Digital Explorations Along the Borderlands: Transfronterizo Youth, Testimonio and Personal Learning Networks

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ABSTRACT

Pedagogical strategies that use technologies for connecting and communicating across differences, provide us with opportunities to disseminate historically excluded voices in academia and in society. The use of new and emerging technologies in and out of classrooms provides students and teachers with tools to craft, narrate, create, and share their lived experiences, life stories, and testimonios in digitized formats. The authors present three digital explorations that focus on technological tools that on the surface may seem simplistic but that carry deep constructs of meaning for the participants involved. These digital explorations focus on the affordances provided to students of all ages by the use of technological tools to demonstrate cultural and linguistic agency and embrace their Community Cultural Wealth in using critical media. The authors hope to signal the need for critical pedagogues to further incorporate digital learning technologies in classrooms.

Keywords: Borderlands, Community Cultural Wealth, Critical Media, Critical Pedagogies, Digital Testimonios, Personal Learning Network (PLN), Technology, Technology-Based Pedagogical Tools, Transfronterizo Youth, Twitter

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, we have seen a growth in the use of genres that highlight lived experience as a source of knowledge and as important teaching tools (Flores Carmona & Luschen, 2013). Genres include oral history, storytelling, family history, life story, testimonio, and personal learning networks, which can be used as pedagogical tools and incorporated across many disciplines and in diverse educational spaces (Barone, 1992; Bell, 2010; Benmayor, 2012; Dyson & Genishi, 1994; Flores Carmona & Delgado Bernal, 2012; Jackson, 2002; Lanman & Wendling, 2000).
2006; Ohler, 2008; Parkinson, 2009; Sleeter, 2008; Solinger, Fox, & Irani, 2008). Combining these genres with the use of new and emerging technologies provides powerful new examples of pedagogical tools for use in and out of the classroom. As witnessed in this article, such technology-based pedagogical tools, students and teachers are able to craft, narrate, create, and share across physical, cultural and virtual borders, their lived experiences, life stories, and testimonios.

Technology-based pedagogical tools for connecting and communicating across differences, provides us with the opportunity to disseminate historically excluded voices, in academia and in society. A powerful example of technology-based pedagogical tools used in this manner is employed by transfronterizo youth, students who cross the US/Mexico international border daily to attend school in the United States or who attend school in the US and return to their homes in Mexico on weekends. Their use of new and emerging technologies includes Google Translate for translation of academic work, the use of Skype (a web conferencing tool that allows for video, audio, and text chat conversations) as a source of communication, and the use of English/Spanish captions to learn English through subtitles. The production of digital testimonios in higher education, informed by Chicana-Latina feminisms, is another technology-based pedagogical tool that serves the purpose of informing and calling attention to urgent issues that people of color are facing in academia and in society. Finally, teaching students in higher education about developing or expanding their personal learning networks (PLNs), via technology, allows for unprecedented access to lived experiences across differences and across the globe.

We present three disparate digital explorations where different technology-based tools surface. Although, some may seem simplistic, these tools carry deep constructs of meaning for the participants involved. Their voices express a range of nuanced feelings and thoughts bringing witness to realities whilst remaining grounded in their cultural identities and demarcating the complexity of borders and the need for teachers to comprehend such fluid realities. The students in these digital explorations uniquely employ technology-based pedagogical tools that demonstrate cultural and linguistic agency to navigate the educational pipeline. We focus on how students of all ages use their voices and how they remain grounded in their cultural identities metaphorically connected across borders. As teachers, it is our hope to bridge these intersecting vectors towards a new and powerful technology-based pedagogy.

We hope to signal the need for critical pedagogues to further incorporate technology-based pedagogical tools in classrooms. The top-down approach of educational reform focused on a standardized change model is clunky, time-consuming, and difficult to implement. A grass-roots, bottom-up approach of sharing new forms of education and learning design, thereby updating focused areas of curriculum is a non-threatening approach and completely doable (Jacobs, 2010). We document and share the incorporation of diverse epistemological constructs within classrooms. We are not advocating for our work to be viewed as a model, but as a venue for ideas and possibilities to germinate. Araujo explores students’ use of technology to gain access to their families, communities, and other resources across and between borders. Flores Carmona explores undergraduate students’ digital testimonios that denounce vivid traumas they experienced and connected to readings of Chicana/Latina feminisms. Parra explores the need for graduate students to contribute to and access global voices and conversations across the spectrum of personal and professional topics made instantly available through PLN’s and social media. These explorations are a testament to the vivid use of technology-based pedagogical tools that serve to reinvent communicative cultural tools and enhance teaching and learning in a global and digital world.
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