

**What happens when students use digital storytelling to tell the stories of
themselves and others?**

Action Research Project

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Abstract

Digital Storytelling is a powerful medium for expressing student voice, sharing stories, and building an empathetic community. My action research project chronicles a digital storytelling project in one 6th grade class during a semester of Multimedia with 27 students at High Tech Middle Media Arts, a San Diego public charter school. By analyzing student data from surveys, exit cards, interviews with focus students, and case studies, I found that digital storytelling had broad and personal impacts. As a result of my students' experiences sharing stories of themselves and others, I found that students have stories they want and need to tell, that sharing stories is scary but necessary, and that the impacts of sharing have an effect on everyone. I learned the importance of empowering every student to share a personal story of his or her life, and that building a safe environment for sharing enabled me to know my students better. The implications of my study share the dynamics of using digital storytelling to engage students in sharing personal stories in the classroom.

Introduction



Digital storytelling can have a life changing impact on the people who share, produce, and view the stories. It was the end of my second year teaching multimedia at High Tech Middle Media Arts, and I was reading the reflections from my students about their digital storytelling project on the defining moments of veterans in San Diego. CA.

One reflection read,

“Nothing is impossible if you just believe,” is a phrase that we often hear, but hardly ever take to heart. Your story gave me the chance to truly understand this phrase and have it remain in my mind during difficult times”- Mary Ann, 8th grader, HTMMA.

As people, we don’t always get the opportunity to make a difference, and in middle school, I was never given a chance. My students took the chance to tell the story of someone’s life and to honor the service and sacrifice of veterans in our community. Telling stories and building relationships changed me, my students, and the veterans.

“Thanks to you and the young ladies for providing me with such a wonderful experience. It's gestures like those that make everything I've endured worth every second”- Sherman, President of the Paralyzed Veterans Association, Marine Corps.

Together, we embarked on a journey we’d never forget. We built community, shared the voices of veterans, and learned from their experiences in war. Through the veteran’s digital storytelling

project, students and veterans were given a chance to make a difference in each others lives, by learning to listen and share stories. It's a project I will never forget, and the inspiration for the work you are about to read.

The power of digital storytelling is not an entirely new concept. It began in the early 1990's and was immediately picked up at schools, libraries, and individual classrooms as the nouveau storytelling approach for the 21st century learner. Digital Storytelling blends personal narrative with images and music. By transforming personal narratives into movies, it's a way of telling a story that we can experience with our minds, eyes, and ears.

I found out about this powerful storytelling approach in the Spring of 2009 when I contacted Warren Hegg, President and Founder of the Digital Clubhouse Network in San Jose, CA, and President of the *Stories of Service* organization. A colleague and friend suggested that I do a *Stories of Service* project. It seemed like an exciting way to engage students in media that mattered, so I inquired if the project was still active. I could never have predicted the enthusiastic and immediate call to action I received, nor the two months of digital storytelling which followed. My students and I launched full speed into the *Stories of Service* project and began chronicling the lives of local veterans through movies about their service to our country. Thirteen stories later, we found ourselves at the Veterans Museum in San Diego screening the movies the students had produced. One month later, eight students and I raised the funds to attend the National *Stories of Service* conference and Memorial Day Parade in Washington, D.C.

It was a whirlwind journey, but since then I've been reflecting about the impact of such an experience, and the words and actions of my students. My students, who were in 8th grade when we embarked on this journey two years ago, still have a voice with Stories of Service. As high school students, they started their own student-led organization that seeks to continue the spirit of the stories. They joined the program's other initiative, *Spirit of '45*, to document the stories of the WWII generation, and interviewed local Pearl Harbor Survivors. Even two years after producing digital stories for their project, they recruited 80 Girls Scouts and other students at our school to walk in the 2010 San Diego Veteran's Day Parade to honor veterans. They have impressed me beyond words. I wonder, how can I make the experience happen again for a new generation of students? How can I reach more students through sharing the power of digital storytelling?

My research seeks to continue the spirit of storytelling that brought me and my students closer to one another, as well to our community in a way we never imagined. We gained a better appreciation of the sacrifices of the men and women who fought to protect our freedoms. We learned about ourselves and our new roles as storytellers. Through digital storytelling, the veterans of San Diego brought a real perspective to war, suffering, triumph over odds, and sacrifice that awakened a sense of inquisitiveness, empathy, and a commitment to service in my students. Speaking to a veteran gave students an opportunity to hear about war through their eyes. So much of what students know about the war is sensationalized in the news or in the video games they play.

My experience led me to wonder, how can we bring the voices from our past and present together in the classroom and forge new relationships between the generations? How can we use digital storytelling to pass on the lessons of one generation to the next? Can these stories preserve the memories of our past, but also serve to heal wounds unresolved in the present? What other uses and impacts can digital storytelling have?

In conducting my research, my hope for my students is to explore the world of digital storytelling through telling the stories of themselves and others. I hope that the former will open up pathways for them to communicate their identity, while the latter will help build empathy between people. Throughout the *Stories of Service* project, I saw a reciprocal bond formed between storyteller and producer. Students felt a sense of pride by producing a story for someone else, and the storytellers felt honored. I hope that making digital stories will help students find stronger connections and empathic ties to others as they share their lives.

These goals lead me to a research question that I am excited to explore further: What happens when students use digital storytelling to tell the stories of themselves and others? As I explore my students' stories, I am particularly interested in how the digital storytelling process impacts their sense of identity, empathy for others and feelings about classroom community. As I try to capture the essence of digital storytelling, I hope the stories allow students to share who they are, give them tools to share with each other, and create a culture of storytelling that enriches not only themselves but others as well. I plan to execute this research in a digital storytelling project

in my 6th grade class. I am hoping to find that students will become more thoughtful about their own life choices and more sensitive to people in all walks of life through the project.

Setting Description

School Setting

At High Tech Middle Media Arts, a San Diego charter middle school serving students in grades 6 through 8, I have the great privilege of being the multimedia teacher, offering a curriculum in communications, media literacy, graphic arts, video production, and photography to our 300+ student population. Not many schools in the San Diego Unified School District offer a course in multimedia to their middle school students, so in a sense it feels like paving a way for teaching the future.

HTMMA belongs to a family of charter schools, collectively known as High Tech High. Our schools in total serve a diverse population of students from all areas of San Diego County through a lottery-based admissions procedure. Students at our schools are chosen through the "luck of the draw" based on zip code, parent info session attendance, and an application of intent to join our schools. In this way, we enjoy a more diverse student community, while also creating a more natural reflection of the community.

As seen below in Figure 1, we share a community of learners who are diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, English Learners and free and reduced lunch students. We are working towards a demographic model more aligned with the San Diego Unified school district through continued use of a zip code lottery for our admissions process.

	African-American	American Indian or Alaskan Native	Asian	Filipino	Hispanic or Latino	Pacific Islander	Caucasian	Free and Reduced Lunch	EL
SDUSD	13%	<1%	5%	7%	44%	5%	25%	59%	30%
HTMMA	13%	<1%	7%	7%	30%	2%	41%	28%	5%

Figure 1: Comparative chart of breakdown of student population

As I write this, there are nine schools in the High Tech High charter organization, which has expanded from the Point Loma campus to North County and Chula Vista. Of those, three are middle schools, which like all of our schools are founded upon three common design principles: Personalization, Adult-World Connection, and Common Intellectual Mission. We base our philosophy on these principles in hopes of offering the most complete support system to all students on their academic pathway towards higher education.

Personalization ensures that teachers know their students, and in knowing them can provide the best education and meet the needs of all learners. In addition to their teachers, every student has an advisor who acts as their personal adult contact with whom they can share what's going on in school and outside of it. Advisors make a home visit to every new student to create a personal connection instead of just an academic one.

Adult-World connection offers students a taste of real-world systems through project-based learning. Like a business, students manage their responsibilities, work in teams, and follow real-world procedures. When I teach video, they learn the steps of pre-production, production, and post-production just like any professional videographer. Teachers invite guest speakers and

experts in the field, and they encourage students to doing more outside of the classroom, such as service learning in the community.

Our common intellectual mission gives students a chance to work to their highest expectations without a tracking system so that all students can achieve success of the highest nature. As a project-based learning school, we offer curriculum to students which integrates them in real-world contexts, so that they feel like they are part of the process of learning instead of just receivers of content. Through projects, students follow a path, take a journey, and discover through an exploration of their world. Students also share these journeys in the form of public exhibitions as well as on their school digital portfolios, a public website created by all students in HTH from 6th-12th grade, to display their work.

Although there are currently three middle schools in the High Tech High Village, two in Point Loma and one in San Marcos, HTMMA distinguishes itself as a communications-based, media-oriented school. Our school offers an exploratory program which offers a year's worth of instruction to all students in the disciplines of Art, Drama, and Multimedia. Each year, all students take a semester-long course in two of the three courses available. There are two multimedia programs serving the middle school level, one at HTMMA and the other in San Marcos, helping our digital natives become better at expressing themselves and gaining understanding through various media. Exploratory courses fulfill visual and performing arts standards as well as NETS technology standards and offer instruction to each grade-level for one hour per class. Our class sizes average at 28 students, and the students are divided in teams of 56.

In addition to their exploratory courses, the students are also enrolled in their core subjects, Humanities and Math/Science. These are each two-hour blocks that are taught by team teachers who work together to integrate instruction. There are two teaching teams per grade level, making a total of six teams in the school. These classes integrate the use of technology into their classroom curriculum, and often collaborate with the exploratory teachers to create major exhibitions of student learning.

Students receive a secondary path of learning that fulfills a more social-emotional context in their advisories and x-block. In advisory, our students have gained service learning skills by spreading out into the community to perform various clean-ups, support for other schools, and humanitarian acts. Each week, advisories, which are made up of mixed students in 6-8th grade, meet three times a week to participate in a variety of activities geared around issues around school, such as cyberbullying, racism, and community. Following an advisory model called *CPR, Circle of Power and Respect*, students are greeted each time they meet in advisory, participate in a sharing protocol and group activity, and hear school announcements. We also meet once a month for a Community meeting, a forum where the whole school joins together on a certain theme or activity.

X-Block is offered every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon for one hour of instruction that provides a more relaxed context for students to get physical education or develop skills in areas of music, crafts, or dance for example. It is also a time to offer study skills and support to

struggling learners. In the effort to offer various opportunities at my school, I've taught x-blocks such as Beginning French, French Cooking and producing the school Yearbook.

As students enjoy many opportunities for growth, teachers at our school also gain valuable experiences for professional development and collaboration. As teachers, we are encouraged to work together, to join with other schools on projects and to share our teaching practices with our colleagues creating collective resources and opportunities. HTH is also the first to offer an adult-learning program through their Graduate School of Education which offers a Teacher Intern and Induction Program, Leading Schools Certificate Program, and Teacher and School Leadership Masters Programs. Thus, teachers work as practitioners, observing other teachers, reflecting upon their own work, joining in study groups, planning community meetings, facilitating staff meetings, communicating through the use of digital portfolios and making connections with the educational community at large.

Classroom Setting

I am a multimedia teacher at HTMMA and I currently teach 6th graders in the fall semester and 8th graders in the spring semester. My class is taught in a lab fitted with 13 G5 Macintosh computers and two I-Mac computers. This offers each class about a 2:1 computer ratio. The programs I use teach students skills in word processing, video production, photographic manipulation, graphic design and web design. With only an hour per lesson to teach the complex processes of multimedia creation, I divide the class time to offer hands-on instruction, lecture or

tutorial, and reflective practices, such as journaling. Students spend about 30 minutes a day on the computer or in a hands-on project. The rest of the time is for first thing focus (a beginning exercise in reflection) direct instruction, student planning, group planning, and/or pre-production planning depending on the project. Students work individually on projects such as creating their digital portfolios, or in teams, making a video or poster. The content I teach falls under the main umbrellas of media literacy, communications, and visual arts. Students are building valuable critical thinking skills, 21st century skills, and creating visual art with the aid of a computer or digital technology. I have a cabinet of resources, including digital cameras, digital camcorders, a green screen, tripods, dollies, and audio equipment which allows students the facility to use real-world professional technologies in the classroom.

Through the use of technology, students learn to make professional work, using professional standards derived from real world professions. My hope is to inspire students to work towards careers in the visual arts, and to recognize that these skills will help them grow in any field, but are also a recognizable field in themselves. Through teaching a class such as multimedia, students open up to the possibilities of becoming film directors, game designers, graphic artists, videographers, photographers, computer programmers, and engineers. I always say, they are in control of the media, not the other way around. As producers of content and not just mindless consumers, I hope they will gain insight into how to reach out to the world through their creativity.

