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The Need for (Digital) Story:

First Graders using digital tools to tell stories

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**The Need for (Digital) Story:
First Graders using digital tools to tell stories**

by

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Dedication

For Mom

Acknowledgements

So many people contributed in small and big ways to the completion of this dissertation. Of special note is Beth Maloch who believed in me and took me on even though she already had a lot of other students on her plate. I consider myself extremely lucky and privileged to have worked with such a thorough, conscientious, and brilliant advisor, as well as a committee made up of UT's finest professors. I'm grateful to Jo Worthy, Jim Hoffman, and Diane Schallert for their positive support. And thanks to Cinthia Salinas for treating me like family from the first instance we met.

My dad had a very special contribution to this work. When I was at Texas Tech studying Journalism, he asked, "When will you become a teacher?" When I got my teaching certificate and started my career, he asked, "When will you do that writing thing?" When I got my Master's in English, he asked, "When will you get that Doctor's degree?" When I was muddling through more graduate school, he asked, "Are you finished with that paper?" I hate to be cliché and call his prompting the wind beneath my sails, but I must admit that is the most accurate description.

My brother has always been as proud of me as I have been of him. When I told him that the young African American participants in my study loved to shock their peers,

he was not surprised. He made me promise to include his favorite shocking punch line from childhood here: “Catch that and paint it blue.”

I do not have the words to express how grateful I am to my mom, my best friend. I know she was with me every day, with me every word I wrote. My sense of humor comes from her. My way with words comes from her. My special connection to children comes from her. This dissertation is our accomplishment together.

The Need for (Digital) Story

First Graders using digital tools to tell stories

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to explore the process and product of African American First Graders as they participated in digital storytelling. Of interest was the role digital tools played in the creation process. Eight participants participated in 18 study sessions during which they composed, recorded, and then shared their digital texts with their peers and at home. Data sources included classroom observations, parent and teacher questionnaires, participant pre and post interviews, field notes, video and audio tapes of sessions, and story screenshot captures and print outs. Study questions focused on the nature of the texts the student produced, the role of the digital in the creation process, and the meanings and purposes the participants had for the texts they produced.

This study's findings challenge teachers to offer students authentic experiences with writing so that children can construct their own ideas and interests, their own writing personalities. Digital texts were a particularly engaging medium for these young children and allowed them to produce texts that reflected their identities as well as their attitudes

toward using digital tools. The nature of the texts varied depending on the child, his or her attitude toward using the digital tools, and likely their previous experiences with composition. One unique type of text was identified as a hybrid text that seemed to capitalize on both the ability of the child storyteller and the affordances of the digital. Due to the study's emphasis on sharing these texts with peers and at home, the first graders were introduced to a sophisticated view of audience. This transactional role of the audience made them aware of audience as a living, breathing entity that gains ownership of the texts' meanings once they are shared.

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CHAPTER ONE

Dyson and Genishi (1994) rightfully claim first ownership of the title, “The Need for Story” as it graces the front cover of their collection of articles focused on the purpose and power of children's stories in multicultural classrooms. I have co-opted that title here for three reasons.

The first reason is the plaintive urgency evoked by the word “need.” In my years as a primary teacher, I taught my students the difference between “wants” and “needs” each September. The title elevates children's stories to the “need” level, as basic as water, bread, and love are to our very survival. I have inserted “digital” into the title as ostentatiously as I could manage within the shallow limits of print to elevate children's experiences with technology to that same urgent status. Even our youngest students have digital lives out of school (Marsh, 2003); if what children learn in school is to be meaningful and authentic, those lessons must match their real world.

My second reason for borrowing the title is to comfortably situate this proposed study on the same proverbial shelf as other studies that focus primarily on children's thinking and creations within multicultural contexts. The purpose of this study is not to feature the cold blue and white lights of computer monitors and digital cameras, but on the texts children generate that reflect their lives. How might their stories expand or

change when given the opportunity to use multi-modal tools to expand them across font, audio, and audience through the web?

Lastly, there is a need for research about young children, literacy, and the use of (not so) new (anymore) technologies. Lankshear & Knobel (2003) found a glaring lack of research about technology in major literacy journals, and even less when they narrowed their lens to research involving young children from diverse backgrounds. When they excluded research that focused on using technology to reinforce elements of traditional literacies, the pool of available research became even smaller. While digital literacies have expanded and transformed (Lankshear & Knobel's 2008) since Lankshear and Knobel's 2003 study, the balance of available research within literacy journals remains stable.

Lankshear & Knobel spoke to a need for more research with young children and new literacies that extended beyond using technology to reinforce the encoding and decoding of print. There is a dearth of research that explores young children's participation in new discourse communities –not merely for the sake of reinforcing traditional literacies -- but for the purpose of providing children with authentic, “insider” (Gee, 2003) opportunities to participate in the real digital world.

What follows in this chapter serves as an introduction to the research and theory that supports this dissertation's problem statement. The theoretical framework is provided in Chapter 2.

The Need for Story

Dyson & Genishi (1994) wrote about the need for story in culturally diverse classroom communities. Stories provide children the opportunity to tell the story of their own lives, and share their interpretations with others. They use these stories to imagine what could have happened, what should have happened, what actually happened, and to shape their lives. In multicultural classrooms, teachers and students find a way to connect with each other across diverse experiences. Stories provide a way that students can negotiate a “permeable curriculum” (Dyson, 1993) where cultural differences are not in conflict, but shared.

While storytelling requires a different set of skills than written stories, many educators believe that storytelling is a bridge into effective schooling and early literacy (Bruner, 1984; Rosen 1988). Miller & Mehler (1994) found that personal storytelling is a strength for many young children, including minority children and children from low income homes. Young children are avid and eager participants in personal storytelling and they use their stories as tools for expressing and making sense of who they are.

Many teachers of young children incorporate a sharing time, or a show and tell time into the curriculum. Michaels (1981) identified this routine classroom event as one of the few times during the school day where children have the opportunity to create their own oral, self-chosen texts, and to bring their out-of-school, personal experiences into the classroom. Sharing time can have many purposes: as a vehicle to build community in the classroom, as practice in making oral presentations, or as a prelude to written stories.

Regardless of the curricular purpose of the event, creating narrative is a universal meaning-making strategy. But there is not one way of transferring experiences into story. However universal the need to tell stories is, the way the stories are told are revealed through the grammar of the storyteller's culture. Michael's (1981) research revealed differences in expectations between the stories African American children produced and what European American teachers accepted as appropriate. Stories are an opportunity for children and teachers to create deeper understandings, but cultural misunderstandings of the nature that Michaels discovered could be detrimental to student learning.

Digital Mediators

Once upon a time, people used stones and sticks to carve out stories on cave walls. Today, our stories can be told through a mix of image, music, video, animation and colorful fonts. Before teachers had totally embraced what could be done with computers in their classroom, the Internet exploded offering many more opportunities and challenges. And just recently O'Reilly (2005) and others heralded the birth of Web 2.0, a version of the web that is transformed into a place for mass participation, distributed knowledge, and widespread collaboration: wikis, not web pages; blogs, not message boards, YouTube, not CNN.com.

A discussion of digital mediators must begin with Vygotsky's notion of how social tools like computers are not only shaped by human minds, but also have the ability to change the mind of humans (Wertsch, 2007). Computers, like any other technological tool used in education, do not by themselves bring about improvements in learning;

instead, they change learning in unique ways. Research on the use of computers shows a reorganization of learning environments, a reshaping of literacy practices, and students reshaping themselves as learners (Morgan, et al., 2002).

Leu (2000) discussed two perspectives on the influence of digital mediators on literacy learning. Reinking's transformative stance (1998) reflects the notion that technology transforms the nature of literacy. From this perspective, researchers can seek to understand the new literacies that occur because of the technology. The transactional stance, on the other hand, sees technology and literacy mutually influencing each other in multiple ways. While technology changes literacy, literacy also changes technology as users envision new purposes for the emerging technologies (Leu, 2000). I will expand upon these ideas in the theoretical framework in Chapter 2.

In their role as digital mediator, computers play a unique and distinctive role in groups of students interacting in classrooms. Wegerif (2003) observed the computer's dual role as object (a machine) and fellow participant (interactive) when young children work in digitally-mediated groups. He points to the IDRf (initiation, *discussion*, response, feedback) transformation of the typical IRf (Cazden, 2001) pattern of student-teacher interaction, where the interloping element of *discussion* is a factor remarkable to computer-mediated interactions.

In a decade old study, Labbo (1996) also observed the interactions of young children and computers as digital mediators. She recorded kindergartener's semiotic uses for the tool: sometimes it was a canvas for painting pictures, sometimes it was paper for

writing stories. No matter the stance the children took to the computer, all their interactions were supported by their budding traditional literacy skills.

The Need New Literacies

Over the last decade, there have been calls for a broader view of what it means to be literate (New London Group, 1996; Leu & Kinzer, 2003). Traditionally, literacy instruction meant a focus on encoding and decoding of rule-governed, print-based forms of the national language. Such traditional instruction fails to meet the challenges faced by a world that is increasingly impacted by a larger role of technology in children's lives, as well as the widening acceptance of cultural diversity. (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). This broader definition views literacy as a social act, embedded in a culture's beliefs. Mastering a finite set of skills is not enough; students must be able to interpret meaning across a multiple sign systems in a variety of communications contexts (Ware & Warshauer, 2005).

New Literacies are the post-typographic literacies associated with new information and communication technologies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003b). Of course, not all work at the computer is considered New Literacies. Common classroom activities like typing a written report to produce a neat copy, or using slideshow technology to retell a story do not meet the standard for a New Literacy event. In fact, Lankshear and Knobel claim that school is often the least likely place to find New Literacies in practice because of two deep seeded constructs: "teacher-directed" and "curricular" (p. 30). Teacher directed instruction limits what is covered in the classroom to the teacher's

knowledge, which is often more limited than their students', particularly concerning new technologies. And curricular refers to a pre-determined set of strategies and skills that must be transmitted to the student, with little room left in the instructional day to build upon the rich reservoir of students' funds of knowledge (Moll, et al., 1992). Lankshear and Knobel wrote about the tension between the authentic uses of new literacies that happen out of school and the conflicting "deep grammar" (p. 30) of the classroom.

Gee (2003) described authentic interactions with new literacies as those events that give students the opportunity to gain an insider's perspective and expertise into the situational language and contexts of new digital spaces. When students participate actively in electronic discourse communities, they have the ability to produce their own learning experiences and customize learning to meet their own needs. Kist (2000) includes opportunities to respond in multiple modes, as well as a mix of collaborative and individual activities to also be indicative of New Literacies.

Teachers of very young children often encourage children to respond using multiple modes. As students grow older and become more involved in the digital milieu out of school, the more mono-modal their school instruction becomes. This disconnect (Levin & Arafah, 2002) between students' out of school literacy practices and the school curriculum is exacerbated by the recent emphasis on high stakes testing (Vincent, 2006). For school to be efficacious, learning needs to be connected to real world, adult ways of practicing literacy, which increasingly includes new technologies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003b).

The Need for Digital Equity

Any research focusing on African American children and technology must consider the influence of the digital divide on today's learners. The digital divide refers to the gap in not only access to new information and communication technology, (ICT) but also to inequities in technology use for non-white, non-male, non-high socioeconomic status populations. As many African American children populate low income schools, an investigation of computer access and use in such schools is warranted.

Initiatives aimed at getting technology into schools across the United States have been successful. Between 1994 and 2002, the percentage of classrooms with Internet access in schools with high poverty rates (75% or more students eligible for free and reduced lunch) grew from 25% to 89%. (Judge, et al., 2006). Judge, et al. found very little difference in Internet access in schools regardless of demographics. However they did note a disparity in home access related to household income. Their study found that less than 50 percent of low income homes had a computer available for the children's use. Lack of Internet access at home was correlated with lower achievement in reading and math, even after controlling for income and other factors (p. 58).

Concentrated effort aimed at getting computers into schools has shown progress in equalizing access for all children. Yet research reveals a continued gap: not in access or numbers of computers available in schools, but in regards to equitable use of technology. Warschauer, et al. (2004), identified three patterns of computer use in schools: *performativity, workability, and complexity*.

Performativity referred to an emphasis on tasks that focused exclusively on mastering hardware and software, rather than on bigger learning outcomes and knowledge construction. While performativity was identified across high and low SES schools, children from low SES schools were more likely to be harmed by time spent on meaningless, disconnected tasks.

Workability described the problems teachers had integrating computers into their curriculum. Warschauer noted that high- SES schools were more likely to spend professional development dollars on training teachers to use the available technology. In low SES schools, the same funds were often put in training teachers to prepare students for high-stakes testing.

Finally, the pattern of complexity described further problems teachers had using the available technology. The pressure of high-stakes testing made time in the curriculum for meaningful uses of technology rather scarce. Also, teachers in high SES schools assumed their students had learned computer basics at home, and felt free to go beyond the basics during school as well as assign homework that required computer use. Teachers in low income schools tended to underestimate how many of their students had computers at home, and spent more non-academic time (activities such as inputting text) during precious school hours.

Low income and minority children were more likely to use the computer lab for basic skill review and drill software (Becker, 2000; Judge, et al., 2006; Warschauer, et al., 2004). In fact, Judge et al. found a correlation between high computer use in high poverty schools and lower reading scores. The researchers speculated that the children

were spending their time with remedial software instead of instructional time face to face with a teacher.

Despite the entry of computer and Internet access in schools, there remains a larger problem with digital equity. Minority and poor children are faced with a society that increasingly encodes its most significant messages digitally (Clark & Moore, 2007). True literacy for these children must include experiences that allow them to acquire and produce knowledge with technology.

Problem Statement

I began this chapter with the “need for” theme borrowed from Dyson and Genishi’s book on the place of culturally relevant stories and story creation in elementary classrooms. I started there because I wanted this dissertation grounded in story and what it means in the classroom: a way for children to share themselves and their culture, a way to build a community, a building block for further literacy, a common place, yet highly personal mode of expression. From there, I expanded the theme to include topics relevant to our increasingly digital world: digital mediators, new literacies, and the digital divide. I hoped to lay the groundwork for a compelling and intriguing reason for bringing these elements together in a study of African American children creating texts -- their stories --with digital tools. The current research has not yet brought together the elements of storytelling, African American Language, primary students, and computers. This is particularly true of research with a literacy focus. There is need for a study that explores the place where the permeable literacy curriculum (Dyson, 1993) – a curriculum

infused with what diverse children bring with them to school – meets the permeating digital – tools that saturate and influence our present day society. Since African American children are among the least likely to engage in meaningful experiences with technology, there is a need for such research.

Questions Guiding This Study

- What is the nature of texts that African American first graders create while using digital tools?
- What role do the digital tools play in the students' creation process?
- What meanings and purposes do they attribute to the digital stories they create?

CHAPTER TWO

This chapter contains a review of theoretical and empirical literature in the areas that are relevant to my study. I have organized this chapter into four sections. The first section details the theoretical perspective that guides this study. Following that, I share three sections linked closely to my three research questions: (a) the nature of texts that African American children create, (b) the cultural resources African American children bring to their literacy endeavors, and (c) the ways in which digital mediators transform language and literacy for today's children.

Theoretical Perspectives

The research questions and design of this study are guided by the principles of socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978). Socio-cultural theory is based on the idea that human learning is achieved through interaction with other humans. A commonly occurring theme in Vygotsky's writing is the concept of mediation. He believed that we do not interact with the social and physical world directly; instead our contact with the world is indirect or mediated by "psychological tools" or "signs" (Daniels, et al., 2007). These tools can be a myriad of things and people: tutors, maps, graphs, math algorithms, conventional signs, computers, and of course, language itself.

In his work interpreting Vygotsky's writings, James Wertsch distinguished two types of mediation. Explicit mediators are tools intentionally introduced into a problem solving situation, and generally take a material, non transitory form. A tutor, a computer, or any other of the physical tools listed in the previous paragraph can serve as explicit mediators. Implicit mediators usually involve spoken language, and are accessed unintentionally because they are built into mental functioning. The integrating of these signs into thinking means that these mediators are not objects of conscious reflection. An example of implicit mediation in action is a third grader composing a text that has a clear beginning, middle, and end after years of instruction and exposure to that organizational structure.

One of the most intriguing ideas concerning Vygotsky's mediators is their effect on human nature. Since individual learning is dependent on institutions, settings, and cultural artifacts in one's social milieu, the tools and signs one is exposed to mediate new patterns of thought and mental functioning (Wertsch 1991). The exciting ramification of this notion is that we can no longer consider intelligence static. Instead, intelligence is dynamic, and alterable by technological advances that alter cultural tools, that in turn alter cognitive functioning. Considering the technology advances of the last 30 years, it is reasonable to conclude that there is a lot of untapped human potential from a socio-cultural point of view (Bonk & King, 1998).

Leu (2000) reported two different, but equally viable to this study, stances on the influence of technology on learning, specifically literacy learning. He outlined Reinking's (1998) transformative stance as believing that technology transforms the nature of

literacy. While in the early 1980s it may have been strange to see the terms “literacy” and “technology” in the same sentence, it is now easy to acknowledge that technology is more than a subset of literacy learning. Reading and writing with technology requires an expanded set of skills, including visual literacy (Flood & Lapp, 1995) and representational literacy (TCGV, 1994) that encompasses multimedia and other forms of expression that technology allows.

The second view Leu reported was a transactional stance which considered technology and literacy interacting in multiple ways and influencing each other. In this view, technology transforms literacy, but literacy also has the ability to transform technology as users envision new ways of using emergent technologies for literate acts (Leu, 2000). For example, Leu mentioned the moment teachers and students first envisioned connecting classrooms across the globe through the internet as a moment when literacy transformed technology.

Leu added a third, what he considered comprehensive, stance: Literacy as deictic. The term deixis is used by linguists to describe words that change meaning depending on the time and space they are utilized. Leu maintained that literacy is deictic, not due to variance of time and space, but because new technologies and new envisionments for using those technologies are continuously changing what literacy means. This continuous change influenced by technology is reflected in the evolution of what it means to keep a journal: from the spiral bound pad, to personal websites, to blogs with participatory functions.

Socio-cultural perspectives that identify and define how culture mediates the literacy learning of children from diverse backgrounds are also an important theoretical frame for this research. These cultural influences can be identified as cultural models (Lee, 2003) that represent socially constructed ways of knowing, with knowledge organized into implicit ideas, attitudes, values, and beliefs about the world.

Boykin (1994) purported a cultural model he found persistent in African American communities and had roots in West Africa. He called for learning environments for African American children that were responsive to what he termed an Afro-cultural ethos. He identified nine dimensions of Afro-cultural orientation, with six being: *harmony* – the belief that humans and nature are interdependent on each other; *movement* – a connection of psychological health with rhythm, music, and dance; *verve* – a propensity toward relatively high levels of stimulation and for action that is lively and energetic; *oral tradition* – a preference for oral modes of communication where both speaker and listener are part of the performance and oral virtuosity is cultivated; *expressive individualism* – the need to cultivate a distinct personality and personal style; and *social time perspective* – the valuing time as a social construction, not according to physical, spatial time, but according to the event taking place (Ford, 1996).

The other three dimensions make up the heart of the Afro-cultural ethos (Laird, 2004). They are: *spirituality* – an acknowledgement of omnipresent, immaterial forces that permeate everyday life, and that being attuned to spiritual truths is vital to personal well being; *affect* – sensitivity to one's own affective tone, and the emotional cues given by others, as well as an interweaving of thought and emotion that influences action, such

as responding to others based on “vibes;” and *communalism* – a commitment to the fundamental interdependence of people in which premium is placed on the social bonds and obligations to one’s social group.

Boykin considered these Afro-cultural dimensions a third of the Triple Quandary in which all African Americans participate. African American children must at all times negotiate the mainstream experience, the minority experience, and the African American cultural experience. There is always interplay and often conflict across these three realms of experience (Boykin, 1986). Earlier, Dubois (1982) introduced the related concept of the double consciousness of African Americans, as they are always in tune with themselves as well as how they are perceived by whites. African American children often develop defensive postures to cope with these competing realms, or this dual consciousness. Ogbu (2004) identified several defensive postures that are part of the African American collective identity and are rooted in the antebellum south. One of these defenses is associated with, “the burden of acting white” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). This defense was not a resistance to success in school; instead it discouraged behaviors and attitudes associated with whiteness such as studying, talking in Standard English, or having white friends. African American students who successfully dealt with this peer pressure often managed to make good grades while appearing to put forth little to no effort.

Also in line with Ogbu’s theories of collective identity and resistance strategies is the insistence in some quarters on using Black English (or African American Language) as a rejection of the stigma put on the dialect for centuries.

Finally, I include Bahktin's concept of the dialogic nature of human utterances as a central perspective to this study. Bahktin considered language dialogic because when we speak, we take up the social languages that are already in existence in the cultural communities of which we are a member (Lee, 2004). We are forever responding to propositions, stereotypes, beliefs, and values already in play. We are responding to our social milieu whether we are using inner speech to solve a problem or whether we are in a conversation with others. When we dialogue with others, we are crafting our contribution in anticipation of what response we will get. All communication is linked like a chain. When a child composes a text, he or she is also composing a sense of self, or his or her place in the social world. The dialogic relationship between self and the social world accounts for the sociocultural nature of children's texts (Dyson, 1992). In a dialogic relationship, there is no sense of self without the accompanying social world (Bakhtin, 2002).

Dyson (1992) used Bahktin's communication chain to dispute the Piagetian notion that young children were egocentric when writing stories or sharing a tale. Children being egocentric in their communication would mean that they wrote texts with no consideration for audience before they are shared. This notion conflicted strongly with the children she'd worked with in urban classrooms. Indeed, she found her students to be sociocentric when crafting their texts. That is, from the moment of conception their stories had a social purpose in mind. Dyson's subjects wrote in anticipation of how their audience might react. "Children's writing is not made socially sensitive by the response of others; it is itself, a social act, a way of interacting with each other" (p. 6).

Dyson continued by providing an example (from d'Ambrosio, 1988) of a second grade teacher who wished to teach his students how to be sensitive to their audience's needs. He asked the listening audience to provide feedback to the author, sharing what they liked about the piece, as well as suggestions to make the piece better. Dyson noted that while this technique adequately supported the purpose of reinforcing the school's writing expectations, it did not take into account that children had their own social expectations for their writing, social expectations that could vary tremendously across the classroom. Dyson cautioned that in "socioculturally diverse classroom, it could well be problematic" (p. 7).

African American Students' Written Texts

As mentioned in Chapter One of this dissertation, researchers with a socio-cultural perspective of literacy have broadened the definition of literacy from a set of universal, culturally neutral skills, to viewing literacy as culturally shaped practices. This broadened definition aligns well with principles of culturally relevant pedagogy that affirm the "cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students" (Gay, 2000, p. 29). A culturally relevant frame for student learning would privilege the everyday contexts of students' lives, particularly those of color. Students' routine practices at home are considered rich sources for learning (Moll & Greenburg, 1993; Smitherman, 2000). Teachers looking for meaningful ways to include these cultural resources into the curriculum would do well to offer students opportunities to create and share knowledge in multiple forms.

Dyson's groundbreaking work in the 1980s and 1990s with first graders of African American descent, revealed the intriguing world of young children learning to write. Dyson, along with others (Miller & Goodnow, 1995; Nelson, 1996), chronicled the importance of children's reframing of cultural material in constructing their own texts. Parents and teachers cannot simply provide children with meaningful contexts for learning. Since children must participate in their own construction, they have no choice but to depend upon their past experiences and their cultural milieu, then reframe them in literacy learning contexts (Dyson, 2000).

Dyson (1999), while working in an urban classroom, observed that children not only wrote, but also drew, sang, played, and above all, talked. She labeled this phenomenon symbol weaving (Dyson, 1986). She found no sense in studying children's compositions by picking the print out of these multimedia events. To truly interpret African American children's writing process, a balance had to be struck between drawn pictures, enacted dramas, and black and white print; no single portion would reveal the full semiotic capacities. Also interrelated with symbolic and cultural resources were social ones. That is, Dyson discovered that a major reason for children's manipulation of text was to manipulate relationships with each other (Dyson 1989).

While the participants in Dyson's studies were African American students, her findings have broad implications for all young children learning to write. Smitherman (1994) took a more targeted look at the writing samples of African American students from the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Scores for African American students on the NAEP writing assessment consistently lag behind the scores of their

European American counterparts. Although African American and Latino students made great improvements in the decade before Smitherman's research, reports from the 1988 assessment still showed very few African American students performing at adequate or higher levels (Applebee, et al, 1990).

The goal of Smitherman's research was to compare the scores of African American students across a variety of ability levels so a norm might be established. Smitherman's research team developed a holistic scoring model to analyze African American discourse style in NAEP writing samples. Some of the markers for African American discourse are listed below.

- Rhythmic, dramatic, often repetitive, evocative language
- Reference to color/race even if the topic doesn't call for it
- Use of proverbs, aphorisms, Biblical verses
- Tone that is reminiscent of sermons in traditional Black church style
- Direct address to the reader, conversational tone
- References to cultural/ethnolinguistic idioms
- Verbal inventiveness, unique nomenclature
- Consciousness of the African American community values/situation
- Field dependent: personalizing events, lack of distance from subjects and/or topics

When African-American writers of mixed ability levels were compared to one another, Smitherman found that essays containing the most African American discourse (also called AAVE – African American Vernacular English or AAL – African American

Language in the literature) markers garnered higher scores on the NAEP. She also noted that African American writers consistently scored highest on the imaginative-narrative assessment.

Smitherman believed her results should encourage teachers to value African American discourse in writing tasks. Also, African American strengths in imaginative narrative writing should be applied to other genres of writing (persuasive, comparison and contrast, informative, etc.). As cultural norms move away from “book” English to “human” English, the narrative-like, dynamic quality of the African American expressive tradition will help students produce lively, concrete, image-filled essays regardless of the modality (p. 95).

Ball (1996) studied the writing of African American high school students who were successful in blending an African American discourse style with expository texts. They were able to strategically use elements of their out-of-school literacy while meeting the requirements of in school assignments. These successful students often made conscious decisions to avoid using their cultural language their teacher might not understand. Similar to Dyson, Ball noted that these written texts ceased to be merely communication, but instead became a performance. The writers invited the reader into the performance with discursive language, and by including topics and ideas they were passionate about.

The communicator transforms into a performer (Dyson, 1993) by the language used, and the stance taken toward the audience. Techniques in the African American community include musical components such as the rhythmic use of language, patterns of

repetition, expressive sounds, and ways to include a participatory sense to the performance, such as dialogue, tropes, hyperbole, and call and response patterns within the texts. While the Smitherman's list in the previous section noted the indicators of African American Language (AAL), Ball's list below shows how students used AAL as a strategy for better compositions.

Ball's close study of the texts produced by these successful writers revealed that they:

- use repetition to create formulaic patterns.
- establish a link or sense of rapport with audience by including inclusive terms like "we're."
- take on qualities of performance within the written text.
- mix culturally-based, oral patterns along with mainstream "school" organizational patterns.
- use interactive dialogue to bring the reader into a participatory stance.
- include African American idioms when they feel the reader will understand and share similar cultural experiences.
- link topics by including personal anecdotes and narrative bits skillfully within the expository text.

Like Smitherman, Ball saw usefulness in capitalizing on African American discourse styles as an accepted part of classroom expository writing. She pointed to Heath's (1983) teacher involvement program discussed in *Ways with Words*, as well as Hawaii's Kamehameha Early Education Program as successful programs in which children's home language and culture were not ignored by the school, but instead used as an integral tool in scaffolding student literacy.

Children and Their Spoken Texts

Little is known about how students might draw upon their own cultural knowledge to shape texts in digital formats (Hall & Damico, 2007). Hall and Damico set out to add to the knowledge base by investigating a group of urban secondary school children who participated in a digital media course as part of a summer enrichment program. Their study sought to address issues of access and offer students culturally relevant experiences with technology.

While the primary goal of the course was to have students engage meaningfully with technology to create digital texts about topics that interested them, Hall and Damico wanted to understand the way these African American youth accessed and applied their linguistic resources and knowledge in constructing their digital texts. They found evidence of tonal semantics, sermonic tone, call and response, and signifying.

Tonal Semantics is the use of intonation to shade or alter the meaning of words (Banks, 2005). The students used words like “police” and “please” that had different connotations depending on the tonal semantics. Sermonic Tone was used in the students’ movies when one of the actors took on the role of an authority figure, and then used a story or parable-like tale to illustrate his or her point. Call and Response, a participatory interplay between speaker and listener, appeared frequently in the students’ creations. Phrases like, “I know that’s right” acted as a way to second a motion. Lastly, signifying was also a common occurrence in the students’ texts. Signifying (Smitherman, 1977)

refers to speaking with innuendo and double meaning with the purpose of playing with the sound words, producing a witty response and indicating a Black presence.

Author Toni Morrison (Rushdy, 1999) said that an important aspect of African American literature is to “be both print and oral literature: to combine those two aspects so that the stories can be read in silence of course, but one should be able to hear them as well” (p. 56). The African American oral tradition might be why, as referenced in the first chapter, that young children of color have shown strength when it comes to telling personal narratives. Opportunities for children to tell personal narratives and participate in sharing time can be considered opportunities for those students to create culturally relevant, non-print texts.

As made quite clear by the previous research presented, African American children’s oral and written narrative structures are often different than those of middle class European American children. Michaels (1981) investigated show and tell events in a first grade classroom. The researcher differentiated between the European American and African American styles by using the terms *topic centered* to label the narrative style of European American children and *topic associative* to describe the narrative style of African American children (Michaels, 1981). Topic centered narratives are favored in school, and feature a linear presentation and factual information about an explicit topic. Topic associative narratives consist of a series of personal anecdotes that are implicitly connected. While topic associative narratives lack a clear, beginning, middle and end, they could not be considered mindless wanderings.

