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Through the Looking Glass of Digital Storytelling in Adult Education

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Keywords: adult education; digital storytelling; online learning; adult learning

Abstract: Incorporating digital storytelling into online course environment can aid in the development of a productive and engaging community of learning. Adult learning strategies addressed are: Use of stories to illustrate content and highlight key points; "Storying" the curriculum; and making autobiographical connections with the content.

In Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There*, mirror images involve opposites' imagery, distortions in time and space, and chess like moves of two dimensions, forward and backward motion, and symbolism. As Alice walked into the Looking Glass she became both an actor and an observer. This approximates the digital storytelling experience. The adult learner becomes an active participant and observer in the digital storytelling assignment. This learning strategy is increasing in popularity with the ease of and readily accessible technologies to create the digital stories.

Rossiter and Clark (2007) discuss three adult learning strategies employed by digital storytelling:
1. Use of stories to illustrate content and highlight key points
2. "Storying" the curriculum (constructing narrative of the content)
3. Learner makes autobiographical connections with the content

Lindgren and McDaniel (2012) conducted a study on the effectiveness of digital storytelling in the online environment on student engagement via narrative and agency (learner choice). Agency meets the need of an adult learner to have choice and make meaning of the learning within the context of her personal and professional needs and experiences.

Narrative provides the voice of the student in the sharing of the assignment in a cooperative learning environment without interruption and without presentation anxiety. This narrative facilitates the meaning making process on multiple levels and is central to learning and empowerment (Johnson-Bailey, 2010; M. Rossiter & Garcia, 2010). The students viewing the digital storytelling of their peers experience knowledge acquisition and insight to the personae of the author. Online discussion boards are the vehicle that enables cross communication that is simultaneously emotive and tangential. The community of learners become actors and observers as they communicate what they are learning, how they are feeling, and any action that may be initiated from the experience. The experience can be compared to Alice in Wonderland's looking glass: two dimensional imagery and interaction.

This action research project focuses on strategies to engage the adult learner in practical application of applicable adult learning theories and other course content in a cooperative learning environment. The theoretical framework is critical emancipatory inquiry. Students use voice and self-directed learning in developing their digital story. The action plan included

instructions on key elements of assignment construction, applications available on varied platforms, and tutorials for those applications.

The Roundtable Session will provide an overview of the implementation of digital storytelling across adult and community education courses, student examples, students' reflections on the assignments, and adult educator's assessment of the quality of the assignment and cooperative learning environment.

The Roundtable Session participants will be engaged in an interactive discussion of this topic using the following questions as prompts:

1. Have you used digital storytelling in your adult education courses? If yes, provide examples.
2. What do you perceive as the challenges in utilizing digital storytelling?
3. Have you employed comparable instructional strategies?
4. What else would you like to know about digital storytelling?

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