

Health Education Field Experience Stories: A Reflective, Digital, Performance-Based Project

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ABSTRACT

This article describes a reflective, systematic, performance-based project resulting in the development of a digital story about a community health education field experience. The project is designed for pre-service health education students at the college/university level. The primary benefit of the project is that it challenges students to engage in a personal reflection and professional product development process simultaneously for self-examination in relation to a professional health education environment.

INTRODUCTION

Experiential learning in professional work settings is recognized as valuable to pre-service health education students (Sweitzer & King, 2004; Carson & Bill, 2003; Schmidt & Hurley, 1990). Known by names such as clinical practice, practicum, internship, and student teaching, the aforementioned experiences are often completed as a capstone experience prior to graduation. However, experiential learning can co-occur with undergraduate health education coursework and provide students opportunities for engagement with professionals and priority populations in real work settings. Such "field experiences" are a form of experiential learning through direct and practical encounters that are organized and subsequently processed in some manner (Sweitzer & King, 2004).

For the co-occurring undergraduate health education course and field experience, various instructional strategies, assignments, and projects can facilitate associated student learning, including tests, reports, literature reviews, analysis of data sets, and structured problem solving tasks. Further, the Responsibilities and Competencies of the Health Educator (National Commission for Health Education Credentialing,

2010) and the AAHE/NCATE Health Education Teacher Preparation Standards (Hillman et al., 2010) provide a framework through which field experiences can be dissected to support objective, professional health educator knowledge and skill acquisition and/or gap analysis. The importance of such professional preparation tasks for students cannot be overstated.

Yet, it is also important to provide students opportunities to connect field experience to their own humanity and self-understanding. The importance of knowing oneself in relation to the environment is fundamental to being a fulfilled and successful professional health educator (Read & Greene, 1980). Thus, it is important that health education students engage in learning assignments designed to stimulate reflection, creativity, and enduring understanding, including self-understanding. Reflective learning assignments can be structured that require creative cognitive tasks such as visioning beyond the immediate circumstances one is in and producing ideas that are pertinent and atypical (Kneller, 1965) to previous understanding.

The purpose of this manuscript is to describe a reflective, systematic, performance-based project that results in the creation of an original

story script and corresponding digital images (e.g., a digital story) about a health education field experience. Performance-based projects are an alternative platform for students to create products that exhibit skill and/or concept mastery. Such projects require utilization and application of knowledge rather than rote recall of information. Authentic assessment is required to determine student mastery of specific concepts and skills associated with the performance-based project (Salik, 2008; Joint Committee on National Health Education Standards, 2007; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998; Hart, 1994).

“An assessment is authentic when it involves students in tasks that are worthwhile, significant, and meaningful. Such assessments look and feel like learning activities, not traditional tests. They involve higher-order thinking skills and the coordination of a broad range of knowledge. They communicate to students what it means to do their work well by making explicit the standards by which that work will be judged” (Hart, 1994, p. 9).

Examples of performance-based tasks include demonstrations such as role plays, portfolios containing collections of writings and other work assembled over time, and complex group problem solving tasks. Unlike assignments scored with the use of vague ratings (good, fair, poor) or counted errors, performance-based assessments judge student work using well-defined standards incorporated into a scoring guide or rubric (Joint Committee on National Health Education Standards, 2007; Hart, 1994). See Tables 1 and 2.

Though the educational uses for digital stories can take many approaches, the development of digital stories can usually be categorized in one of three ways: 1) personal narrative that recalls life incidents; 2) historical account that explores past events; and 3) informative or instructional story (University of Houston, 2011a). The digital story development in this manuscript could take the form of any of the aforementioned categories depending on the story each candidate develops through the processes described. Furthermore, while today's undergraduate college students utilize technology proficiently in many areas of their lives, they may not have used digital tools to develop professionally-inspired projects that assimilate

authentic meaning. The digital story project can help students expand their digital and technology literacy to integrate, evaluate, create, and communicate an original story about a field (professional preparation) experience (State Educational Technology Directors Association, 2011). Ultimately, the digital story can be a product health education students can add to their professional portfolios for use in internship or job interviews.

METHODS

Target Audience

This performance-based project is designed for preservice health education students at the college/university level. The project could be adapted for any secondary education level that included a field experience.

