Digital Storytelling in the Time of COVID: Developing Writing Pedagogies with Pre-Service Teachers

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Abstract

This qualitative case study examined a cross-curricular collaboration between two-methods instructors using digital storytelling to engage pre-service teachers in developing writing pedagogies through the curriculum integration and authentic application of the practice of writing and technology. Pre-service teachers learned about writing techniques in a writing methods course and relevant components of digital storytelling in their technology class. These experiences were combined and resulted in the pre-service teachers developing a digital story related to their experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. An analysis of participants' work products including their digital stories, reflective essays, and exit slips was conducted to discern emergent patterns around two research questions: 1. What patterns and themes emerged in examining the content and craft of candidates' digital stories? 2. How does the personal use (and sharing) of digital stories influence candidates' perceptions of their own writing and its connection to supporting the development of writers in elementary classrooms? Results revealed that the learning experience facilitated participants' connections to their future practice and the benefits of digital storytelling for their future students, including differentiating instruction, writing for an authentic audience, developing digital literacies, and increasing social-emotional learning.

Keywords: pre-service teachers, educator preparation programs, literacy, digital literacy, writing pedagogy, digital storytelling

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Literacy development has consistently been the purview of pre-service elementary teachers. Broadly defined, literacy focuses on receptive and generative communication including reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Despite the need to engage students in each of these modalities, there has been little emphasis on writing in K–12 classrooms (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Brindle et al., 2015; Gillespie et al., 2013). In 2003, the National Commission on Writing reported that NAEP assessment data revealed that 97% of elementary students reported spending less than three hours a week on writing and writing assignments; approximately half of twelfth-graders surveyed reported completing an assignment of 3 or more pages once or twice a month, while approximately 40% reported never having such assignments. In 2015, Brindle et al. further supported the notion that students write little in elementary classrooms when discovering that third and fourth-grade teachers reported only teaching writing for 15 minutes a day with students only writing 25 minutes a day (across disciplines and content areas). Given the reality that writing is often de-emphasized or neglected altogether in K–12 classrooms, it is important that pre-service teachers understand not only the importance of writing instruction, but that they understand how to engage students in the process of writing. One means of supporting this understanding and the development of writing pedagogy is to support pre-service teachers in their own personal writing development so that they may model and convey a writing identity in their future classrooms.

In the context of the 21st century, it is also critical to acknowledge the intertwining of writing, composition, digital literacy, and digital tools. The emergence of digital technologies, including the Internet and information and communication technologies (ICTs), has changed what it means to be literate. Building on foundational literacies, new literacies require students to develop the knowledge and skills to read, write, view, and communicate with the numerous ICTs that we use

daily (Leu et al., 2004). As a result, preparation programs must also prepare their students to use instructional technologies to teach foundational, new, and digital literacies.

Although the importance of written communication and digital literacy are evident, challenges abound for pre-service teachers as they transfer learning into their own classrooms. Specifically, there is a need to support them in understanding the value of written composition and digital literacy and to develop their sense of efficacy in implementing instruction supporting written composition and the use of digital tools. Research on transfer in the process of learning "indicates that students often do not spontaneously transfer what they have learned, at least not across superficially dissimilar scenarios" (Goldstone & Day, 2012, p. 149). Research on pre-service teachers' ability to use technology to teach has found that while most pre-service teachers feel prepared to use technology in the classroom, few of them integrate technology in their lessons (Batane & Ngwako, 2017). This speaks to the challenge faced by methods teachers who work to support students in the development of theory and methodology to carry into their future teaching practice.

In order to support teacher candidates' development in writing pedagogy and understanding of the importance of writing instruction, and in recognition of the value of intentional integration of technology methods and content methods, two professors in an educator preparation program collaborated to create a shared learning experience. The two professors, one teaching a technology methods class and the other a literacy methods class, designed a learning experience engaging candidates in the creation of a digital story connected to COVID-19. Candidates developed the composition portion of the assignment through their literacy methods class and learned about digital storytelling and relevant tools through their technology methods class.

The purpose of this study is to examine candidates' experience with the process, including an analysis of their products, reflections on the process, and their thinking about their own writing development and future classroom instruction. The

findings of the study will benefit the development of composition skills and digital literacy of pre-service teachers' future students. Additionally, the study of the process benefits educator preparation providers by demonstrating the positive impact of collaborative efforts of methods instructors to create authentic learning experiences.

Review of Literature

Educator preparation programs can support pre-service teachers' use of technology by employing digital tools in their courses (Shedrow, 2021). Historically, pre-service teachers have learned about instructional technologies in stand-alone technology courses; however, research has demonstrated this to be an ineffective method in preparing pre-service teachers to successfully integrate technology into their instruction (Karatas, 2014). While stand-alone courses continue to be used in many educator preparation programs, a more effective approach to teaching candidates to effectively use technologies to support instruction is by integrating them into methods and content courses (Childs, Sorensen, & Twidle, 2011; Foulger, Wetzel, & Buss, 2019; Pierson & Thompson, 2005; Tondeur, van Braak, et al., 2012). This approach is aligned with Shulman's (1986) work on aligning pedagogy with content knowledge as well as Mishra's and Koehler's (2006) related research on the incorporation of technology to support pedagogical approaches to teaching content knowledge.

