



That night, at home, the weight of that familiar old fork in my hand and the comfort of the warm running water was bittersweet, making me feel both lucky and guilty.

*Special thanks to Sean Kelley, the women of ICIW, and the reviewers for the Journal of Cultural Research in Art Education.

Rachel Marie-Crane Williams is an associate professor at the University of Iowa with appointments in the School of Art and Art History, Gender, Women's and Sexuality Studies, and the College of Education. She can be contacted at Rachel-williams@uiowa.edu.

Digital Storytelling and the Pedagogy of Human Rights

GAIL BENICK

ABSTRACT

The increase in global migration has given rise to new concepts of citizenship and belonging. In the post-colonial era, the maintenance of a collective identity has been redefined as a human right. This paper considers the role of art educators in promoting the right to one's own culture as a site of minority resistance and empowerment. The inclusion of digital storytelling in art education offers an opportunity to intervene in the field of representation, to contest negative images and transform representational practices around race and ethnicity in a more positive direction.

Migration, arguably *the* defining global issue of the 21st century, has increased in volume and political significance in the post-colonial era. Although mass migration, both voluntary and forced, is hardly a new feature of human history, there is a growing recognition that the current global dispersion of migrant populations has given rise to a new order of instability (Appadurai, 1996; Spiro, 2004). In many classic countries of immigration such as Canada, the United States and Australia, the shift from race-based policies to race-neutral policies of admission has contributed to high levels of racial, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity among the populace of these nations. But the urban concentration of diverse peoples and cultures has undoubtedly led to a world brimming with tension, confusion and conflict. For the relocated subject, the migrant experience is often fraught with disruption, displacement and loss. Whether the migratory flow involves labor migrants, permanent settlers, exiles or refugees, a formidable longing for homelands may accompany individuals into the diasporic wilderness, encumbered by what Edward Said (2000) has called an "unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place" (p.173). After settlement follows either secure legal status and gradual acceptance, or exclusion, socioeconomic marginalization and the formation of minorities whose presence is widely regarded as undesirable and divisive. In many countries of settlement today, the urge to return to old conventions and fundamental values is palpable, resulting in a trend toward heightened xenophobia and intolerance of difference.

New concepts of citizenship and belonging have emerged to accommodate mass migration and major demographic shifts, but with a distinctive twist.

Neither citizenship nor belonging is now anchored in a single nation state. Until the late twentieth century, citizenship and loyalty to the state were still considered to form an inseparable bond. Only recently have we witnessed the acceptance of dual or multiple citizenship on a global scale in which belonging is decoupled from the national collectivity and is no longer territory-based (Faist & Kivisto, 2007). Under such circumstances, the universal right to one's own culture within and without national borders has emerged as a pressing dimension of human rights discourse. The Sri Lankan writer Shyam Selvadurai (2004) described the impact on transnational migrants this way:

Dual identity is a burden forced on them by the fact that their bodies, or their skins to be precise, do not represent the nation-state they are in, thus compelling them to wear their difference on their sleeve and carry it around on their back. (p. 2)

This paper considers the role of art educators in promoting the right to one's own culture as a site of minority resistance and empowerment. As the institution of national citizenship disaggregates and new modalities of membership evolve (Benhabib, 2007), human rights concerns assume particular importance for art educators. Pedagogical approaches in art education must challenge the way visual representations signify the other (Desai, 2000) and enable students to recast those who have been termed foreigners and aliens in a more complex and historically accurate framework (Desai, Hamlin, & Mattson, 2010).

Sixty years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed a wide spectrum of human rights that every human being has without discrimination. They include the right to freedom of expression and freedom from torture or ill-treatment. The right to education, adequate housing and other economic, social and cultural rights are guaranteed in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as in other legally binding international and regional human rights treaties. Nearly every country in the world is party to a legally binding treaty that guarantees these rights, which include the cultural rights of minorities and Indigenous Peoples. Fostered by massive decolonization in the post-war period and through the works of such international organizations as the United Nations, UNESCO and the Council of Europe, the right to one's own culture has gained increasing legitimacy (Soysal, 1999). Collective identity has been redefined as a human right and identities have become important organizational and symbolic tools for creating new group solidarities. Yet, despite the enormous growth in rights-consciousness, the so called rights revolution has been slow to deliver on its promise in this area. The right of groups to maintain traditions and cultural practices remains a contested arena in many nations, including in Canada where the shift from assimilationist to more multicultural models of integration dates back to the 1970s.

