Teaching and Learning Idea: Student Voices and Digital Storytelling Activity

Engaging directly with student voices and stories compels audiences to listen to real-life culturally unique and personal travails and achievements. Storytelling can be a powerful tool to strengthen empathy, understanding, and connections among diverse individuals. Having a class or course activity that includes Asian American and/or Pacific Islander students sharing their individual stories about racist, xenophobic anti-Asian hate or exclusion due to language, culture, religion, and other dynamics that they have encountered or experienced—both on campus and in their communities—can promote deeper learning and conversation among college constituencies, internally and externally. If you don't have a Storytelling Program, contact your Communication Department for assistance.

Pioneered by UMass Boston's Asian American Studies Program in 2005, several AANAPISI-funded programs, such as Bunker Hill Community College and Mt. San Antonio College, have recently begun to integrate Digital Storytelling as both a teaching/learning and research/documentation method to capture and share the unique experiences of students of color. Students reflect on, excavate, write and produce their personal narratives in digital multimedia format and present them as projects to peers and public audiences. These aural and visual stories often elicit and provoke meaningful conversations about the challenges, interactions, and perspectives among students of color and their audiences.

Recently, the Digital Storytelling in Asian American Studies team at UMass Boston led by Dr. Shirley Tang hosted a webinar that featured new digital stories co-produced by their own Asian American, immigrant and low-income students focusing on issues they faced during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak of spring 2020. The students' videos presented authentic and powerful examples of health and mental health challenges, struggles with racism and economic loss, and educational resilience for themselves, their families, and their communities in touching and often bilingual ways. Although digital storytelling requires technology, script writing and other multimedia production capacities as well as context- and meaning-making, the process and products can provide great learning and conversation tools not just for students of color, but also for their communities. For more information about Digital Storytelling, Asian American Studies, and relevance for AANAPISIs and other MSIs, in particular, please contact Shirley S. Tang, Ph.D. at shirley.tang@umb.edu.