Michaels reported that European American teachers often had difficulty scaffolding the narratives of the African American children. Teachers interrupted and restated directions to the African American children, more often than they did with the children of European American descent. Over time, Michaels believed that the teacher's inability to scaffold the topic associative stories was detrimental to the students' literacy learning.

Michaels and Foster (1985) researched a primary classroom where the sharing time was run by the students. There were no teacher rules on topic, style or even the amount of time that each student could speak. The children themselves decided on what they considered to be appropriate sharing. Two styles of narrative occurred during the student run sharing time: the "lecture demonstration" and the "performed narrative." The lecture demonstration style, usually employed by European American students, was marked by these characteristics: factual information, usually about an object, used the school register, clearly enunciated, solicited questions from the audience, formal and instructional. The performed narrative style, usually employed by African American students, was characterized by these markers: narrative account, emphasizing interaction between friends and/or relatives, stylistic devices such as gestures, and extra loudness, and shifts to present tense dialogue (Champion, 2003).

Michaels and Foster reported that the children involved appreciated both styles of sharing. There were no implicit notions of correctness that appeared in the earlier studies. The most important aspect of the student run sharing events was keeping the audience's interest. The authors thought it was significant that the students were allowed the freedom

to use their discourse skills that they brought from home, and build competence and sophistication at school.

Michaels, along with Heath (1983) were among the first to attribute African American children's narrative styles to cultural differences (Champion, 2000). Heath's work in the low income African American community of Trackton led her to identify differences in narrative styles between them, and the middle class children that attended the same school. The families of the Trackton children were less likely to modify their speech when talking to youths, so those children were aware of creative uses of similes, metaphors, rhythmic language and other tools of the master storyteller. Linear flow and clear delineations of beginning, middle and end were not favored in their homes, so much as grabbing and keeping the audience's attention. Cultural differences like these led to misunderstandings once these children went to school.

Trackton parents were less likely to engage their children in the traditional in-school staple of the Known-Answer-Question. Questions like, "What color is your dress?" and "How many shoes do you see?" were common in the middle class homes across town. In Trackton, children were more likely to be asked analogical questions, such as "What's that like?"

Differences in home language practices caused conflict for the Trackton children at school. Once Heath worked with teachers to scaffold students' learning with aspects of their students' home language, the Trackton students achieved higher levels of literacy growth.

Moll et al. (1992) described the cultural resources available for building upon at school as “funds of knowledge.” He defined these funds as the “essential cultural practices and bodies of knowledge that households use to survive, get ahead, or to thrive” (p. 21). Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg (1992) confirmed the value of applying home knowledges and ways of knowing to school. They discovered that the way knowledge was passed on in minority households was through culturally created processes that have an effect on the self-esteem of children. These processes are possible sources of cultural conflict in school if opportunities for cultural relevancy are not present. These processes also contribute to children’s understanding of roles, rules, relationships, emotions, values, beliefs, organization and functions of society (Wood & Attfield, 1996).

How Digital Mediators Transform Literacy

In chapter one of this document, I reported Lankshear & Knobel’s admonition that all literate acts completed using computers are not a New Literacy. However, there is research on the growing effects of the digital world: transforming literacy and some believe, transforming the child.

Transforming Literacy

Labbo’s (1996) study of kindergarteners interacting with each other and multi-media software revealed young children using digital tools for their own social purposes. Similar to Dyson’s first graders, Labbo’s participants used the digital tools to entertain, tease, and even share inside jokes with their fellow students. Their stances toward the

computer depended on the social purpose they had in mind. Sometimes the screen was a landscape where they explored the capabilities of the software and the territory of the screen space. At other times the screen was a playground where they shared humor using cleverly placed clip art and/or drawings. They took a screen as stage space at times when they carried about elaborate dramas using the screen for props, scenery and characters to move around and use in role playing. The children saw the screen as a canvas for creating art with clipart and electric paintbrushes, and the screen as paper as they used the computer for letter writing, notes, signs, and stories.

Beyond the stances, Labbo observed that for these children, what it meant to communicate was transformed. In traditional literacy activities done on paper, graphical elements such as drawings are considered subordinate to print. However, in these creations, color choices, fonts, graphics and animation were integral to the message conveyed. When given the opportunity to create across multiple sign systems, the kindergarteners became quite adept at making decisions about the appropriate symbols for their purposes.

As Labbo discovered, graphical elements are a major factor in the creation process for children using computers. Mathewman and Triggs (2004) researched teacher's complaints about "obsessive compulsive font disorder" where students spent, in the teacher's opinion, too much time choosing fonts and images before getting down to the real business of writing (which meant the text) when composing on computers. Instead of actually wasting time, Matthewman & Triggs found that visual elements of writing are significant at all parts of the composing process and play a significant role in

the generation of ideas. This is in contrast to a traditional linear model of the writing process where presentation is only considered at the end. Reinking (1994) wondered if our privileging of linear styles of writing might simply be based on the limitations of centuries old communications' tools – paper and pencil.

Burnet and Myers (2006) speculate that different attitudes toward writing on paper and writing on the screen might be rooted in the fact that while you look down at paper, you look up at a screen. They wonder if this might make writers more aware of how their audience will take in their work visually. Like Matthewman and Triggs, these researchers revealed that considerations about visual elements were particularly important when students were just beginning to compose. Clip art, images, and other available frames within the program played a dual role in students' composing process, serving to shape ideas and content generated, but also limiting what students could communicate. They cautioned that students should be taught to be critical of available images. One example they provided was that the available images of “work” reflected white males carrying briefcases.

In an earlier study, Baker and Kinzer (1998) found that products produced in the technology-rich classroom they studied were never actually finished. While traditional compositions were often complete and put in a folder or a drawer, the students continued to go back to their digital creations, editing and collaborating with others, even on older pieces.

In this discussion of how computers transform literacy, it is important to include Kress' (2003) notion that creating with computers and the Internet has strong

implications for our ideas of authorship. Writers have always drawn from their experience with other texts, but with computers, the “borrowing” is more overt. The new composing process is often a construction process, assembling pieces according to the creator’s unique ideas for design and purpose.

Ways that children use their literacies to form and transmit their identities is also transformed by digital mediators. Think of Dyson’s (1994) portrayal of William who, despite what adults might think about content of his texts, he boldly claims, “I’m gonna express myself” (p. 155). Then consider the teenage instant message connoisseurs who participated in a study by Lewis and Fabos (2005). IM “talk” is a performance that shifted, depending on the audience. The form of communication took on speech-like syntax: dropped g’s, and shortened meanings that optimized quick exchanges. And unlike the traditional concept of a static, personal “voice” that applies across multiple texts, “voice” in the girls’ IMs was fluid, and used to enact multiple identities based on the relationships built during online and offline contexts.

Sadik (2008) sought to explore digital storytelling with the purpose of examining the level of engagement of students with the technique, and how well digital storytelling supported teachers in effectively integrating technology into learning. His observations of students (age 13-15) and their teachers lead him to recognize digital storytelling as an authentic and powerful way to integrate technology into the curriculum. He also found that using software like Photo Story and hardware such as digital cameras motivated students to stick with projects for longer periods of time. Sadik’s findings suggested there

was a need to encourage teachers to give students more long-term and problem solving opportunities so that there was sufficient time to create and present digital stories.

Transforming the Child

Every generation is shaped by the events and innovations of their time. For today's children their world is shaped by the variety of digital gadgets that ubiquitously appear in their world. The notion of "looking up" a word in the dictionary, so familiar to older generations, is completely transformed for today's child. The trusty set of World Book Encyclopedias has been replaced by the internet search engine. As noted in the first chapter, even young children have digital lives (Marsh, 2003).

Digital Natives is the term coined by Prensky (2001) and elaborated upon by Tapscott (2008), Palfrey & Gasser (2008), and others. The label refers to a generation of youth, born after 1983, who do not know a world without computers, the internet, cell phones, and text messaging.

Prensky claimed boldly that Digital Natives think differently. Their skill set is suited to a digital world: they multitask, they have strong visual-spatial skills; they crave interactivity. Indeed, "they develop hypertext minds. They leap around. It's as though their cognitive structures were parallel, not sequential. Linear thought processes that dominate educational systems now can actually retard learning for brains developed through game and Web-surfing processes on the computer" (Retrieved February 4, 2010 from <http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part2.pdf>, p. 3).

Recent research has found evidence to counter Prensky's high flying language. Jones, et al., (2010) provide findings that show the generation that has been termed, Digital Natives, or the Net Generation, are not a homogenous group when it comes to use of technology. They caution against including all born after 1983 in a generational block.

Paltry & Gasser took a more sociocultural tact to their discussion of digital natives. They noted how Digital Natives interacted with their world. Instead of sitting down to read the paper every morning, Digital Natives are more likely to graze the news. That is, they go through the day absorbing information, from Yahoo, Google, RSS feeds, and Facebook. Digital Natives are not more creative than other generations; they just have access to different and more varied outlets for their creativity. The advent of free or inexpensive authoring tools, and venues like blogs and YouTube, provide Digital Natives multiple ways to express themselves and provide them broader access to a wider audience.

The theoretical perspectives and literature review presented in this chapter provide a foundation for this study. Young children composing texts in a social world, the cultural knowledge African American children bring to school, and transformations forged by interactions between new technologies and literacy learning, are all integral issues to understanding the young subjects who will participate in this study. Considering the continuous change to what it means to be literate, and the struggle of students of color to experience meaningful encounters with technology, this proposed study should fill in a gap in the current research across the relevant fields.

CHAPTER THREE

The purpose of this study was to explore the process and product as African American first graders use digital tools to create stories. This is a qualitative study. Strauss & Corbin (1998) defined qualitative research as “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (p. 17). Qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study because at this study’s heart was an attempt to understand the role digital story making tools play in the young children’s texts and social interactions, and the meanings and purposes the participants applied to their texts. Qualitative methods were necessary to support the exploratory character of this study as little was previously known about the topic. This study used source data such as observations, interviews, and artifacts that must be considered according to qualitative methods.

Naturalistic inquiry involves studying real-world situations as they unfold naturally (Patton, 1990). Although this study’s pull-out nature bears a hint of set-up, such methods were appropriate for this study because participants, their interactions with digital tools, and their artifacts were allowed to occur free-flowing. An important assumption of naturalistic inquiry is that the researcher allows events to unfold and reflects upon emerging patterns and themes, instead of being guided by predetermined restrictions and limitations (Soares, 2009).

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- What is the nature of texts that African American first graders create while using digital tools. (e.g., editing software, drawing software)
- What role do the digital tools play in the students' creation process?
- What meanings and purposes do they attribute to the digital stories they create?

Participants

The participants in this study were eight African American first graders from a rural/suburban school in the southwestern region of the United States. They were selected from three different classrooms in a grade level made up of five teachers. Twelve total students were invited to the study, but only eight returned permissions slips and parent questionnaires in a timely fashion. While all participants were officially categorized as “African American” on school documents, at least two of the participants were of mixed descent. All participants were either six or seven years old at the time of the study. All had relatively the same experiences with writing and storytelling in their first grade classes, and all had relatively the same school experiences with computers. Data collected from teacher questionnaires and student class journals showed similar curriculum offerings across all the participant classrooms.

The following table provides useful information about the participants that was collected at the beginning of the study. It is notable that almost all the students in the

study had a computer at home and that each child’s primary use for computers at home and school was to play what their parents and teachers called learning games.

| Participant pseudonym | Age at the time of study | Classroom teacher pseudonym | Parent report of computer use at home | Student report of favorite school computer activity. |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Baron | 7 | Mrs. P | Internet and CD games | Learning game websites |
| Sydney | 7 | Ms. O | Learning games on CD | Did not answer |
| Tony | 7 | Ms. O | Subscription games on the internet like Toontown, learning cds | Learning game websites |
| Jordan | 6 | Ms. O | Nickelodeon game website, math game website | Learning game websites |
| Kevin | 7 | Mrs. G. | Playing games, cd and internet | Learning game websites |
| Terrence | 6 | Mrs. G | Internet game sites (Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network) | Dr. Seuss website (shown by the librarian the day of his pre-interview. |
| Ariel | 6 | Mrs. G | Does not choose to use the computer often, learning websites like Starfall | Learning game websites |
| Starla | 7 | Mrs. G. | No computer at home | Learning game websites |

Table 3.1. Participants general demographics and home/school computer use

Table 3.1 provides a snapshot of the students’ experiences with computers both at home and school. In Chapter Four, there is significant space dedicated to the students’ pre-study experiences with classroom composing.

Understanding the participants is a key to understanding both their stories and the journey we undertook with this study. To aid in this understanding, I have provided some short definitions describing each child compiled from my field notes, quotes from

interviews, parent and teacher interviews, and the recordings. You will have to finish reading the entire dissertation before knowing these participants fully; however, the following paragraphs provide the reader a primer.

Baron – Baron was a boy whose mind was filled with aliens, ancient magical realms, and Pokémon creatures. He most fit the characteristic first grader who drew upon pop culture as sustenance for his daydreams and stories. His mother seemed very proud of his great vocabulary and wrote, “He always surprises me with the things he says.”

Sydney – The quietest child I have ever met. She seemed to have adequate reading and writing skills, as testified to by her teacher and mother, yet she held back her words, almost painfully. Her teacher, Ms. O, stated that she hoped since I was also African American, I would be able to get “more out of her.” But the following chapters provide evidence that I did not.

Tony – Only six, but Tony was already the consummate politician. Likeable, easy going, and seemingly competent, but he had some learning weaknesses that were hidden by a big vocabulary and a lot of bravado. His mother wrote of his enjoyment of books about “boy stuff – trains, cars, animals.”

Jordan – Jordan was bubbly and talkative. She had a strong will and lots of confidence. On the teacher questionnaire, when asked “what topics does the child choose to talk about,” her teacher, Ms. O, wrote in large and dark letters “ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING!” Then she underlined the phrase.

Kevin – He had a loud and boisterous tone and laugh that reminded me of Bill Cosby at times. Kevin is an identified ESL student because his family spoke the African language, Ibo/Igbo at home. Mrs. G wrote that he spoke in broken sentences that were not grammatically correct, and that he “often takes several minutes to complete his thoughts.” I found him to be a delightful and engaging storyteller. Mrs. G. also mentioned that he loved talking about his family which was a recurring theme in the stories he would tell during this study.

Terrence – It seemed to make Mrs. G a little perturbed that Terrence never returned any paper work for her class, but he was the first to bring back the signed permissions for this study. His older sister was known throughout the school for several instances of bad behavior, and he carried some guilt by association. He seemed to crave attention, and really enjoyed participating in the study. On the session tapes, I could be heard asking him repeatedly to sit down and to stop fighting over the large, wheeled “teacher” chair in the computer lab.

Ariel – Ariel and Baron were cousins, but nothing alike in personality. Baron was a quiet boy who at any moment might be thinking about the planet’s destruction; Ariel was more interested in the visible plane. She wrote about little girls, flowers and rainstorms. Mrs. G described her as dramatic in her speech and nature. Her mother’s observation on the questionnaire that she didn’t choose to play on the computer at home was telling as further chapters reveal her as somewhat timid at the keyboard.

Starla – Starla was a little round doll with a head full of ribbons and bows. Both her mother and Mrs. G agreed that she had a good grasp of reading, writing and speaking skills. Her mother noted that Starla liked to hear “all happy stories” and that she was “good with communication.” Interestingly, just like Mrs O described Jordan, Mrs. G described Starla as enjoying talking about “anything and everything.” But instead of the animation (and perhaps consternation) expressed by capitals and underlining, Starla’s “anything and everything” was neatly typed and simply followed by a happy face.

These definitions are short, but I hope they provide some introduction to the participants to be encountered in the following chapters.

Setting

This study was conducted at Sundown Elementary, a school located on the southern border of a large southwestern city. The school enrolled children both from the

city suburbs and from a tiny community on the outskirts also called Sundown. The school served about 680 students. It drew from an eclectic assortment of neighborhoods; from the rural areas of Sundown, to brand new middle income subdivisions that were springing up in the far south reaches of the city, and from low income trailer parks that lined parts of Sundown Road. Approximately 35 percent of the students received free and reduced lunch. The school was not eligible for Title 1 funds. Of the 680 students, seven percent were African American, 49 percent were Latino, and 44 percent were classified as White/Other. Across the five first grade classes, there were 12 African American children. Permissions slips for this study were sent to all 12 students and eight of those students completed and returned the paper work. Those were the 8 participants who took part in the study.

The study took place over 18 scheduled sessions during a three month stretch in the spring of 2008. These scheduled sessions lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. There were non-scheduled sessions as well when students came to make up for an absence, or to complete their projects in small groups or alone. The time for the non scheduled sessions varied depending on how much the student could be away from their class. The sessions took place in the school's computer lab. The lab was a large, sparsely decorated room with 27 computers packed tightly on long desks that were arranged in rows facing a white board and a projector screen. There was an aisle down the middle of the room and a cart holding an lcd projector and computer was centered in front of the screen. Of the 18 sessions, three were focused on computer's author's chair where the students' stories were shared using the lcd projector to show them on a big screen.



Figure 3.1. Photo of participants and researcher in the computer lab



Figure 3.2. Students watch a participant's story during computer author's chair

Tasks

The students in this study had 4 main tasks. The first task required participants to brainstorm and record story ideas with paper and markers, a common activity in schools at the beginning of a writing workshop. This activity and sample products are shared in Chapter 4. The second task asked the students to create three stories using the digital tools. Another task required the students participate in three computer author's chair events. During this task, students and researcher watched and then commented about the

participant stories. The final task asked participants to take a DVD of their stories home and share those dvd with their families. All four tasks were subject to informal debriefings where participants were interviewed about their experiences and feelings about the events.

The second task was the main task of the study. Early in the study, participants were shown a simple digital story example. The example was a fable-like story about a fish created by the researcher. Once students had collected their own ideas for stories (the first task mentioned above) they sat in front of computers to begin their own projects.

The software the students used was an art program called Pixie. This software was purchased by the district for use in the elementary schools. The participants had used the software occasionally when they went to the computer lab with their class every other week. They were all familiar with the basic drawing tools; students who had time to experiment had used the more advanced tools for stamps, stickers, and blending colors on the screen. Because the computers were old and poorly maintained, the sophisticated software often froze up while in use of some of the higher functions. In Figure 3.3 there is a screen shot of Pixie in use.

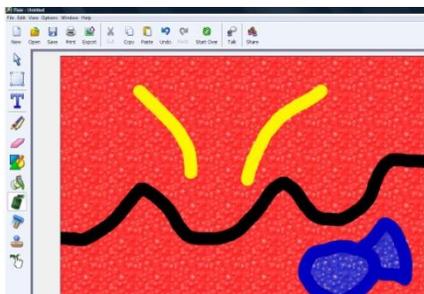


Figure 3.3. Image from the Pixie Software

The screenshot shows some of the tools that the participants had at their disposal. These tools included a text tool, drawing tool, eraser, shape tool, and fill tool among others. Most of the participants in this study may have avoided the text tool because it was often difficult to manage properly.

In Figure 3.4 below, I provide an example of the stories you will see in the following chapters. Some of the stories are told with one image for the whole story. Others, particularly stories made in the later stages on the study were made with 3 to 5 different images. The images were made in Pixie, saved as jpegs, and then moved to a simple editing program from Microsoft called Photo Story. Photo Story provided a storyboard for the pictures. It had voice recording capability for students to tell their stories. The software also gave the still images an illusion of movement by panning across and in and out of the picture.

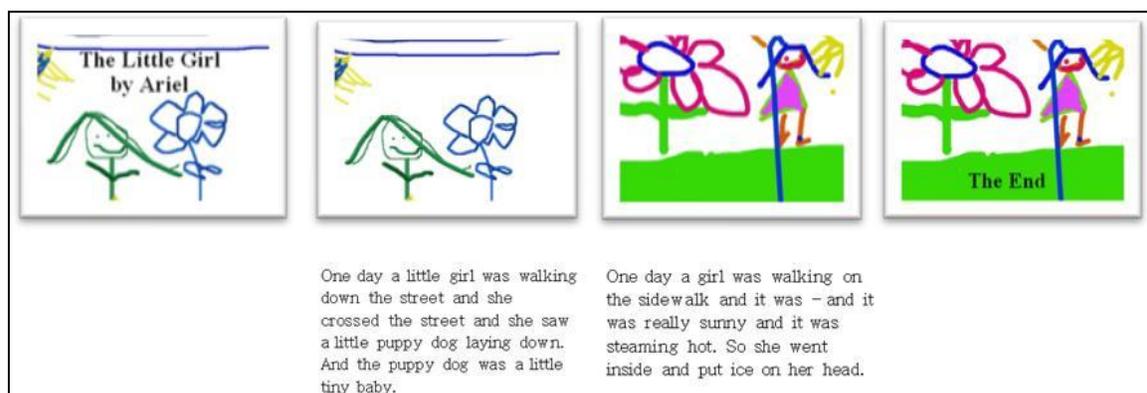


Figure 3.4. An example of Ariel's first digital story

As you can see, Figure 3.4 is a two image digital story produced by Ariel. In this example, her first picture doubles as a title page, and the second picture doubles as an end

page. This is a common structure for the stories in this study. The words appearing beneath the images are the spoken texts the participant recorded for their story. As in this example, most students chose not to use text in their images except when they added the title and ending in the Photo Story software. Table 3.2 below outlines the process further.

| Action | Person Responsible for Action |
|--|--|
| Students drew their stories using Pixie Software. If they made more than one image, they simply clicked new and started their next page. | Students did their own drawing. The researcher helped with tasks such as resizing the mouse pen, or copying an image so that the student can paste it on their other pages. |
| Students' images were saved as jpegs. | Students left their images open on the computer and the researcher saved their work after the session was over. |
| Students images were placed in Photo Story editing software storyboard. | Researcher placed images in Photo Story with participant consultation. ("What image do you want to put first?") |
| Students used the Photo Story capabilities to add titles, "the end," and occasionally, music. | Students add titles and ending texts using Photo Story with the researcher close by for support. |
| Students recorded their story using the capabilities of the software. | For the first two stories, the researcher handled turning the recording on and off for the participants. During the third story participants did this part on their own. |
| The story was played back for the students so they can check if they like the output. (Students chose to edit if other voices, long pauses, or speaking too close to the microphone marred their recording.) | For the first two stories, the researcher was in charge of playing back the story for this check. ("Do you like the way it sounds?") During the third story participants did this part on their own. |
| Once the recording was acceptable to the participant, the video was compiled into a common video file suitable for burning on to DVD or in other formats. | The researcher was in charge of the compiling functions in the Photo Story software. The researcher also burned the three stories on DVD for all participants. For the DVD version the researcher corrected some recording mistakes made in the third stories when students recorded on their own. |

Table 3.2. A detailed version of the story making mechanic.

The table shows that the researcher provided the most technical support in terms of using the Photo Story movie editing software. Students had much more independence

as they were creating images in the Pixie software. I will discuss my role as participant/observer more in the next section.

Role of the Researcher

My main role in the study was that of researcher. I spent much of my time in persistent observation and asking informal questions of the participants. However, the parameters of this study required me to take on other roles as well. In the previous section, I outlined the role I played in the story making task. I would describe one role I played as “tech support,” as I performed the mechanical functions of saving the images in a suitable file format, and handling the higher functions of the editing software. The software was fairly simple and the first graders were able to take over the recording functions by their third attempt. Figure 3.4 is a screenshot of Photo Story showing the storyboard, motion and recording functions. There is space for students to write their texts before reading. Most participants in this study chose not to use this function.

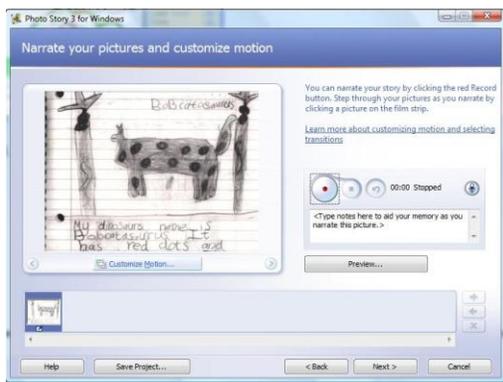


Figure 3.5 Screenshot taken from the Photo Story software

Notice that the recording functions are displayed with familiar symbols that made it easy for first graders to use.

To identify my roles during the other tasks, I examined my statements in the recordings of the tasks. Using color coding I was able to identify two other roles beyond “tech support.” The other roles are “cattle prod,” when the researcher encouraged students to keep working, and “traffic cop” when the researcher steered students toward or away from an action.

The following table is text cut from my field notes from a very early session in the study. The notes were taken right after the session while listening to recording.

| Written Notes taken from recording | Role of the Researcher Explained |
|--|--|
| <p>Terrence has a bunch of money stamps on his screen. Kevin copies him. <u>I keep saying that the stamps will freeze the computer.</u> Kevin must have gone to help someone else make money stamps because <u>I said again that money stamps will freeze the computer.</u></p> <p>Terrence wants his journal so he could get an idea from his journal to write about. (I can't identify which journal belongs to him. Not all of them have names.) <u>I say remember it can come from your own head or your heart map?</u> But I help him find his journal.</p> <p>Baron is working pretty intently. Ariel wants him to look at something and it takes a lot to draw him away from his own screen.</p> <p>Ariel is still trying to get him to participate with her, tapping him on the arm. He's ignoring her.</p> <p>Some kids are having a few tech difficulties... mainly with the text boxes. <u>I instruct Kevin how to get rid of them.</u> Helping with tech difficulties...there's not much, though.</p> <p>I say, <u>"Baron did you change your mind?"</u> He's erased his entire screen and started over. I am worried that he is piddling and won't get anything done.</p> <p>Ariel is fussing because she can't draw people. <u>"What can you draw,"</u> I ask? She says... nothing. <u>I kind of laugh and say, you can draw stick people.</u></p> <p>Baron has a nice background already. I ask <u>Baron what he's working on.</u> He says he is drawing about an alien.</p> <p>Ariel is crying! I can't draw anything! <u>I help her resize the drawing tool because it is way too big.</u></p> <p>Over at Kevin and Terrence. <u>"What's that going to be about?"</u></p> | <p>Traffic Cop - Here the researcher is trying to discourage the use of the stamps.</p> <p>Traffic Cop – The researcher is trying to steer the participant toward other choices.</p> <p>Tech Support Role</p> <p>Cattle Prod Role – The researcher is worried the students won't complete projects.</p> <p>Cattle Prod Role – The researcher is offering suggestions to keep her going.</p> <p>Cattle Prod Role – Researcher remains worried about Baron's slow pace in this early recording.</p> <p>Tech Support Role</p> |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Money? Yours is a page full of money too? I'm kind of like... Okay...</p> | <p>Traffic Cop Role – The researcher is still trying to steer the two boys from making a page full of money, but does not attempt to force them to change.</p> |
|--|--|

Table 3.3. The role of the researcher explained

All of the roles in the table above dissipated over time, and I was more able to concentrate on my observer role. The roles of cattle prod and traffic cop disappeared as I, the researcher, became more comfortable with the students' working styles and became confident that they were motivated to complete projects on their own. The role of tech support also lessened since students for the most part worked within their own capabilities.

During the computer author's chair sessions, we enjoyed and discussed the movies. I took on a participant role similar to the one of teacher as her class participated in author's chair (Routman, 2007). I set a tone of celebrating the children's work, and encouraged their talk in response to each other's work. Again I used questioning as a tool to gain students' insight. Questions like these were used:

- What do you think the best part of _____'s story was?
- What made _____'s story a good story?
- What will your next story be about?

Procedures

Early in the chapter I have mentioned that the permission documents were sent home with the first graders at the initiation of this study in March of 2008. When all the forms were in and completed, the next step was to send out parent and teacher questionnaires. I also spent time observing in the three classrooms with the purpose of

getting to know the 8 participants involved, and to see firsthand the activities that the teachers referenced in interviews. Once all the parent questionnaires were returned, pre-interviews were conducted with all the participants. The pre-interviews were held sitting on the floor in the hallway outside the first grade area. At that time, I also collected their journals to select and copy some writing samples.

From that point, the participants were called into an empty classroom for their first session. Even though the students were from different classes, they were familiar with each other due to shared recess times in kindergarten and first grade. This session included viewing the sample digital story, and discussing what a digital story was. After that, students were given time to work on their “Heart Maps,” a pre-writing activity meant to get them thinking about stories they would like to tell.

By the third session, the first graders were eagerly placed in front of the computers in the computer lab to begin their first stories. Students worked at their own computers making their own projects, but often talked loudly across the large room as they asked the other participants to come see what they were doing. By the end of the study, there had been 15 work sessions for the students to complete their three stories. There were also several times when students came alone or in small groups to finish or catch up on a story in progress.

There were 3 other times when the participants and researcher met as a group to share the stories on the big screen in the school’s computer lab. Chairs were pulled into the middle of the room and the researcher played the completed digital stories on the big

screen using the lcd projector. The discussion after each story was focused on the questions included in the previous section of this dissertation.

Finally, when students had completed their final digital stories and had taken home a DVD of their work, the researcher met once again with students in the hallway outside the first grade area for post-study interviews with students. The post interviews included member checking. A few follow up informal interviews were held with the teachers and participants in the fall of 2008.

Data Sources

I collected various forms of data in order to answer the research questions. Details of each data source are described in the following sections.

Observations

At the beginning of the study, while waiting for parent questionnaires to be returned, I spent about an hour and half in each of the participants' first grade classrooms. I was able to observe the students as they participated in their language arts blocks, and also was able to witness firsthand some of the activities the teachers mentioned on their questionnaires. Since much of the activities observed were teacher directed, data from this observation was not included in student case studies discussed later in this chapter.