Action Objectives

By the end of this semester long project, health education students will: 1) complete a field experience in a health-related community-based organization (CBO); 2) purposefully reflect and write (journal) about a health education field experience to support the development of a story script; and 3) compile a collection of field experience digital images for integration with the story script to develop a digital story.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this project, health education students will be able to: 1) appraise a professional experience for personal meaning and/or understanding; and 2) communicate a personal story about professional experience through digital technology.

Materials and Resources

Health education related field experience sites (see Table 3 for a sample list of CBOs) are necessary for students to complete this project. Students will each need a digital camera (or device for capturing digital images such as a cell phone with camera), a USB flash drive (data storage device), a computer with headsets and microphones (the instructor should schedule computer lab time for the class) and Microsoft Photo Story 3 software (free download at: <http://www.microsoft.com/downloads/en/details.aspx?FamilyID=92755126-a008-49b3-b3f4-6f33852af9c1>) or other digital photo story creation software.

PROCEDURES

Procedures for implementing the project are identified in a sequence of recommended steps for implementation over the duration of an academic semester.

1. The instructor will select the digital photo story software. Many computer software programs exist by which digital photo stories can be created. The author chose to use Microsoft's Photo Story 3 due to its accessibility (free Internet download for Windows) and functional similarity to other Microsoft Office computer software products such as PowerPoint (University of Houston, 2011b). Direct students, if possible, to download the software selected onto their own computers. It should be noted that iMovie is the comparable software for Apple Mac users.
2. This project should take place over a semester as students engage in field experience with an assigned CBO.
 - a. The CBOs should be public health, health education, or other entities that engage in professional activities aligned with the one or more of the *Responsibilities and Competencies for Health Education Specialist* (NCHEC, 2010) through the services they provide to their priority populations.
 - b. The instructor should provide students with information about the CBOs and direct students to rank their most preferred sites in which to work, including writing a short essay describing why they desire work with their top three ranked organizations. The instructor should use the following prompt: "In the space below, please write 3-5 sentences about why you would be a good fit to work with each of your top three ranked organizations."
 - c. The instructor determines student CBO assignments based upon candidate rank order and essay, CBO position availability, and best fit. See Table 3 for a list of organizations used by the author.
3. Next, the instructor will preview the Journal Assignment directions (Table 4) and Journal Assessment Rubric (Table 1) criteria with the health education students. The instructor will then preview the Digital Photo Story Assessment Rubric criteria (Table 2) with the students and show them one or more examples of a digital photo story. Examples can be found on the web, but the author recommends the instructor create an authentic photo story for use as an example. Doing so will allow the instructor to engage in the process described in this teaching strategy.
4. The instructor should set a final digital photo story due date for the end of the semester. From that date, the instructor will work backward to arrange four Journal Assignment due dates.
 - a. Journal Assignments 1-3 (see Table 4) provide directions for candidate observation and information collection about their assigned CBO, individual reflection about what story to tell, and engagement in easy-to-use processes that support development of the digital photo story script.
 - b. Journal Assignment 4 (see Table 4) provides the basis from which students develop the final story script (voiceover or narration) and storyboard (image sequencing, transition, and effects with story script alignment) for the digital photo story. Students will need to have collected their digital images to complete Journal Assignment 4.
5. From early in the field experience and throughout the semester, students should use their own digital camera or purchase a disposable digital camera to capture still images (pictures) of their field experience. If this is not an economic reality for any student, the instructor may seek funding from the appropriate academic unit. As the privacy of priority populations and their information is paramount for many CBOs, digital images should only be collected and shared according to CBO policy. The instructor should direct the students to confirm photographic or

digital image policies of the CBOs. Students should also determine if the CBO has images it is willing to share (e.g. CBO website images). Then, abiding by the respective policies, each candidate should be encouraged to capture field experience images of their choice, including images of the CBO site and staff, priority population, and candidate experiences. Students should observe copyright laws for all digital images. See The United States Copyright Office website for additional information (The United States Copyright Office, 2012). Students should also use the Journal Assignment (See Table 4) prompts to inspire ideas for image collection.

