



Unleash the Power of Digital Storytelling

By Miguel Guhlin, Director of Instructional Technology Services, San Antonio ISD
With Dr. Maria Kaylor, Assistant Professor, UT San Antonio
and Dr. JoAnne Ollerenshaw, Assistant Professor, UT San Antonio
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Children like to tell stories. Amid the push for highest performance, that desire for storytelling and listening may be neglected in schools today. What if you could tap into that desire in a way that reinforces content-area essential knowledge and skills, as well as models appropriate technology use? Digital storytelling is one way to accomplish that. You can find a variety of resources on digital storytelling available on the web (refer to Sidebar #1). Implementing digital storytelling in your classroom can be as easy as installing the appropriate software, crafting a story using the writing process, storyboarding, and then publication.

This article is the first of three that focuses on digital storytelling use in the classroom, as well as shares one school district's approach to a district-wide implementation of storytelling. Only time will

tell if this approach will work in your district. Once you have seen the engaging benefits of digital storytelling first-hand, you will want to unleash digital storytelling in your school district. Benefits of doing just that include the following:

- You can engage students, teachers in authentic ways that motivate reflection and revision at higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy (e.g. Synthesis and evaluation).
- Content-area TEKS are addressed within the process students follow to create, transform their story from an idea to publication-ready product.
- Technology Applications:TEKS are addressed within the digital storytelling process.
- Digital storytelling software tools are free and available on both Windows and Macintosh platforms.

Sidebar #1

Resources for Digital Storytelling

Center for Digital Storytelling –
<http://www.storycenter.org/index1.html>

BernaJean Porter's DigiTales –
<http://www.digitales.us/gallery/>

SAISD's and UTSA's SCRIBE Initiative: Digital StorySwap – <http://itls.saisd.net/scribe>

PhotoStory Tutorial –
<http://www.jakesonline.org/photostory.pdf>

Get the Free, MS PhotoStory –
<http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/digitalphotography/photostory/default.msp>

Sidebar #2

Copyright Friendly Music

Wikipedia classics –
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Sound/list>

Tutorial on Converting/Playing OGG files –
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Media_help_\(Ogg\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Media_help_(Ogg))

Project Gutenberg Music –
<http://www.gutenberg.org/browse/categories/4>

- The sense of a larger audience compels students to do their best work in ways working for ONE teacher would not. Sharing student work with a worldwide audience is much easier. Teachers can use class blogs to make their students' work available and subscribable by a large audience. This enables teachers to have a repository of digital stories to use with their students in the future.

- Publishing students' digital stories only invites dialogue and home-school communication among readers, all safely controlled within blogging software's comment features.

- Safety issues can be addressed up front and controlled for in digital storytelling composition and publication.

To enhance the conversation, Dr. Maria Kaylor and Dr. JoAnne Ollerenshaw (University of Texas at San Antonio – UTSA) will join in on the discussion of digital story-

telling in K-12 school districts. This series on "Unleashing the Power of Digital Storytelling" will explore the responses to the questions below:

- 1) How do I encourage my students to become digital storytellers?
- 2) How do I empower my district leadership to facilitate digital storytelling in my school district?
- 3) How do I assess the impact of digital storytelling on student achievement?
- 4) How can I use Read/Write Web technologies (like blogs and podcasts) to enhance the storytelling experience and story-swapping? and finally,
- 5) What can I do to connect with a larger community of storytellers outside my classroom and district?

Two Simple Actions to Get Started as a Classroom Teacher

As a classroom teacher, it's pretty easy to get started. However, ignorance of the digital storytelling process may seem daunting. I encourage you to jump in and experiment with the software and the storytelling process included in this article. This is only your first attempt, and we will explore the storytelling aspect in more detail later. For example, I experimented with Photo Story and created a "digital poem" using Kenneth Koch's "Rose, Where Did You Get that Red?" poem. Read more and view it online at http://www.mguhlin.net/blog/archives/2006/05/entry_1438.htm.

Your first step is to learn how to tell a digital story yourself. To get started, I would recommend you actually take the time to tell a story that is personal to you, but that you would not mind sharing with the world at large. It should also be a story that is age-appropriate for your students. For example, you could pick a story of a particular object/heirloom that has come into your possession. You can see an example of such a digital story online here (<http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/learnshops/digital/movies/treasure.mov>).