Questionnaires

Parent questionnaires were sent home with the participants once they returned the IRB required permission notices. The parent questionnaires focused on computer use at home, reporting of home literacy practices, and school practices that manifested at home. The parents, as a whole were positive and knowledgeable about their children's reading experiences at home and school, but for the most part were unaware of any opportunities to write stories taking place at school. At least two parents indicated that they didn't think their child was writing stories at school, and three others claimed not to have seen any written products come home during the year.

Teacher questionnaires focused on the teacher's perception of each child as a literacy learner. The teachers indicated that they used formal and informal observations to rate the participants' verbal and writing skills as high, medium, or low. Generally, the teachers were less positive than the parents about the literacy capabilities of the children involved in this study. The children they determined had medium or low verbal skills struggled with "basic sentence structure" and "elaboration" in speaking and writing. The only child, (Jordan) who was rated by her teacher as having both high verbal and writing skills, was also judged to "not know when to stop" talking.

Examples of both parent and teacher questionnaires are included in appendix of this dissertation.

Pre and post study participant interviews

Interviews were conducted with participants before and after the study. Pre-study interviews focused on the children's interest in computers as well as their perceptions about writing stories and telling stories during school. Pre-study interview questions (Appendix D) included:

What do you like to do when you are at the computer?
What kinds of stories do you like to hear or read?
What kinds of things do you like to write about at school?
Are you a good story writer?
What makes you a good story writer?
What kinds of things do you like to tell stories about at home and school?
Are you good at telling stories?
What makes you good at telling stories?
What makes a story good?

Post-study interviews included similar questions. Students' ideas about what they liked to do on the computer broadened from the internet and cd games they mentioned in the pre-interview, to include "drawing" and "writing" with the Pixie software they used during the study. Also, in the post-interviews, the questions were expanded to include:

What did you like best about making stories during this project?
What was it like when you showed your family your story dvd?

Almost all pre-interviews and post-interviews for the participants were audio taped and transcribed. The exception to this was the pre-interview from participant, "Sydney." Her audio-taped pre-interview was mostly the researcher asking questions and silence in response. Sydney's reluctance to speak would be a factor throughout the study.

Video and audio tapes of study sessions

The 18 planned sessions were either videotaped or audiotaped. There were several unplanned sessions as well as students came to the computer lab to work alone or in small groups. These unplanned sessions were often audiotaped as well. Due to the logistics of the room involved in the study, most of the videotapes caught voice data more than video data, as the camera remained stationary most of the time, and did not capture all the movements of the very active first graders. After each audio taped session, the tape was rewound and listened to so that actions that accompanied the audio and video could be noted. Table 3.3 earlier in this chapter is an example of the audio taped notes. Details like, “Ariel is crying!” were important to note soon after the fact, as the audio taping device could not record the participant putting her head down on the keyboard, nor her silent, yet pronounced, shaking shoulders.

Field Notes

I recorded field notes immediately after each session. Because I was an active participant while the students were present, I was unable to keep notes during the sessions. In my notes I documented participant absences, attitudes and progress toward completing their digital stories. In my notes I also posed questions for myself that came up during the study, and generated some possible answers. One question that I dealt with often was “Why aren’t they writing stories?” I frequently wondered why students were not creating “stories” as I conceived a “story” should be.

Digital Story Screen Captures and Transcripts

The print versions of the digital stories you will see throughout the later chapters of this dissertation were made by capturing screen shots of the students' videos. Students' names were change on the title screens to protect their privacy. Once the screenshots were placed in story order in a word document, their recorded stories were transcribed and placed under the corresponding screenshots. By the end of the study the eight participants had made 23 digital stories. Each child made three, except for Jordan, who left school for several weeks during the study for a trip to California. An example of the students' digital stories rendered into print form was included in the *Tasks* section earlier in this chapter.

Class Journal Samples and Heart Maps

Two final data sources were a representative selection of three writing samples from each participants' writing journal (the main vehicle of writing for these first graders) and a story starter "heart map" task that students completed just after the pre-study interviews were complete. By far, the predominant topic found in the students' journals were students' response to the prompt, "What did you do over the weekend?" Scattered between those responses, were the occasional spelling lists, responses to prompts that fit the science or social studies curriculum, and assigned descriptions ("Describe what you are wearing today?"). I found it unusual that in the student journals were also re-copied essays authored by *other* students in the class. Later, I found out that these copied essays were part of an activity that in some ways was similar to interactive

writing (and, in important ways, not similar). I describe this activity more thoroughly in Chapter Four.

The heart maps were the first task of study meant to capture some idea of the students' literacy skills as well as to provide the students with "story starters" they could refer to during the study. However, these heart maps were forgotten by both myself and the students as the moment for a traditional story starter did not occur while we worked with computers. Generally, students used the digital tools to work themselves into their stories. That is, they played or experimented with the computer software instead of turning to the heart maps for story ideas. This phenomenon will be discussed thoroughly in later chapters.

Data Analysis

Data analysis of the digital stories produced in this study was guided by the constant-comparative method. The constant-comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) involves the process of analyzing relationships within the data and drawing conclusions. It is a method of analysis often used to gain theory that is grounded, that is, derived inductively from the research data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Participant stories were analyzed both as digital entities, as well as in their transcribed, print form. The stories were replayed and reread several times and notes were taken in the margins. Eventually similarities that could be organized into hypotheses emerged. Story types eventually became clear and their connection to previous research on young children and computers (Labbo, 1996) emerged. One particular pattern that

became apparent through analysis is the fact that most of the students did not start out creating story forms that could be recognized as traditional, linear plots. If the participants created a more traditional story form at all (referred to in the following chapters as a “Screen as Stage” text based upon Labbo’s framework) it was their second or even third effort. One negative case that did not support this pattern came from Baron, who among all the participants, seemed to have a much more active storytelling life that merged with his interest in Pokémon, fantasy tales, and science fiction. His first digital story was a traditional narrative. He would prove to be an exception in several instances throughout the study. Negative cases were actively sought during analysis and were either explained in terms of the hypotheses, or the hypotheses were revised to fit the negative case. Analysis occurred during as well as after the study, so new data was constantly compared with previous hypotheses to check for continued validity.

For much of the data other than the digital texts, I first employed a within-case analysis by creating summaries of each participant. I brought together the data from across the myriad of sources. For example, collected together in one summary were Terrence’s pre-study and post-study interviews, his journal samples, his parent and teacher questionnaires, and field notes, and video-tape transcripts that applied to him. I created summaries for each of the eight participants with the purpose of examining the whole child for answers to the specific research questions. I searched for contextual variables (Merriam, 1998) that may have impacted each case individually. Of note were Terrence’s much weaker literacy skills as compared to the others, as well as Baron’s much stronger connection to the stories and story characters in his cultural milieu as

compared to the other participants. Each participant's attitude and comfort with computers were also key data that emerged in these summaries.

Cross-case analysis was the second step as I sought to identify the larger themes and patterns across all the participants. As Merriam stated, I wanted to "build abstractions across cases" (p. 195). In particular, teacher responses to their students' journal work, and the participants' attitudes toward themselves as writers emerged as powerful themes through cross-case analysis.

I employed the methods of open coding, axial coding and selective coding throughout all my analysis. Strauss & Corbin (1990) describe open coding as the breaking down of data into discrete parts, examining the parts for similarities and differences, and then asking questions that arise from the comparisons made. I was able to define categories and subcategories and organize them into categories and then themes. I organized the categories and themes into three core hypotheses, and then identified how all the other categories related. You will see the main hypotheses used as organizational tools throughout the final chapters of this dissertation.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the believability of a study and the degree to which a reader can have faith in the study's worth (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). My intent was to meet the goal of trustworthiness in this study by employing techniques suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) that are common to qualitative research: persistent

observation, prolonged engagement, informal member checks, thick description, and triangulation.

To meet the goals of persistent observation and prolonged engagement, I spent all the study sessions engaged with the participants, in the roles mentioned earlier in this chapter, as well as my researcher roles as an observer and an informal questioner. I believe that my long time engagement with the students and teachers involved gave me insight into the culture and built my participants' trust. Even after the actual study had concluded, I had informal interviews and member checks with some participants and their teachers. Throughout the study, I kept my sights on answering the posed research questions and was able to identify key factors leading to those answers, and understand them in great detail and with depth.

Informal member checks involve getting the participants' input on the researcher's emerging hypotheses. Member checks were tricky when dealing with first graders. In particular, these first graders had a tendency to pick up on the opinions of adults and parrot them back. However, the member checks in this study yielded pertinent information concerning the first graders' awareness of their audience, and their feelings about sharing their digital story collection dvd with their families.

Thick description is a technique designed to provide the reader with everything they might need to know to understand the findings. An effort was made to include relevant descriptors of the participants, their actions, and their artifacts so that the findings could be interpreted based upon "factors thickly described" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316).

Finally, triangulation was achieved through the multiple sources of data generated during this study: observations, student interviews, parent and teacher questionnaires, field notes, videotaped sessions, and student digital stories. Employing multiple sources of data provided a large range where I could identify points of divergence, convergence, and contradiction. Triangulation helped to insure that the data produced was an authentic portrayal of the social world (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

Limitations of this Study

There are some notable limitations to this study. The results of the study may not be transferable to other elementary school settings; however, the knowledge gained in this study will contribute to the literature base in the area of new literacies, and perhaps the input from primary age, African American children will provide fresh perspectives to current research. Also, researcher bias is a danger in any study. During the course of the study, I had the pleasure of getting to know my young participants, and becoming appreciative of their humor and their intellect; I formed attachments. I tried to quell the tendency to overvalue their comments and actions, in the way that a proud parent sees “greatness” in her own child’s drawings, jokes, or first time at bat. I also had my own ideas about what “story” meant which might have conflicted with the participants’ own meanings.

Dealing with young children, there is always the threat of adult researcher’s undue influence of their thoughts, when it is their thoughts that were important to the study’s findings. I noticed early in the study that these students easily took the

suggestions and opinions of significant adults in their lives as their own opinions. The study was designed to limit suggestions from the researcher and I believe I was mostly successful, even though there are points when I believe more interference from myself would have garnered “better” (in my teacher’s perception) digital stories.

Another limitation is the small number of participants engaged in this study. Because of the demographics of the school, only a limited number of participants were available for this study. However, I think the demographics of the school offered the chance to highlight the experiences of African American children from a lower middle class school where they are a small portion of the student body. Many African American students (myself included) experienced K-12 education as the one, or one of the two, black students in their class each year. Yet it seems that many researchers who choose to study African American children select their participants from schools where the demographics reflect high or majority black attendance.

The pull-out nature of the project is a limitation. It is probably more compelling for teachers to see research of this type done in a classroom setting with the standard 1-4 computers per classroom. However, Sundown Elementary did have a lab where whole classes were able to engage in creating Powerpoint and Photo Story documents. The other children involved in whole class lab work were second graders through fourth graders; such an undertaking with 20 or more first graders was not being attempted at the time of this study.

A final limitation of this study is the fact that some readers might infer that I am unfavorably comparing students’ classroom experiences with writing to the stories they

created during the study. On the contrary, my intent was to use their previous written texts to help understand the experiences and influences that defined the nature of their digital texts. It is a limitation however that there was no storytelling, sharing time, or show and tell data from the first grade classrooms to better mesh with the data collected in this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

This chapter provides a close look at the findings across the multiple data sources of this study. The findings presented here are most closely related to two of this study's guiding questions: what is the nature of the digital texts produced, and what role do the digital tools play in the creation process?

Data analysis related to these first two questions suggested that the nature of the texts and the role the digital tools played in the creation process were interrelated. Moreover, the nature of the texts seemed best defined by considering the child who composed them and their interaction with the digital tools.

The first section of this chapter describes the writing curriculum and the written texts the participants created in their first grade classrooms before beginning the study. As you will see, their first grade curriculum was teacher-centered and featured few opportunities for student choice, story-telling, or sharing with an audience. These classroom experiences shaped how they saw themselves as writers, and seemed to influence the nature of the digital texts they would later produce. Certainly it is clear that these digital texts were the artifacts of fledgling authors just constructing for themselves what makes a good story. The next section features the heart maps students produced to begin this study. The heart maps provide the first clues into the identity imprints that the students would leave within their digital texts. Next, the nature of the texts was

categorized by a framework that is grounded in the composer's identity and the way he or she chose to manipulate the tools.

The final two sections of this chapter relate the role of the digital tools in terms of the physical space where the study took place, and also their influence on the composer's decision-making. A chapter following this one provides data concerning the final research question.

Classroom Experiences with Composing Texts

As noted above, this section provides a detailed look at the participants as first grade composers before they joined the study. I believe a portrait is drawn here of teacher-centered classrooms where students have few experiences with the important elements of composition: choice, sharing, and critiquing.

The eight participants in this study were drawn from three different first grade classes. However, insistence from the school administrators on continuity across classrooms, as well as a general school-wide privileging of structured, quiet, regimented classrooms, meant that the instruction delivered was amazingly similar across all the classrooms. The modified "open concept" layout (the school was built in the popular 1970's architectural style; over time, concrete barriers were built that added a small degree of separation) of the first grade classrooms also encouraged uniformity.

Hallway displays along the walls of the first grade area reflected many of the same activities; collaborative planning sessions meant that lessons given at the grade level were fairly standard. A teacher who had the inclination to do her own thing would not be harshly discouraged, but would need to be of hearty spirit to resist the subtle pressure to blend in. Of the three teachers involved in this study, none suffered from such a non-conformist bent.

When all the first grade teachers were asked in an informal interview if they each made an effort to provide the same curriculum in every class, Mrs. S., a teacher not directly involved in the study, answered, “Yes. Better than most (of the other grade levels).”

Mrs. O added, “With our own personality twists of course.”

Data provided from teacher and parent questionnaires, classroom observations, student journals, and student pre-interviews, supported one of the major themes that emerged from the data collected during this study: that students’ ideas and beliefs about themselves as writers/storytellers seemed to be influenced by what was privileged by their first grade teachers and the first grade curriculum. This theme is important for understanding the nature of the texts students’ created.

Four of the eight participants in the study were in Mrs. G’s first grade class. She was a young Latina teacher, who had a strong air of confidence and trustworthiness. Even with just three years of teaching experience, she easily garnered a leadership role among teachers at the school. Her demeanor was pleasant but firm; she expressed from her beginning year of teaching that she was interested in becoming a principal in the near

future. At the time of this writing, she was preparing to enter a teacher leadership program the district offered. This program encouraged and built upon teachers' abilities to be decision makers at their local campuses. The program also provides the district with a pool of talent that they can draw from and nurture as future administrators.

So despite Mrs. G's position as the least experienced teacher on the grade level, she often spoke for the group when in informal interviews (often over lunch in the teacher workroom) while the other teachers interjected their agreement or additional commentary as they saw fit.

The first grade teachers at Sundown Elementary school regularly provided students three different opportunities to compose their own texts. All three activities were writing based. None of the teachers mentioned formal opportunities to speak to the class (as in a sharing time, show and tell, or oral presentations). The three writing activities were: content area response writing, a greatly modified version of interactive writing, and journal writing.

The teachers used content area response writing as a major form of assessment for their science and social studies units. The main goal was for the students to write facts about the topics they were learning about. "How else will you know if they learned anything?" Mrs. G explained. The teachers incorporated "creative writing" – their term – into these assignments by directing students to respond to fanciful prompts: invent a dinosaur, or persuade your mom to let you have a dinosaur pet. Mrs. G. emphasized that even in these creative responses, the students were expected to display their knowledge of facts. Ms. O provided this example, "Like if they tell their mom they will keep the

dinosaur in the pool and not the bathtub. Because, you know, a dinosaur wouldn't fit in the bathtub.”

The content area writing assignments were all highly structured with plenty of teacher modeling, examples, and direction to insure student success, Mrs. G said.

“Otherwise they don't produce good work.”

With these assignments, specific criteria charts and examples were created during class with teacher direction. These criteria charts were displayed so students could consult them while writing. In a separate conversation, Mrs. S expressed some concern that such structure would constrict student responses and encourage them to produce stilted, unconnected sentences in the same format as the examples provided. Her description of such writing matched a piece (Figure 4.1) copied from Jordan's writing journal.



My dinosaur's name is Bobcatasaurus. It has red dots and it is orange. It eats meat. It likes to hunt. She lives in a jungle.

Figure 4.1. Jordan's content area response

Mrs. S. specifically mentioned being concerned with the repetitive structure and uninspired, fill-in-the blank style sentences that are displayed here in Jordan's piece.

A second writing activity for first graders at Sundown Elementary was a modified version of interactive writing. Mrs. G. had observed the technique during her student teaching experience in a pre-school classroom and was excited about transferring it to first grade when she arrived at Sundown Elementary. The other teachers were eager for new ideas and were interested in the technique. They all incorporated it into their writing program, though each at different amounts of implementation. All eight participants' journals had examples of the modified interactive writing, though Mrs. G's students had the most instances of the practice.

The main purpose of the lesson was to reinforce appropriate spelling of high frequency words, Mrs. G said, though opportunities for grammar instruction often arose from these study-generated texts. While I label the practice a variant of interactive writing, it also has characteristics of Daily Oral Language (Byers, 2001) and Author's Chair (Graves & Hansen, 1983). This activity was a rare opportunity for students to share the texts they created, even though content was not the focus. According to Mrs. G, the modified interactive writing process went as follows:

1. A student's work was chosen from their journal based on it being "his turn." Turns were determined by going down the attendance roll in alphabetical order.

2. The student copied a text he had written previously onto chart paper while the other students were journaling. The teacher also wrote the text on a white board for easy editing.
3. Students were instructed to copy the students' text into their own journals, making sure they signed the actual author's name at the bottom so there would be no confusion that this text was their own.
4. With teacher direction, the each class member was expected to correct the spelling and simple grammar problems in their peer's text.

The first grade teachers made it clear that modified interactive writing was mainly for spelling instruction. However it was mentioned as a "writing activity" during teacher interviews and the practice appeared enough times in the participants' writing journals that I thought it was important to include here.

While I have termed this practice as modified interactive writing for purposes of description and from its roots in Mrs. G's student teaching in a Pre-K classroom, the activity really deviates from the spirit of interactive writing. The spirit of Sharing the Pen, as interactive writing is also called, is lost in an activity that looks at misspellings without greater meaning. And the purpose of having each child re-write the text in their own journal seems more busy work than authentic task.

A third and finally writing opportunity for first graders at Sundown was journaling. Journaling was scheduled as a beginning of the day activity, but usually occurred only once (Monday mornings) a week, judging from the student entries across the grade level. The actual practice took place more or less often depending on the class.

Students in Ms. O's class had far fewer of this type of text in their journal than students from the other classes.

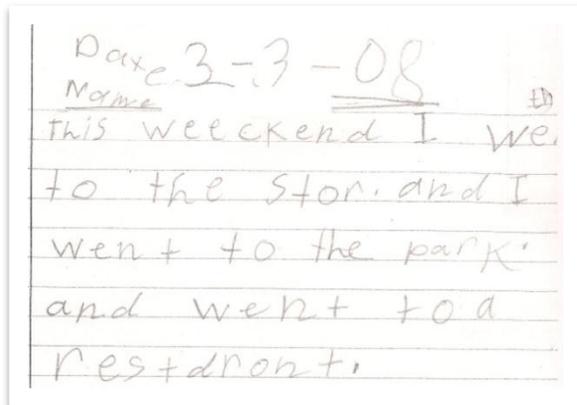
Primarily, journaling entailed students writing to a prompt. And that prompt was overwhelmingly "What did you do this weekend?" Or, on rare occasions, "What did you do during recess?" appeared. These texts were the main fodder for the modified interactive activity detailed previously.

The journals also seemed to be a catch-all place for other types of writing. There were instances of spelling words written three times each in the participant journals. Also, as mentioned earlier, the modified interactive writing, where students copied other students' texts were also completed in student journals. Even the Figure 4.1 example from Jordan's journal about her invented dinosaur was taken from the journal. So while the journal was predominately a place for prompted writing first thing Monday morning, it was also in use during other parts of the instructional day. Because all three writing activities were on display in student journals, I was able to make some assumptions about teacher focus and attitudes about writing instruction from the writing samples gathered from the participant journals.

Student opportunities to write without a prompt or on a topic of their choice were nearly nonexistent. In fact, after perusing all participant journals to select three representative samples for each child, only Baron's journal held a single entry that appeared to be a response to a free writing invitation, or an open ended prompt.

Figure 4.2 was a typical journal entry from study participant, Starla. Mrs. G has rated her as an average language arts student who had a successful academic journey

through first grade. The text Starla created was edited before being placed here. Edited out of the image are Starla's real name and the picture she drew of items on store shelves that accompanied the writing. Though the text is not written in an obvious numbered list format, it definitely reads like a list.

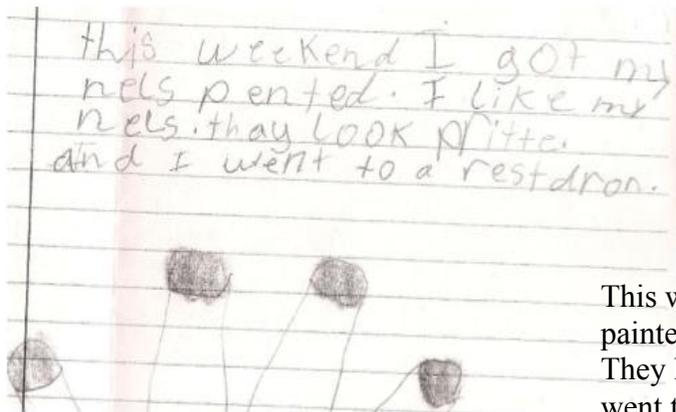


This weekend I went to the store. And I went to the park. And went to a restaurant.

Figure 4.2. Starla's journaling

Figure 4.3 is another journal text from Starla. The same prompt was given for this text. Starla seems a bit more excited about this text. She reports details about her nails, and reports her feelings. She even traced her hand and drew in her painted nails with her pencil in honor of the event.

On the teacher questionnaire, Mrs. O noted that there was a sentence quantity requirement for the journal responses. That is, students were required to write a certain number of sentences, depending upon the time of year. This requirement might explain why Starla added the unrelated sentence on the end of her writing about her fingernails.



This weekend I got my nails painted. I like my nails. They looked pretty. And I went to a restaurant.

Figure 4.3. Starla's journaling

While the writing remains list-like, this writing does have some lively parts due to details incorporating how she feels about her nails and how pretty she thinks they look. Once again, while the page was edited for placement in this dissertation, no words were cut out. Just like the other text, there was no teacher comment.

Baron was in Mrs. P's class and his journaling also lacked teacher comment. However, Kevin and Terrence are two participants from Mrs. G's class who did have about half of their similar writing pieces marked with a check by their teacher. Ariel and Starla, also from Mrs. G's class, had a journal full of texts that were predominantly not marked, graded, or commented upon. Why the difference? After working with these first graders, it is easy to speculate that Kevin and the highly active Terrence would require a teacher response or they would produce no text at all.

Kevin wrote about a topic he continued to write about during the study: money.

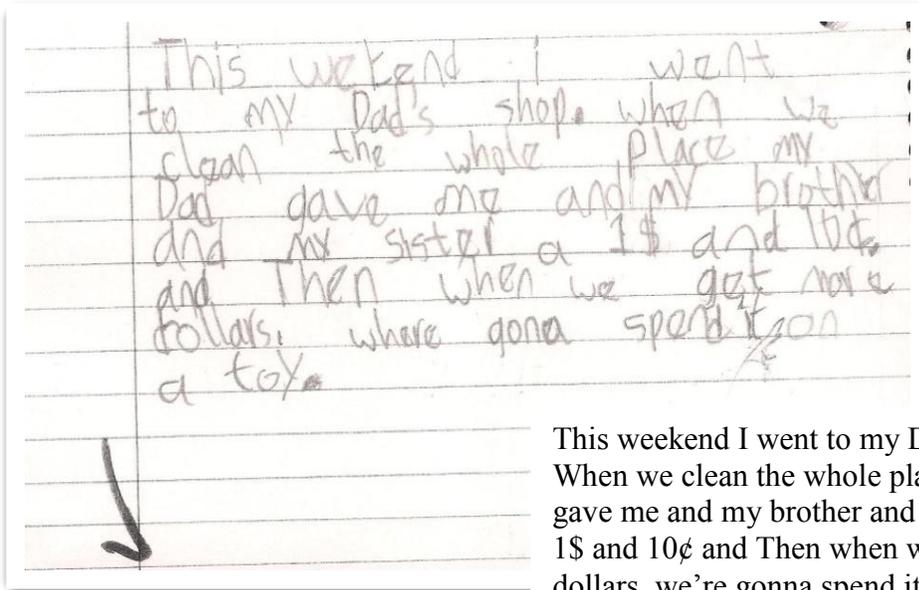


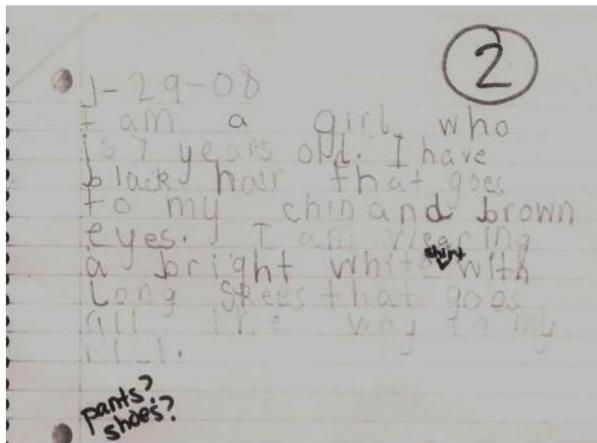
Figure 4.4. A sample from Kevin's Journal

Kevin wrote three sentences that are all connected around the same topic. The piece lacks the list feel found in Starla's text, and his lively personality was imbued in the words. He managed to provide the details that make the writing interesting. Whose shop? His Dad's shop. How much of the place must he and his siblings clean? The whole place. How much money did he and his siblings receive? A \$1 and a \$10. What would they spend the money on once they had more dollars? A toy. This text was representative of the writing in Kevin's journal. And though Kevin did get a checkmark response from his teacher, there was no response to his content.

Three of the study participants were in Mrs. O's class. Their journals were the least populated of all study participants, and the most regimented. That is, Tony, Jordan and Sydney had fewer opportunities to write in their journals, and the tasks were even more teacher directed than the "what did you do this weekend" tasks found in the other

participants' journals. Also, texts produced in Ms. O's class were more likely to be tied to the classroom curriculum. Most of the texts in their journals were indicative of the content area responses discussed earlier in the chapter. Figure 4.1, Jordan's piece about an invented dinosaur, is an example of the majority of texts that populated the journals from Ms. O's class. Also, the writing samples from Mrs. O's class were also most likely to be graded, marked, and commented upon. The comments mainly focus on spelling, editing, and detail (though not the kind of detail found in Kevin's text above).

In Figure 4.5, Sydney was directed to write a text describing herself. The text stays on one topic, but reads like a list of connected ideas. A small spark of personality can be seen in the double adjective use of "bright white" to describe her long sleeve shirt.

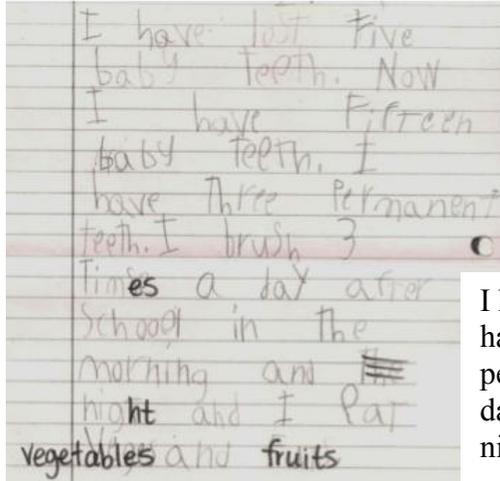


I am a girl who is 7 years old. I have black hair that goes to my chin and brown eyes. I am wearing a bright white (shirt) with long sleeves that goes all the way to my wrist.

Figure 4.5. A sample from Sydney's journal.

Mrs. O graded this piece and prompted Sydney for more detail. A grade of 2 was circled at the top. At Sundown Elementary, a 2 reflects a grade similar to a C; it is not a failing grade, but one that means more is needed for adequate progress.

Tony's text, displayed in Figure 4.6 is also one directed by the teacher. While it is not graded, Mrs. O edited his text for spelling.



I have lost five baby teeth. Now I have fifteen baby teeth. I have three permanent teeth. I brush 3 times a day after school in the morning and night and I eat vegetables and fruits.

Figure 4.6. Writing from Tony's journal

Mrs. O ignores Tony's misuse of capital letters and, like all the writing samples across the eight participants, does not reference or comment on the content the children presented.

The curriculum these first graders were exposed to seemed to greatly influence their ideas and beliefs about themselves as writers as well as the nature of the digital stories they would soon create. Data pulled from Ariel's journal and pre-interviews provide a good example of how the incomplete school writing curriculum shaped her ideas about herself as a writer.

Ariel was tall for a first grader, with skinny legs and long wavy hair that was usually pulled into a bushy ponytail hanging down her back. She was a vivacious girl with a silly and slightly wicked sense of humor. Her teacher, Mrs. G, described her as "dramatic" when speaking in class. From Mrs. G's questionnaire about Ariel:

This child uses complete sentences and can add dramatics to get her point across. She always made sense and spoke in the correct tense at all times. [She is] a strong language user. She can inform you of her thoughts verbally and in print.

The drama, the pizzazz and the rapsallion wit did not appear in the writing samples drawn from her journal. In Figure 4.7 Ariel responds to a teacher directive to describe what she is wearing that day. In Figure 4.8, Ariel relates in laundry list fashion some fairly exciting events she participated in that weekend.

