

Details

Uncheatable Assessments and the Role of Digital Storytelling in the Classroom *with Michael Hernandez* -214

In this episode, Michael Hernandez, Teacher and ISTE Author, discusses the power of digital storytelling and tips for infusing creativity into any classroom. You'll hear his take on "uncheatable assessments" and how to unlock the full potential of digital storytelling to transform the way we check for understanding.

Link to live show notes:

<https://classtechtips.com/2023/05/09/uncheatable-assessments-214/>

*Uncheatable Assessments

Introduction

Hello there, my name is Monica Burns and welcome to today's episode of the Easy EdTech Podcast!

I'm a former NYC public school teacher and started the Easy EdTech Podcast in 2019 to share my favorite tips, tricks and strategies for technology integration. You'll hear stories from my time in the classroom, the work I do now with schools and districts, and my travels to different EdTech events.

Each episode is designed to give you ideas you can try yourself, share with a colleague, or bookmark for later in the school year — so don't forget to head to my website classtechtips.com/podcast for all of the show notes and resources from today's episode.

If you're listening to this episode on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or Google Podcasts, or another podcast player you'll see the show notes link in the description, too.

Promotion/Reminder

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Today's Intro

This week's episode is titled "Uncheatable Assessments and the Role of Digital Storytelling in the Classroom *with Michael Hernandez*" and I'm very excited for you to hear from a fellow

Apple Distinguished Educator, as well as another ISTE author on a our growing list of ISTE authors here on the podcast. Today, we talk about the idea of uncheatable assessments, something that has come up a lot in conversations around AI in the past few months. You'll hear about Michaels work in the classroom, and his new book on digital storytelling, too.

Episode Transcript

Monica Burns:

Welcome to the podcast. I am so excited to chat with you about this big idea of digital projects, digital storytelling, Uncheatable Assessments. But before we dive in, can you share with us a little bit, what is your role in education? What does your day-to-day look like?

Michael Hernandez:

Yeah, my name's Michael Hernandez, and I am a high school teacher in the Los Angeles area, and I've been teaching broadcast journalism, cinematic arts, photography, and graphic design for about 24 years now. So my daily day-to-day is never the same. It's really exciting. I switch between courses and really what I, I think is most exciting about my day-to-day is that I get to work with teams of students who are all working on project-based learning assignments that they sort of develop themselves and follow their passions for. So it's really just being more of like a coach to help them ask good questions, to find good resources and sculpt their stories and then publish those stories to an audience. So it's always really exciting. It's always different, and we have a lot of fun.

Monica Burns:

And, you know, as we're thinking today about all those things that are happening with your students, the different types of projects that they're working on, you know, one of the terms we'll we'll talk about is digital storytelling. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>, can you unpack this term for a listener who hasn't heard of this before or who hasn't dived into this idea of digital storytelling yet?

Michael Hernandez:

Yeah. I think it's funny that we have to put the word digital in front of storytelling. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>, because everything is digital now. I mean, we look at our phones for news about the world and our families and our friends. And so for me, in the classroom, digital storytelling can mean anything from like a simple photograph that maybe gets marked up

mm-hmm. <Affirmative> to a data visualization. I love infographics and, you know, analyzing data and math and what I call in my book you know you know, painting by numbers, right? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So you're actually creating an image based on data all the way up to something complex like a video documentary. So with my students digital storytelling can be a range of stories. That can be an explainer video, it can be a podcast, it can be a digital book.

Michael Hernandez:

They create their own digital portfolios that they keep with them once they graduate. So it can mean a whole variety of things. And we try to have the kids have experiences in multiple different media, so they become very familiar with it. And you know, for me, I guess it's really important because that's how the world works. And I wanna make sure that my kids are digitally literate. And the only way that you can really become digitally literate is by using and embracing and learning how those, those media work, both in terms of the construction of them, but also designing something for an audience that will be consumed. So what's the impact you want to have? So by, anyway, that's kind of a long rambling answer to your question, but that's how I would define digital storytelling.