Understandings

Their story, yours and mine -- it's what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them —William Carlos Williams

We all have a story inside us. Indeed, our memories are stories that we need to share with others (Schank, 1990). Our desire to tell and hear stories is innately human in that, as far as we know, humans are the only creatures capable of telling stories. As one of the oldest forms of human communication, storytelling has shaped our culture today. From the caves of Lascaux, to modern day literary classics, we all know stories from the past and some have made an impact on our lives. From learning the moral of a story, to diving into the lives of other characters, stories become a part of how we understand the world. Just as stories shape our culture, they also shape who we are to the world as we construct our own personal mythology (Schank, 1990). According to Schank, each time we communicate who we are to others, we construct a sense of ourselves. Our personal mythology is a set of experiences that we relate to others through conversations, storytelling, and writing about ourselves. Through stories we learn lessons, morals, values, histories, and experiences from a variety of authors to which we can relate to our own lives.

There are many ways to tell stories, many kinds of different stories, and many audiences for stories. In today's world of new media, storytelling has expanded from a local experience to a global one. The interactivity of storytelling has shifted from real-time to anytime. The limits of

storytelling are seemingly endless and now allow for more possibilities to view, make, and share stories.

What is Digital Storytelling?

Digital Storytelling is a process that blends the traditional practices of narrative storytelling with a new media approach that uses audiovisual elements that can be edited together as a movie using a computer. Many people have their own definitions of what it is, but most contemporary literature points to the founder of the Center for Digital Storytelling, Joe Lambert. Mr. Lambert and Dana Achtley, a performer who inspired his work, defined it as a “short, first-person video-narrative created by combining recorded voice, still and moving images, and music or other sounds.”(Lambert, www.storycenter.com). Achtley imbued a mixed-media approach to stage performance, involving personal photographs, memoirs and video footage, inspiring Lambert to produce a similar effect using digital media tools, such as a computer, scanner and a microphone. Written or oral stories could now be transformed into audio and image-rich short movies.

Digital storytelling has many applications in the classroom, library, business and community space for a variety of fields and disciplines (Lambert, 2006). What makes digital storytelling different from other storytelling methods is that it can put the personal experiences of a storyteller in front of a global audience, connecting that one individual with innumerable others through media. It also blends voice with images, constructing a more audiovisual experience for the viewer. The construction of a digital story requires the knowledge of media practices from editing video, to scanning photos, and recording voiceovers, making personal stories come to

life. For this reason, many media specialists offer courses or workshops that seek to train students of digital storytelling to learn the visual language of filmmaking. Although it can be a complex process, anyone can learn with the guidance and expertise of someone who can teach multimedia skills such as sound recording and editing, archiving and scanning photographs, and video editing.

My research aims to focus on the construction of a digital story as a method for teaching students how to explore personal stories about themselves and others. The following section will seek to chronicle other research and experiences that I have found to be useful in understanding how students experience digital storytelling, specifically in the classroom.

Educational Benefits of Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling has several uses in any K-12 context and beyond; yet what interests me most is how transformative it can be for the individuals who participate. It can have the power to bring communities together, increase student voice and motivation, engage struggling writers, empower students to produce multimedia content, and build 21st century learning skills. The digital storytelling experience and its benefits are well documented in a variety of digital storytelling projects.

Warren Hegg, Founder of the organization, Digital Clubhouse Network, states that the power of *Stories of Service*, a national veteran's storytelling project, is its mission to connect kids to their communities through intergenerational-storytelling (2008). To illustrate this point, two girls in

my 8th grade class worked together to produce the digital story of a WWII Pearl Harbor survivor. The story of Pearl Harbor came to life through hours of interviews and picture scanning with a veteran who experienced it first hand. Through the process, the students learned more about a historical event through the eyes of a survivor than they ever could from a history textbook. They forged a personal connection through several meetings and shared their final movie with him at the local Veteran's Museum to honor his story and his service.

The power of these stories can be far-reaching. As the stories are passed on, they can transform our perceptions of the storyteller's identity. I witnessed this transformation by a former student who produced a digital story about a WWII veteran. She remarked, "at first he was just my neighbor, but now he's a hero from WWII." Before the storytelling process began, these people didn't really know one another. But, after the digital story was produced, the storyteller became the immortalized and the digital story producer, the immortalizer. Although the storyteller never admitted to being a hero, his digital story transformed his identity in the eyes of his producer.

The digital storytelling experience and its benefits are well documented in research on a variety of other digital storytelling projects. In the *Place Project*, providing students with the opportunity to tell stories about a place that was significant to them increased student voice and motivation (Banaszewski, 2005). Realizing that there are always special places in the hearts of children, Banasweski simply prompted students to describe that place in a story and make it digital through narration and visuals. He found that students saw a change in themselves as writers when motivated to tell a story about a special place and create a movie to visually

represent the story. The project not only motivated students, but also built community by teaching students to trust one other through the sharing of their stories. Other researchers have found that by allowing students a chance to voice their stories in digital form, students were able to form stronger bonds with their teachers that empowered communication and led to increased motivation and engagement (Kahn, 1998). Telling a personal story and sharing it became a transformative experience not just for students, but personally and professionally for teachers as well. The transformation for one teacher in Edenvale, CA came from the realization that her students had powerful stories to share in an immigrant community that was struggling to survive.

Through the process of drafting and writing a script and producing a digital story for an audience, research has shown that students employ multiple literacies, and that struggling writers in particular benefit from the process (Sylvester, 2004). Sylvester describes that although multiple literacies such as visual literacy, computer literacy, and media literacy are all a part of digital storytelling, the process really begins with writing. She describes that students often struggle to see themselves as strong writers, but that there is an extra motivation for the student who knows that their writing will become part of a multimedia project. Accessing the stories that students have to tell through multiple approaches can help them communicate what they want to share. For struggling writers, having someone else type their oral account can make the story more vivid. Asking students to tell a visual story using photographs can help them organize the story in their minds. Bringing the written together with the visual helps bridge the gap for students who struggle with traditional storytelling methods.

Digital storytelling also engages students in the media making process as producers, rather than just consumers of digital media (Ohler, 2005). This is an important idea. When I wrote a grant for digital cameras in my classroom, I titled it, “Beyond YouTube: Kids Creating Content.” I realized how the Net-Generation of students could become mindless consumers of technology and media as YouTube and other video sites fill up with user content at an exponential rate. By giving students opportunities to see themselves as producers of meaningful content, such as in the case of personal digital stories, they can step beyond the sea of media watchers and rise above as media makers. The significance of this shifting paradigm shows that as technology becomes increasingly easy to manipulate, those who use the technology will have to become significantly more creative in its application. Anyone can drag and drop a photo in I-Movie, but not everyone will have the underlying skills to construct new meaning and ideas.

This brings into question for my own research, how relevant is digital storytelling to my students' futures? According to the 21st century partnership, today's students need to develop skills in media literacy and media production. Research states that making digital stories builds 21st century skills, and that these are necessary for students to gain 21st century employment (Czarnecki, 2009). By combining digital skills, media literacy, and organizational skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving and communication, digital stories can help students learn skills to help them in society. However, I am more interested in exploring the personal implications and the transformative potential of digital storytelling for students. Through the process of creating stories that communicate messages and lessons from their lives, as well as the lives of others, the personal gain will be just as important as the digital skills they will acquire.

As I venture into the world of digital storytelling with 6th graders, my hope is that they will be able to take away new skills and blossoming experiences as I have seen evidenced in previous research and my own classroom. In my own study, I will be focusing on the impact digital storytelling can have on building a sense of identity, empathy, and community. This is what matters to me most. As a middle school teacher, I often witness the pangs of growing up, as students are struggling to understand who they are and learning how to fit into the crowd and how to stand out from it. Ultimately, I hope that students will find the links that connect them all, and learn to value each other for their individuality. Below I discuss how digital storytelling can play a role in nurturing students' sense of self, building empathy for others, and creating community.

Narrative and the Self in Digital Storytelling

How does one construct their identity using digital storytelling? Can it be an effective tool for students to dig deep into the heart of figuring out who they are? What is the role of invented stories in this process? Schank writes that, “Story invention, for children or adults, is the process of massaging reality” (1990, p.35). It doesn’t necessarily mean that the events in the story are untrue, but rather that the storyteller chooses how the events are told. Invented stories don’t come out of thin air, and how we interpret our stories says as much about us as the stories themselves. Particularly in middle school, invented stories may provide a safer way for students to explore who they are and to share this with others. I am trying to get at the notion of what stories kids

want to share and why. How do students choose the stories they wish to tell and what do those stories say about them?

Ultimately, I want to help my students construct a sense of life story and identity. To do this, I plan to use the life road map activity in the *Facing History and Ourselves* curriculum, which states, “When ‘life road maps’ are used to focus on students’ own decisions, this strategy can help them reflect on key choices that have shaped their identities” (2011). The life road map activity engages students to reflect on their lives through the metaphor of a road map and then share these with other students. From birth, to their first pet, going to a new school, or the death of a family member, students choose symbols such as traffic lights, stop signs, detours or dead ends to identify these life events. I also plan on using the interview approaches of *Storycorps*, “an independent nonprofit whose mission is to provide Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs with the opportunity to record, share, and preserve the stories of our lives” (<http://storycorps.org/about/>). I hope that teaching students to interview each other will help them become comfortable sharing life stories with each other. The questions from Storycorps’ great questions list are open-ended and can lead to further discussion of an important life event. By asking questions like, “What was the happiest moment of your life? The saddest?” students will be opening up their emotions and memories to one other.

I’m not sure what will emerge as students explore their identity through digital storytelling, but as I look into more research on developing life stories, I am struck by what those stories tend to focus on. Particularly in the study of *Emerging Identities*, Matsuba and colleagues discuss when

life stories emerge: “While adolescence may be the time when people have the cognitive and psychosocial abilities to assemble a life narrative, it is in childhood when early life experiences occur that shape the later emerging story”(2011, p. 134). As we dive into digital storytelling, it will be interesting to see if students choose stories from a recent time or from past childhood experiences. I will also be looking at whether students' stories focus on themselves, someone else in their families or someone in their communities. As I look to see what happens, I am excited to find out what stories 6th graders most want to tell, and what their choices communicate about their own perceptions of themselves.

Story as a bridge to Empathy

Another one of my goals is to examine how sharing our stories affects students' understandings of one another and our classroom culture. Will they feel more connected? Will they understand each other better? Will they be more empathetic? Empathy is one of those factors that I predict will be hard to gauge. R. Greenson states, “To empathize means to share, to experience the feelings of another person” (1960, p. 418). To me, empathy is the ability to connect with another person through the understanding of their life perspective. To walk in another person’s shoes is an experience I hope that sharing stories will enable.

Humans form empathy through their experiences and connecting to the experiences of others. Thus, story can have the power to create empathetic connections to one another through the sharing of one’s own experiences. Interestingly, there’s another side of this to consider. As I

reviewed P.J. Manney's article, "Empathy in the Time of Technology: How Storytelling is the Key to Empathy," he states:

"There is a belief among some academics and storytellers that the non-visual story has a deeper psychological impact than the visual story, since the non-visual relies on each mind using its personal experience to build its imagination, making it a more intimate, relatable 'vision' with a greater impact on one's empathy"(2008, p.4).

In an age where visuals bombard the senses everywhere and anytime, it is interesting to ponder the effects of storytelling in visual and non-visual forms. In the case of traditional literature, the mind's imagination can often bring characters and situations to life more vividly than in the movie rendition, especially if the story has personal meaning to the reader.

I can see the argument that Manney brings up regarding the non-visual story and the visual story. However, I predict students will have greater insight into another person's experience by watching the digital story version. I think it will be interesting to observe how empathetic connections occur in the classroom as students move from sharing stories orally, to audibly, to visually wrapping it all together. I also wonder how to facilitate empathy with 6th grade students who are at a biological point of developing the adolescent ego? What happens when students can't empathize? How could digital storytelling perhaps open the door for the possibility of empathetic connections? Manney provides some advice related to these questions,

"Therefore, the only hope is for all of us to tell stories. Lots and lots of stories. Both our own stories and the stories of others. Both true and fictional stories. But most importantly, like the best storytellers, we must make these stories universal in their

appeal. And make them from our heart. Then we must spread these stories as pervasively as possible in the multicultural sphere, using as many forms of media as possible, in the hopes of catching those who don't share the same views unawares, so when they read or see or VR [virtually realize] that story, they might say to themselves, 'You and I may not be alike, but now I understand you. And I think you'd understand me, too, if I told you my story'"(9).

This idea strikes a chord with me as I delve into researching my question. I hope that by telling stories from our hearts and sharing them, I will find that students come to a better understanding of each other through expressing themselves and finding connections to one another.

Building Community Through Storytelling

Stories are told to be shared. There are different views of audience and purpose, ranging from stories for oneself, stories for others, and stories as conversation (Schank, 1990). When I think about how a story can build a sense of community, I think back to my experience with *Stories of Service*. Before doing the *Stories of Service* project, students in my classroom did not really see a connection between themselves and the surrounding San Diego veterans community. After producing stories of veterans, students became activists and leaders in their communities, helping to represent members of their communities through facilitating storytelling sessions at veteran meetings and honoring them in parades.

