

# AI – Supported Digital Storytelling

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## OVERVIEW

This lesson plan outlines a learning unit in which a group of preservice teachers (PSTs) explored both AI in education and educational uses of digital storytelling, then integrated AI into a digital storytelling project. The PSTs used an instructor-created custom chatbot to support script writing, then employed AI image generation programs to create visuals for their digital stories. Finally, they used a video creation platform to record their own voice overs and synthesize all media elements into a cohesive storytelling video.

Topics: Generative AI (GenAI), Teacher education, Digital storytelling

Time: Three weeks, with one 2.5-hour class meeting in the first and third week. No class meeting was held in the second week.

## MATERIALS

- [MagicSchool \(free plan\)](#)
- Instructor-created [custom chatbot](#)
- [AI in Education presentation](#)
- [Digital storytelling assignment and rubric](#)
- AI image generation programs ([Adobe Firefly](#), [Canva Magic Studio](#), [ChatGPT](#) or other generative AI tools that can create images)
- Video creation platforms ([Adobe Express](#) or [Canva](#), etc.)
- Computer (Desktop or laptop with [Zoom](#))

## SETUP

There was one synchronous class session on Zoom during the first week and one during the third week, each lasting 2.5 hours. The second week was asynchronous learning in Desire2Learn.

## CONTEXT-AT-A-GLANCE

### Setting

A four-year public state university located in the Midwestern United States

### Modality and Class Structure

Instruction combines synchronous Zoom sessions in weeks one and three with asynchronous learning in Desire2Learn during week two.

### Learner Characteristics

The learners were 16 licensure-seeking PSTs in a graduate-level instructional technology class, with diverse undergraduate backgrounds, not all in education.

### Instructor Characteristics

The instructor should have knowledge about digital storytelling and AI in education. They should demonstrate skills in integrating AI into educational contexts, including developing custom chatbots using AI platforms, and using AI tools for tasks such as image creation.

### Development Rationale

Through this activity, PSTs gain hands-on experience integrating AI into education, thereby preparing them to apply these skills in their future teaching practice.

### Design Framework

Guided inquiry can significantly and positively affect student learning (Lazonder & Harmsen, 2016). In this learning unit, various supports were employed including explanation (readings, the instructor's presentations, and instructions), heuristics (project document), and scaffolds (project document, custom chatbot, and other resources).

## STANDARDS

The learning unit was implemented in an instructional technology class for preservice teachers enrolled in master's degree programs. The following ISTE Standards for Faculty (International Society for Technology in Education, 2025) and Standards for Educators (International Society for Technology in Education, 2024) align with the learning.

### FOR FACULTY

**Instructor-Design learning opportunities:** Faculty design learning opportunities that integrate digital tools and resources, foster innovative, inclusive learning experiences, and equip students to use technology in the workforce.

**Leader-Model and share effective use:** Faculty mentor colleagues and students by modeling and sharing effective use of technology in teaching, research, and service.

**Leader-Ethical and responsible behaviors:** Faculty model ethical and responsible behaviors by promoting the safe, legal, and responsible use of technology in academic and professional practices.

### FOR EDUCATORS

**2.1 Learner:** Educators continually improve their practice by learning from and with others, and exploring proven and promising practices that leverage technology to improve student learning.

**2.1.a Set professional goals:** Educators set professional learning goals to apply teaching practices made possible by technology, explore promising innovations, and reflect on their effectiveness.

**2.5 Designer:** Educators design authentic, learner-driven activities and opportunities that use technology to accommodate learner variability.

**2.5.b Design authentic learning activities:** Educators design authentic learning activities that incorporate technology to advance student outcomes and develop opportunities for students to apply their knowledge.

**2.6 Facilitator:** Educators facilitate learning with technology to support student achievement of the 2016 ISTE Standards for Students.

**2.6.d Model and nurture creativity:** Educators model and nurture creativity and creative expression to communicate ideas, knowledge or connections.

