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Professional Resource:

StoryKit (2009)

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StoryKit. iPhone application. <http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/storykit/id329374595?mt=8>

This past July, Newsweek's article, The Creativity Crisis, shared with the general public that creativity in America is on the decline. Authors Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman share that researcher Kyung Hee Kim at the College of William & Mary has found that creativity scores were steadily on the rise until 1990. Though too early to determine why, one hypothesis they share is "the number of hours kids now spend in front of the TV and playing videogames rather than engaging in creative activities." However, this draws a line of distinction that doesn't show the creative opportunities digital media offer to children.

This distinction pushes forward that we are consumers of media rather than producers. As parents and educators, we do our children a disservice if we only use the media as the babysitter or the distraction and we help to spread a negative outlook on the uses of media rather than the promises it holds for encouraging creativity in our children. As a parent and educator, I want to share with you some simple ways for you to engage children with media creatively.

My family moved from Boston to Los Angeles this summer. We wanted our son Ocean to experience a piece of American history rather than just reading about it in books. And that is just what we did as we stopped at many attractions, starting (as many Americans do) at the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, then on to making our own chocolate at Hershey, Pennsylvania and riding up to the top of the St. Louis's arch to see the expansive plains of the west. Pretending like we were Jesse James, we hid in the Merramac Caves, the Petrified Forest had us observing green collard lizards lazing on the rocks and we were transfixed watching the magic of the sunset over Grand Canyon.



Before we started our road trip, I decided to purchase the new iPhone and download all the different applications people had recommended to me throughout the year. One of the suggested apps was StoryKit created by the International Children's Digital Library. StoryKit <http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/storykit/id329374595?mt=8> is a free application for either the iPhone, iTouch or iPad for children to read, remix and create their own stories. Though it comes with some classic books for children to read, like Humpty Dumpty and Three Little Pigs – what gravitates me toward this application is the simple ability for kids to create and remix their own stories. The authoring tools available within StoryKit are not limited to traditional text, but allow children to author their story using various modalities including taking or loading pictures, creating drawings and recording sounds.

Get Started Using StoryKit

- StoryKit is available for use on

I have always been drawn to super-heroes, from being obsessed with Wonder Woman as a child, to having my mother (who was an English Teacher) tell vivid adventure stories of Odysseus at bedtime, to standing in the long ticket line to see the first Star Wars movie. I have passed this love for the “Hero’s Journey” on to my son, Ocean. And often, we spend hours talking at length about super-heroes, and spending time in the car during our trip was no exception. It actually gave me time to encourage him to not only create in his mind these super-heroes and phenomenal stories but to finally write them into being using StoryKit as his creative tool.

Get Started Using Story Kit

- Launch the app and choose either Read, Edit or Share to begin.
- Read allows you to choose one of the books on your books shelf.
- Edit encourages you to author your own book or take one of the existing books and remix it by adding your own text, images or sounds to the story.
- Share your book once you’re done creating it by posting it to the website or sharing it with friends and family to their email addresses.

During his play, Ocean practiced the new media literacies, performance (the ability to adopt alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery) and distributed cognition (the ability to interact meaningfully with tools that expand mental capacities), while enabling design thinking into our playtime by encouraging Ocean to observe, brainstorm, create characters, develop a story, and build his narrative.

Fostering the new media literacies allows us to think in very different ways about the processes of learning, because they acknowledge a shift from the top-down model to one that invokes all voices and all means of thinking and creating to build new knowledge. Buckingham (2008) writes, “[technology] has produced new styles of playful learning, which go beyond the teacher-dominated, authoritarian approach of old style education. It is creating new competencies or forms of ‘literacy’, which require and produce new intellectual powers, and even ‘more complex brain structures’” (13-14).

Our brainstorming involved having each of us (including my husband with Ocean posing questions to him through the walkie-talkie since he was driving our other car) answer the following questions ...

What is your super-hero name?

What do you look like?

What are your powers?

Would you use your powers for good or evil?

This type of learning also fosters a creative learner. Ocean tinkers as he processes his ideas, which allows for a visibility of intention through choosing the form, color and technique he will tell his story, as well as mastering new digital skills and techniques through play (Lindstrom 2006).

I could have just handed him the iPhone to play with as a distraction during our trip, but instead I used this time to connect our in-depth reflections of super-heroes to his creative process and encouraged him to record it into StoryKit. Here is the adventure of Monster Super-Hero, Queen Bubbles and Night Hawk that he was able to share immediately with friends and family.

Ocean Saves the Day (<http://iphone.childrenslibrary.org/cgi-bin/view.py?b=us2n7xzxmmmmme43zaear>)

By Ocean Reilly



Though I love all the latest technology available to us today, I'm not a proponent of tuning out each other on long stretches of road. Ocean's time was not spent just watching DVD's and playing video games or listening to his iPod through headphones. We spent the hours in character development, story line, and collaboration. StoryKit enabled a six year old to create and communicate his ideas on his level. After all, the point of a road trip is time spent together in the car and that is the time I'll remember most.

The combination of Ocean's passion for superheroes and playing with creative technology offered a "motivated interest" (Kress 2009) experience which structured Ocean's attention, his interpretation, and engagement with and across media. This interest also drives children's multimodal meaning making.

Kress has argued extensively that children are fundamentally dispositioned towards multimodal forms of meaning making (Kress 2009). StoryKit offered Ocean multiple modes of sensory engagement to tell his story. Ocean is a very avid reader, but at six he is still learning how to phonetically sound out words and spell them. StoryKit didn't just offer a text tool, but also included a drawing, audio, and image tools, which ensured that the tool supported his storytelling instead of preventing him from telling his story through traditional means.

There are many different ways StoryKit can be used for creative learning. Other examples include interviewing a relative, such as having your child collaborate with a grandparent in developing an interactive family history, or having your students develop a journalistic report during a field trip, allowing them to capture information, edit, and refine their work immediately. Since StoryKit is a mobile application, it allows the flexibility to create anywhere.

With children older than 8 spending an average of about 10.5 hours a day using media outside school, we must meet children where they are in order to convert couch time at home and seat time at school into creative learning time (Generation M2: Media in the Lives of 8- to 18-Year-Olds).

You don't need to be driving cross-country to bring creative learning to your own super-hero. My hope is that this engages you to see the benefits of using tools that encourage authorship, rather than downloading applications of passive entertainment merely for distraction. Features to look for in other applications include the ability to:

- Draw
- Tell a story
- Animate
- Make a video
- Create a character
- Mix music
- Design solutions to problems
- Open-ended stories that encourage choice for your child
- Encourage divergent and convergent thinking skills

The Joan Ganz Cooney Research Center has developed Kids Creativity Tools (LINK) and offers applications that foster creative learning for web, mobile, computer and console platforms. We need a better understanding of the types of activities that foster children's creativity, which features of their creative process demonstrate learning and which features of digital media are best suited to deliver those experiences. Don't think of creativity and technology in opposition of each other, but seek out digital media that uses both to motivate a child's learning.

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