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DIGICOM is training teachers to redefine the classroom through digital storytelling

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(Photo: Zoe Meyers/The Desert Sun)

The school year just ended, but some local teachers are already back in the classroom.

For the past two weeks, educators from throughout the Coachella Valley have participated in the professional development opportunity offered by DIGICOM Learning, which hopes to benefit the academic experiences of both students and teachers through the medium of digital storytelling.

"I tell teachers to come to DIGICOM for revolution and redefinition," said Jessica Pack, a language arts teacher and student leadership director at James Workman Middle School. "The redefined classroom is one in which the technology makes the instruction possible."

Pack, a 2014 California Teacher of the Year, has been using digital storytelling in the classroom for 12 years, predating DIGICOM's 10-year history of training teachers in Palm Springs Unified on implementing digital storytelling in the classroom. Now, she's a DIGICOM instructor running one of the four workshops.

"The engagement piece is huge," Pack said. "It's great for students who are in middle school who are figuring out who they are."

As DIGICOM Learning continues to cultivate its relationship with local school districts, Pack and other teachers have been using digital storytelling to illustrate mathematical concepts or to bring to life scenes from literature. In classes where the 21st-century medium is fully implemented, students are able to produce their own videos to demonstrate their mastery of the course material.

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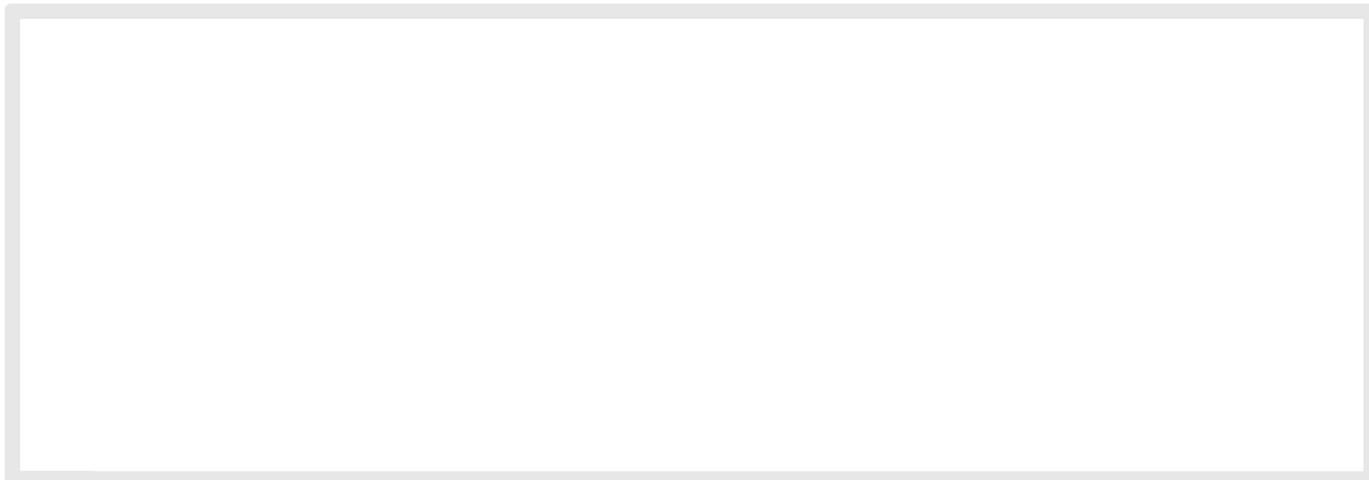


A group of Palm Springs Unified teachers work on framing an interview during DIGICOM's video production training program, Palm Springs, Calif., June 13, 2018. (Photo: Zoe Meyers/The Desert Sun)

"It's another vehicle that allows students to explain the process," said Sherri DiBari, a local math teacher and an instructor for DIGICOM Learning. When students produce videos where they explain the results of an experiment or the solution to a word problem, she said, they're forced to become comfortable with the language of math and science. DiBari compared the production process to "digital flashcards."

"The editing process requires the students to use the vocabulary over and over in the video," she said. "How else would I have gotten them to use these words?"

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DiBari said her students make about five videos a year. While digital storytelling and mathematics might seem like an odd pair in the classroom, DiBari's students have been able to use new media to take ownership of their learning.

"In math, it's a way to do that process and then having to explain their work," she said. "Their story is trial and error."

DiBari said digital storytelling has been most effective for students whose first language is not English. She said some of her students who are insecure about their English have gained confidence through speaking on camera. For a school district where about a third of the students are English learners, there is a high potential for student success.

"They refuse to speak in English because they struggle," she said. "The first time I saw one of my students speak English was on a video."

DiBari is teaching the intermediate portion of the DIGICOM Learning's summer training program, which helps teachers develop skills in identifying and
 exp 4 free articles left. s, which contains the largest group of teachers, are learning basic technical skills.
 Tw 99¢ per month. Save 90%. mplementing digital storytelling in the classroom through more advanced video



Vanessa Nassar, right, adjusts a tripod with Rick Sturms. The two are participating in DIGICOM's video production training program for Palm Springs Unified teachers, Palm Springs, Calif., June 13, 2018. (Photo: Zoe Meyers/The Desert Sun)

"Part of it is not to produce something polished. There's no such thing as failure." said Dominik Radwanske, creative director at DIGICOM who is teaching the "applied" course. "This is the beginning of a relationship. We don't abandon them after this week."

While these teachers might not be producing masterpieces right away, their efforts and those of the DIGICOM Learning have been galvanized by academic research.

Viet Vu and Mark Warschauer, two scholars at the University of California, Irvine, detailed their findings in a paper titled "Digital Storytelling: A Case Study," which is to appear in the "Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy."

Through surveys of students, teachers and DIGICOM employees, Vu and Warschauer found that digital storytelling in the classroom not only resulted in the "encouragement of positive student identities through linking of school, community, and culture," but also supported efforts in language and literacy development.

Teachers who attended the DIGICOM training sessions said the new medium did not take time away from the foundations of reading and writing. Brenda Ragland, a second-grade teacher at Della Lindley Elementary School, said digital storytelling and more traditional academics go hand-in-hand.

"The cornerstone of digital storytelling is writing," she said. "With digital storytelling, they're much more excited about it."

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