## CONTEXT AND SETTING

The learning unit was implemented in an instructional technology class required for all PSTs in master's degree programs in elementary education and middle-level education. In this class, PSTs learn to utilize technology to enhance teaching, learning, and authentic assessment. Digital storytelling is a topic in this class, as it is a powerful tool in education (Robin, 2016). PSTs in this class are required to create a digital storytelling video for instructional purposes. In this project, writing a script is essential. Based on the instructor's past experience with PSTs in this class, some students tended to create instructional presentations instead of stories when working on the digital storytelling project. Of the seven elements of storytelling (Robin, 2008), emotional content and a dramatic question were often unidentifiable or missing in their stories. Visual elements are also important in a digital storytelling video. Students usually had difficulties getting copyright-free images that reflected the themes or aligned with the narratives.

AI has advanced significantly over the past decades, progressing from symbolic and predictive systems to generative AI (GenAI), which is a powerful technology capable of creating content including text, images, videos, and code (Pratschke, 2024). GenAI chatbots use large language models to process natural language and generate human-like responses based on users' prompts. They can engage in dialogue, answer questions, provide explanations, generate content, and assist users in various tasks. Due to these features, using chatbots in education helps to enhance accessibility, provide personalized learning experiences, and support subject-specific development (Jusoh & Kadir, 2025). AI chatbots can be customized to serve as specialized pedagogical tools tailored for specific class needs. A custom chatbot can act as a tutor, a coach, or a course assistant that provides students with targeted support (Bruff, 2025).

Given the educational potential of GenAI, teacher educators need to help PSTs develop skills in using GenAI tools, exposing them to innovative instructional strategies, and equipping them with the knowledge to use AI ethically and effectively in K-12 classrooms. Therefore, in this instructional technology class, AI in education is also an important topic. Due to the time constraints in this class, digital storytelling and AI in education were introduced to PSTs simultaneously. AI was not only a learning topic but also integrated into the digital storytelling project to model the use of AI. Specifically, the PSTs interacted with a custom chatbot to improve script writing and then used AI image generation tools to create visual elements to support storytelling. Finally, they recorded their narrations, synthesized them with the visuals, and produced a video using a video creation platform. To make the project manageable and help the PSTs stay on track, the project was broken down into three steps with interim deadlines.

To use AI to provide PSTs with personalized learning and support their script writing, the instructor created a custom chatbot hosted by MagicSchool. MagicSchool is an AI platform dedicated to K-12 education and offers a free plan for individual teachers. The custom chatbot feature on MagicSchool allows teachers to create a chatbot by providing instructions and uploading materials to train the chatbot to offer an immediate and personalized tutoring experience to students. The custom chatbot used by the PSTs in this learning unit was trained to provide feedback on the story scripts that they created. It could not write the script for the PSTs. To share the chatbot with them, the instructor first created a student room in MagicSchool using the “Rooms” feature and then added the “Custom chatbot” tool to the room for the students to use. The instructor was prompted to create the chatbot by following the directions. The students were able to access the “room” in which the chatbot was located by either using a web link or scanning a QR code.

The PSTs took this instructional technology class in the first semester of their graduate studies. Some students were enrolled in the elementary education program; the others were in the middle-level education program. Self-introduction during the first class meeting revealed that students generally felt confident learning new technologies and were interested in exploring how technology could be integrated into their future teaching practice. Nine PSTs indicated that they had not previously used any AI tools or programs. Therefore, AI in education was

introduced when the PSTs began working on the digital storytelling project.

The class was offered remotely and adopted a bichronous mode that combined synchronous and asynchronous learning to offer flexibility to the PSTs who were also working professionals (Martin et al., 2020). The learning unit was implemented over three weeks. Weeks one and three each included a synchronous class meeting via Zoom lasting 2.5 hours. The PSTs were required to turn on their webcams and mute their microphones when not speaking during each class meeting. The second week consisted of asynchronous learning, during which the PSTs followed the structured and detailed instructions posted in Desire2Learn to engage with course materials and work on course assignments at their own pace. Throughout these three weeks, different types of guidance were provided to scaffold the PSTs’ inquiry and exploration. They could also access the learning materials in Desire2Learn. The instructor held five virtual office hours each week and responded to the PSTs’ inquiries and questions via email.

## LEARNING REPRESENTATION

### WEEK ONE

#### INTRODUCTION

In the first week, the PSTs explored digital storytelling as a powerful tool to enhance instruction and learning experiences. To prepare them to use AI tools, the instructor introduced the topic of AI in education during the synchronous class meeting. The PSTs then planned to design a digital story and created a story script for their future students. They could use the custom chatbot created by the instructor to brainstorm story ideas, but they had to create the story script independently.