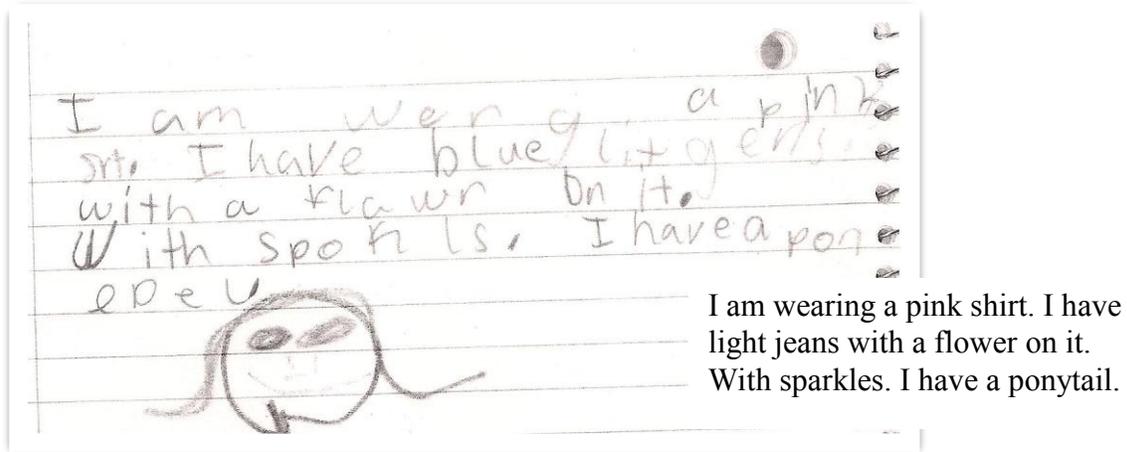


Figure 4.7. A sample from Ariel's journal

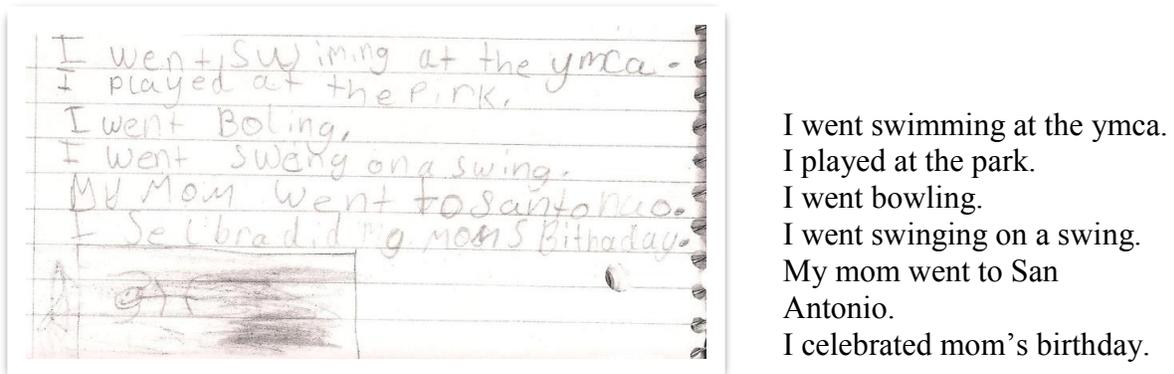


Figure 4.8. Ariel writes about an exciting weekend

Ariel's description of what she is wearing is understandably unexciting based on the lack of an engaging topic. Unless a child happened to wear a tiara to school that day, or brand new sneakers with flashing lights and wheels, one can assume that assigned topic would not inspire much enthusiasm. However, it is disappointing to see in Figure 4.8 the rather bland list of potentially exciting events that go without elaboration or comment from the teacher who dictated the topic.

I did a pre-interview with Ariel on a muggy spring morning while the rest of her class was in the library. We sat on the floor in the hallway between the library and the first grade rooms. She knew me of course as I had worked most of the year in the computer lab as an assistant helping teachers integrate technology into the classroom. Still, the situation was a bit strange for all the first graders, and she was a bit reticent in this first interview. I asked her many questions and she'd warmed up enough to talk about the stuffed animals she'd gotten from Six Flags that she enjoyed bringing for show-and-tell when she was in kindergarten. She got even more enthusiastic when reporting that she enjoyed scaring her little cousins by telling them scary stories.

During the pre-interview I tried to get at each student's ideas and beliefs about themselves as writers. When I asked Ariel if she was good at writing stories, she nodded her head yes. (Interestingly, all the first grade participants questioned stated that they were "good writers.") Then I asked her what she enjoyed writing about at school, she said she enjoyed writing about what she'd done over the weekend. When asked what made her good at writing stories, she answered quickly: "Because I write nearly every day." Despite some prompting and more than a little wait time, she could not come up with an

answer for the question, “What makes a good story?” Note in the transcript below that while Ariel believes she is good at writing stories, and knows what makes her a good writer, she struggles to explain what makes a good story.

Researcher: Are you good at writing stories?

Ariel nods in response.

Researcher: What makes you good at writing stories?

Ariel: Because I write nearly every day

Researcher: Okay, okay... Are you good at telling stories?

Ariel nods in response.

Researcher: What makes a good story? Like you’re telling the story. What makes it good? Like you’re telling a story to your cousins or someone’s telling you a story, or you’re reading or writing a story. What makes it good? (Ariel requires several prompts before coming up with an answer.)

Ariel: Because the words are coming out of your mouth.

Researcher: Yeah...? Because the words aren’t just coming blah, blah, blah? (Again, Ariel requires more prompting.)

Researcher: So what are they using?

Ariel: Their mouth

Researcher: Their mouth?

Ariel: Their voice.

Researcher: Okay, their voice.

Ariel was certain that she was a good writer and certain that “writing every day” was the secret to her success. The elements that make a story “good” were harder for her to define.

Terrence is another study participant in Mrs. G’s class. While Mrs. G rated Ariel as an average to high language student, and one who had been successful in first grade, Terrence was a struggling reader and writer. About Terrence, Mrs. G wrote:

[Terrence] will only write streams of letters or words that are put up around the room. He very rarely spoke in complete sentences. His speech is very broken up. He seemed not to be exposed to as much language as other students. He is below grade level.

Figure 4.9 is an example of writing from Terrence’s journal. As Mrs. G described, he has written a random set of words he has copied from the environment.

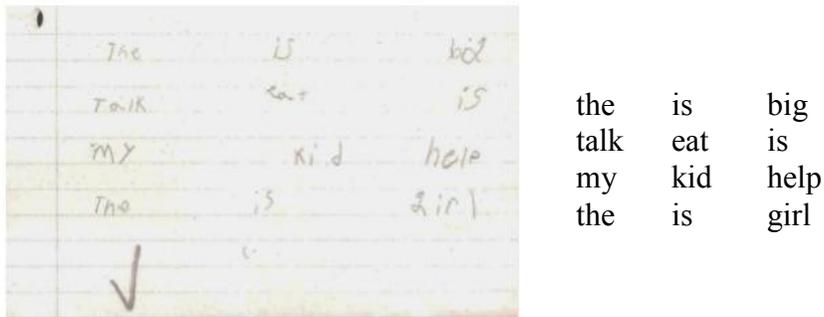


Figure 4.9. A sample from Terrence’s journal

Mrs. G has checked this writing in response. As noted previously, most journal entries across the participants have similar responses or none at all.

During his pre-interview, Terrence also expressed confidence that he was a “good writer.” When asked what he enjoyed writing about, he mentioned a journal entry retelling a Magic School Bus movie he’d seen in class. This was a manifestation of the content area writing mentioned earlier in this chapter; after watching a movie on a science topic, students were expected to write the facts that they remembered.

When I asked Terrence what made him a good writer, his response was similar to Ariel’s: “Every single day I get better and better at writing.” He also expanded his answer to reading: “And if you read when you get home more, it makes you get gooder on your voice.”

As a primary school teacher for 18 years, I recognized that Ariel and Terrence seemed to be parroting what I term teacher talk. There are many things teachers tell their students on a daily basis, and “writing every day makes you a better writer” is one of those things.

My suspicions that the students were influenced in their beliefs about themselves as writers were confirmed when I compared Tony’s pre-interview and his teacher’s questionnaire response about him as a language user.

Tony, like Sydney and Jordan, were students in Mrs. O’s class. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, he has an air of confidence about him that makes him the perfect representative if someone is needed to speak for the class, but also makes it hard to steer him in a different direction if he is doing a task wrong. His teacher rated him an average language user who had a greater strength in math. Both his teacher and his parents noted his uncommonly strong vocabulary.

The questionnaire had a section that required the teacher to “Describe this child’s writing/composition skills.” When responding about Tony, Mrs O jotted: *“not much focus/planning. Just begins w/out direction and adds more detail where ever his mind takes him.”*

Interestingly, Tony responded with almost the same words when asked, “What makes you a good writer?” during the pre-interview: “It’s just that I think about it first, then I write it... the other thing is that I just think first.”

The difference between the two responses is that Mrs. O meant Tony’s lack of thinking before writing as constructive criticism. Tony had turned it around and stated as

a positive about his writing ability. He'd probably heard that he needed to think before writing several times from Mrs. O!

The following data chart lists each child, their teacher and a truncated version of their response to two personal questions: What makes you a good writer? And, What do you like to write about at school? As I said previously, all the children responded that they were good writers so that question is left off the chart. Also, parent questionnaires indicated that home writing was not a significant event for most of the participants so school writing was the appropriate question to include in the pre-interview. The chart shows a pattern of response from the children that reflects what their teacher privileged about writing.

| Student | Class | What Makes you a good Writer? | What do you like to write about at school? |
|----------------|--------------|---|---|
| Kevin | Mrs. G | My sister taught me. I write every day. | What I did and where I went. |
| Starla | Mrs. G | I write neatly. | What I did at recess. |
| Ariel | Mrs. G | I write every day. | What I did over the weekend. |
| Terrence | Mrs. G | I get better every day. | Science movies watched at school. |
| Tony | Mrs. O | I think before I write. | My mom. Spelling tests |
| Sydney | Mrs. O | No response | No response |
| Jordan | Mrs. O | I have a beginning, middle and an end. | What I did for spring break. |
| Baron | Mrs. P. | The pictures and the words. When they get it. | Math |

Table 4.1. Students' self-described attitudes toward school composing.

Looking at this table with the knowledge of a long time teacher, I recognize students parroting what their teachers have told them about writing. Of course their first grade teachers have told them they are good at writing, and have repeatedly discussed

what made them a good writer. The students have even chosen among their teacher's assigned topics what is their "favorite" to write about.

There are two things to note about Figure Table 4.1. One is that Sydney was very reticent to speak throughout the entire study. Her teacher noted that she struggled to get Sydney to say anything in class. Unfortunately, that was consistent throughout this study. Her pre-interview was a painful series of nods and fruitless prompting by the researcher.

A second thing to note is the asterisk by Baron's name. Baron will continue to be an exception in many places in this analysis. His response to the "what makes you a good writer" question infers a previous experience with sharing stories with an audience. To Baron, a good story is one that his audience "gets," or understands. Over the course of getting to know Baron, I learned that there were stories piling up in his head waiting to come out. From the data I conclude that his experiences sharing stories with an audience were extra-curricular.

Also, in Baron's case, I had to modify the second question. He only responded "uhhhh" to the question what did he *like* to write about at school. When I modified the question to what *did* he write about at school, he responded, "Math." From the beginning it was apparent that Baron had formed an independent identity about himself as a writer, and that identity was formed outside of school. The parent questionnaire has a final question that asks, "Do you have any other information to share about [Baron] as a language user?" His mother wrote in response: *He has always surprised me with the things he says.* Baron would continue to surprise and be an exception throughout this research project.

For most of the young participants in this study, they had rare experiences with the story creation process in the classroom environment. The data shows that their writing curriculum was greatly focused on mechanics, number of sentences, and recall activities. The important components of self-selected writing, writing for varied purposes, peer and teacher feedback, and learning to write for audiences were absent. These first graders' beliefs and ideas about themselves as writers –down to their personal likes and dislikes – seemed limited by the boundaries of their first grade writing curriculum. The digital texts these first graders would later create were for the most part fledgling attempts at storytelling in a school setting.

A comparison of the data gathered during this study and the first grade language arts standards (TEKS) (Texas Education Agency, 2007) reveals some components of the school district's writing curriculum to be missing. In particular there are writing curriculum requirements that mandate that students write for a variety of purposes and audiences as well as in a variety of formats. Also missing are stated requirements that students generate ideas for self-selected topics and have opportunities to respond constructively to others' writing. The curriculum asks that first graders learn to determine how his/her own writing achieves its purposes, and to identify what makes writing effective.

For the participants in this study, composition was rarely a means to its own end. Instead it was used as a tool to evaluate which facts students could recall from science and social studies lessons. It was a way to drill spelling of high frequency words. And, one can assume it was a way to keep students busy first thing on Monday mornings when

there were several business items to occupy teachers. These activities are all good and practical uses of writing in a first grade classroom, but they do not make a complete curriculum. Missing are the components that make composing a worthwhile endeavor for its own sake for students.

My purpose so far in this chapter was not to challenge the writing curriculum the data revealed as compared to the Texas Language Arts standards. Nor is my intention to compare the writing students did in their classroom to the digital stories they created during this study. Instead, my intention was to present evidence of a writing curriculum that is highly teacher directed, focused on length and spelling, with teacher-centered topics, that did not focus on what the individual child brought to the table when he or she wrote a text. Few opportunities were provided to interact with peers, or even to gain teacher response to the content of their lives the students dared to share in their writing. These factors impacted the nature of the digital texts they would later produce, but also the sharing aspects of the study. Sharing their own stories with an audience during this study would be a fresh experience for these participants.

In the literature review of this dissertation I presented research that depicts children's writing as a social act, a way of interacting with one another, a link in a Bahktinian communication chain. Dyson (1992) wrote that to develop fully as composers, children "must learn to anticipate the needs of other people, their audience. These first graders had definite ideas about themselves as writers that they had taken from their teachers. To this point in their writing biographies, I don't believe they had the opportunity to, in Dyson's words, develop fully as composers.

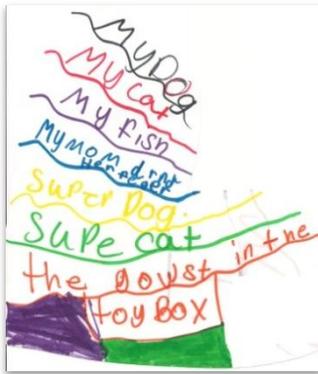
Student Heart Maps as Identity Artifacts

After pre-interviews were complete, teacher and parent questionnaires collected, and journal samples selected, the next order of business was to gather the first graders together for the first time and create Heart Maps (Heard, 1998) as described in Chapter 3.

This first meeting was hectic and rushed; the teacher who had promised us we could use her room during her recess time got rained out and came back early. In my role as participant/observer I told the students they would be creating stories using computers. These stories, I said, were called digital stories and I defined them as small stories you create from your heart, a definition attributed to British photographer, Daniel Meadows (retrieved June 20, 2007 from <http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu/>). I showed the first graders a sample digital story that I had created, and then passed out markers and heart shaped papers.

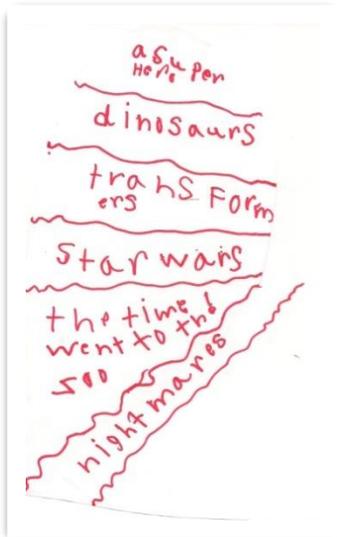
On the heart maps students were encouraged to draw or write about things they most would like to make a story about. I considered this a “gathering experience” (Kissel, 2008), an activity that helped the children generate their own ideas for writing. Figures 4.10 and 4.11 show examples of the heart maps the students created. All the children chose to use words and short phrases instead of pictures to record their ideas. The children sat around a large table with markers and often called out to each other the thoughts that they were writing down. Mercer argues this sort of supportive talk, what he calls cumulative talk (Mercer, 1995, 2000) can lead to ideas being expanded and built upon and shared across the heart maps.

In Figure 4.10, Ariel starts with real things that are close to her like her cat and her fish, but as the conversation of the children around her turned to more supernatural ideas, so did her choice of writing topics. In Figure 4.12, Baron began his heart map with things he was most interested in, and revealed a boy with interests in science topics like dinosaurs, as well as films that were popular at the time of the study.



My Dog
 My cat
 My fish
 My mom (...)
 Super Dog
 Super cat
 The ghost in the toy box.

Figure 4.10. Ariel's heart map.



A super hero
 dinosaurs
 transformers
 Star Wars
 The time I went to the zoo
 nightmares

Figure 4.11. Baron's heart map

Something to note in these two examples is that these children, Ariel and Baron are cousins. In this artifact, you can see Ariel's leap into the fanciful takes her from her dog and her cat to a relatively down to earth "super" dog and cat. Baron however, easily imagines himself wielding stories of giant space operas and machines that have amazing transformation powers. Interestingly, Baron was the only student who relied on popular cultural elements (Dyson 1998) in his social environment to fuel his storytelling during this research project.

These heart maps played a smaller role in the overall study than was originally intended. Both students and researcher put them aside and they did not play their projected role as "story starter." There were no events that occurred across the project that reminded us to use them. Participants in the study did not express a need for ideas as they were sitting at their computers; when students were at a loss for story ideas, they took on an exploratory stance toward the technology, described later in this chapter as a Screen as Landscape stance (Labbo, 1996). Unlike frequent trips to the pencil sharpener in a traditional writing class, the opportunity to experiment with the digital tools masked any noticeable cases of writer's block.

If we consider the texts students create as artifacts of their identities (Roswell & Pahl, 2007) however, then these heart maps have their place in this analysis. In his heart map Baron showed his interests in the fantastical, and Ariel showed her eagerness to follow her cousin – at least as far as her more grounded imagination would take her. In the following examples, Kevin (Figure 4.12) displayed his focus on activities with his family, just as his journal sample presented earlier in this chapter. We will see Kevin



Mom
Dad

Figure 4.14. Terrence's heart map

These Heart Maps, while not influential in regards to their intended purpose for the study, do provide some hints of the influence of student identity on the texts they would later produce.

Clarifying the Use of the Word “Story”

Before going into the sections of this chapter that include the digital texts themselves, I'd like to first clarify the use of the word story in this dissertation and why I call the products the students made in this study, “stories.”

The directions the students had when first asked to sit in front of the computer screens were simple. I told them to make a story. In Chapter 3, I detailed the relatively hands-off roles I played as researcher/participant.

As the students' stories are presented in this dissertation, one might question if some of their texts should be called “story” at all. They *are* stories: their nature in part

determined by the students' lack of previous storytelling experiences in school, and in part by their own identities and cultural resources.

It is important to note that their only direction from the researcher was to make a "story." I did not define what "story" meant. Research that attempted to define characteristics of story (McCabe & Peterson, 1984; Michaels, 1983; Stein & Policastro, 1983) revealed definite cultural differences in the texts. As previously shown, these students had very little experience composing narratives of their own. It is very possible that these first graders had different notions of what constituted a story than I did. I did not ask these students their definition of "story" before they began the project. So the only evidence of their understanding of the meaning of story is the texts they produced when tasked to make one. Previous research points out there can be a disconnect between a teacher's expectations of story and a child's (Michaels, 1981). For these reasons, for the purposes of this dissertation, I have chosen to call the students' digital storytelling efforts "stories," as these texts are what the students produced in response to being asked "to make a story." The students' cultural backgrounds most likely influenced the non-traditional nature of these stories.

A Framework for Categorizing Participants' Digital Stories

Finding a way to categorize and label the participants' digital texts created during this study was an important consideration determining their nature. Multiple influences such as previous classroom experiences, cultural and identity, as well as the fact that these stories were made with digital tools, made them resistant to labeling based on

content alone. However, one of the inspirations for this research project was Labbo's (1996) study of kindergarteners' interactions with multimedia software. While this current study is different in that it focuses on young children creating digital stories, I was able to extend the categories identified in Labbo's findings for the purposes of this research. These categories helped define the nature of the texts produced during this study as artifacts grounded in the personality, and attitudes of their composers.

In an early study of computer use in primary classrooms, Labbo recorded the stances, or attitudes, kindergarteners took to the screen as they interacted with multimedia software. These stances provided an appropriate framework for understanding how the first graders in this study began the task of composing their digital stories. These stances adequately described the attitude the participants took when they sat down in front of the computer and worked themselves into the story they would eventually create. The students' stances were generally static throughout a single composition, though there were times when their stance changed in the middle of the composition process. Such changes will be noted in examples later in the chapter. The stance the children took toward working at the computer greatly determined the nature of digital text the student would eventually complete.

Screen as Canvas

One label Labbo used for student stances toward the computer was Screen as Canvas. In this stance, Labbo's kindergarteners approached the screen as a place to create art. Many of the first graders in this current study took that same stance toward the screen

when they first sat down to create their stories. A picture was drawn and then the story was conceived to match the artwork. A good example of a student taking a Screen as Canvas stance was Ariel's first digital story. This text, shown below in Figure 4.16, is made up of two art pieces Ariel created. Note that her first picture doubles as a title screen, and her last picture also acts as an ending screen. Underneath is displayed a transcript of her spoken narrative that was recorded with the movie editing software, PhotoStory3. For all the stories, I, in my role as tech support, placed the pictures in the software's timeline with student direction for titles and picture order. I also helped students with the record buttons on all but the last round of stories.

Notice that Ariel's first recorded text (transcribed below the pictures) shows elements of the story that were not reflected in the pictures. There was no puppy in her picture, nor did she draw a street to cross, or ice pack. This is because Ariel's prewriting stance was that of Screen as Canvas; her strategy was to make a pretty picture, and the ideas for forming a "story" came later. This is despite the fact that the task set to her from the beginning was to "make a story."

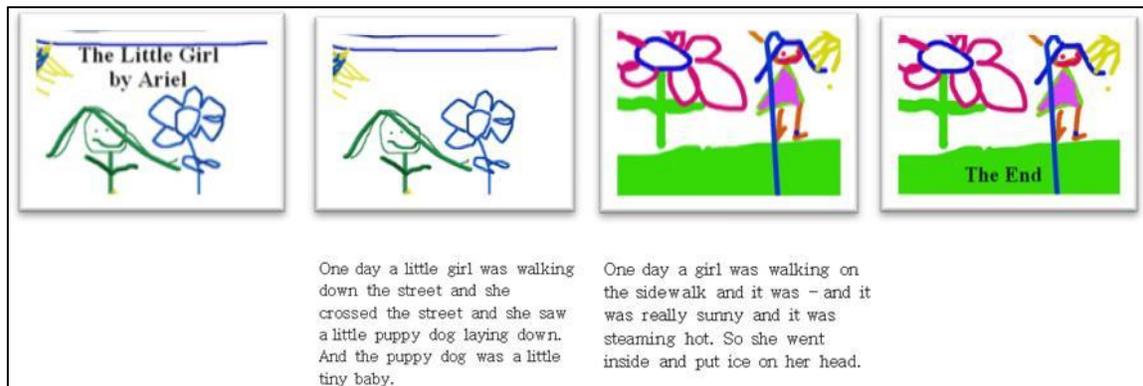


Figure 4.15. Ariel's first story

The pictures Ariel drew display common characteristics of students using Screen as Canvas as their stance toward the computer. Ariel's digital pictures do not look much different from texts that could be drawn with markers and crayons. Although her drawing tool is a mouse, Ariel wields it as she would a pen, drawing lines and strafing with the mouse to fill in grassy areas. The drawings here do not differ greatly from those in her journal featured in Figures 4.7 and 4.8 earlier in this chapter. Her texts do show a pen size change (note the larger lines in the second drawing) but this was due to her working on this text over a two session period and ending up at a different computer. At first, Ariel was not willing to manipulate the technology's capabilities to suit her needs. In fact, she was in tears upon beginning her second story because the software was set to a bigger and rather unwieldy pen size (Figure 4.16).



Figure 4.16. Ariel's second story

Note the large pen size in the first two panels of her digital story. In my role as tech support, I fixed the pen for her so she could continue without further distress.

In this second story, Ariel displays another characteristic of the students who used the stance of Screen as Canvas. It is a series of separate vignettes told about each picture as shown in Figure 4.16. In Ariel's second story, however, the spoken text more closely matches what is going on the images. By her second story, her wit, not present in her journal writing, began to display itself in her recorded narrative as she chuckled gleefully at her play on words and her choice of content in the last panel (she confirmed that "one almost got killed and one almost didn't get killed" was meant to be humorous). The specter of death was not uncommon in the digital stories the children created in the study; and they each thought the prospect of an untimely death was outrageously funny. The content of the stories the children produced is a topic for Chapter 5.

Screen as Landscape

Another stance the participants took was Screen as Landscape. Labbo characterized this stance as an exploration of the screen and its software capabilities, and as "a mapping of the territory represented on the screen space" (Labbo, p. 362). In this study, this stance produced stories that were wildly different than those produced by students who took a Screen as Canvas stance.

I have used Ariel's work so far in these examples, and I show her last text as an example of a Screen as Landscape stance. Ariel was not one to easily experiment with the technology; however during the final session, she sat between Jordan and Sydney and their collaboration prompted an evolution in the text Ariel created.

On her final story, Ariel collaborated with Jordan and Sydney as she composed her images. Jordan only completed two digital stories. She created a Screen as Canvas piece featuring her family and friends as her first piece. Then she left for a trip to California and came back just in time for the other students to be working on their third piece while she was working on her second effort. In her second story, Jordan took a Screen as Landscape stance, and Ariel and Sydney happily followed her lead.

In Figure 4.18, you will notice distinct differences in style in Ariel’s third piece from the previous two. In her final piece, Ariel used all the available space on the screen, leaving no white space, unlike her first two creations. She discovered the stamp tools the software had, and added an assortment of butterflies. She scribbled with the fingerpaint tool that allowed her to “swirl” a background for her wild smattering of fish stamps. The screen space is filled, and there’s a feeling of exploration, of “what does this do?” as she tried different tools in the software.

Then abruptly, Mrs. O called Jordan and Sydney back to class. Ariel was left to finish the last panel on her own. (She used the last panel for her title page for this piece.) Left alone to her own devices, Ariel reverted back to her own Screen as Canvas style.

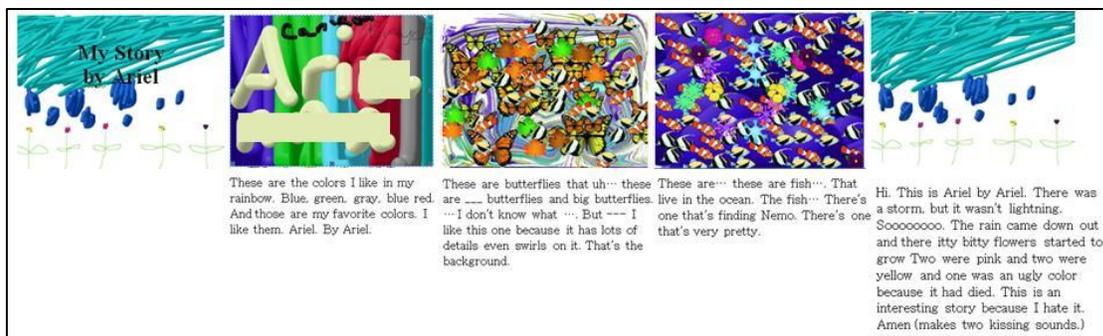


Figure 4.17. Ariel’s third story

In the last panel, the white space returned to her work, and the drawn images of flowers and sky were back. The style of image Ariel created in the company of Jordan and Sydney was so different from her own natural tendencies, that she felt the need to restart her spoken text (“This is Ariel by Ariel” repeated in the last frame) upon recording the narrative for the last panel she created without collaboration.

Recordings for texts that began with the Screen as Landscape stance are hard to label in any form or fashion, “narrative.” The explorations are often so wild, and so overwhelming, that the participants seemed helpless to do more with their recorded text than describe what was on the screen and their process in creating it. Stories produced from a Screen as Landscape stance were more about the technology than story.

Stories that began with a Screen as Landscape stance were mostly about the process, a description of what was on the screen, and the manipulation of tools. Tony was one student that allowed what he could do with the computer tools to guide his creations and even identified the stance as his “strategy” for composing in his post-interview. “I play around with the stamps (graphics within Pixie) until a story comes to me,” he said. It seems to me that in his third digital text, the story never “came” at all. The story, pictured below in Figure 4.18, is a long and tedious regurgitation about his placement of stamps on the screen. The middle part of Tony’s spoken text has been left out in the interest of conserving space.

Screen as Stage

Some students took on a strategy that resembled Labbo's Screen as Stage stance. In this strategy, the students portrayed action and events across scenes in a sequence of narrative events. The first graders who took this stance developed stories that most resembled traditional narratives. Their digital stories have the recognizable feel of a movie or a play. It is most likely that the stories created from this stance are the ones teachers would hope all students develop. For this reason, I consider the Screen as Stage stance a destination stance, the one that most teachers will want their students to evolve toward eventually.