Humans are natural storytellers and by engaging students in the act of storytelling, teachers can help them to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Gaeta et al., 2014) while facilitating their ability to make sense of the world and their personal experiences (Egan, 1988; Rambe & Mlambo, 2014; Wyatt-Smith & Kimber, 2009). Digital Storytelling–short movies that combine "the art of telling stories with a variety of digital multimedia" (e. g., images, audio, and video)–has been popular in K–12 classrooms since the early 1990s (Robin, 2006, p. 1). These short movies typically take the form of one of three types: personal narrative, historical events, or informational/instructional. Each of the different formats of digital stories

must contain seven elements: point of view, a dramatic question, emotional content, the creator's voice, music, under three minutes long, and appropriately paced (Robin, 2006). The continued popularity of digital storytelling in the classroom can be attributed to the instructional benefits they provide students and teachers (Girmen, Özkanal, & Dayan, 2019).

Perhaps the primary benefit of integrating digital stories into the classroom is the development of traditional literacy skills. Creating digital stories can improve writing (Alismail, 2015; Shelby-Caffey, Úbéda, & Jenkins, 2014; Tanrıkulu, 2022) by engaging students in a "continual process of planning, writing, and creating," including "constant revision as students evaluate whether the story works and is appropriate for the intended audience" (Yearta, Helf, & Harris, 2018, p. 15). The digital nature of these stories allows them to be placed online and shared with a wider, authentic audience, which has been shown to prompt students to spend more time planning (Graham & Harris, 2013) and revising their stories (Sylvester & Greenidge, 2009) as well as to be more active and invested in the writing process (Graham & Perrin, 2019; Yearta, Helf, & Harris, 2018). Through sharing their stories with an authentic audience, students come to understand that being part of a collective conversation means listening and learning about ourselves and one another (Yearta, Helf, & Harris, 2018, p. 15). This process can assist in the development of a sense of community (Bromley, 2010; Cunningham, 2015; Lambert, 2013), an understanding of each other and the world (Cunningham, 2015; Lambert, 2013), empathy and perspective-taking (Garcia & Rossiter, 2010; Yearta, Helf, & Harris, 2018), and an emotional connection to the content students are learning about. Writing can support students' emotional health through offering an avenue for expression (Smyth, 1998).

Digital storytelling has also been linked to gains in students' reading fluency and oral language skills (Campbell & Hlusek, 2015; Isbell et al., 2004; Liu, Tai, & Liu, 2018; Morgan, 2014). Creating digital storytelling circles can improve student reading (Morgan, 2014). Fluency and vocabulary can also be improved when teachers assign students to work collaboratively

with a peer on their stories (Morgan, 2014) and encourage them to use new words in their stories (Royer & Richards, 2008). The creation of digital stories has been shown to excite reluctant readers about literacy (Morgan, 2014).

In addition to the development of traditional literacy skills, the integration of digital stories in the classroom provides teachers with the opportunity to engage students in the development of several new literacies. As noted by Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, Castek, and Henry (2013) "new literacies build upon foundational literacies rather than replace them completely" (p. 5). Communication through traditional literacies, reading and writing, will take new forms as text is combined with new media that allows multiple modes of communication (Leu et al., 2013). By incorporating digital storytelling into their instruction, teachers allow students to demonstrate learning through multiple modes of communication (Miller & McVee, 2012), which in turn can expand their understanding of what "counts as valued communication" (Hull & Nelson, 2005, p. 253). Johnson and Kendrick (2016) explain that working with different modes and their respective cognitive and affective qualities challenged the students in their study to take different approaches to thinking about their experiences. The process of choosing an appropriate image further involved considering which image best represented their own experience of that emotion through design elements such as color, light, perspective, and foregrounding. Finally, selecting music (i.e., thinking musically) required paying attention to the overall structure of a piece and its elements, such as tempo, dynamics, melody, key, and instrumentation (p. 672).

Using different modes of communication in a literacy project can "shed new light for students on their experiences and themselves" as well as improve their self-confidence and positive identities and lead to increased feelings of personal achievement and significance (Johnson & Kendrick, 2016, p. 673). The multimodal nature of digital storytelling can also assist struggling writers including English Language Learners (Dollar & Tolu, 2015). The limited nature of traditional modes of communication constrains the ability of students to

communicate (Kress & Jewitt, 2003). The auditory and visual nature of digital stories provides alternative means for struggling writers to develop their voice and "the opportunity to express themselves in new ways" (Erstad & Silseth, 2008, p. 221).

