Transforming Practice:
Using Digital Video to Engage Students

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Abstract

In this article the four pedagogical components outlined by the New London Group (1996)—situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice—were used to focus attention on the case studies of three beginning teachers and their use of digital media (particularly the creation of a digital literacy autobiography) in an English language arts methods class and their subsequent and transformed use of digital media with their own students in the classroom. Their shifting perceptions of multiple literacies were explored, as well as how these shifts in thinking helped shape or transform their ideas about teaching and learning language arts. Through the analysis of the three case studies, four persistent themes were identified related to students' use of digital media both in the program and in their teaching practice. Specifically, these themes focus on the performative, collaborative, and multimodal affordances of digital media, and they tap into the potential for using digital media as "identity texts" in student learning.

Beginning in Complexity

At the Faculty of Education, University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT), every student has a laptop with hardware and software that can be used for educational purposes, as well as ubiquitous access to the Internet. Our primary/junior language arts methods course begins by plunging students headfirst into the rich depths of multiple literacies, including media literacy, critical literacy, computer literacy, and digital literacy—depths we maintain throughout the course.

Beginning in complexity contrasts with the style of some language arts teaching textbooks, which typically begin with one area of instruction, such as reading, then address critical and multiple literacies toward the end of the text. This strategy suggests that these topics are peripheral rather than pedagogical frameworks undergirding language and literacy teaching and learning.

Our course goals include developing in our students the capacity to look beyond the literal meaning of text and media and embrace their complexities. We want our students to observe what is present and what is missing; to evaluate the text's complete meaning and the author's intent; and to focus on issues of fairness, equity, and social justice. We hope to produce teachers who are users of technology, certainly, but more importantly, who are questioners and producers of technology (as defined by Selber, 2004). Media literacy deconstruction and production are facilitating instruments of learner analysis, growth, and empowerment.

Within the multiliteracies framework outlined by the New London Group (1996), which contemplates the future of literacy teaching and the role of schools in the context of a rapidly changing world, are four underlying pedagogical components: situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice. In this article these pedagogical components are used to focus attention on the case studies of three beginning teachers and their use of digital media (particularly the creation of a digital literacy story) in our English language arts methods class and their subsequent transformed use of digital media with their own students in the classroom.

Their shifting perceptions of multiple literacies are explored, as well as the ways these shifts in thinking help shape or transform their ideas about teaching and learning language arts. Through the analysis of the three case studies, four persistent themes are identified related to our students' use of digital media both in our program and in their teaching practice. There are important implications for education when the focus is on the performative, collaborative, and multimodal affordances of digital media and when the potential for using digital media as "identity texts" is tapped in student learning (Cummins, Brown, & Sayers, 2007).

Theoretical Perspective

Narrative and Agency/Identity

These case studies focus on three beginning teachers who created a personal digital literacy story and the ways in which they repurposed that activity for use with their own students. The activity positioned preservice and beginning teachers as storytellers of personal learning and growth and offered opportunities for them to experience "narrative reconstruction" as they reflected on their lives, their learning, their choices, their past experiences, and their goals for the future (as also in Hull, 2003, p. 232). As Hull pointed out, "The ability to render one's world as changeable and oneself as an agent able to direct that change is integrally linked to acts of self-representation through writing" (p. 232).

When students are given opportunities to share their "identity texts" with peers, family, teachers, and the general public through digital media, they are likely to make gains in self-confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of community belonging through positive feedback (Cummins et al., 2007). In the context of multiple literacies, the definition of *text* must expand to include multiple forms of digital communication and its social

contexts and add empowerment as an additional gain for preservice teachers. Multiple literacies give students opportunities within which they can voice their growing awareness of educational and societal factors that freed or constrained them in their personal development.

Ample research exists on the role of narrative in the construction of personal agency and identity (cf. Ochs & Capps, 2001). Bruner's (1994) studies of narrative indicated that changes in conceptions and representations of self are typically associated with "turning points" in personal narratives. Bruner identified turning points as "thickly agentive...whose construction results in increasing the realism and drama of the Self" (p. 50). There is a dialogical relationship between narrative and self: to shape our narrative is to shape ourselves and vice versa.

