

Multiliteracies, Digital Narratives and Storytelling

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Abstract

Multiliteracies represent a new approach to literacy pedagogy and instruction (New London Group, 1996). Multiliteracies supports and enhance the fundamental purpose of education that sees learning as benefitting all students by learning in ways that allow learners to become part of an educational process that goes beyond the classroom walls (Albers and Sanders, 2010). Education as a situated practice can enhance students' motivation to learn across the content areas. This is due to the fact that motivation is the students' ability to read different texts at different levels of complexity and understanding (Pahl, 2007). In turn, Education and Multiliteracies are paramount for supporting students' motivation to read for meaning in the classroom.

In this study, the author analyses the importance of designing and applying new media literacies in K-12 classroom. The scholar analyzed the digital storytelling developed in a graduate literacy course by pre-service and in-service teachers. The participants were 11 teachers (n=11) attending a literacy across the content areas graduate course in a liberal arts college in Virginia. The participant developed 11 digital storytelling narratives in their area of expertise as a mid-term project by making different choices on the technology to use for this task in the course. The analysis of the digital storytelling was carried out by looking at four main components: (a) text; (b) sound; (c) visual aids to better comprehend the narrative and (d) voice or narrative support in the story. The findings of the present study suggest that digital technology can become an integral and systematic component of any curriculum to enhance student motivation to read and write. The further development of software and technology in K-12 schools in the USA will give teachers the opportunity to explore and experiment with technology to allow students to access different genres of texts in the curriculum.

1. Introduction

The definition of being literate in the 21st century has changed dramatically due to the new media literacies in K-12 schools (Burn & Reed, 1999). The idea of reading and writing in a digital world has shifted from the traditional paper and pencil process to a more digital interactive one where technology and digital processes present the printed word within different reading-writing environments. The technology of the computer such as CD and DVD players and word processing functions and the internet ask students to have a systematic knowledge of new literacies in and out of school (Sylvester and Greenidge, 2009). Students in the 21st century need to become able to read the word and the world by accessing different literacy environments often simultaneously (Sylvester and Greenidge, 2009).

The use of digital stories in K-12 classrooms supports students to apply literacy skills by reconceptualising the printed word in new reading-writing environments. In order to do so, pre-service and in-service teachers must shift from a traditional approach to literacy education to a Multiliteracies methodology for teaching reading and writing in the classroom (New London Group, 1996). The New London Group (1996) claims that "to define generally the mission of education, one could say that its fundamental purpose is to ensure that all students benefit from learning in ways that allow them to participate fully in public, community, and economic life" (p.1). Also, the New London Group (1996) points out "Literacy pedagogy is expected to play a particularly important role in fulfilling this mission." (p.1) The use of literacy pedagogy and Multiliteracies in the specifics has the potential to support students' acquisition and application of critical literacy skills in a global literate society.

In this study, the author analyses the importance of designing and applying new media literacies in K-12 classroom. The scholar analysed the digital storytelling developed in a graduate literacy course by pre-service and in-service teachers. The participants were 11 teachers (n=11) attending a literacy across the content areas graduate course in a liberal arts college in Virginia. The participant developed 11 digital storytelling narratives in their area of expertise as a mid-term project by making different choices on the technology to use for this task in the course. The analysis of the digital storytelling was carried out by looking at four main components: (a) text; (b) sound; (c) visual aids to better comprehend the narrative and (d) voice or narrative support in the story.

1.2 Methodology

All the participants in the study are pre-service and in-service teachers in the content areas ranging from math to science to social studies. The Literacy Across the Curriculum course taught in the fall of 2014 asked students to develop digital storytelling in their areas of expertise with the goal to motivate students to engage with the content in a more systematic and effective way. At the beginning of the semester, the instructor of the course and the participants analysed the definition and components of digital storytelling, the rubrics for the assessment and grading of the midterm project and samples of digital storytelling by using different technology. Lambert (2002) definition and components of digital storytelling were used to design and complete the midterm project in the course. Lambert (2002) definition of digital storytelling is the ability to tell a story by using different modes of text production. For the present study, the mode of production was defined as the ability to use technology (PPT, Pretzi, etc.) to develop a story in a specific content area to support students' learning in the classroom. The components of digital story telling analysed in the study and used by the participants are the following: (a) point of view, what the author is trying to communicate with the story; (b) dramatic questions, what important issues are presented and problematized in the story; (c) Emotional content, what is expressed in the story; (d) language, using a language that communicates the content in the story; (e) the rhythm of the story (f) voice, the use of pitch, inflection and timbre to give pathos to the story and (g) soundtrack, using music to make the story more interesting and enhance emotional response (Lambert, 2002). The participants in the study created digital storytelling (n=11) based on the framework presented above. Figure 1 shows the 11 digital stories telling developed by the participants.

Title	Digital Storytelling	Content Areas
The story of a parallel	Explain the parallel in math by developing a fictional "love story" between two lines.	Math
Goldilocks	Teaching manners and good attitude by presenting a traditional folktale within a digital environment	Language Arts
Political Process How to Become President	Teaching students the presidential elections by presenting it with political cartoons and satire	Social Studies
Pepito Comes to the USA	Digital storytelling developed to teach the importance of English to ESL students.	ESL/Language Arts
The Fighting Frogs	The story was developed to teach English and Family Life Education for elementary upper grades	Language Arts
The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere	Story based on the "English are Coming." To teach the war of Independence to middle schooler	Social Studies
War poems from WWI	Images, sound, music and words to visually recount the atrocities of WWI to High school students	Social Studies
Art and Max	Digital Storytelling to teach students the colours in Arts classroom in a funny and creative way.	Arts

A Smoky Night	A digital story telling created to educate students to the L.A. riots in 1992-the racial tensions between white and blacks for High school students.	Social Studies
The Human Body	Digital storytelling on the human body and how it works	Biology
The Cold War	Story developed to make students aware of the Cold War Era for 9 th Grade History	Social Studies

2. Findings

The findings of the present study demonstrate that digital storytelling is an important component of literacy education in the classroom. The participants in the study, pre-service and in-service teachers, pointed out that developing the digital storytelling in their content areas was crucial to become aware and understand new possibilities of teaching literacy across the curriculum. In particular, the participants in the study discussed the important issue of becoming more technology savvy to balance literacy and new forms of narrative and learning in the classroom. The narrative format of digital story telling presents the potential to help students becoming more engaged and life-long readers in and out of school and see technology as an integral and systematic part of their literacy education.

The present study represents the beginning steps in the exploration and application of digital story telling in literacy education across the curriculum to motivate and engage students to acquire the content they are studying. The use of digital storytelling is paramount to turn students not only into engaged readers but also and more importantly in engaged writers across the curriculum (Sylvester and Greenidge, 2009). More studies and data need to be collected and analysed to support the findings of the present study. The potential to transform literacy education via Multiliteracies in K-12 is before our eyes. More systematic and effective research is needed to take the next steps in K-12 schools and support the digital natives (Prensky, 2001) to read the complex literate world of the new millennium.

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