#### CONTENT PRESENTATION

The instructor gave a presentation about AI in education that covered the following content:

1. Concepts of AI, machine learning, deep learning, and GenAI: The introduction of these concepts

- helped the PSTs understand how well-known AI tools, such as ChatGPT and Gemini, work (slides 2-3).
2. Limitations: Understanding the limitations of AI can promote responsible and ethical use of AI (slide 4).
  3. GenAI and its integration into education: This knowledge helped the PSTs understand the potential benefits of GenAI in education and how to integrate it into educational contexts (slides 5-7).
  4. Prompt engineering: The PSTs needed to learn effective prompting techniques to get desirable AI output (slides 8-9).
  5. AI models for teachers: The instructor introduced three popular AI platforms for schools and teachers (slide 10).
  6. Concerns and impacts: The PSTs needed to be informed of common concerns about using AI in education and its impacts on the environment and society (slides 11-12).
  7. Responsible use: It was necessary to highlight responsible use of AI in the presentation (slides 13-14).

During the presentation, the instructor checked the PSTs' understanding, invited them to ask questions, and encouraged them to share thoughts at intervals to maintain their motivation and engagement. Zoom polls and other interaction tools such as Slido were also used to support interactions between the instructor and PSTs.

Following the presentation, the instructor informed the PSTs that they would have hands-on experience with AI integration by producing a digital storytelling video. This project involved interacting with an AI chatbot to support story script writing and using AI image generation tools to create visuals.

To align the chatbot with this specific learning unit, the instructor provided the following pedagogical instructions when creating the custom chatbot using MagicSchool.

*You are a friendly and knowledgeable teaching assistant, called ET, in an instructional technology class. The students in this class are graduate students from an elementary education program and a middle-level education program. They are preservice teachers. One topic in this class is digital storytelling. The students learn to create a digital story to support teaching and learning in their future teaching practice. One*

*important step in this project is to create story scripts. As the teaching assistant, you need to answer their questions about storytelling in education, help them brainstorm ideas for this project, provide feedback on their story scripts, provide improvement suggestions, and help them to improve the script. You cannot write the scripts for them or create an outline for their story. If they ask any questions and discuss anything irrelevant to storytelling in education, you need to remind them and pull them back to the right track.*

*Please note that your responsibility is to help with the story scripts. Of the elements of digital storytelling, pacing of the narrative and audio soundtrack are not needed in the story scripts.*

Although the storytelling strategy was not new to the PSTs, they needed to intentionally explore educational uses of digital storytelling. Since not all the PSTs had undergraduate backgrounds in education, readings were assigned. There were two journal articles and one online article that were accessible through Desire2Learn. These articles were also designated as the specific knowledge that the custom chatbot should have and were uploaded to MagicSchool when developing the chatbot.

Robin, B. R. (2016). The power of digital storytelling to support teaching and learning. *Digital Education Review, 30*, 17-29. <https://revistes.ub.edu/index.php/der/article/view/16104>

Robin, B. R. (2008). Digital storytelling: A powerful technology tool for the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom. *Theory into Practice, 47*(3), 220-228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405840802153916>

Goek, S. S. (n.d.). *Keeping up with...digital storytelling* Retrieved April 2, 2026 from [https://www.ala.org/acrl/publications/keeping\\_up\\_with/storytelling](https://www.ala.org/acrl/publications/keeping_up_with/storytelling)

## PRACTICE

The PSTs were asked to practice prompt engineering techniques using different AI tools and then compare the outputs. They were also asked to familiarize themselves with the custom chatbot before using it for the digital storytelling project.

## ASSESSMENT DELIVERABLE

Step one of the digital storytelling project was shared with the PSTs in Desire2Learn. For this assignment, they were required to create an original story script independently. They could use the chatbot to brainstorm ideas if they wanted, but they could not use AI to generate the script. To prepare the PSTs to seek feedback on their scripts from the chatbot, the instructor intentionally did not provide specific comments on their work.

## WEEK TWO

### INTRODUCTION

In the second week, the PSTs continued learning about AI in education. Meanwhile, they interacted with the custom chatbot to receive feedback on their story scripts and improve their script writing. Since this week's learning was asynchronous, all instructions and materials were posted in Desire2Learn.

