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Abstract: This paper discusses the role of instrumental, communicative, and emancipatory learning through digital storytelling in a class that deals with spirituality and culture in the health and education professions in an adult higher education setting, and explores its theoretical and practical implications.

There has long been a distinction in the field of adult education based on Habermas's (1971) conceptualization of the different types of interest and forms of knowledge: instrumental, communicative, and emancipatory. It is often argued that much adult education in society, particularly that is supported by governments and large funders, focuses only on instrumental or skill based knowledge (Brookfield, 2006; Kincheloe, 1991). There is often little opportunity for interaction among learners about their lives beyond learning the skill (the realm of communicative knowledge), and little attention to or critique of social or cultural concerns, which can lead to emancipatory forms of knowledge. Many critical adult education scholars believe that forms of education that focus on how power and privilege shape knowledge production are essential for helping learners forge their own identities in the world in a way that leads to their greater emancipation. Such scholars generally consider these forms of education superior to programs that only focus on technical skills. While this may be an overstated argument, what critical theorists/educators can often overlook is that sometimes learning technical skills can easily be combined with forms of communicative knowledge production that can result in emancipatory learning. The purpose of this paper is two-fold: (1) to discuss the role of instrumental, communicative, and emancipatory learning through digital storytelling in a class that deals with spirituality and culture in the health and education professions in an adult higher education setting, and (2) to explore theoretical and practical implications of digital storytelling.

Context and Theoretical Grounding

The context for this digital story activity was specifically related to the content of a graduate course on spirituality and culture in the health and education professions—namely the intersection of spirituality and cultural identity. A basic premise of the course is that spirituality and its expression of it are always acted out in light of the cultural identity of the actor, and it is acted upon in a cultural context. Latino writer David Abalos (1998), who discusses a particular view of transformational learning, argues that in order for particular cultural groups to be able to sustain positive social change that is transformational both for themselves and their own cultural communities, it is necessary for individuals to re-claim four aspects or "faces" of their cultural being: the personal, the political, the historical, and the sacred. All of these "faces" are related to cultural identity; his notion of the "sacred face" is related to spirituality and highlights that individuals need to consider the sacred stories, images, symbols, and ways of being from their home cultures and communities, and to reclaim them to refresh them with constantly new

meaning. Abalos (1998) suggests that reclaiming all four faces leads to transformational and emancipatory knowledge. In essence, making use of digital story in the class was a way of encouraging students to tap into these images, symbols, and music that are part of their "sacred face" for their own emancipatory learning. But they did need to learn the technology of the digital story program to do so; so did the instructor.

Digital storytelling in the field of adult education is really a continuation of the body of literature that highlights the importance of narrative and story in adult learning (Rossiter & Clark, 2007). The very increase and popularity of qualitative narrative studies in the past few years indicates a resurgence in what human beings have known since the dawn of time: that people learn a tremendous amount from stories, particularly stories that evoke powerful memory. Indeed, as theologian Frederick Buechner (1991) says, such stories are powerful because they "have life in them still." There is also much discussion on how to use digital stories in education (e.g., Hull & Katz, 2006; Lambert, 2009), and there is beginning to be some such discussion in adult education (Rossiter & Garcia, 2010) including at AERC (Cueva et al., 2011).

On one level, it may seem at first glance that much of the digital storytelling literature is very instrumentally focused; Joe Lambert (2010) of the Center for Digital Storytelling has created a "Digital Storytelling Cookbook," which outlines the "how to's" of the technical skills and steps in creating a digital story. He outlines seven points that are ways of writing a story that focus on issues like the point of the story, the role of emotion, pacing, picture, etc. in the process. He then outlines the particular steps of how to run the technology. This approach can seem very technical at first glance. Nevertheless, crafting the story itself is clearly not limited to instrumental knowledge; typically a story that links spirituality and cultural identity in some way is a very important story to the teller. It is part of a story that has emerged in their life context, and is generally part of their communicative knowledge. Creating the story with personal pictures, music, and words takes the communicative power of the story to a different level—one that has the potential to be emancipatory.

Class members (students and teacher) created the actual story from their own life experience that touched on the intersection of spirituality and cultural identity. That, along with being expected to share the story with an audience of one's classmates, upped the ante. For some, it was a spiritual experience grounded in what the transformative learning (TL) literature considers a cultural-spiritual perspective of TL (Taylor, 2006), as opposed to those grounded in the individualist-rationalist perspective of Mezirow. In any event, the experience of creating and then sharing the digital story was far from instrumental, because the stories that were told were about negotiating power relations, family relationships, dealing with love and death, taking social stands, and stories of what people experienced as the divine in their lives. These aspects of learning are indeed far beyond instrumental learning. The instrumental component itself was learning how to run the technology (Photostory 3 or iMovie); the communicative learning was creating the story in the context of a community. The emancipatory learning was critically reflecting on how the story related to spiritual and cultural identity or the past, present, and future, and the risk-taking action in showing it to the rest of the class.