6. The instructor will gain access to or schedule a computer lab with the digital photo story software on the computers for at least four work sessions during the semester. Students will likely need to work on their own time in addition to scheduled computer lab time. For each visit to the lab, direct students to bring:
 - 1) stored digital images on their USB flash drive for import into digital photo story software, and
 - 2) Journal Assignments (including notes taken to complete the Journals).
 - a. The first computer lab time should be scheduled after students have collected some digital images and completed Journal Assignments 1 and 2. The instructor will use this lab time to introduce the digital photo story software selected for the project. Direct students to explore importing images, reordering them, speaking into the microphone/headset, and recording images. The first lab time should familiarize students with the tools that will be used, some of which they will supply and create, to develop their digital photostories.
 - b. The second computer lab should occur after Journal 3 has been completed, which will help students explore the multiple elements combined to complete a digital story, including point of

view and pacing of voiceover (narration).

- c. The third computer lab visit should occur around the same time or shortly after Journal Assignment 4 is due as all elements to complete the story should be procured or developed by the candidate.
 - d. The fourth computer lab time should be scheduled to allow students to finalize their digital photo stories.
7. Digital photo stories, due to file size (three-five minute story is approximately 8,500 KB), are difficult to send through email for assessment. The instructor should consult with his/her institution's technology professional to arrange storage space in which students can save their digital photo stories. Ensure access to all candidate files in the designated server space for assessment.

Assessment Procedures and Evaluation Rubrics

The instructor will conduct assessment on the four Journal Assignments and the Final Digital Photo Story using the scoring guides (rubrics) in Tables 1 and 2. The instructor will provide the rubrics to the students at the beginning of the semester so they may clearly understand the expectations for each level of performance (unacceptable, acceptable, and target). The value of each performance level for the criteria in the Journal Assignment and Final Digital Photo Story Assessment Rubrics may be determined as related to individual course evaluation needs.

RESULTS

This project has been implemented four times in Community/Public Health, a required course for all health education majors or minors (community health or school health) at the author's institution. One hundred twenty seven digital stories have been completed by health education students. Student stories vary, but common themes include: 1) realizations about health needs of priority populations; 2) challenges with program implementation and barriers to program success; 3) professional relationships developed during the field experience; 4) realizations about how the com-

munity benefits from an organization's services; 5) organizational mission and daily activity; and 6) personal attitudes or beliefs altered about health education or oneself.

DISCUSSION

The primary benefit of this project for students is that it challenges them to engage in a personal reflection and professional product development process simultaneously, which should be a habit of professional health educators. Every process or product one creates is connected to who one *is*, who one knows oneself to *be*, and *how* one knows oneself to relate with the professional environment. Providing ample opportunity for health education students to examine themselves in relation to a health education environment is paramount to their individual success as well as that of the profession. Additional benefits of the digital story project include student ability to create a product through use of widely available technology and utilize digital tools for a professional purpose beyond word processing or data analysis.

As with any assignment or project, students range in interest in and resistance to the project. However, students' comfort working with digital images and technology has increased. This may be due to a rise in general knowledge of how to use digital technologies. Increased digital story quality may also be due to the author's increased experience in teaching students how to successfully complete the project. Author research and reflection have supported refinement of student directions and assessment criteria, and computer lab and instruction time have been increased. Students' ability to appraise a professional experience for meaning and digitally communicate a personal story about the professional experience has improved, leading to increased digital story quality.

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Table 1: Journal Assessment Rubric

Criterion	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Target
Content Included <i>(varies for each journal; see journal assignment directions)</i>	Content requirements stated in directions are not included.	Most content requirements included; those that are included are robust with detail.	All content requirements stated in directions are robust with detail.
Clarity* <i>(includes accuracy, precision, and relevance of a statement or group of statements)</i>	Ideas are not completely developed and articulated. Main points are not illustrated. Appropriate examples are absent throughout.	Ideas are developed but not well articulated. Some points are illustrated but in an inconsistent manner. Appropriate examples are utilized throughout.	Ideas are clearly developed and articulated. Main points are illustrated. Appropriate examples are utilized throughout.
Depth*	Journal provides little evidence of reflection about complexities inherent in prompts and questions.	Journal demonstrates a partial reflection about complexities inherent in prompts and questions.	Journal clearly demonstrates reflection about complexities inherent in prompts and questions.
Logic* <i>(requires a statement or group of statements to make sense or to follow a sense of order; requires a combination of statements to be mutually supporting)</i>	Position is not clearly explained. Response is unclear.	Position is clearly explained. Response is clear.	Position is clearly explained. Response is clear. Conclusion is logical in light of the evidence provided throughout the work.
Disposition*	Product fails to demonstrate awareness of issues related to prompts and questions. No evidence of enthusiasm.	Product exhibits awareness of issues related to prompts and questions. Enthusiasm for content, issue, or profession evident.	Product exhibits intellectual vitality and a sensitivity to issues related to prompts and questions. Tangible evidence of enthusiasm for content, issue, or profession.