Literacy in a Digital Age

Studies in the areas of multiliteracies, new literacies studies, and digital literacies indicate that students bring with them new skills that remain untapped in the classroom setting (Alvermann, 2002; Alvermann & Xu, 2003; Cook, 2005; Dyson, 2003; Gee, 2003; Knobel & Lankshear, 2006; Kress, 2003; Marsh, 2003; Millard, 2003; Pahl, 2003; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005; Short, Kauffman, & Kahn, 2000). Students of all ages regularly engage with a number of new digital media in their out-of-school lives.

Based on surveys administered at the beginning of our Faculty of Education English language arts classes, multiplayer games, MSN (the Microsoft portal), Facebook, MySpace, and the like, figure prominently on the list of ways that our students communicate online. As a result of the constant exposure to digital media and social software, students come to our classes with sophisticated, if nascent, sets of skills that until now have remained largely untapped in the classroom context. These skills can be applied to media construction to allow students a wider range of tools to represent themselves.

Our aim at UOIT, with its technological focus across all programs, is to prepare teacher candidates to teach in a digital age, to become familiar with the out-of-school literacy practices of their students, and to consider how they might use these media for educational purposes in their own classrooms. In particular, students should develop critical media literacy skills to give them power over popular culture and to create their own meanings (as in Kellner & Share, 2006). To that end, our English language arts course has been designed on the premise that literacy goes far beyond the traditional notion of reading and writing print text.

As Harste (2003) stated, "This is not a matter of walking away from what we already know" about what comprises a good language and literacy program, but rather a matter of a different emphasis (p. 8). The language arts course at UOIT begins with a focus on multiliteracies, including critical literacy and social justice, then weaves an explicit focus on digital media literacy construction and reconstruction throughout the duration of the course.

Methodology

Setting for the Study

These case studies feature three beginning teachers who graduated between 2007 and 2009 from the Faculty of Education. At the beginning of the program, each of the

participants created a digital literacy story using either PhotoStory or MovieMaker as part of their course requirements. The research focuses on these novice teachers' experiences with digital media in our program and in their own classrooms.

As Harste (2003) pointed out, a multiple literacies approach has implications for the way teachers think about literacy and, in turn, influences classroom practice.   Harste argued that, rather than viewing literacy as "an entity (something one either has or does not have), when coupled with the notion of multiple literacies, "literacy can be thought of as a particular set of social practices that a particular set of people value" (p. 8).

In keeping with the notion of literacy as social practice, the first assignment for English language arts students in the fall term is to create a digital story about the literacy events in their lives. The stories are rich, personal, and insightful. Through their telling, the teacher candidates realize that they already possess important knowledge and insights about literacy and literacy teaching. The assignment positions teacher candidates as producers rather than as consumers of knowledge in the form of technology products and prompts them to think about literacy in broader terms. They look at their own "situated practice" (New London Group, 1996) and must consider how their experiences have shaped their ideas about literacy and how image, text, and sound converge in the process of creating a digital story.

These literacy stories are also an important step in helping teacher candidates recognize and identify their own assumptions about literacy, literacy teaching, and society. Through this process, teacher candidates begin to realize how their backgrounds and experiences have privileged or constrained their literacy development.

Recognizing the importance of understanding their own literacy stories is a course goal and an important step toward better understanding the literate lives of their students. The literacy stories are shared in small groups, and some are shown to the whole group, followed by a discussion of the story itself, its content, narrative structure, and use of image, text, and sound to create a coherent story.

These stories form a cornerstone of the program and become a constant frame of reference for the learning community, as teacher candidates develop their teaching philosophies and reflect on their practice. For example, when we discussed strategies for working with English language learners, we remembered a digital story one candidate had previously shared about being placed in an English-as-a-second-language (ESL) class, even though she was born in Canada and was fluent in English, simply because she was very quiet. In her story, she shared her experience of having to sit at the back of the classroom and color, while the other students engaged in more meaningful learning activities.

New media offer performative affordances that cater to a variety of modes of expression and multiple ways of knowing, such as gestural, aural, visual, and spatial, as well as linguistic (Gardner, 1993; Jewitt, 2006; New London Group, 1996). For us as instructors, the power of this particular project is that it allows us to hear the students' voices; developing voice in writing is an important part of English language arts instruction.

Harste (2003) pointed out that "writing begins in voice. If you can get students to write 'what is on their minds,' the rest may not take care of itself, but you will have come a long way toward creating a potentially great literacy program" (p. 9). Multiple literacies allow students a wider range of spaces for their voices, and the digital media also allow them to

write and create for an extended audience. The digital stories are more often shared with family and friends than are print-based texts.

