Digital Storytelling and Its Use in Education

by
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Introduction:

Digital storytelling is a means for people to tell their story in various digital mediums, both of which can be video and/or audio based. This ranges from what the story is to how the story can be used. How digital storytelling can be used ranges from education purposes, what colleges teach it, its impact in education, and what places show and use educational storytelling.

Digital storytelling can be in short-form or long-form. It is done by everyday people to film professionals as a way to tell stories or share aspects of their lives. However, the term digital storytelling is still relatively new. It is part of New Media which has been a growing new trend which has resulted in a change in technology. So, the term of digital storytelling covers a range of digital narratives ranging from web-based stories, interactive stories, hypertexts, and narrative computer games (Wikipedia).

Digital stories in these mediums are often short, typically lasting from two or three minutes to no longer then eight minuets long, is based on film making, and recently, has been used for advertising and promotion, particularly by commercial companies, and non-profit organizations.

Since digital storytelling is based on film making, and is New Media, it uses the same equipment, production techniques, and software. Such equipment in digital storytelling includes digital cameras and digital voice recorders. Software includes iMovie, Windows Movie Maker, Avid, and Final Cut Express or Pro. Since many people can now get access to these technologies, and the internet; people often share digital stories on YouTube, Vimeo, (recordable) compact discs, podcasts, and other means of electronic distribution (Wikipedia).

With such easy access and availably to this technology, digital storytelling is an interactive and multi-media based medium that contains a combination of photographs, video, animation, sound, music, text, and often a narrative voice to develop narration. In terms of narration, digital storytelling is seen as the modern version of oral storytelling. Digital storytelling also allows people to interweave the story with images to develop the content that they wish to create (Wikipedia).

Digital Storytelling in Education:

An important aspect of digital storytelling is its use in an educational setting. The education levels, that digital storytelling is used in, range from grade schools to colleges and universities. However, the difference between digital storytelling in grade schools and digital storytelling in colleges and universities operates at opposite ends of the spectrum. This leaves an impact on digital storytelling, particularly for younger generations. This leaves many young people familiar with digital storytelling and often gives them a place to contribute to its realm.

For grade school education, digital storytelling can contain various mediums such as art, health, language arts, mathematics, and information on places, scientific research, and history/social studies. The University of Houston describes the educational uses of digital storytelling as "the topics that are used in Digital Storytelling range from personal tales to the recounting of historical events, from exploring life in one's own community to the search for life in other corners of the universe, and literally, everything in between" (The University of Houston). With that said, digital storytelling allows students to learn different subjects. As for teachers, it gives them the abilities to incorporate multi-media and storytelling into a particular subject.

As for college education, digital storytelling started happening in the late 1990s. This is because many colleges often collaborate with each other, which resulted in many colleges creating courses teaching it, and thus allowing students to create digital storytelling to produce their own stories. However in the college setting, digital storytelling wasn't solely a means of teaching a subject.

Yet, Hilary Mclellan states that "however, the potential for digital storytelling extends far beyond the fields of communication and media studies across many fields of study, including history, American Studies, business and leadership, knowledge management, community planning, and much more. In addition, digital storytelling has been used to help students prepare for college. Digital storytelling applications include personal stories, digital story archives, memorial stories, advocational stories, educational stories, and stories in medicine and health." (Mclellan).

This leads colleges that use and teach digital storytelling. One such college is the University of Maryland Baltimore. UMBC offers courses in digital storytelling. It is most often in the form of workshops (University of Maryland Baltimore). Other colleges that teach digital storytelling also include Cal State Monterey, Ohio State University, Williams College, MIT, and the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

There is also The University of Colorado, Denver; Kean University, Virginia Tech, Simmons College, Swarthmore College, University of Calgary, University of Massachusetts (Amherst), and Maricopa County Community Colleges (AZ) (Wikipedia).

These colleges often teach multiple levels and styles of digital storytelling courses. The courses that these colleges offer in storytelling are either writing courses or art courses ranging from the 2000 level to the 3000 level.

The most recent colleges to offer a course in digital storytelling are the University of Utah, Ball State University, and the University of Mary Washington. The University of Utah offered the course for the first time in the fall semester of 2010. The course started with only 10 students in its first semester. Since then, the course has grown to 30 students, and at one point, had 5 graduate students in the course (Wikipedia).

For Ball State University, it developed a masters program in digital storytelling based in its Telecommunications Department. Ball State's masters program also allows students to approach storytelling from deferent perspectives. This includes creating internet based nonlinear and interactive narratives, as well as creating digital storytelling narratives for mobile apps and game platforms.

Because of the potential and availability of technologies associated with New Media and digital storytelling, this gives students a cutting edge advantage (Ball State University). Most recently in 2011, the University of Mary Washington had started an online course in digital storytelling called DS106. The course is opened to students at the university, and, online participants from around the world who whish to learn digital storytelling (Wikipedia).