After you've decided on the story, select a few photographs or drawing/images that will help illustrate your story for readers. Write your story and compress it down to three to five minutes of narration. If you storyboard your story and pictures — you can use the template at http://www.digitales.us/resources/storyboard_template.php — you will be able to match your text to images as you read.

If you have ever worked with PowerPoint and timing audio and images on the screen, you know how difficult PowerPoint can be. However, here's a tip that will save you time. Use PowerPoint slides to organize your content (images and text), then EXPORT the entire presentation as PNG graphic files (FILE:EXPORT).

Then, when you are ready to mix the images and narration together, you can easily use Photo Story on

Windows (iMovie on Mac) to bring the pieces together. A short tutorial on how to use Photo Story to accomplish this is available at the SCRIBE site mentioned in Sidebar #1. This process is fairly straightforward. One last aspect that you may want to consider is adding music to your story. There are a variety of places you can go for copyright-free music, among them Wikipedia's collection of classics <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Sound/list>. You can download these music files, open them with VLC Media Player, then use the wizard to convert them to MP3 files compatible with Photo Story or iMovie. There are many other places to find music (Sidebar #2).

Your second step is securing where you can publish your story — and that of your students online — that is approved by your school district. I recommend using blogging technology because it allows you to “text-cast” your story. That is, it allows you to share your published work with others on the web and one more important detail. The detail? — the ability for visitors to subscribe to your publications. The genius of blog technology is that people can subscribe to your web pages and easily see changes or updates without having to visit the web site. Let's call this ability for people to subscribe to your web pages *text-casting*, similar to podcasting or putting audio

on the web in subscribable format. With *text-casting*, we're making your text subscribable out on the 'net through the use of blogs. Not only can you make your text available, you can also share the video created by Photo Story with others.

While you can use a variety of free blogs available online (e.g. EduBlogs.org, Wordpress.com, ClassBlogmeister.com are only three of many places), you will want to check with your district technology coordinator and/or director. Now, while I know blogs have a bad reputation, think of them as simply blank notebooks that make it easy for you to publish work on the web and easy for others to subscribe to those web pages.

Your homework for the next article is to become thoroughly comfortable with MS Photo Story or iMovie to create a poem or story. Use the tutorials (refer to Sidebar #1) available online to guide your experimentation. I guarantee that you will be pleasantly surprised as to how easy it is, just as this pre-service teacher discovered. You can see her digital story online at <http://www.mguhlin.net/blog/media/kmarcha.wmv>.

Miguel Guhlin currently is the Director of Instructional Technology Services (<http://itls.saisd.net>) for a large San Antonio school district. You can reach him at mguhlin@yahoo.com or peruse his other writings at <http://www.mguhlin.net>.

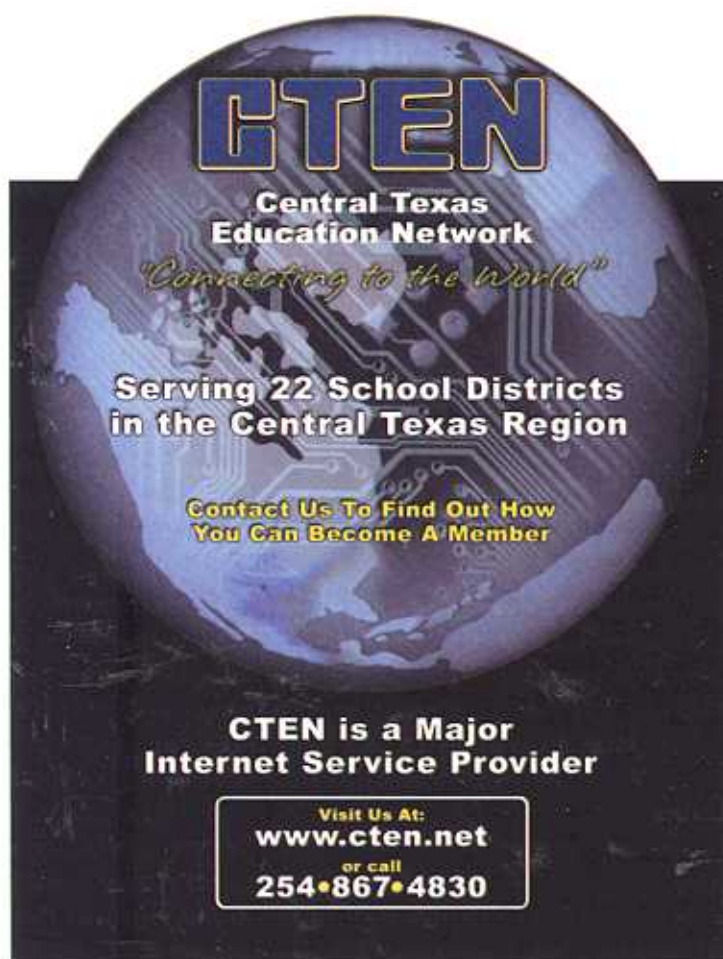
Maria Kaylor is an Assistant Professor at The University of Texas at San Antonio. Her research focuses on issues of teacher preparation and student achievement through the integration of technology. Her e-mail is maria.kaylor@utsa.edu

