DIGITAL STORYTELLING as a Way to Teach Lifespan Development

Debra L. Berke, Ph.D., CFLE
Wilmington University
320 N. DuPont Highway
New Castle, DE 19720

phone: (302) 356-6760
fax: (302) 328-5614
email: debra.l.berke@wilm.edu

ABSTRACT

Digital storytelling can be a powerful instructional tool for both students and educators (How Digital Storytelling Builds 21st Century Skills, 2009; Robo, 2006). Digital storytelling is “combining the art of telling stories with a variety of digital multimedia, such as images, audio and video” (Robin, 2006, p. 41). Digital stories typically revolve around a chosen theme, are usually a few minutes long and have a variety of uses (Robin, 2006).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Digital storytelling has many educational benefits including skills development, reflection and connection making, and fostering voice and empowerment (Anderson & Chua, 2010). Digital storytelling also uses Gardner’s multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983).

Skills Development–Content Skills, Technological Skills/Multiliteracies Skills

Digital storytelling enables students to develop literacy skills such as digital literacy, global literacy, technology literacy, visual literacy, and information literacy. When students create a digital story, they learn research skills, writing skills, organization skills, technology skills, presentation skills, interview skills, interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills, and assessment skills (Robin, 2006).

Reflection and Connection Making

Digital storytelling offers a powerful framework for engagement and reflection (McLellan, 2008). Students are a natural way to “encapsulate and remember information” (McLellan, 2008, p. 21). The process of reflection allows learners to make sense of their experiences and develop deeper learning (Moon, 2004).

Fostering Voice and Empowerment

Digital storytelling helps learners develop their own perspectives by drawing on their experiences to appreciate the dialogue between their own and others’ positions (Bennymoor, 2008). “Both product and process in digital storytelling empower students to find their voice and to speak out” (Bennymoor, 2008, p. 148).

Multiple Intelligences

Digital storytelling uses a number of Gardner’s (1983) multiple intelligences including linguistic, intrapersonal, musical-rhythmic, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and visual-spatial intelligences.

This project describes how digital storytelling has been used to teach lifespan development. Key research questions that guided the study included: How do digital stories provide evidence of deep learning? What are the benefits of developing digital stories as perceived by students? What are the perceived obstacles to implementing digital storytelling and how can be overcome?

METHOD

Sample

Twenty students (5 males and 15 females) who ranged in age from 19-43 years old (mean of 31.6 years) from a mild state university on the East Coast enrolled in PSY 204 Lifespan Development in a distance format completed the survey.

Procedure/Measures

Students created a digital story documenting either their own life or the life of someone they know. They covered the physical, cognitive, and psychosocial development of that individual at different stages in their story. Students were also asked to write a short narrative to accompany their story.

Data was collected using an online questionnaire in addition to the short narrative turned in with the assignment. The questionnaire assessed benefits of developing digital stories, challenges in doing this assignment, skills necessary to develop a digital story, skills learned during this assignment, effect on understanding of lifespan development, software used, likes and dislikes about software choices, and what students would do differently if they did this assignment again, in addition to demographic data.

Quantitative data were analyzed using frequencies. Qualitative data were analyzed with open coding.

RESULTS

Evidence of deep learning: 19 out of 20 students felt that their knowledge of lifespan development was increased by doing the digital storytelling assignment.

“The biggest benefit I found was a review of the course material. On a personal level, it was an interesting, introspective project.”

“I found applying the theories and stages of development to an actual person helpful in understanding them.”

Benefits of developing digital stories: Results indicate that students overall agreed that doing the digital storytelling assignment helped them develop literacy skills, including digital literacy, global literacy, technology literacy, visual literacy, and information literacy as well as content knowledge.

“I initially organized my thoughts, primary theme/ideas, and pictures to accompany my script took the longest amount of time, yet was an experience I incorporated with my family.”

Another cited their biggest challenge was “plotting each picture and accompanying it with the material from the course.”

Perceived obstacles: Students used a variety of software but the most common programs used to create the digital story were Windows Movie Maker, PowerPoint and PhotoStory. Students stated that technology issues were often the biggest challenges.

The second technology issue experienced by a number of students was uploading their assignment in Blackboard.

A number of students indicated that they were planning to continue editing their digital story and/or create new digital stories for other family members.

As one parent said, “It felt a little emotional as I looked at my baby boy who is now a young adult.”

Another parent stated: “The main part of this assignment was actually very fun. Gathering all the pictures made me reminisce about the days when my baby girl was still so small. Isn’t it amazing how time flies.”

DISCUSSION

The data indicate that students were encouraged to think more deeply about lifespan development and personalize their experiences, as well as clarify what they knew about the content before and during the process of developing and communicating their stories. Thus, digital storytelling enabled students to make deeper connections with the material, as well as with themselves or other family members. While this assignment is not without challenges for both the instructor and the students, information gathered from the students indicates that the benefits far outweigh the challenges of doing this assignment. One mother’s comments sum up her experience:

“The Digital Storytelling was an interesting assignment. I was very intimidated by it at first. Once I got going it wasn’t that bad. I am happy with my finished project and I am sure my son The first time he watch it he got teary eyed. I am now going to create one for my daughter. I think this would be a great way to keep up with their developments and play it at a later date. Thank you for the challenge and for teaching me something new.”

SELECT REFERENCES