Creating the Stories

The above discussion provides context and theoretical grounding of digital storytelling about spirituality and cultural identity issues. While there are few discussions in the literature specifically about digital storytelling and spirituality and culture, there are some that deal with its

relationship to dealing with various aspects of identity (Hull & Katz, 2006; Jamissen & Skou, 2010; Vivienne, 2011). But our personal stories as co-authors and participants in the class with different roles, can speak more to the richness of the experience for promoting instrumental, communicative, and emancipatory knowledge. It is to those stories that we now turn.

The Teacher's Perspective: Libby Tisdell

I wanted to include the creation of digital stories in this class on Spirituality and Culture in the Health and Education Professions for the reasons noted in the theoretical grounding section. I also believe that, among its other elements, spirituality is about the ongoing creation of the world, and that it is about creativity. This is what Rabbi Michael Lerner (2000) refers to as "emancipatory spirituality" which "encourages people to work together in social and political movements, and to fill those movements with a powerful spiritual practice that includes meditation, celebration of the universe…'' (p. 169). I thought that participants' creation of a digital story and the experience of putting to words, music, and symbol a significant event and sharing it in the context of community was akin to encouraging people to do exactly what Lerner was talking about as emancipatory spirituality. But of course it required learning the technology to do it, and there was some initial resistance to having to learn the technology.

I am not particularly technologically savvy. But I never require students to do anything that I am unwilling to do myself. Thus, I created a digital story and had to learn the technology, which I found relatively "idiot proof" for which I am and was grateful because I do have my own technological fears. I had to solicit the help of Shivaani, our instructional designer and co-author, both for myself and for my students. The creation process, however, I found refreshingly creative and the digital story that I created talked about the interconnection of the spiritual pilgrimage of climbing Croagh Patrick in Ireland with my father's death. Both of these experiences were transformative. But I found that learning the technology itself for the purposes of sharing this deep story somewhat emancipatory in and of itself. It helped me overcome some of my technological fear, and also gave me a new tool to enhance my own creativity and that of others. The students in the class reported that the creation of the digital story was the highlight of the course. This is where the instrumental meets communicative and emancipatory learning. But it is the content of the story about the intersections of spiritual and cultural identity, and the context of what is created and shared in a community context that makes it so.

The Instructional Designer's Perspective: Shivaani Selvaraj

I came to have an interest in digital storytelling though educating, organizing, and producing media for social justice. Eliciting and documenting stories of critical life incidents, in particular, has been central in my work for its power to inspire critical reflection, construct identity and community, and solidify commitment to action (Hull & Katz, 2006; Jamissen & Skou, 2010; Lambert, 2009; McLellan, 2006; Vivienne, 2011). I bring these life experiences and technical skills to my work as a learning designer in higher education.

An aspect of my work with adults who hail from greatly varying educational and socio-economic backgrounds entails occasionally handling anxiety and resistance. I am not surprised by situations when people learning new digital literacies have to overcome their fears. In the case of digital storytelling, ideas surrounding what it means to be creative can also elicit anxiety. This was somewhat evident in Libby's classroom, though certainly not the case for everyone. I introduced the PhotoStory 3 software in one session under time constraints and in a classroom rather than a computer lab, where each student could have explored the digital storytelling software individually, at their own pace. In this learning context, I demonstrated what I could

through projecting the software on screen, pointing people to where to find additional resources, and reassuring people that this was doable and that I was available for further consultation.

Personal narratives of accomplishment, loss, adventure, recovery, and discovery (Lambert, 2009) emerged within the context of the class. Libby had been creating the environment for this to happen through a variety of other instructional strategies that took people outside of their comfort zones. Singing and dancing, sharing symbols and artifacts from personal spiritual and religious traditions were encouraged. This space allowed people to take greater risks into exploring personal territory and developing competency with new technical skills. Tensions between finding one's story and imagining one's audience were part of the considerations influencing how people decided what stories to tell. In the process of authoring their stories, people remembered and reflected on complex situations—possibly emotional incidents and found ways to make meaning of these experiences through distilling them into representations involving symbols, images, words and sounds.

I helped with some minor technical challenges. More importantly, I gave a few people feedback on their stories. Indeed, digital technologies introduce the possibility of iterative process and greater opportunity for feedback. Mostly I provided affirmation and in some cases asked clarifying questions to invite further reflection on personal insights and what they wished to communicate. It is important to bear in mind that learners' negotiations about what to share may be related to their positionality and attention (or lack of) to how power is enacted in the classroom is of consequence for risk-taking activities. Viewing digital storytelling as an exercise in self-authoring (Vivienne, 2011) that explores one's relationship with the world may increase its relevance as an emancipatory learning process for adults.