After a simple search for digital storytelling projects, I am led to programs and community organizations, such as *Stories of Service*, the Public Broadcasting System's *Native American*

Circle of Stories project, The British Broadcasting Company *Telling Lives Project*, and the U.S. Navy Memorial's *Navy Veteran's Digital Storytelling* project. There are people all over the globe, finding ways of expressing and passing on the traditions of oral history using today's technology. The possibilities of a limitless audience due to the Internet allow the community countless opportunities to gather and share stories. The Center for Digital Storytelling has several case studies that show the vast spread of digital storytelling from projects in the United States to collaborations with 33 countries. They have trained other centers to build digital storytelling programs that teach middle school students to explore the lives of other people in their communities. They have also created story gathering programs at local museums that invite the community to share their stories.

The implications of such projects are still being researched, but the collective voice of different groups is loud and clear. People are expressing their personal experiences and thus weaving together a new understanding of the world. Stories that come from official sources, such as news media corporations will no longer be the only sources of truth. Instead, these personal stories multiplied together make a community of storytellers who are able to shape their own truth and through the process of digital storytelling, make it official (Schank, 1990).

In my own digital storytelling project, I am hopeful that my students will experience a sense of community as a class and as a storytelling force in San Diego. I envision students becoming a part of their school community, sharing resources and experiences, learning together and helping one another succeed. As students produce digital stories of themselves and others, my hope is

that they will become a community of storytelling producers who are skilled and trained to take digital storytelling anywhere they go, to produce their own realities. The stories can be exhibited in the greater community, and bring together not only family and friends of the producers, but also people from the community who could become future subjects of digital stories themselves.

Methods

Data Collection

In my work with the entire 6th grade class, I chose to focus on one class of 27 students whom I taught during the last period of the school day. I chose this class randomly, and focused further on a group of focus students who would help me to discover how different students were experiencing the digital storytelling project. Out of six focus students, I decided to write cases on four in an attempt to give further insight into the student experience. I tried a variety of methods to help me understand student perceptions through collecting data at various points in the project. In using these results, I was able to analyze what stories students wanted to tell and why, as well as how they experienced the digital storytelling process and the process of sharing their stories with others.

Surveys

The survey data I collected helped me track how students were experiencing the digital story project. I collected preliminary data from the entire 6th grade (112 students) using Survey Monkey. I used Google forms to conduct later surveys with my 5th period class (27 students). The preliminary survey (Appendix A) gave me a chance to understand my students' perceptions about identity, storytelling, sharing, and community. This survey also provided me information about who kids wanted to tell a story about based on questions I asked them such as the example below:

If you could tell everyone in the world one story, what story would you tell?

(A) A story about me

B) A story about a family member

(C) A story about a friend

(D) A story about someone in my community

As I reviewed the responses to this question and others, I rephrased the questions in future surveys to relate them to what stories kids would tell and why they wanted to share those stories.

Exit Cards

I used both virtual and paper exit cards to get more detailed information regarding classroom activities related to my research. Paper exit cards ranged from asking students to rate a project experience, to sharing reflections after an interview process, and telling me what story they were going to develop into their digital stories. The following are examples of exit card questions:

- 1) What's one thing that struck you from conducting an interview with your partner today?
- 2) What's one thing you learned about yourself today through being interviewed?
- 3) If you could tell everyone in the world one story, what story would you tell?

A. My story

B. A story about a family member

C. My friend's story

D. The story of someone amazing in my community

Virtual exit cards emailed out to students helped me gather more immediate information from them in a spreadsheet format which could be utilized for deeper analysis.

Interviews/Focus Groups

To gain more insight into what happened when students used digital storytelling, I conducted small group and individual interviews. I was interested in finding out how students viewed the process of digital storytelling from beginning to end. I examined what ideas, questions, and experiences came out of the process for individual students. In conducting interviews at the midpoint, and post-project stages of the digital story project, I learned about how students used digital storytelling and how their thinking evolved in regards to identity, empathy and community.

A sample question on identity:

What do you consider a good personal story?

A sample question on empathy:

Did this project help you share yourself?

A sample question on community:

What did you think about meeting in a circle of chairs at the start of each class?

I chose students to interview who told very different digital stories and who had different experiences in sharing their stories. Some of these students became cases in my study representing different approaches students took to the project. These students also represented the range of diversity in the classroom based in technological knowledge, gender, and race. In the end I had a diverse group who experienced the project in very different ways.

Student Work Samples

Along the way, I evaluated student work, such as their life road maps, *Storycorps* interviews, and digital story script drafts, digital stories and final reflections. These helped inform me about how students were experiencing different modes of storytelling, and how they were choosing stories to tell. I collected data at various points in my research. The following table represents the data collection cycle:

Date Collected	Type of Data	Purpose
Sep 23, 2010	Preliminary Survey (Survey Monkey)	To gather data on student perceptions of identity, empathy, and community
Oct 12, 2010	Exit Card Partner Interview (in-class)	To gather data following a partner interview activity
Oct 13, 2010	Virtual Exit card Story Descriptions (emailed)	To gather data about what story students want to tell and why.
Oct 25, 2010	Survey Digging Deeper (Google Form)	To offer students a chance to tell a different story and gather data on which students changed their minds.
Nov 29, 2010	Survey What's Happening Google Form	To ask the question: What's Happening as you make your Digital Story? Part One
Dec 16, 2010	Survey Google Form	Reflections on Exhibition Night
Jan 20-21, 2011	Project Reflection Form Multimedia Exit Survey (Emailed)	To gather data on purpose of the project, what was learned, and how it impacted them.
Apr 13, 2011	Focus Group Interview	To gather data on student perceptions of identity, empathy, and community following the project. To discuss and analyze impacts.

Figure 2: Data Collection Chart

Data Analysis

Surveys

The survey data I collected helped me track how students were experiencing the digital story project. I collected preliminary data from the entire 6th grade (112 students) using Survey Monkey. I used Google forms to conduct later surveys with my 5th period class (27 students), which collected each student's email address so I could easily identify their responses within a spreadsheet for easy analysis. Open-ended questions could be read in a spreadsheet, and other data could be sorted into graphs and percentages. I only wish that it had further analysis tools to help track word frequency.

As I analyzed the data from one survey, it informed the questions I asked on future ones.

For example, the digging deeper survey asked students:

- 1) What will I gain personally from telling this story?
- 2) What will others gain from telling this story?
- 3) If I could change my story what now would be the story I want to tell and why?

From this survey, students began to reveal the reasoning behind the stories they wanted to tell.

The lessons they wanted to communicate also emerged at this stage. At this point, I knew how students felt about the stories they wanted to tell and why. I coded survey data for key word frequency in their statements which led to emerging themes. I also graphed quantitative data to show trends in storytelling.

Exit Cards

Exit cards helped me most in making immediate changes to inform my practice the next day. Although I experimented with virtual exit cards as an alternative to getting immediate feedback on student thinking, only 60-70% of my students replied, even when given class time to respond. Paper exit slips held students more accountable to giving feedback. From these, I was able to pull out themes in what students were thinking about the stories they wanted to tell, how they experienced activities in class, and what they learned that day.

Interviews/Focus Groups

I transcribed video recorded interviews with focus students to help me gain more insight into how they progressed through the digital storytelling process. I was particularly interested in how their answers reflected current attitudes towards digital storytelling, comfort levels with storytelling, relationships with peers, family members and the greater community. I asked questions relating to the process and found that as I compared different students' responses to interview questions, themes emerged relating to empathy and sharing stories.

Work Samples

Student work samples helped me identify which students to focus on as case studies of different approaches to digital storytelling. By comparing data from collected life road maps, interviews, digital story scripts, final digital stories and reflections, I was able to find out different themes regarding how students experienced digital storytelling and see changes over time in the stories they had to tell.

Findings

When I began the school year, I had a strong desire to find new ways of understanding my students and build a better classroom culture. I wanted to get to know my students. As a result of this desire, I decided to focus my action research on developing a digital storytelling project revolving around a defining moment in my 6th grade students' lives. I wanted to help students creatively express themselves and share their stories with others. I wanted to give students an outlet to make their stories heard. I wanted to know what happened as students told stories of themselves and others through digital storytelling. I found that in the process, students discovered they all had stories to tell, and that their stories had lasting impressions not only on themselves, but also on their audience members. The following findings share the narrative of the project process as well as highlight some themes that I hope prove useful to other educators as they decide how to go about using digital storytelling in any context. I also include a few case studies of students who approached the storytelling process differently.

Building a Storytelling Community

The first few weeks were crucial in forming a strong classroom culture. It was the beginning of the year and I wanted to define a culture where students were encouraged to communicate and participate in the classroom community. I wanted them to be able to share aspects of themselves and who they are with one another. I tried many new strategies to engage students in building an empathetic community and hoped that it would encourage dialogue and a high level of comfort

to share personal stories with each other. In my classroom, I wanted students to build a sense of identity through storytelling, be able to share their personal stories with each other, become empathetic to one another, and share these stories with the community.

Strategies for Building Community

In my previous years teaching in my multimedia lab, I've rearranged the seating several times to accommodate the different activities that students would be doing in the classroom. This year, my focus was making kids feel comfortable with the space, with me, and with each other.

•Circle of Chairs- *"Everybody can see everybody's faces."*-Lauren

Each day the students came in and sat in a circle. I didn't dictate where they sat, but always made sure that everyone felt included in the circle and could see everyone. As a teacher, I felt like this configuration made me less like a "sage on the stage" and more of a facilitator of conversation and idea sharing. However, due to the loose seating assignments, students were extremely talkative which led to taking a longer time to settle in and quiet down. They often sat next to the people they were closest to in class, and as friendships changed, seating choices reflected those changes. After the semester ended, I invited a focus group of six students to share their thoughts and opinions on the semester. As a group, they felt that the circle provided a space to listen to directions or the agenda for the day, and that it helped people become more familiar with one another, especially in the beginning of the year. However, they agreed that starting every class period in the circle "took a long time to get people focused...and we lost a lot of our work time."

·Feelings Drop Box- *“This is a class where you talk about your feelings cause with the project that we did, we pretty much talked about our feelings.”-Tim*

About two weeks into the semester, I hung a large clasped envelope on my desk where students could share notes with me about anything they were feeling. I introduced it as a place to leave thoughts and feelings for students who didn't have a chance to share during our short class period. I wanted to encourage sharing in as many different contexts as possible in the classroom, by allowing students to express their feelings with me privately when they needed. I received notes about things happening in class with others, goings-on in life, and problems that the kids were experiencing. Some notes let me know if they were feeling sad or happy.

I learned later on in my focus group interview that I didn't promote the box very well and that if I had, more students might have used it. However, as things came up I made sure I connected with the student the next day or at the end of class to check in and see how he or she was feeling. For instance, one student left a long letter to me explaining how her heart was broken knowing that her best friend was mad at her. Something had happened in their humanities class and the two girls stopped talking to each other. This was a difficult situation because they happened to be co-producing each other's digital stories in my classroom. I sat the two girls down in my office and had them work out an agreement, and after a few days, they resolved their conflict. In contrast, one of my focus group students remarked that, “I never used that feeling box because it's kind of my personal life my feelings. Sometimes I don't want to express that to...a lot of people.” His remarks helped me understand that students felt differently about sharing.

·**Tech Rovers**-*“When the tech rovers were there they were able to just help us with whatever we needed to do.”-Tim*

In a technology classroom, I found it vital to the community to have students share their abilities and help in the classroom as a way to promote leadership, mentorship, accountability, and responsibility in students. The tech rovers system was magical! The kids had a spot on the whiteboard where they wrote their names so that others would know that they were available as *tech rovers*. At the start of class I would ask students if they wanted to be tech rovers, and those who wanted to help would add their names to the list. Every day and every class had volunteers, though some students volunteered some of the time, and some did not volunteer at all. In one of my focus group interviews, I found out that students who did not volunteer usually wanted to use all their time in class to work on their own project. One of my students felt she didn't have enough computer skills to help, which was quickly shot down by another focus student who exclaimed, “I think she was amazing with the computer.” Students who did volunteer signed up because they felt like helping or finished their work early. They did not sign up if they felt people did not need their help.

I attempted to make sure I was requesting tech rovers to sign up for help in a variety of skills so that different students were able to contribute. Some examples of these expertise areas included Photoshop, creating a digital portfolio in Google Sites, editing in I-Movie, connecting to the school server, connecting a flash drive, connecting a digital camera, and general tech troubleshooting. I usually made a point in the beginning to ask for various special requests for

students who felt comfortable in these areas. Although posting a variety of skills produced some changes in who signed up, it didn't keep a record that would have allowed me to show patterns and track student behavior.

•**Computer Buddies/Co-Producers-***“I enjoyed this project because I like to work with partners and I love to hear my voice...I also got help from my co-producer. He made sure I was on task.”-*
Kris

This buddy system was important to establish a sense of community and peer mentoring. I wanted to demonstrate that good projects could not be assessed without help and critique from another peer. Every student had a buddy who was responsible for offering kind, helpful, specific critique on their digital story throughout the production process. In my classroom, this buddy system was particularly conducive to the learning environment because we have a 2:1 computer ratio, and every student had to share their Mac G5 workstation with a buddy.