In the Canadian context, the duty to protect culture and accommodate racial and ethno-cultural diversity was formally adopted by the federal government with the declaration of an official policy on multiculturalism in 1971. The right to cultural preservation was later enshrined in the Multiculturalism Act in 1988 and entrenched in Section 27 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. To be sure, the trend toward acceptance of cultural diversity is reflected in other countries, but Canada can be considered unique in the extent to which the duty to accommodate cultural diversity has been legalized, constitutionalized and absorbed into the national narrative (Kymlicka, 2003). Still, fissures seem to be emerging in the Canadian mosaic as evidenced in the proposed law to ban niqabs for those seeking public services in the Province of Quebec and the recent backlash against Tamil asylum seekers. As in Europe, public discourse in Canada reflects growing concern for the lack of newcomer integration, particularly in the post 9/11 period. Arrival cities—those immigrant neighborhoods located on the outskirts of major urban centers which have long served as gateway communities—are increasingly viewed with caution as potential parallel societies marked by anger, isolation and cultural separateness (Saunders, 2010).

At the same time, criticism of multiculturalism is emerging from many quarters with calls to strike the term from the national vocabulary and pleas to reframe the problem from one of accommodating cultural differences to accepting differences of identity. The nation state, according to Appiah (2010), cannot be asked to treat all cultural differences the same. Homophobia and honor killings may be cultural traditions, but liberal democracies are not obliged to accommodate these beliefs and practices. The nation state can, however, foster a civic culture which recognizes that identity groups are entitled to equal respect regardless of gender, sexuality, race, religion or national origin. In this regard, teachers as cultural workers are engaged in an essentially political practice (Freire, 2005) and have a pivotal role to play in the guarantee of fundamental human rights.

What tools do art educators have to develop a pedagogy of human rights? An approach that is gaining widespread favor across the educational spectrum is digital storytelling which combines the ancient art of telling stories with digital content, including images, sound and video to create multimedia productions. The popularity of digital storytelling coincides with the rise of a new ecosystem of information sharing. Social media now provide the means to make, distribute and consume content faster and cheaper than ever before, a phenomenon that has been described as an unprecedented jump in expressive capability (Shirky, 2008). The result is the mass amateurization of authorship and the frequent evocation of the personal voice. In learning environments, digitally rendered stories, culled from a range of sources, including letters, interviews, family

photo albums, artifacts and memory, allow students to reflect on their cultural identity and lay claim to habits, likes, beliefs, fears and desires which may differ substantially from the mainstream. Digital storytelling, then, can be an effective mechanism for preserving a culture of one's own, an opportunity not only to collect invisible histories but to authenticate them.

These twin intentions—to retrieve untold stories and legitimize them— informed the decision to introduce digital storytelling into a course titled Intercultural Communication delivered jointly by Sheridan College and the University of Toronto at Mississauga located in the Greater Toronto Area. Like other universities and colleges in this region, a high degree of diversity exists in the student population. In 2005, an Intercultural Communication course survey provided the following data: 27 percent of the 127 respondents resided in bilingual households. A total of 30 different languages were represented in the group, including Urdu, Polish, Korean, Arabic, Italian, Serbian, Swahili, Tamil and French. Three out of four students were able to carry on a conversation in two or more languages. 19 lived in unilingual households in which only Chinese was spoken. In 2010, 53 percent of the 94 respondents to the course survey were born outside of Canada.

For the course director, Professor Gail Benick, the demographics of the classroom provided a cogent reason to focus the digital storytelling exercise on migration and settlement. The goal of the project was to enhance student understanding of immigration by allowing learners to define, order and convey the immigrant experience from their own cultural perspectives. Students were asked to write a short personal narrative of 400 words on one particular incident related to their immigration to Canada or that of their family. From the outset, it was understood that the finished multimedia productions would be screened by peers and possibly showcased for larger audiences. The move from the private to the public sphere demanded that students carefully assess their choice of story to ensure that family confidences were not betrayed or family members put at risk. The written text then became the basis for their movies.

