

Digital Storytelling in Bonnie Scotland: Conversations in Crucial Narratives

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ABSTRACT

This article, grounded in our own crucially storied experiences, centers on the power of storytelling but also on communication and talking with others. The background of this writing stems from two years of Christina's teaching of digital storytelling in two consecutive summers of the years of 2022 and 2023 at the University of Dundee, Scotland in the School of Education and Social Work. Two collaborators, Christina and Andrew, who are co-authors on this article, focused their re-storying (the act of retelling a story) on crucial events or time periods in their lives. They were invited to co-author their experiences and implications for storytelling.

Keywords: Digital Story, un-silencing, narratives, crucial events

INTRODUCTION

I (Christina) teach digital storytelling in my university course, *Teaching with Technology*. In June 2022, I began what would be year one of my autoethnographic research study and teaching of digital storytelling workshops at the University of Dundee in Dundee, Scotland. I framed the research autoethnographically, as my own teaching was the central subject of the study. What is shared throughout this article is not the research portion of spending time in Scotland but rather the reflections from two authors and a second workshop participant that will open the conversation on further writing and discussion with future data from the study. The re-storying that is shared in the following sections is the foundation to what each of us has shared through building our own digital stories.

I taught digital storytelling workshops in-person and through zoom to graduate students and faculty. I took one day out of each workshop (in 2022 and 2023) to talk with participants to learn more about the grand narratives behind their digital stories. In this article, my co-author Andy (former workshop participant) and I share synopses of our stories. A second workshop participant, Lynsey, allowed us to share her story. The entry point to sharing, as the reader will see, is the storytelling itself.

LITERATURE

We make the case that storytelling is a necessary practice because stories are imbedded with larger social aspects and issues from individuals' lives, as synopses of our author stories will show. Storytelling provides relational care (Barrow, 2015; Noddings, 1988; Owens and Ennis, 2005). In the classroom, when students share their stories, others become relationally connected to the story being shared and to the sharer. This community of practice opens windows to individuals' worlds of experiential knowledge and allows others opportunities to empathize with those experiences.

Storytelling is a Sacred Literacy because it reveals individuals' experiences and reflections of crucial events (highly significant events) (Cooper, 2023) from their lives. Imbedded artifacts, or ones that exist or are remembered from individuals' lives are often ones that also connect individuals to crucial events from their lives.

These artifacts, whether existent or remembered, offer entry points into storytelling (Cooper, 2023; Romero-Ivanova, 2022; Romero-Ivanova, 2020).

Re-storying Our Narratives

Crucial Event Narratives

We have re-storied pieces of our grand narratives, not as research but as reflections and guides to future writing about the research. These re-storied pieces or our storytelling are ones that sparked our conversations during the digital storytelling workshop in Scotland. Below are those “smaller stories” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010).

Christina’s Story: No Grave, No Marker, Just Every October

Every October a void fills my body and my spirit. It’s one that cannot fully be dealt with because there is no grave or marker or even a physical artifact left from the day of my miscarriage – only the remembered artifacts of the pregnancy test strip that showed pink fading into nothingness. I can vividly remember the chronic pelvic pain I felt, which worsened as the day progressed and the remembrance of the university nurse practitioner who encouraged me to “take vitamins because that may save your baby” but there is no physical memorial. I carry the emptiness in my heart each October and become silent and still for a few days. The digital story I am building will show the emptiness through my words, and those who listen to my story will hear my voice and its barrenness.

Lynsey’s Story: Listening to Young Children’s Voices through Digital Storytelling

My main passion in research is exploring the use of creative methods to listen to and amplify the voices of young children. When I participated in Author one’s digital storytelling workshop being run at the University, I realized it could be a potential research method which would align with my current passion for these creative approaches in the early years.

Shortly after the workshop, I incorporated digital storytelling into one of my research projects. I was working with a primary school in Scotland, to support teachers to listen to children (aged 5-6yrs) through a range of developmentally appropriate and creative ways. As a way of amplifying children’s voices, some of the playful approaches I had already used with the staff team and children included clay, blocks, loose parts of storytelling, percussion instruments and drawing. I decided to use digital storytelling as a way of synthesizing these different data collection methods, to portray the journey children had been on throughout the project. Children’s voices were valued and listened to. Their views steering all stages of the design process.

Andrew’s Story: The Trauma of Loss

At the tender age of six years old, my life changed forever. It was at this age that I lost my mother to cancer. Although I was old enough to recognize that things at home were different to how they were previously, I was not yet old enough to understand the severity of this event. Instead, I now look back and believe that I lost a few years of my childhood to the depression that came from this traumatic experience, as well as developing adverse health effects like claustrophobia, internal self-hatred, and a significant sense of isolation. When it came to this trauma, I was never taught how to express my feelings or share side effects that stemmed from this event. This level of stress would eventually catch up with me at regular intervals, and I would explode, akin to a shaken bottle of juice. Not being able to express my feelings also led to an internal sense of self-hatred. The manner in how I mentally talk to myself would concern any adult who knew the extent of this thought process.

What Storytelling Can Do

Creating spaces for storytelling within the classroom space can also create spaces for rapport-building among students and a method to know each of your students better. The stories that emerge facilitate understanding and empathy (Romero-Ivanova, Cook, & Fauroute, 2021). From the stories that emerged in the Scotland workshops – Author one’s storytelling of her pregnancy loss, Author two’s storytelling of her research and her efforts to honor the children in her research and their voices, and Author Three’s storytelling of having dealt with the loss

of his mother at a young age – each of these re-storyings allowed for the three of us to appreciate one another's experiences and to empathize with one another's lives. We shared our experiences and then took our stories to the next level of digitalizing them. Even more so, digital storytelling becomes a gateway to understanding others' lives, and whether verbally told or written down, they can become digitalized.

DISCUSSION

Digital storytelling can be used in different disciplines, to tell crucial events or to make meaning with content (Polo, Fiorentino, and Pierri, 2019; Romero-Ivanova, Cook, & Faurote, 2021). Disciplines such as nursing (Mojtahedzadeh, Mohammadi, Emami, and Zarei, 2021), radiography (Robertson, 2019) have used digital storytelling to learn about students' educational journeys through academic programs and learners' identities. Stories gleaned can be used to create small community groups in classrooms, in which student members deconstruct stories' themes and research larger societal issues imbedded in the stories told. This kind of learning experience can help students to understand storytelling from a critical lens in which classmates view stories, and begin to grow empathy for others' lives, but also come to understand storytelling to advocate for themselves and others.

Storytelling happens all around us every day. We hear stories when we ask about someone's tattoo. We hear the story behind a reason for a student not doing well in a course. Stories are imbedded in our daily lives. The matter is if and how we share stories of our experiences, and as teachers, how we provide space for our students to talk about their lives. To go even further, beyond just telling stories, we can help students to story-tell in the context of digital storytelling, which can more critically bring attention to joys, traumas, and resiliencies, because it involves digital artifacts (photographs, other kinds of images), a voiceover or scripted text, and movement.

Steps for Implementation

1. Allow students a narrative space in your class to story their experiences. This "space" can be a simple round-robin story-sharing time, a writing center, daily narrative writing time, a spoken word performance time, or any space that is conducive to sharing.
2. Story-share your own story first. Students feel more comfortable sharing when you share.
3. Keep story-sharing completely open to what students want to share/feel comfortable sharing AND allow private or small group sharing as options, as opposed to only sharing whole group.
4. Have a framework for encouraging students to share multimodally, such as digital storytelling in which stories come alive with images, colors, a voiceover, and other engaging digital aspects.

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