I also found that the buddy system helped keep students accountable to themselves and to others. Every student had a checklist of tasks that their buddy had to sign before they could go on to the next task. Before pairing students up as Co-Producers of digital stories, we did some initial computer skills building with a buddy of their choice. As part of this, I asked them to email me “Buddy Expectations” so that we could establish classroom standards for what we expected from each other. One of my focus students who didn't always like sharing openly with the class surprisingly mentions sharing as part of his and his buddy's expectations:

•**Not to say things that are not TRUE.**

- Work together.**
- Be NICE to each other.**
- Respect each other.**
- Listen to each other.**
- SHARE.**

Another interesting model came from Tim and his partner:

Treat your buddy how you want be treated.

Listen to your buddy.

If your buddy wants to help let them help.

Don't give up even if you and your buddy want to.

Stay on task the whole time.

Try your hardest.

Always be thankful that you have your buddy!

Have a lot of fun!

This data shows that already by the first week of school, students were identifying traits of a good buddy, and being empathetic to one another's needs. By placing them in a situation where they had to rely on each other for help, students realized this responsibility early on, as seen through these buddy expectations.

•**Digital Story Critique-***"I fell in love with it! The music was just right. The pictures were alive and well, wow! I would give it ten out of 13 firetrucks!"-Bill's critique of Lauren's digital story*

The Co-Producer role was the most valuable for engaging kids in working together and encouraging improvement on a peer level, particularly during critique. For digital storytelling, the critique process became a valuable tool in shaping students' ability to share their stories with one another. Critique also provided an opportunity for students to express empathy for each other's stories. We ran critique several times during the process, from reviewing digital story scripts, to their fine cut and final edits in the movie making process.



Figure 3: A small group final draft script critique

According to reflection data, some students felt having a partner was one of the most fun or helpful parts of making the digital stories. I found that as a teacher, fostering these partnerships was vital to building a community that valued the feelings and voices of others. Screening the stories together and having a space for responding to each other's personal stories encouraged empathetic responses. As we screened final cuts, students frequently expressed empathy for one another through comments which started with "I can relate to your story because..." Each of the above strategies and choices helped us to build a community where students shared, were open with themselves, and empathetic to one another.

Pretext for Sharing our Stories

Before I began the project, I used the preliminary survey (Appendix A) data and some *getting to know you* activities to help me understand my students' self-perceptions, comfort with sharing, and views on community.

On Identity:

95% of students in the 6th grade could define three words to describe themselves to someone new.

The most frequent words they chose varied from “fun”, “funny”, “awesome”, “creative”, “friendly” and “helpful.” I was intrigued by their choices as I learned who they were and how they identified themselves. I also noticed that their word choices showed empathetic tendencies by identifying as a “helpful” person.

47% of students said their stories would be found in the comedy section of a video store, whereas 6.5% said documentary.

I found this to be interesting since I expected that students would be more inclined to tell stories of their own lives. However, when I asked them this question I found that they focused on where they would want to find their story perhaps more than what the subject of the story would be.

I also had them all fill out an “Introducing Me” sheet at the beginning of the year that would help me gauge what they were willing to share with me about themselves. They responded to questions such as, “What’s one thing I want you to know about me?” It was a great tool for getting to learn about my students at the beginning of the year.

On Sharing:

I evaluated how comfortable students were sharing with different groups. I had them rate how comfortable they were sharing their stories:

51.3% of students didn't mind sharing their stories with their parents

44.9% couldn't wait to share with their friends

35.8% didn't mind sharing it publicly on the Internet.

In the age of YouTube, it interested me that they were not as comfortable sharing stories on the Internet as they were sharing with their friends, parents or other students. All students responded that they would want to share their stories, but some were more comfortable with different audiences. Students who did not feel comfortable sharing their stories were least comfortable sharing publicly on the Internet. Students who couldn't wait to share their stories wanted to share most with friends, then with teachers, grandparents, parents, classmates, siblings, everyone, and least comfortable sharing publicly on the Internet. This data seemed to mirror the adolescent desire to develop peer relations. Not surprisingly, students most wanted to share with friends and are most comfortable sharing with friends.

On Community:

I wanted to gauge how students viewed themselves as part of a classroom community, and find out if they were engaged in the community outside of school. I wanted to foster a sense of community in my classroom through routines and structures that supported involvement and participation from the students. At this point I wanted to know if they felt like it was working.

86% of students feel they contribute to the classroom community.

86% of students feel they contribute to the greater San Diego community.

It struck me how many students felt they were a part of the classroom community. Although we had just begun school, students were already identifying themselves as “helpful,” “respectful,” “comfortable,” “safe,” “supportive,” and a “friend.” I definitely noticed that students were contributing to the classroom community by being helpful, respecting the technology, being a friend and volunteering to be a tech rover. One student described her contribution as, “Interacting with my classmates and even helping them with certain things.” It was good to know that they felt like the classroom was a place they could feel comfortable and where they felt they could be helpful. At this point, I felt comfortable knowing my students had a sense of what community felt like, looked like, and how they played a part in it.

Journey to Finding A Story

“I knew I had the story I wanted to tell when I started writing my script and thinking about what pictures to bring in, what I wanted my voice to sound like, etc.”-Chelsea

I found that many students experienced different pathways to telling the story they wanted to share. For some, the answer was clear, but for many, it was a winding path before arriving at the final screening. In the beginning, I knew it would be a challenge to facilitate the process of finding a story to tell, much less share with an audience. I wanted the story prompt to be open-ended, and have students guided by their own desire to share a story about their lives or someone else's. I tried several approaches in my class to help students brainstorm stories to share. I also gave students several opportunities to share them as a way to build a culture of empathy in the

classroom and increase their comfort with sharing. In this chapter, I describe some of the activities we engaged in to help students generate ideas for their stories.

• **Jigsaw**

After taking a course in my first year of graduate study in differentiation, I learned about a technique called “jigsaw.” The purpose of a jigsaw is to “develop a depth of knowledge not possible if the students were to try and learn all of the material on their own” (Aronson, 1978). I used the jigsaw technique to help students understand the elements of a digital story (Appendix B) Students broke out into a small group of four to watch one of the digital story examples I had compiled from various websites. After watching one together and answering questions about the story, students broke up into a second larger group of seven to discuss the different stories each had watched. After watching the stories and reflecting in large groups about what makes a digital story, we created a list of elements of a digital story as a class. Students described that a digital story had to have pictures, music, voiceover, titles, effects, and transitions. Although we had not pulled out themes as a class, I hoped this activity helped students frame in their minds the kinds of stories people were telling and the variety of stories to tell.

• **Life Road map**

I found the life road map activity (Appendix C) as a result of a web search to help students reflect on their lives through the metaphor of a journey on a road. I wanted students to remember significant moments in their lives, and attribute those to the bigger picture on the map of life. In asking students to reflect on their lives in this way, I found it opened students up to

expressing not only the memories of what had happened in their lives, but also triggered an emotional response to those moments. The activity was a two-fold process where students had to list significant events in their lives according to what kind of road symbol they represented such as speed bumps, stop signs, traffic lights, detours and dead ends. Then, they had to take those moments and illustrate a map showing the symbols and events as a road. There were many different interpretations of what made an event a stop sign or a speed bump. The drawing of the map was also left very open as a free interpretation. I found that this activity helped students most in processing the meaning of a significant life event, and helped them recall these events as moments in their journey of life.

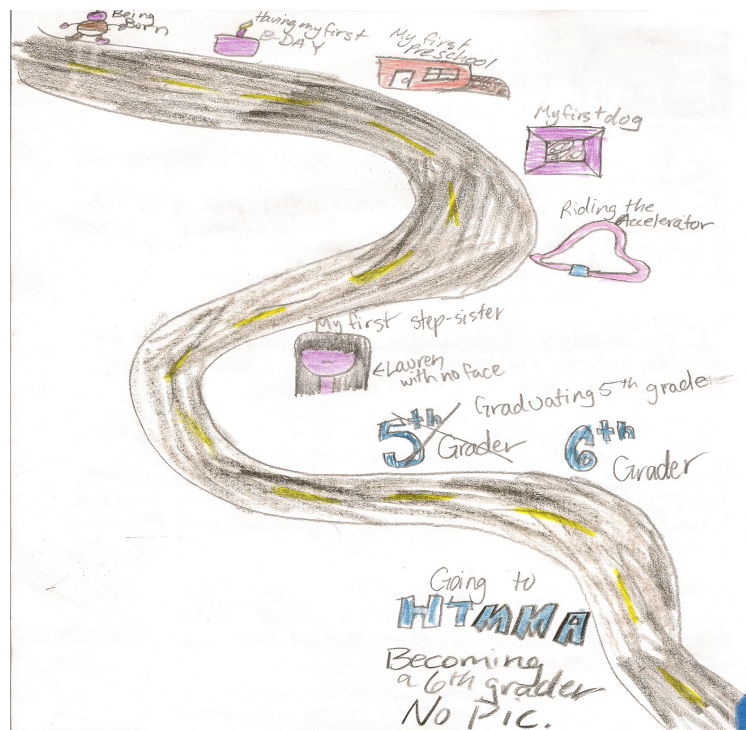


Figure 4 - Lauren's Life Road Map

The activity also helped students learn about each other as they shared them in a *gallery walk*. A gallery walk is a forum for sharing student work, where students look at each other's work and leave kind, helpful, or specific comments about it. The day we set up gallery walk, we wrote down a list of gallery walk norms ranging from taking our time and leaving good feedback, to being kind and being thoughtful. I played soft music in the background to inspire a gallery feel, as students went around to different tables around the room and reviewed their classmates' life road maps. On sticky notes, students left comments sharing what they liked about the work of others. They felt that the gallery walk was a good way to see each other's work and learn about their lives. In an exit card following the activity, I asked students to comment on the following questions:

- 1) How did you feel about the life road map activity?
- 2) What was the most interesting life road map that made you want to know more? Why?
- 3) Find a comparison you found between your life road map and someone else's.
- 4) Find one difference.
- 5) Where would you like to see your life road go in the future?

Students responded to the first question positively overall:

“I loved it!”

“I feel really good because I don't mind people knowing my life.”

“I felt very comfortable writing my road life because I felt like sharing it.”

Many students shared these sentiments of feeling comfortable sharing with others, while other students expressed a desire to reflect and express themselves. One student felt “really nice about it because I was expressing my feelings about the past.” Another remarked, “It felt good

because after it brought back good memories to share. Before I felt nervous because in the beginning I didn't know how people will react."

However, a few students were not comfortable sharing their road maps with the class. For a handful of students, they felt their maps were too personal to share with others in a gallery walk or they felt uncomfortable sharing what they created. In my feelings drop box, I received one note from a girl who was "embarrassed" to share her life road map because it was "too personal." In allowing students the option before the gallery walk to not share their maps, I hoped that they would soon feel comfortable sharing over time.

•Day in the Life Photo Project

The day in the life photo project was one I came up with to help students relate their stories in a visual way using photography (Appendix D). Because the final digital stories would be made up of at least some personal photographs, I wanted students to be familiar with the camera and be able to construct a mini-story about a day in their lives in six photos. The purpose of the assignment was to tell a story without words--a skill called visual storytelling that would later become an essential part of their final digital story. The result was a series of selected photos on a storyboard with no text, so as not to identify the storyteller. These were hung up in our room for students to look at and speculate which pictures belonged to whom. Unfortunately, I ran out of time and could do nothing more than assign it as a homework. We didn't share the day in the life photo stories as a class as I had intended.



Figure 5. Student Work Sample: Day in the Life Photo story

•Choosing the Story

After a few weeks of engaging the students in these activities, the time came for them to submit their initial ideas about what story they wanted to share as a digital story. I sent out a series of surveys in Google Forms, asking them questions about who they wanted to tell the story about, who the story was for, why they wanted to tell that story, and what they wanted to send as a message to others through their story. I spent weeks asking the same questions, and re-phrasing those questions as I helped students through this most difficult task in the whole process. One student reflected that the most difficult part of making a digital story is “finding the right story to tell because you want to share a lesson with everyone.” These surveys ended up being my

primary source of getting at the question continually on my mind: What stories do kids want to tell?

In response to my own sense that students weren't telling the stories they wanted or needed to tell, I sent out a digging deeper survey two weeks later, asking them what they would gain personally from their stories, what others will gain, and if they could change their story what story would they want to tell. Out of 22 students who responded, nine students didn't want to change their story, and 13 students offered new stories. From this data, I started having individual conversations with students whose new stories presented a deeper sense of personal need to tell.

I wanted kids to articulate why they wanted to share their particular stories and what others might gain from their story, hoping that this would help them discover a purpose for sharing. I wanted them to identify a strong story, so that their digital story would not be flat.

This corresponds to Banaszewski's advice that the "technology was always secondary to the storytelling"(2002, p.35). Ohler also states the importance of "story first" (2006, p.4).

Finally students had chosen their final story concepts to turn into scripts.

