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Interview with Bernajea Porter

We recently sat down with Bernajea Porter, longtime ISTE member and founder of the Web site *Digitales.us*. Bernajea is currently planning to start a new SIG on Digital Storytelling.

1. Tell us a little bit about yourself and how you got involved in educational technology:

I have always loved learning new things. After fourteen years of teaching lots of grade levels and subject areas, I connected with an old high school flame who offered to take me to a ComDex Show in the late 70's. I remember wandering around this twilight zone of stuff in Dallas for two days and still asking him to explain the difference between hardware and software again as I tried to get my mind around this strange world. He said this was the wave of the future and I should get involved. Well, I plunged into getting a masters degree from Lesley College that immediately landed my job with Colorado Department of Ed as their Senior Technology Consultant. Believe me yearning for new things to learn has never been a problem since.

2. How long have you been an ISTE member, and why did you join?

I joined in the mid 80's as part of the networking process in finding and learning from others with my interests. In those days programming and MECC software organized most technology uses. I am proud to be a founder of TIES, an affiliate organization of ISTE, which I founded to support ed-tech leadership in Colorado. I as also honored to be named one of ISTE's Consultants that Work Awards in 1991.

3. What do you love about digital storytelling?

I am deeply committed to the art of digital storytelling—not as the latest technical fad but as a way of nourishing our inner lives while also deeply connecting with others. The magical power of releasing our own story into local and global communities is its ability to create understandings, build positive relationships, and leverage shared values between people of different communities or cultures. Our world could use a LOT more of that!

At the end of the day who we are as a people are the stories we tell ourselves. Storytelling is a vehicle we use to make sense of our lives, values and experiences—it also gives a lot of sticking power to whatever we are learning or trying to understand in the world. Anyone creating even one digital storytelling will gain a LOT of learning results. There are at least thirteen (13) digital storytelling skills that support 21st century skills and a multitude of national and state standards. In digital storytelling, as you weave the voice narration, images and music together to unfold a sensory experience, you also strive to find the essence of meaning or value this experience has made for your life. Having a “moral lesson” or point to the story is an essential element that organizes the entire narrative making digital storytelling unique from other types of digital stories.

Using my background in coaching speech and debate along with training students and teachers in writing processes, I designed a highly engaging 3-5 day storytelling camp based on the writer's workshop model as a way to package the many learning curves. Facilitating community learning also provides a unique artist retreat that renews educator's spirits, creativity and passion for learning—at the end of our camps there is an understanding and passion to embrace the many benefits of digital storytelling. I especially love coaching authors to find their lesson learned or wisdom in the story they have chosen to tell. It is the spine of the story deepening and organizing their narratives from good to great stories. Telling stories together about things that really matter has an extraordinary effect on people even more so when their digital stories are distributed and related meaningfully to quite literally a world community through the World Wide Web.

Finally I am finding that my DigiTales Storytelling camps enables participants to master a set of dynamic media skills and deepen their understandings of processes needed to coach others in creating all kinds of exemplar multi-media products beyond storytelling. Our students deserve teachers prepared to help them communicate and illuminate their ideas and understandings beyond just using words.

4. What are some ways that people can start getting involved now?

Of course making your own personal storytelling from start to finish by sharing a defining moment, a memorable experience, or a person that has touched your life is always a good first experience. Developing the story prompt you want to use begins the process of selecting and guiding the kind of story that needs to be told. Teams of teachers have also gathered to tell the story of how their projects or initiatives have made a difference for the kids in their classrooms.

Of course, many teachers want to make content or curriculum connections sooner than later. You can view a knock-your-socks-off storytelling experience with a science concept at Story-of-the-Month at <http://web.mac.com/bernajeaporter>. It shows an incredible example of what teachers can do coaching kids in effective multi-media products after they personally learn their own digital storytelling skills.

My book, *DigiTales: The Art of Telling Digital Stories*, provides step-by-step detailed processes for beginners wanting to get started on their own without workshops. A number of colleges are now using *DigiTales* as their primary digital storytelling textbook. And using the resources offered on my website will be an immediate place for getting started as well.

