any kind of software to produce a digital story. The students incorporated the ideas of visual literacy and storytelling from the course to design a learning tool for K-8 students.

While doing this assignment I thought a lot about all the different forms of art there are, and how art is constantly changing and evolving to match the times. But while it evolves and changes, the things that came before are still done. The assignment helped cement the idea that there isn't a wrong way to do something, only a different way. I have tried to live by that motto for a long time but it's refreshing to have it enforced like this. But it also reminded me that even though I consider myself an artist I only use a few mediums and there are many more out there for me to explore. *J.J.*

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