We went on to do a voiceover recording of the scripts, which was a real turning point in the project. I had the opportunity to bring in a voice actor to describe the process and help me with the recording of the stories. Hearing the voices of the students reading their stories transformed the words into context for me. I felt the power of the stories that the kids had to tell through their

voices. With expert help, students were getting a great experience, dramatizing their life stories through their own voice. It was a magical transformation that made the words leap off the page. The process was finally underway, and the digitizing of the stories began.

From the voiceover phase, students began to insert images into I-Movie and edit together voice and pictures. I sent another survey to have students reflect on their final choices and give me an indicator of how the process was going for them. I asked the following questions:

- 1) As a producer, what message do you want to communicate to everyone who watches your story?
- 2) If you were talking to another student, what would you say is the most difficult/fun part of the process?
- 3) If you could change anything about the process so far, what aspect would you change and why?
- 4) What else can you say about digital storytelling so far?

Their responses helped me further understand what they hoped for their stories to communicate, and describe the most fun and most difficult parts of the process. When I analyzed the data, students overall found that the most difficult part of the process was voiceover recording and finding pictures to tell the story. Editing in I-Movie and putting the pictures into the story was the most fun part according to most students. This data reflects the perceptions that I found out later in my multimedia exit survey. Most students claimed that learning to use I-Movie was their favorite part of the project, and for many, their favorite part about the class.

It became my primary goal to help students find the story they most wanted to tell and share with everyone. Yet, I learned from my focus group interview after our project had ended that if I had simply asked students to tell a personal story, this process could have been much easier and clearer. Students were confused by my open-ended questioning. I asked them *who* they wanted to tell a story about, rather than *what* story they wanted to tell. I gave students the option to tell the story of their defining moment from their Humanities assignment or to tell a different story that they wanted to share. At this point it became tricky, since students wanted to tell a range of stories that involved different levels of vulnerability. In addition, I had to find a way to support the development of different types of scripts, since their Humanities class was focusing on defining moments alone. I also realized the importance of supporting students in telling the stories that they really wanted to tell; for some these were deep stories that served an emotional need, while for others, the stories were seemingly more surface.

The Stories Kids Want to Tell

“You really want to pick something that you really want to show with everyone else, not just do it to do it, because you want to be able to be proud of it.”-Tim

The 6th grade class produced a wide-range of digital stories all having a personal connection to their own lives. In my focus class, many themes came from a writing assignment in their humanities class where they shared a defining moment in their lives. For many that moment was defined by new friendship, lost friendship, divorce, death, or achievement. In the scriptwriting process, students were asked if they wanted to tell a digital story from their defining moment or

if they had another story they wished to tell. Surprisingly, out of 27 defining moment stories, 5 students used their defining moment writing piece and 17 changed their stories. One student changed his story 3 times, while most others who changed their story only did so once.

In the process of looking for what stories kids want to tell, I asked them who they wanted to tell a story about. Initially, most students wanted to tell a story about themselves or a friend. Family members came up last. However, when I compare this preliminary data with the stories they ended up telling, students told stories mostly about themselves, family, friends and least of all “other.” The graph shows the distribution of the number of students who chose a particular story subject:

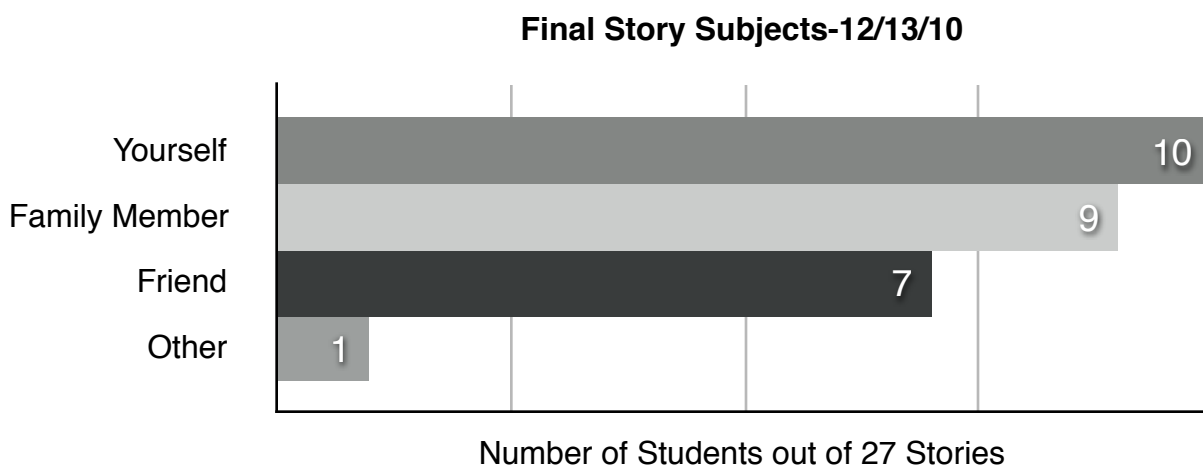


Figure 6. Subjects of student stories at final draft

Although I find it interesting to see a change over time regarding the subject matter of the students' stories, what this data doesn't show is how the stories intertwined subjects and the resulting themes that emerged. Stories of themselves were really about moments in their lives that either represented personal goals, dreams, accomplishments, defining moments, or

experiences. Stories about family members were about their dealing with the death of a family member, experiencing divorce, learning about family roots, remembering a time spent with family, welcoming new family members, and saying goodbye to college-bound siblings. Stories about friends were about loss, moving on, best friends, and the importance of friends. The outlier story about the high school robotics team could cross over into family since the inspiration came from a sibling on the team, however, I kept it as a separate category due to the nature of the storytelling, which leaned more towards documentary than personal narrative.

I wanted to discern what students hoped to gain by sharing their stories. Students wanted to share stories for a variety of reasons. They wanted to know more about themselves, or gain knowledge about others. They wanted to gain trust, or learn to let go. They wanted to tell stories about dreams, happiness, memories, and defining moments. They wanted to let others know that it's important to move on, to recognize that people pass away, to not get down. They wanted to tell stories about the importance of friends. They wanted to raise awareness, or share an experience. In asking what they hoped to gain through telling their story, students had different personal reasons that they communicated:

- *learn more about myself*
- *get something off my chest*
- *tell people how I feel*
- *find myself*

These are just some of the lessons they wanted to share and messages they wanted to communicate:

- *Everybody passes away*
- *Perseverance and working hard can get you far*
- *Be good, caring about your pets*
- *Just because someone looks different doesn't mean they are*
- *It's very hard to leave all your friends*
- *Don't give up when life puts you down*
- *Even though you're sad you have to move on*
- *Everyone should have the chance to participate in the sport or hobby they like*
- *I want people to be interested in robotics*

These lessons and messages not only communicate the heart of their stories, but also show how many aspects of life they tackled. From sharing their learning, their hardships, their successes, their memories, and their interests, students shared a voice mature beyond their years.

In interpreting and internalizing these stories, I have come to find that:

- A) Every student has a story to share, and different stories serve different purposes*
- B) Sharing personal stories is scary, but it doesn't have to be*
- C) The more personal the story, the greater the impact it can have on the storyteller and the audience*

I wanted to understand student thinking on a deeper and more personal level as it applied to the themes that emerged. Every student approached the storytelling process differently and as a result had a different experience and point of view to share. As I wondered what happened during the project, I realized that my insight would be inspired by a select group of focus students who

represented a wide range of outcomes regarding the stories they wanted to tell and the impacts of their stories.

Some Storytelling Cases

I chose three case studies to highlight some of the details around what kids were feeling and thinking during the digital storytelling project. Since I cannot go into depth on each individual student in my focus class, I selected the following students to represent the variety of approaches that students took in making a digital story and the stories they wanted to tell. Each case shares the experience of one student, however, their perspectives are shared by others in the class. I hope that the cases reveal the importance of giving students voice, allowing change, understanding comfort levels, and listening to what stories your students want to tell. I examined their reasons for sharing or not sharing personal stories. I found connections they made with others who were affected by their stories. I learned the impacts their stories had on themselves and others.

Sending a Message: Samantha's Story

“Well, for me, I really wanted to tell this story, because I really want to get it off my back. My mother and grandma are still grieving about it making it hard for me.”

Samantha wrote about the grandfather she never knew as part of her initial defining moment writing piece in Humanities. She had a direct purpose in telling her story. She needed to get something off her chest. It had been bothering her to know that her mother and Grandmother

were suffering still from grief over his death two years before Samantha was born. In her script she writes:

All my life I have been grieving for someone who died 14 years ago. You would probably think that this person has nothing to do with me but it's in my name.... This person is my Grandfather Roy and I am named after him, ... so my very existence is constantly reminding people of him.

Samantha knew from the first initial survey whose story she wanted to tell and why. She held on to this intent throughout the process and she hoped to communicate to others through her story, *"That even though you are sad you have to move on."* Her story led her to question who the man was that her family mourned. It determined her approach to finding her own answers and looking through family archives to get them, and it led to her own conclusion that her family needed to celebrate his life and move on. Her purpose in telling her story came across in the end of her script:

It is quite sickening to an 11 year old girl to say that her deceased grandfather is ruining her life but it is true because of all the sadness he has brought to me and my family.

In sharing her story, Samantha made a powerful impression on her family. In an interview recorded a month after the exhibition, the first time students shared their stories with family, Samantha's mother shared her perspective on what she thought of the story and her surprise in seeing it for the first time:

“I actually broke out in tears during the presentation. I..I didn’t know what she was doing with them [the pictures] and why... she never got to meet my dad. And hers was based on 14 years ago although she’s only 11, that 14 years ago was a day that changed her life. And it threw me. It threw my husband who was sitting there watching it, just like ‘Oh My Gosh’ because of the stories she’s heard and that’s how she expresses it about this man who was her namesake.”

She went on to share with Samantha that her grandmother watched the story at her home and afterward said of Samantha, *“What a deep, kind passionate thinker.”* For Samantha as a digital storyteller, the impact was strong. In her final reflection, she felt that a big take-away from the project was *“hearing my mom say that my grandmother saw my movie.”* During the process, she described, *“I’ve been learning more about myself and my grandfather as I’ve been doing it.”*

Samantha's approach, with a clear intent and expected outcome, led to her telling a story which in the end made her *“proud.”* It also elicited empathy from those who saw it. Before screening her story at exhibition, the story made an important impact on another student in her class. This is what he had to share after watching her story,

“I connect with this story a lot because I never got to meet my grandfather either and his name is [same name as student]...so try and forget that.”

Although the tone of the statement doesn’t come across, in the video showing this response during a critique session, the student was trying to empathize by saying he felt what Samantha was feeling by constantly living with the reminder of his own namesake.

For Samantha, the digital story provided a vehicle to address a nagging need to share a dilemma in her life. She was trying to resolve an issue she had been dealing with for awhile and send a message to her family and to others about the way it made her feel. In a focus group interview, she stated, “I think the digital story helped me. I’d do it again if I had a story to tell.” The power of the digital story for her not only affected her own sense of getting something off her chest, but also made an impact on her family members who didn’t have a full sense of what Samantha was feeling. I asked Samantha later on if things had changed at home as a result, and if her family had stopped bringing up the pain of their grief. She told me that “things were better.”

Another interesting point about Samantha’s case was that she never felt like she couldn’t share her story. Although she admitted to being a little scared to share, it was to her the only story she could think to tell. She reflected, “I just had to kind of jump and say I’m just going to do a personal story. And I did and it turned out good.”

Samantha's approach of jumping in to tell a personal story resonated with the approach of other students. However, even for students with a clear need or desire to tell a personal story, sharing those stories didn’t always come easily.

Finding her Voice and Helping Others: Lauren’s Story

“You pushed me a little harder than everyone else...I felt like you were pushing me to tell an amazing story. And when I did, I felt it could be better but everything has room for improvement...You sat me down to write down thoughts of the stories I wanted to write.”

Lauren was my advisee, a student who I met with three times a week, and whose home and family I had visited. When she came to me with her idea to tell a rollercoaster story, I felt like she had something much more meaningful to share. It came from her very first draft. I noted that there was a quick reference to her mother's divorce and her new family. I pushed her to develop that part of it more. I could tell it was there, hiding underneath the surface.

At about the same time, I sent a survey asking students if they could change the story they had set out to tell, what would they change it to and why. Lauren responded. "If I could change my story to my mom getting remarried because that was a happy moment in time for her. I wouldn't talk about her divorce because the main details are the details my mom doesn't want anybody else to hear or know." Although I tried not to be critical of students' choices and direct their intentions, I still found it necessary to push some kids thinking when I saw that there was a potential for a deeper story. I asked Lauren probing questions about what had happened.

As a result, Lauren changed the structure of her story to tell her "*Up and Down Life*." The simple way she shared these moments in her life communicated a complex understanding of hardships contrasting with joy, as shown in this excerpt from her script:

Have you ever had an up and down life like mine? Well, if you have then you can probably relate to this story. If not then follow along and you'll be able to feel my up and down life.

UP- I am an eleven year old girl living in San Diego, CA and LOVING IT!