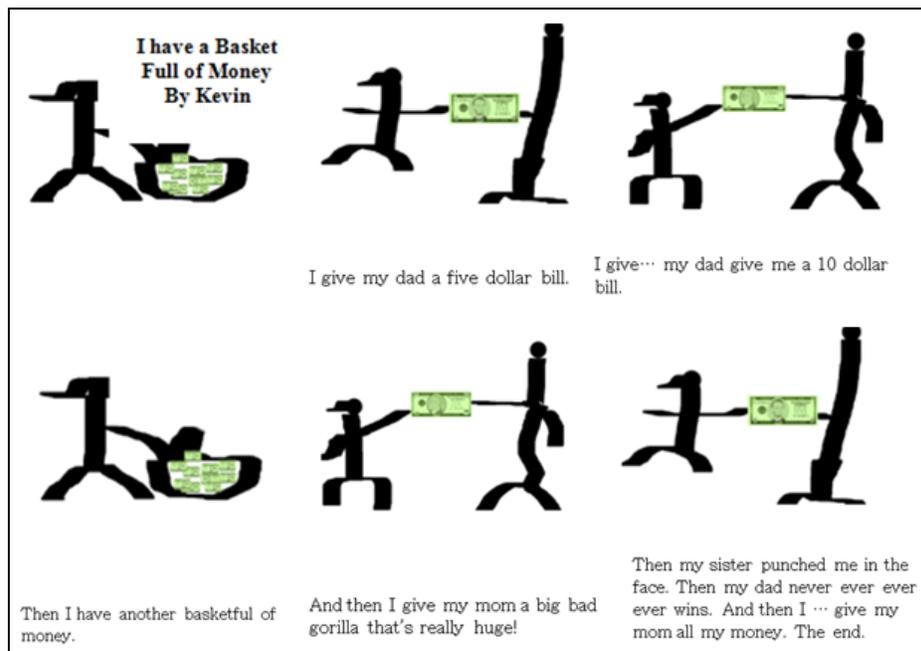


Figure 4.19. Kevin's second story

In Figure 4.19, notice that Kevin portrayed a sequence of events that take place over time across his panels. He manipulated the technology to fit the needs of his story. Before beginning this piece, he asked for help in resizing the dollar stamp so that he could make a lot of them. In my role as tech support, I resized the stamp for him and then taught him how to copy and paste. His actions indicated that he had pre-planned at least some of his story before beginning, and even manipulated the technology to fit his story plan. He did take a sudden detour at the end of the recording to talk about gorillas, punches and sisters. He explained later that he had made a spur of the moment decision to make the story “funnier.”

Except for Baron, who would prove an exception during much of this research, the Screen as Stage stance did not appear in the participants’ very first efforts at creating digital texts.

Starla’s final production (Figure 4.20) is also an example of a student taking on a stance of Screen as Stage. There are definite motion picture elements in her story about the tragic death of a baby duck in the street. Unlike Kevin, she produced very careful illustrations even without doing anything with the capabilities of the software other than changing the pen color.

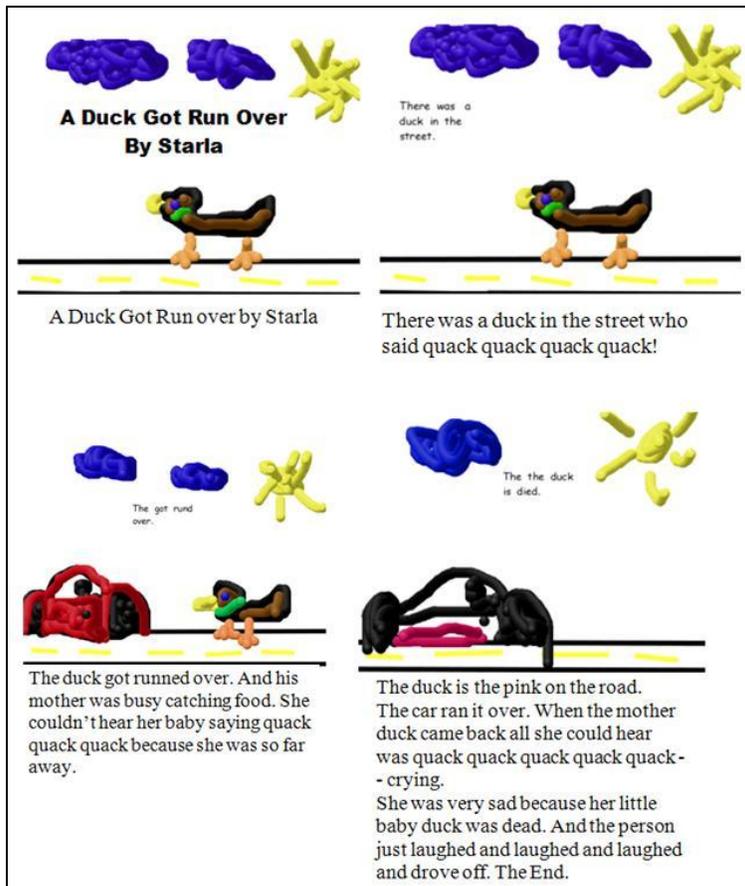


Figure 4.20. Starla's third story

Screen as Science Lab: The Hybrid Texts

For the purposes of this study, Labbo's research was extended to help describe the strategies that these first graders used when approaching the computer screen to make stories. The stance that the students took, and how willing they were to manipulate the technology determined how their stories would eventually turn out. There was one stance that Labbo did not identify but that appeared in this research. Labbo did have a Screen as Paper stance that reflected when the children wrote texts as directed by their teachers.

Since all the efforts in the current study were meant to be “texts,” I did not think that stance was applicable to this research. However, I identified a new stance for the current study that I labeled, Screen as Science Lab. Students who took on the stance of Screen as Science Lab deftly manipulated both the story they wished to create, and the technology, to create a story that was a hybrid of the two, just as a scientist might combine two different substances to create a new mixture.

An example of Baron taking on the Screen as Science Lab stance is shown in Figure 4.21.

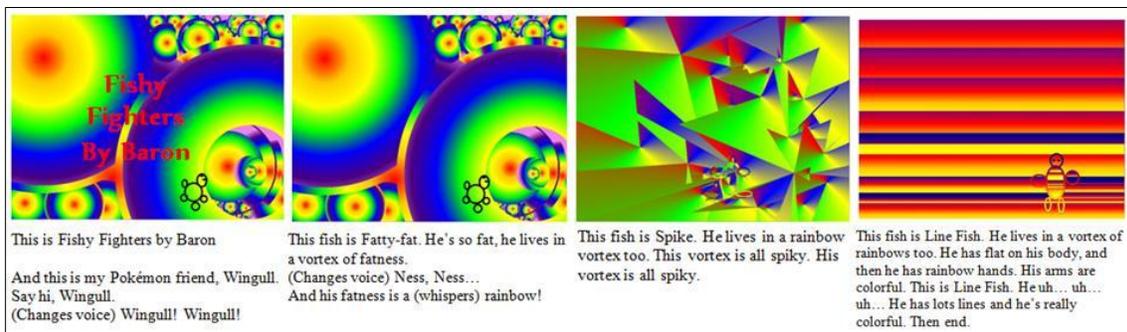


Figure 4.21. Baron’s third story

Similar to the students who took a Screen as Landscape stance, Baron found it important to fill the entire screen with color. Also, like the Screen as Landscape stance, he explored the software’s tools and abilities. Baron’s creation is more sophisticated, however. In an earlier conversation, Baron expressed his intention to make his last story about “talking fish.” So there is adequate evidence that his topic was pre-planned. However, elements of his story come, not only from his prior intent, but also the “rainbow vortexes” he created with the software’s gradient tool. His intent to create a

story about fish highly influenced the choices he made as he manipulated the software. The outcomes of his exploration with the gradient tool influenced how his story eventually turned out. To stretch the scientist metaphor a bit too far, consider that Baron mixed the elements of his text and the images he created in the solvent of his digital text, and like a scientist in a lab, created a new hybrid solution. His text is hybrid concoction of a boy's ideas for a story, and the fantastical things he could do with the computer.

Tony's second digital story provides another example of Screen as Science Lab as shown in Figure 4.22. Here he crafted a story that is a mixture of the picture he created on the screen, and the bomb narrative he imagined. However, Tony's strongest tendencies lean toward Screen as Landscape. So as you can see in the example, he gives into this tendency by the final panel of his digital story. His story does provide a nice contrast between the two stances as you read from the third to final screen.

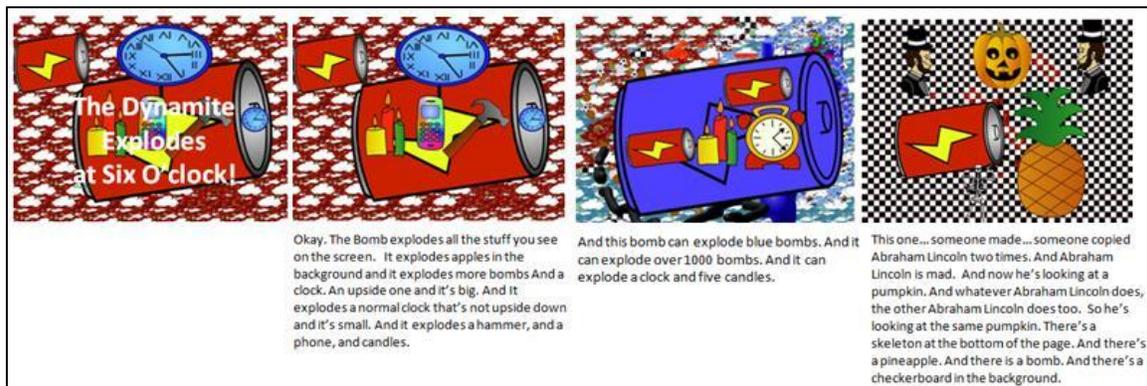


Figure 4.22. Tony's second story

Tony's first two panels tell the narrative of the dynamite. It is a mixture of a tale he is trying to put together and what he managed to create with the software. In a

discussion of authorship and new media, Kress (2003) wrote that texts produced on computers were often compilations of others' work brought together under a new idea. Tony's story exemplifies Kress' ideas as he took the software's stamps, and compiled and configured them into something new, his own story.

In Tony's last screen his connection to narrative gets weaker, so by the time he got to his last few sentences, the story became a recitation of what he placed on the screen. This is an indicator of the Screen as Landscape stance, which appeared to be Tony's strongest inclination.

Wrapping Up the Stances

The participants' stances usually remained static throughout their composition process. A story that began with a Screen as Canvas stance when the child sat down to draw the images, remained so through to the oral recording that might take place the next day. Tony's second composition and Ariel's third, both mentioned previously, were exceptions. While participants tended to have a stance they were most comfortable with, they sometimes took different stances across their three efforts. In the case of Ariel mentioned above, it was the influence of a peer working beside her that made her change stances in her last story. In other cases, such as Kevin and Starla, the students seemed to mature into different stances as they became more familiar with the task and the digital tools.

The chart below outlines how I have extended the stances Labbo identified in her research to map the stances the students in this study took as they were directed to "make

a story.” I was able to compile this chart from data collected from observing students as they created their stories, and from the completed digital texts themselves.

| The Stances | Indicators of stances from Labbo’s Research (p. 362) | Indicators in the current study of Digital Storytelling |
|------------------------------|---|--|
| Screen as Canvas | Aesthetic creation using painting, and clip art Evaluation of the artistic nature of work | Lack of tool manipulation Closely resembles drawing Story text does not always match images Story text and images either lack connection, or have appear to be episodic; the text about the panels within the composition are separate entities. (See Figure 4. 17) |
| Screen as Landscape | Exploration of the screen and ware applications Mapping of the territory represented on the screen space | Lots of tool manipulation, exploration Entire screen space filled Story text describes the child’s process of exploration (See Figure 4.19) |
| Screen as Stage | Moving and direction of clip art to te action Direction of scenes | Pre-planning Digital tools are manipulated to meet story irements Story “action” moves sequentially across the panels scenes in a play or movie Recognizable as a traditional narrative story form (See Figures 4.20 and 4.21) |
| Screen as Playground | Language play accompanies ction of clip art and drawings Shared humor | A joke is enacted in drawn scene and reported in en text Little kid humor, language play (See Figure 5. 3) |
| Screen as Science Lab | | Pre-planning Story elements influenced heavily by both student’s s and the student’s digital experimentation Final text is a mixture of student narrative intention and exploration with tools (See Figure 4.22) |

Table 4.2. A comparison of Labbo’s stances with the stances in the present study

Labbo’s work provided an interesting framework for analyzing this data. Here her stances were extended to a different set of participants: first graders purposed with making digital stories. You can also see how the framework differed when used to categorize the texts in the current study. It is important to notice that students’ attitude

toward the tools as they first sat down at the computer highly influenced the type of story that the student would eventually create. A child who did not experiment with the tools, and who chose to use the mouse as he or she would a crayon, produced a much different text than the child who wildly experimented with the tools' capabilities. Then there was the delightful stance of the child who deftly experimented with the computer, and integrated his narrative ideas with those digital experimentations to create a hybrid text.

Space, Stances, Materiality, and Participant Interaction with the Digital

In this section, I attempt to pull together some of the data that reveals the role of the digital in the creation process. First, a look at how the physical space the digital tools created may have been the first way those tools changed the creation process for these young digital collaborations.

The Role of the Digital in the Study's Physical Space

This study took place in the computer lab at Sundown Elementary. The lab was a sparsely decorated room separate from the academic areas in a wing that included the cafeteria and gym. In the room were 12 long brown tables, arranged in rows, six on each side of the room. Each table held two or three computers. The computers were black desktop computers with large crt monitors. The computers were not always reliable since they were 4 years old at the time of this research, poorly maintained, and most likely selected for purchase with school district funds based on their "cheapness" and not their zippiness. They often froze and needed rebooting while using some elements of

multimedia software, Pixie. Students were aware of this and were resigned to the fact that they might have to abandon their work when the computer stopped cooperating and move to a different computer.

Even though this was a “digital” writer’s workshop, the model presented in Dyson’s research (as referenced in Chapter 2) of young children writing in collaborative fashion was the vision I had for this study before beginning. Also as an experienced primary teacher, I was used to and expected lively collaboration, sharing, and banter as part of these first graders’ creative process.

Several factors seemed to contribute to the writing process of the first graders being less collaborative than I assumed. First, the structure of the tables lined up in severe rows. The size of the room, the large quantity of computers, and the ever-present quest for a computer that was not frozen often meant students were working at a computer alone in a row as you can see below in Figure 4.23. The bulky monitors, central processing units and keyboards dominated the tables and the participants’ line of vision so even students sitting close teach were less likely to conspire across their texts.



Figure 4.23. Sydney is working alone in the long row of computers.

Another factor that seemed to contribute to a lack of collaboration across most of the study was the lack of external speakers on the computers. The computers were equipped for solitary use with personal headphones. In Figure 4.24, Kevin listens to his story for the first time as it plays for his ears alone.



Figure 4.24. Kevin is astounded as he listens to his story through his headphones.

There appeared to be enough supporting data to conclude that the use of computers, particularly those large, speaker-less desktops with wide monitors in a lab setting, could interfere with the collaborative tendencies of first grade composers. The digital tools for the most part, made their creation process a singular affair.

However, the most determined collaborator eventually found a way. From the beginning, Ariel seemed to need collaboration to support her work at the computer. In Chapter 3, I shared a section in my early field notes where I recorded that: *Baron is working pretty intently. Ariel wants him to look at something and it takes a lot to draw him away from his own screen. And: Ariel is still trying to get him to participate with her, tapping him on the arm. He's ignoring her.*

By the time they were working on their second stories, Baron had wisely moved to a computer farther away from hers. Undaunted, Ariel can be heard on the study tapes calling out to her cousin from across the room.

“What do you want me to write about, Baron?”

“Baron, should I do trees or dogs?”

“I’m going to make Baron laugh his head off.”

By the time she was working on her final piece, she is happily working with two of the other girls sitting together at the first three computers in the front row. As will be discussed in later in this dissertation, the final stories those girls produced had many similarities.

Participant Stances toward the Digital Tools

The stances or attitudes the participants had toward using digital tools influenced the nature of the texts they created. The interaction between the child’s personal choices and the tools revealed that the digital played a large role in the creation process.

The nature of texts the student created seemed to depend on the attitude or “stance” each child took upon sitting down at the computer. Students who had a bold, confident, and inquisitive attitude toward creating these computer texts devised digital stories that were heavily influenced by the capabilities of the software. What they accomplished by manipulating the Pixie art software was a key factor in their composing process, and their explorations were a dominant part of the final storyline. In Figure 4.18, the images Tony created reflected his exploration of the different stamps available

in the program, as well as his mastery of the software's editing tools as he experimented and changed the background images. When asked about his creation process while composing, he enthused about the changes he was able to make in the apple background provided by the software. Indeed, he voiced his composing strategy as one of fiddling around with the stamps and backgrounds until the ideas emerged for him. So his final recorded texts strongly detailed that exploration. Tony was an experienced and confident user of technology and his final texts reflected that confidence more than they showed any hint of a traditional story line.

Participants who were less inclined to experiment with the tools used the digital tools much as they would familiar devices like markers and crayons. Since they did little exploration, a recitation of their accomplishments with the technology does not dominate their final texts; instead a more traditional story line is often apparent. In Figure 4.25 below, Kevin's narrative storyline about a man who meets an unfortunate end outside a store dominated his final story. The images he drew using the digital tools work merely as visual placeholders representing his narrative.

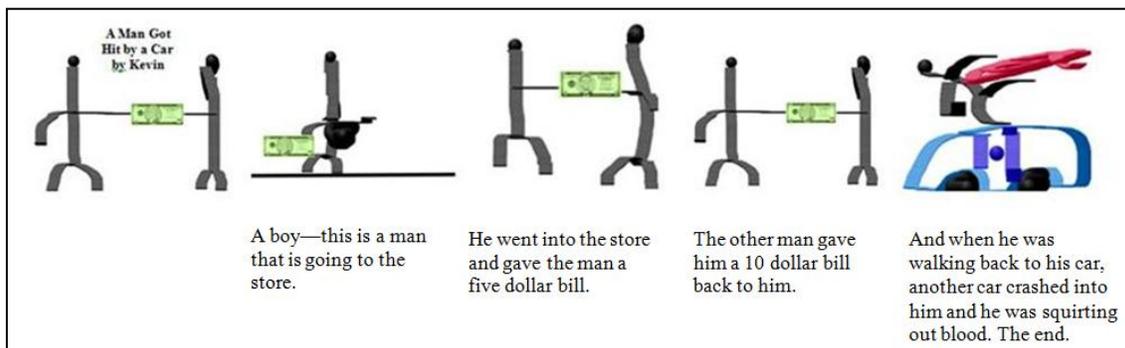


Figure 4.25. Kevin's third story

In Figure 4.25, Kevin takes a Screen as Stage stance, and creates a story form that most teachers would celebrate. His text closely resembles a traditional narrative. He did very little exploring with the computer tools.

At the beginning of this chapter I outlined the students' previous school experiences with composing stories. These students were relatively new to the experience of creating their own texts, much less using digital tools to do so. I believe this newness to the proposition of storytelling was a contributing factor to the nature of the digital texts they produced, and made their interactions with the tools more intriguing.

There is a physical process to constructing a digital story: a physical process that includes the use of tools which, in this instance, were relatively new to the users. Further research on multi-modal texts focused me on how the physical process of manipulating the tools to construct this particular genre of text – digital story – was an overriding influence on these compositions. Kress (1997) sees multimodal texts as having a material dimension. Materiality in this context refers to the physical aspects of creating the text and mode choices that the composer makes as he works.

So we can make assumptions about students' identities from the materiality of their texts, the choices they made about mode, and the stances they took as they composed. Tony gave us information about his confidence and comfort with the computer, as he sat down to explore with the tools. I would venture to say that Tony was more comfortable manipulating computer software than creating imaginative texts. Ariel gave us a picture of her lack of confidence with computers as she cried helplessly when the pen tool was too big for drawing in her second story (Figure 4.16). Later, she eagerly

followed Jordan's lead and explored the screen and tools for most of her final story before returning to her comfort zone in the last panel after Jordan left (Figure 4.17). Looking at Ariel's Heart Map (Figure 4.10) and her rather pedestrian attempts to keep up her cousin Baron's fanciful ideas, you get the idea that she's not one to stray too much from the tried and true on her own. So the materiality, the physical choices she made as she composed, sedimented parts of her identity into her digital stories.

Rowsell and Pahl (2007) believed that the texts people create contain their identities not only in terms of materiality that was discussed in the previous paragraphs, but also in terms of content. The researchers describe the term sedimented identities as being evidence of a child's funds of knowledge (Moll, et al, 2001) or habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) left within the texts they create.

An excellent example of identity sedimented in narrative was Kevin's body of work. His sample journal entry (Figure 4.4) detailed the money he and his siblings received for working at his father's store. His first two digital stories depended upon various exchanges of money stamps (diversion into gorillas in the second story notwithstanding). And his final text was a sordid tale (Figure 4.25) of a man's death in the street outside a store. From Kevin's content choices, we could gather clues about how central his father's business was to the family.

The choices that the participants made in response to the digital tools influenced the shape and form of the final texts, and left an imprint or reflection of their identities both in terms of content and in the materiality – the very structure – of the digital story.

CHAPTER FIVE

In the last chapter I presented data that attempted to define the nature of the texts produced in this study by the participants' previous experiences with composition, their cultural resources and their attitudes toward using digital tools. I categorized the texts that students produced by extending Labbo's (1996) earlier research on young children and their stances toward the computer. I noted how each student had a tendency toward one stance or another, but also evolved or were influenced into other stances over the course of the study as they became more familiar with the tools and storytelling. The digital tools played a significant role in the shaping of the participants' stories

This chapter provides a closer look at some of the digital stories themselves and their meanings and purposes in creating them, addressing the third and final research question. I emphasize how participant stories changed over the course of the study. While much of the evolution of student stories can be attributed to the students becoming more familiar with the tools, and more experienced at telling stories, this chapter focuses on the influence of audience on the students' stories.

The students' growing sense of audience seemed to be a catalyst for the evolution of their stories over time. Comparisons of students' first stories and their last stories show a greater consideration for their future audience: whether it was higher levels of reflection

guiding their actions, vocal qualities adopted to add “flava” to the recordings, or explicit statements that their intention was to make their peers laugh. Their growing sense of audience guided most of the students toward a path of more entertainment values in their final pieces. By entertainment values, I mean that the students employed “strategy moves” (Hays et al, 1990; Ryder et al, 1999) during the composing process that had the goal of gaining audience reaction. Further, the digital format seemed to engender a more sophisticated sense of the relationship between themselves as composers and their future and past audiences.

In the following paragraphs, I provide several examples of the participants’ purposeful attempts to interact with their future audience. It is notable that even though the participants had different motivations and proceeded through different measures, they all sought the approval and engagement of audience.

The Appeal to Audience: Terrence’s Direct Approach

This chapter begins with Terrence’s work, not because he made the most delightful digital stories, but because he immediately recognized the potential to appeal directly to an audience with these stories. He also recognized early on the potential the potential for an undesirable audience reaction and that concern overwhelmed the content of most of his stories.

When Terrence was making his first story, he had no knowledge of the “computer author’s chair” (Labbo, 2004) that would later give him a student audience. Although I had explained to the participants that we would be sharing our stories with others, they

had no context to judge what the event would be like before the first one took place. According to the first grade teachers, and the students' pre-interviews, they were unfamiliar with sharing previous compositions with a peer audience.

His first story, pictured below in Figure 5.1, is a Screen as Canvas piece. He drew a picture using the software, mostly allowing the tools to act as crayons or markers. He added a flower stamp in the left hand corner. He then titled the piece fittingly: "Beautiful Picture."



Figure 5.1. Terrence's first story

Terrence used an expressive voice in this first piece. As he recorded he looked to me for approval when he stretched out the word "much." He also ended his story in the way one would end a conversation. So from the beginning, Terrence sought to entertain, even if it was just me who sat near to help with the recording function. He spoke as if he were conversing personally with someone. And he was. He was talking to me. He sought to please me. He used an expressive voice and varied emphasis on his words. He seemed to instantly understand the power of his story as an opportunity to make a connection

with his audience, even if he thought his only audience was me as I sat near helping him record.

Terrence's second digital story was composed after we had met together to share our first stories using the lcd projector and a big screen. His second story (Figure 5.2) had many of the same elements as his first including a Screen as Canvas emphasis on the "picture" as it was drawn. Terrence decided to use less vocal variety in recording this story even though I had complimented him on his expressiveness in the first one.

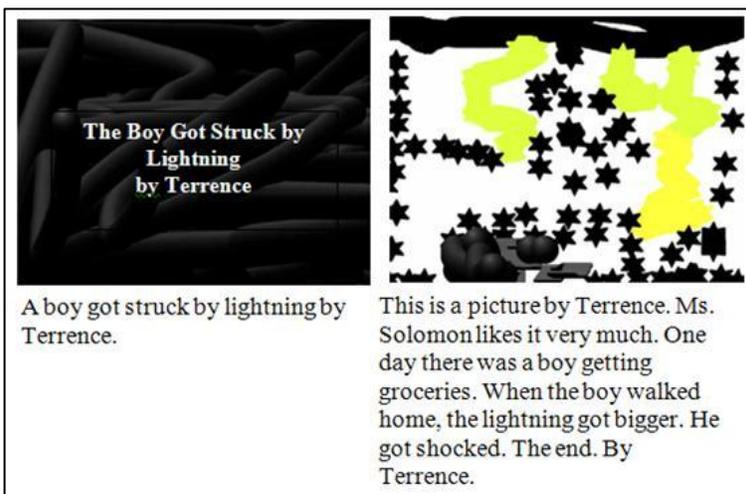


Figure 5.2. Terrence's second story

As you can see, he assured his future audience that this story was a good one – not because *he* liked it, as he said in his first story, but because *I* liked it. I cannot find evidence in the data that I told Terrence whether or not I liked his picture. However I was a safe ally; he knew I would not contradict his statement. This second story was composed after he'd been through computer author's chair with his first effort. When

composing this story, he knew it would soon play on the big screen for an audience of his peers. His future audience could not doubt the worthiness of this story because it had been sanctioned by me. His goal was to ward off any unpleasant audience responses.

Terrence composed two versions of his last digital story. The first version was mentioned in Chapter Four as an example of a Screen as Playground stance toward his task. The Screen as Playground stance is recognizable by inside jokes, language play and blue humor. Figure 5.3 represents his first version, and Figure 5.4 is the version he recorded once he reflected on possible audience reaction. You will notice that Terrence never moved to the point where he was using a series of pictures to tell his story. He was satisfied with one image for all his digital stories. In his third story, second version Terrence had gone past trying to ward off undesirable responses, and focused on guiding his audience to the reaction he wished to receive from them.

Terrence and Kevin were sitting quite close together in the computer lab when they made their last stories, and both of their stories ended with bloodshed. I think there was a chance that Terrence made his first version of the story as a naughty joke to share with Kevin only, but the audio tape did not pick up any actual evidence that this was the reason for two versions. I believe his title, “The Best Friend” was also an appeal to Kevin. He stated it clearly before starting each recording. Terrence was always considering his audience.

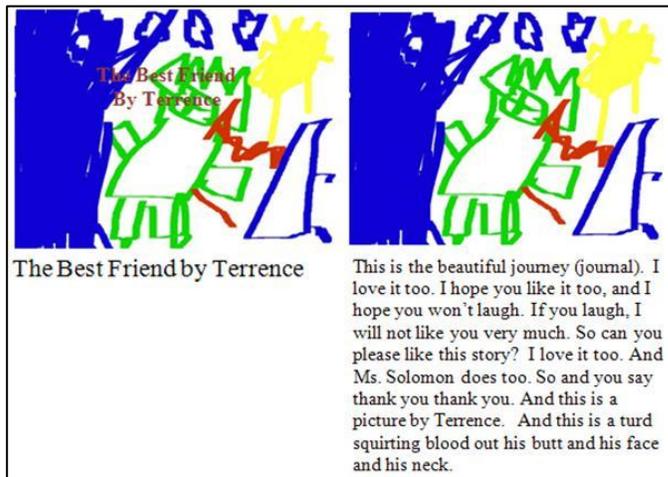


Figure 5.3. Version One of Terrence's third story



Figure 5.4. Version Two of Terrence's third story

Terrence's decision to rewrite his story was his own. During the third round of stories I put their pictures on the Photo Story storyboard, and then I taught them how to record on their own. So, while I knew he had made a second version, I was not aware of his content change, nor was I sensitive to his reasoning until after I accidentally played his first version of the story for the other participants during the third computer author's chair

event. In the video tape of the event, Terrence looked a little stricken once he realized the first version was playing on the big screen, and not the second version that he intended for the wider audience. After the group viewed his digital story, I admonished him, “no butt parts allowed.” He gave a most memorable pained look into the camera. His mood did not improve even though a sing-song chorus of “I like the butt part!” started by Jordan and enjoined by most of the other participants arose after my words. Terrence remained mortified that I had not shown the correct version. He had clearly created a G-Rated version with a specific message for his future audience. His oral text for the second version was filled with pleadings and directives. “Do you love it?” “I hope you have a wonderful time.” “I hope you won’t laugh.” Terrence would easily be classified as the participant with the weakest traditional literacy skills. But from the beginning he identified these stories as opportunities to connect with others, and attempted to control his future audience’s response while composing his texts.

Terrence kept his Screen as Canvas stance throughout his three stories. His recordings were about the picture he drew. His voice recordings did evolve based on his intent to influence his future audience. His second story (Figure 5.2) was a move toward telling a narrative as he told the sad tale of a man “shocked” by lightning on the way home from the store. However, his attempts to appeal to Kevin who was sitting nearby while he was working on his third story, and his anticipation of how his future audience might react, and his need to mold that reaction, overwhelmed both versions of his third and final story.

The Appeal to Audience: Jordan's Relies on AAL

Due to a family trip to Disneyland that landed in the middle of this project, Jordan was only able to create 2 stories. Her first story was a Screen as Canvas piece, the artwork detailing her family and close friends. From the beginning she created multi-image stories. In her first piece (Figure 5.5) she used the computer tools as she would crayons or markers. But she used color in distinct ways. Perhaps she sedimented her identity as a bi-racial child into the images by coloring in black faces for her “granny” and mom, and leaving her own face outlined in black or brown. In the third panel, she distinguished herself from her Anglo friend, “Cassidy” by using bright pink to draw her friend’s face and body.