Digital storytelling also facilitates the development of 21st century literacies (Robin, 2006). Shelby-Caffey, Úbéda, and Jenkins (2014) point out that the development of digital stories often requires students to conduct research, providing students with an opportunity to develop the necessary skills associated with 21st century literacies such as reading on the internet to locate, analyze, synthesize, and communicate information (Leu et al., 2013). Robin (2016) identifies several other literacies associated with 21st century literacies that students develop when creating digital stories:

- Digital Literacy - the ability to communicate with an ever-expanding community to discuss issues, gather information, and seek help;
- Global Literacy - the capacity to read, interpret, respond, and contextualize messages from a global perspective;
- Technology Literacy - the ability to use computers and other technology to improve learning, productivity, and performance;
- Visual Literacy - the ability to understand, produce, and communicate through visual images;
- Information Literacy - the ability to find, evaluate, and synthesize information. (p. 21)

Additional benefits of digital storytelling in the classroom include enhancing students' communication skills by "learning to organize their ideas, ask questions, express opinions, and construct narratives" (Robin, 2006, p. 4; Tetik & Arslan, 2022), as well as promoting student engagement and reflection (Ribeiro, 2016; Robin, 2016; Tanrıkulu, 2022) and presenting reflections in multiple modalities (Kim, Coenraad, & Park, 2021). These findings extend to prompting pre- and in-service teachers in self-reflection (Gachago et al., 2013).

Pedagogically, digital storytelling is an effective tool for teaching content knowledge. In the process of creating digital

stories, students can develop traditional and new literacies while building community and gaining insight into personal experiences and developing empathy for the experiences of their peers. Digital storytelling can also be used with pre- and in-service teachers to model effective integration of technology to support content instruction and promote reflection.

Purpose of the Study

As a pedagogical strategy, digital stories support students' development of traditional and digital literacies (Tetik & Arslan, 2022). Digital storytelling can assist students in the development of perspectives and provide insights into their personal experiences and making sense of their worlds (Egan, 1988; Rambe & Mlambo, 2014). Furthermore, research suggests that narrative digital storytelling can be a transformative learning experience for students (Coulter, Michael, & Poynor, 2007) and provide them with an opportunity to express key events in their lives from a position of strength (Hull & Katz, 2006, p. 668), including assisting in the treatment of trauma (Anderson & Wallace, 2015; Cohen, Johnson, & Orr, 2015; Hancox, 2012), and making connections between their experiences and academic content. This study focused on examining the following research questions:

1. What patterns and themes emerged in examining the content and craft of candidates' digital stories?
2. How does the personal use (and sharing) of digital stories influence candidates' perceptions of their own writing and its connection to supporting the development of writers in elementary classrooms?

Method

This qualitative research study employed a case study design (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative inquiry was selected as the means of observation given that the data gleaned are "a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions of social processes" (Miles et al., 2020, p. 3). The case was bound by time, experience, and place. Junior pre-service teachers taking both a literacy methods course and a stand-alone technology course in the spring of

2020 were asked to participate in the research inquiry through sharing product and process artifacts of creating a digital story connected to their experience with COVID-19. Candidates could determine the mode of their writing (informative, narrative, argumentative), but brought their composition to fruition through digital storytelling.

Participants

Thirteen candidates participated in the study. All participants were pre-service teachers at a small, private liberal arts university in a midwestern city and had a double major in elementary education and exceptional children's education. It is notable that the university is in a city that experienced intense turmoil due to the police killing of a woman of color in the late night/early morning delivery of a search warrant. This was reflected in the content of some candidates' storytelling as they connected to the idea of multiple pandemics – not only COVID, but also the long-lasting disease of racial injustice.

Data Sources, Collection, and Data Analysis

Data resulted from a project entitled "Living Life as a Writer" in a literacy methods course and included digital stories, reflective essays, and written exit slips. The "Living Life as a Writer" project consisted of two parts: 1) the digital story, including their writing script for their story, and 2) a reflective essay, which included chronicling what they had learned about their own writing process, the role of writing instruction, and ways to engage their future students in the writing process. The day that the digital stories were due, candidates shared their digital production with their literacy methods professor and other members of the class. Exit slips were a regular routine in the class and were used to gather responses, thoughts, and reflection about the experience of composing and sharing their digital stories and thoughts about their future practice. The reflective essays were submitted at the end of the semester as a synthesis of candidates' insights about their own writing processes and teaching writing in the future.

The assignment was introduced early in the semester. The

pandemic digital story was assigned a due date close to mid-term. Once the assignment was introduced in literacy methods, candidates explored components of digital stories in their technology integration class. This included reading and discussing relevant articles, identifying key characteristics of digital stories, and analyzing models. Candidates were given a choice about what software to use in completing their stories including, but not limited to, i-Movie, Movie Maker, and PowerPoint. After working on their digital stories for several weeks, candidates shared their work in class through an author's chair – an opportunity for candidate authors to share their compositions. As the class was structured as a synchronous virtual experience, candidates were able to share their digital stories through the share screen feature of the meeting. During the sharing of the stories, peers had opportunities to provide feedback and make connections with one another through the meeting chat. At the end of the class period, they reflected through personal responses to digital exit slip prompts that included important walk-aways from the experience such as thoughts about composing and crafting as well as the impact and benefit of sharing with peers.

Processes of open coding and in-vivo coding (Miles et al., 2020) were used in analyzing candidates' work products (including exit slips from the day the pandemic digital stories were shared, pandemic digital stories, and reflective essays) (See Appendix A). Codes were assigned by each researcher independently and then collapsed into relevant themes (See Tables 1-3, pp. 67–73). The sections that follow articulate the patterns that emerged and evidence from artifacts which supported the presence of a particular concept.