A Student Perspective: Gregory Carrow-Boyd

It was difficult for me to choose a narrative to portray in digital story. I could not find the words, nor did I have the tools to express my spiritual experience in a way that I thought others could understand. However, determining what to depict helped me to see the connection between my responses to two events that occurred a decade apart: displaying a neckerchief in my locker as a 15-year-old high schooler and writing a poem, *A Lamentation for Osama bin Laden*, as a 25-year-old director of children's ministry at a Unitarian Universalist congregation.

My response to the declaration of war on Afghanistan following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001—hanging a neckerchief in my locker which had been gifted to me from an Afghan boy scout I met the previous summer while I was representing my church's national organization at the United Nations —was rife with significance for spiritual testimony. However, when I began to view the ten-year period between that response and my composition of a lamentation for Osama bin Laden as a continuous narrative, I was moved to testify through the medium of digital story.

This narrative discernment process had already assisted me in constructing the arc of the digital story—writing and synthesizing the media for the project posed me little difficulty. I had a clear vision about representing the linkages between the commemorative act of displaying the neckerchief and scribing the poem. Nevertheless, I could not have anticipated the additional emotions that would accompany the narrative process.

Foremost among these unexpected emotions were anger and disappointment. I realized that I was still upset with my fellow citizens, my government, and myself for the feelings of helplessness—disempowerment—over my inability as a 15-year-old to prevent US military

bombings in Afghanistan. I was disappointed because I realized my lamentation (poem) was my acknowledgement that I felt universal salvation begins by practicing forgiveness of oneself. The digital story creation process also imbued me with something akin to masochistic despondency.

To give my digital story credence, I had to seek out the images, events, and sounds that spoke to that experience: I had to revisit my pain and confusion. At times, it was frustrating when I could not immediately find the media for some of the most poignant images in the story; when I had to confront the fact that either reality or the recollections of others of events did not perfectly match my memory.

Moreover, the creative process was painful because I discovered that I cannot experience without pain that which is still unhealed. I do not think that I ever actively tried to process my contempt for what I feel is my complicity in not preventing the inception of the current US wars in the Middle East. I suppressed that pain only for it to resurface at an equally inconvenient time.

Yet, it was this inconvenience that allowed for the feelings of emancipation I experienced during the creation and sharing process. Learning to convey the pain in my narrative in way that others could understand and experience while viewing the digital story created the condition whereby I could confront and sublimate this pain. These methods allowed me to find ways to integrate my spiritual self with my physical self; to find a way to process my pain in action through the creation of digital story. The process provided me with new emancipatory insights and tools to assist in making these connections. Through producing and sharing my digital story, I learned, borrowing from the words of my poem, that I am wholly imperfect, perfectly incomplete, wantonly unpredictable: a lamenting beast.

Another Student Perspective: Janelle Heiserman

My first experience with digital storytelling was through the assignment for this course. The parameters of the assignment were widely open, but we were asked to focus on one story from our lives that was significant in shaping our distinctive selves that we were willing to share with our classmates. Ironically, the hardest part of the entire assignment was deciding *which* of my life stories to tell. Not that I'm a particularly interesting person, but it was hard for me to select one life experience that truly conveyed my personality, spirituality, and cultural identity. I briefly weighed sharing stories of personal loss and personal struggles; but quickly decided that those stories don't accurately portray me as the strong, positive, motivated person that I like to believe that I am. I also wanted to incorporate my spirituality, the core of my being, the area deep inside from where I draw strength. I spent much time deciding how to best describe this; and eventually decided to tell the story of a theme that's been consistent throughout my life: my lifelong passion for running.

Once I had a theme, the creativity and inspiration ran rampant. As a young student, I found the technology of Photostory relatively easy to navigate. The further I diverged myself into the software, the more my creativity was sparked. I began collecting running photos, framing a story in my mind, and thinking of music that would best supplement my message. My story literally came together through a completely irrational process; not once did I stop and "plan" my assignment, it simply flowed from the timeline of photos. I also did not script my story, as the software allows you to record on each slide; my story also just framed itself based on the progression of the photos. One of the hardest technical parts of this project was adding the music. I knew the song that I wanted to use, but had trouble figuring out how to incorporate it. Eventually, I ended up adding the instrumental only version during the first half of my story to

play behind my dictation, then adding the song with lyrics towards the end and letting the song itself tell my story.

   This project ended up being a very emancipatory and emotional process personally. The creation of my digital story created a rollercoaster of emotions; from sadness, to joy, to pride, and finally to strength. By connecting aspects of my personal self to a technical, communicative project and then subsequently sharing it with my peers; I learned that my identity can only be defined by me. I am who I am because I create my own path and only I can decide how to tell my story. At its very core, the digital story emancipated a profundity in me, which allowed me to come to this conclusion.

Conclusion

   While space limitations don't allow for much discussion, it is clear that as co-authors of this paper we believe that digital storytelling has an important place in adult higher education. Given the emancipatory power of spiritual stories that relate to cultural identity, that are shared in a community context, adding an instrumental skill to reach greater numbers of people in more creative ways can only increase its emancipatory power. In the future we hope to explore how more deeply.

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