STUDENT MULTIMEDIA AUTOBIOGRAPHIES: THE ROLES OF TECHNOLOGY, PERSONAL NARRATIVE, AND SIGNIFYING PRACTICES

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Abstract

In 2009, the Parsons StoryCorps qualitative case study was designed to closely observe the complexity of youth engagement with digital media for self-presentation in an afterschool digital storytelling project designed to provide students with rich, varied uses of technology in a urban middle school in North Carolina. Several frameworks were utilized to analyze student work and the interactions among teacher, students, and curriculum that affected the construction of students' digital autobiographies. These included theories on self-presentation and autobiography and critical social theory about representation, articulation, and visual culture. Multimodal discourse analysis was employed to analyze data that included: field notes, interviews, and participants' digital stories. Findings suggest that teacher expectations, recruitment, and family involvement play a large role in framing the kinds of stories that young people tell, and challenges other findings that suggest digital storytelling projects provide the freedom for students to tell whatever stories they want. Findings also confirm theories on autobiography and personal narrative that argues autobiographical storytelling is never static and always co-constructed by author and audience. Students' use of multiple media displayed sophisticated digital literacy skills although these were not overtly supported in the curriculum. Recommendations for future curricula directly address issues of representation and provide concrete examples of how to engage students in learning the necessary digital literacy skills to become producers and critical consumers in our technology-mediated culture.

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Chapter One: Introduction

> In the economies and institutions of what James Paul Gee calls "new capitalism," adolescents are faced with the challenge of navigating community and academic discourses and balancing forms of identity, new work practices, and the demand of new technologies and popular culture.
>
> Luke and Elkins, 2000, p. 1

Fundamental shifts in the U.S. economy, politics, and culture have occurred over the past 30 years (Castells, 2000; Gee, 2008; Harvey, 2004; Luke and Elkins, 2000). These changes have been accelerated as people of all nations continue to access, consume, create, and interact with new media technologies (Buckingham, 2008). At the same time, concern is growing that here in the United States, tremendous cultural shifts are not adequately supported by public schools' use of technology or with curricula that support the increased presence of digital media both in and outside of the classroom (Dede, 2008; NRC, 2005). As a result, young people are often left to navigate new media on their own (Gee, 2008; Luke and Elkins, 2000; MacArthur Foundation, 2009; Moje, et al., 2008). Given that contemporary Western culture is technologically mediated and that this mediation will probably continue to increase, determining the roles of educators and curricula in helping children and adolescents make sense of the complex signs and symbols that surround them grows ever more important.

Complicating the ability to both understand and support young people's critical engagement with digital media, technological tools, and popular culture is the prevalence of two extreme views. One exoticizes youth, assuming they are "digital natives" with fluid understanding and ability to both consume and produce with these new media. The

other finds peril at every turn because untutored use of new media can render young people vulnerable to both predators and rampant consumerism (Herring, 2008). In both scenarios, adults are seen as having abdicated their educative responsibility to aid young people's development of the literacy skills that are necessary to make sense of new media technologies (MacArthur Foundation, 2010). These two extreme views can be harmonized, however, if young people's use of new media is understood in context. Such understanding includes knowledge of how they use new media, where they are using it, and with whom they are using it. If new media are being utilized in learning environments, for example, it is necessary to understand how teachers and students use these tools and materials for learning. Unless contextual factors are understood, young people's technology use will be over-generalized and detached from the material conditions within which that use takes place.

Project background

In the summer of 2008, I was presented with an opportunity to study how young people use new media to tell their own stories in an afterschool program developed by Amelia, a sixth grade science teacher at Parsons Middle School in Baylor, North Carolina.[1] At this time, Amelia was enrolled in the Masters Program for Experienced Teachers (MEDX) in Instructional Technology at the School of Education, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Our collaboration was made possible through my role as a teacher's assistant, in which I worked closely with Amelia throughout the two-year MEDX program.

[1] In order to protect the identity of project participants, pseudonyms were used for all participants (teacher and students), school, and geographic location.

In the fall of 2007, Amelia had co-created a digital autobiography with Sam, one of her sixth grade students, for the course "Technology Across the Curriculum." Early in the school year, Amelia had been informally approached by the sixth grade language arts teacher on her grade-level academic team about a written autobiography that Sam had completed for a class assignment. This teacher had been greatly affected by the story and wanted to share both her experience and Sam's exemplary work with colleagues. She was particularly excited because although Sam was a good student, he was socially isolated and this often resulted in behavioral problems at school. After reading his autobiographical essay, Amelia immediately approached Sam with the idea of collaborating to build his story using digital media. She believed that creating a digital story would fulfill the project requirements for her own course in MEDX and also help Sam build important technology skills though the creative process of digital storytelling.

Sam's Story, which depicts his exodus from Liberia, is compelling, emotional, and graphic.[2] With flexible and largely unrestricted[3] access to a variety of media tools and sources (cameras, audio recorders, software, the Internet), Sam and Amelia were able to collaboratively create a provocative document, complete with graphic and sometimes violent depictions of Africans fleeing war-torn communities. Sam and Amelia expressed to each other, and to me, the profundity of this shared experience. According to Sam, it had a great impact for him socially and personally. Because his friends saw him in a different light after viewing the work, perceiving him as heroic and courageous, he felt that the work was helping him integrate more successfully into his life in Baylor.

[2] *Sam's Story* is available through YouTube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2V_q29lbvxY

[3] It should be noted that when Sam was working at the school he was subject to Baylor Public Schools security filters.

According to Amelia, the process of working with Sam on his story revealed to her the potential technology holds for students' experiences, both academic and social, a potential especially important for students who are having difficulty in school. Moreover, this potential aligned with her overall goal as an educator "to give voice to marginalized student populations" that she had considered silenced by their schooling experiences. She believed that competent use of technology could also provide a vehicle for students' creativity and the development of their digital literacy, a core learning goal that she believed was absent from the formal curriculum.

As a result of this experience and a job change (she became the technology facilitator at Parsons Middle School in the fall of 2008), Amelia decided to start the Parsons StoryCorps[4] project there. She titled the project after the nationally recognized StoryCorps® program, supported by the Smithsonian Institution to collect oral histories from "everyday people," because she wanted it to capture the same kinds of stories from her students. Since its founding in 2003, the national StoryCorps project has collected more than 50,000 stories at kiosks equipped with audio recording technology that anyone can use. These recorded stories result primarily from interviews and conversations between family members; each is then made available to its participants on a free CD and is also archived at the Library of Congress' American Folklife Center. According to the StoryCorps website (2010), it is the largest oral history project of its kind and has become an established nonprofit public service organization that strives to become an "enduring American institution." Specifically, the project's mission is

[4] The Parsons StoryCorps project is loosely based on a similarly named project facilitated by an independent nonprofit organization, StoryCorps®, whose stated mission is to "honor and celebrate one another's lives through listening." For more information, see http://www.StoryCorps.org/about

> . . . to provide Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs with the opportunity to record, share, and preserve the stories of our lives. We accomplish this by providing access both to the StoryCorps interview experience and to the content that emerges from these interviews. StoryCorps reminds us of the importance of listening to and learning from those around us. It celebrates our shared humanity. It tells people that their lives matter and they won't be forgotten. Through StoryCorps, we hope to create a kinder, more thoughtful and compassionate nation. (StoryCorps, 2010)

Amelia presented stories from StoryCorps in the first workshops held for her own project. The StoryCorps project structure influenced Amelia's motivations and expectations and also helped shape participants' choices about the kinds of stories they wanted to tell.

My interest in this project, both scholarly and personal, is a result of working as a researcher in the field of education technology for 18 years. I was thrilled to take advantage of a unique research opportunity to build on this work and to incorporate emerging theoretical frameworks from the field of digital media and learning. During the 1990s, as issues with and concerns over the growing digital divide increased, I was fortunate to collaborate with researchers who understood the complexity of this issue—most important, that it was not only about access to hardware and software. While schools were dedicating substantial resources to bring computers into their buildings, and the larger society was becoming more technologized, simultaneous educational shifts, such as the federal policy changes mandated by No Child Left Behind, placed enormous obstacles in the way of substantive educational reform. In most instances, new testing and accountability policies were not helpful but instead prevented schools from harnessing new information and communication technologies that would support students' development of an analytical perspective toward the world around them.

Current education technology reform.

Since 2000, new frameworks have been developed at federal and state levels for the insertion of new curriculum demands on schools that are meant to integrate technology more effectively and also address the development of twenty-first-century skills. One of the central arguments in favor of these new frameworks is that "the United States, in order to be globally competitive and to attract growth industries and create jobs, requires a fresh approach to education that recognizes the importance that 21st century skills play in the workplace" (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009). These skills, which are seen as necessary for students' future roles as workers, are described in terms of their ability to be "flexible thinkers" who "understand and utilize the most appropriate media creation tools, characteristics and convention [and] understand and effectively utilize the most appropriate expressions and interpretations in diverse, multi-cultural environments" (21st century skills framework, Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2008).

Unfortunately, these skills frameworks are overly broad, require only surface attention to media education and digital literacy, and generally do not address specific, pragmatic strategies to integrate "new" skills into existing curricula (Buckingham, 2007). Moreover, schools are not provided with much incentive to make these changes because district and state testing structures are not aligned with twenty-first-century curriculum standards (Bransford, 2000; Dede, 2008; NRC, 2005). However, these flaws have not diminished the emphasis placed by policymakers and education technology advocates on the integration of the new standards into existing federal and states' standard courses of study; schools are required to at least try to address these skills in the classroom. Gee (2001) argued that this type of education reform is designed to prepare children for the

"new capitalism," which he defined as an economic structure dependent on information and communication technologies, as opposed to older capitalist economies based on industrial manufacturing and production. The goals and assumptions of this reform compare badly to a pedagogical perspective that supports a critical stance on the part of both educators and students toward the economic and political circumstances that effect changes in schools and curricula (Gee, 2008/2001; Street, 2009; Luke and Elkins, 2000).

According to the current emphasis in education technology policy on twenty-first-century skills (NRC, 2005; North Carolina, Standard Course of Study, 2010; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009), Amelia's project provides a rich context for the investigation of two areas: 1) how a digital storytelling project can address digital literacy and also provide empirical evidence of the literacy skills that participants already possess; and 2) how students make use of mixed media, moviemaking and slideshow software, and hardware including cameras, digital audio recorders, and iPods to extend their own voices and personal storytelling practices. In fact, a growing number of digital storytelling projects in schools and afterschool centers nationwide use storytelling as a way to support the development of digital literacy skills (EduCause, 2010; National Writing Project, 2010). Many of these projects, particularly the ones in informal settings, include digital storytelling as a way for underserved student populations to creatively use technology, particularly in communities where home access to technology is limited and school use is restricted (Nixon and Gutierrez, 2008; Nixon, 2007). Amelia's motivations for the project she began at Parsons Middle School were similar: to provide digital media access to students she believed were underserved and to create opportunities for all

students to claim their voices in an educational setting in which she believed they were silenced.

