

INDIE MAJOR PODCAST

4/8/24 Emily Jajliardo

Individualized Major: Visual Storytelling for Children

Ken:

This is Indie Major, a show devoted to the wide-ranging stories and visions of individualized majors at the University of Connecticut. I'm your host, Ken Cormier.

I'm here in the studio with Emily Jajliardo. Hi, Emily.

Emily:

Hello.

Ken:

How are you doing?

Emily:

Good. How are you?

Ken:

Very good. You are a recently graduated individualized major. Why don't you tell us what your major, what was your major called?

Emily:

Visual Storytelling for Children.

Ken:

And why don't you tell us what that major is all about?

Emily:

So basically, my major comes from the disciplines of communication and child development. And I really wanted to focus on visual communication because I've always had an interest in film photography, production type things. But I've also grown up teaching, working in my local martial arts studio. So I've always had an interest in helping children, teaching and child development. But I couldn't really decide if I wanted to do this or that. And when I learned about the individualized major, I was like, why not combine them?

Ken:

So teaching is the thing that goes way back for you. How old were you when you started teaching in the martial arts?

Emily:

I started teaching in, I believe I was in sixth grade, and I was kind of just a helper teacher. So I helped the instructors. I mainly held pads for students to punch or kick, and just made sure everyone was behaving themselves and helping where I could help. But then through their leadership program, I was able to develop those skills and become more of a lead role in the dojo, and then eventually getting an actual job there when I did turn 16.

Ken:

So the interest in the martial arts also then brought in this idea of being interested in teaching.

Emily:

Yeah.

Ken:

And it did it come naturally? Do you think you just gravitated toward it?

Emily:

Actually, no. My main instructor, Jenny, she saw in me something that she saw in herself. I was very shy. I was very quiet. I actually went into the martial arts and my mom had to tell her, do not call on Emily to demonstrate or else she will quit because she does not like being in front of the group that happened in gymnastics. So she was like, just warning you, and so as I was training and getting better, she saw that spark in me. And she was like, I really think you should join the leadership program. And from there it just kind of blossomed. I ended up loving it. I got out of my shell. It helped me a lot with my confidence and that's kind of how it bloomed.

Ken:

And what about the interest in the visual stuff, the visual media stuff? Where did that come from?

Emily:

I've always enjoyed photography. That's something my mom has always said that from as soon as I could hold a camera, I was basically playing with her cameras, taking pictures, they were usually like of the ceiling fan or the bathtub or floor tiles, but I was always taking pictures. And then when I got older and had access to an actual DSLR, I started taking more pictures of like friends and our pets and nature. And I just I really enjoy it and that's where that came from, I guess.

Ken:

So you had these two interests happening in parallel, it sounds like as you were going through high school, but your major is visual storytelling for children. So there's also storytelling in there. You want to talk about that part of it?

Emily:

Yeah, I like being able to share things with others. So in my videos, they might be just my travel, but it's telling the story of my travel. Like first we went to the airport and this happened in the airport. Oh, and then we went, I don't know, to Colorado. And then we did this in Colorado. And I'm kind of sharing my story. After learning a lot about child development and then seeing what can be done with visual media, I really wanted to create these stories or movies or shows for children where they can learn from that. Kids are always learning from everything that's around them. So having good role models and a good story or moral of a story to share with them through something as entertaining as visuals, I think that's really important. Also, I grew up being not so much of an auditory learner, but I was a very visual kinesthetic type learner. So I know that it can be difficult in classrooms for kids to just listen to a

teacher drone on about a subject. So if I'm able to make visuals that can kind of show what the teachers are telling, I think that'd be a great supplement for kids. And that's kind of where that came from.

Ken:

So this actually puts me in mind. Now, you graduated a semester early, so last December, which is only a few short months ago.

Emily:

Yeah.

Ken:

And you did a capstone project that plays with some of these ideas you're talking about, right? Did it in a more formal way. Do you want to talk about maybe the written part and what you kind of explored there, and then the other part that you made.

Emily:

Yeah. So the written part was really interesting because I looked at how visuals in the classroom can help or just being creative in a classroom, it's more being creative. I looked at they were international studies, a lot of them were done in Greece or I think England. But it looked at more of a creative curriculum. How kids maybe are doing a painting project in order to learn about history. It really showed how important it is for students to be creative in the classroom and not just sitting, writing an essay, taking a math test, doing a spelling test. Because they're getting not only this information, like educational information, but they also are

often given the chance to grow emotionally and socially. Because the arts aren't always just independent. There were a lot of projects that kids were doing with their peers, and a lot of it was also a lot of feedback between them and their teachers and their peers. So they're learning how to communicate with people the same age as them, people who may be in a more authoritative role as them. But they learned that communication skills, which is so important, and they got that through the creative arts that they're doing.

Ken:

And when you looked at some of these studies, did these things make a lot of sense to you in terms of like how you experienced school?

Emily:

Yeah, it made a lot of sense. So unfortunately, when I was going through school, a lot of it was just sit down, listen to me talk, maybe look at this map that I'm showing you. Because there are some things like geography you kind of have to have a visual component to. But adding the kinesthetic hands on creative aspect where the kids can manipulate something or change it and see the effects of that changing it helps them kind of get an understanding of what they can do, their own abilities, but also understand the topic. One of them was reading, writing kind of subject. But they used play as in acting. So they would come up with a story and act it out. Or they would use an already written play that's age appropriate, but they were acting it out and getting into character. And that was another way. Again, they learned about the English subject, but they also learned emotionally socially. Oh, I can change something, Oh, I can be like this, this character acted like this, and this happened to them. Maybe I don't want to do

this, or maybe I do want to do that. So getting that hands on manipulation is just really important for the kids. And I resonated with that because when I, especially with karate, when I was able to physically do the different movements that I was taught, so much easier to understand what I was doing than just listening and being like, I don't really know why that I do that, but I'll do it. Because I was told to.