Data Collection and Analysis

We used a case study method, which is suitable for collecting in-depth stories of teaching and learning. The case study method is also appropriate for studying a "bounded system" (that is, the thoughts and actions of participating students or the learning/community connection of a particular education setting), so as to understand it as it functions under natural conditions (Stake, 2000). The analysis was qualitative, in keeping with the established practice of in-depth studies of classroom-based learning and case studies, in general.

Case study data consisted of (a) field notes; (b) teachers' writing; (c) interviews with each teacher; (d) the digital stories created by teachers; and (e) the digital artifacts created by their students. Because of the complex blending of multimodal data elements, we relied in part on the digital storytelling analysis method of Hull and Katz (2006) of developing a "pictorial and textual representation of those elements" (p.41)—that is, columns of the spoken words from recordings juxtaposed with original written text, the images from digital stories and other digital artifacts, and data from interviews and field notes. This method facilitated the "qualitative analysis of patterns" (p. 41). The analytic methods included thematic coding (Miles, 1994), and the data were read and coded for major themes and subthemes across data sources. The codes were revised and expanded as more themes emerged.

In the authoring of the digital stories, we were particularly interested in moments that might be interpreted as "turning points" (Bruner, 1994) in the representation of identity or the conceptual understanding of literacy teaching and learning. Part of the analytic process was to use turning point moments to construct narrative threads, based on diverse sources of data (Hull & Katz, 2006). The four persistent themes that emerged focused on the collaborative, multimodal performative, and critical aspects of creating digital stories, as well as the teachers' revised perceptions of what it means to be literate in a digital age.

In each of the three cases that follow, we explore what the novice teachers say about their situated practice through their digital literacy stories. The turning points in their understanding of literacy learning is noted, and their use of digital media with their own students is examined, focusing on a specific incident or project.

Sarah's Story: Using Digital Video to Create Visual Essays

Sarah is a 27-year-old British student who immigrated to Canada in 2001. She came to our program with experience teaching ESL students in Japan and volunteering in a literacy program with adults who did not complete high school. She also came with a passion for social justice and a keen ability to think critically that set her apart from many of her classmates. Also, as a talented make-up artist, Sarah already understood that communication goes well beyond speaking/listening and reading/writing conventional print texts.

Sarah's digital literacy story was about the loss of literacy (Video 1). She began her story by saying, "I've had my own literacy stripped from me several times in my life." She juxtaposed this statement with an image of herself with tape across her mouth (see Figure 1). She went on to give several examples of her feelings of loss, beginning in kindergarten when her teacher scolded her for being able to read and write, because she "would have to be re-taught everything correctly." Sarah's experience in Japan and her subsequent move to Canada helped her understand how difficult it was for anyone who does not speak a global, hegemonic language, but also lacks an understanding of a particular culture. Later, when asked about this image, Sarah explained,

Figure 1. Image from Sarah's digital story.

The tape that was across my mouth in the opening shot was linked to how passionate I am about freedom of speech or more accurately the freedom to be literate: A few years back, I had been strongly affected by a photo of a student protest where they had done something similar to show their voices not being heard. It was this link to the personal elements of literacy in this assignment that enabled me to understand how personally I take literacy and how deeply it is embodied within me.

The creation of the digital story helped Sarah reflect on her own situated practice and critically analyze elements of oppression in her experience. In her short video (3:17 min), Sarah used only nine images to convey her story. The majority of the images (seven of nine) were her own photos, either selected from her collection or taken specifically for this story.

Unlike many of her peers, Sarah did not include a soundtrack, other than her articulate narration. The seeming simplicity of her story belies the complex tale she told of trying to adjust to the language and culture in several different contexts—as an immigrant to Canada, as an ESL instructor in Japan, as a French-as-a-second-language student, and as a volunteer teacher of adult literacy.

She used images that complemented her narrative, of course; however, she also selected images that enhanced both the mood and the theme of her story. For example, when talking about the frustration associated with trying to communicate with someone without the language skills necessary to articulate oneself, Sarah used a pulsating image full of neon Japanese signs and symbols (see Figure 2). Similarly, when she described her passion for "other methods of communication…and the mediums through which we can express ourselves," Sarah illustrated her point with an image of one of her own make-up designs (see Figure 3). She connected her experiences as a make-up artist to her belief that teachers should "promote multimodal learning and multiple literacies," which, she argued, are "fundamental to student success."