Purpose of the study

The goal of this research was to explore two aspects of personal storytelling by youth through:

1) a close investigation of Parsons StoryCorps, in order to understand how Amelia originally conceptualized it and how the curriculum she implemented provides context for students to select personal stories and construct them via digital media;

2) an analysis of students' digital stories that considers how their use of mixed media (images, sound, and text) affects their narratives and, more generally, how young people appropriate such methods to tell their own stories.

The development of a case study around the Parsons StoryCorps project incorporated three main research questions:

- What are the conditions in which these digital stories are being told?
- Within the practice of digital storytelling, what are the personal narratives that middle-school students create?
- How does technology (digital media) influence the stories that students tell?

Amelia's use of digital storytelling and her adaptation of methods used by StoryCorps, an oral history project of national scope, provide important contextual information for her motivation to start the Parsons project and for the curriculum she implemented there. Programmatically, the practices used both by the national version of StoryCorps and the version Amelia implemented at Parsons involve storytelling that emphasizes counter-narratives (i.e., narratives based on different principles than the ones commonly constructed for and by dominant popular culture). Although this type of

storytelling does not completely exclude popular cultural influences, it owes more to oral history traditions; particularly those that feature stories from commonly marginalized communities. This grassroots aspect of oral history is often associated with the work of Studs Terkel[5] and the collections archived by and at the American Folklife Center[6].

The next section will explicate the definition of digital storytelling and how it comprises both oral histories and popular culture.

What is Digital Storytelling?

The emerging field of digital storytelling is generally considered a grassroots movement for the support of community-based storytelling through the use of multimedia. The practice is largely promoted and supported, through the distribution of curriculum resources, by the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS) at the University of California, Berkeley (CDS, 2010). Although digital storytelling can utilize diverse approaches and implementations, the structure of many projects follows a similar approach to the one laid out by CDS. Their approach emphasizes short length, emotional content such as "moving images," and accessible, user-friendly software that opens the practice to "non techies." According to the CDS website:

> Typically, digital stories are produced in intensive workshops. The product is a 2–5 minute film that combines a narrated piece of personal writing, photographic and other still images, and a musical soundtrack. The philosophy behind this type of digital storytelling is using technology to enable those without a technical background to produce works that tell a story using "moving" images and sound. The lower machine requirements for using stills rather than video, and the ease of use of iMovie with the so-called "Ken Burns" pan effect, allows for the creation of short films by non-techies (Center for Digital Storytelling, 2010).

[5] For an excellent collection of his work and interviews see http://www.studsterkel.org/

[6] See http://www.loc.gov/folklife/

This clear prescription combines personal writing with multimedia and seeks to make the practice of digital storytelling accessible with "lower machine requirements." The structural elements of digital storytelling described by CDS, particularly the infusion of "photographic, and other still images, and a musical soundtrack," have resulted in digital stories that mix elements of personal storytelling with other artifacts, including ones appropriated from popular culture. For example, media artifacts that are used to create digital stories tend to combine personal archival material such as family photographs and videos with and popular cultural items such as images retrieved from Google searches, favorite songs, celebrity photographs, and so forth (Hull et al., 2006; Nelson, et al., 2008).

Digital storytellers incorporate technologically mediated popular culture as they construct their stories, but they are also engaged in a practice built on the tradition of collecting oral histories, a model that aims to get "ordinary people to tell their own true stories but in an emotional and engaging way" (CDS, 2010). Because the practices of digital storytelling as it is currently done are rooted in oral history traditions, proponents have tried to distance it from commercial and highly polished media products (Wikipedia, CDS). For example, the Wikipedia entry on digital storytelling states:

> The broad definition has been used by innumerable artists and producers to link their practices with traditions of oral storytelling and often to delineate work from the highly produced commercial or conceptual projects by focusing on authorship and humanistic or emotionally provocative content. (Entry of 12 May 2010)

Numerous educational organizations, such as EduCause and the National Writing Project, have incorporated the practices of digital storytelling for their own learning goals. They too define digital storytelling as the use of a broad range of easily accessible technology

to create personal and emotional stories that is derived from the practice of oral storytelling (EduCause, 2010; National Writing Project, 2010).

CDS began its community storytelling workshops in cooperation with the American Film Institute in 1993; this collaboration suggests that the cinematic storytelling practices, which inform the field of digital storytelling, have long been used in conjunction with oral history. The importance of audience, drama, and emotion is stated clearly in the CDS curriculum:

> This effect is principally a result of a truthful approach to emotional material. A story that deals directly with the fundamental emotional paradigms–of death and our sense of loss, of love and loneliness, of confidence and vulnerability, of acceptance and rejection–will stake a claim on our hearts. Beginning with content that addresses or couches itself in one or another of those contexts will improve the likelihood that you are going to hold an audience's attention.
>
> (Digital Storytelling Cookbook, p. 8)

The genres of cinema and oral history which provide the foundation for digital storytelling are amenable to research sub-questions that address story selection processes and the influence of digital media. In this research, such questions seek to elucidate how young people's storytelling practices can be understood (for example, how theories of autobiographical genre and personal storytelling could be useful in understanding young people's stories) and how the incorporation of popular cultural artifacts can affect young people's personal narratives (for example, how theories about visual culture and representation could be incorporated to better understand such effects).

Personal Storytelling and Popular Culture

A central goal of digital storytelling is "to have people tell their own 'true' stories…in an emotionally and engaging way" (Center for Digital Storytelling, 2010).

What remains unclear, however, is who gets to define "emotionally engaging." When digital storytelling is implemented in an educational context, how the curriculum is structured, how an educator presents activities, the students' ages, and the specific classroom context all influence what kinds of stories are told. As educators and students develop narratives in a space that is structured by a particular curriculum and programmatic requirements, as was the case with Parsons StoryCorps, conflicting agendas may become apparent. For example, the goal of producing "emotionally engaging" stories may be interpreted as emphasizing narratives that stress hardship rather than creating multimedia presentations of lighthearted events (McLean, et al., 2004). Therefore, the claim that many digital storytelling projects help students "to tell any story they want" (Nixon, et al., 2008) ignores the fact that any autobiographical storytelling consists of a conversation between author and audience that is highly determined by context (Ochs, 1996).

Autobiography and the co-construction of personal narrative.

For the present study, autobiographical theories and sociocultural psychological frameworks were consulted in order to better understand how children select and construct their digital stories. These theoretical perspectives revealed how narratives are always co-constructed between author and audience. In digital storytelling, this collaboration offers a lens through which the relationship among teacher, student, and curriculum can be articulated (Bruner, 1994; Fivush, 2003, 1994; Holland, et al., 1996; McClean, et al., 2006; Ochs, 1996).

Although participants did not directly connect their story selection process with their exposure to stories from the national StoryCorps archive, many followed similar

patterns of interviewing family members to both select and construct stories about their own childhoods or that were based on important family narratives. In a way that echoes the definitions of digital stories, StoryCorps emphasizes the importance of emotional content as well as "everyday people's" stories. Both initiatives share the explicit goal of extending media authoring practices through the use of accessible technology. In addition, both digital storytelling and StoryCorps explicitly strive to distance the practice from highly polished and commercialized media products while focusing instead on the personal acts of autobiographical and biographical storytelling. This kind of individualized activity has the potential to invite young people into the process of cultural production, not just consumption. However, it invites their participation with a preexisting preference for the kinds of stories that are considered important and meaningful depending on the context. For example, if the context is a school-based project, the curriculum and teachers will largely determine the valuation placed on certain stories over others. This contradiction illustrates theoretical arguments that suggest all narratives are affected by cultural cues and the specific context in which stories are told. Therefore, clarity about how the participants in this study understood and incorporated these goals into Parsons StoryCorps, as they told their own personal stories, becomes very important.

As the young people at Parsons Middle School developed their personal stories, in addition to looking to their families and communities for material to use as narratives within their digital productions, they also turned to websites from which they could select images and songs to represent aspects of their stories. Understanding their criteria for these choices required consulting theoretical frameworks that directly address the

mediating role of popular culture and how young people understand, consume, and use images, sound, and texts for their own personal expression.

Appropriation of popular culture.

> It has become commonplace to say that ours is an age in which the pictoral turn has supplanted the linguistic one, as images push words off the page and lives become increasingly mediated by popular visual culture.
>
> Hull, 2003, p. 230

The ubiquitous (re)use and consumption of popular culture, once considered a hallmark of postmodernism, has become what many call "the new remix culture" (Lessig, 2004). Advocates of remix culture not only share the goals of digital storytelling as defined by Hull's quote, but also actively encourage the re-appropriation of popular culture for personal expression. Through this practice, they argue, an open society is developed in which corporate control of cultural production is questioned and undermined.

Although descriptions of digital storytelling projects take children's use of popular culture into account, little critique has focused on issues of representation. For example, theories on visual culture and cultural studies are seldom referenced in the analysis of a young person's selection of particular imagery to represent a personal story or an aspect of personal identity (Barthes, 1964; Evans, 1997; Hall, 1985/1997; Van Dijk, 2006). Little is known about how young people incorporate and appropriate specific material for their own constructions of personal storytelling, or about how their selection processes contribute to theoretical frameworks of representation in a technologically mediated visual culture (Hall, 1985). British cultural studies scholars, notably Stuart Hall, have studied media and representation for more than three decades, yet their work has not

been incorporated into the analysis of young peoples' digital stories. To address this gap, stories collected through the Parsons StoryCorps case study draw from analytical frameworks of cultural studies.

Popular culture and curriculum: The case for multiliteracy.

School curricula that support students' critical reading of popular culture have long been necessary because of the common use of cultural artifacts to create products, conduct research, and craft personal stories in an educational setting (Brunner and Tally, 1994; Hobbs, 1998). If, as Hull suggested, society has taken the "pictoral turn" and private lives are mediated by "popular visual culture," it is necessary to understand whether projects that directly ask students to engage with popular culture in a structured program, even if in an informal setting, are equipping them with the tools to understand, analyze, and author with this material. It is also necessary to understand whether educators' pedagogical strategies differ when students are using technology and when young people are engaged in writing personal stories. The National Writing Project (2010) and the Center for Children and Technology (CCT) (2004) have both incorporated curriculum strategies that build students' abilities to author with multimedia. These strategies will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

For almost two decades (although TV has been in the classroom for much longer), popular culture has been brought into the classroom on a daily basis through the widespread use of the Internet and other types of media that flood teachers and students with text, imagery, and sound—without the accompaniment of media literacy curricula, despite strong advocacy efforts (Buckingham, 2007; CCT, 1997; Kellner, 2004). Although welcoming popular culture into the classroom has long been supported as a

practice through which media literacy can be taught, it is still infrequently employed as a pedagogical strategy (Giroux, 1998; Kellner, 2004; Trier, 2002). Rarely are students asked to dissect the media parts with which they are authoring, nor is time allotted for the deconstruction of these texts (Buckingham, 2007; Gee, 2008). Students would gain a deeper and more purposeful understanding of multimedia if, for example, they were required to analyze how, for whom, and for what purposes images, online text, or sound, have been created. Because few curriculum guidelines include media literacy activities, individual teachers are usually responsible for developing their own strategies to support this kind of literacy enrichment with students. Buckingham's (2007) argument that media education (a broader agenda than just media literacy) requires educators to engage in a more thorough reading of media texts is quite similar to pedagogical strategies promoted by new literacy proponents for traditional subjects such as literature and language arts (Baker and Luke, 1991; Gee, 1996; Luke and Elkins, 2000).