Dr. JoAnne Ollerenshaw is also an Assistant Professor at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

Texas Computer Education Association

Contact us:

P.O. Box 141759
Austin, TX 78714-1759
800-282-8232
fax: 512-476-8574
tceaoffice@tcea.org
For the latest info:
www.tcea.org
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Part 2

"I'm motivated! Digital storytelling will help me encourage my students from kindergarten through fifth grade to become more motivated to read, write, and use more language literacy skills," shared one participant from the Summer Digital Storytelling Academy, "because it is user-friendly. Teachers and students can use different technology tools to develop their digital storytelling. I cannot wait to start digital storytelling in my school this fall!"

"There is clearly a new love affair with storytelling in a variety of disciplines, and this is resulting in emerging research trends and applications," contends Figa (2004).

This article, the second in a series about digital sto-

rytelling, (Guhlin, 2006), describes the professional development activities from the Summer Digital Storytelling Academy. Three academies were offered over the summer for teachers to learn oral and digital storytelling strategies. Teachers from elementary level, middle level, and high school content, special education, and technology classrooms participated in three-day intensive Academies. You can find information related to these academies in sidebar #1. Below is a general description of the professional development model used for the academies.

Day 1: Oral Tradition

This is a digital storytelling academy, yet day one required no computer at all. Why? Because we focused on the traditional art of storytelling — the oral tradition. Teacher participants listened to stories, identified

Sidebar #1

Resources and Links

Find out more about Digital Storytelling Academy Resources http://itls.saisd.net/scribe/?page_id=6

Listen to Campus Instructional Coordinator, Susan Garay, as she shares her insights and experiences from the first Digital Storytelling Academy. http://itls.saisd.net/scribe/?page_id=6

Tutorials for MovieMaker and Digital Storytelling Examples of Projects

Sidebar #2

Digital Storytelling: oral vs. written debate

Digital and traditional storytelling retrieved on Sept. 6, 2006 from <http://www.jasonohler.com/storytelling/>

Oral storytelling tradition vs. written storytelling process retrieved on Sept. 6, 2006 from http://www.edsupport.cc/mguhlin/blog/archives/2006/07/entry_1810.htm

storytelling techniques, and then worked to develop their own storytelling skills using a storymap (Ollerenshaw, 2006), which is a combination of a concept map and a storyboard. Each of them orally edited and then shared their stories. Teachers downloaded a copy of their grade-level Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, then searched the documents to find the content link of their storytelling with the TEKS. Time was spent developing rubrics, writing a conceptual statement, or as Popham (1999) states, “re-writing the [TEKS] concept as a measurable broad objective” to score the storytelling for content. The teachers used the rubrics to self-assess their storytelling and to critique other participants’ storytelling. The day concluded with teachers reviewing the events of the day by reading “Storytelling: Eight Steps That Help You Engage Your Students” (Ollerenshaw, 2006). Their homework assignment was to practice their story at home and share the story

with anyone who would listen, even the house pet or bathroom mirror, if need be.

