

Bridging the Basics of Business Law through Digital Storytelling

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Digital storytelling is a powerful and effective instructional tool to engage students in active learning and to support problem based learning. This paper reviews the AACSB standards for quality teaching as a starting point for the creation of a digital storytelling project for use in the undergraduate business law class in the College of Business Administration. The project provided an opportunity for students to learn 21st century skills by creating their own digital stories of actual legal cases in a collaborative learning environment. Each digital story served as a case to be presented to the class for legal analysis, discussion and debate. This paper provides an overview of the digital storytelling project. Benefits and challenges are addressed.

INTRODUCTION

New 21st century technologies present pedagogical challenges and opportunities in business education. As instructors move away from traditional lecture style teaching, they may experiment with emerging technologies that emphasize active learning. Digital storytelling is a promising new technology-based learning tool that instructors may want to consider for use in their business classes. Digital storytelling creates a learning environment that engages students and supports problem based learning.

This paper examines the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International (AACSB) 2010 standards for quality teaching as a foundation for the use of digital storytelling in business education. A semester long project in the undergraduate business law classroom in the College of Business Administration was developed in collaboration

with the university library. This innovative project utilized the case method and instructional design using digital stories to support problem solving and active learning. The project provided an opportunity for students to learn 21st century technological skills by creating their own digital stories of legal cases in a collaborative learning environment. The digital stories were then presented to the class for legal analysis and discussion.

AACSB (2010) STANDARDS

The AACSB (2010) sets standards for quality teaching for faculty members of its accredited business schools. AACSB (2010) Standard 13 recognizes that “the most effective learning takes place when students are involved in their educational experiences. Passive learning is ineffective and of short duration” (p. 56). Faculty members are encouraged by the AACSB standards to develop active learning methodologies that engage students and make them responsible for meeting learning goals. Standard 13 encourages student collaboration, requires faculty to provide students with opportunities to develop cooperative work skills and recognizes the importance of frequent, prompt student feedback.

AACSB (2010) Standard 12 recognizes that “business education is experiencing change in content and process” and that “technological advances in business make changes that regularly outpace the development of teaching and learning materials” (p. 54). Standard 12 recognizes that the “pedagogy and delivery mechanisms of higher education also are changing rapidly, with the introduction of new technology-mediated and action learning practices” (p. 54). Faculty members are encouraged to include instructional innovation in their courses and administrators should provide professional development opportunities to support such innovation (Standard 12 AACSB (2010)).

The 2010 Report of the AACSB Task Force on Business Schools and Innovation echoes the importance of innovation and the need for creativity in today’s business schools. The Report recognizes that one

way that collegiate business schools can support innovation is through teaching. The AACSB (2010) Report states that there is a “growing perception that overemphasizing analytics can stifle creativity, which some argue is necessary for innovation but in short supply among today’s business graduates”.

DIGITAL STORYTELLING

The ancient art of storytelling is the original form of teaching (Pedersen, 1995). From a very young age, children listen to stories, re-tell them in words, song or rhyme and begin to create their own stories. Stories provide a memorable, compelling format for exploration, transferring information and integrating learning (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989). Stories can be used to support learning as problem cases to be solved or as presentations to teach difficult course concepts (Jonassen & Hernandez-Serrano, 2002). When used correctly, stories of real life business situations are a powerful and effective tool to teach management knowledge (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006).

With technological advances and the growing social nature of the internet, it is not surprising that storytelling has turned digital. Digital storytelling is simply the use of digital technology to construct a story. Through the use of widely available digital media software (Photo Story 3, iMovie, Adobe) students collect, arrange and mix together digital images, music, sound clips and recorded narration to create a short 3–5 minute video story.

Over the last few years, digital storytelling has emerged as a powerful and effective teaching and learning tool (Robin, 2008). The most tangible benefit of digital storytelling is its ability to promote learning and engage students (McLellan, 2007; Sadik, 2008). Barrett (2006) found that digital storytelling supports student-centered active learning through the integration of student engagement, project based learning and reflection for deep learning. Robin (2008) argues that a digital story can “serve as an anticipatory set or hook to capture the attention of students and increase their interest in exploring new ideas”. McLellan (2007) found that digital

stories promote “creativity and problem solving while encouraging self-direction and personal initiative, all valuable skills” (p. 68).

There is a growing interest in digital storytelling by corporations. Some corporations use digital stories in their online marketing efforts to build brand awareness and create social communities of customers (Stepanek, 2000). Other corporations are experimenting with digital storytelling to communicate corporate strategy and help their employees make a stronger connection to their firm (Ohara & Cherniss, 2010). Some corporations have discovered the educational value of digital stories and use them as a training tool for their sales force (Gronstedt, 2004).

Despite the increasing use of digital stories by corporations, there is very little research on the use of digital stories in collegiate business education. This is surprising given that business schools utilize the case method for teaching and learning. One innovative use of digital storytelling in business education was undertaken in an undergraduate accounting class (Executive Briefing, 2008). The researcher found that the digital stories of simulated real world business situations gave students an understanding on how accounting theories can work in real life.