The criteria for the assignment adhered closely to the Seven Principles for Digital Storytelling developed by the Center for Digital Storytelling in Berkeley, California. According to the Center's executive director Joe Lambert (2002), an effective digital story includes the following elements: 1. A point of view which defines the specific realization that the author is trying to communicate within the story and is expressed from the first-person perspective; 2. A dramatic question which drives the action of the story and sustains the creative tension; 3. Emotional content which explores the author's inner feelings; 4. The storyteller's voice which is recorded in a voiceover; 5. A powerful soundtrack which establishes the mood of the movie and changes the way the viewer perceives

the visual information; 6. An economical structure built on a small number of images and video, as well as a relatively short text; 7. Attention to pacing or the rhythm of the story and the occasional change of pace. The Center for Digital Storytelling's model with its infusion of a strong emotional component and personal tone, supported the goal of the digital storytelling assignment in Intercultural Communication. This approach enabled students to undertake the conceptual work of constructing new understandings of their immigrant identities and places of belonging. Similarly, the technical criteria for the assignment, developed by Professor Elizabeth Littlejohn (2010), were consistent with the above Seven Principles, as seen in the following instructions to students:

For this assignment, the narrative is told from the first person point of view, with your voice providing the voiceover. It should be one to two minutes in duration, and use Flash animation, with images either hand drawn or found through archival research or family photos. The use of clip art is discouraged. A consistent voice is maintained through the narrative with a clear delineation of who the narrator is as situated in the story. Is the narrator the protagonist relating events that occurred to her/him directly, the re-teller of the story or a first person witness?

By encouraging hand drawn images and photos found in family archives rather than the use of clip art, Littlejohn privileged student-generated depictions of self and culture over stereotypical representations. The exceptions were the acceptable use of such symbols as flags, as well as maps, which were informational in nature. To achieve compositional economy, students were limited to eight to ten different images, thus forcing them to pay close attention to the placement of visual elements in each screen and the sequencing of images over time. As Lambert (2002) stated, "storytelling with images means consciously economizing language in relationship to the narrative that is provided by the juxtaposition of images" (p. 57). Compelling students to consider carefully the relationship between the two tracks of meaning, the visual and the auditory, is one benefit of digital, as opposed to traditional methods, of storytelling.

The final digital stories that resulted from this assignment depicted, to a large extent, social difference, dissonance and self-discovery, themes that emerged early in the writing stage of the project. As one student stated in her assessment of the written assignment: "It was very personal to me to write this story. It brought back some deep feelings and hurt. It made me realize that being here was not easy and was hard to deal with when I was young." Drawing mainly on childhood memories, some students revisited incidents they had previously tried to forget. "I really had to contemplate to release the feelings I had locked away for several years," another student wrote. For others, remembering itself played a transformative role. "My memory of coming to Canada is still very clear. I

sometimes also reflect back to the experience I had, and now I look at myself, I have come a long way.”

The digital story assignments clustered around three distinct storylines. Memories of school were the most common source of story content, particularly school experiences that were perceived to be extraordinary in some way or to elicit a powerful emotional response rather than more everyday aspects of going to school. Students were more likely to remember events that were angering or humiliating, such as the first day in a new school. These stories implicitly posed questions about vulnerability and acceptance. For example, one student wrote in her story:

I will never forget entering a predominantly white (Caucasian) elementary school and being the only Black girl in my class. Though it wasn't the only time I felt different from everyone else, I remember thinking after that experience that I wanted it to be the last time I cared.

