

Digital Storytelling: Bringing Storytelling to Life with Innovative Technologies and Interactive Resources

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Abstract: By fusing the age-old tradition of sharing stories with cutting-edge technological tools, digital storytelling holds the potential to enhance student engagement and learning in a variety of classroom settings, from kindergarten through twelfth grade and beyond. This session will provide attendees with creative tips and tricks for using digital storytelling to enhance students' learning experiences and more effectively meeting curricular needs.

Introduction

By fusing the age-old tradition of sharing stories with cutting-edge technological tools, digital storytelling holds the potential to enhance student engagement and learning in a variety of classroom settings. Digital storytelling enables teachers to offer their students a “leg up” by integrating innovative technology into classroom curriculum (Frazel, 2010). The following article explores digital storytelling's role in the classroom and tips for utilizing this tool to expand the curriculum for twenty-first century learning.

Why Digital Storytelling?

From infancy, we listen to stories told and read to us by family members, thus laying the groundwork for appreciating stories' ability to captivate, inspire, and impart knowledge. Students enter the classroom not only eager to tell stories, but in many cases, also equipped to produce them through means of technology. The vast and growing collection of student-generated videos on various Internet sites such as TeacherTube offers evidence of their excitement to do so.

Digital storytelling elevates the enduring art of oral and written stories to a new level, adding fresh, interactive elements to capture the interest of a digital generation. In today's world, an infinite stream of media - from photographs to videos to voice recordings and music - provides a broad foundation upon which stories can be constructed and shared. Further contributing to the plethora of tools at teachers' and students' fingertips, the ever-growing collection of Web 2.0 resources has transformed the World Wide Web from a read-only medium to one by which anyone can publish and share created content (Solomon & Shrum, 2007). The students of today's world expect and anticipate opportunities to utilize such tools for inventing and interacting (Prensky, 2010).

Whether simple or multifaceted, digital stories hold tremendous potential to enrich students' lives. My second grade students once created autobiographical “documentaries,” showcasing the most important moments in their lives through personal photographs and narrative scripts they wrote themselves. This served as a unique venue by which to introduce themselves to fellow classmates at the beginning of the school year. For example, young Lindy's documentary featured special family photographs, from the day of her birth through her favorite “play date” with her grandmother and her family vacation to the Grand Canyon. After viewing the finished product, she smiled with unbridled delight and proudly remarked, “I can't believe I'm starring in a movie!” In fact, many of my students and their parents commented that this was among the most meaningful and memorable projects we created. From such personalized activities to inquiry-based learning endeavors, educators face the challenge of consistently engaging their students and effectively guiding them in demonstrating their learning. Digital storytelling uniquely fulfills this need.

Embarking on the Digital Storytelling Journey

The journey to incorporate digital storytelling begins with the process of establishing a roadmap of curricular goals to guide the way and meaningfully address the concepts to be learned. In general, digital stories typically fall into one of three categories: personal narratives, explorations of historical events, or stories that inform or instruct (Robin, 2008). Additionally, digital media can serve as an instrument through which students "publish and illustrate" an original work or story.

For instance, my school's second grade science objectives include an exploration of various types of rocks. Instead of simply examining carefully-cut samples of rocks from a classroom science kit, I once guided my students through a campus-based field trip for gathering a variety of rock specimens. Throughout our journey, I snapped digital photographs of the students in action. These images, along with my students' journal entries about their rock findings, formed the basis for our own digital representation of the delightful children's book *If You Find a Rock* by Peggy Christian and Barbara Hirsch Lember.

After deciding upon such specific objectives, teachers must give clear-cut directions for the project, thus ensuring that learners grasp the task ahead and understand how it aligns with the concepts to be learned. Additionally, teacher- or student-created examples greatly assist learners in visualizing the end result. Furthermore, guidance in effectively organizing student resources serves as an essential planning component. Older students might gather their typed scripts, audio files, images, and videos in electronic file folders. For younger students, scripts may be written on paper and stored in a set location. Additionally, young learners will likely need assistance saving their photographs and other media within a set digital location, perhaps on one common workstation.

After students incorporate the resources they gather in creating a video, peer review might play a role in the final stages of the project. Although the digital storytelling audience may be limited to the classroom, teachers and students might also endeavor to reach a wider audience through uploading their stories to the Internet.

Discovering Free Digital Storytelling Resources

Are you considering the prospect of introducing digital storytelling to your class? If so, many free, teacher- and student-friendly resources reside on the Internet, little more than a mouse-click away. One noteworthy website, the Educational Uses of Digital Storytelling (<http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu>), is dedicated to providing teachers with essential tools for incorporating digital storytelling into classroom learning experiences. This expansive website presents explanations, exemplars, tools, and instructions for designing digital stories.

Educators of younger learners might particularly enjoy viewing such teacher-created stories as "Mission: Gum," a kindergarten teacher's quest to teach students about making predictions by tracing the experiences of a wad of gum in the classroom. Those working with more mature students will uncover a plethora of exemplars to spark ideas for learner-created stories. For example, "Cardio" comprises a poignant personal reflection on the family effects of cardiovascular disease, smoking, and cancer. "Lincoln's Speech," another illustration of a highly feasible project for older students, showcases a visual representation of Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address.

The Center for Digital Storytelling (<http://storycenter.org/>), an international non-profit organization, is another valuable resource for supporting teachers and students across the globe in utilizing media tools to create and share digital stories. The Center's extensive website offers case studies and examples of digital stories spanning elementary through higher education, even including specialized workshops for educators. Teachers can peruse this site for a vast collection of manuals, books, and articles encompassing every aspect of digital storytelling.

Digitaless (<http://www.digitaless.us/>), another complimentary online resource, presents educators with beneficial information for creating and evaluating digital stories. Although this site showcases an assortment of examples produced by teachers, such stories also serve as excellent samples of the sorts of stories students might invent. Experienced educators realize that one should never underestimate the creative genius of students, especially when given the chance to integrate their aptitude for technology!

Let the Journey Begin!

In today's information-saturated world, storytelling is being revived as a unique tool for assisting learners in sifting through an onslaught of data and crafting meaning of the world around them. The digital storytelling process channels everyday information into distinctive opportunities for lasting learning. By journeying alongside students as they create and share their stories, teachers have the potential to breathe new life into learning. Let the digital storytelling journey begin!

References

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