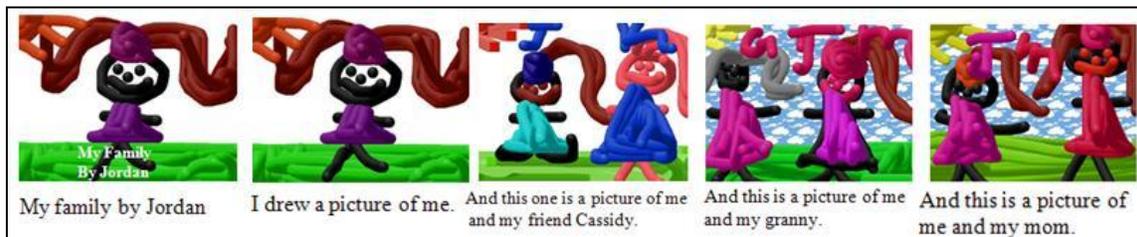


Figure 5.5. Jordan's first story

Jordan's first digital story she chose to report in a matter of fact voice the content of each picture. While Terrence was quite expressive during his first story, Jordan spoke as one might report the news. She did not seem interested in entertaining an audience through her spoken text as she recorded her first digital story. The identity work through the illustrations and color choices were enough for her.

Jordan's second story was also her last. Her family scheduled a trip to California right in the middle of the project. She was present for the first and last author's chair

event. So by the time she composed her final piece she understood that she had an audience of her fellow participants to please. Jordan's last story is shared in Figure 5.5 below. You will notice that her work here is similar to Ariel's last piece displayed in the previous chapter. Jordan, Ariel and Sydney sat together when composing this last story. Jordan took the lead and the other girls followed with similar explorations and produced texts that were in Screen as Landscape mode. In her images she played with the different colors and pen shapes the software allowed. The exploration of the screen space appeared to be the most important goal when she was drawing, so that when she recorded her text later (separately from the other girls) she relied on her vocal rendition to add entertainment value to her work.

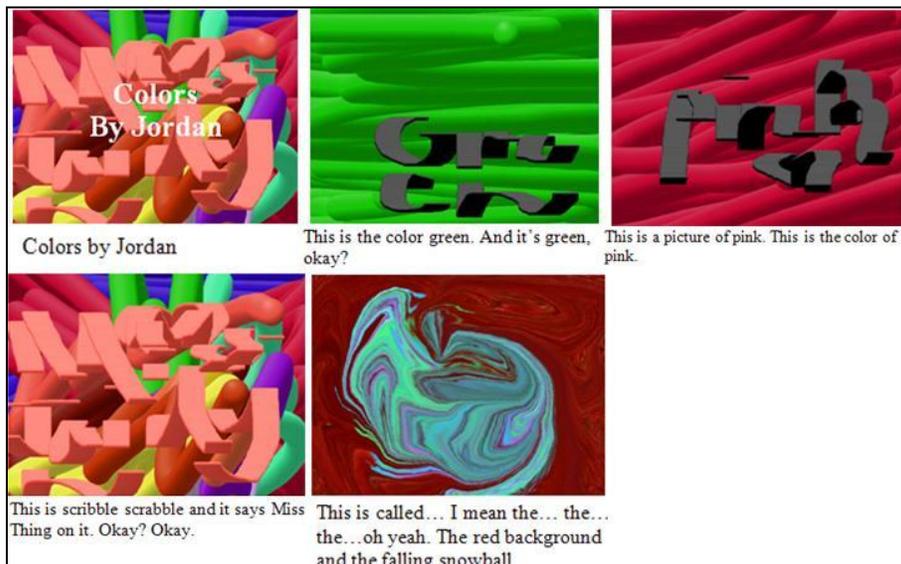


Figure 5.6. Jordan's second story

While Jordan's first story was told matter-of-factly, in this composition, she varied her voice greatly. She affected a tough, belligerent tone to tell her tale. I suspect

she felt the need to dress up her images which do not appear to have a greater purpose other than exploration. She also seemed to have relied on some identified conventions of AAL such as repetition and call and response (Ball, 1996; Smitherman, 1994, 2000) during her oral recording. In the last screen, ellipses and “uh”s do not sound like ordinary indications of hesitation; those final words are highly stylized and dramatic pauses until she final intones in a spooky voice, ‘the falling snowball.’ There is enough evidence here to believe that Jordan was thinking about her future audience when she crafted the text for this digital story.

The Appeal to Audience: Baron, Subtle and Sophisticated

Baron crafted his digital stories as if they had been bursting to get out of his head for all six of his years on earth. In particular, his first tale (Figure 5.7) spilled out in elaborate detail that overwhelmed the single picture he drew with the software.

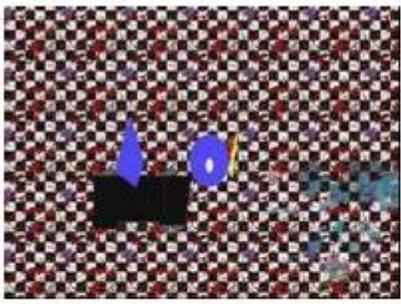
| | | |
|--|---|---|
| <p>This is the Battle for the Future by Baron</p> |  | <p>When a future monster named ...um... Tyzon was playing outside. He saw this big dark cloud. And he knew this was the symbol of the future battles. And when the future battles begin, the evil king comes and destroys all good guys. But Tyzon didn't want that to happen. So he wanted to battle the king. And he did. But he lost. And then when the dark cloud came again, he tried again. But that time he won.</p> |
| <p>And then the evil king brought his minions to destroy Tyzon. But Tyzon didn't get destroyed because he got help too. His friends... Taylor and Ankie helped him. And he won again. And then the king said, "I won't lose anymore." And then the king got out his sword and battled Tyzon. When Tyzon used his ... thunder horn to beat the king again, the king got a fire sword and then he destroyed the lightning that the lightning horn threw. And then when the lightning got destroyed, it made a big wave that hit all of the future. And then the king got destroyed. And when the king got destroyed, the minions got destroyed too. The end.</p> | | |

Figure 5.7. Baron's first story

This first text was so surprising, that I did not think to ask Baron if he'd gotten some of his ideas from cartoons or movies he watched. It is reasonable to suspect that some of these ideas are from his cultural milieu, as he is the only participant who clearly drew upon popular culture to craft his stories. Still, it is apparent he had combined what he knew about telling a tale – heroic characters, evil kings, weapons of thunder and lightning, epic battles to save the future – and created a text all his own. What appears to be particularly sophisticated is the plot gimmick of it taking more than one battle to conclude the story; the hero is defeated, but rises again to defeat the evil king (and his minions). It is a story form that has been told thousands of times, and it appears to be a story that had been waiting for the opportunity to jump out of Baron's head for a while. Any consideration for audience probably had little influence on content or form; he told the story that pleased him.

Baron's second story (Figure 5.8) is different. By the time he composed the second story he had experienced the display of his story on the big screen for an audience, and is also more acclimated to the capabilities of the technology. He depended on the images he created with the software to support the ideas he expresses in his text. He also chose to take advantage of the medium by altering his voice while speaking the title: *Aliens in America*.

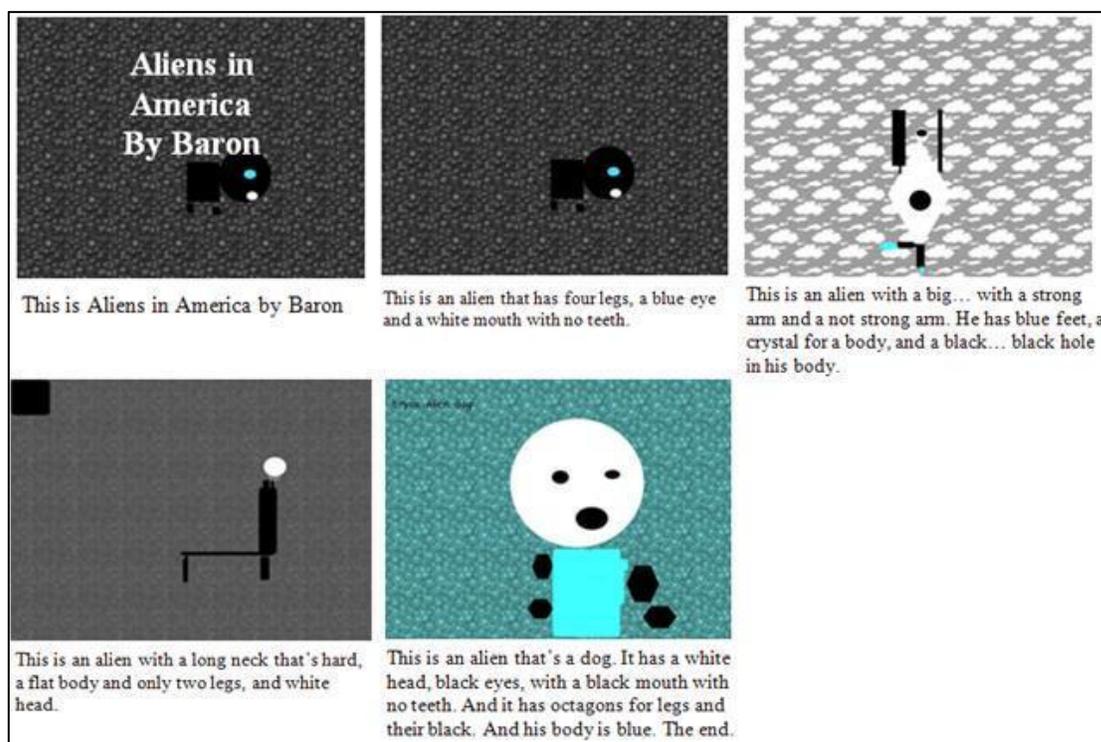


Figure 5.8. Baron's second story

I would categorize his second story as a Screen as Science Lab occurrence because his purpose was to tell a story about aliens, but those aliens are born within the limits of what Baron could create with the software. He chose to edit the pixie software background (something both he and Tony considered a priority in their texts) and then used the software's shape and color tools to craft his aliens. Unlike his first story, where the narrative had a life of its own and the picture he drew merely provided support, this narrative could not exist without the images he crafted. His text had the feel of browsing through a stack of alien trading cards, or pages of a non-fiction book about animals, or even a tourist guide book describing the creatures you might see if you look hard enough in the environment.

Baron had definite ideas about what he wanted to make his digital stories about and those ideas came from his own agenda, not necessarily what he thought might engage a future audience. I asked him why he created the story about aliens. He said, “Because aliens are my favorite.” When I asked him what he might want to do for this final story, he said, “I want to make a story about talking fish.” In his post interview, Baron said that a good story was one with “aliens or monsters.”

In his final text (Figure 5.9) Baron turned up the entertainment value in the oral portion of his text. Baron, who used some expression and slight character voices in his first story, and who introduced his second story by using a weird, alien-sounding voice as he said the title, found a way to raise the bar in his third text.

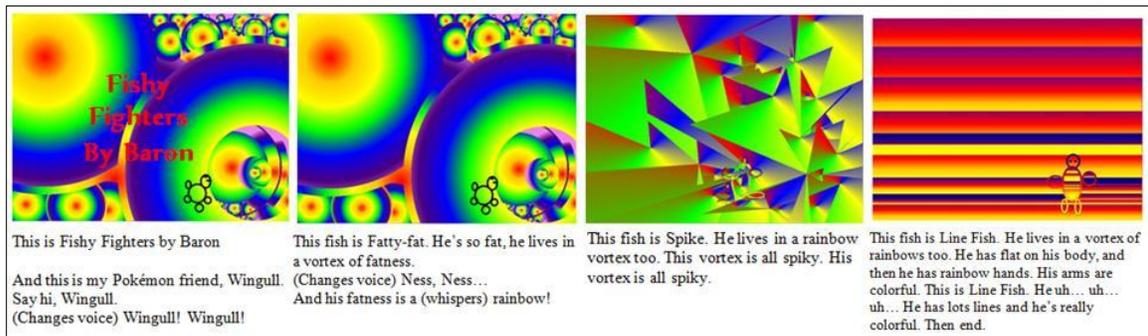


Figure 5.9. Baron's third story

He brought a Pokemon card “friend” with him the day he recorded this story. He also brought the card to the final author's chair event, and held the card up to the camera proudly when the lens turned toward him. Wingull, to those in the know, is a sea-faring Pokemon character.

In the story transcript above, I tried to indicate Baron's character changes, but it is hard to do his rendition justice in print. Suffice it to say, that while in his first story, he was expressive vocally, and distinguished his characters, this piece was a full on production. He even varies his volume, using whispers at times, and varies the speed and cadence of his voice. Like Jordan, his "uh...uh" is highly stylized and very distinct from his first story where his "uhs" were simple placeholders till he could process what he wanted to say. The stylized "uhs" are the clue we need to know that Baron was indeed considering his future audience. His "uhs," like Jordan's, are dressed up for the sake of future listeners.

Baron had definite ideas about what he wanted his stories to be about. He chose topics of interest to him. He was sharp enough to understand that monsters and aliens were in so many books and television shows because many kids found those topics interesting. So he likely knew his subject matter was good for an audience of his peers, and he attempted to make his stories even more appealing by being vocally expressive in his second and third stories. Baron's efforts to engage a future audience got increasingly more sophisticated as the study went on. Even though he employed different, more subtle measures than Terrence, fundamentally their goal was the same: to engage and influence their future audience positively.

The Appeal to Audience: Sydney's Surprise

Sydney is one participant who has not been heard from much in the analysis so far. I mentioned early in Chapter Four that Sydney was not very verbal and probably

needed much more time to respond to the questions in her pre-interview than I gave her. Also, her stories were often the victims of technical difficulties and mishaps, so that she had to record them more than once, much to her chagrin. By the end of the study, she could only be coaxed to come redo her final recording and the post-interview if Tony accompanied her. He was more than happy to leave class and come play games on the computer while she re-recorded her story.

Figure 5.10 displays her first story. She gave a heavy, uncomfortable sigh while reciting her title, repeated the title again, and then plowed quickly through to the end. An audience beyond me sitting there waiting for her to complete the task did not seem to be a consideration for her. Her goal was to just get finished.



Figure 5.10. Sydney's first story

While Sydney was drawing pictures for her second digital story, I stopped by and asked her what her story would be about. She told me that her story was going to be about girls dancing. Frankly, I was excited about the prospects for this text. Sydney used mostly pink and red to draw with, but she experimented with the fill tool and made dresses and faces with interesting textures. Two days later when she came back to record

her story, she said she could not remember her story and no amount of time sitting silently in front of the pictures on the computer screen would change that fact. Nothing would convince her to say anything into the microphone. So Sydney was left without a second digital story to share during the 2nd computer author's chair.

I was motivated to go back and complete Sydney's second story because of her crestfallen look during that second author's chair event. By that time, the first graders were familiar with computer author's chair. Many of the participants were piping and jumping about, eager to have their story shown first. Once they were not first, they then argued mightily to be next. I assured them, that they would all "get their turn."

For some reason I continued on and said, "Except Sydney. She didn't want to do one. Right, Sydney? But you're here and that's what is important." The latter two sentences were in response to the look that came over her face as I spoke.

Afterwards, I sat down with her to complete the story the best we could. I reminded her that her story was about dancing girls and she silently allowed me to title her story, "Sydney's Dancing Girls." She nodded when I picked out some lively music generated by the Photo Story software to play in the background.



Figure 5.11. Sydney's second story

Sydney's final story started out on a good note (though it ended on a bad one; she had to redo her recording because the first one malfunctioned). She was sitting with Jordan and Ariel and following Jordan's lead, created a Screen as Landscape text just as the other girls had. You can see definite similarities between the images in all the girls' final stories, even though their recordings were different since they worked on those separately. Sydney worked by herself while recording, though Tony was close by playing games at an internet website. For the third and final story, I had taught them how to record themselves and only provided tech support when called upon. Sydney's third and final story is displayed in Figure 5.12.

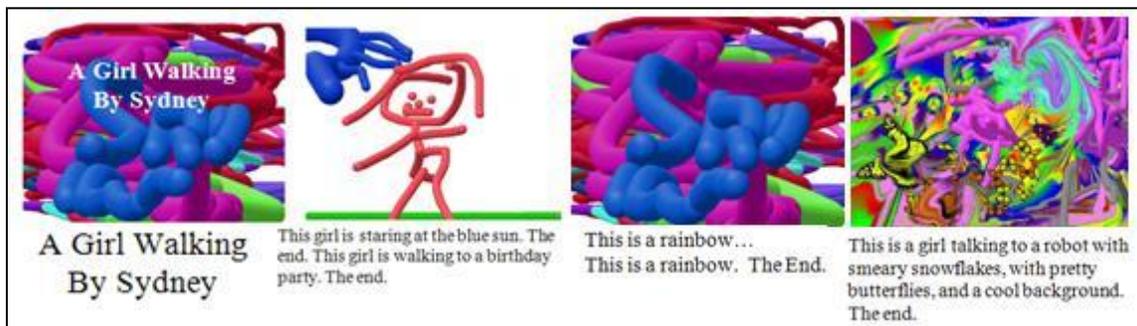


Figure 5.12. Sydney's third story

Sydney's images look similar to Jordan's and Ariel's; she has even written her name among colorful scribbling as Ariel did, and used the fingerprint tool to make a smeary last panel just as Jordan had. Like Terrence's first story, Sydney responded during this story to the audience at hand: this time her audience was the two friends she collaborated with as she made her images.

A comparison of the stance taken by the trio of girls, and Starla, who worked separately on her third story, is noteworthy. A look back at the recordings of that work

session revealed a telling difference between Starla's stance toward her work, and the other three girls – Sydney, Ariel and Jordan – who worked together.

When asked what she was working on, Starla seemed to have a clear plan aimed at her future audience. "I know what I'm going to write. It's going to be really silly." Starla would go on to compose a Screen as Stage piece about a duck in the street.

When the other three girls, sitting in a row together were asked the same question, Ariel answered for the group, "We're making a... We don't know what we're doing. We're just doing."

Then Jordan could be heard saying, "Let's do it like this, Ariel" as she directed the other girls to use a new tool in the software.

The audience that counted the most for Sydney and her friends was the collaborative group they'd formed during the creation process. In the end all three girls produced Screen as Landscape stories with similar images.

As noted previously, Sydney was not a verbal child. According to her teacher, she rarely talked during class. Perhaps being so quiet, she managed to make her silences and her wordless utterances - like the long sigh in her first story - meaningful. There are silences in her third recording where she seems to think long and hard about how to get quickly to the next sentence, and then to the end of her story. An example is her third panel. She starts the sentence, "This is a rainbow..." with a lift in her voice as if she has more to say about the rainbow. And judging from her journal writing, I think she is capable of saying more. But her goal is to get this done soon, so after a long pause, she

restates the phrase, *this is a rainbow*, only this time ending it flatly in a sentence. Her last panel she goes through speedily, knowing she is near the end.

Two other occurrences convinced me that Sydney's final text was influenced by anticipation of a future audience. Occurrence number one was that she persevered through re-recording in the first place. I do not think she wanted to be sitting at the third author's chair event and once again be the only one without a story to share. The other occurrence happened when her third story was projected on the big screen during the final author's chair event.

Earlier, when she was finishing up her final composition, I had come by and asked her what her story was about. She told me that the final screen was "a girl looking at a robot." At the time, I just accepted her statement even though I didn't see a robot in the image.

Later during the screening, when the other participants began commenting on whether they could see the robot or not, she dared a rare burst of words to say that she had purposely hid it so that they would have to find it while they watched. This brought even more conversation among her peers about who could see the robot, and where it might be located on the screen. Now this could have been on the spot justification for there being no robot (that I could see) but I will take her at her word that it was a pre-planned hide-and-seek treat for her future audience.

Sydney, despite her reluctance to talk in a research study about talking, and despite her poor luck with technical difficulties, had moved over the course of the study from a one sentence story (repeated three times) that she just wanted to get done with, to

a composer who had planted an I-Spy game in her digital story for her audience's entertainment. A future teacher might be interested in knowing that opportunities to write and talk for an audience could be a key factor in drawing Sydney out of her reticence to speak.

African American Language as a Resource for Storytelling

I have detailed how 4 of the 8 participants' stories evolved over time as their awareness of their audience grew. Next I would like to look again at Ariel's final text as an example of how some of the students drew on resources of the AAL semantic patterns when they wanted to make their final texts more entertaining. While most of the students in this study were not users of AAL phonology, AAL semantic and stylistic patterns have typically crossed class and generational lines among African Americans (Ball, 1998). One caveat: these stories are very short texts from young and beginning storytellers; the theory that is applied to analyze them should not outweigh them.

So with a light touch, not a heavy hand, the final panel of Ariel's third story is presented in Figure 5.13 as an example of her drawing from AAL as a language resource (Ball, 1998). In her tiny text, she offers a bit of signifying, or misdirecting word play ("this is an interesting story because I hate it"), and a call out to a sermonic tone by ending her story with an "Amen."

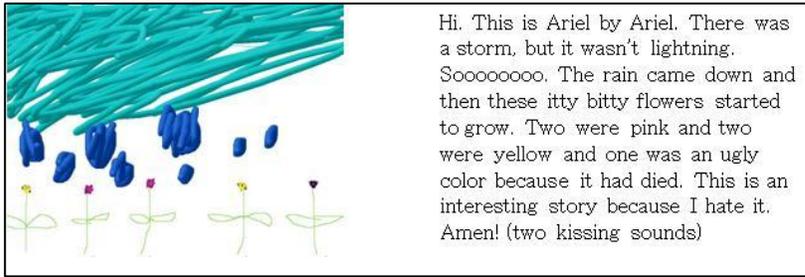


Figure 5.13. Ariel uses aspects of AAL (African American Language)

Of course there was not one single language resource that all the participants drew upon. In fact, the one overriding characteristic found in all the students' final digital stories was an increased emphasis on performance (Michaels, 1981) and the performance indicators were produced mostly in the orally recorded portion of the stories. The idea of performance, links back to AAL as well and the oral tradition of African American communities, and the "oral virtuosity" that was cited by Boykin as a strength in the African American community.

The following table (Table 5.1) summarizes the students' strategy moves that were not in the students' first efforts, but appeared in their later digital stories.

| Strategy Moves | Mode | Examples |
|--|--------------------------|---|
| Oral Virtuosity - Performance, hyperbole and variance in vocal tone, African American Oral Tradition | Oral recordings of texts | Baron's and Jordan's stylized "uhs" (Figures 5.6 , 5.9) Ariel's use of misdirection or signifying, "This story is esting because I hate it." (Figure 4.20) Jordan's call and response, "Okay? Okay?" (Figure 5.6) |
| Conversational, Direct Appeal to Audience | Oral recordings of texts | Terrence's appeal to audience "not to laugh." (Figure 5.3, Tony's "there's that thing again" as he casually tells his audience he doesn't know the name of the cornucopia. (Figure 4.25) |

| | | |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
| Abrupt, shocking plot developments | Story line (spoken in the oral recordings, but not shown in the images) Digital images | Kevin’s gorilla, (spoken about but not shown) (Figure 4.18) The baby duck as “pink stuff” in the road. (image) (Figure 4.19) Lightning strike – Ariel (Figure 4.19) Lightning strike – Terrence (Figure 5.2) |
|------------------------------------|---|---|

Figure 5.1. Strategy moves

I noted these examples to demonstrate the meanings and purposes of the texts the children created. Their intent, both stated and implied, was to entertain and to get the desired reaction from a future audience. Ariel stated plainly that her intention in her last story was to “make Baron laugh his head off.”

This chapter provided a look at the meanings and purposes of the texts the students created. I have attempted in this section to share a closer look at the students’ stories, focusing on how they changed over the course of the project, and how their growing sense of audience provided a catalyst for that change.

Participant Story Content

After spending so much time with the student stories, one might be prompted to ask: Where did the children get their ideas for their stories? We know Baron included in his texts ideas from pop culture, cartoons, television shows, and games he enjoyed. There were a multitude of flowers, cloudy skies, starry skies, and stick figure girls in these digital stories, typical things kids might draw if given blank paper and crayons. More curious are the instances of strange and tragic mishaps of characters getting heat stroke, getting “shocked” by lightning, getting run over by cars, and other woeful tales of agony.

When the participants were asked why they chose these themes, most of the participants were definitive with variations of the same answer: “I wanted to be funny.” In fact, before they were tasked with making their third and final story, most of the students had a goal of “making everyone laugh.” Exceptions were Baron, who remarked that he would make a tale of “talking fish with arms” and Terrence’s stated goal of making a “scary” story. (The tale of squirting blood and other bodily entrails would soon follow).

Most of them sought an audience reaction. Kevin summed things up nicely for the group in his post interview when he said he considered a good story one that makes people “be like nice or funny or mean.” In other words, a good story makes people feel something.

In his post interview, Kevin elaborated that he wrote about the man getting run over because his mother wouldn’t let him sit in certain areas in the car because she was afraid he would “jump out and get run over.” Many of the stories did have that feel: a feel of those dangers mothers typically warned us about when we were very young: lightning, the busy street, getting too hot or too cold.

Researchers like Cooper (1993) and Engel (1999, 2005) consider stories a way that children can take on concepts that frighten them in a playful and empowering manner. Wright, et al. (2008) found that while an adult bystander was disturbed by a child’s particularly violent story presentation in an early childhood classroom, the other children were not troubled at all. The researchers theorized that the children might not consider death permanent. Regardless, they felt they needed to reassure parents that

disturbing material was typical of student stories, more than they needed to calm and comfort the children involved.

Corsaro (1985) noted that children's imaginative play and stories often included themes of death and rebirth, lost and found, danger and rescue. According to him this allowed children to challenge shared sources of fear and overcome them. In the case of the current research study, most of the danger and death was an unresolved punch line at the end of the student stories. While factors indicated in previous research obviously played a role in these first graders' stories, there was also a strong intent to garner a strong reaction --- usually laughter -- from their peer audience.

Introducing the Transactional Role of the Audience

Kevin's quote mentioned above is significant: Good stories "make" the audience "be like nice or funny or mean." Good stories touch the audience emotionally. The characteristics of the digital storytelling are ideal for producing emotional responses. In an earlier project (Solomon, 2009) I argued that young children had stronger, more physical reactions to their digital compositions which communicated across multiple sign systems, than they had to traditional forms of classroom texts. Matthews-DeNatale (Retrieved December 15, 2009 from <http://www.educause.edu/Resources/StorytellingintheAgeoftheInter/159755>) was surprised to find that her students were more personally involved -- physically, emotionally, and intellectually -- with their digital stories than with any other task she assigned.

Indeed, the participants in this study reacted to their stories being shown during Computer Author's Chair differently than I had seen with traditional author's chair circumstances. During the presentation of his stories, Kevin paced the room like an expectant father from an old television show. While her story played, Jordan put her fingers in her ears and closed her eyes. Ariel covered the whole sides of face with her hands and pressed *hard*. Starla slumped down in her chair like a person about to commit perjury. (In Figure 3.2 you can catch a glimpse of Starla with her hands covering her ears as her story is played.) And Terrence swung back and forth in the teacher's swivel chair, looking surly and uncomfortable.

They seemed to want more control over their message at the time of the event. Perhaps they wanted to be able to make changes to their performance on the spot, as they gauged audience reaction in real time. This on-the-fly revision is just not possible in many computer based presentations. I noted in the previous project cited above that an important consideration for young composers of digital media was control over their texts once they pushed the save and publish buttons. Due to this lack of control, the participants in this study seemed to experience a more sophisticated sense of audience than most young children are exposed to. The participants in this study developed an awareness of what I term the transactional role of the audience.

I borrow the idea of a transaction from Rosenblatt's theories on the reading process. Rosenblatt described reading as a mutual process where meaning was not exclusive to the page or the reader, but somewhere between both parties. The reading of the text is an event in time, a happening between reader, text and context (Ottinen, 2000).

Similarly, Bakhtin's idea of dialogic describes interactions with texts as a meeting between the text, the reader, and different readers, writers, contexts, as well as the past, present and the future. There is a "constant interaction between meanings," Bakhtin claimed, and those meanings have the "potential of conditioning others" (Bakhtin, 2002, p. 426). The students in this study discovered that transactional role of their audience. Their attempts to control and choose the reaction of their audience were made futile by the mutual and equal role the audience had in the sharing of their digital stories.

The idea of a transactional role for the audience led me to look more closely at previous research on audience awareness. Since digital storytelling is relatively new area of interest to researchers, it was actually hard to find appropriate research for this study.

Audience awareness is often taught as a component of good writing instruction. Advocates of process writing programs (Graves, 1983; Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2007) consider audience awareness a key part of the revision process. Audience awareness instruction appears in the form of peer response opportunities in classroom writing workshop formats. However, at the elementary and secondary levels, these peer revision experiences tend to focus only on issues of wording and grammatical errors (Butterfield, et al., 1996).

While much of the research on audience awareness and student writers focuses on upper grade and college level students in persuasive writing contexts, a few studies have focused on primary composers and their sense of audience. Kos and Maslowski (2001) found that the second graders in their study were often aware of their audience's needs, but valued their own needs more. That is, faced with an audience who specifically

requested more information, or expressed confusion, the children refused to revise, or expand their writing, unless it could be done during the oral sharing of their texts, or tagged quickly to the end. Re-writing was a no-go for those primary writers.