Monica Burns:

I love those examples because it really does give us us a sense of all the ways that we consume content, that we create content and empowering kids to do all the things and all the different mediums that you mentioned. And so, in your new book, you use the term uncheatable assessments. And this is something that I know a lot of people are talking about right now when it comes to the availability of generative AI or artificial intelligence tools. I've talked a lot about ChatGPT here on the podcast, fellow Apple Distinguished educator, Richard Perry was on with me mm-hmm. <Affirmative> earlier this year talking about this in his classroom. So how did digital storytelling projects help create uncheatable assessments? And how can this improve student learning outcomes?

Michael Hernandez:

Yeah, so, you know, I've been thinking a lot about this with my own students and what teachers at my school are going through right now with AI. For me first of all, we have to think about what do we mean by an assessment? What are we here to grade, right? Is it the system or is it the values? Like is it the knowledge or the application of the knowledge? Right? And so for me, it's the latter, right? I want to make sure that kids understand it by applying it. And so digital stories can actually help kids apply that knowledge. And so I think a lot of times people think digital storytelling is not for them, cuz they teach science or history or math or

something like that, right? But if you have an outcome that's sort of like a project-based learning model the kids are working towards completing that project because they care about it because it's meaningful.

Michael Hernandez:

It actually has purpose beyond the classroom. It won't be thrown away, you know, at the end of the lesson or the unit. And so first of all, it, it instills in them the sense of purpose behind it. So they don't want to cheat because they care about the outcome of it. So we de-incentivize cheating that way. And then the other big piece as a teacher is that, you know it's, it's not a common answer. If every student has the same answer or is expected to have the same outcome, of course it's cheatable. But because every story is unique, every story is different based on the student, the, the, the subject that they choose, how they choose to tell the story, the people that they interview, the, the shots that they take, the design of a slide that's all unique and it can't be cheated.

Michael Hernandez:

Now, they could, sure, they could make up the, the research, they could fake the numbers <laugh>, but at the end of the day, they have to create something and everyone's gonna see it, and it's public as well. So for all those reasons, we disincentivize the reasons for cheating in the first place. Because kids want to do the work, <laugh>, they wanna have the outcome. There's a meaning and purpose behind it, and everything's unique. So for me, I think that's, it's a, it's a really easy thing to see here, and everybody should be embracing it. I think it's a great option.

Monica Burns:

That's such a great reminder, Michael, about the different content areas that are here, right? This is not just in an English language arts classroom or in a social studies classroom, but you know, you already shared a bit about right infographics, which might have a lot of data or research that's taking place that connect to a science concept. So there's so many directions teachers can go in when embracing this idea of uncheatable assessments, right? Especially if that's a front of mind for them. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So can you share some examples maybe from your own work, from classrooms, you've visited from schools and districts? I know you work with educators in different parts of the country, different parts of the world. Can you share some examples of successful digital storytelling projects from your work and the impact they've had on student learning and engagement?

Michael Hernandez:

Absolutely. And for me, one of my favorite classes is my broadcast journalism class. And I know a lot of folks don't teach quote unquote journalism, but in my book, I actually make a comparison that journalism is basically like science. And I call journalism stem for the humanities because it's basically, here's this problem that's out there that we're noticing and we want to develop a solution for an end user. And in this case it's our audience, right? And so the students are free to choose, you know, issues in their communities or around the world that they feel need to be addressed or discussed or explored somehow. And so for me, some of the most exciting and and powerful examples of success stories come from my journalism class. And this could be a documentary that you do as well, but basically a really good idea, sorry, a really good example came from a documentary trip that we took to Cuba a few years ago.

Michael Hernandez:

And one of my students was a sophomore at the time, so she was 15, produced this wonderful documentary while we were there, and she published it to her YouTube channel, her personal YouTube channel. And she came in one day and she says, Mr. Hernandez, like, somebody left these really weird comments on my, on my post, and I don't know what to do. And I'm like, uhoh, what happened? So we looked at it and there was somebody <laugh> outside of my class and in the world who actually lived in Cuba, saw her video and critiqued it. He's like, you got it all wrong. You know, you're coming in with perspective of, you know, poverty in Cuba and the government, blah, blah, blah, blah. And he went off on her. And he wasn't a troll. He wasn't being a bully, he was just very passionate about getting the facts right.