Discussion

Data analysis revealed themes clustering around three central concepts: content and themes of the digital stories, characteristics and craft applied to the digital stories (RQ1), and instructional implications for their future classrooms (RQ2). Within the concept of content (RQ1), themes which emerged included an exploration of dichotomies (or juxtapositions)

from the conflict, a feeling of epiphany or insight referred to by some candidates as "opened my eyes," and an exploration of time, space, and isolation. Characteristics and digital story writing craft (RQ1) evident in candidates' products included the purposeful selection of visual images, intentional use of music, and application of narration that created an increased sense of writing voice.

As candidates were participating in methods classes (both for writing and technology integration) reflections on their personal use of and experience with writing and digital storytelling were central and used as a springboard to consider future teaching practice (RQ2). Patterns that emerged included discussion of the role of sharing writing in creating classroom community, the utility of digital stories as a means of increasing elementary students' efficacy and motivation, and the importance of choice in the learning process and through assigned tasks (for candidates and their future students).

Content and Themes of Digital Stories

Three central themes/concepts emerged from the content of the digital stories: awareness of time and relationships, insights or revelations, and juxtapositions. The ways in which candidates expressed and revealed these themes and concepts was different; however, there were patterns in how universal ideas were revealed through both content and structure.

The passage of time and how it contributed to feelings of both isolation and connection was an explicit and implicit theme throughout the stories. Several candidates structured their stories around the passage of time within the pandemic (about a year at the time when the stories were created) by tracing the seasons, months, or milestone events (weddings, holidays, and birthdays).

This awareness of time was met with gratitude by some and bitterness by others. Several candidates expressed gratitude for the time to improve hard relationships with families. One candidate reflected, "Though this past year has been horrible, I'm grateful for the growth in my relationships and honestly, I wouldn't change anything." In a similar vein, another candidate

shared, "Without the summer of forced together time I think my family relationships could have been severely damaged. I am so thankful that during the pandemic I learned to get along with my family." Another candidate expressed gratitude for time at home to spend with the family's aging dog, Sammy, "We were able to spend the last months spent at home loving our lifelong friend for her last four months of life. We were so lucky to have that time with you" (Link to "To My Sammy Girl": https://bit.ly/3MXoG9o).

In contrast, one candidate reflected on the unwelcome presence of COVID through moments and milestones in her family including holidays, her sister's bridal shower and wedding, and her own twenty second birthday. Her frustration with COVID and the omnipresence of COVID through 2021 is clear in the closing lines of her digital story, "I will always remember you COVID because you will always be attached to these memories, for better or worse." Another candidate reflected on how the intense time together increased tension, "The journey didn't start when the pandemic hit, it only got worse when it did. Changes were made on a daily basis. 'We will get through this together' was the new motto; but we had never felt more distant from another. The glue holding everything together started to fall apart."

Insights about life were woven throughout many of the digital stories. As with the examples above, several of these insights indicated a sense of gratitude. One candidate reflected on the power of disconnecting to discover what you love, how to love yourself, or to realize what's really important in life. "Maybe just maybe you'll realize the best way to connect is to disconnect." Another candidate reported on the year of tragedy that she experienced through the pandemic: losing a pet, losing her grandfather and her aunt, and struggling financially because of the inability to work. In spite of these struggles, her closing lines revealed insights connected to gratitude, "It's made me strive to make the best use of my time on earth, because no day is guaranteed … I am thankful God had given me the time to experience this crazy year of 2020."

Several candidates shared their revelation about the

pandemic in the phrase "opened my eyes." One candidate, heartbroken and disappointed that her life-changing internship at Disney World was cut short by the pandemic, ultimately reflected that the pandemic "opened her eyes to new possibilities." Another candidate reflected on seeing the movement of disease throughout the world and also the trauma of racial injustice (Link to "Opened My Eyes": https://bit.ly/3DmRkhc). In the pain of these observations, she found her passion and the ability to move hope to action. She summed all of this up by saying the pandemic was the "year that opened my eyes."

A third theme or concept that emerged from the analysis of the content of the stories was the exploration of dichotomies or juxtapositions. These tensions were apparent in different ways; in some digital stories they served as a universal idea, in others they were a means for structuring the story. Some stories used the concept of juxtapositions thematically and as an organizational structure. One candidate titled her poem "Inhale," and throughout the poem she contrasted the calm of inhaling with the challenges present in the pandemic world (e.g., breathing with a mask, being inside all the time, fleeting attention) and closed with the direction to inhale, inhale, inhale "until it doesn't feel real, until your lizard brain remembers to exhale" (Link to "Inhale": https://bit.ly/3VRkDj4). The author of the digital story, "To My Sammy Girl" filled her story with warm images of a family pet bringing presence, connection, and humor to a difficult time that contrasted with the pain of loss that was felt when the pet died. Through the story the audience gets a strong sense of both the warmth and gratitude of intense time spent together while also understanding the grief and sadness of losing Sammy.

Several candidates alluded to the idea that "not everything has changed for the worse" as they reflected on improved relationships with family and friends or greater understanding and appreciation for the meaning and gift of life. Similarly, the concept of before and after (the pandemic) was used as an organizing frame for a writer thankful for personal growth and development. Stillness and busy-ness also emerged as a dichotomy as one candidate wrote, "a pause in the busy-ness of

life was the opportunity to start living again."