Day 2: Make It Digital

The oral storytelling strategies that we learned on the previous day would now be transferred to the digital format. The purpose of this day was to have participants become familiar with the digital part of storytelling. The story evolves over time, in the oral tradition of storytelling, as the teller and the story get to know one another better. Teachers were able to record their stories, listen to them, then change them and re-record if they wanted to change anything. The more they listened to themselves telling the story, the more adjustments they wanted to make to improve their work. This was an easy process due to the iAudio recorder, which is an easy tool to use for recording. Once they were satisfied with their stories, they developed rubrics reflecting the content of the story. Teachers used Movie Maker™ [or iMovie™] and downloaded the audio file. They selected images, edited the images and audio, and revised the rubric. Finally, teachers shared their digital stories with one another, and used the rubrics to self-reflect and critique other participants’ digital stories.

Day 3: Now, Make It Your Own

The last day of the workshop provided teachers the opportunity to develop original digital stories that they would use in their classrooms at the start of the new school year. They had opportunities to review their technology concerns with iAudio, Movie Maker, or iMovie. They identified the specific conceptual statement from the TEKS and used the storymap to create their digital stories. They identified and selected the images, cognizant of Internet and copyright issues with images and music. They imported the audio and images. Saved, Edited, saved, and Re-Edited and saved, and Re-Edited and saved, and made final edits. Teachers spent time trouble-shooting and moving files, and re-naming files. Finally, they published and shared their digital stories while using the rubrics to self-reflect and critique other participants’ digital stories. This day allowed participants to go through the model of digital storytelling from start to finish so that they had the experience of creating a story just as their students would in a few weeks.

Oral vs. Digital Storytelling

My position about digital storytelling diverges from the mainstream position on digital storytelling, because I support the oral story instead of a written story for the digital storytelling. [Read and listen to the debate from Sidebar #2.] Since we are working with students in school, our purpose for digital storytelling differs from the Digital

Storytelling camps, e.g., the Center for Digital Storytelling. I strongly suggest: do NOT write your story out first, since you are modeling for your students. Especially do NOT ask your students to write out their stories first. Encourage students to use the storymap (Ollerenshaw, 2006) and then develop their stories orally. Students develop oral language naturally (Vygotsky, 1978; Snow, 1977; Engel, 1995). If students are provided with an opportunity to tell their stories orally, then when it comes time for them to write, they will write. F. Scott Fitzgerald (2006) said that, "you write because you've got something to say."

Oral Language and Communication

Ananny (2002) says, "In short, children do not learn to read and write spontaneously and in isolated and overtly pedagogical contexts where text is primary. They instead gradually learn to create and comprehend written language while they are still deeply immersed in social and collaborative contexts in which oral language is the primary means of communication." Storytelling construction is a way for students to identify their complex interpretations and their perceptions of the world. Students who are provided with opportunities to choose how they will develop their stories will then use negotiation strategies as they will use make meaning from the storytelling. When students share and think about their interpretations of the story, they will organize a new story from their interpretation of the story, tell and revise a new story, and re-tell the story. "The primary function of speech, in both adults and children, is communication and social contact (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 34)." The revising and re-telling are the essential processes often absent from classroom activities due to unavoidable time constraints. Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people and his environment and in cooperation with his peers (Vygotsky, 1978)."

Storytelling: Is There Any Learning?

Storytelling is a tool for teaching and learning. Vygotsky (1978) contends, "that the student's mind will have a radically different structure if new tools of thinking are available." When planning for teaching, teachers using the story form model provide students with better tools for learning (Egan, 1986). The essential element, however, in all teaching, is the observable behaviors students demonstrate as an indication that learning has taken place. If storytelling is a tool for learning, what observable evidence is there for this claim of success? When students develop competence to negotiate the story structure, their interpersonal skills — for example, communication, listening, and discourse — show increased improvement (Baker, 1979; Cooper, 1985; Miller, 1991). Storytelling assists stu-

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dents with the transition from auditory language to visual language (Dwyer, 1988; Temple, 1996; Trousdale, 1994). Students develop awareness and cultural understanding through storytelling activities, whereas, students in multicultural, ESL and bilingual classrooms demonstrate increasing language proficiency and personal self-esteem (Chiang, 1993; Davies-Gibson, 1994; Lie, 1994). And overall, teachers and researchers report, the students feel good about their work, learn ways to act, and deal with reality, and develop reasoning and problem solving skills (Baker, 1981; Cooper, 1989). What follows is an increase in student self-confidence and self-esteem (Cooper, 1985).

