Digital “Storytelling” to Enhance Student Learning and Engagement

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Why Did I/We Create This Innovation?

Inspiration
- Technology is revolutionizing the world of education—replacing familiar classroom tools and changing the way we learn. Much contemporary discourse in communication centers on how the digital revolution of the 1990’s has made media technology central to our everyday existence... how we no longer passively view content, but rather actively engage and consume media, fully engaged media consumers and digital natives. I was inspired to explore how students use cell phones as a lens through which we can observe how digital technologies have opened new opportunities for expression, creativity and student engagement in the classroom setting.

Mission/Goals
- The frequent use of digital media in higher education has received mixed reviews with respect to its usefulness in enhancing students’ learning experiences and out of the classroom, and its ability to provide a forum that bolsters creativity amongst college students. Rather than viewing student use of digital technologies as a detriment, this project aims to 1) increase student learning in digital media literacy and pedagogy. 2) increase students’ use of “digital storytelling” techniques and the use of digital tools (cell phones) as a form of visual/media literacy 3) Transform students from consumers to producers.

Closing the Achievement Gap
“Storytelling” is the interactive art of using works and actions to reveal the element and images of story, while encouraging the listener’s imagination. It has the ability to inspire and empower. This art form is well-suited for student exploration. Using digital media and interactive practices to ignite students’ curiosity and ingenuity help them become civically engaged and involved with their own learning and achievement of goals.

Theory/Evidence/Research
- Critical Media Literacy
- Visual Literacy Theory
- Community-Based Participatory Research
- Standpoint Theory

What is the Innovation I/We Created?

Who
- Students enrolled in Africana Studies 151, Fundamentals of Public Speaking and Africana Studies 337, Black Images on the Silver Screen.
- Freshman students from AFRS 151 are paired with junior level students in AFRS 337.

What
- Train 40 junior level students in AFRS 337 as “Storytelling” Digital Peer Educators.
- Peer Educators paired with freshman students from AFRS 151.
- Working in teams of 2-3 students, the groups conduct research on issues pertaining to the Black Diaspora, and produce a digital 10-minute documentary, solely with the use of smart-phone technology.

How
- Teams are trained:
  1) Interview strategies;
  2) How to conduct research and oral histories;
  3) How to shoot and edit video images using a smartphone;
  4) How to incorporate narration and sound track into the video;
  5) How to complete post-production editing and upload to course website.

What Impact Does the Innovation Have on the Achievement Gap at CSUN?

Real Student Impact
- Utilizing digital storytelling strategies compliment the wave of technology, by contemporary student learning opportunities. It motivates students to take ownership of their intellectual development, and to stretch beyond the typical levels of engagement.
- The use of digital tools and narrative storytelling in the classroom helped to expand mental capacities, spark students’ imaginations and offered them the capacity to experiment with their own surroundings as a form of problem solving. The digital stories focused on issues related to social justice, empowerment, social advocacy and culturally relevant topics.
- The project encouraged students to engage in collaborative, guided action research that weaved together theory and praxis.
- Students served as coauthors and agents in the acquisition of knowledge, rather than as outsiders at the margins of the story.

Markers of Positive Impact
- The project explored how we can encourage students to use creative impulses to deepen their understanding of the social, political, cultural landscape in which we teach and they learn. Students collaborated and shared ways that they could incorporate storytelling, mobile learning (using smart phones) and video production into their student assignments.
- Helped to bridge the ‘digital divide’ by providing access to learning contexts and user content creation tools that are affordable and increasingly owned by students.
- Actively incorporated new processes for critical thinking and creative expression.
- Improved academic performance through mobile learning and modernized teaching/learning methods.
- Developed skills to produce and evaluate digital media projects.

Markers of Positive Impact
- Completion of twenty ten-minute short documentaries:
  - Featuring Hope: The Experience of Former Black Foster Youth
  - Black Role Models
  - Images of Masculinity and Femininity in Music
  - Interracial Dating Between Generations
  - Black College Women in the Media
  - Racism in Ballet Dance
  - The Black Greek System
  - A Single Parent Family
  - Black Women in the Military
  - History of Motown Music
  - Gentriﬁcation of Inglewood
  - National Association of Black Engineers
  - Light Skin vs. Dark Skin Males
  - Lack of African Americans in Major League Baseball
  - Black Women in the Media
  - Black Diaspora of African Music and Dance
  - Skin Bleaching in the African American Community
  - Black Masculinity and Homosexuality
  - African American Females in the Magazine Industry
  - Body Image: Full-Size African American Women

How Could This Impact More CSUN Students?

How Could This Be Scaled?
- Prepare curriculum and facilitate workshops for faculty interested in incorporating documentaries and digital technology, with the use of smartphones in the classroom.
- Train faculty and students on techniques of digital documentary filmmaking.
- Develop a Documentary Film Institute on campus, where faculty and students can explore the use of photo-voice, digital photography, conducting digital oral histories and digital video production, using mobile technology and other devices.

Future Partners
- USC Annenberg, School of Communication and Journalism Center for the DIGITAL FUTURE
- CSUN Department of Cinema & Television Arts
- CSUN Tom and Ethel Bradley Center
- CSUN - The Center for Visual Communication, VISCOM
- CSUN Faculty Technology Center