

NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS USE DIGITAL STORYTELLING TO PRESERVE AND CELEBRATE CULTURAL HERITAGE

Target Stores, the National Hispanic Cultural Center, and the Indigenous Language Institute Offer Cutting-Edge Training to Empower Ordinary People to Preserve Their Oral Histories

Taos, N.M.—Target Stores, Scholastic, and the National Hispanic Cultural Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico, have partnered with SUBE, a New Mexico-based innovator in language education, to offer a free online curriculum designed to bring Digital Storytelling training to the widest possible population. This powerful new medium allows ordinary people, with little computer experience and with readily available electronic tools, to create three- to four-minute video clips that can be played on a computer, shared as an email or played on a television.

“We’ve created a set of lesson plans that takes the teacher through the process, step by step, of how to teach Digital Storytelling to youth,” explains SUBE founder Agnes Chavez, an educator, artist and curriculum developer who has been training people in Digital Storytelling since 2002. “We designed it for a classroom environment, and it’s aligned with the National Language Arts Standards. But of course the same curriculum could be used for adults.”

The complete curriculum is available for free downloading on www.scholastic.com/dreamincolor/digitalstorytelling/ and on www.sube.com/home/sube-community/digital-storytelling/curriculum. Comprising eight easy-to-use lesson plans and a wealth of teacher resources, the curriculum breaks down the process of combining scraps of multimedia materials (such as photographs, drawings, music clips and other memorabilia) with the storyteller’s own words to create a unique story.

Target originally intended to offer the lessons online until late 2008, as part of its Dream in Color cultural-heritage initiative. But the Digital Storytelling curriculum has proved so popular that Target recently extended its availability until December 2009.

Another national cultural organization, the Indigenous Language Institute in Santa Fe, New Mexico, also hired Chavez to teach Digital Storytelling workshops to Native American trainers, who then went back to their communities to pass on the skills. “One of our focuses is to help all Indian communities develop their own materials in their Native languages,” explains Inee Slaughter, executive director of the Indigenous Languages Institute. “So we require participants to create pieces that are 75 percent or more in their Native language.”

Since partnering with SUBE in 2007, the Indigenous Language Institute has helped close to one hundred indigenous language groups produce digital stories, ranging from mythological tribal tales to an examination of the history and cultural significance of long

hair. A selection of these works—many with English subtitles—are available for viewing on the website www.tellingthestory.org.

Both the Indigenous Language Institute and the National Hispanic Cultural Center found that Digital Storytelling was an innovative way to deepen community and to bring generations together. “It’s a really natural extension of oral storytelling and how we used to share our stories with our families around the dinner table and at holidays,” comments Dr. Shelle Sanchez, education director for the National Hispanic Cultural Center. “Anybody from age five to eight-five can create these stories, and they can be archived and shared without a major television network deciding whether they’re good enough. A grandmother can make a digital story and email it to her grandkids. It’s happened!”

“We find that there’s a lot of intergenerational teamwork that goes into creating a digital story,” adds the Indigenous Language Institute’s Slaughter. “Most of the people who know the stories are the elders, but they’re not always comfortable with the computer. And the younger person may not know the Native language [of his or her tribe], because youth now are so assimilated into the mainstream culture. So a lot of our Digital Storytelling has been based on an apprentice-mentorship model. Bringing today’s technology into language work really draws in the young people.”

As a trainer and developer of the Digital Storytelling curriculum, SUBE’s Chavez feels that her role is “like that of farmers who pass on their seeds to families and communities, who then plant and cultivate them.” She notes that, through workshops she has offered since 2002 with the National Hispanic Cultural Center, people in low-income and rural communities have been empowered to preserve and disseminate their stories. And the digital stories produced through the Indigenous Language Institute “excited me because they were done in Native languages, and the whole vision behind SUBE is about preserving language and culture.

“What I like about Digital Storytelling is that it’s for someone who doesn’t have any media experience or money,” she adds. “All the software is free and easily accessible. It really helps break down that digital divide by putting media in hands of people who normally wouldn’t have access. And, because it’s digital, it’s easy to share via the web or email or uploaded to YouTube.”

Based in Taos, N.M., Chavez founded SUBE, Inc., in 1996 to develop innovative ways to teach language and cultural diversity in our schools, communities and homes. The company develops and distributes a line of multimedia products for home and classroom use that empower teachers and parents to teach Spanish or English as a second language by incorporating art, music and games. In 2002 she expanded her language program to include Digital Storytelling workshops and an internet cultural exchange program connecting Spain and Mexico to classrooms in the U.S. Chavez leads international workshops for these programs and continues to develop innovative approaches that educate on preserving language, culture and ecological diversity, in the classrooms and in the community. The company’s vision is predicated on the belief that learning more than one language develops in children a global awareness crucial to their success in the world

today. For further information or to schedule an interview with Chavez, contact SUBE at (PHONE NUMBER) or (EMAIL ADDRESS), or visit www.sube.com.

written by Diana Rico 9/14/08