DOWN- On my birthday when I was seven years old my parents got divorced. I only got one present that year.

It came together in a way that she and her family were proud of and it allowed Lauren to open up a part of herself that “some people don’t know about me.” Her original intent to teach people about her life was preserved, but her story changed to reflect who she was and what she had been through. Her case represented the importance of helping students recognize elements of their stories that they are not as comfortable sharing, but that are important to them.

Her story also helped another student share personal feelings he hadn’t been ready to expose. I asked John, one of my focus students, about a story he shared at the beginning of school. It was a personal story about a friend who was special to him but had gone to jail. I asked him why he did not want to make his digital story about his friend and he told me it was too personal. He had many memories with his friend, and explained how he had pictures of them together. I encouraged him to look further into why that story wasn’t one he could tell. It came back to the fact that he didn’t want to share the whole story because it was personal.

At that moment, Lauren walked in on our conversation. She and I had the same conversation a couple of weeks earlier about personal things we share and our comfort levels when sharing those with others. I had her talk to him about how she and I discussed the same difficulty of opening up the parts of the story that are difficult or personal. The conversation blossomed and I soon found myself just listening as they spoke to each other about reasons why they were wanting to share parts of themselves without giving away the whole story. Here are a few things I heard them say:

“I wanted to tell my story because no one knows me better than myself”

“Our parents can’t get inside our heads and know our thoughts.”

“You have to let some of you out and not be shy because you can’t hold it all in, you have to let some things out.”

“It’s good to let people know who you are.”

Through this conversation, John had found a confidante. When I asked him if he’d like to try and write another script, he said he would and Lauren asked if she could read it. He left knowing that he could share a personal story without giving too much of himself up. Lauren empathized and was able to help him feel comfortable opening up because of the success in having done so herself! It was a powerful moment in the storytelling process because empathy between the students helped open up a new pathway for a student who was struggling to tell his story. They learned through each other’s experiences to relate to one another, and gained the courage to share.

Lauren taught me that the stories that kids want to tell might be hiding underneath the surface.

With conversation, probing questions, and support, some students might have felt more comfortable sharing. By pushing herself to be more honest with her feelings, she stated,

“To me, I thought that the deep and personal stories might have got the most applause because that means you put your heart into your story.” When I asked her why she was able to share a

more personal account of her story, she explained, “I didn’t really want to share this topic,

because I thought it was too revealing, but I did because some people don’t know that about me.”

In the end, after screening her story, she felt proud because “my family members were very

proud of me.” Some students felt like pushing themselves to new limits. In Lauren’s case, she soared to new limits, and helped not only herself, but others, to go deeper.

Opening up the Past: Shelly’s Story

“I think that the choices I made was just how important the story was for me.”

Similar to Lauren’s case, Shelly changed her original story about her first sleepover with friends.

When I asked the question, “If you could change your story, what story would you want to tell?”

Shelly replied:

“If I had to change my story I would probably write about my brothers death. I would write about that because it was important to me and it helped me move on and be stronger. It also taught me that we all have things in life that we don’t like but we can’t forget about.”

Not many students had such powerful alternative stories to share that it compelled me to ask them if they’d change it. However, I asked Shelly if she wanted to share the story of her brother. Unlike Lauren, I did not have to coach the story out of her. She asked me if it was okay to tell the story of her brother, as if she wasn’t sure that I’d accept it. I told her absolutely it was okay and that I appreciated her willingness to share his story with us.

This was a critical moment that led to a story that became by far one of the most memorable in the whole process. I realized at that moment, that if had I not asked that question, she would not have had the chance to share a deeply personal story and affect us all. This experience taught me

that sharing stories is a personal process, and it requires every opportunity to reflect. Asking students multiple times about the story they want to tell helps determine if it is the one they most wish to share.

These cases taught me how to view the approaches of each student with the intent to help them share a story that they will be proud of, that they want to share, and that has meaning for themselves and others. I learned that these students all experienced varying levels of success on the project, and personal fulfillment. Their journeys to finding their stories were complex and motivated by different reasons. I realized that although students all have a story to share, their desire to share will be different. The power of digital storytelling was in the heart of the stories kids want to tell, and their desire to share fueled the impact their stories would have.

Screening and Sharing the Stories

“I want to tell something I am comfortable with that way I can go deep into that and not get too personal” -Lauren

“I felt proud and shy because it was really personal.”-Colby

It was important to keep in mind student comfort levels when sharing personal aspects of their lives with each other. Before we began the storytelling process, I shared my story of being adopted from Korea. I returned to Korea for the first time at age 23 for an educational trip and discovered a sense of Korean identity I hadn't known before. I also shared other digital stories with students that included stories about identity, loss of a family member, celebrating cultural

heritage, overcoming adversity, and a defining moment of a veteran. Looking back, I realized that many of the stories I shared as models were deeply personal, reflecting both positive and negative experiences. I assumed that in order for students to experience a positive personal impact from the process, they would need to tell a personal story. However, as Colby's words above highlight, the more personal the story, the more risky it feels to share.

When it finally came down to exhibition night, excitement and terror mixed in the air as I asked students how they wished to exhibit their digital stories. I got mixed reviews. Some students wanted to share it on a computer with just a few select people, while others wanted it projected on the big screen with a movie theater audience, popcorn and awards. Remember, I was only one teacher with 112 sixth graders and one night to invite the entire 6th grade class and families.

I decided to compromise with my students and host four screenings in one night by class, inviting parents and guests to attend their students' class screening. Students were encouraged to participate and present their digital stories, however, not everyone shared that night. The majority seemed to be pleased with my compromise since they didn't have to share with the whole 6th grade and were comfortable at that point sharing with their class.

I didn't realize until after collecting their reflections on the project what an impact this decision would have on the entire project. I struggled with the decision because I wanted to honor the students individually but couldn't quite come up with a better way. I found that sharing the stories with an audience of family and classmates led to unexpected results. Students who were

at first afraid to share, were mostly glad that they did. I asked students how they felt when their movie ended and they heard the audience applause. 18 out of 21 students responded to this reflection question positively, using words like “proud,” “happy” and “relieved.”

On the other hand, some students felt “upset,” “nervous,” “shy,” and “uncomfortable.” Samantha claimed she “felt happy that I was able to show my movie. It was really nice.” In response to what others said about her movie, she wrote, “My mom and dad said that they cried.” For Samantha her storytelling journey had a direct impact on her family members. Sharing her story helped her communicate a message further validated by her own family's reactions. Her mother revealed to us that she shared the story with her grandmother, who also cried and was glad to have it. The effects went far beyond Samantha’s expectations.

Shelly exclaimed, “I was happy and overjoyed that people actually liked it...I know that it touched some people and thats what I wanted...I felt happy and I smiled.” When she went on to write what other people had to say about her story, she continued, “People said that it was really powerful, touching, and a lot of people cried. They also said that it was an amazing and awesome movie and it was really cool.” The impact of sharing produced the desired outcomes for Shelly and though she didn’t mention it in her comment, I would guess that her story would not have had the same impact on her or her audience had she stuck with her original idea.

Screening the movies was the defining moment of the whole project for me. It was in this moment that my goal to have students share themselves with the community through digital

storytelling came alive and in working together, we achieved the seemingly impossible task of sharing our stories with others. By giving the students an opportunity to express their individuality and creativity with a real world audience through an exhibition night, I found that in the end making and sharing the stories was well worth the effort.

In my quest to have students share and build their identities, be more empathetic, and belong to a community of storytellers, I've found that students became more comfortable sharing with others. Students shared stories that were personal on many different levels, and our classroom community made it all possible. Students wrote a reflection at the end of the project and described one take away from the experience:

- work hard*
- I will always edit and revise things*
- How to make a movie*
- if anyone needs help I could help them*

Students also shared with me their most important learning experience from the project:

- how to express myself*
- working together*
- making a movie*
- Being able to talk about my defining moment*
- presenting my movie in front of a bunch of people*
- learning other people's stories*
- always be focused*

•*Seeing how many people have a defining moment in their lives*

When I asked students if they would want to tell another story using digital storytelling, 19 out of 21 had an idea of a story that they would want to tell. This data encouraged me that at the end of the project students hadn't given up on the idea that they could tell stories using this new method. Even as the school year comes to a close, I have had students asking for help on digital stories they've made for family outside of school. Since the project, many students have come up to tell me that they have begun or have already made another story for a family member to give as a gift. Shelly made DVDs for her mom to share at her workplace. Samantha accomplished her goal and her mother shared her story with her grandparents. Another student made a story for her Bat Mitzvah.

There are still unanswered questions. How can I help all students feel safe to share a personal story with others? How I can preempt any negative behavior that could jeopardize sharing? How can I make the project expectations more defined? How can I better assist students with finding a personal story to tell?

Now that I have completed the same project with a class of 8th graders, I have learned that older students are more ready to share a personal story. Although many parts of the process were similar to the 6th graders, I was able to structure a more direct and efficient approach to finding a story. I've learned to value what's important in the process, and in my conclusions I highlight three themes that I took away from the project to illustrate what happened when I used digital storytelling in my classroom.

Conclusions

When I began my research, I wanted to examine how digital storytelling would affect my students' sense of *identity, empathy, and community*. My vision for this project was to help 6th grade students express their individuality by telling a personal story about one significant moment in their lives. I wanted them to identify these moments in their lives or share the life of someone else. I hoped that through their digital stories they would share themselves. I hoped that sharing their stories would create a sense of empathy in our classroom by encouraging students to relate their life experiences. By working together to produce the stories, I wanted to inspire a community of storytellers, where everyone's voice mattered and where everyone was willing to share their stories with each other and with the public. As their stories emerged, I paid close attention to how students experienced the digital storytelling process and how sharing personal stories affected them and their audience.

As I conclude my study, I have found that digital storytelling had different impacts than my previous intentions to build identity, empathy, and community in my classroom. Rather than being stand-alone conclusions, identity, empathy and community were intertwined throughout the project experience. The project didn't build a sense of identity in students so much as provide an opportunity for self-expression. Students used digital storytelling as a vehicle for sharing themselves with their peers. Through this process, most students learned how to share the heart of their story and tell a personal story at their comfort level. As I predicted, students were empathetic but it's difficult to measure how the project instilled empathy over time. I saw

empathy through the connections they were making to the other kids in class. This was possible because of the way the community was set up for helping and sharing. Students helped each other through being a class tech rover and a co-producer, teaching them the importance of having peer support and teamwork. As students shared their stories, they became more aware of each other's defining moments. However, this was not the case with all students, and by the end of the semester, there were a few who remained reluctant to share a personal story. Some students were not as comfortable sharing personal stories, and some felt like they didn't have a personal story to tell. Although I hoped that this experience would allow everyone to open up and share a personal story, I realized the importance of helping them grow through the process and accepting students where they are.

Along the way, I discovered many nuances about what happened as students shared digital stories. From my case studies, I gained valuable insight into how the project was affecting students on an individual level. In the end, what I learned can be summed up in three main themes:

- Every student has a story to share, and different stories serve different purposes**
- Sharing personal stories is scary, but it doesn't have to be**
- The more personal the story, the greater impact it can have on the storyteller and the audience**

Every student has a story to share, and different stories serve different purposes

For educators who want to produce digital stories with their students, it's important to recognize that the process is individual and not everyone will experience it the same way. The way in which one student approaches the process will be completely different from another student. It is necessary to give students the tools and the time to be able to tell a story that they feel proud of and to allow them to go just beyond their comfort level. I realized in hindsight how it must have felt for some students to share their stories when they didn't feel like they were as good as others. Because students vary in their writing and media abilities, they will vary in levels of digital story products as well. It's important that everyone can see the variance in final products, but also celebrate the value of the stories that kids have to share. If a student isn't feeling motivated to tell their story, try to get to the heart of it and see what happens. How do we do this as educators? In Lauren's and Shelly's cases, they shared insights on how giving our kids a little nudge of support can go a long way.

Every story needs to have a heart

"To me I thought that the deep and personal stories might have got the most applause because that means you put your heart into your story."-Lauren

What does it mean to put your "heart into your story?" After producing digital stories with 112 6th graders, and now, 56 8th graders, I've learned storytelling takes heart. Students have to care about their story in order for the process to be meaningful to them and their families. When I reflected on the kinds of stories students had to share about their lives, I realized the colorful patterns and different threads that emerged. It wasn't easy for students to share their personal

lives, and not everyone was ready to take that leap into the unknown. For some, it was a need of sorts to express themselves, communicate a message to others, and let people know who they were. For others, it was a burden and a source of discomfort to be so open with people to whom they were vulnerable. I had hoped that by setting up a strong classroom culture that sharing would become natural and easy for all of my students. However, students shared the stories at the level they felt comfortable.

Different Strokes for Different Folks

When it came down to the types of stories kids wanted to tell, I found from my focus group the rewards and drawbacks to telling a personal story. According to them, subjects for stories that were more personal were about death and divorce. Stories that were less personal were about injuries. Lauren shared, “Some people wrote about injuries and that to me is not really as personal as like other people writing about divorces or somebody dies in their family.”