*(Paul & Elder, 2009)

Table 2: Final Digital Photo Story Assessment Rubric

Criterion	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Target
Purpose of Story <i>(storyline)</i>	It is difficult to figure out storyline or purpose of story.	Establishes storyline or purpose early on; a few lapses in story clarity occur.	Establishes storyline or purpose early on and maintains distinct clarity throughout.
Point of View** <i>(specific realization or lesson learned; story ownership voice or personality)</i>	Point of view or specific realization only hinted at; difficult to discern. Story knowledge and ownership are lacking; story personality lacking.	Point of view or specific realization clear but not connected throughout story. Story knowledge and ownership evident in most of story; story personality minimal.	Point of view or specific realization is well developed; writing from knowledge demonstrates story ownership that contributes to overall meaning of story. Story personality evident throughout.
Quality of Images	Little or no attempt to use images to create complimentary tone for story.	Image choice logical but not consistent with tone throughout entire story.	Images create tone that matches all parts of story. Images communicate symbolism and/or metaphors.
Economy of Story Detail** <i>(flow)</i>	Lack of story detail detracts from point of view. Story too short or too long to be interesting. Extensive editing needed.	Story detail provides point of view. Story drags a bit with too much detail or needs more detail in one or two sections. Some editing needed.	Story detail completes point of view. Story not too short or too long to be interesting. No editing needed.
Editing <i>(grammar and mechanics, which includes words as various parts of speech to be used in specific ways with punctuation to communicate ideas effectively)</i>	Errors in grammar or mechanics distracted from story, including clarity and point of view. Story script is 50 to 75 words over or under 400 words.	Grammar and mechanics were correct for chosen dialect most of story. Errors did not distract from clarity and point of view. Story script is approximately 400 words.	Grammar and mechanics were correct for chosen dialect and contributed to clarity and point of view. Story script is approximately 400 words.

** (Satterfield, 2009)

Table 3: Sample Community Based Organizations for Field Experience

- American Red Cross
- Children’s Discovery Museum
- Community Cancer Center
- Environmental Education Non Profit Agency
- Head Start
- University Health Promotion and Wellness, Student Wellness Ambassador Team
- County Health Department
- Hospital Patient and Community Education Center
- Nursing/Assisted Living Community
- Community Center (K-12 academic out-of-school time program)
- Elementary School Parent Teacher Organization Wellness Committee
- Community Center (K-5 after school program)

Table 4: Developing the Digital Photo Story Through Journaling

Journal Assignment 1: Getting to Know Your CBO and Identifying Your Intentions

1. Investigate your CBO. Read the website's materials or collect and read material they provide to their clients about who they are and what they do. Observe your CBO surroundings (physical environment, social-cultural environment, service delivery) to the extent that you have been able to be in your CBO. Make notes about what you observe. Talk to the priority population of your CBO (for whom does the CBO provide service?) Talk with staff of the CBO and get to know who they are and what they do.
2. Answer the following questions in a journal format (limit 750 words):
 - a. Describe your CBO's mission (in your words). Include the CBO's priority population and describe two or three of the services they provide (you won't know them all yet, but identify as many as you can).
 - b. What type of health education setting would you identify your CBO as (PK-School, Community, Industry/Business, Healthcare, and University)? Explain your answer.
 - c. Describe your feelings about getting started with your CBO. Are you anxious, excited, or filled with dread? Explain. How do you think the way you feel about completing your CBO hours will affect the experience?
 - d. Describe at least one "thing" you believe you can learn through your time with your CBO (e.g. a professional or personal lesson, information about a priority population, public health needs).
 - e. Identify and describe at least one intention for your 30 hours and why you set it. An intention is an "aim that guides action; an objective."

