

Sylvester, R. & Greenridge, W. I. (2009). Digital storytelling: extending the potential for struggling writers. *The Reading Teacher*, 63, 4, 284-295.

Story telling is as old as man is; since the man first spoke he has shared his life, and his history through oral story telling. In an age of digital technology, the art of storytelling has lost its importance. Alberta Education has deemed speaking as a stream of Language Arts, the ability for students to communicate effectively verbally is a primary goal of educators. Digital story telling affords educators the ability to synthesis the tradition of telling stories with the digital age, allowing writers, who as Sylvester and Greenridge (2009) indicate, “are more literate in new literacies and employ these to scaffold traditional literacy” (p. 294).

Educators struggle with engagement in the classroom. They are competing with life like graphics of alternative worlds that promote escapism. This reality is pronounced if the student is a struggling writer. The ability to engage a struggling writer in creatively writing a story, most days is futile. Digital story telling offers extrinsic motivation that struggling writers intrinsically lack, thus students who rarely write are producing work that might not otherwise be authored. Digital storytelling can be defined for the classroom, as Sylvester and Greenridge (2009) tell us, “Students go through the writing process of composing a story by traditional methods: using pencil and paper or the word-processing functions of a computer. This composition later becomes the digitized voice-over narration” (p. 287) .

There are great advantages to adding the element of digital storytelling to a piece of creative writing. Students are still required to “write” a story. They cannot produce a digital story without a story. That story must follow the conventions of creative writing, including point of view, conflict, and content. What the digital version offers is the ability to give the student a

voice. When students record their voice over, they are encouraged to as Sylvester and Greenridge (2009) suggest, “employ the pitch, inflection, and timbre of one’s own voice to narrate the story [as] one of the most essential elements that contribute to the effectiveness of digital storytelling” (p. 287). Often it is hard to find an audience outside of the classroom, digital storytelling makes sharing of stories easy. Students can upload their stories to the internet and have a worldwide audience, or at least the opportunity for immediate and extended family to view and share the story. Sylvester and Greenridge (2009) state that, “multimedia used to create a digital story promotes active learning and collaboration, two approaches to learning that help distracted students stay engaged with the assignment (p. 292). Digital Storytelling creates an environment that promotes the ability to share and collaborate with peers, “the creator of the project then becomes the expert” (p. 292). Allowing students who lack proficiency in fine motor skills to create using a word processor and then the Digital Storytelling eliminates the “handwriting obstacle and replace[s] it with the pitch and expression of students’ own voices” (p. 293).

As with any form of technology there are obstacles, and digital storytelling is not an exception. When the students begin to add graphics to their story they may encounter “information overload,” this could provide a distraction that will de-rail even the most focused student. This is mitigated by restricting websites. A possible solution would be to provide a webquest for the student that has pre-selected websites that narrow searches. Often educators are reluctant to implement technology in the classroom due to a self-perceived lack of proficiency. Today’s educators need to realize that the classroom is an environment within which to learn. That learning is for everyone, including the teacher. Educators must allow students and themselves to experiment and for students to teach the teacher and their classmates. Logistical

issues will always be a part of technology. Classroom management, technical snags, administrative support and effective assessment are all issues that a classroom teacher must way when integrating technology. These issues should not be allowed to undermine the authentic learning that digital storytelling provides.

Due to the commonality of technology in the 21C, traditional definitions of literacy no longer convey complete meaning of literacy. “A term coined by The New London group, a coalition of teachers and media literacy scholars, is *multiliteracies* to refer to the literacies used today” (p. 284). Digital storytelling enables students to be multiliterate; it allows for a greater audience, for collaboration and a 21C understanding of oral storytelling, these are life skills students require to navigate this digital century.