Figure 2. Sarah's image from Japan.

Figure 3. Sarah's make-up design.

In reflecting on her digital story, Sarah recounted that the learning experience was powerful:

Figure 4. Sarah's tattoo.

> To learn that I embody a lot of the qualities I consider so important, for example having a tattoo of a saying on my wrists ("Whatever you refuse to conquer, will eventually conquer you") [see Figure 4], helped me feel stronger as a teacher because I felt that I wasn't faking a sense of passion about something that doesn't really interest me. It rekindled my desire to teach both my subjects [English and Math] through the lens of social justice.

Sarah's conviction that "promot[ing] multimodal learning and multiple literacies is fundamental to student success" led her to consider how she might use digital video in her own teaching during her final practicum. She decided to have her students create visual essays based on the novel, *The Lord of the Flies*.

Reading or writing a visual essay, a text that relies more heavily on images with minimal print text, entails new forms of semiotic processing of the combinations of the visual, audio, textual, gestural, and spatial (Hughes, 2008; Jewitt, 2008; Kress, 2003). Creating a visual essay requires students to explore a piece of literature or to capture the human experience of social problems (Lankshear & Fabos, 2008; Kinchloe, 2006; McClaren, 1993) predominantly through sound and image and to consider elements of design (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Jewitt, 2008; Kress, 2003; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001), as they choose the most appropriate features for effectively communicating their message to an audience. Design choice and multimodal understanding of the communicative ability of the way modes work in concert to communicate meaning requires producers to be critical readers in making choices (Bearne, 2003; Burke & Hammett, 2009; Jewitt, 2008; Mayer, 2008). In her reflections on her students' visual essays, Sarah wrote,

> I was completely shocked about what my students managed to produce, not because I didn't think they were capable, but because of the profound ways in which they told their opinions, thoughts, and feelings on the novel and the issues it provokes: I have never been affected by a written essay in the same way (brought to tears) and I doubt I ever will.

Sarah's reasons for using digital media went well beyond the curricular expectations in a typical media studies class, where students study and discuss the critical elements of the medium. She argued that a "more traditional teaching tool is unlikely to yield a window into the students' lives or thoughts and opinions and is also unlikely to be shared with others—a more positive social and cultural trend in the world today." The notion of students performing their work for a wider audience (cf., Hughes, 2008) was important for Sarah in her teaching, as she asked, "Why wouldn't you want to make school relevant and applicable to the world they are entering and hoping to play a successful part in?" She argued, "Teaching digital media offers more than just school skills; it offers a chance for students to become worldly."

Although Sarah commented that she is not sure whether the success of the visual essays was due in part to the novelty of the task, she believed the benefits to her students were many.

Many of my students said the visual essay was harder than they thought it would be, not because of the technology, but because the medium forced them to think about what they wanted to say before they could really start—it focused their attention and minds on the task at hand. I also felt that the visual essay leveled the playing field for the ESL students in my class, as the emphasis on text was removed and other forms of literacy that, in some sense are more universal (image, colour, sound), were able to play an equal part in the whole visual essay and their evaluation.

The fact that all of her students were successful in expressing their ideas through the visual essays was very important to Sarah, who concluded her interview by saying,

> Being able to turn perspective on its head and make people reconsider concepts and the way they view the world is, in my opinion, the power behind being literate and is something I hope to use as a practitioner as well as a teacher of critical literacy.

As a future teacher, Sarah demonstrated that she was a multiliterate person who is encouraging her future students to also be multiliterate, critical, and culturally literate. Sarah's passion for critical literacy and her desire to develop in her students the ability to read the *world* as well as the *word* and to participate equitably contributed to her decision to use digital media with her students. The performative potential of digital media, with its access to wider audiences, provides students with more opportunities to have their voices heard on a more level playing field.

Emily's Story: Using Digital Video to Explore Poetry

Emily graduated from our program in 2007 and secured a position teaching media arts and English to grade 9-12 students almost immediately. As an English and art student, she came to our program with considerable experience working with children and youths ranging in age from 3 to 18. When she entered the program, Emily had been a certified skating coach for 5 years and had coached a junior level competitive coed cheerleading team. She had also worked for 2 years as a tutor-in-the-classroom and was an art

instructor and camp director at the Varley Art Gallery. An accomplished artist, working primarily in photography but also in painting and sculpture, Emily even had a group show last year at the Varley Art Gallery. Her life experiences surely contributed to Emily's comfort level with the notion of multiple literacies, because she had used a variety of artistic media to make meaning and express herself in ways other than print text.