The social markers of race and class surfaced in many of the school narratives as students began to interrogate the condition of being outsiders. In one movie a Chinese student represented his experience of otherness by showing twenty pairs of little blue eyes staring at him on his first day in Grade 1. His feeling of isolation abated only when his mother gave him a lucky jade necklace which enabled him to return to the classroom the next day with his head held high. Other digital stories addressed the embarrassment and shame associated with not being able to speak English or what was perceived as inappropriate dress. Anxiety, rooted in perceptions of social difference and inequity, emanated from a student's depiction of her first day at school:

I walk over to the empty chair in the corner and survey the small room of white faces, straight hair and crisp, clean clothes. I compare our differences as the classroom floods with chatter and mumble. I sit. I sigh. I hope that the hardest part of the day one is over. While Mrs. Lazarus finishes the class attendance, I daze off into my internal world; the world where no one is different and everyone is the same, the world where teachers don't pronounce my name wrong and then say it's unique, the world where adults don't ask me where I am from and children don't ask to touch my hair, the world where I have so many questions but no answers. On the board the teacher wrote the assignment for students to discuss in groups: WHAT DID YOU DO THIS SUMMER? They all start talking at once about vacations, camping, barbeques and parties. I think about how I can make moving for the fifth time sound as fun as going camping and having barbeques. “Well...” I finally mutter: “...to be honest I didn't really...” “How come your hair's like that?” the blond girl interrupts.

The often told lunch box story also foregrounded the experience of cultural estrangement. In this set of stories, students were grappling with fears of cultural slippage and loss as they navigated the dominant world of public education. In their movies, students typically visualized traditional, homemade foods—pasta made by nonna/grandmother or stir-fried noodles cooked by mom—which were then packed into shiny lunch boxes in contrast to the western lunch staple of peanut butter and jam sandwiches carried in brown bags. One student lamented that she “envied whatever was in those wrinkly brown paper bags.” Caught between home and school cultures, the immigrant children in these stories resolved the dilemma by throwing their uneaten lunches into school garbage cans. One student narrated the experience in this way:

A semester into Grade 4, Mom realized where my lunches were ending up. She told me about the less fortunate children around the world who were starving to death. I didn't listen. One day, she packed me a peanut butter sandwich. I ate my lunch that day at school. I cringed at the bland taste and the dry texture of the sandwich. At that moment I thought of Mom's home cooked meals and all the lunches I threw away.... I realized that as much as I tried to conceal my Chinese background, there are just some things that I could not hide, even if it was as simple as my eating habits.

The sensory description of the bland and dry peanut butter sandwich reflected the student's awakening agency in negotiating her dual identities. She no longer felt that she had to hide her Chinese background and could eat her mother's food at school.

Stories focusing on names frequently raised the possibility of cultural erasure and have in the past signalled pressure to assimilate into the settlement society. In this set of stories, students struggled with the unusual sound of their names in a new environment, but were able to resolve the cultural differences reflected in their names by the end of the stories. For example, in a movie titled “My Name is Ruvani” the student began by bemoaning her odd name. She wishes for a Canadian name like Sarah, Rebecca or Nicole so that she can buy a bookmark with her name on it at the Hallmark shop. However, the student came to accept her name when she learned that Ruvani, a traditional Sri Lankan name meaning beautiful, had been passed down from generation to generation in her family. In another story, a student pondered the change in the pronunciation of her name. In Hong Kong “Ng” sounded like a grunt, but in Canada the surname “Ng” was pronounced as Nung Eng, Ang or Ong. The learner had no explanation for the change in pronunciation. “I don't know why my name sounds different when we immigrated; maybe the ocean we flew over altered it somehow.” She concluded by inserting herself into the discourse on cultural loss and displacement, not as a victim but as an exuberant performer: “What I do know is that the written

character in Chinese looks like a person playing a keyboard and waving at the audience.”

Although the creation of multimedia productions about migration can present challenges to the student's ability to retrieve site specific content, the advantage of the visual narrative over the written essay can be found in the very need to collect photos and other artifacts which serve to anchor students more firmly in their kinship networks and communities of belonging. One student wrote in his assessment: “I used a photo that I found in a picture album in my crawl space, which in turn led to me asking my grandparents about their immigration experience.” Many other students reported that the assignment necessitated phone calls home and the search for archival evidence that could be included in their movies. A student commented that she enjoyed completing an assignment that she could put a bit of herself into rather than an essay based project. Yet another stated that he liked being able to combine narrative, images and sound to complete an assignment. He noted that a feeling of pride in his life and family was reflected in his movie. In this case, easy distribution of his digital story to family in Canada and his country of origin was no doubt a project advantage.