5. Tell us a little bit about your Web site, *Digitales.us*:

My new website—www.DigiTales.us—organizes a lot of rich resources to inspire and jump start beginners in experiencing the magic of merging the ancient art of oral storytelling with a palette of digital tools. Even if you are reading and writing other multimedia forms than digital storytelling, you'll find the Seven Storysteps; Take Six:

6. What is your vision for the Digital Storytelling SIG?

First I believe there will be powerful benefits locally and nationally from creating intentional story fields. Story fields are fields of influence created through the collections of storytelling that then permeate psycho-social space and influence the lives of those connected to them. (www.co-intelligence.org/l-powerofstory.html) I hope to develop a community of practitioners to share and expand this emerging communication mode in ways that not only serve their students (learning and communication skills) but also build capacity to serve their local communities. Storytelling is not just a language arts skill or even an expression mode for learning a multitude of 21st century standards. Storytelling is considered a vital skill for developing native intelligence, communicating an understanding of what we know and

understand and building community. Together I believe we can raise the bar of narrative storytelling skills, inspire and guide others, provide events and services, and create our own virtual campfires to support us in learning forward how digital storytelling serves our humanity.

The Digital Storytelling ISTE SIG will be launched at NECC 2008. One first group task will be organizing ourselves as an international storytelling corps actively engaging and leading others in a national EdTech 2009 narrative storytelling event. "The Story of Us" will build an archive of personal digital narratives gathering the history and many "stories" of education technology thus far. These stories are expected to capture the arduous and winding journey of how efforts, successes, challenges, and celebrations of education technology have served our kids over the years featured at NECC 2009 (Washington D.C.) marking thirty years of ISTE.

7. Where do you see your profession going in the next 5 years?

While digital storytelling camps are still considered an emerging learning experience in the scope of most schools's present urgent agendas, I love training this communication skill and digital storytelling events to expand as a very effective teacher training strategy that will develop teachers skills in reading and writing multi-media. Daniel Pink's book, Whole New Mind: Why Right Brainers Will Rule the World, names "story" as one of six key attributes essential in our market place. We have a lot of room to grow in embracing and excelling in the communication form of digital storytelling.

I am also presently forging a number of partnerships with vanguard projects like Rachel Kessler's Soul of Education, to support and celebrate the personal narrative stories of how their programs and efforts are making a difference for kids. Data (numbers) does not really tell the whole story of how we are doing. I want to lend my talents to making their successes visible by helping teachers and students learn to effectively use the narrative digital storytelling mode. I believe that our public often generously funds an initiative when they hear and understand the personal narrative stories of how it impacts our kids. Hard to get the same spirit and enthusiasm around the impersonal numbers that many of our data reports presently provide. We need both kinds of data but I have found it is the stories we tell and the experience of viewing personal expressions created by our students that really inspires urgent enthusiasm to support more of what has made this happen.

Educators and parents work hard to serve our kids. The news stories don't always shine on our many, many daily successes and endless classroom heroes. We need to step up purposely creating our own story field by distributing our own storytelling of how educators and communities continually make a difference for kids. Our students deserve to have their own voices heard beyond the classrooms as well. I want to be part of that effort for a long time! So many stories, so little time!

8. What is your favorite Ed Tech tool?

I love any tool that invites creativity—and video editing is certainly emerging as a vital 21st century tool. But recently I have been having lots of fun with Comic Life™. Making comics engages visual literacy, synthesis, symbolism, the art of what is NOT said and exploring creativity mastering this highly engaging communication mode. One emerging use of comics is narrative documentaries melded to represent on-the-ground reporting and research from some of the world's most traumatized regions. An example of this is Rall's To Afghanistan and Back: A Graphic Travelogue. The world needs a lot of understanding so I find it very interesting to use the craft of visual literacy or graphic novels to communicate serious topics to others. I'll be conducting a pre-conference workshop on using graphic novels for H.O.T. personal expression at NECC 2008—just for fun!

9. Forgetting about work, if you could be anywhere in the world right, where would you be and what would you be doing?

I find that creativity often follows long periods of silence or solitude. So even though I have lots of ideas and events that I am excited to participate in right now . . . I have on the top of my personal list manifesting some time at the Soneva Gili's Water Villas located in the Maldives. I am sure I will not only have fun releasing my mind to float around and conjure up even more new ideas but then be able to feel rested and regenerated in ways that would contribute to the creative work we all have ahead when I return. And maybe . . . I can also connive to host a digital storytelling camp there for educators who also deserve this spirit space in their lives!