One candidate explored a juxtaposition through content and structure as she framed her digital story around a list poem of single words with images of paintings that she created. The list shifted through the poem from words of despair to words of hope. The use of juxtaposition in terms of revealing theme and driving structuring is indicative of the mix of feelings candidates felt in considering their pandemic experiences.

Benefits of Digital Stories in Revealing Written Composition and Instructional Practice

Participants' digital stories, written reflections, and group discussions revealed numerous benefits to incorporating technology into a writing activity. Benefits clustered around three major ideas: 1) the ability of the medium of digital storytelling to convey candidates' compositions, 2) the congruence of digital story telling with recognized best practices in writing instruction, and 3) the capacity of digital storytelling for supporting candidates' socio-emotional development and the creation of classroom community. By incorporating technology into the writing process, candidates were able to communicate multimodally through images, videos, music, and their voices. Best practices in writing instruction that were revealed to candidates through the process included writing for authentic audiences beyond the teacher and sharing and publishing writing within the classroom community. Through the process of creating the digital story, candidates reported the benefits of writing on their own mental health and a strong sense of connectedness to their peers through the sharing of the stories.

Using Craft to Convey Meaning

All the candidates incorporated visuals into their digital stories. These multimodal forms of communication included stock photos, original artwork, and personal photos and videos. The use of images, whether selected from stock collections or self-created, offered an additional means of communication. As one candidate stated, "I used my own art to describe the words I wrote," which she felt added "a whole new level of emotions

and structure to the piece that was not there before." In fact, the use of images to "describe the words" was reflected in the themes and emotions conveyed in all the pandemic stories. For example, participants selected images of the virus, people wearing masks, family, friends, pets, outdoors, and social distancing, all of which connected to themes of loss, isolation, routines (e. g., normal vs. new normal), and discovery conveyed in their stories. One candidate wrote in her reflection that the use of images in the writing process has the power to elicit memories, which was an emotional experience. She went on to connect this to her future class, noting that she could only "imagine how that may be beneficial for my future students." The "multimodal nature of digital stories enable children and young people to express complex thoughts and emotions" (Nilsson, 2010, p. 152).

Half of the candidates used music in their digital stories. Music can frame and contextualize the story (Alonso, Molina, & Requiejo, 2013, p. 382). Candidates provided emotional context through their selection of music, which were primarily somber instrumental arrangements that reflected their feelings about the pandemic. Music is often used in digital storytelling to convey the feelings and emotions (Chung, 2006). The emotional content of the stories and accompanying music were not limited to melancholy. One candidate decided to write about the positives that she found in the pandemic and incorporated a soaring choral song that reflected her choice. Another candidate used a fast-paced instrumental piece that conveyed the anxiety and stress associated with the "emotional turmoil" and feeling that the "walls around us seemed to be getting closer and closer" which she also communicated in her writing and her voice. Similarly, a candidate captured a feeling of nostalgia in her story conveying her wistfulness for musical theatre (Link to "Musical Theatre": https://bit.ly/3QQn6b4).

The development of voice is an element of teaching writing as well as one of the seven required elements of digital storytelling. Using a multimedia approach assists candidates in discovering voice in their writing (Banaszewski, 2002). Candidates record their voices narrating their stories,

incorporating another method of multimodal communication. Like the images and music incorporated into their stories, candidates' voices reflected the emotional tone of their writing. For example, the strained emphasis on the word "inhale" as the candidate repeats the word over and over, implores the listener to take deep breaths as they face the various challenges of the pandemic. Another candidate inserted long pauses in her narration to emphasize a point.

Supporting Writing Development and Community-building

The process of creating digital stories was valuable to candidates in that it gave them first-hand experience with practices recognized as beneficial in writing instruction. These included: writing for authentic audiences beyond the teacher (Fredrich, 2019), creating an engaged community of writers (Graham et al., 2012), and engaging candidates "by involving them in thoughtful activities" (Graham and Harris, 2019, p 14). It was through engagement with these processes that candidates were able to see benefits beyond writing development to include the creation of strong community. Nine candidates expressed the intertwining of writing development with learning about peers and how these contributed to the overall development of community.

Consistent with a challenge to provide students opportunities to create writing for an audience beyond the teacher (Fredrich, 2019), participants cited the value of sharing their stories with an authentic audience. Candidates published their stories through presenting them to the class; therefore, they were viewed by all the students in the course. Participants discussed how they were able to make connections to their peers' stories and life experiences. One candidate commented, "Writing lets you get to know your students." General comments about the process included that the digital stories were engaging, powerful, impactful, and promoted social emotional development. Such sentiment is revealed in the following reflection:

> I also have learned how much writing can help make a strong classroom community. Creating an environment

where students are able to share their stories and learn about each other—an environment where students can flourish. I hope that my students feel safe and secure in my classroom. Each student wants their story to be heard and they want to share, so it is necessary that we give them an environment [where] they are able to.

