

Getting Started with Digital Storytelling *by David S. Jakes*

How do you get started with digital storytelling? The answer: slowly....

Digital storytelling projects are big and sloppy, they're not cookie cutter PowerPoint projects so often done in schools today. They are not Microsoft Publisher brochures done on biomes in cut-and-paste plagiarism style.

What they are original authentic stories by students, merged with voice, imagery, and music and that means they are complex, involve serious project management skills, and some dedicated roll-up-your-sleeves support. I'm just being honest.

But the result is worth it. We finally have a learning experience where technology is truly effective and adds value to the learning experience and takes learning to a place that could not be achieved unless the technology was present. Here is how to get started, in no particular order:

- 1. Start small**-select one or two teachers who are risk-takers and capable of stretching their comfort zone.
- 2. Choose wisely**, make sure these individuals are respected and connected with their peers-this will go a long way in extending the fledgling digital storytelling initiative beyond this small pilot.
- 3. Build administrative support** before beginning-show examples-and especially involve department chairs or other types of leaders because some individuals may have a difficult time understanding what students learn by doing digital storytelling projects.
- 4. Be sure you can answer** "What do students learn in this process?" Consider learning vs. accomplishment.
 - Digital storytelling develops visual and multimedia literacy in students. Digital storytelling addresses the development of the interpretation of digital media and the application of that interpretation to a personal message or story.
 - Digital storytelling provides students with a competitive and compelling voice by enlarging the boundaries of who students can communicate with and by increasing the depth and power of that communication.
 - Digital storytelling permits students to recapture creativity, develop it and intensify it, apply it, extend it...
 - Digital storytelling helps students write more effectively by permitting the visualization of the writing, resulting in an additional level of perception that extends the writing process to a place seldom reached.
 - Digital storytelling provides an authentic personal learning experience- as such, student investment is greatly increased resulting in greatly improved motivation and end product.
 - Digital storytelling teaches technology and information literacy.
- 5. Be sure everything works technology-wise.** Where will kids store their projects, where will the software be housed, which software will you choose, does the software perform within the constraints of your network, and do you have sufficient scanner capacity?
- 6. As part of your pilot**, develop a set of handouts prior to the first experience, so that during a general rollout you are using second generation support documents that have been modified as the result of the first experience.
- 7. Limit the projects.** No video (at least initially), 20-25 images work well (don't go above-images become meaningless, don't go below-do PowerPoint instead), 2-3 minutes in length, one song. Do the voice-over last.
- 8. Stories should have a theme and they should be a story.** This is not a project about how DNA makes proteins, or who were the major players in the American Revolution. That's for some boring PowerPoint presentation. Instead, focus on the importance of Rosalind Franklin and her contributions to the unraveling of the structure of DNA and women in science; instead of reporting on George Washington, focus on revolution and stories of people changing the world.
- 9. Render the movies** as QuickTime movies (Mac) or Windows Media Player (PC) movies. No DVD's, MPEGs, or Video CD's. Keep it simple....
- 10. Get good support** from people who can and are willing to support students.
- 11. Buy good noise-canceling microphones** and get a class set so everyone can record voiceovers. Avoid the VOB (Voice-over Bottleneck).
- 12. I would always add images first**, then transitions and then music and then voice. I think that in terms of composition, this makes the most sense. If you want to do it in another fashion, that's OK too. There are multiple pathways to an end.
- 13. Always, always, always share the stories.** Digital stories provide insights about students almost never seen, their classmates now have a way to see that the girl with the blue hair across the room is actually not that different from them.
- 14. Be patient.** Don't get frustrated.
- 15. Be ready to work hard.**
- 16. Teachers should be experts** in the software and full participants in the process. If done in a lab or a library, no grading papers! Conduct staff development before expanding your initiative.
- 17. Use what you learn** in your pilot program to develop a staff development program on digital storytelling. Seek to involve the pilot members in staff development as teachers-always strive to build in-house capacity.
- 18. Share the products** with parents at open houses and with teachers during in-service.
- 19. Help students avoid P.T.S.** (PowerPoint Transition Syndrome). Teach that transitions should not distract from the story; have them watch television commercials the night before-you just don't see the paper airplane flying away transition in Pepsi commercial.
- 20. Get ready for one of the best teaching experiences of your life...**