Emily's digital literacy story focused on the variety of ways that she could "read, communicate, and understand the world" (Video 2)   In a confident and composed narration, Emily asserted,

> I can read. I can read books and magazines. I can read numbers and sheet music. I can read the stars in the sky and all those hidden messages in paint and plaster. And I can read cracks left on the ice. And I can read faces, some better than others. I can read images, and traffic and the world.

Throughout her digital story, Emily made the connection between "being literate" and being "cultured," "cultivated" and "educated," as she juxtaposed images of cultural artifacts—paintings, architecture, theater—and images of herself and the places she had travelled. The theme of her narrative was underscored by her classical piano soundtrack that plays cheerfully in the background.

Like Sarah, Emily acknowledged the importance of being able to read the word and the world (as defined by Freire & Macedo, 1987). For example, she rather quickly moved from an image of a Renaissance painting to a close-up of her sister's face and then to an image of neon advertisements (see Figure 5). The notion of reading the world was also reinforced through the opening and closing images, as Emily framed her story with a photograph of a starry night sky.

Figure 5. Emily's images.

The creation of the digital story was pivotal for Emily in terms of her understanding of literacy and, although she had a nascent understanding of multimodality, the assignment helped her to sharpen her awareness of what being literate means in the 21st century. In her reflection on the assignment, Emily wrote, "As I reflected on my literacy development, I came to acknowledge that it is about multiple modes of communication and expression."   Not only did the digital story assignment impact Emily's perception of her own literacy, it also helped shape her practice as a teacher. She commented,

> I realized that literacy was not just about reading comprehension. It involves so much more. The inclusion of images forced me to think about the multiple modes of communication and consequently the multiplicity of literacy. I started to see myself as a multilingual person. I think this has made me more aware of my

students' many modes of literacy and learning and has driven me towards differentiating my instructional practice. I strive to promote critical thinking and also to be well-versed in the many languages of our lives.

Like Sarah, Emily found the creation of the digital literacy story to be powerful, not only because it "combined [her] love of story-telling, self-reflection, art and technology" but also because she thought "it was a perfect mode of communication" for her and because "it reflected contemporary educational practice."

Emily was acutely aware of the out-of-school literacies in her students' lives. She commented, "My students love YouTube and their iPhones, so anything that involves them creating something similar is a huge hit. I feel that if they love the assignment, then they can engage more deeply in the subject matter." Emily said she felt "very fortunate" to have a SmartBoard in her classroom, which she used to show her students examples, highlight important ideas, add notes, and generally "engage in the medium together as a group." She viewed media art as "a hybrid form of traditional art and new technology" and noted that she challenged her students "to create new hybrid works by engaging with technology every day."

Although Emily used digital video in a variety of ways, including having students tell stories through claymation, one of her most successful endeavours involved having her students create digital poetry. The first iteration of this project was done during her first practicum in October, in a grade 8 Toronto classroom. Significantly, approximately 86% of the school's student population at the time consisted of English language learners, with the majority of students being East Asian. Emily decided to focus on poetry because it is an immensely powerful genre for English language learners and does not require a lot of the second language (in this case, English) to produce powerfully expressive pieces. Also, students can move from their first language to English fairly easily with support from teachers and peers.

On a Friday afternoon, Emily and her students read a poem called "Where I'm From" by George Ella Lyons and were given about 20 minutes to brainstorm some ideas for a poem of their own based on the same topic. She showed them an example she had created based on her own life and explained that they would be given more time the following week to work on their digital poems. One student, "Brian" (a pseudonym) returned to school the following Monday with his digital poem already completed. This promptness was remarkable to both Emily and her associate teacher because Brian, who was the only Chinese student in the class and new to the school, seemed rarely engaged in class. He was shy, reluctant to participate, especially in group situations, and only about 6 weeks into the school year. His teacher was still unsure of Brian's potential.