One candidate wrote, "A lot of people have had a pandemic experience similar to my own. I want to be better at checking in with everyone around me. I think that is so important, and I will carry that forward to my future students." These findings are supported by research that demonstrates that sharing digital stories can promote the development of a sense of community and an understanding of their peers' experiences (Cunningham, 2015), create empathy (Yearta, Helf, & Harris, 2018), and build an emotional connection to the content they are learning (Shelby-Caffey, Ubeda, & Jenkins, 2014, p. 196).

Candidates also cited the ability to assess students' digital stories and written scripts as a benefit of digital storytelling. They found that the peer feedback provided by their colleagues improved their writing and cited this as another reason for using them in their teaching. The ability of digital stories to support formative and summative feedback is supported by research on the use of digital stories to teach writing (Kearney, 2011).

Incorporating digital storytelling into the writing process greatly influenced these pre-service teachers and their conceptions of their future practice, as this comment shows:

> [I] honestly want my future students to be able to do some type of digital story. It would probably have to be for older students and a little less complex. But, I really enjoyed being able to learn so much about my peers; I'd like to do the same with my future students.

Participants discovered that digital stories have the potential, through multimodal means of communication, to create an emotional impact that can, as one candidate pointed out, heighten words and facilitate writing. Reflecting on the process of turning their written pieces into digital stories, candidates conveyed a newfound sense of pride in the product of their

writing and spoke with enthusiasm about sharing digital storytelling with their own students: "Digital storytelling can be so impactful for students. Students are able to make connections to their peers' writing pieces and overall tell their story in a unique way."

Implications

Findings from this study provide several implications for teachers in K–12 classrooms. The cross-curricular collaboration serves as a model for the benefits of professional partnerships and the authentic application of technology (e. g., digital storytelling) in writing methods courses. By engaging pre-service teachers in the authentic application of digital storytelling to support narrative writing, instructors can improve their understanding of the benefits of specific instructional technologies. For example, requiring pre-service teachers to write, create, publish, and discuss their digital stories with their classmates, instructors can facilitate their development as writers by helping them to recognize strengths and areas for growth, which can inform their future practice. Additionally, creating digital stories and discussing them with classmates supports processing personal experiences and assists in developing classroom community, building empathy, and social-emotional learning. Finally, by requiring pre-service teachers to reflect in their journal, and discuss the assignment with their classmates, instructors can help them to make connections to the benefits of digital storytelling and teaching writing to their future students.

Results also support candidates' adoption of digital storytelling to assist their students in the development of important 21st century literacies through multimodal communication, which also facilitates their differentiation of writing instruction. Integrating digital storytelling into writing instruction in both educator preparation programs and K–12 classrooms allows teachers to engage students in the development of important 21st century skills related to creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and communication. Each of these benefits align with International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) educator and student standards.

One area traditionally associated with the integration of digital storytelling that was not evidenced in the findings from this study was the development of digital literacies. In their discussions and written reflections, participants did not identify technology as an area of skills developed as part of their work on this assignment. This could be an oversight on the part of the pre-service teachers or could be a result of their long-term use of technology. Additional research should be conducted to examine to what degree digital stories continue to contribute to the development of digital literacies in this population of students.

Conclusion

In this cross-curricular study, two instructors collaborated to engage pre-service teachers in the use of digital storytelling to support narrative writing. The study serves as a model for educator preparation programs by demonstrating the benefits of collaborative instruction as it relates to moving technology instruction into the method courses which supports pre-service teachers' thinking about the transfer of practice in their own classrooms. Findings from the study support the existing body of literature on the benefits of authentic integration of technology into methods courses and the potential this integration provides for an authentic means of sharing and publication within and beyond the confines of the classroom. Likewise, results align with research on the ability of digital storytelling to support and augment student writing.

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Appendix A: Coding Index of Stories

Participant	Analysis of Written Product (Techniques)	Analysis of Digital DIgital Product (Techniques)	Content
BG	"Inhale" poem Used of repeated structure Poem of address Use of irony Use of paradox	Author narration Stock images Prosody Pictures convey anguish	Finding space Coexistence of hope and anxiety Pandemic Sameness
LE	Poem Sense of the pandemic taking over Sense of doom	Music (used for dramatic effect) Author narration Use of stock images	Things falling apart Isolation Hopelessness
BT	"To My Sammy Girl" Repeated line you were Parallel structure	Author narration Video clips Piano music	Focused on dog, Sammy Sadness of losing furry friend Gratitude for the time
LW	"Disconnect to Reconnect" Parallel structure "Life is about…" Poem of address Maybe just maybe - circular ending - the only way to disconnect is to reconnect	Use of personal images Music	You and the people you love Bigger things in life Make what you want
MY	"My Digital Story" Use of paradox	Author narration Intense music Starts with stock images Moves into personal images	Language of the pandemic Not everything has changed for the worst Better family relationships Gratitude Also–what I miss Trying to make the best of it
NI			Miserable at first–grew in family relationships–a pause–time to start living again Wistfulness over what didn't happen Mentioned BLM

Appendix A: Coding Index of Stories, cont.