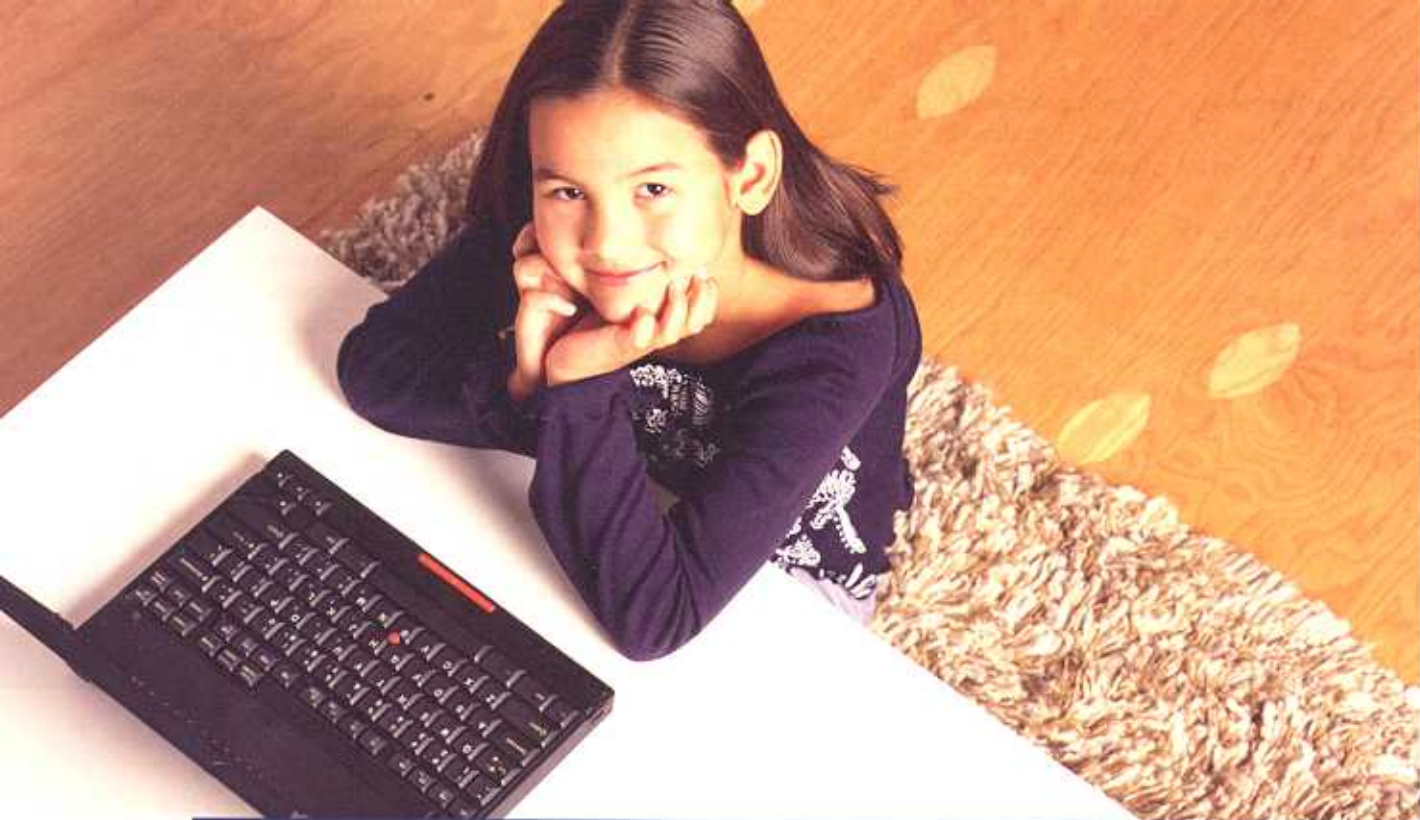
Dr. Jo Anne Ollerenshaw, Dr. Maria Kaylor and Miguel Guhlin are collaborating with the Digital Storytelling Academies. Dr. Jo Anne Ollerenshaw is the oral storytelling consultant for the academies. You can reach her at science_storyteller@yahoo.com or log onto her storytelling blog: <http://jolle.edublogs.org/about/> Dr. Ollerenshaw taught grades K-6 science for 20 years.