Brian's poem is an example of an identity text (Cummins et al., 2007). Cummins outlined three important components that must exist for English language learners to be successful literacy learners: literacy engagement, cognitive engagement, and identity investment. Each of these components was present for Brian, who created a powerful and personal performance of self in a mode that begs to be shared with others. Brian took images from his world (both video and still images) and merged them in a sophisticated technological way to express himself. Adding video was not a requirement for this assignment, and to get these video segments Brian had to capture the video clips from YouTube and then edit them on MovieMaker, removing the sound track in order to accommodate his own sound track. No one at school showed him how to do this; he figured it out on his own. He drew on his past and present and provided a glimpse into his out-of-school literacies, demonstrating the technological savvy that some students have.

One of the insights into Brian's out-of-school literacies was his interest in Japanese anime. He incorporated images from some of his favorite series, including Naruto and Bleach. Over one of these images, he layered the following text: "I am from worlds of fantasy and reality slipping from one into the other." Then, several screens later over a series of three different screens, he wrote, "I am from these worlds of fantasy and these moments of my past/Belonging in neither one." He concluded with, "Reality or Fantasy – it's all the same to me."

This search for identity and their place in the world is a common theme among adolescents. Adolescents are engaged in forming and questioning their identities on many different levels, and this was evident in Brian's poem, as well as in many of the digital poems submitted by Emily's students. Although initially it was an unintended result, Emily found that the adolescents in her classes were using the digital world to explore their identities.

Emily argued that the digital poem assignment was transformational for Brian and many of the other students in her class. In Brian's case, the reluctant student disinclined to share his work enjoyed the attention his poem garnered and was pleased to show it to his class. Emily suggested that the digital poetry assignment was so successful, in part, because it was relevant to her students' lives, adding, "My students always like when I make it relevant." Although Brian completed his digital poem over a weekend, outside of school, he used Emily's model and the class discussion, which focused on the strengths of her sample digital poem, as the overt instruction he needed to take the assignment and run with it and to make it his own.

In addition to using video clips rather than still images, as Emily had used in her model, Brian incorporated a soundtrack in Japanese and some Japanese text, so he effectively created a dual language text. This result was unexpected, as well, and something that Emily can incorporate into future assignments for her English language learners. Emily positioned herself as a learner alongside her students and commented, "I feel that my students appreciate my use of technology, and we can learn from each other. I show them new things and they show me new things. That is the way education should be."

Hilary's Story: Using Digital Video to Promote Critical Literacy in the Early Years

Hilary graduated from our primary/junior program in 2009. She entered our program with her bilingual certificate after 13 years of French immersion instruction. Having been schooled in northern Saskatchewan, Hilary also learned Cree. Previously, Hilary had volunteered as a literacy coach for students struggling at the early literacy level. In a class of 28 students Hilary's quiet confidence and insistence on excellence was quickly noticeable. When she shared her digital literacy story, "In My Mother's Eyes," with the class (Video 3), the room was so emotionally charged that students needed a break to regain composure. The story focused on what she learned primarily from her mother, as her father died in a plane crash when she was only 9 years old.

From her mother, Hilary learned "never to fear the unknown, but to explore it" and to be independent and "have [her] own direction." Her mother taught her to read cardinal directions and road maps from an early age: "She didn't want me to become a lost soul." With her mother's encouragement Hilary became a proficient classical pianist and learned to read musical notation: "To this day I truly appreciate the beauty in the sound of a note." She learned how "to read the rhythm of [her] own feet" as she explored the world of dance.

Then, as Hilary's reader is fully immersed in the close relationship the two women shared, Hilary said, "After 2 years at university, Mom and I read the results of her recent testing for the 6-year battle she'd been having with cancer. I decided to move back home … Until the end." These words are followed by silence and a black screen. Her mother's death renders her speechless and clearly has the same impact on her readers. The story does not end there, going on to Hilary's subsequent marriage to her "best friend" and her graduation from university. Hilary's story is so powerful not only because of the emotional content, but also because of her skilled storytelling and keen sense of narrative.

Hilary used the combination of images, narration, and a musical soundtrack to tell her story effectively. Unlike Sarah and Emily, who found it necessary to fill in some gaps in their stories by using images gleaned from other sources, primarily the Internet, Hilary used only personal images, which she scanned into the storytelling program. As a result, and coupled with the fact that Hilary dedicated her story—"in loving memory" —to her mother, Hilary's story is intensely personal (see Figure 6). She concluded her narrative with four simple words – "I love you, Mom"—that have a powerful impact on her audience, an audience that has narrowed from many to one.

Figure 6. Image from Hilary's video.