New Literacy Studies (NLS), which will be discussed further in the next chapter, advocates pedagogical approaches that bridge children's literacy practices outside of school with those formally addressed in their school curriculum (Gee, 1991; Luke and Elkins, 2000; Street, 2009), based upon the understanding of literacy as a social practice embedded in relationships and cultural contexts. Although NLS engages with multiliteracy that both includes and extends well beyond digital literacy, the infusion of digital media into Western cultural practices underscores the need for literacy to be understood more broadly. An understanding of literacy that is connected only to written text is increasingly seen as too limited because it does not capture the range of practices that young people engage in every day, both in and out of school (Luke, 2006). The

absence of media literacy curricula and the exclusion of mobile technologies and social media (Facebook, MySpace, etc.) from schools further exacerbate the divisions between home, school, and community faced by young people. This lack of continuity and relevance in formal curricula has been criticized for almost a century (Dewey, 1998). By contrast, the Parsons StoryCorps offered an opportunity to investigate the implementation of a digital storytelling afterschool project that specifically asked students to bring in stories from home and construct them within the school setting (albeit informally) using digital media. It also incorporated a structured curriculum. All of these activities provided avenues for research that contributes to a new, important area in education technology, as well as the relationship among digital media, learning, and NLS.

The next chapter outlines both theoretical approaches and empirical research literature in an attempt to position the Parsons StoryCorps case study within the broader fields of digital storytelling, and digital media and learning. The unique theoretical perspective of this research incorporates autobiographical and sociocultural psychological literature as well as cultural studies approaches to understanding representation, popular culture, and articulation (Barthes, 1964; Bruner, 1994; Fivush, et al., 2003; Hall, 1985; 1996; Hall and Evans, 1997; McLean, et al., 2006; Ochs, 1996). In addition, the three broad research questions incorporate a multimodal discourse approach by focusing on 1) social practices, 2) design, and 3) production of multimedia texts (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). Through these perspectives, this project hopes to contribute to an emerging area of study, and offer a portrait of young people's engagement with digital media that is more complicated than the portraits contained in earlier work. The findings and analysis are intended to provide a useful, concrete path by which to develop specific

pedagogical strategies for both informal and formal learning environments, curricula, and teacher education. This study's central aim is to support media education goals that strengthen young people's facility with the swirling, complicated, technology-mediated cultural practices that surround them.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Over the past decade, the use of digital media for creative expression has demonstrated new possibilities for youth (Gutierrez and Nixon, 2007; Ito, 2008; Nelson, et al., 2008; Roche-Smith, 2004). To better develop authoring skills using these methods, digital storytelling projects around the country are providing opportunities for young people to express their political views, play with identity, and find voice (Center for Digital Storytelling, 2010; Nelson, Hull, and Roche Smith, 2008). Digital storytelling also provides a vehicle through which young people can develop important digital literacy skills (Gutierrez and Nixon, 2007; Nixon, 2007; Roche-Smith, 2004). Believing that her students could benefit from these opportunities, Amelia developed the Parsons StoryCorps project as a way to engage them in a process whereby they could see digital technology as a set of tools for self-expression. The project was also intended to provide an experience for students *in* school, albeit in an informal environment, that would expose them to technology use and develop important technological literacy skills that Amelia believed were missing from the current curriculum.

To understand the complexity of young people's digital storytelling, three main research questions have guided this study:

1) What are the conditions under which young people's digital stories are told?

2) What are the narratives that Parsons StoryCorps participants choose to tell and create?

3) How did technology and the use of digital media influence the stories that these young people told?

To address each of these questions, theoretical frameworks were utilized that are diverse enough to sufficiently consider the complexity of the project and the media products that were created. These frameworks were drawn from three areas: 1) technology in education and new developments in curriculum that are intended to address twenty-first-century and digital literacy; 2) genre, personal narrative, and the use of storytelling for self-presentation; and 3) representation, articulation, and multimodal discourse analysis that help reveal the influence of media in storytelling.

What Are The Conditions Under Which Young People's Digital Stories Are Told?

The use of digital storytelling in school, even informally, can be instructive about how to engage youth in meaningful uses of technology. The opportunity to observe young people as they engage in personal digital storytelling can provide ideas about how to create curricula that address the twenty-first-century skills (CEO Forum, 2004; National Research Council [NRC], 2006; North Carolina Business Committee for Education [NCBCE], 2009). Too often, however, rhetoric and policy jargon regarding twenty-first-century skills are unclear about *what* these standards are and *how* they should be integrated into actual classroom practices. Although the term "digital literacy" is routinely included as a fundamental learning goal within these frameworks, it has been disconnected from the broader discourses of new literacy and multiliteracy (these discourses will be defined and discussed later in this chapter, with particular attention to the field's critique of twenty-first-century curriculum frameworks). Only close investigation and analysis of curriculum and corresponding student work in context (classrooms, community centers, libraries, etc.) can suggest how concepts such as digital

literacy and multiliteracies (Davidson, 2010; Gee, 2008, 2000, 1991; New London Group, 1996/2000) can be better presented as literacy practices instead of isolated skills.

Technology and schools.

Since 1990, the implementation of a combination of federal, state, and local education technology policies has resulted in almost ubiquitous access to information and communications technology in the nation's schools (Congressional Research Service, 2005). As of 2007, 100% of U.S. schools report access to the Internet (Franklin and Bolick, 2008; NCES, 2007). Substantial progress has been made in bringing technology to millions of children who might otherwise not have access. However, problems found in many under-resourced schools, such as a lack of professional development and educational policy that incoherently stresses basic skills while mandating restrictive and punitive accountability measures may actually constrict use and ultimately reinforce existing inequalities (Benton, 2002; Cuban, 2000; Dede, 2008; NCES, 2007; NRC, 2006). Under-resourced schools, and the students they serve, are most vulnerable to the approaches and implementations common to a basic-skills curriculum and therefore are less likely to investigate, experiment, and recognize technology either as a tool for production or as something within their control (Becker, 2000; Margolis, 2008).

According to Amelia, the Baylor school district in which Parsons StoryCorps is situated has largely adopted a basic-skills curriculum approach. The district also serves large numbers of students who are eligible for free and reduced lunches, is chronically underfunded, and is similar to school profiles identified in several national studies that have documented differences in technology use between better-resourced and under-resourced schools.

In a recent research study conducted in New York City (Culp, Ba, Tally, Nudell, and Gersick, 2005), two schools were chosen to participate in a case study investigating two aspects of children' experience with technology, differences in technology use between schools, and how those differences influenced technology use out of school. These differences were identified through direct observation of teacher and student use and according to the pedagogical strategies employed to integrate technology into the curriculum. The schools' two distinct uses of technology were characterized as Deeply Integrated Technology (DIT) and Superficially Integrated Technology (SIT). In the DIT schools, technology supported a project-based curriculum in which students engaged in multidisciplinary, in-depth, long-term inquiry projects that required various uses of technology including Internet-based research, writing, multimedia production, and presentation. In the SIT schools, technology was only used on an ad-hoc basis to support discrete skill-building tasks. Students used computers for rote skill activities such as online multiple-choice tests instead of project-based work.

The research was designed to investigate children's technology use by applying a more holistic conceptual approach. Youth technology use has traditionally been isolated into separate spheres: home, school, and community. Using what they defined as an ecological framework, Culp and colleagues wanted to understand how students' use of technology in school impacted their use at home, and with peers. They found that students in the SIT schools developed discrete technology skills as opposed to "resourcefulness," a characteristic that would view technology as a range of tools that could be applied to multiple tasks in diverse situations. The students with discrete skills had difficulty applying technological skills beyond the tasks in which the initial skills had

been taught. In addition, students at the SIT tended to see technology use as purely for consumption rather than for authorship. By contrast, students in the DIT schools saw technology as providing tools for their use and often created multimedia texts and projects. Students in the SIT schools were less likely to use technology for these purposes, had less ability to conduct information searches on the Internet, and generally had a more passive relationship with technology.

To encourage a shift away from marginal use of technology, policy and advocacy organizations have called for the reshaping of curriculum and new media use in all schools to address twenty-first century skills (NRC, 2007; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2010). Their findings and recommendations emphasize the possibility of dire consequences for the United States' economy and political stability if such changes are not implemented (NRC, 2007; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2008). Unfortunately, reform efforts are complicated by challenges faced by schools on a daily basis, including chronic underfunding, inequitable distribution of resources, and inequitable distribution of experienced, qualified educators (Clotfelter, Vidor, and Ladd, 2004). Consequently, the majority of schools have focused only on limited use of technology, which usually means teaching students discrete skills and tool use as opposed to using technologies to support complex thinking, critical thinking skills, problem-solving, and artistic expression (Buckingham, 2008; Margolis, 2008).

21st Century Skills Curriculum

National curriculum frameworks such as the *Framework for 21st Century Learning* have attempted to create classroom-based standards that provide teachers with concrete materials with which to help students develop critical literacies. The Partnership

for 21st Century Skills was created in 2002 by a consortium of state and federal policymakers and corporate leaders from the leading technology companies including Microsoft, Time Warner, and Cisco Systems. Therefore, the curriculum emphasizes students' skill building for economic competitiveness and workforce development. The Framework for 21st Century Skills is divided into three parts: core subjects; learning and innovation skills; and information, media, and technology skills. These standards emphasize specific skills, for example how to

> *Analyze Media:* Understand both why and how media messages are created; Examine how individuals interpret messages differently.
>
> *Create Media Products:* Understand and utilize the most appropriate media creation tools and conventions.
>
> (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2010)

According to the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, "The United States, in order to be globally competitive and to attract growth industries and create jobs, requires a fresh approach to education that recognizes the importance that 21st century skills play in the workplace" (press release, 10 September 2008). The partnership's findings and recommendations emphasize possibly dire consequences for America's economy and political stability if these changes are not implemented (NRC, 2007; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2008). Although other countries, such as Britain, have made significant advances in changing their curriculum and assessment structures to incorporate twenty-first-century information, communication, and technology (ICT) skills, the United States lags behind despite its early acknowledgment of the importance of these skills for future economic and political viability.

The NRC report advocates for a shift in curriculum focus away from basic skills to more sophisticated critical literacy development. This statement, however, clearly

promotes the conclusion that the importance of these new skills for children resides in the role these children will play in maintaining American economic dominance. American students are seen only as future workers, not as citizens. As a result, the NRC frames twenty-first-century skills as necessary to support the changing landscape of a capitalist economy, not as necessary for the development of active participants in a democracy.

Literacy researchers and theoreticians advocate for new digital literacy from a different vantage point. They believe that digital literacy is important as a way of providing students with the tools to be producers of new media, not only consumers, and to have agency in a world mediated by technology. This approach is firmly rooted in the tradition of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1974; Giroux, 1996; Luke and Elkins, 1996). Although these advocates for the integration of digital literacy into curriculum and education policy represent different ideological positions (one focused on workforce development, the other on the development of critical literacy), they are united in their criticism of current educational policy that promotes basic skills over advanced literacy development. However, suggestions about how to address this imbalance depend on the pedagogical approach of the speaker. Addressing digital literacy only as an isolated set of skills necessary to prepare students for a media-rich workplace undermines a more thorough development of students' understanding of and agency with technology. Digital literacy should be understood as one part of a larger array of literacy practices that young people learn to develop in and outside of school, in ways that are connected to their community, and that are intended to support their ability to engage with cultural practices that are not only complicated but also technologically mediated.