John continued, “I like that people open up and share personal things, but I don’t want them to get too personal cause I don’t want to know every single part of their life. I don’t want to get too personal.”

As I listened to what these students had to say about what makes a story more personal, it seemed as though they connected sharing of difficult moments in life to be more exposing and personal. Moments of happiness, memories of good times, stories of achievements and dreams didn’t strike them as the most personal stories. However, these types of stories helped the students learn more about each other in a different way. There are many different stories that will

emerge when doing a project like this, and as I discovered, each one will surprise you, give insight into your student, and teach you something that is important to them.

Give Kids a Reason to Share their story

Getting them to think about people in their lives who have stories was an important step in the process of finding their story. Many students realized that their family members had a great affect on their lives and made meaningful subjects for telling stories. For some, they connected the loss of a family member to their own lives. For others, they wanted to express an homage to a family member who made a difference. These stories led students not only to think about their subjects but also about their audience. For some students, knowing that family would be watching their stories helped them formulate reasons to share.

In asking students to reflect on what they would gain from the process of sharing their story and what they hoped others would gain, I found that every student's comfort level varied for different reasons. Below are some comments from students that help to highlight what they hoped they, and their audience, would gain through sharing their stories:

- Expressing oneself-*"I really don't know anyone better than I do myself."*
- Communicating a feeling-*"I missed my friends so I wanted to make a story about them."*
- Gaining release-*"Well for me I really wanted to tell this story, because I really want to get this off my back."*

- Sharing a Meaningful story-*“Well I knew I wanted to tell the story of my friend because it’s meaningful and people can connect their same story to it.”*
- Providing Inspiration-*“I wanted to let people know that if you try your best and believe in yourself, you will most likely get what you want.”*
- Communicating a Message-*“I wanted to share with people that people die and you just have to live with the fact that they are going to die and you can’t do anything about it.”*

Sharing personal stories is scary, but it doesn't have to be

“These digital stories, I know a lot of people didn’t want to get too personal but like if you want to be a person that is stuck in a shell all your life, that’s kind of not a great life.”-John

Students are taking risks to tell their story. The more personal the story, the bigger the risk. Even those who were proud of their stories had anxiety about showing them. John took the brave step of going outside his own personal comfort zone to share a story he described as “deep and dark from my past.” Although it wasn’t easy for him to express this story, he felt a need to dig deeper and share a big part of his life.

If I was to do this project again, I would tell students, “You’re going to experience a slight discomfort throughout this process. But, trust me, it will all be okay! We’re all in it together and you’ll be glad you did.” Yes! Sharing is scary! I didn’t realize at the beginning how much some students would want to open up and how much others would resist it. For some, the story is just under the surface, for others it’s burning to get out, and for a few it is still evolving.

Supporting Students to go Beyond their Comfort Zone

I realize now how important it is to get kids to explore their personal lives and be willing to share who they are and what matters to them with their peers. Middle school is an awkward time of social acceptance, self discovery, growing pains, and life lessons. I knew it would not be easy for students adjusting to a new school and new friends to share deep and personal stories with each other. But, I had to try! The motivation was strong for me to give students an opportunity to self-reflect, open up, and let us into their lives. Learning to share a personal story with others not only had the potential to create greater empathetic bonds between students but it also grounded students in a sense of themselves and their life history.

Lauren was a student who taught me to be persistent in helping kids to share something personal, even if it isn't easy. She expressed in a focus group interview, "some of the digital storytelling projects were very emotional. My project was one of those because I didn't really want to share this topic, because I thought it was too revealing, but I did because some people didn't know that about me." After screening her story, she felt proud and shared that it is important to "impact your family in a good way."

In Lauren's case, it took a little pushing and prodding to get her to be open and completely honest with her feelings in her writing. Through one-on-one conversations, and my insistence that students tell a story that they care about, many students ended up sharing deeply personal stories. If I hadn't been able to push Lauren to step just outside of her comfort zone and say

what was on her mind, she might have told a story about her first roller coaster ride and never have discovered something about herself through the process. In the end, she learned that she can tell a personal story and become comfortable sharing herself with others. She also learned that the value of sharing a story that came from her heart made a greater impact on her family. As a result, she felt a sense of accomplishment and success in sharing her story.

I would want Lauren's triumph to be everyone's experience, but it simply doesn't work out that way. There are students who, for various reasons, aren't ready to step outside of their comfort zone and express who they are to their peers. It's not a bad thing, but in the end, the evidence shows a lack of positive results in these cases. For students who don't explore their personal side, there is a lack of heart in the story and these students tended to feel less satisfied with the process. However, it's important to realize that this is not a failure. One student's inability to share now might emerge later as a desire to share in the future. I think the best thing to do is keep an open mind and to be encouraging. Whatever students have to share is a forward step in gaining the confidence it takes to be open with others.

Supporting Empathetic Connections Through Sharing and Critique

Studies show that there is a decline in empathy amongst today's college aged students (Kolrath et al, 2010). When I read this article, it made me feel a sense of urgency to do something to change this trend. It worried me that it would only get worse unless kids were encouraged at a young age to understand each other. I wanted to start with my middle school students and encourage sharing our stories to help reverse this fate. As students shared stories, I wanted to

know, was the process of sharing stories of their lives helping students to be more aware and empathetic towards each other? Would telling and sharing personal stories help students recognize and understand each other's life circumstances and experiences better?

During the critique process, I found that students were making empathetic connections to each other. When students read their scripts, screened their rough cuts of the movies, and discussed feedback, different comments emerged. I transcribed videos of the critique process and found that students thought others were brave for sharing, they related to each other's stories to their own experiences, and gave helpful feedback on the construction of the digital story. In one screening critique, a student offered support and admiration for another students' efforts when he said, "I thought it was really brave that you put your own voice on there because a lot of people are afraid to put their own voice on there." Every student had to make a voiceover of their story script, and for many this was the hardest part of the process. The students found ways to empathize not only with subject matter but also with the digital storytelling process.

Giving kids a chance to share how they relate to each other's stories is important in reinforcing an empathetic culture. Lauren remarked during a critique of one story about friendship, "I can relate to your story because...coming here [to HTMMA] I kind of went away from all my friends, but I made a lot more friends than I did there in five years in two weeks here." Many comments during our critiques started with, "*I can relate to you because...*" I felt that the hard work that went into building a supportive community for sharing made a huge difference in their relationships with each other.

Risks of Sharing

“I felt like everyone should have done a personal story, because when people didn’t do personal stories I felt that the people who didn’t were the ones who were mean and those people that are mean um were targeting the people that did personal stories.”-Tim

The issue of meanness and bullying emerged as a surprising limitation in the project. The topic came up during my last focus group interview about three months after the project had ended. One student remarked that “the digital story project did make some kids a little bit meaner. I mean some people, it made them have a motive for speaking to other people about their lives and stuff like that. I’m kind of one of those people because I don’t like to talk about my feelings that much.” Although the risks of sharing are important to take into consideration when doing this project, I heard this problem represented by a small population of students. I didn’t have a chance to find evidence of this beyond what the students were saying. Overall, the benefits and impacts of sharing outweighed the dissatisfaction that some students experienced. However, it does reinforce the importance of setting norms as a community. In order to prevent bullying in the future, I hope to emphasize the importance of sharing as a way to build empathy and understand each other. Although this was an outcome I hoped for, I don’t think I explicitly told this to the kids as a class. I hope to make it a clear goal for everyone in our community to share stories as a way to build empathy.

The more personal the story, the greater impact it can have on the storyteller and the audience

When I asked students to describe the impacts their stories made, Tim said that after sharing his movie with a family member, “once they watch the movie, they can remember that time and everything.” I interviewed another student who was making a digital story for her mom after the project had ended. She shared with me her motivation to make another story: “I can’t just explain it all in words, how much pain I was in, how much I love my mom for helping me through it, my family. I thought instead of just telling her about it, I could make like a video.”

These impacts on storytellers and their families share another part of the digital storytelling project that I hoped would emerge. I wanted the stories to be real, to come from kids’ hearts, to share moments in their lives, and to create an empathetic community. What happened was that many students found ways of expressing memories, experiences, and messages that had dramatic impacts on family members.

I highly recommend hosting a final exhibition screening of the stories as a necessary piece of the whole project. Without an invitational screening, students are shut off from the experience of sharing something personal and impacting the people closest to them. For family members who are the subjects of the stories, they benefit from watching what the students have to share. To keep a safe sharing space throughout the process, I believe it’s important that the invited audience stay intimate. As students experience sharing stories from telling a partner, to sharing in small groups, to a class screening and finally to an invited audience, they have many chances to become more comfortable sharing with a larger audience who is invested in learning their stories.

Although stories varied in how they impacted others, sharing them as a community made every voice heard. As I move towards the implications of my study, I want to encourage that voice in all of us to emerge. As educators we can provide opportunities to enrich our communities by understanding the people in them. Through storytelling, I saw students come together, learn to share, express themselves and what's important to them, and find an audience who could empathize with their life experiences.

Implications: Creating a Supportive Story Telling Community in Schools

In setting up the culture for storytelling it's important to understand that your students come to you with varying degrees of comfort in sharing. Letting kids know that they will be given a chance to express themselves takes trust in everyone. The most important aspect of setting up this culture was providing many opportunities to share, by starting small and ending up with the story they most want to share.

In thinking about your own students, mine tended to be in one of three categories:

Students who wanted to share a personal story

Students who were pushed to tell a personal story

Students who didn't want to share a personal story

Storytelling activities should get more complex as sharing becomes a routine in your classroom.

I began with activities that centered around getting to know students names, having them introduce themselves to me and each other, setting expectations, sharing computers, working with buddies, and sitting in a circle so they could feel connected as a class. If I was to start again, I would definitely take time to do all of these and remember to build slowly.

I feel the same slow build should happen in the storytelling process as well. As students become more comfortable sharing themselves with each other, they need to start thinking about the stories they feel comfortable sharing. Partnering up for interviews helped students learn more

about each other. Teachers could build on these interviews to help students identify story ideas. Reflecting through the life road map activity (Appendix D) also helped students internalize life events over time and can highlight moments that defined their path. Sharing these ideas in the early stages can help students open up and find that story they might want to tell. For some students, they will have clear ideas and be ready to go, but for others it may take time.

One aspect of the process that I did not share with students at this point but wish I had was to think about how to tell the story visually. Many students developed stories that were difficult to show. Some had to reenact moments from the past and some had trouble finding images to relate to their writing. Students adapted and found creative storytelling methods, but many struggled to find pictures to match their words. If I had started the process earlier in having them think about the visuals to accompany their stories, I think they might have had an easier time in that part of the process.

Once students have their story, the movie making process begins and the critique along the way helps it evolve into the digital story they will share at exhibition. As students develop what story they want to tell, its important to give them moments to reflect on why they want to tell the story and with whom they would like to share the story. Thinking about the reasons for sharing gave my students an opportunity to reflect on the heart of the story and the purpose for choosing that particular story. At this time, I nudged some students to go deeper with their story ideas, or gave them a chance to change their story after reflecting on other story possibilities.

In the end, the storytelling process will be slightly different for every student involved, but the steps to foster this development are helpful and can lead to beautiful stories! I feel digital storytelling has impacted my teaching and approach to community building, and I hope that through my project, other educators find the joy of creating and sharing digital stories with their students.

What you can do to get started now

- Set your class up for sharing-

- Have a circle of chairs when reflecting as a whole class community.

- Create partnerships to help students have a sounding board for their story ideas, encourage teamwork, and help students be accountable to someone other than themselves or the teacher.

- Construct activities from sharing with one person, then a small group, then to the whole class, then to a public audience.

- Encourage many brainstorm activities to identify and share stories

- Use life road maps for student reflection to help the story brainstorm process.

- Have students conduct partner interviews to encourage talking to each other and getting to know one another.

- Have a gallery walk for sharing their brainstorms and promoting learning about other classmates.

- Collaborate with a Humanities teacher who has the time to help students find the heart of the story, add figurative language and descriptive details, and frequently workshop the final scripts

-By collaborating with another teachers on the story process, I found students were much more able to express what they wanted to share in a meaningful and vivid way.

- Offer opportunities to revise and change the story idea

- Engage in conversation with students

- Push them to the edge of their comfort if they seem ready and willing

- Let students know ahead of time that they will need photos to help tell their story or start being creative about the re-telling through images.

- Celebrate each other's stories

- Help students build empathy through sharing stories and encouraging kind, helpful, specific critique.

- Have a screening and invite families to join in!

- Most of all, have fun and honor everyone for sharing their voice!

Reflection

As I was trying to come up with a great action research question, I reflected on some of the goals I wanted to accomplish during the year. I wanted to improve my multimedia curriculum by making it more meaningful. I wanted to have the best opportunities for my students by introducing new ways of expressing themselves. I hoped to create a project and develop a question that would help me understand my students better and build community. The time came for me to make a decision and I still wasn't sure how I would decide. Then, a wise teacher leader who helped spark the idea for doing my first digital storytelling project, *Stories of Service*, chimed in her thoughts. How about digital storytelling?