### CONTENT PRESENTATION

To further explore the topic of AI in education, the PSTs were instructed to read four articles, including journal articles and online articles, to examine different perspectives on AI in education. They accessed the full text of the journal articles through the university library website.

Nadelson, L. S., Walthall, B., Faidley, E. W., & Filer, J. (2025). Generative artificial intelligence in teaching and learning: Concerns, practices, and supporting student use. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 118, 535-546. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2025.2511229>

Adisa, I. O., & Adefisayo, A. O. (2025). Middle school students' perspectives on adopting generative AI in K-12 education. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 118, 724-735. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2025.2510393>

Kohn, A. (2025, September 22). *AI in the classroom is often harmful. Why are educators falling prey to the hype?* Education Week. Retrieved April 2, 2026 from <https://www.edweek.org/technology/>

[opinion-ai-in-the-classroom-is-often-harmful-why-are-educators-falling-prey-to-the-hype/2025/09](https://www.edweek.org/technology/opinion-ai-in-the-classroom-is-often-harmful-why-are-educators-falling-prey-to-the-hype/2025/09)

Boles, S. (2025, September 19). *How AI could radically change schools by 2050*. The Harvard Gazette. Retrieved April 2, 2026 from [https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2025/09/how-ai-could-radically-change-schools-by-2050/?utm\\_campaign=25-09-23\\_AI-in-Education-Newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=interncom](https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2025/09/how-ai-could-radically-change-schools-by-2050/?utm_campaign=25-09-23_AI-in-Education-Newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_source=interncom)

To continue their hands-on experience with AI and digital storytelling, the PSTs were instructed to work on step two of the digital storytelling project.

### PRACTICE

The PSTs continued using the custom chatbot to support the digital storytelling project, while learning more about AI in education through readings.

### ASSESSMENT DELIVERABLE

When working on step two of the digital storytelling project, the PSTs were required to upload the story script they developed in step one, interact with the chatbot to seek feedback, critically evaluate the feedback, and then revise the story script. They highlighted the revisions in the final story script document. In addition, they were required to submit another document specifying what AI suggestions had been adopted, what suggestions had been rejected, and the rationale for each decision.

The instructor reviewed the PSTs' final version of their story scripts, their interactions with the custom chatbot, and their evaluations of the AI feedback. Since the PSTs began working on step three of the project after submitting the final scripts and there was insufficient time for a turn-around of instructor comments and student revisions before that, the instructor did not grade the story scripts or the PSTs' interactions with the chatbot. The instructor did not provide comments on the PSTs' final scripts unless a serious issue was present in the work.

## WEEK THREE

### INTRODUCTION

In the third week, the PSTs continued exploring the use of AI in education and working on the digital storytelling project by using AI tools. By the end of week three, they produced a digital storytelling video.

### CONTENT PRESENTATION

The synchronous class meeting in week three started with a class discussion in which all the PSTs were invited to share their thoughts after reading the articles assigned in week two. This opportunity allowed them to reflect on their learning in relation to their hands-on experience using the chatbot when working on the first two steps of the digital storytelling project and to express their own perceptions.

After free exchange of ideas, the instructor engaged the PSTs in a role-play activity. The entire class was divided into four stakeholder groups representing teachers, students, administrators, and parents. The PSTs volunteered to join one of the groups. Then, each group joined a Zoom breakout room to have a group discussion. By the end of the group discussion, each group drafted a statement from the perspective of their assigned role that summarized the group's overall stance on AI in education and was supported by at least one citation from the readings. Also, each group provided three recommended actions that they thought the school should take. After the group work, the entire class reconvened and each group reported to the class and took questions.

The role-play activity was followed by an exploration of using AI tools to generate images, including prompting techniques and a list of AI tools that the PSTs could use when creating images for the digital storytelling project. The PSTs were directed to read the following webpage to learn to prompt AI to create images:

Harvard University Information Technology. (2023, November 16). *Getting started with prompts for image-based Generative AI tools*. Retrieved April 2, 2026, from <https://www.huit.harvard.edu/news/ai-prompts-images>

### PRACTICE

The PSTs practiced using various AI image generation tools, including, but not limited to Adobe Firefly, Canva Magic Studio, and ChatGPT. An [image prompting practice game](#) (Google Arts and Culture, 2023) was shared with the PSTs in Desire2Learn so they could practice at their own pace. The PSTs also explored how to create a video in which their voice recordings of the story script were combined with the images. They could use a video creation tool of their choice, such as Adobe Express or Canva, to create the video. These practices prepared them to work on step three of the storytelling project.

