

Dissertation Title:

Digital storytelling in ESL instruction:
Identity negotiation through a pedagogy of multiliteracies

Researcher:

Polina Vinogradova
University of Maryland, Baltimore County
polinav1@umbc.edu



Polina Vinogradova

Research Supervisor:

JoAnn Crandall
Beverly Bickel

Summary:

This qualitative exploratory study investigated how a pedagogy of multiliteracies can be introduced to the ESL curriculum using the narrative modality of digital stories and explored the ways ESL learners negotiate their identities through the multimodality of this narrative genre. The study was based on the premise that in language education it is crucial to account for multimodality of discourses and bring students' diverse lifeworlds and experiences into the classroom thus extending an understanding of literacy to multimodal communication and inviting ESL learners to explore their diverse, multilayered, and dynamic identities.

The study elicited data from twenty ESL students through focused participant observations, content analysis of students' essays, weekly journals, and final semi-structured interviews, and through discourse analysis of the students' drafts of verbal narratives for digital stories, digital storyboards, and final digital storytelling projects.

The findings revealed the presence of situated practice; overt instruction; critical framing; and, in a more limited way, transformed practice in the process of digital story production. While situated practice evolved with the students narrating about their families, life-changing events, and important cultural practices, overt instruction included explicit and systematic instruction and scaffolding that fostered the understanding of multimodal meaning making. Combined with situated practice it resulted in critical framing when students reflected on their perceptions of language learning, critically evaluated their own progress as language learners and producers, and analyzed multimodal cultural representations in their digital stories. Some nascent examples of transformed practice were evident when students were suggesting how this class had influenced their approaches to learning and understanding of meaning making.

Students negotiated their identities through the process and product of digital stories. The study revealed that none of the participants articulated as central an ESL student identity indicating that this social role was not the most significant identity factor at the time of digital story production. Instead, the students were storytellers and producers, mothers and sons, daughters and sisters, granddaughters and world travelers, friends, women and men, people with different cultural backgrounds and various social experiences influenced by their gender, culture, and social status. And since the students were in constant communication with each other, personal stories became experiences that moved other students and influenced their understanding of cultural diversity. This created a multicultural community of practice conducive

to the recognition and respect of diverse identities and social roles present in the current educational setting.

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