Michael Hernandez:

And so she's like, what should I do? And I'm like, well, why don't you respond to him? Why don't you reply? And so she ended up having a conversation in the chat for a YouTube post with a real person in the real world, a stakeholder, someone that she had not met before, but had lived that life that she hadn't lived and ended up in a much better place, a much bigger understanding of the politics and the economy and, and the cultural differences for someone who living, who was living in another place. And for me, that hits on so many different levels of learning, right? So it's, you know, how do I truly understand politics? How do I have empathy for other people and get outside my own head and my own community? Because face it, you know, we're all sort of insulated in our small communities, in our bubbles, right?

Michael Hernandez:

And how can I engage in constructive dialogue with someone who has a difference of opinion? How can I engage in and understand constructive criticism, right? And take criticism, which I think is a really struggle for all of us, you know? Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>, myself included. And so it's hitting on everything. It's not just the exact curriculum that I'm teaching, which is filmmaking. So I'm, I'm concerned about is the camera in focus <laugh> for the audio, right? And that's nothing, you know, if you think about it, that's the least important part of it. The most important part is that experience that they have, connecting with other people and how they learn to process ideas and how they learn to, to research and process and think differently moving forward. So for me, that's a success story, and that's why digital storytelling is so important.

Monica Burns:

And just the implications there, or, you know, what can happen in any content area. All of that feedback, all of the critical thinking, right? Just that evaluation of different sources or where you're gathering information from, that's not something that's just in one domain, right? Or, or in one subject area. So, you know, as someone's listening today and, and they might have a, a math teacher hat on or a media specialist hat on, right? Or, or coming from their specific background or their specific learning environment. What are some practical strategies for educators who wanna implement digital storytelling projects in their classroom? They love this idea of uncheatable assessments mm-hmm. <Affirmative>, but maybe they face some limitations such as time or resources or even administrative support. What are some some strategies or tips that you would recommend for, for them to consider?

Michael Hernandez:

Yeah, I mean, digital storytelling can be very simple and easy, as simple as just taking a photograph and analyzing it, right? Documenting what you do, sharing different perspectives. And in my book, I actually have a whole section on quick, easy lessons that you can implement right away. So you don't really need a ton of time or technology to do it. So I would say start small. Know what you're going for, what are your learning outcomes, what are the goals that you have? And I would say focus on the content rather than on the technique so much. And I mean, that's a good way to start. I feel it's also tricky cuz I think we are not used to having a messy project. We want it to be quiet, right? We want the kids to sit down and, and just sit in their desks and everybody have the same answer and learn to be comfortable with noise and movement and having everybody having a different outcome.

Michael Hernandez:

I also feel it's really important to share in the learning too. So in my chapter on assessment, like how do we assess these kinds of stories mm-hmm. <Affirmative> is to have there's different levels of assessment. So there's the assessment I would give them personally with a note that's private to them, but I also feel there's value in sharing and having class critiques as well. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So that's an easy thing to do. It takes a little bit of time, but when everybody can see everybody else's work, the students sort of elevate each other and they kind of, yeah, get inspired by what other people are doing. Cuz we don't wanna keep the learning secret. We want it to be public and learn from each other. So developing that culture of, you know, shared discovery and curiosity, I think is really important. And and that doesn't really cost anything other than a little bit of time. Mm-Hmm.

Monica Burns:

<Affirmative>, and that's such a great reminder too when we talk about creation or creativity, you know, and the audience aspect of that, right? Who's gonna see, who's gonna celebrate that? You have that kind of built-in audience, right? Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>, and you might have students celebrating not just the final product, but being part of the process along the way, right? And we talk so much about the importance of feedback and community in a classroom, and that's such a great way to tie all of these goals together. So Michael, you mentioned your, your book, which comes out later this year. I know it's available for pre-order now and we'll include all the links where people are listening. But can you provide a brief overview of your book, storytelling With Purpose Digital Projects to Ignite Student Curiosity? And what inspired you to bring this to life, to write this book for educators?