### ASSESSMENT DELIVERABLE

By the end of week three, the PSTs completed step three and created a digital storytelling video that met the requirements specified in the project document available in Desire2Learn. A couple of PSTs asked whether they could use photos taken by themselves or copyright-free online images to better reflect the themes of their stories. The instructor agreed and offered flexibility.

After the PSTs submitted the complete project, the instructor graded their work using the assessment rubric in the project document. The instructor made comments on their story scripts, their interactions with the chatbot, the images used in the video, their voiceover recordings, and the overall quality of the storytelling video.

### CRITICAL REFLECTION

The learning unit on AI in education and digital storytelling was implemented once. Assessment of the PSTs' digital storytelling projects, especially comparison between the PSTs' initial and final story scripts, revealed that the custom chatbot helped the PSTs improve their work. Based on the instructor's observations, two storytelling elements were usually missing in PSTs' scripts of instructional stories: 1) a compelling question or narrative tension to keep the audience engaged, and 2) emotional content to build personal connection. The chatbot identified the lack of these elements and made suggestions in its feedback to the PSTs. It also detected issues in clarity, style, sentence structure, and overall flow of writing to assist the PSTs in enhancing the quality of

script writing. Therefore, in this learning unit, the custom chatbot acted as an effective tutor to support the PSTs in developing the story scripts. Nevertheless, there were lessons learned regarding the use of the chatbot.

First, when creating the custom chatbot in MagicSchool, it would have been helpful if more specific instructions had been provided. In the instructions given to the chatbot that the PSTs used in this learning unit, pacing of the narrative and audio soundtrack were excluded from the digital storytelling elements. Since the chatbot was intended to improve script writing only, the instructor should also have specified in instructions that no feedback was necessary on personal voiceover to keep the chatbot's feedback focused on script writing.

Second, the PSTs accessed the chatbot using a designated link to the student "room" where the chatbot was in MagicSchool. Their interaction with the chatbot was a one-time attempt and the chat was not saved. Therefore, each time they joined the room and had a conversation with the chatbot, it was a new conversation. In this way, the instructor could have had PSTs interact with the chatbot in one sitting or advised the PSTs to save the chat history for future reference. The instructor can also send each PST a copy of their conversation with the chatbot, as the instructor can view the details of all PSTs' chat history.

Third, some PSTs did not engage in iterative interactions with the chatbot. The project document stated, "Your interactions with the chatbot are expected to be iterative, as you may ask for clarifications and have questions about the feedback and suggestions." It was necessary to emphasize this requirement more strongly and ask the PSTs to engage in iterative interactions with the chatbot. This would have ensured deeper engagement with the feedback process and promoted critical evaluation of AI-generated feedback through follow-up questions while working to improve their script writing.

In addition, when using AI tools to create images, some PSTs seemed to have difficulty creating images that reflected the themes of their stories. Prompting AI to create images involves a fundamental shift in thinking compared to text generation, as it requires users to account for spatial composition and visual details (Liu & Chilton, 2022). Therefore, more time spent on discussing how to use AI tools to create images and scaffolding PSTs to

create appropriate images for their stories would have been helpful. PSTs may also need more time for practice.

In the future, the instructor will make modifications to address the lessons and gaps discussed above. Additionally, the instructor will consider sequencing the topic of AI in education before the topic of digital storytelling. This may require adjusting the course schedule. Ideally, there will be two weeks exclusively focusing on AI in education before digital storytelling is introduced to the class. When having PSTs work on the digital storytelling project, the instructor will adopt the Peer and AI Review + Reflection (PAIRR) model that combines peer and chatbot feedback (Sperber et al., 2025). Specifically, when working on the digital storytelling project, PSTs will have an opportunity to receive peers' feedback before asking the custom chatbot for feedback, and then reflect on their experience and critically evaluate and compare the peers' feedback with the AI-generated feedback. This will enable them to better understand the potential and limitations of AI in education while using it to support their script writing.

The lessons learned underscore the importance of thoughtful design when incorporating AI into educational contexts. It is in the hope that this practice and reflection provide a helpful reference for other instructors who want to implement a similar lesson and leverage AI tools in teacher preparation.

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