

Chapter 4

Digital Storytelling and Teachers' Disciplinary Multiliteracies

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reports on a multidisciplinary research collaboration which aims to explore how digital stories may be used to support pre-service teachers across disciplinary boundaries of English, science, and health education. Digital stories play a distinct role in enacting disciplinary practices within each of these curriculum areas and provide a valuable context for expanding students' semiotic repertoire. By integrating digital storytelling in initial teacher education (ITE), the authors provide a pathway for teachers to develop pedagogic knowledge of genres that are distinctly disciplinary in their purpose but which draw on semiotic affordances and pedagogic practices from across boundaries of traditional literacy education. Drawing on digital stories produced for a range of purposes, they report on the meta-language we have developed in our collaborative work to inform a coherent multiliteracies framework to build on and extend pre-service teachers' semiotic repertoire for functional, critical, and creative disciplinary practice.

INTRODUCTION

Literacy researchers have long engaged in multidisciplinary research collaboration to address real life problems which traverse traditional communication spheres. This chapter reports on one such collabo-

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ration, which aims to explore how digital stories may be used to support pre-service teachers across disciplinary boundaries of English, science and health education. Digital stories play a distinct role in enacting disciplinary practices within each of these curriculum areas and provide a valuable context for expanding students' semiotic repertoire for making links across curriculum areas (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], n.d.).

The focus of this collaboration, on the middle years of education, responds to a number of concerns from across curriculum and discipline literacy contexts. Middle years learners, who are typically aged between 11-14, face increasingly specialised uses of literacy, which require expanded semiotic choices. Achieving curriculum goals of English, science and health involves students in interpreting and creating increasingly complex genres which reflect distinct disciplinary practices and traverse discourses of school and community. While learners from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds have been found to bring particularly valuable perspectives to their school literacies (Harman, 2018), many content area teachers have not been sufficiently prepared with understandings to connect these perspectives to disciplinary ways of using literacies (Jones & Chen, 2012; Macken-Horarik, Love, & Unsworth, 2011; O'Connor, Jeanes, & Alfrey, 2016). By integrating digital storytelling in Initial Teacher Education (ITE), the authors provide a pathway for teachers to develop pedagogic knowledge of genres that are distinctly disciplinary in their purpose but which draw on semiotic affordances and pedagogic practices from across boundaries of traditional literacy education.

Understanding the multiple roles and affordances of digital stories has required commitment of all collaborators to participate in research discourses beyond the discipline/s in which teacher educators were trained (Unsworth, 2008). It has also required that they deepen knowledge of the specialised curricula they are preparing their pre-service teachers to work with and find ways of connecting digital storytelling to what they hold as the "core business" of those curricula. Throughout the chapter the authors tell their stories of the multiple knowledges they have drawn on to inform the boundary crossing work across ITE units and in the interface of school and community literacy practice. These stories are woven together using sociocultural and social semiotic theories which have influenced the development of multiliteracies pedagogy (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015; Halliday, 1978; Unsworth, 2001). Data for the authors' teaching and learning activity includes digital stories produced to entertain, inform and/or persuade young people, which they have analysed to learn about different disciplinary purposes, audiences and semiotic affordances. The social semiotic metalanguage the authors have developed in their collaborative "behind the scenes" work has allowed them to share meanings of these digital stories and their distinct ways of storytelling because it makes explicit connections to the contexts in which the stories are interpreted and composed. Although context in the current study most directly refers to the aims and content of the Australian curricula the authors connect the concerns of these curricula to global and national concerns as well as policies and events which shape their development and application (Gebhard, 2019). Following Cope & Kalantzis (2015), the authors have developed a coherent multiliteracies framework which weaves amongst multiple knowledge processes to build on and extend pre-service teachers' semiotic repertoire for functional, critical and creative disciplinary practice.

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