Chapter 8

Innovation in Education through Web-Based Instruction: Digital and Cross-Platform Storytelling

Roberta Levitt
Long Island University Post, USA

Joseph M. Piro
Long Island University Post, USA

ABSTRACT

Technology continues to revolutionize the teaching and learning landscape opening up new possibilities to use new media to digitally enhance multiple literacies. The authors argue for the reconceptualization of the instructional activity of a WebQuest as a single or multi-player high end multimodal experience with potential to stimulate student interest, motivate goal-directed learning behaviors, and positively sustain academic achievement and accomplishment. Suggestions for creating a WebQuest using emerging cross-platform methodology will be probed in order to examine their innovative potential both in teacher preparation and class instruction. Recommendations for utilizing a WebQuest to digitally enable both students and pre-service teachers are also offered.

TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE 21ST CENTURY

As this globalized society advances further into the 21st century, its vocabulary for the teaching and learning process continues to transform. Unsurprisingly, much of this vocabulary centers on technology and those instructional experiences, which can be accomplished by its utilization. One scenario suggested by Prince (2014) in a report from the Knowledge Works foundation discusses the future of K-12 teaching, identifying it under the theme of “Four Scenarios for a Decade of Disruption.” In the report, Prince (2014) plainly and candidly states that “education in the United States is facing a decade of deep disruption as the digital revolution and the cultural and social changes that have accompanied it challenge the sector’s fundamental structure” (p. 3). Prince uses words like “learning agent,” “teacherpreneurs,” and “craftspeople” to better explain the new role of teachers and what behaviors will be expected of them.

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as they cultivate their craft to meet the demands of creating the future of learning. Each term, in its own way, challenges education’s fundamental assumptions, and their use will only become more pervasive as the avalanche of technology and its disruption forces dramatic changes across the national, and global, education landscape. Prince makes the perceptive argument that in order to keep pace with drivers of change affecting classroom teaching, teachers must remain “plastic professionals” or individuals adapting and readapting to changes in their environment. One of the ways this teacher “plasticity” can emerge is to have teachers stay open to the new ideas, tools, and resources that can come from a variety of sectors including science, business, and the arts. Moreover, teachers must become both learning agents and learning partners, expanding their role in not only instructional capacities but into a larger life of the learning community. As “learning agents,” teachers must also be sufficiently networked and connected to multiple platforms of information, which will need to be seamlessly and adroitly integrated into their instructional repertories (Prince, 2014).

A trend which Prince (2014) suggests will flourish is that of transmediation. This term can be defined as the effective use of communication outlets leveraged across multiple platforms including, but not limited to, immersive games, social media, vodcasts, blogs, podcasts, and video. This continued move toward transmediation will amplify the role of the teacher and place teachers into classrooms with fewer content boundaries. This is a space where they must deftly balance social, political, economic, and environmental change in order to equip students with the requisite platforms to negotiate these changes. In effect, students must be trained to become learning citizens, who must be able to parse, organize, and reflect on digital data streams sent through multiple information channels. Teachers must model multi-platform mediation in order for their students to use this information in coherent and productive ways creating their own personal learning ecology.

The author also describes an interesting scenario, one in which learning agents interact both inside and outside of traditional learning institutional frameworks creating an instructional ecosystem responsive to the “whole” student. Within this scenario, resources and tools from other learning providers, including museums, libraries, scientific laboratories, and businesses, merge to recast their traditional roles in this ecosystem into ones which facilitate and support more effective learning in school with the aim of assisting students in demonstrating mastery. The author suggests, that “with ‘school’ becoming forms of schools, educators trained in the industrial-era school system have redefined their roles to match their strengths, creating more differentiated and satisfying career paths” (Prince, 2014, p. 8). These tectonic shifts to core foundational ideas of education will, in effect, make schools into what the KnowledgeWorks report calls “platforms of resilience” where responsive flexibility, distributed collaboration, and transparency turn these institutions into open, innovative, and productive learning communities.

**Trends in Cross-Platform Design and Storytelling**

Perhaps among the most intriguing developments suggested by the author of the *KnowledgeWorks* report is the trend toward seamless blending of data from open and differentiated sources and the exciting potential to learn across multiple platforms (Fisch, 2013; Prince, 2014). In 2015, one of the growing trends identified by Johnson, Adams Becker, Estrada, and Freeman in the NMC Horizon Report, a document produced by collaboration between the New Media Consortium and the Educause Learning Initiative, was the proliferation of Open Educational Resources (OER). This ongoing trend means a broad variety
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