Wollman-Bonilla (2001) also researched young writers and audience awareness. She worked with first graders who wrote persuasive notes home to their family with the goal of getting a targeted response. For instance, a child writing home about a classmate getting a puppy got the desired response from her parents when they wrote back that in the near future she would get one as well. The children developed tactics for gaining the desired response from their anticipated audience, including strategy moves that resembled the tactics of the participants in the current study. Strategy moves appealed to the audiences' emotions and sense of humor. Also, like the first graders in the present study, Wollman-Bonilla's participants integrated the use of these tactics while composing the first and only drafts of their texts.

I found previous literature documenting students' attempts to control their future audience's responses, but I could not find much beyond the theories of Rosenblatt and Bakhtin about young children's stories being confronted by an audience with their own ideas about the texts. In Chapter 2, I noted that Dyson thought the idea of young children offering suggestions on their peers' writing could be problematic. In the following paragraphs, I relate the narrative of students in this study as they encounter the transactional role of the audience.

There were three author's chair events planned and carried out for this research project. They were an occasion for the participants in the current study to share their

compositions in front of an audience of their fellow participants. I have used data gathered from these events throughout my analysis.

As noted previously, sharing their texts (beyond papers being hung for display outside the classroom) was a fairly new experience for these students. In my role as researcher, I offered little guidance on how they should respond to each others' texts, other than asking them, "What did you think?" Or, "What did you like about that story?"

From the beginning, Kevin was the most ebullient during these events, and Terrence was the most reluctant. On the audio tape of the first author's chair event, Kevin can be heard laughing downright uproariously as Starla's first effort (Figure 5.14) played on the big screen.



Figure 5.14. Starla's first story

The following transcript of the conversation that occurred after Starla's digital story is shown:

Researcher: What'd we like about her story?

Kevin: It was kind of funny.

Researcher: Yeah, Kevin. What was so funny? Why were you laughing so much?

Terrence: This is serious. It isn't very nice.

Researcher: It's okay to be funny.

Kevin: The first part is really funny.

Researcher: What else do we like?

Jordan: It's cute.

Kevin: Her voice was nice. *(A few minutes earlier, I had complimented him on speaking loud and clear into the microphone.)*

Starla: Well, all I did was draw a picture of stars.

From the tone of her voice, Starla was genuinely perplexed by Kevin's laughter.

Whatever reaction she expected when she realized the others would view her piece, I do not think she was expecting anyone to think it was funny. This seemed to be the study's initial incidence of a participant encountering an incongruent audience reaction.

Whatever made Kevin laugh so hard came from his own background and experience, but his laughter seemed to make Starla wonder about her own text. "All I did was draw a picture of stars," she said, as if she were thinking through her story again trying to ferret out what was so darn funny. What Dyson thought could be problematic, this audience input from peers, was indeed a puzzle for Starla.

Starla's final digital story (Figure 5.15) was well received during the third author's chair event. Her audience happily quacked along with her as the story played on the big screen. Later, Tony would report that it was his favorite story of the project, because it was "funny that a duck would be in the street."

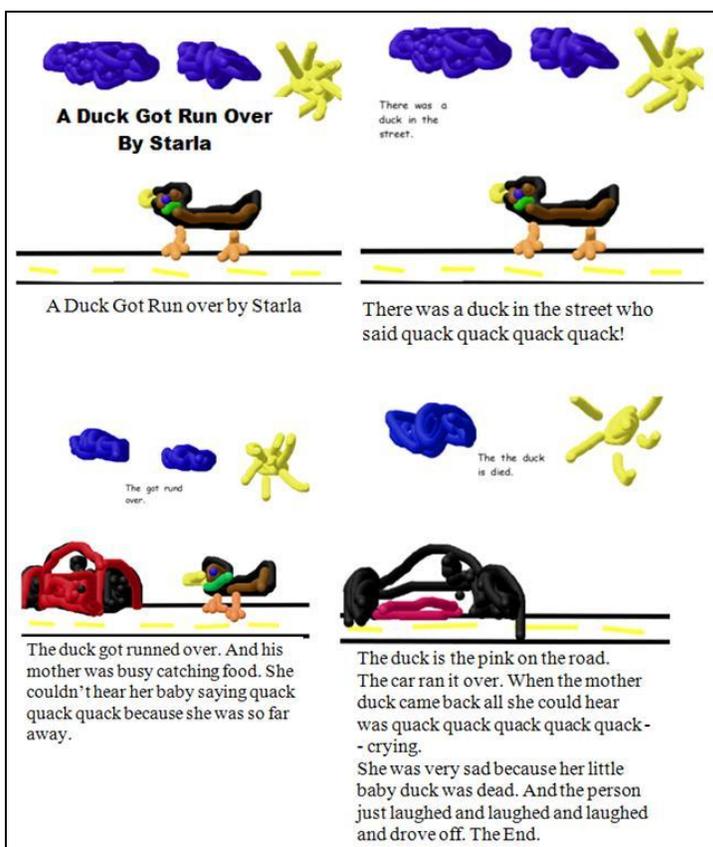


Figure 5.15. Starla's third story

The video camera caught the look on her face as I and another student commented that we thought her movie was sad. Starla didn't say anything, but a quizzical look crossed her face, once again indicating that she didn't expect or understand our reaction to her work. Like most of the other participants, Starla had stated after the second author's chair event that she wanted this final story to "make everyone laugh." Yet two participants stated they found her story sad. Her short, puzzled look indicated that bump into the wall of others' perceptions, suddenly just as valid as her own intentions for her story.

During Starla's post interview, she was very eager to report what had occurred when she played her story DVD at home. She even made me rewind her final story twice so she could provide play-by-play commentary on the specific parts where her family laughed.

“We can go back. You'll see... look... Like you're going to hear like... I made it kind of funny. You're going to hear it. Did you hear that part? I made that kind of funny. I added an extra quack. And I said streeeeeeeeiiiit. My mom laughed on the quacks and she laughed when I said streeeeeeeeiiiit.”

Though Starla's stated goal for this story was to be “funny,” at her post interview, she refused to take direct credit for the parts her family laughed at the most. She claimed that she “made it funny because I was nervous” while recording. Still she laughed delightedly, as she recalled the parts her mother thought was funny, and how surprised her niece was when the man in the car drove off laughing.

Starla's encounters with the transactional role of the audience had been confusing for her as she participated in computer author's chair with us at school. How could her first star story be so funny, and then, how could some of her audience find her third funny story, “sad?” At home however, she found a more compatible audience, and her commentary about her family's reaction indicated that their response had added to her own enjoyment of the story.

Starla had not only made significant advancements as a storyteller, as you can see from Figures 5.14 and 5.15, she also had developed an appreciation for her audience's response to her stories, at least an audience who's reaction matched her expectations. Her

story, and the memory of the audience response she got at home, was something for her to savor and added value to her creation. It seemed that audience response was more than something to be feared or puzzled over; it could also enhance the storytelling experience.

Jordan did not simply make a polite, puzzled face when she did not get the audience reaction she wished. She got downright mad. During the third author's chair event, she got in an argument with Ariel because Ariel had said Jordan's story was "kind of blurry." Ariel meant that Jordan had spoken too loud and too close to the microphone when she recorded her text, so some of her words were hard to understand. I had noticed this just after Jordan finished recording the story and asked her if she wanted to re-record it. She had replied, no, her mother would like it no matter what. But Ariel called her out on it.

Jordan's favorite comment for everyone's stories was, "It's cute." So she demanded of Ariel, "Why can't you just say it's cute?" The two argued about whether or not Ariel had indeed said it was "cute." Eventually Tony broke up the argument by complimenting Jordan's use of the Pixie software's finger painting tool. "That's something I couldn't do," he said, probably falsely, trying to placate his fellow first grader.

Once again, the young composer was faced with an audience response that was discordant from the expected reaction. Once Jordan's story was played for an audience, her audience suddenly had the right to share opinions and interpretations that had not been sanctioned by Jordan. Suddenly she was aware of the transactional role of her audience and that her text, once displayed, had become a thing open to the interpretations

and criticisms of others. She learned a lesson similar to what every playwright knows: you write your play just the way you want to, then each actor feels compelled to put a personal spin on your characters, then director has his own vision; the venue, the lighting, the availability of parking have their influence as well. Finally the audience experiences the story through their own filters. It might be gratifying for experienced writers to know that a single tale can branch off in many directions and have many meanings. But Jordan found this transactional role of audience unacceptable and attempted to dictate what should be the proper reaction to her story.

Baron provided an interesting example in his encounter with the transactional role of the audience. When I first talked to Baron during his post interview, he surprised me by denying he had changed his voice for entertainment purposes in his last two digital stories. He denied using that creepy, low, alien voice for the title of “Aliens In America,” and he denied changing his voice for his Pokemon friend Wingull in his final story. I was determined to do a member check with these first graders as part of my triangulation strategy, so I was pretty insistent that he had indeed changed his voice, and he became almost belligerent in his assertion that he had not done so. I had questions: Why was he denying what was obvious on the tape?

Tony helped to shed light on Baron’s reaction for me. Tony and Sydney did their post interview together. While Sydney silently affirmed that she had shown her DVD at home and that her family had liked it, Tony reported that playing his at home had been “sort of embarrassing.” When I asked him why he thought it was so embarrassing, he said, “because they laughed.” His response reminded me of Terrence, who from the

beginning was aware of possible audience reactions to his stories, and had gone out of his way to avoid having laughter directed anywhere near his digital stories.

I began to understand why Baron had reacted the way he did during the member check. Starla, who had enjoyed the reaction of her home audience, had stressed that she had done those funny things with her voice because she was nervous. Baron's strategy was just to deny he had been so creative all together. Like Tony, I guessed that Baron had been embarrassed by his family's reaction to his digital stories. Once again, the encounter with an audience who did not react as he thought they should have was an unhappy one.

Because I still had questions, I scheduled another interview with Tony, Kevin, and Baron, so we could talk again about the experience of sharing their DVD with their families. The three agreed that it was embarrassing when their families had laughed at their stories. It seemed a lot of the embarrassment came from hearing their own recorded voice through the television, which for most people can be an unnerving experience. The initial embarrassment had not stopped them from playing the DVD again, as they all said they'd watched it more than once.

During the interview, the boys diverged on their own accord into what they would do the next time to get a more suitable response from their families. Baron said emphatically, "I'm not going to be as funny next time!" Tony agreed with him, while Kevin mentioned that his sister really liked the gorilla part in his second story, so he would include more gorillas in future digital stories. The transaction between author and audience became a cycle, as they plotted how they might more aptly fit future digital stories more closely to what had been appealing to the audience.

I started this chapter with data that showed how audience awareness was a key factor in how the students' stories change over time. I end it with the boys' problem solving for future encounters with audience. These students were just beginning to contemplate a deeper role of audience in their thinking and planning their compositions. The audience was a living, breathing entity that had its own thoughts and feelings and interpretations of the work. Different audiences react differently to the same text. An author's own meanings and purposes are not just transported into the audience's head, the audience themselves have a filter that controls the meanings and purposes they see in the work. The author then considers his audience's response in planning his next composition. The audience's role in digital storytelling is transactional, similar to what we know about the relationship between book author and reader (Rosenblatt, 1996) where both book author and reader share a mutual and equal role in creating meaning. The audience's role can be something to fear or to be embarrassed about. It can be puzzling or make one angry. It can be pleasant when it closely matches the author's own intentions, or it can challenge the author to create a new text with better results.

Did this enhanced encounter with audience make the experience too traumatic for these first graders? I do not think so. Except for butting heads with Baron during that ill-fated attempt to member check, the participants were mostly matter-of-fact when expressing their embarrassment. And those thoughts did not dominate their final discussions. As a whole they were enthusiastic about the stories they created. When I asked them about their favorite parts of the project, they mentioned drawing, making stories, and sharing them. Although they were still sponges, easily taking on my ideas if I

was not careful with my opinions, they seemed to be developing their own sense of what made a good tale, expressing ideas that were filtered through their own experiences with story.

CHAPTER SIX

The participants in this study have gone on to second grade by the time of this writing. Most have left the school where the research experience took place. It really was a strange occurrence that so many African American children (12 total) were in the same grade at a school that generally had a small African American population.

Terrence moved to a neighborhood further north and west in the same district; his new teacher has already called with questions about his slow progress. According to Baron, Arial, his cousin, now attends the private school just down the street from the school. Starla, with her lovely clothes and brightly beaded braids, moved to Arlington; her mother got an opportunity to go to nursing school there. Jordan and Sydney disappeared over the summer to parts unknown, and Mrs. G. jokingly fretted in passing that so many of her ex-students had left the school. “Did I drive them off or what?” she wondered out loud.

Tony and Baron were two of the remaining students; they were both in the same class with a teacher who was a little overwhelmed with the number of special needs students in her class. She confirmed Tony’s hard shell of confidence and bravado that I witnessed that made it hard to correct and refocus him during literacy tasks. And since she held a daily writing workshop, she had witnessed Baron’s whacky and wonderful

authoring ability. She was actually a little surprised to hear that he'd been so quiet and non-participative in 1st grade. "He's really coming out his shell then," she said. She reported that both boys were confident leaders in her class.

Kevin was in the class across the hall, and at first his second grade teacher seemed unsure what to make of him. One Friday earlier in the year I dropped by and sat beside him as the class took the weekly spelling test. I was surprised to look at his paper and see nothing written down. The numbers 1-15 were scrawled down the side of his spiral page, and I could see the devastation left by a very poor eraser next to each number. His teacher made a face and rolled her eyes in exasperation with him over his and her other students' heads. By the time I sat down beside him, it was time for the challenge words. With me sitting there looking over his shoulder, he spelled the last 10 hardest words correctly without a moment's consternation and without erasing. His test grade would remain poor however because his opportunity to spell the first fifteen easy words had long since past.

By the spring semester, Kevin's teacher knew him better and seemed to have warmed up to his quirkiness. She told funny stories about his antics with genuine warmth in her eyes. She'd come to know the keen intelligence that flitted ethereally betwixt and between the scattered, disorganized, not-quite-of-this-earth waves that animated from him as he interacted in the staid and structured classroom environment.

I saw the three boys often when I went to the school to visit old friends I used to teach with or to help out in the school's computer lab. We treated each other as ancient friends who once shared a playhouse. Kevin was usually in a hurry when I saw him; often several steps behind the rest of his class as if he was the last student ready to leave the

room. He moved with purpose, his upper body leaning forward into the wind of his life, his brow knit due to some mundane earthly task that momentarily perplexed him.

Tony was generally near the front of his line. He was a handsome, curly-headed boy who walked with the air of a future safety patrol or class president. His demeanor was one of someone who could stop and pontificate broadly on a number of subjects. You just had to ask.

Baron was usually at the back of his line, stealthily playful, conspiratorially sharing a secret or joke with the other back-of-the-line-boys. He leaned into another little boy, whispered something and then pulled back; the other little boy then turned a bit and returned his sly grin.

One time I overheard Baron say with a huge grin, “I am going to sue you.” I knew of course he was talking to his friends, but I pretended I thought he was talking to me.

“Sue me?” I said, trying to join the joke. “Please don’t sue me!”

Baron’s big smile never wavered, but he didn’t answer me, and I got the feeling from the slight tightness around his eyes that he did not think I was funny, nor did I belong in his joke. I quickly got the message and stepped out.

The Need for Digital Story

I titled this dissertation, “The Need for Digital Story” because I sought to extend previous research on the role of storytelling in multicultural primary school settings into the digital age. I used the theme of “need” in the introduction chapter to emphasize the

importance of further research in the areas of new literacies, digital mediators, and digital equity, particularly in terms of children from diverse backgrounds. From the first page, it was explicitly stated that this study was not meant to be about computers or software; it was meant to be about story. However, the study design intentionally made technology part of every step of the story making and story sharing processes.

Three questions provided continual guidance throughout this study's implementation:

- What is the nature of texts that African American first graders create while using digital tools. (e.g., editing software, drawing software)
- What role do the digital tools play in the students' creation process?
- What meanings and purposes do they attribute to the digital stories they create?

To answer these questions I relied upon data collected across multiple sources. Data sources included student pre and post interviews, questionnaires from parents and teachers, field notes of informal interviews and student work sessions, classroom observations, video and audio recordings of student work sessions and the three computer author's chair events, member checks, informal interviews with students and teachers, and importantly, transcripts and archived recordings of the stories the students created.

The study took place over three months in the spring of 2008, with follow-up interviews and member checks continuing into the fall of 2008. Analyzing the variety of data required different types of analysis. Case and cross case analysis (Merriam, 1998)

were employed to generate understandings about students from their interviews and the parent and teacher interviews. Constant-Comparative techniques (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) were used to identify the researcher's role (outlined in chapter 3) and to find patterns across multiple sources of data, including the students' texts themselves. From the analysis stage, hypotheses were drawn and then checked across data sources in the interest of triangulation. Negative cases were sought out to refine hypotheses and safeguard credibility. In Chapters Four and Five, I detailed my findings and their relationship to the three research questions guiding this study.

In this chapter, I summarize the findings of this study as they relate to the study's questions. I then consider the theoretical implications of the findings as well as the implications for practice. Finally, I discuss my recommendations for future research and conclude by summarizing the purposes and outcomes of this study.

The Nature of the Digital Texts the First Graders Produced

Presented in the previous chapters are the digital stories that first graders created. Much analysis went into trying to categorize these "stories" to determine their nature. Eventually, I took my focus away from merely looking at the texts as solitary entities, and began considering the contexts in which they were created, as well as the experiences and personality of the child who crafted them. In the end, I determined that the nature of the texts was both a product of the students' culture and past experiences with composing stories, and a product of their attitude, or stance, toward using the digital tools.

An important aspect of understanding the nature of the texts produced in this study is understanding why many of them are not what we traditionally consider “stories.” Yet they are labeled “stories” throughout this dissertation. To begin the study, participants were given the task to “make a story” and then given time and technical support to complete the task. The study was designed to be exploratory, and allow for as little interference from the researcher as possible. While I set them the task of making a “story,” I did not define what the term story meant to me, nor did I ask them what they thought a story was. In fact, in their pre-study interviews, many of the first graders had trouble answering the question: “What makes a good story?” While they were all confident that they were good at telling and writing stories, most of them could not speak to the attributes that made a story “good.” If you recall, from the chart presented in Chapter 4, the students had definite ideas about what made them good writers. The data supported the supposition that the students were probably parroting motifs they frequently heard from their teachers. However, the data did not reveal if the students understood the idea of “story” in the way I do.

This lack of understanding might stem from a hole in their first grade curriculum. The students wrote for many purposes – they wrote as seatwork while the teacher took care of Monday morning business, they wrote to evaluate spelling and punctuation progress, and they wrote in response to content area lessons to show their understanding of targeted concepts – but missing was the opportunity to write for writing’s sake. The data collected from their writing journals showed scarce opportunities to write stories, or to make choices about their writing.

Adding to all these factors is previous research on African American children and storytelling. Research by Champion (1994) and Michaels (1981, 1996) revealed diverse types of texts generated from African American children's storytelling. While European-American children are highly likely to tell stories in the traditional, linear style that is broadly privileged in schools, African American children often vary much more broadly, with some using the traditional linear style, and others choosing a topic associative oral style. This variation was mirrored in this research project. Traditional stories were produced as well as other forms.

Once I stopped looking at the texts as narrative entities on to themselves, I was able to find a framework that most closely defined the types of texts the first graders produced in this study. Labbo's 1996 study of kindergarteners using a classroom computer center identified stances that the children took as they sat before the screen. Labbo's stances were adapted and extended here to categorize the digital stories produced in this study. The nature of the texts could be understood by their composer's attitude toward the computer (Labbo referred to all the digital tools involved as the "screen" in her stances) and the evidence of their attitude could actually be identified by characteristics in the texts themselves.

Labbo described her Screen as Stage stance as one where students enacted events and created multi-scene stories using the software tools. In the present study, students who took a Screen as Stage stance created digital stories with characteristics similar to a movie, where one storyline is played out across multiple panels in a linear fashion. These

stories were heavily plot driven, and dominated by the story idea the participant brought to the process.

A counter to Screen as Stage is a Screen as Landscape stance. In Labbo's work, children who approached their task with a Screen as Landscape stance explored the screen, experimented with the software tools available, and mapped the entire screen space. In the present study, a typical Screen as Landscape text showed evidence of experimentation as students filled the entire space of their screen with strokes of color, and interacted with different tools. Students who took on this stance allowed the manipulation of the screen to be their road into the story making task, a pre-composing strategy. These stories were dominated by the images that experimentation produced, and generally lacked an identifiable plot or linear movement. Two other stances identified by Labbo and adapted for this study were a Screen as Canvas stance and a Screen as Playground stance. A table in Chapter Four (Table 4.2) summarizes Labbo's stances and shows how this study extended them to young children composing digital stories.

A new stance, Screen as Science Lab, was generated to satisfy the data collected in the present study. This stance is a hybrid stance between Screen as Landscape and Screen as Stage. Children using this stance approached the task with a plot idea, but depended upon experimentation to fill in how their story would eventually flesh out. An example of Screen as Science Lab would be the child who stated before beginning that he would create a story about "talking fish." He had the idea that he wanted to create a story about fish, but experimented with the capabilities of the software to create those fish and flesh out his idea.

While the traditional, movie-like Screen as Stage stories are likely to receive high praise in schools, I consider hybrid texts created from a Screen as Science Lab stance the texts that most fully integrate the powers of the technology with the powers of the human storyteller.

The Role of Digital Tools in the Creation Process

The answer to this question was closely related to the previous one, which was the reason it was impossible to isolate the texts from the technology and the composer. For this question I had to focus on the opportunities that the technology offered the young composers as they attempted to make meaningful texts. The digital tools played the role of both a buffet table offering a full menu of choices from which the participants could create, and also played a role similar to Shakespeare's character Touchstone, reflecting the child's personality and attitude toward working with computers.

Although digital storytelling is a relatively new area for research and schools, there are many incidences of the genre to be found on the web. At the time I began this study, most digital storytelling projects required the participants to plan their story by traditional means first, gather their photos or images to fit their plan, draft, and then finally take their work to the computer (Sylvester & Greenidge, 2009). Even though the stories were called "digital" stories, the technology was merely a final step in the process.

Such project designs do not fit with what previous research says about composing with computers (Kress, 2003b; Matthewman & Trigg, 2004). Writing with computers defies the idea of a linear writing process where publishing is always the last step. To the

contrary, Matthewman and Trigg found that considerations for publishing such as font choices or how the page is formatted often come before drafting when writing with computers. Kress also identified a skewed writing process, where composers slip in and out of drafting, editing, revision, and publishing stages frequently while working. An added consideration was the fact that these young children had limited experiences using the computer to tell stories, so if they waited to “publish” on the computer, how would they be able to integrate the technology’s capabilities into their composing process? How would they learn the affordances of the digital (Rowse & Pahl, 2006) if the crafting of the story was complete before they even touched the computer?

For these reasons, I designed this study so that the digital tools would be a part of all phases of the storytelling. Students began their stories by drawing at the computer, ended their stories with digital voice recordings, shared their stories with each other using an LCD projector in the computer lab, and then took their stories home to their families on a DVD.

It is certainly true that the digital environment of this study shaped the participants’ processes and products. The severe, straight rows of unwieldy computers on long tables in the lab, along with the large monitors and headphones, seemed to stifle the collaborative spirit of first graders’ writing (Dyson, 1993). The social process that is well documented in Dyson’s work, and referred to in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, most strongly appeared in the participants’ attentiveness to their future audience, and did not dominate the work environment of the study. Until the final round of story making, the participants’ ideas and images did not have the feel of a collaborative effort.

By the end of the study, the most industrious participants had overcome some of the barriers listed above. Three of girls grouped together to produce images for their last text. Also, there was some evidence that a participant composed a first version of his digital story as a joke for a friend sitting close by, and then created a second version meant for whole group viewing.

However limiting the digital tools were to the social world of first grader writers, they did serve as a buffet table of choices available for the children's meaning making. Pen color and size, the careful selection and placement of stamps, and the design of the screen space were all available considerations that the students used ably. Two of the boys found creating a background to be such an important part of the design that they spent many minutes editing the stock background images for each of their panels. I asked the boys why their backgrounds were so important, and they could not express their thoughts other than saying "it just is (important)," but it did serve to illustrate that these young students made design decisions specifically to communicate meaningfully. Also, most students, particularly in their latter texts, depended upon the digital recordings of their voices to add the elements of performance (Michaels, 1981) and oral virtuosity (Boykin, 1994) to their stories – that is, they seemed to call upon one of their cultural resources, the African American oral tradition – in their efforts to entertain.

While partaking of this smorgasbord of meaning making modes, the children managed to embed a bit of themselves into their digital texts. In Chapter 4, I referred to the work of Rowsell and Pahl (2007) who combined theories of text and sociocultural theories to define *sedimented identities* – the traces of identity that are left within the

objects that children create. One participant, Kevin, had a persistent theme of money exchanges across all three of his digital texts so we can understand how much Kevin's life was influenced by the convenience store that his father owned. Similarly, Jordan's first text clearly displayed her awareness of the distinctions that made up her bi-racial family as she carefully designated the mouse pen colors to indicate precisely who was European American, who was African American, and who was of mixed race in her illustrations.

The digital tools did more than provide a buffet table of multimodality. The materiality (Kress, 1997), the physical process of actually using the tools and performing the act of creating a digital story played a role in what became the completed text. I use the analogy of a touchstone to describe this second role of the digital in the creation process. Touchstone, Shakespeare's character, offered insights into the sensibilities and perspectives of the other characters around him. Also, a touchstone, when used as an assaying tool, reveals the true worth of other stones.

Participant Tony is a good example of the computer's touchstone effect. He was a very confident computer user. Both his pre-interview and his parent questionnaire reflected multiple opportunities to use computers at home and at school. He was even registered for pay-to-play websites for kids that he used frequently. His confidence led to digital stories with a high amount of experimentation with the capabilities of the software. He carefully and thoughtfully edited backgrounds in multiple ways and he deftly resized and rotated stamps. In fact, he was such a confident computer user, that a viewer might consider some of his texts more exploration than actual story.

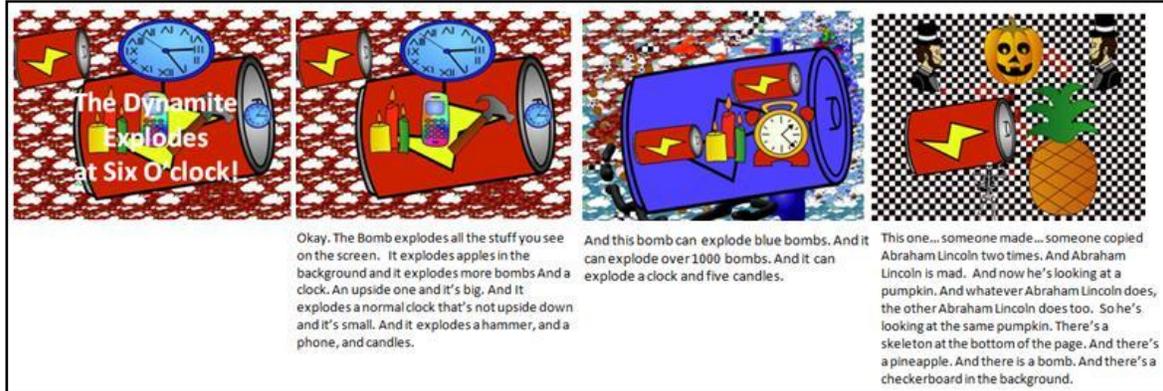


Figure 6.1. Tony's second story displays his competence in manipulating the software

Tony's digital story pictured above displayed his purposeful editing of backgrounds, resizing stamps, and rotating Lincolns. His identity as a confident computer user was reflected in the way he physically used the tools and was sedimented within the text of his digital stories. The digital tools provide a touchstone that revealed his confidence.

Ariel on the other hand, is an example of a student who was not as sure of herself at the computer. Her digital stories mostly featured the pen tool used as a crayon to draw as one might draw on a piece of paper. She did not venture out into the stamps, or backgrounds or tools to make shapes or make her pen larger or smaller. She did not attempt to change textures. In fact, she was so reluctant to experiment with the tools, she put her head down on the keyboard and cried when she found the mouse pen was pre-set to a size too unwieldy for her to draw. She was inconsolable until I came around and reset the pen to a more manageable size.

However, Ariel's final digital story was different. While she crafted her last story, she worked side by side with Jordan, a brasher user of technology. While working with a

confident friend, Ariel was bolder as well. She used a large pen color to make broad stripes of color that filled the page, she stamped a myriad of fish, and she used the fingerpaint tool that smeared the screen contents as if in a blender. In fact, if you placed Jordan's last story and Ariel's last story side by side, it would be easy to see the similarities that their collaboration produced... until Jordan had to leave early. Once Ariel was left on her own, she went back to her most comfortable style, drawing with the mouse as if it had merely the capabilities of a box of crayons.

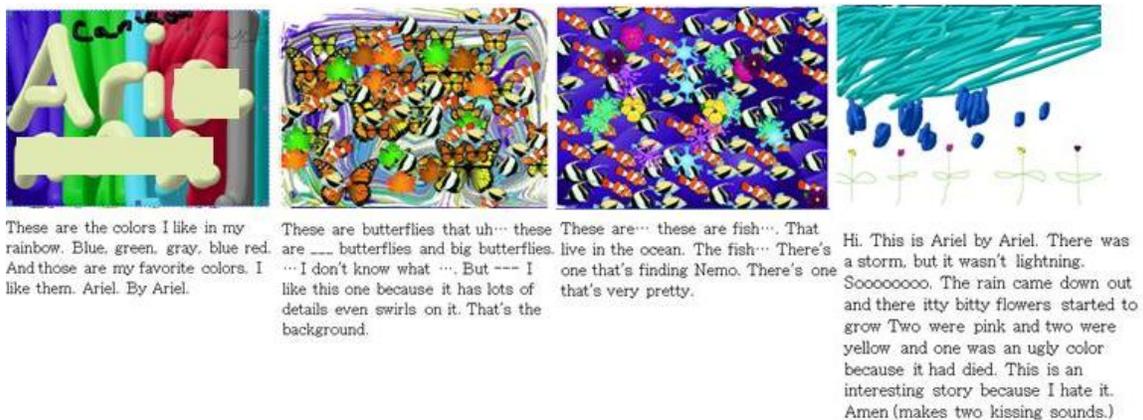


Figure 6.2. Ariel moves from a Screen as Landscape stance to a Screen as Canvas stance

In this figure, you can observe that Ariel's last panel was a crayon-like drawing more like the images in her first two digital stories. The first three panels reflected exploration that was not typical for Ariel. The digital tools served the role of the touchstone as her attitude toward the computer and software were revealed within her stories.