Journal Assignment 2: Connecting Story, Self, and Setting

1. This journal entry will guide you through a series of questions intended to help you "awaken" to what goes on around you or within you at the CBO. Keep in mind that honesty will serve your creativity and that there are no "wrong" answers. It is recommended not to attempt answering all the questions in one sitting. Allow some time to process and answer a few, and then come back and process a few more.
2. The questions below are to help you develop ideas, concepts, content, and phrases that will eventually support the development of a digital photo story script. So, it might help to begin by thinking of this journal (not the entire digital photo story) as a guided diary entry. What would you tell your diary about your CBO experience? Or, what would you tell your best friend?
3. Limit your journal to 650 words (approximately two pages double spaced). You still need to consider the Journal Assessment Rubric Criteria, but only after you get a draft of the Journal completed. Write from your heart/intuition/experience first. Then go back and edit as necessary.
 - a. Make a list of your favorite children's books from your own childhood or youth (e.g., favorite books such as "Green Eggs and Ham," "The Giving Tree," "Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs," or favorite oral stories/histories that someone told you such as bedtime stories or stories about events from family histories, and so on). Next, add to the list of favorite childhood stories by writing what your favorite stories are now. Such stories could be in the form of your favorite movies, books, etc.
 - b. Describe what each of these stories means to you. To form your description, consider why you love the stories, including what emotions and thoughts they generate, why they inspire you, what values are represented that you love or dislike, and what you learn or are reminded of from the stories.
 - c. Now, transition to your field experience in your CBO. Stories are waiting to be told about your CBO experience. What have you already observed or experienced at your CBO that has caught your attention (e.g., an emotional moment, a particular person or group served by the CBO; a successful employee, unsuccessful event, or complicated process)? Why or how did these things catch your attention?
 - d. Has something about your CBO, its priority population or staff profoundly moved or impacted you? Has something annoyed or disgusted you? Describe it.
 - e. Have you discovered some new "truth" or contradiction about health education you had previously not known or recognized? Have you discovered some new truth about yourself (e.g., I don't like being around kids; I'm really interested in a particular health topic I never thought about before.)? If so, how do you feel about the truth you have discovered? If not, what can you change or do differently the next time you are at your CBO to connect to a new lesson or truth?

- f. Visualize your CBO environment. What images and sounds come to mind? What feelings emerge when you focus on those images and sounds? Describe.
- g. Close your eyes and for one minute, visualize yourself AT your CBO. What feelings emerge from this visualization? Describe.

Journal Assignment 3: Planning Story Script and Content

1. Recall/review your writing for Journals 1 and 2. Use this information to inform step four below.
2. Review the assessment rubric for the digital photos story. The rubric criteria are the elements upon which your digital photo story will be assessed, and for this Journal, you should focus on all of them except for "Quality of Images."
3. Read "Eight Tips for Telling Your Story Digitally" (Satterfield, 2009) at <http://www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/training/page6738.cfm>
4. In tip one, use the identified "seven elements" to begin to draft your story script. Describe your story's point of view, dramatic question, and emotional content. Next, draft ideas about voice and soundtrack for your digital photo story. Finally, draft ideas about the economy and pacing of your digital photo story.

Journal Assignment 4: Digital Photo Storyboard

1. Using Journals 1-3 as support, complete a final draft of your digital story script (approximately 400 words for a three to five minute digital photo story).
2. Next, create a storyboard (Lambert, 2010). In the context of this assignment, a storyboard is a series of your field experience digital images or pictures that outline your story's sequence and major changes in action or plot. Pair each digital image with segments of your story script.
3. In a portrait format, develop a storyboard for your digital photo story. Each storyboard segment should have the following elements in the order as listed below:
 - a. Digital Image (picture)
 - b. Amount of Time Image Remains Visible (15 seconds, one minute)
 - c. Brief Image Effect Description (e.g., fade in from white; checkerboard in)
 - d. Voiceover (segment of story script that accompanies image)
 - e. Soundtrack Transitions (e.g. fade in "Here Comes the Sun" by The Beatles)