

FROM ARTIFACTS TO STORYBOARDS: Energizing the Adult Literacy Classroom Through Multimedia

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Martha Torres, a student at the Socorro Independent School District Even Start Family Literacy Program in El Paso, Texas, examines an artifact shared by one of the other women in the group, as Tere Benavides looks on. The artifact is a small pan containing a blessing, which had hung in the kitchen of the woman's grandmother.

Research indicates that adult literacy programs don't rush to embrace technology. And who can blame them? Computers crash, equipment breaks, Web sites disappear, and software is often glitchy. As justifiable as their views may be, these programs can end up short-changing students who might otherwise embrace new ways of learning with technology.

Here are a few projects that can help teachers and students get started connecting technology with language and literacy learning. Some of these projects can be done with pictures and photographs, digital or film. Others require only pencil and paper. All of these projects were developed as part of our work with the Socorro Independent School District Even Start Family Literacy Program in El Paso, Texas.

Alphabet Books for Adults

Alphabet books are a great way to engage low-literate learners in projects, allowing them to present their view of the world in compelling pictures and powerful words. They are particularly effective when tied to civics and challenge students to represent their community in ways that speak to others.

How does it work?

With your students, review several alphabet books for adults and children to get a sense of the range of pictures and texts that are used. Invite students to create an alphabet book that reflects ideas and concepts important to them and to their community. Students then map out text and pictures to get a sense of the final product. Students can create collages or use simple pictures with text while experimenting with various designs. If they use a word processing program, students can also explore various fonts for their pages. These books can be displayed and shared in libraries, on school walls, or at the Chamber of Commerce. Alphabet books created in PowerPoint can also be shared electronically.

Artifact Activities

Artifact activities combine personal memories with cultural items. They allow students to write about their families using a concrete item as a starting point. Sharing meaningful artifacts helps build community and builds a stronger bond between teachers and students. Students can make drawings of their cultural artifacts or photograph them using a standard camera. They can also capture them with digital cameras and then display the photos both on paper and on the Web. Again, creating a PowerPoint presentation or a digital story can be an option; and sound, animation, and special effects (all part of PowerPoint) can add pizzazz.

How does it work?

Following a discussion of local cultures and childhood memories, invite students to bring in artifacts that represent their cultures and have personal meaning for them. Examples might include an instrument, a tool, a food item, a cooking implement, or a religious icon. Then ask students to answer these questions:

- What is it, and when is it used?
- What memories do you have?
- What do you want your children to know or remember?

You can then take pictures of individual students and their artifacts, or the students can take pictures of each other holding the artifacts. Students can then add text to the photos so that the final products can be displayed and shared with others outside the program.

Storyboards

Storyboards, used extensively in film and video production, are a great way to help students be creative and focus their thinking. In their simplest form, storyboards are laid out as a series of separate boxes to which text is added either beneath each box or inside in the form of dialogue bubbles. These storyboards allow students to tell a story, explain a process, or lay out a sequence for a short scenario or a longer story that will be videotaped.

How does it work?

To get the group started, introduce the need for clear instructions and hands-on processes as a cornerstone of informal learning. To help you make your point, you can bring some how-to manuals and step-by-step cookbooks to the class and then have a little party where groups of students make something (fresh salsa, instant pudding, paper airplanes, a tree ornament). Or you can discuss what to do in case of an earthquake, tornado, or hurricane, and then engage students in creating appropriate illustrations.

Invite students to think about ways in which these skills can be shared with others who may not be familiar with the process. Work with students to capture some of these ways, introducing storyboards in the process. Invite students to select a familiar sequence and work in small groups to explain it step by step using the storyboard.

As a follow-up project, find out what students want to learn more about (giving CPR, repairing

a broken toilet, using a digital camera, or making soup from scratch). Work with the students to capture in pictures (in PowerPoint, on video, or on CD-ROM) whatever steps they select so that others can learn, too.

Conclusion

All of these ideas can be used with either low-end or high-end technologies. They offer a chance to breathe new life into old classes and encourage students to create knowledge for others by using technologies as smart tools.

When students prepare to share these projects with others, their learning is multiplied as they spend long hours trying to get the language just right. They practice English with each other and do work on their own time in order to overcome their fear of speaking in front of an audience.

We know that technology-mediated projects allow learners to develop increased confidence as they gain competence in using digital tools such as cameras, videos, and PowerPoint.

Don't all students deserve this chance?

Tutor Training Tip

Describe It

Purpose: To practice simple present tense

Preparation Time: 10 minutes

Materials: Pictures of various objects

Preparation: Gather a variety of pictures. They can be of objects, animals, etc.

Procedure: Show the picture to the student. Ask him or her to describe it.

Examples:



It is red.
It tastes good.
It is round.



It eats mice.
It likes milk.
It is furry.

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