Ken:

Right, right. And then so you did this really excellent, thoroughly researched rigorous paper, which was awesome. And then but you also did a media project. Want to talk about that?

Emily:

Yeah, the media project was super cool. So the title of the video project was "Multimodal Learning", and it was in a middle school classrooms. So I went to our local middle school and I went and asked mainly sixth grade teachers, but some seventh grade and some special education teachers about their experience in the classroom. And since a lot of them have been teaching for many years, they have that idea of what they were doing before and then that shift to multimodal learning. And they explained to me their differences that they saw in their students. Like when they were doing a lot of test taking, writing, a lot of that stuff, the kids may not have been as engaged. But as they started to use different forms and methods of teaching, that wasn't just doing creative activities like my essay was, a lot of it was including videos and pictures and links that they can go to and games that they can play that are online or group activities and projects. It was all different things rather than just a slide show and the teacher teaching. And the teachers pretty much unanimously agreed

that this multi modal learning was helping the kids be so much more engaged in the classroom. And their understanding just deepened when they were able to see so many different displays of the same information.

Ken:

So the two projects really went together in a really interesting way.

Emily:

One was like the student's perspective of being able to be creative. But then the other one was really looking at the teachers and how they saw their students improve with what they were doing in the classroom.

Ken:

And so that makes me also wonder, do you envision at some point in your career producing works that become part of a curriculum? Is that the kind of thing that you think toward or are there other ideas that you have as you're moving forward?

Emily:

That's one of them. I have a lot of different ideas.

Ken:

Okay.

Emily:

So that's one of them. Like being able to produce or work with Natgeo kids would be really cool because they do a lot of that education stuff. They have their Natgeo magazine for kids. I remember I read those and looked through them and love just looking at the pictures of them.

Ken:

Sure.

Emily:

But also just making fictional work for them too. Just like the TV shows that I grew up on, I learned a lot of social things from those TV shows. And right now. Honestly, I haven't watched many, but the ones that I have seen don't seem as good as the ones that when I grew up with. So like maybe bringing that kind of style back into children's media realm. That's another area that I want to go into.

Ken:

All right, so we covered some of the visual media part and the storytelling part, but what did the learning part look like in your major? Did you take courses that were education based or what was that?

Emily:

I took a couple really interesting classes. One was sociology of the family, and then one was diverse family structures. And both of those classes were really interesting, especially for my major, because they didn't specifically focus on the child and how the child grows. It focused more on the parents, the environments

around the children, and how those environments affected the children. Like role models, which could be parents, friends, teachers, or media role models. But I think the most interesting class I took was mass media for children, or children in mass media.

Ken:

Okay.

Emily:

And that was super interesting because we went through birth to young adults and they're different medias and what they actually learn from their media. So like a lot of very, very young kids mainly will start hearing words and they'll learn words and mimic what they see on TV. But then when they get older, they are looking for social connection with their characters. And then in that middle childhood age, they kind of learn actions and consequences through their media. And that one was super interesting because I think it like hit my major right on the head. Because it combined how media helped them and what they are learning from the media.

Ken:

Did that course cover any of the history of the way media and worked with kids in that way?

Emily:

Yeah. Like Sesame Street, which actually has not only media specialists, but also child specialists and researchers who are looking into how are kids learning, what's the best way to teach

them? And so that's why Sesame Street is so successful, is because they have that whole team of not only just producers, but people who actually have children in their best interest in that group, creating, formulating, producing the show to help kids learn ABC's 123, things like that, right?

Ken:

So what do you envision for your future moving forward? What directions do you think you're going to be heading in if it's more academics or career wise?

Emily:

Yes. So in the long term, I really hope to be working in the production field, visual production specifically. But I want to work in a realm where I can also incorporate like child development type stuff. So whether that be working in production for children, nonfiction fiction, documentary, whatever it may be. Or on the other hand, it would be really interesting to teach children in, not a formal school setting, but maybe in a community art school about photography, video production, mainly younger middle school age children, upper elementary. With my research into the creative arts in the classrooms, I think it could be really helpful for them. I've actually formulated this theory in my head. I can go into a middle school as like an extra curricular option. And I go with a group who's interested in production and I work with them, teach them things about video production and work with the kids. So it's like a movie produced by the kids for the kids. So they get to choose the topic, they write the story, they are all the actors. They do the camera work, they do the editing. But they're gaining those skills that I'm able to teach them. But while working together, they're learning the social skills that go into

it. They're learning more of a “real world” emotional skills that they're going to need when they're collaborating with others. And then they also have a fun product at the end that they can show off and be like I made that or I'm in that.

Ken:

And this is the kind of energy I think that you brought to the program, making these really excellent documentary style things. Even though you made a great piece that described what your major is that we actually happen to feature on our website right now. Because it's such a great representation of the work that you did and the work that we all do. So thank you so much for coming in and talking about this. This was excellent, of course.

Emily:

Thank you for having me.

Ken:

Thanks for listening to Indie Major. If you'd like more information about individualized and interdisciplinary studies at the University of Connecticut, please visit our website at iisp.uconn.edu. That's iisp.uconn.edu. We'd also like to thank UConn Enrichment Programs and WHUS UConn Radio for their support of this show.