Invited Column
Digital Storytelling: A Sacred Literacy Practice

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Individuals diversely engage with different literacies in multiple ways, and literacies that are close to the heart – ones that are personal, open spaces for sharing. Narrative practice allows for this space of sharing crucial events (Ivanova, 2014; Romero-Ivanova, Cook, and Faurote, 2022; Romero-Ivanova, 2020), and sometimes through the format of digital storytelling.
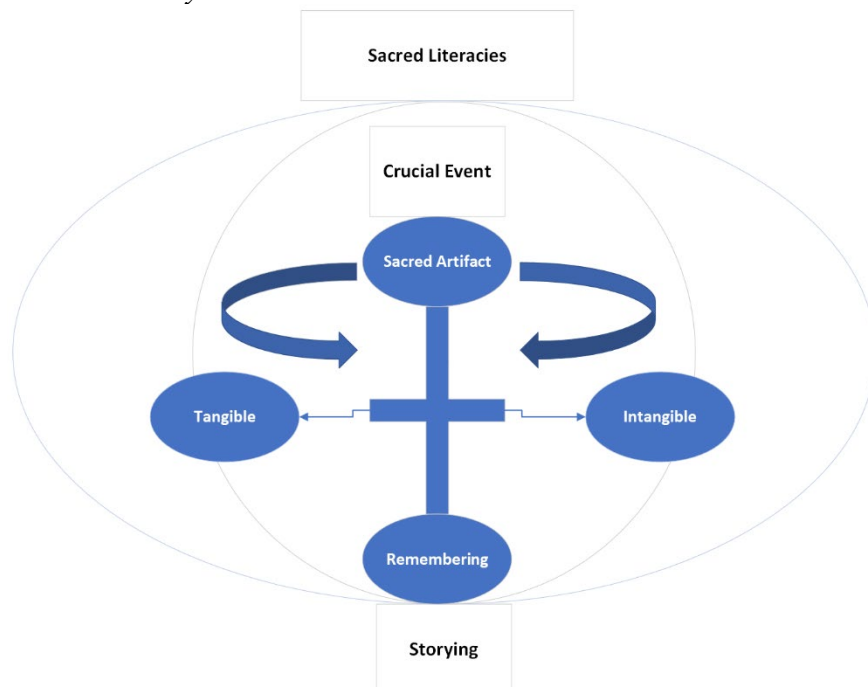
For the purposes of this article, I focus on digital storytelling as literacy practice – and one that is *sacred*. I will more fully develop this perspective in the following sections. Digital storytelling is the practice of telling a story – of relaying an experience – through the multimodal means of a digital application such as PowerPoint, iMovie, Canva, or any application the storyteller feels comfortable using. Seven elements make up a digital story: voice, musical soundtrack, the dramatic question, point of view, economy of the story, emotional content, and pacing (Dreon *et al*, 2011).

A Theory of Sacred Literacies

Individuals naturally imbed storytelling into their lives in different ways, and some literacy practices, such as storytelling are sacred by their very nature of being held significantly important (Ivanova, 2014) by the individual. Below, is an image that shows the process of storying as a sacred literacy.

Figure 1
Storying as a Sacred Literacy

In this visual, the sacred literacy practice – and for the purposes of this article – storying a crucial experience, involves sacred artifacts. Sacred artifacts are tangible objects (ones physically imbedded in a person's life) or objects that are intangible (ones remembered that once physically existed in a person's life) as connectors to the remembering of a crucial experience, an experience that significantly impacts a person's life (Romero-Ivanova, 2020). Cara (pseudonym), a participant in my research study, storied her experiences in college as a teacher education student at the University of Dundee, Scotland. In her storytelling of her experiences, she noted two remembered artifacts of her grade report and degree plan, which she was able to digitally draw for her digital story she shared with me summer 2022.