Miguel Guhlin is the Director of Instructional Technology Services <http://itls.saisd.net> for the San Antonio Independent School District. Contact him at mguhlin@yahoo.com or explore his writings at <http://www.mguhlin.net>.

Dr. Maria Kaylor, is an assistant professor of special education at the University of Texas San Antonio. She will present the third part of this series in the winter 2006 TechEdge issue. Access Dr. Kaylor's blog online at [CyberRoots](http://CyberRoots.com), www.kaylor.us, or e-mail her at maria.kaylor@utsa.edu.

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Part 3

This article, the third in a series about digital storytelling, (Unleash the Power of Digital Storytelling — Parts 1 and 2), describes reasons for using digital storytelling with students who have learning disabilities.

In the second part of our series, Jo Anne Ollerenshaw (2006) wrote: *Ananny (2002) contends, "In short, children do not learn to read and write spontaneously and in isolated and overtly pedagogical contexts where text is primary. They instead gradually learn to create and comprehend written language while they are still deeply immersed in social and collaborative contexts in which oral language is the primary means of communication."* This point becomes especially important when considering that the acquisition of oral and written communication

skills, among other things, can be delayed for students with disabilities. Of all students in classrooms, those with learning disabilities require learning environments that are rich in all types of communication, both oral and written, in order to have situational contexts from which to gradually develop their language skills.

Written language and students with learning disabilities

When writing, students with learning disabilities tend to have difficulty in all stages: planning, creating the written product, revising, and finishing a completed piece of writing that adequately meets objectives (Roth, 2000). According to Brice, (2004), the writing process must incorporate several foundation skills: phonological awareness, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, sentence structure, and sequencing among others. She also states, "All of these skills can be demanding for students with

LLD, as they may have difficulties with any single skill or a combination of the foundation language skills. Students are often expected to have developed knowledge of the foundation skills before learning the process writing approach. Consequently, students need to have mastered most of these foundation skills in order to successfully write narrative, persuasive, or informative essays for class assignments and statewide assessments.”

How do students with learning disabilities master these foundation skills? How do they make enough progress to write successfully? Through opportunities to practice, explicit instruction, and engaging lessons. Even so, this is a time consuming process and learning cannot stand still until mastery is achieved. That is where new techniques such as digital storytelling come into play.

Using techniques that can teach all sorts of objectives while being interesting and engaging enough for the students to want to participate in is vital to the students’ continual progress towards objective mastery. Creating an oral story allows students to concentrate on content, flow, sentence structure, sequencing, and other foundation skills without

Sidebar #1 Resources and Links

For more about our project, visit <http://mguhlin.jot.com/WikiHome> and click on Digital Storytelling Series

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focusing on the struggles that present themselves when practicing these same skills with pencil and paper or computer and keyboard (until they are ready). The situation is analogous to five team members wanting to play a basketball game. One can shoot, one can pass, one is a great defender, one dribbles well, and the other can run up and down the court with speed. Just because they are not all good shooters, passers, dribblers, and runners does not mean they cannot play the game. It means they need practice and opportunities to learn these other skills. Practicing these skills in isolation will make it difficult for them to apply them in a game situation. They need drills, they need game situations at practice, they need scrimmages, and finally preseason to put it all together before it really counts — before they step on the court for the regular season. Just as these basketball players need opportunities to master new skills as part of a game plan and meet their goals, so do students with learning disabilities.

Digital Storytelling for Students with LD

Using digital storytelling as a multimodal approach may

have unparalleled results for students who have traditionally been left behind in the classroom because of learning disabilities. There has been discussion in research literature that examines the current view of multimodality in the classroom. Traditionally, we consider learning modes activities such as speech, gestures, sound, facial expressions, etc. With the introduction of computers to the classroom, we have introduced a new mode of teaching as well as learning (Jewitt, 2003). Students are now exposed to different ways to access information and demonstrate mastery of objectives. Seigel (2006) reports that students who are struggling or labeled as having a learning disability are the ones who show the most academic growth in a situation where a multimodal curriculum is present.

