

Digital Storytelling: Better than Therapy

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Ruch Community School's 7th grade class has participated in the Digital Storytelling Project over the past 8 weeks. Ark Media and Productions, The Oregon Writing Project, and SOU Education and English Interns have teamed up to create a life-changing experience for these students through digital media.

Weight, bullying, suicide and the absence of a parent are all difficult subjects for 7th graders to share, let alone with their classmates. Abram Katz, the owner and operator of Ark Media and Production (AMP), has joined up with Margaret Perrow Oregon Writing Project Director at SOU, interns from Southern Oregon University English and Education departments, and Ruch Community School to create the Digital Storytelling Program where these kids are able, and willing, to share what they would normally only discuss with a therapist.

“[The students] have an opportunity to speak their voice and shine a light on some of the darker things inside them and be supported through the process,” Katz explains when asked about the project. The Digital Storytelling Program combines language arts and digital media and provides a safe environment where students are encouraged to let loose their demons. So what exactly does Katz and his team do to create such an amazing experience for the students?

The first step is to have the kids write stories about experiences or subjects that have influenced their lives. Next, Katz and the interns work with the students to provide a quality audio recording of them reading their own story (all the emotion included). Then the middle schoolers explore the internet to find images that relate to the mood and words of their story. After all the images have been selected (and approved), the video production software gets broken out. Each student has the opportunity to create their own 1-3 minute movie made up of the audio they recorded, and the visuals from Google. Finally, after 8 long weeks of waiting and working, they present their videos to their class.

Keep in mind these are not easy experiences that are being shared. “This was a great experience for me because it helped me open up and be more honest about my true feelings,” remarked a student who had participated in the program last year. Students from previous *ARK Digital Storytelling* programs were surprised at how after watching their peer’s projects, many other kids were going through the same turmoil and issues they were. The program not only developed intern-student relationships, it also developed a better understanding for the students that their peers are just as human as they are. With the help of proper funding, this program has the potential to help students all over the Rogue Valley.