This digital storytelling course is taught in two sections. The first section is taught by Professor Martha Burtis while the second section is taught by Professor Alan Levine. The course's aim is to develop an understanding of storytelling and narration in the digital landscape utilizing New Media technologies. The assignments consist of projects that use a variety of tools, techniques, and technologies to create digital stories. These assignments include students coming up with two original projects and the ideas for them. Major assignments include a radio show for the mid-term project and a final story challenge as a final project.

Other assignments include creating two tutorials and participating in weekly summery posts throughout the semester.

In summation of how digital storytelling is used; grade school students use it as a means to learn various subjects, while for teachers, it is seen as a new tool to teach students subjects. However for college students, it's a different approach as they learn about digital storytelling as a means to create storytelling as a form of New Media, as colleges now teach it in specific courses to teaching full degrees on it.

Digital storytelling also has an educational impact in current times. The impact of digital storytelling is now widespread due to new technologies. This is due to the fact that it is now incorporated as a new means of oral storytelling. Both kids and adults can use digital storytelling to covey their own stories and have others learn from them, or, they can use stories already created on subjects in the future as a means of education (Mass Impact).

Another factor of digital storytelling's impact is the argument for its use, particularly for educational purposes in which Janet Vogel has studied at the University of Illinois at Urbana - Champaign. Vogel states that digital storytelling has many areas of impact for students. This included research supporting digital storytelling in the classroom. Here, she cites research conducted by Lesley Farmer saying that "for students to succeed in this endeavor [sic], they must know their facts, make decisions about the key elements, and shape those within the parameters of telling a story. Such work involves high-level information literacy, critical thinking and creativity; the result is an original and authentic product of the child's knowledge and imagination."

ther impacts of digital storytelling that Vogel states is that it helps build "multi-literacy" which people will be literate in both the combination of words and multimedia.

This allows people to create and understand how to convey their ideas. Vogel also goes on to say that because of "multi-literacy," it brings a strong influence to what society and technology is about in today's media. With these two factors, Vogel says that it also helps build better writing skills, mainly because people will have to write a script first and develop storyboards before working with the technology to develop a digital story (Vogel).

these are the results of digital storytelling's impact with its use in education, because of the new technologies, as a new means of oral storytelling. It also helps people become more literate with combining words and multimedia. In tern, it helps people become more adept in modern times with digital storytelling as well.

Other Uses of Digital Storytelling:

As mentioned earlier in this paper, one of the areas where educational storytelling is shown is in elementary education to teach students various subjects and concepts. However, there is other areas in which digital storytelling are shown as an educational tool, which also brings it to an international level. These other uses and areas are in public health, health care, museums, and in libraries (Wikipedia).

For public health, one such development is the Silence Spring Project. The Silence Spring Project began in 1999 under the founding of Amy Hill. Hill then later joined the Center for Digital Storytelling in 2005 which led the expansion of educational digital storytelling in public health. Public health content by the Silence Spring Project includes digital storytelling in what the project's website describes as "first-person voices [that] can bring attention to the systemic causes of chronic poverty, ill health, and violence in ways that demand accountability and prompt change at community, institutional, and government levels" (Silence Spring).

For digital storytelling in health care, one group is Patient Voices which is based in the United Kingdom. Patient Voices intent is to bring the story of ill patients to life through digital storytelling. Patient Voice's other intent is to use the stories through 20-credit e-learning courses, used for the Royal College of Nursing, as a means of digital storytelling for health care (Patient Voices).

For museums, educational digital storytelling often varies by museum, even throughout the year as exhibits change. An example of this is happening in England. It is called "Culture Shock!" in what is deemed to be the largest digital storytelling project is currently taking place. The intent of this project uses museums and their gallery collections to inspire people to create their own stories based on the exhibits. These stories in turn are being added to the museums that feature the inspirational exhibits (Cultureshock.org. uk)

The final example of educational digital storytelling is its use in libraries. In libraries, digital storytelling can have different functions depending on the local area. One example is in California where various libraries up and down the state have installed "digital story stations" in their local libraries. One local project is in San Diego, California. In San Diego, residents, at their local libraries, can tell their own life stories which range on various subjects in a short 3-5 minute video (Media Arts Center San Diego).

Conclusion:

It is clear that digital storytelling and education works hand in hand. In conclusion, digital storytelling can be used by all people to convey their stories, both on the amateur level and professionally, using various levels of equipment to piece a short story together electronically. In education, digital storytelling can be used to convey various subjects as a teaching tool while colleges flip the coin and teach students how to make digital storytelling.

Once it gets to the next step, digital storytelling has a widespread impact due to its educational and technological impact on people in the present day. Once it gets past this point, it helps people and educates others in various mediums ranging from public health and health care down to the local levels in museums and in libraries.

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