NS	A Year of the Pandemic	Not really a digital story– PP with pictures	Narrated each month of the pandemic–victories and challenges of the year
RD	List poem, one word	Original artwork	Shifts from despair to hope
DB	Pandemic Writing Piece Narrative description		Shifts before/after What has been good about the pandemic (time with familly, taking initiative, interacting more)
TC		Personal images	Year that opened my eyes Pandemic of racial injustice (disease) Awakening Ultimately found passion Put hope to action
VT			Compared to Jumanji Personal losses (pet and family) Job loss Thankful for the time even if it was hard
ST	March 18, 2021		Disney Friends for the first time Sense of loss Shift from loss to hope Opened my eyes to new possibilities
BM		Use of personal images	Connection to theatre Value of friendship Life is theatre (vice versa)
OC	Poem of address to COVID "I will always remember"	Use of personal images	Connection to family events and that COVID was unwelcome and present (bridal shower, wedding, junior practicum, Halloween party, 22nd birthday)- always remember for better or worse because you are attached to these memories

TABLE 1
Themes from Content of the Writing

Participant	Content
	Dichotomies
BG	Poem – inhale – each line contrasts the peace of inhaling with a challenge (breathing with a mask, being inside all the time, fleeting attention, hard, hurts to get out of bed, though muscles are tight, today is not forever, sunshine and possibility, until it doesn't feel real, until your lizard brain remembers to exhale)
BT	"My Sammy Girl" - contextualized dichotomy – sadness over the loss of a furry friend, gratitude for the extra time to spend with her
LW	"Maybe just maybe the only way to reconnect is to disconnect"
MY	"Not everything has changed for the worse" couples language of the pandemic with benefits – stronger family relationships, gratitude
NI	A pause in the busy-ness of life was the opportunity to start living again
RD	List poem of single words that shift from despair to hope
DB	Pandemic Writing Piece – contrasts before and after (what is changed? What is better?)
VT	Thankful for time, though it was hard (loss of family members, work)
ST	Shifts from new adventure to despair to regaining hope
VT	Therefore, the idea for the writing piece stemmed from that reflective practice, but the quote "despite the immense grief, fear, panic, anxiety, etc. that this year brought, I would not have changed my experience for the world" was really where the piece emerged from.
	Time/Space/Isolation
ST	Isolation –describes this in the joy of finding friends through her internship and then having to leave them again
LW	talks about the value of time to refocus
MY	talks about the value of time to connect with family
NI	talks about the value of time for healing
LE	captures strong feeling of isolation and sadness even as people are in the same house

TABLE 1
Themes from Content of the Writing, continued

Participant	Content
BG	Time/Space/Isolation, continued talks about finding space and the monotony of the sameness of it
	"Opened My Eyes"
TC	"Year that opened my eyes" (seeing the pandemic of disease and racial injustice) (finding passion - moving hope to action)
ST	"Opened my eyes to new possibilities"
MY	"Opened my eyes to new possibilities"
NI	I decided that it was up to me to find some of the brighter aspects of the pandemic. The project actually helped me productively process the pandemic. I am someone who wants to start projects early, but that hope is rarely executed correctly. However, I started this project days early because I was excited about it, and I had ideas. Overall, I was excited and proud of my final project.

TABLE 2
Themes from Technology

Participant	Content
	Stock Images
All	Stock images associated with pandemic (pictures of the virus, pictures of graphics and numbers, pictures of people struggling with emotion)
	Original Artwork
RD	Use of her own art
	Photographs
BT	family and dog
BM	pictures from the theatre and with her friends - even times where she may have used stock images were tightly tied to the message of the story and could have been pictures that she had taken
MY	pictures of family, self, friends
LW	use of personal images of self, friends, and family
NS	use of personal images
ST	use of personal images
TC	use of personal images
	Video Clips
BT	clips with dog and her family members
TC	some personal videos (from protests)
	Music
All but one participant	(somber, reflective, triumphant, nostalgic, intense)

TABLE 3
Themes of Instructional Practice

Participant	Content
	Community Relationship
BG	"Writing lets you get to know your students"
DB	"One thing we learned more about today was digital storytelling. Digital storytelling can be so impactful for students. Students are able to make connections to their peers writing pieces and overall tell their story in a unique way."
LW	"Digital storytelling is a way to get to know students better and assess writing at the same time"
BM	"A lot of people have had a pandemic experience similar to my own. I want to be better about checking in with everyone around me. I think that is so important, and I will carry that forward to my future students. Digital stories can be so powerful for students. I felt like I learned so much about my classmates today, and I will take that into the classroom when learning about my students."
MY	"I honestly want my future students to be able to do some type of digital story. It would probably have to be for older students and a little less complex. But, I really enjoyed being able to learn so much about my peers; I'd like to do the same with my future students."
VT	"Everyone has had a different experience with the pandemic."
NS	"Through digital storytelling, everyone has had similar experiences with the pandemic, however they all tell their story in a unique way."
BT	I also have learned how much writing can help make a strong class room community. Creating an environment where students are able to share their stories and learn about each other. An environment where students can flourish. I hope that my students feel safe and secure in my classroom. Each student wants their story to be heard and they want to share, so it is necessary that we give them an environment they are able to. "I'm interested in writers writing to entertain friends, inform peers, persuade parents, change minds, provoke tears, project thinking" (Kissel 18).

