

Creating Personal Narratives Using Digital Media Storytelling

Concept Description for the OPUS Collective

The OPUS Collective Website: <http://opuscollective.org>

Dr. Teshia Roby Email: teshiaroby@csupomona.edu

Since the beginning of time, humans have communicated with each other using storytelling. Some cultures would share information in the form of a song or through musical instruments. Other cultures would record their stories using drawings or hieroglyphics. Some societies kept their cultures alive by passing on their treasured oral histories from generation to generation.

In today's society of new media, new technologies, and fast computers, storytelling is no less important. Storytelling allows people to share personal and cultural accounts and perspectives in ways that are unique and individual, yet have the potentiality of being transsituational and transcultural. The technique of personal narrative through digital media storytelling requires the storyteller to do a great deal of introspection and have personal connectedness to the topic. Personal artifacts such as old pictures, home movies, a passport, old letters, drawings, a piece of clothing, a birth certificate, etc., and accompanying music are used to help reveal the story, and work in concert with the most important component of a digital story: the storyteller's own speaking voice which gives the story life.

In the best learning conditions, the needs of the students are at the center of the instructional environment: active engagement is encouraged, academic- and self-efficacy are promoted, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approaches are present, a community spirit develops and is nourished, and a ripe amount of cultural inclusion takes place. Each of these elements can be addressed by inclusion of new media storytelling in a learning community. The vision to develop a rich collection of personal narratives to promote cultural understanding is a project called The OPUS Collective. The goal of the OPUS Collective is to provide an online, publicly accessible, searchable repository of personal narratives. The word "opus" in the name of the project has two meanings. First, the accepted definition of an opus is an original creative work. Second, OPUS is an acronym that represents the project goal of "Offering Perspective Using Storytelling."

For users of the eventual OPUS Collective repository website, the stories will serve as conversation- and lesson-starters, supplemental learning opportunities, and cultural- and global-perspective gaining opportunities. For the creators of the digital stories (both students and faculty), the stories will offer opportunities for deeper personal connection to the topic addressed, and a demonstrated understanding of the topic. The digital stories also enable the faculty to integrate constructivistic and active learning approaches to the curriculum topic, employ universal design for learning (UDL) principles and experiential learning techniques, and offer alternative assessment requirement for the assignment.

Each digital story will be a 2- to 5-minute multimedia production that is related to a topic within a humanities discipline. An example of digital stories that will be produced as a result of this phase of the project and will be contained in the repository is a 3-minute digital story called "Wisdom," in which the socio-cultural and historical topic of light-skinned versus dark-skinned blacks is discussed (<http://opuscollective.org/examples>).

The OPUS Collective digital stories will be indexed and cross-referenced for ease in searching and to allow more exposure for the stories. For instance, while the "Wisdom" story will appear under the "Cultural Studies" category and perhaps the "Cultural Relations" subtopic, it will also be found under searches for stories that contain themes related to the "Psychology" category and the "Family & Relationships" subtopic.

The true innovativeness of the proposed project comes from the effective use of new media to extend the walls of the classroom to include culture and the human element in the curriculum. Moreover, the long term-goal of the OPUS Collective is to be an interactive teaching and learning resource for educators, students, community organizations, and individuals seeking to gather cultural perspective on a variety of topics. The OPUS Collective will utilize a variety of Web 2.0 social and sharing technologies, as well as searching, indexing, and cross-categorization techniques.