The digital tools played three roles in the creation process. First, the physical arrangement of the digital environment was a barrier to collaboration that the first graders eventually overcame. Second, the affordances of the technology offered a smorgasbord of choices with which to create texts. The first graders showed themselves as highly capable of working across multiple modes to communicate their intended meaning, and in doing so left traces of their identity sedimented into the content. Finally, digital tools served as a touchstone that reflected a bit of their true nature, their attitude toward the physical act of creating a digital story. That is, their confidence level and general attitude toward the physical process of using the digital tools left an imprint on their texts.

Meanings and Purposes the First Graders had for Their Texts

The first graders had many meanings and purposes for the digital texts they created during this study. They experimented, they explored, they composed; they played together and called one another over to share a particularly cool piece of work that appeared on their screen. For the purposes of this dissertation, I focused on one particular meaning and purpose they had: appealing to audience. The data showed that there were differences between the participants' first stories that they composed before they had participated in the computer author's chair and their later stories. These differences add up to more than just the students becoming more comfortable with the tools as the study went along; their later efforts were markedly more geared toward entertaining their peers. An example is the use of "uh" as a spoken placeholder while waiting for the idea to come to mind. Baron's first story included a few "uhs," and they were flat sounds inflected

with little other meaning than just a holding mechanism. Later, in his third piece, Baron used the “uh” again, and while it seemed to serve the same purpose – as a place holder until he gathered his next thought– he infused the utterance with performance by changing his vocal quality and rate of speech. He knew an audience would be hearing those “uhs” so he dressed them up like a character in his story.

Since research on digital storytelling is relatively new, there is very little prior literature on what composers do to signal their attention to audience in this format. Studies featuring young children writing persuasive pieces (Wollman-Bonilla, 2001) showed that the children often employed strategy moves, a device to appeal to the future audience’s emotions. The students in this study also seemed to employ strategy moves as they set about the purpose of entertaining their audience. In interviews conducted during and after the study, most of the students stated that they crafted their story with goal of making their future audience laugh. Due to the nature of the digital story medium, the participants were able to place their strategy moves across multiple phases of communication, oral recordings, images, and plot choices. The mode the students most relied upon was the oral mode as they recorded their stories at the end of the crafting process. Below is a table mapping the strategy moves the students made in their effort to entertain their audience and illicit laughter. This table was first displayed in Chapter 5.

| Strategy Moves | Mode | Examples |
|--|-----------------------------|--|
| Oral Virtuosity - Performance, hyperbole and variance in vocal tone, African American Oral Tradition | Oral recordings of texts | Baron’s and Jordan’s stylized “uhs” (Figures 5.6 , 5.9) Ariel’s use of misdirection or signifying, “This story is esting because I hate it.” (Figure 4.20) Jordan’s call and response, “Okay? Okay?” (Figure 5.6) |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| Conversational, Direct Appeal to Audience | Oral recordings of texts | Terrence’s appeal to audience “not to laugh.” (Figure 5.3, Tony’s “there’s that thing again” as he casually tells his audience he doesn’t know the name of the cornucopia. (Figure 4.25) |
| Abrupt, shocking plot developments | Story line (spoken in the oral recordings, but not shown the images) Digital images | Kevin’s gorilla, (spoken about but not shown) (Figure) The baby duck as “pink stuff” in the road. (image) (Figure) Lightning strike – Ariel (Figure 4.19) Lightning strike – Terrence (Figure 5.2) |

Table 6.1. Strategy Moves

The table attempts to show how students used their images, the storyline, and performance values in their oral recordings to entertain their audience. The oral recordings were the main conveyor of performance in most of the digital texts.

Some observers of these texts might be surprised at the body count these first graders compiled in their digital stories. Lightning strikes, heat stroke, dead flowers, dead baby ducks, and car accidents are all tragedies that populated these tales. However, previous research on young children’s storytelling also reflected a goodly serving of bloodshed, tragedy and death. Corsaro (1985) argued that children’s imaginative play and stories often included themes of death and rebirth, lost and found, danger and rescue. According to Corsaro’s research, these themes allowed children to challenge shared sources of fear and overcome them.

In this study however, the students’ digital stories did not end in a cathartic dénouement where fears were overcome. Instead these stories tended to end abruptly just at the moment of tragedy. This change might have been a result of the digital medium, but I think it was most likely due to the students’ oft stated purpose... to illicit a strong

response from their audience, to make them laugh. Perhaps to them, the funniest part of the cartoon was when Wile. E Coyote got squashed by the boulder.

Laughter proved to be a double-edged sword in the case of many of these students. Once the stories were burned on to DVDs and proudly shown on home televisions before parents and siblings, the performance values and oral virtuosity often became a source of embarrassment. Consider that the first opportunity to hear yourself on a tape recorder can be unsettling, much less hearing your voice through the television speakers. Baron, who spoke in a creepy alien-like voice to introduce the title of his second story, was so embarrassed by the home viewing experience, that later, during a post-interview member check, he flatly denied changing his voice at all.

As the study participants worked through their feelings about showing the texts to different audiences, and their frustration with not being able to control their audiences' responses, I believe they were introduced to a sophisticated notion of audience, the notion that the audience has a transactional role in the story telling experience.

The idea of a transactional role of the audience was inspired by Rosenblatt's (1996) theories of reading. When a child reads, meaning is not simply transferred from text to reader in a uniform fashion. Instead of a transfer, the act of reading is a transaction and the reader, or the audience for the text, has an important role. What exact meaning is conveyed from the text is dependent upon the nature of the reader and his previous experiences with reading. This is a well known concept in reading research, but perhaps not something that is often considered when students are the producers of the texts instead of the consumer.

So while the students spoke of being “embarrassed” upon showing their movies at home, they also began to consider the reactions of their audience as a part of their thinking about their texts, and even future texts. Starla, as she talked about the experience of sharing her story at home during her post-interview, found extra pleasure in the places where her family had laughed, or commented about her text. These pieces of her story were special to her because her audience had found them funny or unusual. Her audience’s reaction became integrated with how she felt about her text. Tony, Baron, and Kevin, after remarking that it had been “embarrassing” to show their stories at home, began a spontaneous conversation on how they might get a more desirable response from their home audience in a future composition.

Theoretical Implications and Implications for Practice

In Chapter Two of this dissertation, I shared three models of literacy and technology integration that echo Vygotsky’s ideas about the role of mediators (Wertsch, 2007). The transformative model holds that technology changes what it means to be literate. The transactional model (Reinking, 1998) states that while technology changes literacy, literate uses of technology also change the technology. Leu postulated a third model that encompassed the previous two: that literacy is deictic – always changing depending upon the temporal and situational space it takes place in. Data and analysis from this study reflected all three models. Certainly what it meant to compose stories was forever changed for these children. Also, the digital tools’ purposes and capabilities morphed as they were wielded differently by each first grader. The theoretical and

practical implications of this study can be placed within the context of one or all of these three models.

Theoretical Implications: Attentiveness to Audience

Every use of technology does not signal a change to what it means to be literate. Teachers who have their students draft with paper and pencil, then publish at the word processor remain rooted in conventional epistemologies and traditional pedagogy. Digital epistemologies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2005), a growing ethos in our burgeoning digital culture, are markedly different from conventional epistemologies. Digital epistemologies emphasize audience: strategies are employed to gain attention or keep attention. High value is placed on interesting moves and ideas. Innovations on old rules and breached boundaries are encouraged. Invention of new rules through risk-taking and trial and error (Wyatt & Kimber-Smith, 2006) is highly touted.

This study exhibits that even young children can partake successfully in this new borderless digital frontier. In this study, the participants often adopted experimentation as their pre-writing strategy, as a pathway into the composition process. They quickly focused on pleasing an audience as their main goal. On their own, they recognized the value of gaining and keeping attention in digital contexts. They used the available resources and multiple modes to strategize, experiment, and invent novel moves so that their composition would succeed in a crowded attention economy (Goldhaber, 1998). While they adeptly crossed multiple modes to communicate, they relied heavily upon oral language variety and creativity to reach their audience.

An attention to audience is not a new concept in the research on African American compositions. Ball (1996) discovered that expository texts of high school students had identifiable and traditional AAL patterns designed to connect with audience. I have previously mentioned the work of Dyson (1991) who found that African American children often aimed their verbal presentations at their particular audience, indicating a performance stance. Dyson (1992) also remarked upon young children's purposeful writing for an audience, referring to their compositions as links in a Bakhtinian communication chain. This study extends these notions into the digital realm and its attention economy.

The freedom offered by digital literacies to work outside the traditional canon may be particularly appealing to African American students. As previously referenced in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, Boykin (1994) recognized a need for individualistic expression as a strength of Afro-centric culture. Alim & Peacock (2007) point out that "flipping the script" (p. 91) is common among hip hop language communities (the present day focus of much of black language research). Black language, like digital epistemologies, is always changing, always generating new rules, always free-form and ever changing. While standard English is limited by structure and rules, Black English is "limitless" (p. 92). In the context of digital epistemologies, and of the attention economy, language difference is no longer language deficient; on the contrary, language inventiveness is prized.

One of the most compelling aspects of this project was the young students' fledgling reflections and thoughtful considerations after experiencing what I termed, the

transactional role of the audience. Hayes (2002) considered the attempt of a writer to experience their composition as their audience might a “complex representational act” (p. 37). Hayes, et al (1986) found that most writers use themselves as their primary model for the future audience and that this strategy was unreliable. To combat this unreliability, protocols were developed to provide writers audience input during the revision process. A similar idea is capitalized upon in process writing workshops where peer editing sessions are employed to aid the writer in audience awareness. The transactional role of the audience in the present study goes a bit further than a revision protocol to ensure writing clarity. This research revealed to the young authors a living, thinking audience who had a shared role in forming the meaning of the composition.

A transactional role in the reading process has long been identified (Rosenblatt, 1996) but a reciprocal relationship in the writing process is not prominent in the research. Digital environments change so many paradigms that we have about composing texts (Jewitt & Kress, 2003; Mitra & Cohen, 1999). The idea of the writer working alone to create a tome full of his furies and meanings is belied; we know that digital compositions and the meanings derived from them are a social event before, during, and due to the data produced in this study, *after* the story has been told. This study breaks new ground in documenting the reactions, thoughts and feelings of children after they have shared their composition with peers and family.

Theoretical Implications: The Digital Texts Themselves

The first teacher who set her class before computers and interacted with a class in another country through the internet, changed the technology by changing its possibilities. In that same moment, the possibilities for literacy were also expanded (Leu, Karchmer, & Leu, 1999). So too a group of first graders who sat before computers, and, in wielding all the power of their social and cultural experiences, created digital texts that were wholly unique and required new understandings of what it means to tell a “story.”

Previous researchers have argued that the characteristics of digital texts change what it means to be literate because they require new ways of reading and writing (Leu, 2000; Reinking, 1995; Reinking et al., 1997). Labbo’s 1996 study, adapted extensively for use in this study, found that kindergarteners used the computers to play, create art, and write. In later commentary, Labbo & Kuhn (1998) claimed that children who use digital tools get the idea that “that composing is a process involving the manipulation of typographic symbols and ideas” (p. 88). Another change is the subordination of alphabetic text to the image in digital formats (Kress, 2003). Karchmer (2001) summed up the differences between electronic texts and traditional texts as follows: “They (a) are interactive and malleable, (b) incorporate audiovisual aids ...and (d) produce alternative text structures” (p. 448).

The data in the present study confirmed previous research about the nature of digital texts. Young children with few school experiences with composing or with computers were not only able to deftly manipulate images and their ideas, most were able to design their texts across several planes of meaning making: images, a storyline that

moved across panels, and vocal recording. An interesting alternative text structure that I labeled “Screen as Science Lab,” appeared as a hybrid between a child’s ideas about the story they want to craft, and what they can produce with the tools available. Although the Screen as Stage stance produced texts that are valuable under traditional measures, this study’s new, hybrid text best takes advantage of the storyteller’s craft and the digital’s affordances.

The new text produced by the African American first graders in this study stretch ideas about what a story is and how stories are composed. These hybrid texts are an exciting and significant clue to the new frontiers that may unfold as more children get more access these tools and more experiences with digital storytelling.

Something else intriguing about these digital texts is the ability to classify them by understanding the attitude, or stance the composer had toward the digital tools involved. The structure and form of the final texts were highly influenced by how comfortable the composer was with the tools. The texts produced in this study illustrate and integrate Kress’ notion of materiality (2003) and Rowsell & Pahl’s (2006) assertion that both the physical process of creating, and the child’s identity could be deposited like sediment into the texts children create.

Practical Implications: From Theory to Practice

While not a major focus of this research, it was exciting to discover that these first graders were sponges for ideas about writing and writers expressed by their teachers (and the researcher). It was good to learn that these children readily adopted information

presented by their knowledgeable others, but this fact requires a concerted effort to provide authentic experiences that help them learn to construct their own knowledge and therefore deeper understandings about topics and concepts.

The openness displayed by the participants is both an opportunity and a challenge to teachers who might consider this study’s implications for practice. The following table outlines the larger theoretical implications discussed previously, and their implications for practice, to be discussed in the rest of this section.

| Theoretical Implications | Implications for Practice |
|---|---|
| First Graders were able to design unique texts by manipulating several modes and several planes of meaning making.. | Children should have opportunities to compose their own texts (digital or otherwise) so that they might gain an insider’s view (Gee, 2003) of how similar messages in the real world are produced and garner meaning. |
| First Graders saw the value of gaining and seeking attention by employing innovative means. Such attention to audience works well in the new attention economy. | Children should have opportunities to compose digital stories so that they may practice with identified media literacy skills including play, appropriation, and performance that have been determined as important in the digital age. |
| First Graders discovered a transactional role between audience and composer. | Children should have opportunities to create stories (digital and otherwise) then share them at home and at school so that they may reflect critically on past compositions and the challenges of future endeavors. |
| The digital texts can be defined by the sedimented identities (both in content and in materiality). | When teachers allow students to create their own texts (digital or otherwise) the curriculum becomes permeable (Dyson, 1993) and more culturally relevant and authentic. |

Table 6.2. Theoretical and Practical Implications

In the chart, I link theoretical implications in the study to implications for classroom practice. Although I separate these implications into separate sections on the chart, an overriding theme that I hope is conveyed is the value of allowing primary

students to create their own texts – and in particular, digital texts – for their own purposes.

In his book, *What Do Video Games have to Teach us about Learning and Literacy*, Gee (2003) discussed the concept of an insider's view of literacy. He compared the knowledge and deeper understanding of a person who has played basketball, to the level of understanding of someone who has merely watched or read about the game. Gee lamented that students are often expected to read and comprehend concepts about which they have no actual experiences. Also, he spoke of the value of some virtual reality games that allow participants to create computer code and add to the digital world. Opportunities to create digital stories provide similar advantages to students, particularly African American students, who are among the least likely to have access and meaningful experiences with computers. With more and more important societal messages being carried in digital form, an insider's understanding of how those messages are created is invaluable. Just as teachers of young children often include hands on experiences with buying and selling products to help them understand our fiscal economy, teachers should also give their youngsters experiences with creating their own digital messages. The best way for youngsters to understand the attention economy is to participate in it.

Opportunities to gain an insider's understanding of how digital media is created should be prized by teachers of today's young children who have been dubbed "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001). The term digital natives distinguishes today's youngsters from the digital settlers who may be users of technology, but also remember a time when doing research meant using an encyclopedia or a trip to the library, not logging on to the

internet. It is important that media literacy skills be taught to these digital natives, not only because good teaching reflects the students' real life, but also because access to technology is still uneven across populations (Palfrey & Glasser, 2008). Among the media literacy skills (Retrieved September 30, 2009 from http://digitalllearning.macfound.org/atf/cf/%7B7E45C7E0-A3E0-4B89-AC9C-E807E1B0AE4E%7D/JENKINS_WHITE_PAPER.PDF) that are easily reflected in a digital storytelling project are listed below:

Play – the capacity to experiment as a form of problem solving.

Performance – the ability to adopt alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery.

Appropriation – the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content.

Distributed Cognition — the ability to interact meaningfully with tools that expand our mental capacities (Jenkins, pg. 56).

These skills are easily mapped onto activities from this study: Baron playing with the gradient tool to create his “rainbow vortexes;” Tony’s appropriation of stamps to tell his stories; the performances across the participants as they reenacted shared fears (Corsaro, 1985) and sought to engage their audience; and finally, the use of digital tools expanded their ability to tell unique stories beyond the boundaries of their previous capabilities.

Prensky extols the skills that children of today possess because they have grown up in a technology-infused environment. Those skills include multi-tasking, grasping information from multimedia sources, and strong spatial skills. However, there is concern that these students’ strengths do not give them much opportunity for reflection.

Reflection is important for “learning from experience” (p. 14) and is more practically

implemented while reading a book, than while playing an action-packed video game. Kimber and Wyatt-Smith (2006) also spoke to the value of adding opportunities to reflect when students participate in the independent learning and learning-by-doing activities that often accompany opportunities for students to design and create in digital environments. Certainly, sharing their digital texts with an audience gave rise to authentic opportunities for the students in this study to reflect on past and future work as they encountered the transactional role of the audience.

Finally, I would like to speak to the idea that I hope was communicated throughout this section: the value of children writing and sharing texts of their own choosing. Earlier in this chapter I related that these first graders' curriculum included writing for many purposes. The students were sponges, and easily took their teacher's ideas about writing as their own. However, the lack of opportunity to compose and share their own stories was a hole in the curriculum that most likely prevented them from gaining deeper understandings and constructing their own knowledge about themselves as writers. Although most of the students in this exploratory study chose not to compose texts with words, the value of storytelling with young children is clear.

Dyson (1993) wrote about a permeable curriculum that allows for a shared world, an interplay between children's worlds and their teacher's. The permeable curriculum combats the disconnectedness and social distance that is often felt on both sides when middle class teachers are serving children from diverse populations.

When Baron's teacher described him as a language user for this study, she wrote that his verbal skills were average because he "*uses language correctly when he talks, but*

doesn't talk much in class." She wrote that he was "*not overly dramatic or expressive*" and while he completes assigned reading tasks, he "*doesn't elaborate or add a lot of additional detail.*" This is the same student, when given the chance to tell his own story for the first time, related a surprisingly long and detailed epic battle that included lightning swords and multiple instances of defeat before the ultimate victory of the hero. Baron and his teacher could be considered an example of the disconnectedness Dyson wrote about.

Proponents of Culturally Responsive Teaching (Gay, 2000) and cultural historic approaches advocate that teachers start with what the child brings from their backgrounds and prior experiences and build an authentic curriculum from there. Digital texts, loaded as they are with students' sedimented identities both in content and attitude toward tools, could be an exceptional vehicle for connecting with today's diverse children in meaningful ways.

Practical Implications: What Teachers Should Do

Teachers of young children have actually the easiest road to offering their students opportunities for digital learning as outlined in these pages. It is acceptable that young students learn from play. At their centers, they are often doing activities closely related to the media literacy skills so important for today's student: playing and exploring with math manipulatives provides some opportunities to remix and integrate new patterns into their own designs, and to enhance their thinking with the colorful blocks. That same attitude of play works well with students in the computer lab, or at a computer center in

the classroom. Young children's texts are not usually expected to be polished or perfect. Teachers and students can learn together and over time by exploring multimedia software like Pixie and simple editing software like Photo Story. The secret advantage that teachers have is that there are usually a few children in every class who just get technology, who even at six or seven years of age are confident wielders of the mouse. They can serve as guides for their teacher and classmates.

Teachers of young children should give their students opportunities to create their own texts, particularly the kinds of texts that carry messages in the real world, whether they are advertisements, political ads, or their own stories. These texts must emulate the forms that they see in the real world, and that includes digital texts. To create your own message is to understand the messages of others.

It is important that teachers of young children offer regular opportunities for students to tell, write, draw, and share their own stories. I recommend multimodal texts because they allow children to problem solve and challenge themselves to communicate meaning across the modes. But all forms of student texts are pathways to the permeable curriculum as long as those texts are shared and not kept hidden in journals.

Teachers of young children are challenged by these findings to rethink the idea of sharing, and "Author's Chair" in their classrooms. The practice of ending the event after the author reads, and several peers offer praise and a few suggestions is now officially "problematic" as Dyson suspected. The appearance of a transactional role of the audience in this study of digital storytelling should encourage teachers to talk more with their students after the sharing event is complete.

Recommendations for Further Research

Several recommendations for future research arose from this study. Similar to Boldt's (2009) call for a return to a writing curriculum that values the child's writing for their own purposes, this study encourages further research centered on the space where today's digital world, student writing, and student identity meet. In the present study, the writing curriculum presented to these first graders was well-meaning, but incomplete. There is a great need for more research exploring classrooms that actively balance utilitarian goals for writing instruction and goals that feature creativity, imagination and self empowerment. Of course, the multimodality offered by computers and software can be a key tool for this purpose.

Another research recommendation focuses on the place where this study left off: the students' burgeoning reflections on their compositions based on the audience reactions they received during computer author's chair. The present study just brushed the edges of the transactional role of the audience as experienced by these first graders. A study that focused on children's reactions and thoughts about their audience feedback could add to the body of composition scholarship. Corden's 2002 study is indicative of much of the current research on reflection and composition. The focus of Corden's research was on the children's expectations for the audience. Questions like "How did you want the audience to feel about your characters?" were used to gauge the student writer's level of reflection. A future study that considers the transactional role of the audience might ask questions like "What did you learn from the audience's reaction?" Or,

“How did your audience feel about your characters?” The highly engaging act of students sharing their digital compositions with family and peers is a perfect vehicle for examining the role of reflection on students’ attitudes toward past and future endeavors.

Important data could be garnered from a similar study that takes place in a classroom environment while using the typical computer center. As I noted earlier, second to fifth grade classes were using the computer lab facilities at Sundown Elementary to complete Photo Story projects in a lab setting. Of vital interest to many teachers would be a study focused on the single classroom and its three to four computer allotment. The emergence of students within the class who would serve as experts to help other students while the teacher was occupied would be an interesting phenomenon to watch for in such a project.

A fourth recommendation for future research is a closer look at opportunities for literate acts in digital environments and African American children. In the first chapter of this dissertation I referenced research that revealed that minority children were among the least likely to experience authentic tasks with computers during school. I think the present study provides strong evidence of what young children are capable of doing with the computer when they are not regulated to skill and drill software and typing spelling words. A curious matter left unanswered in this study is what it was about the mixture of African American first graders, digital tools, and time to compose that sparked the unique, new type of text revealed in this research.

Another interesting phenomenon that occurred in the present study was how the children, who for the most part were native speakers of Standard American English,

chose to draw upon their cultural resource of AAL when called upon to entertain and innovate. The students in this study, African American children from a predominately white and Latino school, opened a bit of fresh territory that could do with further probing. Much of the past research on African American Language (Ball, 1994; Rickford & Rickford, 2000; Smitherman, 1994, 2000) focused on students whose first language was AAL, and much of the current research, (Alim, 2006; Richardson, 2006; Smitherman, 2006) begins to narrow its lens to a Hip Hop language. These researchers reject any attempts to denigrate AAL, yet they understand the need for students to discourse ably in the language of the wider communication. These researchers call for a bilingualism, or bidialectalism that this study's first graders may have already grasped, and used with dexterity in their digital texts. But more study is needed. Digital storytelling could be the perfect crucible, the perfect contact zone (Pratt, 1991) for further research into the modern interplay of language, language as a cultural resource, and African American youngsters.

Conclusion

This study was meant to address a few gaps in the literacy research. As Lankshear and Knobel (2003) documented, very few research articles in literacy journals cover technology. Of those that do cover technology, very few of those deal with technology as a new literacy, rather than technology as a tool to reinforce old skills. Of those few studies, minor amounts deal with young children. From there, the number of studies that consider young African American children are minute.

This study sought to situate itself firmly in place with previous research on young African American children and storytelling. The title, “The Need for (Digital) Story,” speaks to that purpose not to focus too much on the cold blue light of the monitor or the mechanical whirring of computer circuits, but to explore the resources children draw upon to tell stories with new tools, and to discover what those stories were like. As the study progressed, and data was analyzed, themes and theories emerged.

This study confirmed earlier research from the likes of Labbo (1998), Leu (2000), Kress (2003a), and Karchmer (1999, 2001) that digital compositions are more than a new genre, more than a mere variation of text produced in traditional ways. Digital texts subordinate the typographical to the visual, are malleable and have different text structures. Authors of digital texts see composing as a manipulation of symbols and ideas.

Labbo’s 1996 study concerning kindergartners and their work at the computer, provided a scaffold for how the texts produced in this study could be categorized. It was interesting to discover that the texts the students produced resisted such organization, until a framework was applied that could consider their attitude toward using the digital tools. Because this study was about composing stories, and not just play at the computer, a new attitude, or stance emerged. I dubbed it a “Screen as Science Lab” stance. Texts produced from this stance were like a scientist’s mixture, a hybrid text that were equally influenced by the child’s ideas about the story he’d like to tell, and what images he could create with the software.

Examined in this study was the role of the digital tools in the storytelling. That role was two-pronged. First the tools served as a buffet table, a smorgasbord of color, line, image, sound, and other items from which the child could choose to make meaning. And the tools served as a touchstone, an object that once interacted with, aided the child in creating a text that revealed their identity and attitude toward the experience.

Finally, audience was a big motivator and the leading factor in how the students' digital stories changed over time. Not only did students think about audience before and during the composing process, but even after their texts were shown on the big screen – computer lab projector or television at home. The children became aware of an important role that the audience played in the composition process, a transactional role that made the audience's reaction a factor in how the final text was perceived by the author, and an important thought in any future plans for further texts.

Again, this dissertation was not meant to be just about the lights and whirring of the machine. This study was meant to be about story and to look again at its place in the diverse primary classroom. I stated previously that I did not think you could know Baron without knowing his stories. I will add that I do not think you could know Kevin, either. He was so rooted in family that many of the connections he made, and motivations that stirred him would most likely be rooted deep within his family as well. I do not think you could understand Terrence's potential as a literacy learner as he communicated stronger in his attempts to reach his audience than in traditional literacy tasks. I do not think you could know that it was really important to Jordan that there were black people and white people in her family; skin color ordered things for her and helped sort the puzzle of who

she was. Getting to know students is the cornerstone for any learning situation, but it is particularly meaningful when dealing with students from diverse cultures. I do not think you can know students without knowing their stories.

Of course this dissertation did include the computer and other digital elements. The digital had a place in their stories. Rather, the digital asserted its place in their stories. The students' relationship with the technology, whether timid or confident, shaped the final story. Because the digital was a part of the story, image and sound dominated the alphanumeric. Because of the digital, the first graders encountered a wealth of options to tell their tales and adeptly did so across multiple arenas of meaning. Because of the way digital mediums were shared with peers and family, these students were treated to a new encounter with the audience's role. It is a role that is usually saved to empower students as consumers of texts, but here, it challenged them as producers of texts.

Throughout the study, there was never a question from them, concerning the "why." "Why are we doing this?" is a phrase teachers hear often enough, if they teach long enough. But in this three month journey the question did not come up. I think because the students were having fun. Also, because they are digital kids, Digital Natives, they understood that these were the kinds of tasks they should be doing in 21st century schools.

APPENDIX A

STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Student Interview Questions

What kinds of stories do you like to hear?

What kinds of stories do you like to tell?

What kinds of things do you like to do on the computer

What kinds of things do you like to write about during school?

What kinds of things do you like to share/show and tell about?

What kinds of things do you like to do on the computer and the Internet?

Are you good at writing stories? Why or why not?

Are you good at telling stories? Why or why not?

What was the best part of this project?

APPENDIX B
TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Teacher Questionnaire
Child's Name:

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|------|--------|-----|
| Child's verbal skills Explain | High | Medium | Low |
|----------------------------------|------|--------|-----|

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|------|--------|-----|
| Child's writing skills Explain: | High | Medium | Low |
|------------------------------------|------|--------|-----|

Describe normal (weekly or daily) writing tasks in your classroom.

Describe this child's writing/composing skills.

What topics does the child choose to write?

Describe normal (weekly or daily) opportunities for children to talk (give opinions, share thoughts) in your classroom.

What topics does the child choose to talk about?

Describe this child's verbal skills during these opportunities (uses complete sentences, speaks in a linear fashion, struggles to make sense, dramatic, etc).

What is your opinion of this child as a language user?

APPENDIX C
PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Parent Questionnaire for _____

Child's Age: _____

Does _____ use a computer at home?

If yes, what kinds of things does _____ enjoy doing while on the computer?

What do you think are _____ language strengths (ex. Reads well, writes well, speaks well, enjoys reading, etc.)

What kinds of stories has _____ written at school?

What kinds of stories does _____ tell at home? (ex. Events of the day, make believe stories, retells stories heard, etc.)

What kinds of stories/books does _____ enjoy hearing?

What role do stories play in _____ family life? (ex. Grandmother often shares stories about her life, Dad reads bedtime stories, etc.)

Do you have any other information to share about _____ as a language user?

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Vita

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