Animals in Society

Animal Studies Scholar Advocacy

Digital Storytelling for Critical Animal Studies Learning

I teach a critical animal studies class at the University of Canterbury in Aotearoa New Zealand. The class, Humans, Animals and Society, takes a broadly sociological approach to the study of human relationships with other animals by focussing on the ways that our – arbitrary – social construction of other animals impacts their (mal)treatment and normalised oppression in everyday practices.

One of the challenges in this class for both teachers and learners is the confrontational nature of the content (I've written, with Heather Fraser, more about teaching controversial issues in animal studies in this volume, Teaching Liberation). As a result of these challenges, I'm always looking for ways to help students manage the feelings the material inevitably brings up. This year, with the help of Julie Wuthnow and Roseanna Brailsford from the University of Canterbury's Academic Skills centre, I set a digital storytelling assignment for the students.

Digital storytelling, when used in a scholarly setting, 'involves students integrating academic research, scholarly communication, and digital skills to create digital content' (Schrum et al, 2021). It has the potential to ensure students are engaged in authentic learning particularly when the problems the assessment focusses on are complex and often ill-defined (as they are in human-animal relations), and it can also lead to/augment the kinds of transformative pedagogy that my particular course is based on (Schrum et al, 2021).

Students were set the task of creating a 1-2 minute video on one aspect of how their relationship to and/or thinking about other animals had changed throughout the course. The assignment was integrated throughout the course with several workhops over the duration of the semester focussing on scripting, story structure, and, using relevant technology, and we showed all the videos (students could choose to opt out) in a final session of the course.

Student feedback indicates that they very much enjoyed the task, seeing it as a chance to get creative, as something different from the usual essay based work they were set, and as something that helped them think through the various emotional repsonses they had to the course material. At the end of the final class, I aksed students if they would be willing to have their videos hosted on this site, and several of them gave their permission. You can see those videos below.

Digital story_Christina_Patterson

darrell house

01:43

Digital story_Maia_Nicholls

darrell house

01:38

Dorian Ghosh

darrell house

02:09

Digital story_Rebecca_Hunter

darrell house

02:00

Digital story_Nikolina_Canaria

darrell house

02:00

Digital story_Jessica_Goodall

darrell house

02:03

Published by Nik Taylor

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June 13, 2022
Animal Studies, Teaching

digital storytelling, teaching animal studies, teaching critical animal studies

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