Michael Hernandez:

Yeah, I mean, I've been teaching now for about 24 years and I've learned that kids really want to engage the world and make an impact. And I feel like that's especially true of the world we live in right now, you know, which can be a very confusing and complicated place. And I've also found that teachers and students, we just wanna have fun. You know? We wanna enjoy learning and also be part of something meaningful. So I wrote this book to help educators sort of leverage students' natural sense of curiosity to energize their classrooms through student created digital storytelling projects. And I feel that's important because we need to provide purpose for our curriculum. You know, the pandemic sort of shown a light on that, that like, oh, we sort of reevaluated our lives to discover what really matters most to us. And so the book really kind of builds on what teachers already do best.

Michael Hernandez:

And so I just offer advice and classroom tested activities that I've used myself to integrate these project-based learning story challenges in every subject area and grade level, right? So I just like we were saying before, you know engaging work is always better than tests, you know, <laugh> and we wanna really connect our curriculum to the, to our communities and help students make connections between their own lives and our curriculum and across different disciplines too. So I feel it's the right book at the right time, and it's actually been a book 24 years in the making. Yeah. <Laugh>.

Monica Burns:

Well, this is such a great conversation, Michael, around all the things that we know are so important, right? Checking for understanding, embracing curiosity and creativity. And I'm gonna link out so everyone can connect with you and, and find your new book and the pre-order page and all of those great things. But for anyone who's maybe on the go and, and listening in, you know, can you let us know where can people connect with you? Where can they learn more about your work?

Michael Hernandez:

Yeah, absolutely. So I am on Instagram @ changing.the.narrative <laugh>. I'm also on LinkedIn. You can just search for me, Michael Hernandez on Twitter as well. So really excited to to share the book with everybody when it comes out and really appreciate having this conversation. It's been really fun. Monica,

Monica Burns:

Thank you so much for your time today, for your insights. Really appreciate you chatting with me.

So let's make this EdTech easy with some key points from the episode...

Keep it simple.

Start small and low tech.

Focus on content.

Provide purpose for your curriculum.

Remember, you can find the shownotes and the full list of resources from this episode including all of the ways to connect with Michael Hernandez on classtechtips.com/podcast and finding today's episode #214!

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Outro

Thank you for tuning into another Tuesday episode of the Easy EdTech Podcast. If you are listening on Apple Podcasts or Spotify, or another favorite app, don't forget to hit the "Follow" button – this way next week's episode will be waiting for you first thing next Tuesday morning.

And if you want to share an idea from the episode with a friend or colleague, text, tweet or post the link on your favorite social media platform – and of course you can tag me @ClassTechTips with any questions!

Episode Resources

- Check out [Change the Narrative Podcast](#) with Michael Hernandez
- Find Michael Hernandez's book [Storytelling With Purpose](#)
- Connect with Michael Hernandez on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), & [Instagram](#)
- [12 Creative and Tech-Friendly Assessment Ideas](#) (Blog Post)
- [Forget a Debate! Try a Podcast with Students Instead](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [A Microblogging Lesson Idea and Template You Can Customize](#) (Blog Post)
- [How to Create a Video Essay with Students](#) (Blog Post)
- [3 Time-Saving Assessment Tips for Teachers with Willisa Osburn](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [How to Choose an Audience for Student Projects](#) (Blog Post)
- [7 Storyboard Examples You Can Use in Any Subject Area](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [6 Apps and Websites To Make Video Journals](#) (Blog Post)
- [8 Time-Saving Tips for Teaching with Podcasts](#) (Podcast episode)

- [Use Digital Videos for Assessment and Engagement with Screencastify](#) (Blog Post)
- [The Benefits of Using Moviemaking in Your Classroom with Jessica Pack](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [Innovative Assessment How to Incorporate Video Essays in Your Classroom](#) (Podcast Episode)