For art educators, digital storytelling offers an opportunity to intervene in the field of representation by providing tools for students to lay claim to a culture of one's own. Expanding that space of authority holds great potential for a pedagogy of human rights, including in its reach not only the storytellers, but also the audience. The presumed objectivity of experts and official records is corrected by the personal voice of immigrants themselves. As one student wrote after viewing the work of his peers, “These movies show that immigration and settlement into Canada are a unique and subjective experience for everyone. Some are uplifting and some are more pessimistic, but they are all completely subjective.” Another student stated that “while statistics give numbers, these stories take every one of the numbers and give the history and reasoning behind it.” In other words, alternate versions of immigration began to emerge during the in-class screening process. A student commented that “the movies had great impact on my perception of the traditional ‘immigrant story.’ I was honestly surprised at how varied these stories were and how each film found a way to surprise my preconceived notions of personal immigration experiences.” Students started to contest negative images of immigrants, noting that “having to view these movies today... allowed me to put away the stereotypes” and “these videos definitely helped break the misconceptions and prejudice people often have in their minds, built and promoted by the media.” The feedback from most learners was reflected in a single sentence of one viewer: “I have a deep empathy for anyone who starts over.” A second classmate noted that “I have

never moved outside Toronto and cannot relate to this struggle, but I see that it must be very scary.” A third viewer acknowledged that “many people who immigrate to Canada feel extremely alienated from Canadian culture, especially if it is at school.” By positioning students at the intersection of the affective and cognitive domains of learning, art educators can assist learners to question assumptions made about immigrants, generate new interpretations of migration and bridge the social gap. Through technology and art's protective lens, the grief experienced by people out of place is transmuted and can feel liberating in the moment of telling painful truths.

As a hybrid approach, digital stories empower students to create in a new medium combining still and moving images, narrative, timing, music, recorded voices and other sounds at a time when digital filmmaking is emerging as an artform. Visual artists, such as Shirin Neshat, are incorporating elements of digital storytelling into their work to examine historical events that have largely been forgotten, as well as gender and cultural difference. In an interview conducted in 2010 regarding her first feature length film, “Women Without Men,” Neshat stated:

I have come to the conclusion that art can be a very powerful tool to communicate and frame some of the most significant issues we face in the world. I'm therefore more than ever committed to making art that functions beyond an aesthetic exercise; art that is also socially responsible without being didactic. I can't say that my film has offered any answers but I can easily say that my film “Women Without Men” spoke both to Iranians and to the Westerners about an aspect of our history that has been largely forgotten and should be revisited as it marks a criminal pattern in the American foreign policy. But most importantly I suppose the film tried to establish that, it is possible to tell a story that is at once philosophical, emotional and lyrical but also deeply political. (Valencia, para. 24)

Digital storytelling can be applied to a wide range of socially relevant issues in the art classroom to examine discriminatory practices and unjust treatment affecting the lives of students. In this way, digital storytelling connects the visual arts to other fields of knowledge in the humanities and social sciences, thus drawing attention to the permeable boundaries of art education. The future development of a pedagogy of human rights requires a sustained focus on transdisciplinarity in research and practice.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The author wishes to thank the students in CCT 200 Intercultural Communication, Fall, 2010 for their participation in the digital storytelling exercise and for permission to use their assignments in this article.