Figure 2
Cara's Grades & Degree Plan as an Education Student
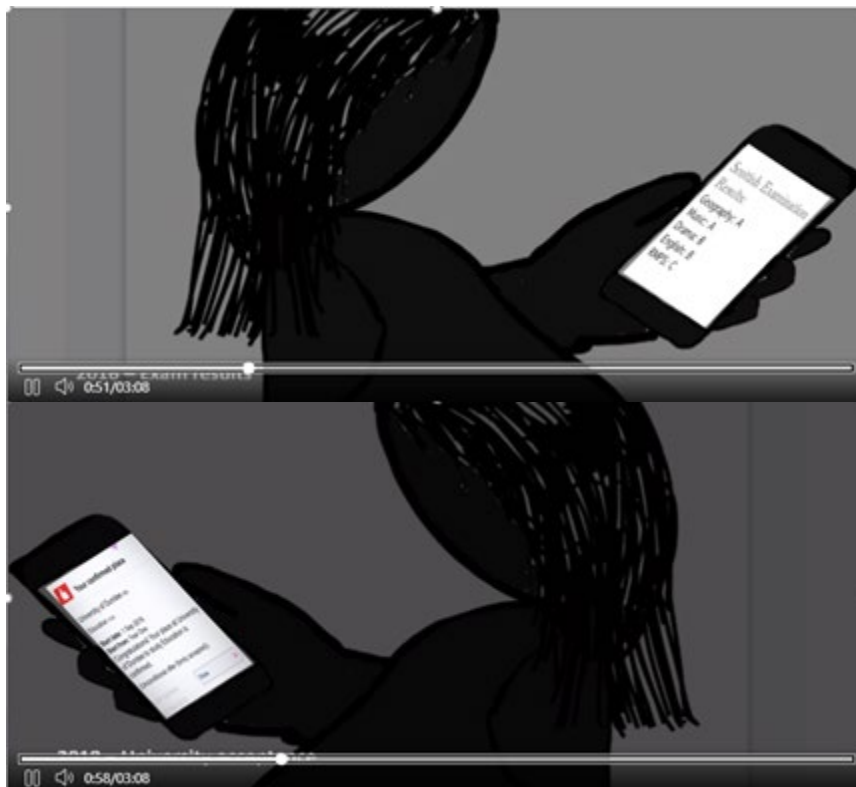
The Critical Nature of Digital Storytelling

"Narratives...can be used as entry points"
-Romero-Ivanova, 2020

Digital stories are entry points into lives and experiences because they are visually engaging, involve the uses of a voiceover (or text), music, and other emotive devices such as animation, and digital artifacts such as photographs. In the above section, I shared screenshots of Cara's digital story which included remembered artifacts of her grades report and degree plan, along with the digital drawings she created. The artifacts along with the voiceover, music, and other emotive devices demonstrated a critical literacy practice. Digital storytelling as a critical literacy

practice mediates ideologies and social issues that matter beyond just the individual's storying of their experiences. Cara's story mediated the tensions and anxieties related to the expected performances and expectations of a university student, and specifically a teacher education candidate. The greater meaning of her story – the dramatic question related to how one manages with tensions, expectations, and anxieties to perform well during their college experiences.

Digital Storytelling is an Empowering Practice for Un-silencing

Individuals can and do story their lives in different ways. Casual conversations in the classroom space can lead to engaging with digital storytelling practices. One such conversation occurred when I began storying my own experiences with students who had come to a digital storytelling workshop at the University of Dundee, Scotland in May 2023. Below are synopses of their sharing, which have since been the framework for creating their own digital stories.

Andrew's Story: The Trauma of Loss
Andrew: At the tender age of six years old, my life changed forever. It was not due to discovering a new hobby that fueled my passions or by listening to a new artist who expanded my horizons. It was at this age that I lost my mother to cancer. Being able to lay out my journey in the storytelling format also led me to further appreciating the improvements that I have made over the course of my life.

Lynsey's Story: Listening to Young Children's Voices through Digital Storytelling
Lynsey: 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. Given that this digital story was shared widely with children's families and the school community, it was essential that the narrative presented was one which the children themselves were happy to be told.

Creating a Space to Honor Students' Stories

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 them sharing.
2. Story-share your own story first.
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 in digital storytelling in which stories come alive with images, colors, a voiceover, and other engaging digital aspects.

References

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Dr. Christina Cooper is an assistant professor of education at Indiana University Kokomo. She teaches literacy courses for those who want to become elementary or secondary teachers and her courses include reading methods, using computers in education, methods for teaching, English Language Learners and Tomorrow's Teachers high school program courses. She earned her PhD in Literacy, Culture and Language Education with a minor in Anthropology from Indiana University Bloomington in 2018. Christina's research focus is narrative inquiry, specializing in women's stories of Silencing and Digital storytelling.