Critique of 21st century and digital literacy skills.

The current curriculum frameworks have been promoted by an array of education groups and also vigorously supported by technology industry groups (CEO Forum, 2004, 2008; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2010). To counter what they interpret as attempts to channel students into a highly segmented labor market, as well as the neoliberal understanding of literacy for workforce development they feel this channeling is based on, New Literacy theorists and practitioners underscore the need for literacy education that does not teach isolated skills but rather treats literacy in terms of social practice. New Literacy proponents argue that literacy is grounded in discourses of power and that the new digital literacy and twenty-first-century skills frameworks are tracking students into particular roles as workers, as opposed to giving them an education that supports their development as active citizens and thinkers.

This conceptualization of worker as technologically equipped to compete in a global economy, known as "new capitalism," has emerged from economic theories that articulate a shift from industrial forms of capitalism (i.e., based upon stable manufacturing and workforces) to an emphasis on economies that require flexible workforces, mobile capital, and fluid geographic borders because they are dependent upon information and communication technologies (Castells, 1991; Harvey, 2003). Under new capitalism, the new worker must be flexible, be able to work in teams, know how to assemble skills for certain projects, and also how to regroup, disassemble, and reassemble new skills for the next project (Gee, 2004, p. 411). The workplace of the future may be flattened, with less supervision, but it will also require fewer workers and longer work hours. Most important, these new workers will not be "defined by fixed essential qualities, such as intelligence, culture, or skill; rather they are (and must come to

see themselves as) an ever-changing 'portfolio' of re-arrangeable skills acquired in their trajectory through 'project space'" (Gee, p. 414).

Gee, Hulk, and Lankshear (1996, cited in Gee, 2000) argued that the new capitalism holds three basic designations for workers: 1) professionals, who design and implement the new systems and have advanced knowledge of how to manipulate and create new symbolic transactions; 2) enchanted workers, who deal directly with products and services, are not paid well but are given bonuses for high productivity, work collaboratively, and redesign their work with each new project; and 3) backwater workers who do "old capitalism" jobs but make lower wages, are temporary, and are low level. In theory, twenty-first-century frameworks advocate support for all children in the acquisition of skills that will enable them to pursue the top tiers of this future labor market. However, according to Gee, frameworks are generally expressed in two types of imagery: one that is conceptual, focused on "social languages and deeper understandings of future symbolic analysts" (p. 414), and another that is more concrete, still calling for teamwork and collaboration and seeming to support simpler skill-building. The former would seem to encourage candidates for the professional tier whereas the latter seems to support the development of the enchanted and backwater workers.

In opposition to curriculum frameworks that are designed to produce the ideal future new capitalist worker, New Literacy frameworks are focused on building upon students' preexisting literacy practices (learned at home, in the community, etc.) so that they will be equipped to understand, author, and critique the complicated media-rich world in which they will probably spend the rest of their lives.

New Literacy Frameworks.

New Literacy was introduced in the late 1970s as the term "literacy" became reconceptualized as social practice, rather than as isolated events; according to New Literacy, literacy practices include both events and the practices that produce them (Gee, 1991/2000; Heath, 1982; cited in Street, 2003; Leu, 2009; Luke, 1996/2000). The field of New Literacy Studies (NLS) has broadened the understanding of literacy beyond written text; instead it posits that the concept of literacy must take into account the multiple literacies that all people enact in social settings. These can include practices as diverse as conversational interactions between educators and students, the use of diagrams by rural farm workers, and political speech by community organizers (Gee, 1991; Street, 2003). Because NLS assumes multiliteracy shifts according to social contexts, it bounds notions of literacy with power relations and problematizes "what counts as literacy at any time and place…asking 'whose literacies' are dominant and whose are marginalized or resistant" (Street, 2003, p. 77). NLS posits that literacy must be understood as a practice (or set of practices) that are directly connected with understandings of what counts as knowledge, identity, and being (Street, 2003, p. 78).

In recent years, attempts have been made to further define NLS in a way that accounts for the ever-widening category of "literacies" which seem to be required for people to make sense of highly symbolic interactions as they interface with the world through computer screens. These attempts, however, put the concept of New Literacy in danger of endlessly broadening to the point of losing its usefulness. In order to avoid this consequence, Donald Leu and colleagues (2009) have recommended that NLS be divided into two areas: upper case (New Literacies) and lower case (new literacies). Lower-case new literacies refer to the specific areas that are investigated; for example, digital literacy

development in a multimedia storytelling project, early language adoption, and workplace literacy. Thus new literacy emphasizes social practice and also maintains a strong focus on the influence of information and communication technology. Leu et al. (2009) define the upper-case New Literacies as:

> 1) the strategies, dispositions, and social practices that are required by new technologies;
>
> 2) necessary for participation in a global community;
>
> 3) changing as their defining technologies change;
>
> 4) multifaceted, requiring multiple theoretical perspectives in order to study and understand them. (p. x)

As particular literary practices become more specifically identified and are studied within more diverse social contexts, criticism has increased about the lack of attention paid to the larger ideological structures in which these "local" practices take place. For example, Brandt and Lincoln (2002) suggested that literacy practices "are not typically invented by their practitioners. Nor are they independently chosen or sustained by them. Literacy in use serves multiple interests, incorporating individual agents and their locales into larger enterprises that play out away from the immediate scene" (p. 1).

The omission of larger ideological and technical structures and their relationship to children's literacy practices is particularly noticeable in studies of educational technology practices and youth interaction with digital media. Acknowledgment of the larger structures is present in media literacy studies that investigate the negative influence of advertising on youth, but is often absent from studies that focus on youth authorship or participation in social media sites like Facebook and MySpace (boyd, 2008; Hobbs, 1996/2004). By contrast, the literacy practices observed in the Parsons StoryCorps study

focused on students' use of, and personal expression with, digital media and popular culture. The technologies that are used in the course of enacting these literary practices, however, are based upon pre-defined structure and logic—and the contrast between this pre-defined structure and the use that students attempt to make of the technology can be both complex and counterproductive. According to Street, "The powerful role of consolidating technologies can destabilize the functions, uses, values and meanings of literacy anywhere. These technologies generally originate outside of the local context; they cannot be understood simply in terms of local practices" (p. 79).

When students conduct a Google search they see a display of images that resulted from a Boolean search based on algorithmic formulas designed by someone who is far away from the students' location and not a member of their community. Similarly, the MovieMaker software program that Parsons StoryCorps participants used to construct their stories defines how images and music fit together, creating a structure for the resulting narrative. Understanding how young people's literacy practices operate inside pre-ordained structure (i.e., evaluating whether students are constrained by them or whether they provide opportunities for new ways of expressions and rearticulation) was a central question in this study.

The Parsons StoryCorps case study incorporates a NLS approach that seeks to explicate the relationship between a particular literacy event and the larger institutional and ideological structures within which the event takes place. This approach was motivated primarily by Amelia's connection of her project to the larger discourses of digital literacy development that she believed her students need for productive citizenship, both economically and politically. As Street (2003) stated, "The practical

applications of NLS across educational contexts is the recognition of the hybridity that lies at the heart of an NLS approach to literacy acquisition regarding the relationship between local literacy practices and those of the school" (p. 78). To move beyond the dichotomy of universalist vs. particularist claims of literacy practices, Bartlett and Holland (2002, cited in Street, 2002) proposed that "to strengthen the practice theoretical approach to literacy studies…[examination of] in particular the locally operant figured world of literacy, identities in practice, and artifacts" (p. 6, cited in Street, p. 82). Pahl (2002) attempted to move beyond this dichotomy in her study of children's family narratives. Her investigation and documentation of London-based immigrant childrens' literacy practices, which focused on students' use of multiple modes of expression such as oral storytelling, visual pictures, and graffiti, extended their understanding of figured worlds to to include the use of multiple modes of expression. With these storytelling techniques, the children were able to construct family narratives that connected stories of their homes in India to their new social context in England. Pahl's findings suggest that children accumulate a range of literacy practices from their home environment that are best expressed through multiple modes. The study recommended that British schools incorporate a range of literacy practices to both build upon and further develop such students' literacy skills.

Although the children in Pahl's study did not use digital media or other technology tools, their multiple-media (graffiti, oral stories, drawings) approach to storytelling was similar to children's digital storytelling described in other studies (Nelson, et al., 2008; Nixon, 2008). This similarity indicates that while technologies used

for digital storytelling may be new, people have used multiple modes of expression for a long time (Ochs, 1996).

> It is no longer possible to think about literacy in isolation from a vast array of social, technological and economic factors. Two distinct yet related factors deserve to be particularly highlighted. These are, on the one hand, the broad move from the now centuries-long dominance of writing to the new dominance of the image and, on the other hand, the move from the dominance of the medium of the book to the medium of the screen. (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2003, p. 3)

Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) argued in *Literacy in the New Media Age* that the logic of the spoken and written word is different from the logic of the image because the former is based on time and the latter is based on space. For example, when we speak (and when we write) we have to say (and write) one thing and then another. But this is not the case with the image, for which spatial considerations are paramount. How and where images are positioned on a screen are central contributors to how their meanings are represented and interpreted. When an author creates meaning via image, s/he has to understand the structures and rules of that representational mode.

> Human engagement with the world through image cannot escape that logic; it orders and shapes how we represent the world, which in turn shapes how we see and interact with the world. The *genre* of the display is the culturally most potent formal expression of this. 'The world narrated' is different to the world depicted and displayed. (p. 2)

Given this understanding, curriculum needs to incorporate *design* as a central component and include formal instructional approaches that assume 1) children are immersed in these new media worlds as consumers; and 2) if children are expected to author in these environments, new literacies have to be developed.

The integration of multiliteracies into curriculum.

In 1996 a consortium of academics, researchers, and educators known as the New London Group developed a new pedagogical approach to literacy, which they called multiliteracy. In it they acknowledged the multiplicity of social, political, and cultural environments as well as the dynamic and technology-rich worlds of new media in which young people are immersed.

> First, we want to extend the idea and scope of literacy pedagogy to account for the context of our culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalized societies, for the multifarious cultures that interrelate and the plurality of texts that circulate. Second, we argue that literacy pedagogy now must account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies. (*A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies*, 1996, p. 1)

Kress (2003) expanded this argument by suggesting that design be positioned as a fundamental aspect of the digital literacy curriculum. A digital literacy approach requires that students understand and develop competency in media representational forms, "for instance visual design in desktop publishing or the interface of visual and linguistic meaning in multimedia. Indeed, this second point relates closely back to the first; the proliferation of communications channels and media supports and extends cultural and subcultural diversity" (New London Group, 1996, p. 2).