The longest of the three digital stories described in this article, Hilary's story was also the only one that utilized a soundtrack with lyrics. This additional challenge required the viewer to "read" multiple and competing texts—the images, the narration, and the lyrics of the soundtrack.

Hilary's story began with Gary Jules' (2003) cover of the Tears for Fears single "Mad World" and conjures a world filled with sorrow, loss, and confusion. At the climax of the story—her mother's death—the music faded out into a black screen, and there was silence, followed by Hilary's voice. As the story continued, Ben Taylor's song (2006), "I Try" fades in with the lyrics, "I try to say goodbye and I choke, I try to walk away and I stumble/Though I try to hide it, it's clear, my world crumbles when you are not near."

These are touching lyrics, which served to intensify understanding of Hilary's loss, but she did not conclude her story there. Hilary went on to describe her successful completion of an undergraduate degree and concluded with a love story and her subsequent wedding. A masterful storyteller, Hilary led viewers through her story without ever losing our interest.

Like Sarah and Emily, Hilary found the creation of the digital literacy story to be a potent experience, not only in terms of her understanding of literacy, but also in terms of how intricately literacy was woven into her family stories. In her reflection on the assignment, Hilary wrote,

> Creating the digital literacy story helped me to redefine my understanding of literacy. In creating this piece I was able to express my literacy/ being literate in new ways—through music, art, and education. It amazed me to see all the connections literacy had to my own life and how engrained the facets of literacy were into my family life. Coming from a family of avid readers and writers I was able to see how connected we were through text—whether as a common pastime or as the major topic of discussion at a family gathering.

On a personal level, the assignment took Hilary back to her childhood and to old photos that had her "digging for memories" she had tucked away.

> It made me think of my childhood in new ways and had me digging further into the boxes of photos, to search for other hidden stories that I had long forgotten. Putting together information via digital media turns us into explorers—searching for the best piece of information, fact, or story to complement the existing masterpiece we've created. Adding elements like voice recording, music and images gets our creative juices going—this is no longer a project, but a work of art. We take great pride in our art and want others to appreciate it as well....There was something very moving about pairing my voice—reading my own text with images of my life. Based on the reaction of my peers on viewing day it was obvious from their emotions that it had touched them in their own way too.

Hilary also pointed out in her reflection that creating this piece evoked a lot of discussion with her family and peers. "It brought back memories and encouraged a lot of storytelling—all of which contributed to the final piece," she said. She observed that this assignment was different from other assignments in which students were required to use technology, because "those programs and tools often did not involve the creative element, and the digital story allowed my creativity to flourish."

Working with the technology as she put the story together helped Hilary to see many other "angles and details" she had missed when thinking about the story separate from the tools she could use to "bring the text to life." "It was really the collaboration with the software that made my story a success. Before this project I had never had that experience before," she said. The technology, then, both promoted collaboration through discussion with family and peers and became a collaborator itself.

Hilary's positive experience with her own digital literacy story influenced her decision to use digital media with her students.

Using digital media such as Photo Story is a powerful teaching tool because it is captivating. Today's students are bombarded by so many images and sounds that using digital media in the classroom is only in keeping with skills they've already developed.

Having an ardent interest in critical literacy, Hilary decided to create a digital book talk based on the picture book, *The Librarian of Basra*, by Jeanette Winter ([Video 4](#)). The book recounts the true story of Alia Muhammad Baker, the chief librarian of Basra, Iraq, who saved over 30,000 of the library's books from the fires of war by secretly moving them to her own home in her car.

Hilary also used digital media to reflect the school's monthly Character Education foci in her Grade 1 practicum. The monthly focus was *kindness*, and after many days of reading about kindness, role playing about kindness, and completing a variety of exercises about kindness, Hilary worked with her students to create a class digital story about kindness. The students wrote a few sentences about a time they were shown kindness and then illustrated their experience and attached their sentence to the illustration. Hilary scanned all of their illustrations into Photo Story and added simple transitions between them. While the class was engaged in their work, she sat with each student to record their narration of the sentence. Although participation was optional, each student was eager to be involved.

Not surprisingly, the students loved this experience, and Hilary found that it was an excellent way to have her students work through the editing process.