Digital storytelling had made a huge impact on me and my students as we told the stories of veterans in my previous 8th grade class. But, how could I do a digital storytelling project for a whole semester with 6th graders? I had been challenged with not having enough time to do meaningful projects with my students, and I always felt rushed. It wasn't until my advisor helped me to envision possibility that my year of digital storytelling began.

I began the digital storytelling project with the intention of instilling a sense of identity, empathy, and community in my students. I hoped that producing and sharing stories in the classroom would create bonds between students, increase knowledge of the individuals in the class, and create a sense of community. I spent many of the first weeks of school on culture building, creating norms for a positive learning environment, establishing classroom routines, and doing games and sharing circles to get to know everyone better. It was something I had never done in

my class to this extent, and I knew that it was important to spend time getting to know my students as individuals who have personalities, feelings, and stories to share.

Before, this project, I saw my role as a teacher as someone who needed to teach content. But now, I see myself as a person and a teacher, capable of sharing herself and learning about her students and their lives. Digital Storytelling has opened up pathways to understanding my students better and understanding myself. I thought it would be all about them--their learning, their experience--but I see now that storytelling is a collective experience. Telling a story is a personal journey. Having an opportunity to reflect on your life can offer a lens through which to examine and ponder how you see yourself, your world, and others. Stories have an impact on both the viewer and producer. Everyone involved in the storytelling process experiences it on different levels. In the end, stories are gateways into seeing our students, sharing with each other, and learning about one another's experiences. Schank states, "Learning from one's own experiences depends on being able to communicate our experiences as stories to others" (1990, p. 12). Through the experience of watching the stories, we built a community of students who shared stories with an audience who listened to them and learned lessons from them.

Digital Storytelling has opened up avenues for myself as a teacher as well as for my students. I always gave up very little of myself in the classroom. I held this notion that teachers could not be themselves. I couldn't share personal information with my students because I thought it violated boundaries I should keep between myself as a person and as a teacher. What I learned is the exact opposite. I found that when I shared my own personal stories with my students, they felt more

comfortable with me which in turn made me more comfortable with them. I'm not saying that teachers should divulge their whole life story, but I shared stories with them that are important to me because that's what I was asking my students to do. It was like a breath of fresh air, finally being just me in the classroom. I thought I would lose control of my class as a result, and respect as a teacher. I found that sharing myself led to me feeling more comfortable with myself as a teacher. Although I never asked directly if my sharing led to increasing their comfort in sharing, I suspect that it opened the door for many of my students.

By opening up myself to my students, I modeled one of the first hurdles in creating a community that values sharing personal stories. I also stepped outside of my own comfort zone and realized the benefits. When I look back, I had difficulty assessing the comfort levels of my students at the beginning of the year, because I didn't ask the right questions. Understanding data collection was certainly challenging. I've learned that it is difficult to measure changes in your students when you're not exactly sure what will change. Now that I know comfort with sharing was an outcome of my research, I know next time I will ask students to rate how comfortable they are sharing a personal story on a scale from 1-4. Then, I will try to assign certain comfort levels to my activities and let students choose their level. We could all begin at level one, but as we progress, students will choose to move up at their own pace, until hopefully they all arrive at being able to share their story with a public audience. This system will help me understand why students feel more or less comfortable to share. It will also serve as a better pre-and post-project measure of how much they change in comfort level.

Finding a story to tell doesn't come easily and it is a different process for each person. I learned the nuances of how to make everyone feel successful in the project. Next time, I would like to structure the project better to allow for more individual conversations to emerge during the story phase. I remember feeling like students were not telling stories that had much heart. They seemed surface and without emotion. I wanted the stories to convey what the students felt, how the moment affected them, and what they learned as a result. Some stories were already developed and some needed more time. To facilitate this process, I found that working with the Humanities teacher to develop the script at the time they create the digital story helped students make stronger stories. When the 8th grade humanities teacher did a fishbowl activity in her class to find the heart of the story, students expressed the heart before making their stories digital. This activity led to making the digital story process more meaningful to the students, knowing that they had an important story they wanted to communicate.

A technical challenge was recording voiceovers for 112 students. Although it was a significant part of the process, it was very time consuming. I had the help of an expert voice actor, and two academic coaches, but even four adults had a difficult time recording the voices of every student. Some students recorded at home which helped the process. But what helped most was teaching students to record each other's voiceover. I learned when I had 8th graders the value of peer teaching. When one student learned from me how to record a voiceover, that student taught the next student who was ready. The relay of information was the best and quickest approach for recording when there were only two quiet spaces in our school. I would definitely encourage this process next time.

When I reflect on the process of data collection, my success was sending out several surveys along the way to find out more information regarding student thinking in a quick and easy format. My difficulty was identifying my focus students sooner and talking to them throughout the project. Although it was helpful to talk to them months after the project had ended, I wish now that I had more conversations with them throughout.

The impacts of sharing have had lasting impressions on me and my students. After making the digital stories in my class, the 6th grade semester ended and they moved on but the lasting effect on them stayed. They learned so much from the sharing process, and exhibiting the stories to an audience left them feeling mostly proud and excited. In their Humanities class the next semester, they were asked to make a Public Service Announcement (PSA). The kids and their teacher shared with me that making the digital story helped them gain the skills needed to make their PSA. Some students returned the next semester to ask me for help on making movies for other events in their personal lives. Some students gave their digital stories they made in class as gifts to the family member they honored in the story. In the 8th grade, one student made a story about being a bone marrow donor to save her little brother. Her mother posted her story on Facebook as a way to communicate to others to become bone marrow donors. Another 8th grader wrote in her reflection that the digital story project helped them bond and make stronger friendships. When I think of the impacts and the continuation of the story process in these students' lives, I feel fulfilled. I feel like as a teacher, I was able to give them the experience and the skills to create meaningful stories.

The impacts of digital storytelling were also met with challenges. Although I hoped that students would learn to share stories from their lives, the process was not helpful for some. I had difficulty reaching some of my students and it led to my own feelings of angst that I had not done my job to support them. It made me realize that some impacts can be negative on myself and the students. I hope that the next time I do this project I will be able to support every student. My goal is to not put pressure on anyone not ready to share. I also hope that in supporting students' individual needs, I will be more accepting of the level they feel comfortable sharing.

What happens when students share the stories of themselves and others was a winding road leading to an audience. Supporting students along this road was challenging, but the success was getting everyone to the destination. At the end of the road, I recognized that we had come a long way. What I know now has helped me understand what stories kids want to share, what challenges arise as kids find their stories, and the importance of supporting all students at their comfort level. For those who aren't sure about what to share, it's important to remember that sharing at all is a big step towards learning to be more open in the future. I've learned that setting up a positive community where kids feel safe to share is vital to the process. I know that I need to do better in supporting struggling students. It is not easy to share something personal especially if it brings up painful memories. I hope next time, students can be more self-guided in determining their level of comfort with sharing stories. My hope in the project will continue to be engaging all students to comfortably share an aspect of their personal lives.

In sharing my work with others, I've learned that stories can all have a positive and meaningful effect on the storyteller and the audience. It's important to encourage stories where kids felt good about themselves or successful. It's also important to help students understand that although bad things happen in life, we learn lessons from them that help us carry on. The most valuable lesson I learned was to encourage student voice and give students a creative medium through which to express it. I hope their stories continue to make positive impacts on the people that watch them and learn from them.

My journey ends only to begin again. Now that I've learned how to use digital storytelling in my classroom and examined what happens, I hope to engage others to try it as I make steps to refine my project and try it again. Although it is a personal journey for anyone who attempts it, we can learn from each other about the insights we gained. As a teacher leader and researcher, I hope that my experience inspires others to learn about their students using digital storytelling. By having conversations with our kids and hearing what they have to say about their lives, I hope that we can encourage a new level of self-expression and comfort in the classroom. Together, I feel that we have the ability as teachers to make a positive difference by sharing our experiences and learning about our students' lives. In the end, may many voices fill our hearts and souls as we encourage the creative practice of sharing our life experiences through digital storytelling!

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Appendix A

Preliminary Survey (Survey Monkey)

* 1. Please share the following information about yourself.

Name

Class Period

Three words to Describe Yourself to Someone New

One thing you enjoy about Multimedia class

2. If a story about you was in a video store, what category would we find your story in?

- Comedy Action/Adventure
- Drama Fantasy
- Mystery/Thriller Documentary
- Other (please specify)

3. How comfortable would you feel sharing a story about yourself with the following as your audience?

	Not comfortable	Somewhat comfortable	I don't mind sharing	I can't wait to share my story!
Parent/Guardian	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Siblings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Grandparents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Classmates	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
EVERYONE!	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Public on the Internet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. What digital media and applications do you feel comfortable knowing how to use?

Check all that apply.

- Adobe Premier Digital Camera
- Adobe Flash Digital Voice Recorder
- Audacity Lavalier Microphone
- Scanner i-Movie
- Digital Camcorder Windows Movie Maker
- Other (please specify)

5. Do you have accounts for the following social networking sites? Check all that apply.

- Blogger
 Wordpress
 Facebook
 MySpace
 Twitter
 None of the Above
 Other (please specify)

6. In the digital storytelling project, you will take on many roles. Choose which of these production roles are you most excited about and least excited about.

	Script writer	Editor	Director	Actor/Actress	Sound Person	Camera Person
Most excited	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Least excited	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. Where do you most often hear stories from? Check all that apply.

- Family Members
 Friends
 Radio/I-Pod
 Television
 Internet
 Video Games
 Other (please specify)

8. If you could choose, who would you most want to tell a story about?

- Yourself
 Family Member
 Friend
 Someone in class
 Someone you'd like to know more about
 Other (please specify)

9. How do you feel you contribute to our classroom community?

10. How do you feel you contribute to the greater community of San Diego?

Appendix B

Jigsaw Activity

Digital Storytelling Jig Saw Activity

Round #1

Story Name: _____

Story Description: _____

_____.

With your group, do the following activity:

- 1) **Watch** the digital story
- 2) **Answer** the following questions about the story in your own journals or back of this sheet:
 - i. What *perspective* is the story told from?
 - ii. What *lessons* did you learn from watching the story? What lessons do you think the storyteller was trying to convey to the audience?
 - iii. How was the story edited? What elements do you notice about the way the film was constructed?
 - iv. Why do you think this digital story was produced?
- 3) **Discuss** with your group. What elements do you think are necessary for making a beautiful digital story?
- 4) **Share out.** What can you personally take away from watching the story and how can you share this with others?

Round #2: Jigsaw

Find your new group according to your assigned number (1s, 2s, 3s, etc.)

With your new group, do the following:

- 1) Share out one at a time:
 - i. What your story was about?
 - ii. Who made it?
 - iii. What did you take away from the story personally?
 - iv. What list did the group generate around what makes a digital story?
- 2) Answer two follow up questions that arise from the group.
- 3) Move on to discuss the other stories in the group by repeating step #1-3 until everyone has shared.
- 4) Come up with **one** group list titled: *Elements of a Digital Story* that shares ideas from each group member about what makes a beautiful digital story.

Appendix C*Life Road Map Activity*

Name _____

Class Period _____

Life Road Map Brainstorm1) *List the most significant events in your life from birth to today:*

2) *Now, identify some of these events in terms of:*

Stop Signs	Speed Bumps	Dead Ends	Traffic lights	Detours

3) *On the back of this sheet, Draw a sketch of your life road map.*4) *Once you have an idea of where things go on your life road map, draw a **final draft in color** on a different piece of paper. **Final Life Road Map Due by Friday, October 8th for a gallery walk!***

Appendix D

Day in the Life Activity

Essential Question:

How do we tell the stories of our daily lives using visual language?

Visual Vocabulary:

Composition: Everything in the frame can be composed by how the photographer chooses to see it. The composition of the shot expresses what the photographer wants us to see.

Mood/Tone: The feel of your photo expressed through color, light, shadow and gesture.

Camera Lingo:

Lenses: Affect how the camera sees the subject

Macro= close up to the subject

Wide-angle= lets in as much of the scene

Telephoto=zooms in closer from afar.

Scenes: Affect how the camera exposes the subject.

Sunset, Portrait, Night, etc.

Flash: An artificial blast of light to illuminate the subject.

Auto, Red-eye, On or Off

Learning Goals:

- To share our personal point of view with one another
- To learn how to tell a story visually without words
- To practice and learn photography skills

Timeline: 9/25 -10/1

Project Requirements:

- 1) Take photos **every hour** or moment you think to take one.
*Hint: You *cannot* be in the photo. It must be taken from your **point of view**.
- 2) Compile photos on your flash drive or home computer.
- 3) Choose your top **6 images** that represent your one day.

Product:

Format: Your 6 photos will be in **color** and arranged on a **single page** in **Storyboard** format and **printed** out.

**No captions allowed. The photos must speak for themselves!*

Theme: Mealtime, After school, Daily routine, Weekend day, Family life, Environment...Focus on what's meaningful to your everyday life