The theoretical approaches recommended by the New London Group can provide a vision for changes in pedagogical approaches to the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries' dramatic technological and social changes. The strict requirements of current accountability policies make their implementation unlikely, however, unless school-based educators can incorporate these pedagogical practices into local contexts and curricula. Although these authors understood the importance of making a paradigmatic shift in pedagogical approaches almost 15 years ago, little progress has yet been made in

incorporating these principles into new curriculum frameworks. Translating this kind of document into everyday classroom activities is the real work that must now be done.

To address the gap between theory and practice, informal programs such as Parsons StoryCorps use digital storytelling to provide opportunities for both young people and educators to link new standards and theoretical frameworks for digital literacy to actual project-based work. Such projects are also trying to encourage the development of literacy in ways that will prepare children for more than adult life in the workforce. The vehicle of digital storytelling allows young people to use self-generated narrative to develop digital literacy practices. As they decide how to use multiple media to represent and construct their personal stories, moreover, they are developing views of themselves as unique, empowered individuals.

Media theorists increasingly see youth work with new media as focused on play and experimentation with identity construction and representation (boyd, 2008; Buckingham, 2008; Livingstone, 2008). This description applies to Parsons StoryCorps, which provided young people an opportunity to experiment with technology. The use of autobiography and personal story as the activity through which to build digital skill and fluency in Parsons StoryCorps requires educators to be familiar with theories about the role of personal narrative and self-presentation, which can be utilized to better understand how young people make decisions about what stories to tell in an educational context. Professional development support materials that provided overviews of these approaches would have been useful for Amelia as she structured her project. Specifically, these resources could have better prepared her for the processes by which the participants approached the task of personal storytelling. This use and application of theory addresses

the second central research question of this study. Because the use of storytelling is increasingly seen as important for the development of self, the next section considers understandings of personal narrative from literary and psychological perspectives.

What are the Narratives that Young People Choose to Tell?

Although Amelia's initial motivation for the Parsons StoryCorps project was to expose her students to creative and unrestricted access to digital media tools, she decided to focus more on the telling of personal narratives. She then created and implemented a curriculum in which students first thought about their own stories and then used their stories as vehicles to support the use of various digital tools. Familiarity with literary and sociocultural/psychological theory is necessary if this shift in focus is to be understood, because these consider the phenomenon at the heart of this study: the process of personal storytelling (Bruner, 1994; Fivush, 1993; Fivush and Haden, 2003; Holland, et al., 1998; Kegan, 1980; McClean, 2003; Olney, 1984).

Whereas the perspectives of literary theory, cultural studies, and psychology diverge in key areas, they do display general agreement that the telling of personal narratives contributes to an understanding of self (Fivush and Haden, 2003). Notions of identity are no longer seen as static but are understood to be fluid and highly determined by social context (Fivush, 1993; Fivush and Haden 2003; Holland, et al., 1996; MacAdams, 2003; McClean, 2003). By extension, self-presentation through narrative is also dependent upon contextual and cultural cues (Bruner, 1994; MacAdams, 2003). Several studies have substantiated the roles of cultural cues, under the label of "master narratives." For example, master narratives from Western cultures that focus on gender identity (i.e., the belief that masculine stories should deemphasize any display of

vulnerability) have been shown to affect how storytellers present them (Thorn and McLean, 2003).

Stories are influenced by cultural cues and traditions that have been transmitted through what people have read, watched on film, or heard from family members. In fact, according to Bakhtin (1986, 1999) all communicative events not only conform to cultural master narratives but are also understood as operating within a speech genre. Bakhtin also argued that communicative events (spoken, written, produced, and performed) are determined at least to some degree by the sociocultural environment in which they occur. Accordingly, the investigation and analysis of Parsons StoryCorps participants' processes of story selection required an understanding of the relationship among storyteller, personal story, and the context in which such a story is told. Without this understanding, the co-constructive nature of this practice would have been misinterpreted or ignored.

Because this project targeted diverse and underserved students, this section will also briefly address the use of autobiography in other schools with a similar target population. Personal storytelling is commonly utilized to counter marginalization that diverse students experience through the dominant culture as transmitted through curriculum and teaching practices. The pedagogical strategy that incorporates autobiography is seen to support students' active participation in school (Atwell, 1987; Greene, 1991).

Self-narratives: literary theory and psychology converge.

New interdisciplinary work in psychology is considering the functions of autobiographical memory and storytelling and their relationship to personal

understandings of self (Fivush and Haden, 2004). New conceptual frameworks that focus on the relationship between life story and self-concept have been developed to frame empirical work that attempts to establish links between particular stories and identity development. According to McLean, Pasupathi, and Pals (2007, the importance of stories "is gaining prominence in empirical psychology, and we build on this trend by proposing a process model of narrative self-development that has as its heart the study of personal autobiographical narrative, or situated stories" *(*p. 262). Situated stories are defined as accounts of personal memory that are told in a certain place, to a particular audience, in a particular situation (p. 263). These new developmental theories stress a process model that places storytelling at the center of self-concept and understanding. Through the repetition of stories in multiple contexts and situations, understandings of self develop over time and are both affected and constructed with each new telling. "The central argument that we want to make, however, concerns the flow from experience to self. We propose that narratively induced self-change happens through the incremental telling of situated stories to multiple audiences and in multiple contexts" (p. 264).

Literary theorists, who have long argued against static notions of memory and self, have instead stressed that the nature of personal narrative is inherently a co-construction. Olney's (1972) theory of autobiography evoked the universal need to communicate something about our essential being to another.

> It may be that the nearest one can come to definition is not to look straight to the self, which is invisible anyway, but sidewise to an experience of the self, and try to discover or create some similitude for the experience that can reflect or evoke it and that may appeal to another individual's experience of the self.
>
> (p. 29)

Current theories of self-narrative and autobiography challenge preexisting notions of autobiography centered on psychological and physiological theories of memory. These frameworks tended to reduce memory and the function of autobiography to universalist and physiological terms of inherent brain processes. "Thus, typical discussions of memory in psychology seminars emphasize sensory registers, short- and long-term memory, retrieval processes, and memory disorders without respect to history or culture" (Gergen, 1994, p. 70). This universalist overlay was also applied to how the study of autobiography as a literary genre placed it within the Western literary tradition, whose "assumption has been that autobiography is somehow authentic, non-fictional, authoritative, often seen as a genre accessible equally by all and constructed similarly by all" (Couser, 1989, cited in Glazier, 2005).

Theoretical challenges to this characterization of autobiography focused on the ways that humans use narrative to make sense of their life stories; these ways are treated as a set of complex, socially constructed, processes (Gergen, 1994; Ochs and Capps, 1996). "Particular events become important parts of our life story because they provide some meaningful information about who we are, and the narrative forms that we use for representing and recounting these events provide a particular structure for understanding and conveying this meaning" (Fivush, 1994, p. 38). In agreement, Ochs and Capps (1996) considered self-narrative as the fundamental process through which humans make sense of life events that are sometimes chaotic and disconnected. Personal narrative has the dual function of both representing and shaping personal experience (p. 18). Perhaps more important, self-narrative outlines the connecting space between the self and the social world. Because it is considered the most personal form of writing, autobiography can also

reveal tension between the inner self and the self that is presented to society (Greene, 1994, p. 77).

The connection forged between someone telling a personal story and that storyteller's social world is a manifestation of the centrality of social interaction to the structuring of personal narrative. The social interaction that takes place during the teller's recitation signal the culturally appropriate forms and strategies for performing this activity (Fivush, 1994; Rogoff, cited in Fivush, 1994). Although the sharing of a particular personal narrative represents only a fraction of the teller's understanding and presentation of individual identity, the creation and sharing of personal narratives is a central part of the continuous process of interaction between individuals and their social world. As such it has been extensively documented in comprehensive studies of the relationship between culture and identity development. For example, the notion articulated by Holland et al. (1996) of the improvisational self, which contrasted sharply with traditional static understandings of identity, suggested that individual identity always reflects the social worlds that the self inhabits.

> We advocate paying more attention to the improvisational self, to what was produced. We do not look directly at either cultural logic or subject position as a phenomenon unto itself. Instead we consider the practical artifacts of the moment —the verbal, gestural, and material productions— emerging from the situation, and ask how, and to what end these artifacts might be taken up and, in later events perhaps, become conventionalized or made into culture. (p. 17)

The co-constructed nature of individual development is most clearly noticeable during adolescence, according to Kegan (1980). He described an "interpersonal self" for whom another is always present; eventually, "the self becomes conversational" (p. 97). The concepts of interpersonal self and conversational self are both relevant to the study of

the process of personal story development that is the core focus of this research. The young people in the Parsons StoryCorps program were at a developmental stage at which there is always an audience, whether it is peers, family, or teachers. At this stage of adolescence, social relationships—fundamental at every stage of human development—are paramount. The personal stories adolescents create are as much representations of self as they are products for a particular audience.

The same is said of all autobiography (Olney, 1984). Whether one is writing in a diary or making a slideshow about a pivotal experience, the story is produced with an audience in mind. Adolescents (ages 13–17) are fully embedded in this stage; they are thinking of others and constructing their identities conversationally, as opposed to being utterly preoccupied with their own selves (a stage Kegan refers to as the "imperial self"). One possible negative consequence of this outer-directedness is becoming so mired in thinking of others that "there is no self to share with another; instead the other is required to bring the self into being" (Kegan, 1982, p. 97). Therefore, the stories created by the young people in the Parsons StoryCorps project may reveal more about their interpersonal relationships, and the meaning of these relationships within their own constructions of self, than about their individual identities.

The Co-construction of self-narratives: the role of the family.

Recent empirical work has investigated the role of family, particularly mothers, in the construction of young people's narratives and autobiographical memory. In this growing body of work (Fivush, 1991; Fivush and Haden, 1997; Haden, 2003; Haden and Fivush, 1993; McCabe and Peterson, 1993; McLean, Pasupathi, and Pals, 2007), differences in how mothers talk to their children have longstanding impacts on how these

children remember past events, as well as how they reconstruct such memories into self-narratives. One of the most important aspects of this process of collaborative recollection between mother and child is the construction of a narrative. Not only are narratives considered necessary to the understanding of events (Fivush and Haden, 1997, cited in Haden, 2003), narrative structures that are considered "good stories" provide increased comprehensibility for children.

> Although all narratives tell what happened in an event, coherent and meaningful personal stories go beyond this referential information. Orienting statements may provide background descriptions and explanations that connect the event being narrated to other related experiences, thus setting it in a larger social and descriptive context. (Haden, 2003, p. 55)

Researchers continued to document the re-telling of "good stories" by these same children as their language skills developed. Consistencies in subsequent retellings suggest that children involved in autobiographical storytelling activities, whether at home or at school, are enveloped in a process of narrative co-construction with the adults around them. Decisions made by adults in these contexts about how to collaborate in children's translation of their experiences into good stories and elaborated stories can heavily influence and even determine the ways they are structured and understood by the children themselves.

Emphasizing the influence of cultural context on the structure of personal stories in child development terminology, Habermas and Bluck (2000) suggested that by the time children are in elementary school they have developed temporal coherence. This quality allows them to learn the cultural norms and conventions for "good stories" and order their personal experiences accordingly. By early adolescence temporal coherence develops into *biological coherence*, which means that they learn how to construct

culturally appropriate biographies and piece together their life events appropriately. These types of coherence are essential for the development of master narratives, a type of autobiography based on culturally mandated, overarching story lines that guide storytelling practices.

