Intergenerational Education and Learning:

Using Digital Stories

5060 Assignment 1 – Literature Review

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Literature Review

Introduction

It is known that the proportion of the world's senior population (over 60 years old) is increasing and the sharing of their knowledge through storytelling can have significant value within education and community (Smeda, Eva, & Sharda, 2014). Williams and Nussbaum explain, "We live in a world that has ambivalent feelings toward diversity-on the one hand it is celebrated and embraced, and on the other hand, discrimination and prejudice toward those who are unlike us is rife" (2012, p. 9). Preserving and cherishing relationships between generations can help in reducing negative attitudes such as ageism and prejudice. In Canada, Intergenerational Day is celebrated on June 1st by 12 provinces and territories. The primary goal is to encourage partnerships and initiatives that support connections between different age generations (McKenzie, 2019). A non-profit organization that is based in British Columbia called i2i Intergenerational Society was developed in 2008 (i2i Intergenerational Society, 2019). Their aim is to promote intergenerational programs and learning across the nation and beyond, offering a wealth of educational resources and information. The research and literature regarding intergenerational education and the use of digital storytelling suggests there are ample opportunities to integrate innovative programs and projects across various disciplines, which have the potential to benefit students, elderly, and community (Pecorina & Duplaa, 2017). The purpose of this paper will be to highlight some of the benefits as well as potential challenges of implementing educational initiatives that aim to build intergenerational connections and will review digital storytelling as one method. This literature review will focus on: developing an understanding of intergenerational education and learning; the use of digital storytelling in

education and as a method for building intergenerational connections; and the use of digital stories within inclusive or special education programs.

Intergenerational Education and Learning

Historically, many cultures around the world have viewed intergenerational relationships with esteem and respect and have valued the impact these have within education and learning. Indigenous nations take a holistic and unique approach to education, where intergenerational connections and transmission of knowledge are central (Cordoba, n.d). Traditionally, it was through oral history and storytelling that literacy, learning, and philosophies were shared by elders in the community. A former Indigenous scholar from the University of British Columbia, Dr. Jo-ann Archibald, focused much of her research and pedagogy on intergenerational learning and mentoring (University of British Columbia, 2017). She believes intergenerational learning derives from an Indigenous traditional way of learning which was through storytelling from parents and grandparents. She also indicates that intergenerational learning fosters inclusive education and that the interactions with elders and people from different generations can often make students feel comfortable and connected to community. Today many First Nations communities strive to maintain the tradition and the deserved respect of elders to ensure the continuous sharing of their knowledge with younger generations (Cordoba, n.d).

According to Mannion (2016), the definition of intergenerational education has evolved and is still emerging, progressing from a basic aim of improving relationships between generations to a greater goal of gaining knowledge, skills, and values through a reciprocal process. The benefits gained from this process can be at the individual and community level, as well as for greater social causes or injustice. In a report by the European Network for

Intergenerational Learning (2013), it was stated that in order for educational activities to be labelled as intergenerational learning, three criteria must be present. These criteria include: the involvement of more than one generation; engagement in activities that are planned and progressive; and there should be mutual benefit between the generations that promote greater understanding and respect.

There are numerous intergenerational education initiatives, whether in the form of programs, projects, or service learning, that are integrated into curricula, which span various disciplines and grade levels (Sanchez, Whitehorse & Johnson, 2018). Place-based intergenerational education has emerged in recent research, which links practice and place asserting that it is all the elements of those that can create great learning about relationships, communities, and the environment (Mannion, 2016). Mannion refers to this as relational ontology where "participating generations need to be responsive to each other and to a changing and contingent environment in which we are enmeshed" (p. 16).

In British Columbia, an unconventional, yet innovative initiative called the Meadow Lake School Immersion project became a source of learning for students, elderly, educators, researchers, and community and health organizations (i2i Intergenerational Society, 2019). It began in 2000 in Vernon, BC, where students ages 9 to 12 attended school in an assisted living facility for a period of 8 weeks. Since that time, the project has received significant national and international recognition and expanded to other communities including Williams Lake. Findings from this project determined that education can be a critical factor in improving intergenerational communication and attitudes.

Digital Storytelling as a Method for Building Intergenerational Connections

Throughout history and across cultures, oral storytelling has been a method of sharing knowledge and values and it has also been a significant pedagogical approach in education (Smeda, Dakich & Sharda, 2014). Today is no different, however, modern versions of the traditional storytelling are emerging, such as digital storytelling, where various forms of technology are used to create and view the stories. Digital storytelling is a unique approach to teaching and learning that can be used for multiple purposes and within all educational settings from elementary to post-secondary (Hewson, Danbrook & Sieppert, 2015). While the first use of digital storytelling dates back to the early 90s in California, a general definition in much of the literature states that multimedia tools, including graphics, videos, and audio are used to create short stories of 2 to 5 minutes. The narrator uses their own voice to personalize and share their perspectives on people, places, things, or interests (Smeda, Dakich & Sharda, 2014).

