Digital Storytelling in Teacher Education

Vivian H. Wright
University of Alabama, USA

INTRODUCTION

In teacher education programs, there is a consistent need to locate and to recommend to teacher educators, teacher candidates, and in-service teachers, viable technology tools and concepts that can be used in the classroom. Digital storytelling is a concept that is growing in popularity and one which offers versatility as an instructional tool. This chapter presents information and ideas on how to facilitate learning, productivity, and creativity through a variety of digital storytelling classroom uses.

BACKGROUND

Storytelling is nothing new and has indeed been a tradition in many families and cultures. However, in an evolving technological age, the trend of storytelling is becoming digital. Digital storytelling uses multimedia software and hardware and "incorporates all available multimedia tools—graphics, audio, video, animation, and Web publishing—into the telling of stories" (Mellon, 1999, p. 46). As the Institute for New Media Studies (2004) notes, "The digital frontier is a dynamic new space for storytelling but its potential has yet to be realized" (¶ 1). Taking a series of still images or moving images and combining them with a narrated soundtrack in order to tell a story is a crucial component of a well-told digital photo story (The Institute for New Media Studies, 2004; Kajder & Bull, 2005).

In teacher education, digital storytelling can be used in many ways including as a tool to promote self-reflection, to illustrate historical perspectives, to promote inquiry, and as a method of technology integration and ongoing instruction. In a K-12 classroom, visual images combined with technological applications have the capability of changing the often teacher-centered, transmission dominated classroom. However, any integration of technology should take place with careful preparation and thought by teachers and students. According to Mason, Berson, Diem, Hicks, Lee, and Dralle (2000), technology should: (a) be "introduced in context", (b) "extend learning beyond what could be done without technology", and (c) "be used to encourage inquiry, perspective taking, and meaning making" (p. 108). Weis, Benmayor, O'Leary, and Eynon (2002) make the claim that advances in multimedia and digital technologies have the ability to change teaching and learning as these forms of media enable students to become researchers, storytellers, and historians.

USES OF DIGITAL STORIES

Through past experiences in using digital storytelling tools across content areas/disciplines and classroom levels, the author proposes three primary categories in which a digital story may be categorized: *personal, historical,* and *reflective*. Each of these categories is briefly explained and some examples for classroom implementation are given.

Personal Digital Stories

In a personal digital story, an individual may use pictures, video, or other media to tell a story, visually depicting personal history or personal observations of an incident or historical account. This concept for learning could be extended into several classes and content areas for teaching and learning. For example, a student in a psychology class may add his/her voice to a digital story depicting an individual who exemplifies one of Gardner's multiple intelligences. Or, a foreign exchange student may build a digital story to illustrate her impression of visiting an American school. In another use, Mellon (1999) developed a digital storytelling assignment using an online conference center in which the instructor could set up a topic or thread. Students added entries and could review others' entries. She developed threads for storytelling, including threads for "a family member who made an impact on your life and an early childhood memory" (p. 47). Mellon concluded that "students are willing to

create and share stories that reveal their deep personal feelings, stories that they probably would not choose to present orally" (p. 50).

Historical Digital Stories

While one may also categorize some personal digital stories as historical, the examples presented here are those types of stories in which, as Tracey Weis noted, "Students become more conscious of, and reflective about, the power and responsibilities of historical synthesis and interpretation" (Weis, Benmayor, O'Leary, & Eynon, 2002, p. 155). In her project, Weis' students visit online sites and use archival research to learn history, while constructing digital stories which synthesize and interpret what they have visited and reviewed. She notes that the "…objective of this exercise is to encourage students to compare and contrast the content and tone of interpretations presented by public historians in historical sites and academic historians in scholarly journals" (p. 155).

Students may also develop historical accounts of their research through timelines of events and present a multimedia digital story versus the traditional term paper. The *Historical Fieldtrip of Alabama Landmarks* project is such an example (http://www.citejournal.org/articles/mc1.html). In this project, pre-service teachers selected a historical Alabama landmark to visit, research, and then report on its historical significance through a digital story. These stories were later used throughout the state by history teachers.

Such assignments are important and illustrate the various ways digital storytelling can be used. Lee (2002, ¶30) further notes: "The availability of these new resources and methods [digital technologies] make for a unique and powerful opportunity to shift the focus of history and social studies instruction from a teacher-centered transmission model to a model that encourages student's inquiry."

Reflective Digital Stories

Self-reflection is an integral part of teaching and learning; when paired with visual imagery, it allows one to see his/her progress (Salpeter, 2005) and to better link theory with practice. Reflection is a key element in teacher expertise, but this comes by having the ability to notice one's role, which is often done through the

means of video technology (Sherin & van ES, 2005). With easy access to multimedia tools, an emphasis on learning how to use and integrate technology in teaching and learning, and an increased interest in digital storytelling in many disciplines, it seems that a natural method of reflectivity lies in the use of digital stories. For example, in teacher education preparation, students completing internships or clinical hours may take digital photos of their experiences at beginning, mid-, and end points of their experience. Then, using a program that combines photos, text, music, and narration, the student can create a digital story reflecting upon their growth as a teacher over the course of that semester. Kajder and Swenson (2004) encourage students and teachers to use digital images as "readers and as writers" (p.18), engaging with both "visual and print texts" digitally to allow students and teachers to "envision, understand, and communicate meaning" (p. 18).

CONCLUSION

Current technologies offer user-friendly software to quickly and easily create digital stories, with many programs offered free or at low cost, such as Microsoft's Photo Story 3 or iPhoto from Apple Computer. Further, growth in digital camera ownership makes it easier (and more convenient) for teachers to implement digital storytelling assignments in a classroom. Personal, historical, and reflective digital stories can be used to engage students, encourage inquiry and meaning making, and extend learning all important to technology integration efforts (Mason et al., 2000). As noted by Weis, Benmayor, O'Leary, and Eynon (2002), digital technologies can enable students to become researchers, storytellers, and historians.

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