Master narratives and genre.

Analyzing children's stories as master narratives can reveal how and why children are motivated to tell particular stories in particular contexts. Such personal stories are "not simply regarded as appropriate ways to experience the world; they are enforced in large and small ways. Master narratives are used by cultural stakeholders as strategies for the 'management of sense-making'" (Boje, 1991, cited in Thorne and McLean, 2003). Thorne and McLean (2003) used two concepts, master narratives and positioning, to analyze adolescent stories of past traumatic events. In one simple example, a teenaged participant recounted a childhood memory about an uncle's death. He was told about this death when he was 11 years old, while he was working on a science project. In response to his immediate reaction, which was to cry, his father said that he shouldn't be sad and to continue doing his homework. The researchers concluded that this memory recollection demonstrates a Western male master narrative that dictates non-emotional reactions to adverse events (p. 171). The story also suggests that the father accepts this attitude within this master narrative. When the researchers asked this participant to recall when he had told this particular story to someone else, the teenager recalled a conversation with a cousin that both focused on his father's reaction to his uncle's death and rejected this position. "I told him that I can't take news like that with such a stoic nature. Joe felt the same way as I did, and we concluded that we were different than our

fathers" (p. 171). In the course of this retelling, the participant stakes out a new position and rejects an older authoritative one.

This study included 60 participants described as late adolescent European Americans (p. 170). The majority of the stories were grouped into two main themes: 1) relationships, and 2) life-threatening events. The researchers documented the story selection as well as how the stories were received. While a few had never been told before, the majority had been told at least once and several had been told multiple times over the span of an entire adolescence. The researchers coded the stories and the emotional positions staked out in each one, using codes developed using prior research on gender socialization (Eccles and Bryan, 1994). These positions fell into three categories: Tough, also called "John Wayne discourse" (Talbot, Bibace, Bokhour, and Bamberg, 1996, cited in Thorne and McLean, 2003); Vulnerable; and a nurturing/rescuing reaction called "the Florence Nightingale position" (p. 175). The only category that indicated significant gender differences was the Florence Nightingale position, which included stories that described trauma but emphasized how the trauma had caused the teller to think and care more about others. Not surprisingly, these stories were told predominantly by young women.

As mentioned above, participants were asked to share their recollections of telling their stories to others. When these recollections were documented, the findings suggested that 80% of the participants recalled a favorable audience response when they assumed either the Tough or the Florence Nightingale position. Storytellers who staked out a Vulnerable position remembered negative audience responses; some added that they had changed the way they told the story as a result. From these findings, the researchers

concluded that the Tough and Florence Nightingale positions, but not the Vulnerable position, could be categorized as master narratives.

> Vulnerable position narratives were more often rejected than accepted by listeners, who preferred Vulnerability to be laced with concern for others, or to be dismissed altogether in lieu of action-packed plot. Tough and empathetic positions seemed to place less burden on listeners because the teller seemed to have resolved the crisis more successfully.
>
> (Thorne and McClean, 2003, p. 183)

The authors acknowledge the smallness of their sample (60 students) and that their findings may not be generalizeable to other groups. In addition, the concept of master narrative may only be seen as relevant by cultural groups who emphasize the personal life story (Rogoff and Mistry, 1991, cited in Thorne and McLean, 2003). Thorne and McClean's study is important, however, because it emphasized two cross-cultural aspects of personal storytelling: the tellers' immersion in a cultural context that provides cues to how personal life events are interpreted and assigned meaning, and the role of the listener/audience in shaping the kinds of stories that are told as well as how they are told. McAdams (2003) similarly suggests that life stories may contain autobiographical "facts" but often go beyond these to include additional actors, settings, and plots that make sense to both tellers and audiences. As Bruner (2003) stated,

> Telling others about oneself is, then, no simple matter; it depends on what *we* think *they* think we ought to be like. Nor do such calculations end when we come to telling ourselves about ourselves. Our own self-making narratives come to reflect what we think others expect us to be like.
>
> (p. 211)

Master narratives are part of a genre of personal storytelling in which the stories themselves reveal the cultural cues that influence the kinds of stories that get told in any particular context. Understanding the nature and influence of genre can help teachers plan how to scaffold activities that show students how to include flexibility in their

storytelling practices as well as how to build literacy skills by deconstructing the master narratives within which their stories fall.

Genre.

The concept of genre in this study is taken from both literacy and semiotic theoretical frameworks. The review of autobiographical theory and master narrative affirms that as young people create personal narratives they are working within a literary genre that has conventions and rules. But these conventions and rules change, depending on the context in which narratives are created. Bakhtin (1983/2003) expanded the concept of genre beyond literary categories by suggesting that social relations constrain, offer possibility, and provide structures for everyday speech (including text production).

> The speaker's speech will be manifested primarily in *the choice of a particular speech genre*. This choice is determined by the specific nature of the given sphere of speech communication, semantic (thematic) considerations, the concrete situation of the speech communication, the personal composition of its participants and so on. And when the speaker's speech plan with all its individuality and subjectivity is applied and adapted to a chosen speech genre, it is shaped and developed into a certain generic form. (p. 102)

This theory of speech genre is helpful in explaining how young people make decisions about what stories to tell, and how the constraints and expectations of curriculum, teachers, and parents can affect the nature and the structure of their stories. In a similar way, the technological features of both hardware and software impose their own possibilities and constraints on personal stories. The structures of the software that Parsons StoryCorps participants use, as well as the media bits they gather to construct narratives and to represent personal stories, effect speech and text creations similarly to the social conditions and context in which the stories are created. Referring to a Bakhtinian understanding of speech genre, Kress (2003) developed a theory of

multimodal genre that will be further discussed in the methodology chapter.

Kress defined the multimodal genre in four stages:

1) Discourse, which embodies all the social practices and contextual conditional within which the multimodal speech/text event occurs

2) Design, which refers to the content decisions that determine the type of speech/text event

3) Production, which includes all the material and technology that is used to produce the speech/text event

4) Distribution, which acknowledges opportunities that technology provides to distribute content to limitless audiences

(It should be noted that for the present study, only the first three stages were used for analysis. The timeline of data collection did not allow the investigation of potential audiences for Parsons StoryCorps stories after they had been posted on YouTube).

The concepts of master narrative and genre are particularly relevant, and in fact may be most salient, to the examination of school contexts. For example, the role of teacher is not only important but also central to the understanding of how young people might approach the task of telling personal stories. Autobiographical storytelling is already a common practice in many education contexts, especially in formal school curricula where it is often considered an effective way to connect the personal lives of students to formal writing and language arts. This way of creating a culturally relevant learning experience is found particularly in schools that serve diverse students. Amelia, however, is extending this practice at Parsons (albeit in an informal afterschool program) as a strategy to build digital literacy skills with diverse students. The next section will briefly describe how autobiography has been implemented in classrooms that serve diverse students and provide insights into Amelia's own motivation for doing so.

The use of autobiography in schools with diverse students.

Autobiography in schools has long been used to support students' development of their own voices and to help them connect their own personal experiences with classroom content, from classical literature to historical events (Beach, 1990; Bleich, 1975; Skaar, 2009; White, 1995). Spires and Donley (1998) contended that the use of personal narrative encourages students to write "openly and honestly"; when this practice is established in the classroom, it motivates students to attend to the texts in deeper ways instead of treating the activities of writing and sharing superficially.

Making the use of personal narrative and writing a priority in schools, particularly with adolescents, has been recognized as an important pedagogical strategy given the enormous changes and challenges that teenaged students often face (Atwell, 1987). Teachers of adolescents often find that their students are the most engaged when they are involved in activities that they initiate. "Although their interests can shift with amazing speed, adolescents' raging enthusiasms achieve incredible ends when the ends are the kids' own" (p. 30). The use of personal narrative in the classroom can also help students navigate physical, emotional, and cognitive changes that they often can't process on their own. Similarly, many educators utilize autobiography to create the "middle space" that narrative always provides between the personal interests, feelings, and thoughts of students and the social world of the classroom (Nixon, 2008; Greene, 1996).

Amelia's motivation to pursue this project stemmed from her desire to expose students to technology in order to build their digital literacy and her desire to "give voice to students silenced by their schooling experiences." This idea of using personal narrative to provide a space in which the student voice is heard is similar to that of many educators

who teach diverse populations (Cook and Lodge, 1996). The use of personal narrative in the classroom allows students to bring their own voices into schools that often suppress them by imposing a mainstream way of talking and writing (Cook and Lodge, 1996). Meyers (1996) described using language autobiography to help students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds investigate their own histories as language users and to incorporate family history and stories so that they can better understand their own development as writers, readers, and storytellers.

Greene (1996) used autobiography with her African American students to resist or make sense of their lives as a minority by first introducing her students to autobiographical texts and then allowing them to create their own. After they had engaged in autobiographical writing, these students were better able to make personal connections to the literature they were reading in class and also to recognize their own cultural traditions. By following a similar path, digital storytelling projects offer diverse students opportunities to express and validate their own histories and cultures using a variety of media; in this way, they extend the practice of autobiographical storytelling (McDermott, et al., 2008; Nixon and Gutierrez, 2007).

The final section of this chapter will discuss theoretical frameworks that offer a more nuanced understanding of students' digital storytelling, specifically how technology and the use of digital media influence the content of such stories as well as their making and meaning. Stuart Hall's (1980, 1985, 1996) theories of articulation and representation were heavily drawn upon to analyze students' work. Hall's work was particularly helpful because the Parsons StoryCorps participants routinely appropriate cultural artifacts such as iconic photographs of the Civil Rights Movement, historical archives, and pop music.

In telling their stories, the Parsons StoryCorps participants rely heavily on the use of image and also use other media elements to create meaning. The new analytical frameworks in multimodal discourse theory are geared to the deconstruction of media objects in order to identify how and whether each mode (text, image, and sound) either delivers specific meaning or instead builds meaning through extension, elaboration, and layering (Barthes, 1974; Gee, 2004; Kress, 2001; Mitchell, 1994/2005). Because Bakhtin's theory of speech genre also underpins these frameworks, a brief discussion of the role of genre in multimodal discourse is included. A more detailed discussion appears in the methodology chapter because these frameworks were extensively used to analyze student work.

How Does the Use of Digital Media Affect Youth Participants' Stories?

Recent projects about the work of digital storytelling have argued that students are able to reclaim their "identities" through creative use of technologies (Nixon and Gutierrez, 2008). Social theorists, who strive to understand the impact of rapid technological change, posit that such changes have resulted in the emergence of "liquid" identities in a postmodern world (Baumann, 2004, cited in Buckingham, 2008). Baumann (2004) believed that the concept of identity is receiving greater attention because it is problematized within the current political, economic, and cultural environment. In a globalized and technologized economy that is characterized by social mobility, dislocation, and "flexible" employment, identity is no longer fixed or bound to traditional social relationships (Baumann, cited in Buckingham, 2008, p. 1).