As a pedagogical approach, digital storytelling has proven to have benefits for students' learning. In a comprehensive study on the effectiveness of digital storytelling by Smeda, Dakich & Sharda (2014), digital storytelling can facilitate a constructivist approach to teaching, which emphasizes authentic contexts and the social aspects of learning. This allows learners to develop their interpretations and understandings based on their experiences and interactions. Digital storytelling is viewed primarily as a student-led activity and thus can enhance student motivation and creativity. Digital storytelling can also create collaborative learning environments that encourage interpersonal skills and reflection.

In an article examining the combination of digital storytelling with narrative gerontology, the researchers looked at the benefits from a different perspective, both for learners, the elderly, and the listeners (Pecorini & Duplaa, 2017). Digital narrative gerontology involves two people of different generations, who have different knowledge, skills, experiences, and values, who are

engaged in an exchange of storytelling where one person is telling and the other is listening. While students often gain confidence, knowledge, and communication skills, the well-being of elderly participants can also be enhanced through sharing, remembering, and outlining their achievements as well as through their interactions with younger generations. This study outlined some challenges in digital narrative gerontology, such as the ability of the elderly to remember certain stories and the possibility of these memories creating emotional stress and reactions (Pecorini & Duplaa, 2017). It is suggested that the narrators (students) need preparation in interviewing, listening, and narrating, and at that same time must realize that not all of the life stories will necessarily be interesting or positive and may trigger emotional responses.

Digital Stories in Inclusive or Special Education

Planned and sound instruction that incorporates universal design for learning (UDL) can enhance teaching and learning for all students, including students with disabilities both in general classrooms and in special education classrooms. In UDL planning "learner variability is the rule rather than the exception" (UDL Supporting Diversity in BC Schools, 2019). SET-BC, Special Education Technology British Columbia (2019) suggests that technology can support inclusion while improving student outcomes. Pedagogically, digital storytelling is an authentic narrative process that incorporates a variety of learning styles for diverse learners that is both hands-on and experiential (Flottemesch, 2013).

An elementary class in British Columbia recently created digital stories based on First Nations legends through the use of innovative technology (SET-BC, 2019). This inspiring project helped to make learning accessible for all students while enhancing student engagement, independence, and collaboration. In another study at Toledo East Junior High in the United States, a special education teacher explored digital stories in language arts and found numerous

benefits (Michalski, Hodges, & Banister, 2005). Specifically, students in her special education class that typically had extreme challenges with the writing process were in the end able to create stories that showed improvement in vocabulary, sentence structure, and organization. The students were excited about their projects and worked cooperatively with others in the class, assisting each other and sharing their ideas.

There were a few challenges with integrating digital stories into the classroom. The main one being the issues often encountered when learning new technology along with attaining the appropriate resources or equipment (Michalski, Hodges, & Banister, 2005). Moreover, an immense amount of time and effort was required during the planning and creation of the stories. The teacher stressed that implementation of digital storytelling in special education requires flexibility, creative problem solving, and a lot of energy from both teachers and students. However, she also indicated the reward of seeing students engage in an alternative learning approach that can help improve literacy and communication and enhance student pride is worthwhile (Michalski, Hodges, & Banister, 2005).

Smeda, Dakich & Sharda (2014) found that digital storytelling can support students with special needs while improving confidence, as well as social and psychological skills. Digital storytelling allows teachers to build scaffolding into instruction and provide facilitation and consultation, rather than solely relying on teacher-led activities.

Conclusion

Building intergenerational connections is important for a variety of reasons, whether for changing perceptions, improving communication, sharing of knowledge, or improving overall health. It is apparent that through a variety of innovative educational initiatives there is tremendous potential to building these connections benefiting different generations. Using

digital storytelling is one way to cultivate intergenerational connections in education and within communities, including with First Nations and immigrant students. Pecorini & Duplaa (2017) are encouraged by the positive findings of digital storytelling and narrative gerontology, which suggest potential benefits for learners, educators, and the elderly. The process has the possibility of stimulating conversations that extend beyond the subject area, to ones that are invaluable to developing intergenerational relationships while deepening student understanding of their own identity (Flottemesch, 2013). Also, digital storytelling projects reflect the UDL principles and have shown substantial benefits for students with special needs or other literacy challenges. As the world is constantly changing, so will technology and the evolution of digital storytelling. It is essential for educators and communities to seek creative ways to facilitate intergenerational connections and utilizing storytelling is a great way to develop knowledge and about oneself, the elderly, the community, and the environment, which can have significate impact on personal and societal attitudes and values.

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