TABLE 3
Themes of Instructional Practice, continued

Participant	Content
	Motivation and Efficacy
DB	Through digital storytelling, everyone has had similar experiences with the pandemic, however they all tell their story in a unique way.
BT	"Through my reading and class work I have learned many strategies and techniques to use in my writing. One technique I tried was to just write, put down all of my thoughts on a page. To not think about grammar or punctuation and instead to that after. I really enjoyed doing this because it helped me get my thoughts out and not forget them. When I went back to reread my writing, I was able to change parts around to make it more impactful. This is a strategy I enjoyed and will continue to use."
LW	Before beginning EDUC 339 this semester I never thought of myself as a writer. I thought I was no good at writing and I was terrified to teach writing to a room full of students every year once I had my own classroom. After working through multiple writing projects during this semester and focusing on my individual writing process, I feel a bit more confident about being a teacher of writing to my future students. I also now feel like everyone can be a writer if they want to be.
	Fear of Openness
LW	During this semester, one thing I learned about myself as a writer is that I enjoy writing poetry. Before this semester started, I was terrified of poetry in every single way. I hated learning about it and analyzing it in school, and crafting poems using a specific format. Since I never had wonderful experiences with poetry in my K–12 schooling, the thought of having to teach a roomfull of students about poetry was mortifying to me. There are a lot of components to poetry that I am not comfortable with using, let alone teaching, so I still have a long way to go, but I am slowly becoming more confident.
RD	For the first part of the project, one thing was on my mind: the rules. I have always had an urge to always follow the rules. I guess you could call me a "goodie-two-shoes," but this has always been my personality. So, for the first portion of the writing, I just did not want to follow them- I wanted to push my limits a little bit. I went for simple and too the point and when drafting I did not worry about spelling or punctuation or grammar. I just wanted to focus on the words and emotions that I wanted to emote

TABLE 3
Themes of Instructional Practice, continued

Participant	Content
ST	**Fear of Openness, continued** Growing up, Ive always been afraid of writing. My fear of other people's judgement prevented me from being open with my writing or sharing it with anyone. I have little to no confidence in my writing abilities which is why it takes me such a long time to complete any writing assignment. I analyze every word over and over to make sure it sounds okay. I read and analyze until I just hate the whole piece. I was afraid if my writing was bad, my teachers and professors would think I was dumb and that I wasn't smart enough to teach. This anxiety I feel about writing is something I would never wish upon any of my students. It's important to me that my students feel com fortable with me and their peers reading or hearing their writing and be proud of what they accomplished. During this semester, we learned a lot about how to build students' confidence in writing and making opportunities for students to write every day. The things we learned from this class have helped me develop ideas of how to use writing as something students will enjoy and look forward to everyday in class.
LW	**Choice** When we first started, I took the invitations very literally and only wrote about exactly what was asked. This made it hard to connect with the invitations sometimes because I was focusing too much on the question that was asked, not what was going on in my mind. As I engaged with more invitations, I found myself taking them in my own directions, which allowed me to write more and feel more connected to the pieces I was writing.
LW	**Role of choice for students** With this information and personal experiences in mind, when I give students writing invitations in the future, I will make sure to remind them that they can choose to take the writing invitation or write about something else that is on their mind. We were reminded of this every week, but I did not feel comfortable with that until I began writing more often. There will be times I want every student to respond to the writing invitation, but more often than not I will allow students to choose what they write. I will find writing invitations that relate to what we are talking about in other subjects, what is going on in the world, and what interests the students.

TABLE 3
Themes of Instructional Practice, continued

Participant	Content
	Role of choice for students, continued
MY	At the beginning of the semester, when we did our weekly writing invitations, I honestly dreaded them. I hated feeling like I had to write about something that I did not care about. However, Dr. Wheeler explained that she wanted us to take our writings wherever we felt we needed to. This was really beneficial for me as a writer. I did not like feeling like I had a box that I had to write in; I wanted to let my mind wander. I am the type of person that lets myself just think and let my brain wander off. I appreciated that Dr. Wheeler gave us the opportunity to do this with our writing invitations. I think this helped me gain a better appreciation for writing. I realized that I do not have to place my thoughts and ideas in a box or limit them to the prompt that was placed in front of me (sometimes). I feel more confident in my ability to "brain dump" and let my deeps thoughts just pour onto the page. I think this is important for students.
RD	One that excites me the most is the writing invitation. I really want to include this in my classroom because it always students to practice their writing without the worry about formalities. They can write what they want or respond to the prompt- it is their choice and that is what I favor the most. Student choice is a very important part of education and must be exercised to have a positive and effective classroom.
VT	In a love for writing, it is important to allow them the opportunity to be creative in their writing. Therefore, it is important to give them some freedoms in what they choose to write about and some freedoms in how they present their writing. We also did this in class. With the digital story project, we were given an overarching theme of "2020," but were free to explore the topic in the direction we wished and our creative outlet to showcase our writing was the digital story. Another example of creative ways of showcasing writing would be a poetry showcase in class, a writing trailer, a slide show presentation, a scary story campfire, etc. Maintaining the drive for writing by providing creative opportunities for students will ensure they are engaged in writing instruction and hopefully facilitate a love for writing.