> Many of them grinned and giggled as they read their sentence. After each recording I had the students listen to it and allowed them to re-record if they wanted to, an important part of the editing process. When their Photo Story was presented, the grade ones sat in awe of the finished piece. Many laughed when their part came on. At the end all the grade ones clapped with enthusiasm, they shared their favourite parts and reflected back on some of the things their peers talked about and how it was similar or different from their own. The students were thrilled when I told them they would get a classroom copy to keep which made me feel very proud to have created such an exciting story with them. This was such a positive learning experience for us all, and one I will be sure to repeat in the future.

Hilary was amazed at how well the students responded, but she was also thrilled with the number of literacy skills they were developing.

> Using digital media hones many literary skills, such as storytelling and story writing, plot development, personal voice, opinion, persuasive writing, the list goes on. Virtually any literacy skill you can think of is exercised when using digital media. It also develops writing skills such as researching, story boarding, revising, adding or deleting, rewriting, condensing, drafting, grouping, and sequencing. Not to mention that digital media is great for exploring new ways of learning when attempting to reach each diverse learning style, as is present in most multiple intelligence classrooms.

Hilary realized that multiple literacies had levelled the playing field, accommodating children across a wide range of ways that children learn. The technology was, once again, empowering. When we introduce our teacher candidates to critical literacy in our English language arts program, some of them are reticent to addresses issues of gender, equity, and social justice with students in the early years. They argue that children should be allowed to "just be innocent" or that such topics are best left until the children are older so that they will understand better or be able to "handle it" more maturely.

Hilary was not one of those students; she recognized that power relationships begin long before students enter school. For Hilary, using digital media was an effective way to get her students thinking about responsibility, fairness, respect, and caring, among other things. This is another element of critical literacy.

Looking Forward in Teacher Education

The teacher candidates in our program learn how to use technology, produce technology, and question technology, and as a result they learn to focus their own teaching on these three components of new literacy education. Teaching media literacy in its multiple forms requires our students to focus on all of the messy elements of deconstruction, production, and multiple meanings. The creative, innovative, and intelligent ways they have used digital media to support their own language and literacy development and burgeoning critical media literacy and social justice awareness have spilled over into their classroom practices during their early teaching experiences. These novice teachers are certainly proficient users of technology themselves, but rather than just giving their students time to work on the computer, our graduates understand the importance of using critical media literacy skills to enhance students' creativity, thinking, learning, and awareness of how each of us are situated in the world.

Because one of the primary foci of our entire program is on technology, our candidates are exposed to many different uses of technology, many of them powerful tools for teaching and learning. What makes the use of digital media in English language arts so effective for these novice teachers is its potential to engage students in an exploration of self and their place in it.

In each of the cases outlined in this article, the students used digital media to write themselves into the piece, whether it was a visual essay, a digital poem, or a collaborative book on showing kindness to others. In each case, the students took great pleasure in expressing themselves in this wider space: performing their opinions, their poems, their stories using all of the multimodal affordances of digital media, including images (still and moving), sounds (voice narration, music, song), gestures, and text on screen in all its wonderful colours, fonts, and transitions. They collaborated with each other, their instructors, and with the technology to produce pieces they were proud to share with their peers and parents.

Harste (2003) argued that "the redesign of curriculum begins with reflexivity; the self-reflective interrogation and critique of what it is we have been doing" (p. 11). Designing and implementing this language arts program with its focus on multiple literacies has certainly caused us both to reflect on our practice and to make important decisions about how we want to model good pedagogy. The digital media that we have incorporated into our program are excellent tools for us; however, the focus of using these new media has remained on preparing our teacher candidates to teach in a pluralistic society in a digital age.

It became clear early in the planning process, and has become increasingly clearer as we immerse ourselves in this program, that literacy teaching in a digital age needs to be reimagined and that we must "reconsider taken-for-granted assumptions, goals, and practices" (Selber, 2004, p. 23). Perhaps our experience offers a suggestive model of using new media effectively in a preservice language arts teacher education program.

Teacher candidates bring a different understanding of the use of technology to their professional learning and growth that stems from their prior experience. In many cases

the teacher candidates have developed a level of digital expertise, given the fact that many of them are millennial children. This demographic applies to students in today's classrooms. However, the question remains, how much of this digital experience is being tapped to empower students to think critically? Also, how can educators help them further develop the nascent new literacy skills for use in the teaching and learning of language arts?

By providing a forum to blend these experiences, teacher candidates will make powerful contributions to the literacy development of their students. These new teachers will have gained personal experiences and knowledge to motivate students based on their interests and digital knowledge and to help them delve into literacy activities on a much deeper and critical level.

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