The understanding of identity formation and self-presentation as processes is in alignment with the ways that new social and information communication technologies are

being used (Buckingham, 2008; Weber and Mitchell, 2008). "The structural features or characteristics of digital production also view identity as an ongoing process, one that is always under construction but that also has a permanence or longevity, an existence tied to embodiment" (Weber and Mitchell, 2008). From this viewpoint, media and communication technologies are seen simply as providing new types of cultural material for people to use in the construction of identities that are never fixed but remain always in process. Proponents of this position take issue with earlier perspectives on the role of technology in identity construction, which identified technology as a contributor to something fragmented and incomplete (Turkle, 1995). Although technology use may influence how the self is represented in multimodal text (for example, by making it less linear) results of this research indicate that digital media simply provide more tools for cultural production.

Youth and new media.

Several recent empirical studies have sought to develop a more complex understanding of young people's digital work. This research has largely focused on social networking sites and the creation of personal websites and blogs by young people. *Youth Identity and Digital Media* (2009), published by the MacArthur Foundation, contains several case studies that directly address issues of identity, agency, youth authorship, and digital media. The explosion of youth-created content on the Internet attracted Stern (2008) to study how kids understand the processes of online publishing and self-presentation and also persuaded her add their voices and perspectives to an area increasingly dominated by adult interpretation. In both mass media analysis and academic scholarship, adults have traditionally analyzed multimedia texts divorced from their

authors. Even now, routine attempts to understand young people's motivation to publish personal information on the Internet are not made; from an adult perspective, it has seemed as if youth culture is obsessed with public displays and cares little for privacy.

In an attempt to reach a better understanding of the thought processes involved in youth online authorship, Stern (2008) sought to "neither celebrate nor to critique youth online expression, but rather to illuminate the ways in which it is a meaningful form of cultural production, particularly during adolescence" (p. 95). Over several years, Stern interviewed hundreds of "youth producers" ranging in age from 12 to 21. She found varied motivations, for example gaining a voice in a public culture that both rewards this kind of communication and requires self-publicity. Stern also found that adolescents would often launch a blog, personal website, or social networking profile before figuring out why they wanted to do these types of things. Frequent explanations included finding out about a particular forum from a friend, deciding it was something they needed to do, having an interest in gaining technology literacy, and "just want[ing] to figure it out" (p. 99). According to this data, young people do not expect or anticipate either challenges or benefits to result from their use of social media and online publishing. Nonetheless, young people who sustained their personal pages and maintained online presence for a significant amount of time found that these things genuinely helped them as they were coming to terms with their own identities and peer their relationships. As one participant noted, "It forces me to think about who I am, what I like, and who I want to be" (p. 102).

The argument can be made that digital storytelling merely extends an already multimodal enterprise. "Narratives are not usually monomodal, but rather they integrate two or more communicative modes. Visual representation, gesture, facial expression, and

physical activity, for example, can be combined with talk, song, or writing to convey a tale" (Ochs and Capps, 1996). However, current studies and theoretical developments on the use and structure of digital storytelling have yet to determine how a medium or combination of media affects a story and, in turn, how do these effects influence what audiences learn from stories. Storytelling has always used multiple texts and varied resources, but something else is going on when digital tools are thrown into the mix.

In a study of fifth graders, Skaar, (2007) found gender differences when students were allowed to choose whether to use computers and digital media or traditional methods of writing. He found that girls tended to choose writing over images in their storytelling projects, but his social semiotic perspective led him to examine what the children intended to express versus what they managed to express. His results showed that the written word allowed the girls much more freedom than the pre-coded, already signified media texts that the boys typically chose to use.

In a recent essay, Skaar (2009) used social semiotics to investigate two premises: first, that people learn when they create signs and texts; and second, that somehow digital technology has changed the parameters of this learning process so that something not yet fully defined is happening. The ability to combine images, sound, and text at will, what some have called "bricolage" (Levi-Strauss, 1966; cited in Skaar, 2009), has contributed to NLS by emphasizing the new roles of digital media and texts in an expanded notion of literacy (Kress, 2003). NLS theorists who focus on digital literacy posit that these new texts are changing the way people produce text and, consequently, how people understand newly produced texts. Kress utilized social semiotic theoretical approach in which the social context motivates all text and sign production. Skaar (2009) built upon

this theoretical foundation and purported that social contexts and relations influence the texts people produce simply because the resources available for such work largely determine the resultant texts.

At the very least, the ready availability of computers, the ease of their connection to the Internet, and access via the Internet to a near-infinite stream of images, sounds, and texts seems to affect the nature of the eventual products. But Skaar also argued that the use of digital texts essentially creates a shortcut whereby people choose among pre-coded texts instead of creating codes to suit a particular text. Skaar, however, did not consider is that we, the storytellers, never choose the codes ourselves. Words, phrases, and genres that are already in use all provide codes. Self-created texts are authored with media (which can range from language to crayon drawings to digitally created images) means, for the creator, choosing among a myriad of pre-conceived symbols with which society is inundated. Using data from his 2007 study, Skaar has distinguished between the work that boys and girls do in the classroom and explored why girls tend to tell stories that are fully personal, emotional, and based on their actual experiences. When choosing the media for their story, the girls he observed selected handwritten, self-generated text. By contrast, the boys used images taken from the Internet and could be hampered according to the degree of freedom they were allowed in this exercise. Internet texts already came with meaning—and although male students could re-package the texts, they lacked the ability to derive original meaning from them (p. 38).

Hull and Roche-Smith's (2008) longitudinal case study of a youth whom they call "Steven" showed different results. In 2002, at the age of 12, this African American boy attended an afterschool program near his home in California. Graduate students from the

University of California, Berkeley and community members volunteered to work closely with the young people who came to this afterschool center. The researchers returned to interview Steven twice: once when he was 15 (three years after his participation in the afterschool program), and again when he was 17.

At the afterschool program, Steven developed a story called *LEMONADE!!* in which he recounted his birth to a drug-addicted mother and his early life in foster care. The story contains media components including images, music, and narration. Although the story begins with the enormous struggles Steven faced as a baby and a young boy, it soon transitions to emphases on how good his foster mother was, how well he was doing in school, and how much he enjoyed his "hobbies" (dancing, laughing, and acting goofy) (p. 424). The story ends with the observation that "Life will always bring you lemons, but you have to be strong enough to make the best of it and make lemonade out of it" (p. 424).

When the researchers returned to interview Steven they found out that this story had followed him throughout his adolescent years. He remarked that new friends at school laughed at his being a crack baby, while adults praised his fortitude. Because the story was digital, it was shared with multiple audiences even as it simultaneously contributed to a fixed interpretation. As Hull, et al. (2008) wrote, "All of these elements of potential meaning, co-deployed as they are, contextualize one another and fix, reify—'add flesh to' in Bakhtin's phrase—a self-presentation of a narrow interpretation of Steven at a fixed time and place in his life" (p. 423).

In their analysis of Steven's interviews and his multimedia project, the authors emphasized two aspects of the entire experience: fixity and fluidity. For them, these

aspects illustrated the effects of digital media on autobiographical storytelling (p. 415). Steven was fixed by his digital story, because the use of both audio and visual media seemed to freeze him in time. Steven's audience thought that the images of Steven as a young boy and the music he chose to add meaning to his story pinpointed the story, and by extension Steven himself, at a particular time and place (certainly more than if he had produced a written essay). The authors also contended that the use of multiple media seems to make stories more "true to life" and limits "interpretive flexibility" (p. 421). The movement of Steven's story over time and space enabled its fluidity. Without digital technologies, Steven's story would probably not have left the community center in which it was created. The use of technology therefore increased its potential audience, a result that can have both positive and negative consequences for youth. In this case, the widespread dissemination of Steven's story brought both positive and negative consequences. Although these conclusions are quite interesting, the authors did not analyze the relationships between youth and adults in similar educational contexts and how such relationships impact the storytelling process.

Hull and Roche-Smith's work with Steven also provides a case study through which the concept of master narratives can be examined. According to their description of Steven's creative process, at first he worked closely with a white undergraduate student who would take notes as he talked through his ideas about both plot and media. When an African American community center volunteer overheard these conversations he requested that Steven work with him instead. This volunteer expressed concern to the project teacher and the university research staff that Steven's story would only serve to confirm stereotypes that "outsiders had of this low-income, largely African-American

community, stereotypes about crime, drug addiction, and welfare abuse" (p. 425). However, data presented in the article from extensive field notes recount that every time Steven talked about difficulties in his life, the community member reminded him of how well he was doing in the present; in fact, it was this person's idea to title Steven's story *LEMONADE!!*. The article also included interview data in which Steven mentioned his foster mother's warning ("My mom said don't write no negative stuff about my business"), a sentiment echoed by the community member (p. 425). The researchers concluded that Steven was not free to tell his own story and that his creative process was interrupted by the removal of the graduate student. Although they still maintain that this story was Steven's own, they also note that tensions are inherent in informal learning situations in which children are invited to create personal stories but are hampered by adults.

> We are not arguing that one point of view is right—surely young people need to come to understand the consequences that can attend their representations of Self and community (as do we all), and they surely also need some freedom to write about what they want. Managing these tensions productively for the sake of the children and youth is key. (p. 436)

The conflict Steven experienced echoes the situation of many youths who are invited to tell their own stories. In Steven's case, the community member who complained seemed to view the university researchers and graduate students as outsiders and wanted to make sure that Steven understood how he should present himself to this kind of audience. This sequence of interactions and events suggests a master narrative; one in which struggles are resolved and success follow adversity. This reaction is similar to the finding, described in the previous section, that storytellers who assume a Vulnerable position are received more negatively and pushed to take a Tough position.

Steven was also pushed to be thankful for his present circumstances (a loving foster family) and to be mindful of representing his community well. These messages can be interpreted as cultural cues that were being overtly communicated to Steven. (The article did not examine the researchers' motivations.) Steven's work and conversations with the graduate student were not reported, which makes it difficult to know how this young person reacted to the conflicting prompts and cues he encountered. In fact, Steven may have been caught between two competing master narratives: the Tough and the Vulnerable.

Theories of autobiography that stress a sociocultural perspective and that focus on interactions between teller and listener are extremely useful for understanding digital storytelling projects. Curriculum and the influence of adults are often discounted or even dismissed in these types of informal educational environments, in which young people are assumed to be "free" to tell whatever story they want. Just like Steven, children everywhere are constantly reading and interpreting cues given by peers and adults in order to understand what kinds of stories are acceptable. Embedding this relationship in relevant cultural context, exploring both the cultural and educational environment, and fully explaining how young people and adults interact and engage in the process of co-construction of digital personal stories all goes a long way toward fully revealing the complicated nature of autobiography. In addition, these actions can help further develop theories about master narrative and situated storytelling. Digital media contribute additional opportunities to enhance and expand the role of the audience and also expand the storyteller's opportunities to layer meaning, connect to larger cultural narratives, and draw from multiple text sources.

Articulation, representation, and signifying practices.

If personal digital stories can take on lives of their own and become stand-alone cultural artifacts, analysis of the digital products themselves that expands their function as evidence of self-presentation is required. Stuart Hall's theory of articulation (1996, 1981) is essential to such an analytic framework.