Teachers may engage their students in traditionally known literacy activities, such as decoding and comprehension, but the form of these activities takes a new direction when using technology (Ware, 2006). Ware goes on to state: “... students do not always respond in predictable ways to the affordances of technology. The differences they bring to the classroom seem to be accentuated when storytelling moves from primarily oral (interactional) to digital. As educators, we do not necessarily need to concern ourselves with transforming (Student1) into a child more like (Student2), or with encouraging (Student2) to develop more facility with the forms of storytelling that involve shared tellership. Rather, we need to recognize that all children have stories to tell, and that the multiple venues for producing these stories need to be valued by teachers and by the classroom contexts in which stories are produced and shared.”

Recognizing that all students have stories to tell can have a tremendous impact on students with disabilities. Combining the desire to share these stories with the technology tools to personalize them can validate a student’s style of learning and motivate them to reach new goals. This article by no means argues only for oral responses by students with learning disabilities (LD). The point is that when considering technological applications for students with LD, using digital storytelling that focuses on an oral model may provide just what a student needs. This includes a modality that could emphasize their strengths, attainable goals, personalized instruction, engaging tools, and real world technologies. An oral model may also be just what a teacher needs: adaptable for individual students, simple steps to use, practical measures for assessing learning and fun for students.

Fall 2006: Digital Storytelling in the Classrooms

Although we can argue for the use of digital storytelling and current research that supports the idea that oral digital storytelling appears to be one technological approach that may have positive outcomes for students with learning disabilities, we need to study these outcomes in order to demonstrate their success. The Digital Storytelling Academies that we held over the past summer have prepared teachers to use the oral model in their classrooms with students with learning disabilities. Teachers have been in their classrooms for a little over three months at the time of this publication, and

LLD, as they may have difficulties with any single skill or a combination of the foundation language skills. Students are often expected to have developed knowledge of the foundation skills before learning the process writing approach. Consequently, students need to have mastered most of these foundation skills in order to successfully write narrative, persuasive, or informative essays for class assignments and statewide assessments.”

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several of the participants from Summer Digital Storytelling Academies have implemented digital storytelling with their students. The teachers, their students, other teachers in the school, administrators, and parents are excited.

What is fascinating is the way that teachers are modifying the professional development plan (refer to sidebar #1) to fit the individual needs of their students. They are holding true to the purpose and tools on which they were trained, but they are able to navigate easily other aspects of the professional development model to fit scheduling, student needs, curriculum, and grading periods. For example, one special education teacher has partnered with a regular education teacher to use oral digital storytelling to meet a writing objective for a Benchmark test to be held in January. The purpose of what we have presented is oral storytelling, but their students' oral stories are created and eventually turned into written stories. Teacher comments indicate that students are more engaged when creating their digital story and that when it does come time to write, they actually complete the assignment without the typical complaints. Plus, they transcribe their oral story and, to keep pace with the style they adopted as an oral storyteller, they write more and what they write is more detailed. Although the professional development model teachers were taught to use has not been followed in exact sequence, the pieces of the model come together to meet the needs of students with disabilities. These students have an individualized education plan and the professional development model can be individualized as well. This is an important factor when considering implementation of oral digital storytelling in the classroom. For this project, springtime will tell if digital storytelling has an impact on students' motivation to read, write, use more language literacy skills, and/or increase their test scores on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), Reading Proficiency Tests in English (RPTE), and/or the State-Developed Alternative Assessment (SDAA). We excitedly await the results.

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Dr. Maria Kaylor is an Assistant Professor of Special Education at the University of Texas San Antonio. She is a former special education teacher with experience at the elementary and high school levels. Her research focuses on the use of technology in pre-service teacher education and the implementation of technology into special education classrooms. Access Dr. Kaylor's blog online at CyberRoots.net or e-mail her at maria.kaylor@utsa.edu.

Dr. Jo Anne Ollerenshaw is the oral storytelling consultant for the project. You can reach her at science_storyteller@yahoo.com or log onto her storytelling blog: <http://jolle.edublogs.org/about/> Dr. Ollerenshaw taught K-6th grade science for twenty years. She used storytelling to teach science, and used storytelling to assess students understanding of those science concepts. These classroom experiences lead her to narrative inquiry research methods, which she focuses on students' and teachers' use of storytelling to teach, learn, apply, and assess science concepts.

Miguel Guhlin is the Director of Instructional Technology Services <http://itls.saisd.net> for the San Antonio Independent School District. Contact him at mguhlin@yahoo.com or explore his writings at <http://www.mguhlin.net>.