REFERENCES

- Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Appiah, K. (2010, October 6). The multicultural mirage. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/opinions/the-multicultural-mirage/article1744245/>
- Benhabib, S. (2004). *The rights of others. Aliens, citizens and residents. The John Seeley Memorial Lectures*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Desai, D. (2000). Imagining difference: The politics of representation in multicultural art education. *Studies in Art Education*, 41(2), 114-129.
- Desai, D., Hamlin, J., & Mattson, R. (2010). *History as art, art as history*. New York: Routledge.
- Faist, T., & Kivisto, P. (Eds.). (2007). *Dual citizenship in global perspective*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Freire, P. (2005). *Teachers as cultural workers*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Kymlicka, W. (2003). Canadian multiculturalism in historical and comparative perspective. *Constitutional Forum*, 13(1) 1-8. Retrieved from http://www.law.ualberta.ca/centres/ccs/uploads/1-ConstitutionalForum13_1.pdf
- Lambert, J. (2002). *Digital storytelling*. Berkeley, CA: Digital Diner Press.
- Littlejohn, E. (2010). Intercultural communication syllabus. Oakville, Ontario: Sheridan College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning.
- Said, E.W. (2000). *Reflections on exile*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Saunders, D. (2010). *Arrival city*. Toronto: Knopf Canada.
- Selvadurai, S. (2004). *Story-wallah! A celebration of South Asian fiction*. Toronto: Thomas Allen.
- Shirky, C. (2008). *Here comes everybody*. New York: Penguin.
- Soysal, Y.N. (2000). Citizenship and identity: Living in diasporas in post-war Europe? *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 23(1), 1-15. Retrieved from http://tires.euv-frankfurt-o.de/data/pdf-doc/soysal_citizenship.pdf
- Spiro, P.J. (2004). Mandated membership, diluted identity: Citizenship, globalization, and international law. In A. Brysk & G. Shafir (Eds.), *People Out of Place: Globalization, Human Rights and the Citizenship Gap* (pp. 87-105). New York and London: Routledge.
- Valencia, I. (Interviewer) & Neshat, S. (Interviewee). (2010). *Artfacts.Net* [Interview transcript]. Retrieved from Artifacts.net Web site: <http://www.artfacts.net/index.php/pageType/newsInfo/newsID/5784/lang/>

Gail Benick is a professor in the joint program in Communication, Culture and Information Technology at Sheridan Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning, and University of Toronto at Mississauga. She can be contacted at gail.benick@sheridan.on.ca.

Disrupting Discourses Digitally for LGBTQ Rights

MINDI RHOADES

ABSTRACT

Current dominant discourses maintain an anti-LGBTQ bias that contributes to and reinforces the continued denial of full, equal LGBTQ rights. Educational environments can exacerbate this denial, to the point of implicitly sanctioning harassment and physical human rights abuses. While digital media can infinitely reproduce and replicate these discriminatory discourses, they also offer virtual spaces and possibilities for collective, community, arts-based actions/responses to disrupt, and change, them (Desai & Chalmers, 2007). Sandoval and Latorre's (2008) activism, Blackburn's (2002) liberatory literacy performances, and Richardson's (2010) interventionist art provide a useful framework for considering, engaging, and challenging contemporary LGBTQ discourses. Their work provides a context for examining hateful/negative, positive/celebratory, and more complicated, conflicted examples of LGBTQ cultural discourses circulating currently. Liberatory discourse attempts are necessary, but these can encounter complex, shifting factors able to co-opt, negate, or neutralize their messages. Art education can help students use new technologies and media to identify such complexities, recognize possibilities, and work for equity.

TENSIONS AND POSSIBILITIES

This moment in America (re)presents multiple, often conflicting, messages around sexual identities and social justice. In fall of 2010, American media focused attention on a tragic series of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ¹) youth suicides. Badash (2010) reports up to 11 anti-gay, hate-related teen suicides in September 2010 alone. At least three of them endured documented relentless bullying at school about being gay *despite repeated student and parent complaints* (Dottinga & Mundell, 2010). An 18-year-old Rutgers student, unknowingly had his sexual encounter with another male streamed online live (Friedman, 2010). A Black gay youth activist "could not bear the burden of living as a gay man of color in a world grown cold and hateful to those of us who live and love differently than the so-called 'social mainstream'" (Barker, 2010). Meanwhile, openly gay Ellen DeGeneres' television show maintains a top-25 rating, with 12 *Daytime Emmys* in its 7-year run (Seidman, 2010). *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*, the 17-year old United States' military policy banning homosexuals

¹ For the purposes of this paper, I use "LGBTQ," "gay," and "homosexual" as interchangeable, deferring to source material or speakers' word choices when appropriate, without interrogating the problems inherent in the terms and their use as labels.