THE PROJECT GOALS

Guided by the AACSB (2010) standards, the business faculty member embarked on a mission of innovation in cooperation with the User Education librarian to incorporate digital stories into the business law classroom. The goals of the project were to:

1. Actively involve students in the learning process with the instructors as facilitators providing frequent and timely feedback;
2. Encourage student engagement and interactivity by user created content through Web 2.0 tools;
3. Provide students with opportunities to improve cooperative work skills;
4. Have students develop interpersonal, communication and leadership skills that are highly important in the business world; and,

5. Encourage innovation and creativity along with the mastery of new technology skills.

COLLABORATION THROUGH COURSE WIKI

Digital storytelling programs are usually collaborative in nature. By working in groups, students learn to build organizational skills. Each group of three to four students were required to read an assigned legal case, discuss it on the group wiki and then prepare a brief of the case. The teacher logged on the wiki frequently to monitor participation and provide positive, timely feedback and guidance where needed. The wiki supported cooperative work skills and made the students' work visible. Case discussion was an important aspect of the project. The students had an opportunity to discuss important legal concepts and issues with their peers on the wiki. Open ended questions were posted on the wiki by the instructor to spur discussion. The online discussion environment helped foster learning between the students and avoided the ever-present scheduling conflicts that seem to occur when assigning group work.

CREATION OF THE DIGITAL STORY: STORYBOARD AND PRODUCTION

Each group was required to create a digital story based simply on the relevant facts of the assigned case. The stories were not to include the reasoning or decision of the court. To this end, each group worked cooperatively in the preparation of a storyboard. The storyboard involves the planning, timing, and sequencing of the scenes and the interaction of the imagery, audio and narrative components (Chung, 2007). To assist the students with this task, a storyboard template was posted on the wiki.

To support the students with the planning of their digital stories, the librarian posted numerous resources to the wiki including copyright guidelines and open source sites used for images and sound.

Next, a hands-on digital storytelling workshop was held in the library to assist students with the creation of their digital stories. Although these

digital natives communicate through tweets, chats, emails and texts, the majority of the students had never used multimedia software applications to create a digital story. Through the use of free user-friendly digital imaging software (Microsoft® Photostory 3), the students used computers to create their digital stories from the digital images, music and sounds they had previously collected. All the students required some assistance and guidance in producing their stories. The students seemed to master the software fairly quickly and appeared deeply engaged in the task of producing their stories.

PRESENTATION OF THE DIGITAL STORY

The final phase of the project involved the presentation of the digital stories to the class. The students seemed excited and proud to present their stories. At the end of each presentation, each group presented discussion questions to further their classmates' understanding of the legal issues and concepts in the case. The memorable digital stories provided students with an opportunity to expand their knowledge of legal concepts through the analysis and discussion of the case..

CHALLENGES

Many teachers do not have a good understanding of how to use new emerging technologies as teaching and learning tools in their classroom (Robin, 2008). Learning new technologies like digital storytelling is time consuming for educators. Due to the growing number of technologies available and their novelty, "many teachers have not have received adequate training to select appropriate technologies and lack support to use them" (Judge, Puckett & Cabuk, 2004, pgs.386387). Learning the technology tool cannot be the goal of the program but the pedagogical benefits of the emerging technology must be kept in mind. It is easy for an instructor to get caught up in adding new Web 2.0 tools to their classroom, but the instructor must never lose sight of the important learning goals. Technical and copyright issues relating to the use of music

and images downloaded from the internet need to be explained to the students. Assessment of the digital stories is also a challenge for the instructor given the unfamiliarity with the methodology.

Another problem relates to the level of risk that is inherent with all new teaching techniques. Some anxiety is unavoidable when experimenting with new teaching and learning methods. The risk of failure may even prevent faculty from experimenting with new techniques and strategies. It may be easier for an instructor to return to their comfort zone of tried and true practices. Risk is not purely negative and can be a motivator to achieve great innovation in teaching and learning. An innovative spirit, creativity and a sense of humor may be needed when experimenting with new methodologies in the classroom.

Another problem with new technological tools is time management. It is extremely time consuming to develop, create, and field test new innovative teaching methods. An instructor who needs to focus on class preparation, grading, research, service and student advisement may have little time left over for innovation. There may also be a lack of institutional and department support for their efforts to innovate in the classroom. You may have to personally seek out campus collaborations in efforts to enhance learning opportunities that introduce new technologies. The User Education librarian acted as a resource for both students and business faculty member. The librarian was also available to the students for research instruction and support.

Unfortunately, teaching innovation is not always rewarded in academia. Tenure and other advancement measures at some higher education institutions may be more closely tied to research and publication, not teaching excellence. The creation of innovative teaching practices, projects and materials may also not receive the same recognition from peers as more traditional scholarly activities.

CONCLUSION

Digital storytelling embraces multi-media technology that is familiar to today's digitally connected college students. It successfully meets the

quality teaching requirements set by the standards of the AACSB (2010) by providing active student involvement, student engagement, instructional innovation, and opportunities for cooperative learning. It also addresses the concerns of the 2010 AACSB Task Force for the need for more innovation and creativity in collegiate business schools. Through the sharing of digital stories, students develop their critical thinking skills by identifying and discussing important legal issues. Digital stories also provide students with a hands-on project to gain valuable creative, communication and technological skills in a collaborative learning environment.

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