



Highlights of Upcoming Events!

Teacher Leader Making a Difference

January 20-21, 2009

Leadership and Technology: Building Powerful Learning Communities

February 21 through April 4, 2009

National Board Pre-candidacy Class Online

February 26, 27, 28 and March 14, 2009

Technology Integration: Audio Podcasting for Teachers & Students

March 30, April 6, April 13, April 20, and April 27, 2009

Technology Integration: Digital Storytelling

March 31, April 4, 14, 21, 28, May 5, 12

National Board Pre-candidacy Class



Nancy Pratt
Technology Coach, National Board Certification Coach

A Technology and Instruction Specialist in Cave Creek School District, Nancy Pratt is a passionate proponent at the Center of both digital learning and National Board candidacy. Teachers will know her through her work at Tech Camp each summer and as a facilitator of National Board pre-candidacy classes. Nancy has also worked on some of the Center's projects to develop and publish curriculum material.

After graduating from college with a degree in English, Nancy joined the US Army where she became a sharpshooter. She came to teaching only after working several other positions she found unfulfilling. "I wanted to make an impact," she says. With teaching, she finally hit her target.

"Working with the Center gives me such an opportunity," she says. "Every person you meet is working toward that same end, greater good for students, which gives me such a connection.

I've never felt so welcome and a part of something bigger than myself than when I work with these people.

Digital Storytelling

THE POWER OF PERSONAL VOICE

How do you show kids that their personal stories deserve to be heard? How do you help them access those stories and then express them to a broader audience in an effective and engaging manner? For K-12 teachers, the answer is by experiencing the power of your story and of sharing it with others yourself.

This summer at Arizona K-12 Center's Tech Camp, a cohort of teachers participated in the Digital Storytelling workshop. Digital Storytelling employs digital media, such as photography, video and audio to create, capture and share stories, with an emphasis on personal experience.



If these teachers were expecting a bland exercise in the application of technology in the classroom, they very quickly realized otherwise. Nancy Pratt, who led the weeklong workshop, encouraged all the participants to express a truly personal narrative, rather than a superficial or simply informative one.

"Digital Storytelling can be transformation in terms of how you see yourself and the world," says Pratt. "It's that feeling of wow, my voice matters."

It's this personal element of self-reflection, openness and emotional exploration that differentiates digital storytelling from moviemaking or video podcasting. While these are also obviously excellent teaching tools, they do not afford students the same opportunity to delve deep, discover the stories that dwell within them and have them validated through connecting with an audience of peers.

In the workshop, many of the teachers took up this challenge with highly personal and powerful accounts from their own lives. One teacher chose for her topic the one year anniversary of the death of her husband. After experiencing this terrible loss, she promised her kids that she was going to shed excess

pounds and get healthy so that her children would not have to worry about losing her as well. Another teacher reflected on her son, now 26 years of age and a teacher as well, who had been born prematurely weighing only two and a half pounds.

Several wrote about the passion that made them choose to become teachers.

STORY FIRST, TECHNOLOGY SECOND

While applications such as iPhoto, GarageBand and iMovie are engaging for students and offer fascinating opportunities for creativity, Pratt encourages teachers not to get lost in the bells and whistles of technology at the expense of the story waiting to be told.

"Spend time in the process of story development before technology," she says, "hone and craft the writing first. The best digital stories are the best written ones."

At the same time, there is no doubt that technology motivates students to invest themselves more fully in the work. Lacey Fredette, who teaches fifth grade in the Cartwright School District, attended the digital storytelling workshop at Tech Camp this summer.

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Digital Storytelling

Continued from front

“Since Tech Camp, the entire way I approach teaching has changed,” she says. “My kids want to do more for me. If technology is involved, they want to do it. It’s already sold.”

At Tech Camp, Fredette won a raffle drawing for the use of a computer lab on wheels for a month. Having the lab in her classroom helped get students going on digital storytelling.

“I’ve noticed a big difference in the quality of writing,” she says “because kids have a lot more ownership, and are a lot more motivated to really make pieces as good as they can possibly make them.”

As Pratt predicted, some of the biggest benefits Fredette noted came by way of the experience of personal sharing. She assigned her students to tell a story about a hero in their life. A significant group of kids chose for their hero a person who raised them who was not a parent. When they told their stories, students realized they shared common ground.

One girl related how she was left by her mother who took off with a boyfriend on a drug binge. It so happens that Fredette herself was raised by her grandparents. She recounts: “When I said, ‘my mom left me too’, the girl looked at me like I was crazy. She said ‘it’s hard, huh?’ I said ‘yeah, it is.’”

Another boy’s mother got deported to Mexico. He and his little brother were taken in by their aunt. His brother was sick and his aunt got him the medical care he needed. The boy shared his feeling that his aunt had saved his brother’s life.

This girl and boy were both shy and had different interests. One liked reading, the other math. But digital storytelling brought them together and they collaborated on their projects.



Because the stories are personal, Fredette saw more attention to detail from her students as well. “I had a girl spend three days looking for the right photo, to fit the right spot,” she recalls. “Finally, I had to tell her to just finish.”

THE PROCESS IS THE PRIZE

One key to success in digital storytelling is providing students with an effective prompt. It should be general enough to give them the freedom to be creative, but specific enough to get them focused and engaged. Fredette’s prompt to describe a hero in her students’ lives is a good example.

“Any time you have the chance to reflect you learn and grow.”

Another critical element is the story circle, during which students hear and respond to each other’s written stories. A sense of community must be created that supports students to give and receive constructive feedback. So this is not necessarily a good exercise for the first week of school.

On the technical side, it’s important to have a system of peer review. Someone other than the author should listen to the completed digital story, to correct any basic issues such as music being too loud and reading being too stilted.

Teachers interested in adding digital storytelling to their lesson planning can learn more from the Center for Digital Storytelling at storycenter.org. However, there is no substitute for participating in a digital storytelling course yourself.

“It gives you the feeling of what you want students to wind up with,” says Pratt. “It’s the process that is the prize. Any time you have the chance to reflect you learn and grow.”

The Arizona K-12 Center will be offering a digital storytelling course this spring, as well as during Tech Camp in the summer.

For more information, visit azk12.org.

EVENT SPOTLIGHT

LEADERSHIP AND TECHNOLOGY BUILDING POWERFUL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Dates January 20-21, 2009

Location Desert Willow Conference Center
4340 E. Cotton Center Blvd, Phoenix

Times 8:00am-3:30pm

Cost \$175

Deadline 1/6/2009

Dr. Tim Tyson, former principal of Mabry Middle School, has been called “The Pied Piper of Educational Technology” by the *School Library Journal*. During this conference he will share lessons learned and philosophical frameworks gleaned from that school’s exploration of ways to leverage technology to sustain and nurture learning communities. Participants will have the opportunity to learn with one another in small breakouts that will focus on 21st Century tools such as Google Docs and Wikis, Blogs, and Web 2.0. School principals, district administrators and teacher leaders are welcome.



Did You Know ? ? ?

Digital storytelling consists of seven basic elements:

- Point of View
- Dramatic Question
- Emotional Content
- The Gift of Voice
- The Power of Soundtrack
- Economy
- Pacing