> While elements of culture are not directly, eternally, or exclusively tied to specific economically determined factors such as class position, they are determined in the final instance by such factors, through the operation of *articulating* principles which are tied to class position. (1981, p. 8)

Articulation occurs through signifying practices that are revealed in the multiple formats of cultural production. The current research investigates how the concept of articulation operates when young people create digital products. To understand how digital media influences their personal narratives, deconstructing the media sources they use can inform how best to design digital literacy curricula. When teachers and students are engaged in a creative process of making multimedia products while simultaneously recognizing how articulation functions, they are utilizing one of new literacy's core goals: to draw students into conversations about discourses of power. Topics of such conversations include but are not limited to how media texts are created, who creates them, and why, as well as questions about whose understandings of the world are privileged.

Hall (1997) suggested two systems of representation. The first, *mental representation*, allows people to make sense of things in the material world and connect the physical environment with comprehension of it. Things in the material world include abstract concepts as well as material objects. The second system of representation, language, includes symbolic and semiotic transmissions of meaning such as speech, text, and visual images. Hall calls the latter system *signs*. In order to understand signs, a

conceptual understanding of what meaning specific signs convey must be shared. Working from a constructionist understanding of language, Hall stated that "things don't *mean*: we construct meaning, using representational systems—concept and signs" (p. 25).

Hall added that representation as process must also be understood. This process can be divided into four elements (Figure 1):

1) Production of representation (the influence of race, gender, ethnicity, class on the actual construction of texts);

2) Reference, which points to what 'realities" are represented in the texts that are tied to the race, class, gender and the ethnicity of the text creator(s);

3) Reception, which means the ways that race, gender, ethnicity, and class affect how texts are interpreted and received.

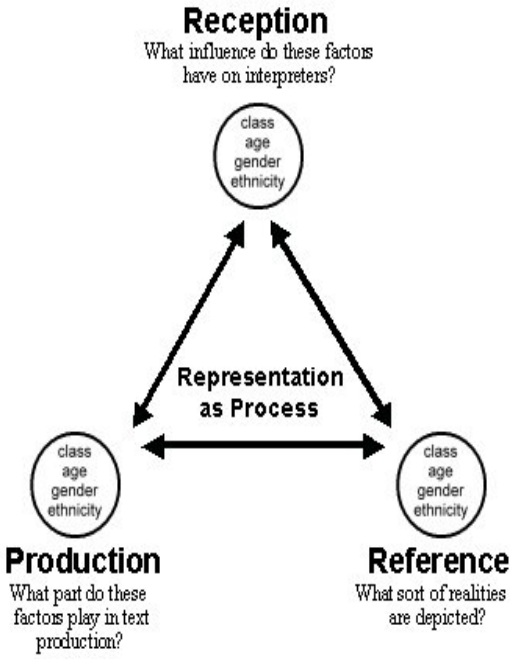


Figure 1. Representation as Process (Hall, 1997)

The conceptualization of representation as process, as Hall argued, underscores the need for deconstructions of all texts as they are both read and constructed. Because young people are surrounded by all kinds of representations, particularly media-based

and media-generated representations, it is only through this kind of interrogation of the texts that they can develop a literate approach to both consumption and production. Hall's (1987/1996) choice of examples focused intently on uses of image to show that no fixed meaning can be assigned. The meaning of an image is entirely dependent on contextual factors—the historical, social, political, and economic positions of the individual(s) who create or interpret it. To prove this point, Hall (1997) developed curriculum materials that deconstructed media images of black men and women. This project began with a discussion of specific images, in order to elucidate how they projected a particular black "identity" and also how both depiction and perceived identity worked to reinforce racialized and gendered politics. These kinds of representations, which always reflect particular political ideologies, operate successfully when they are "closed"—that is, when their meanings are naturalized and the process of assigning those meanings is hidden. In terms of curriculum design, educators can assume the responsibility of making representations "open." Leading questions can support this process: Where do images come from? Who produced them? For what purpose were they produced? Who is silenced in the production of these images (Hall, 1997, p. 54)? When students begin this process of interrogation and deconstruction, the "normalness and naturalness" of closed images disappear.

Since the late 1990s, cultural production of meaning has been affected by new technologies in dramatic ways. "[Meaning] is also produced in a variety of different *media*; especially these days, in the modern mass media, the means of global communication, by complex technologies, which circulate meanings between different cultures on a scale and a speed unknown in history" (Hall, 1997, p. 3). The use of de-

contextualized media parts (text, video, photographic images, sound) to carry various meanings depends on how the meanings are constructed and in what social or educational context they are used. "In part, we give things meaning by how we *represent* them—the words we use about them, the ways we classify and conceptualize them, the stories we tell about them" (Hall, 1997, p. 3). Because young people are completely immersed in these technology-rich media worlds, however, often they don't deconstruct the signs and symbols bombarding them through video games, TV, the Internet, and so forth. With this lack in mind I posed a central question throughout my observation of Parsons StoryCorps: How do the young people in this study use pre-encoded media parts to create their own stories?

The next chapter outlines the research methodology employed for data collection and analysis. These methods incorporated the theoretical frameworks described above, and were designed to present a detailed account of young people's personal storytelling with digital media. In addition, my observations of and the close collaborative relationship that I developed with the participating teacher resulted in findings that can be incorporated into potential curricula that support digital literacy. This potential use will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Three: Methodology

A qualitative case study was designed to closely examine the Parsons StoryCorps afterschool project. The aim was to investigate youth participants' use of multiple media to create personal digital stories, guided by three research questions: 1) What are the conditions under which digital stories are being told?; 2) Within the practice of digital storytelling, what are the personal narratives that middle school students create?; and 3) How does technology (digital media) influence the stories that students tell? As a result of this inquiry, a better understanding of the implementation of a digital storytelling project in a school-based afterschool program has emerged.

Qualitative methods were used to capture this experience. These included participant observations on all workshop sessions and non-structured working sessions in a community setting, informal and formal interviews, and document collection. In particular, the study documented Amelia's efforts to connect the development of critical technology use and digital literacy through student construction of personal stories.

The research methods and subsequent analysis revealed a complex picture of participants' experience in this digital storytelling project and how their experience there relates to their other experiences with technology in school. Using a qualitative research approach may produce a more nuanced view of the development of digital literacy skills. As discussed in previous chapters, the lack of empirical research that closely studies how digital literacy is defined by a particular teacher, embedded in a particular curriculum, and deployed in a particular setting, limited the ability to get a complete picture of what

the development of these skills might mean in practice. Because Amelia was motivated to implement Parsons StoryCorps to address, in part, digital literacy, this case study contributes insights into how digital storytelling might support its development in middle school students.

Why Case Study?

Case studies draw from a range of theoretical approaches. A researcher might analyze the issues in a case and build a theoretical analysis afterwards, or may simply stick to the issues within the context of the particular case and not intend to contribute at all to theory building (Creswell, 2007). However, the point of utilizing the case study approach is so the researcher can investigate complex contextual conditions and variables that impact the phenomena being studied. In other words, a case study allows the researcher to study phenomena in context (Yinn, 2003).

The Parsons StoryCorps case study was conducted during the late spring and fall of 2009. In addition to analysis of the project, a detailed description of the location in which a project is situated (here, a school) is described as warranted in a case study (Creswell, 2008; Stake, 2000; Yin, 2003). The parameters of this study suggest that it is an instrumental case study, which means that it "is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or redraw a generalization" (Stake, 2000, p. 437). This issue of generalization, however, draws attention to a central point of contention for academic research: the importance of the particular versus the need to generalize in an effort to contribute to theory building or policymaking (Denzin, 1989; Stake, 2000; Williams, 2002; Yin, 2003). Because this research was designed as an instrumental case study, care was taken to not over generalize but instead to pay close attention to particulars of the

case itself. Specifically, this case study focused on the teacher, the context in which she designed and implemented the curriculum, the curriculum itself, the participants, the stories they chose to tell, the process through which they used digital media to tell a personal story, and the effect that these media had on the contents and meanings of the participants' stories.

Research Questions

The broad research questions were designed to promote a better understanding of the relationships among teacher motivation, project structure and curriculum, and the digital stories that participants first chose to tell and then constructed with multimedia. The main research questions, and the related sub-areas of investigation that guided the study, are as follows:

1) **What are the conditions under which these digital stories are being told?**
    - In what kind of school is this project taking place?
    - What is the structure of this afterschool project?
    - Who are the students who volunteered to participate?
    - What were their motivations to participate?
    - How did the relationships among these students influence the structure of the project (e.g., its informality, whether students worked together or alone, seating arrangements, etc.)?
    - What were the incentive and motivation for the teacher to develop this project?
    - What curriculum did she employ? How did she structure the program? What decisions did she make about curriculum?
    - What were her overall goals for the project? What did she hope students would gain from the experience?

2) **Within the practice of digital storytelling, what are the personal narratives that middle school students create?**
    - What are the narratives that students chose to tell? In what genre do they fall (turning point or major life event, difficult or traumatic experience, family story, biography of family member)?
    - What motivated the students to tell these stories?
    - Were these stories decided upon before starting the project, or were they created during project time?

- Are these stories that students have already told in a more formal context, such as for an assignment in a language arts class?
- Did students have concrete ideas about the flow of their stories, or were they less structured?
- How did the Parsons StoryCorps curriculum that Amelia employed influence the stories that students told?
- How did students' relationships with Amelia influence their story creation?
- How did students' relationships with one another influence the stories they created?

3) How does technology (digital media) influence the stories that students tell?

- How are media visible in the storytelling process?
- How do the pieces of digital media that students choose influence the structure of their stories? How are the media-influenced versions different from before the technology was introduced?
- How did digital imagery influence the stories? How did the process of searching and selecting visual images influence the stories?
- Is there evidence that pre-coded imagery and text influenced student control over their stories?
- How do audio selections (music, voice-over narrative) influence the stories?
- What are the students' interpretations of the media parts they have selected? How are these readings connected to the personal narratives being told?
- How does the use of technology influence the audience for these stories? Who are students creating their stories for?
- How does technology influence audience interpretation? (In what contexts do these performative events occur? What is the context of the performative event? How do the presence of particular visual and audio media influence interpretations of the story?)
- Do these stories reveal the larger social and political worlds that these students are connected to? If so, how?

The Setting

Parsons StoryCorps was implemented as an afterschool program in Parsons Middle School's media center. Parsons is a highly diverse middle school in Baylor, North Carolina. The school has a total student population of 840: 40% African American, 16% Latino, and 37% white. The remaining 8% are identified as Asian (NCES, 2009). The socioeconomic status (SES) of students reflects a conflation of race and class: of the

approximately 45% of Parsons students are who qualify for free and reduced lunch, the majority are students of color and more than 90% are African American and Latino (NCDPI, 2009). Parsons is considered one of the more successful schools in Baylor in comparison with other schools that have similar demographics. Almost 80% of Parsons students are performing at grade level as measured by state End of Grade (EOG) tests (NCES, 2010). However, when these test scores are disaggregated by race and class, Parsons Middle School suffers from the same race-based achievement gap that plague the rest of the nation. According to the North Carolina Report Card (2009), only 37.8% of Parsons' African American student population is performing at grade level in both math and reading. Latino students at Parsons are also struggling, with only 35.5% performing at grade level. These students' EOG scores are comparable to the rest of the Baylor district but are significantly lower than the state average (Table 1). Economically disadvantaged students both at Parsons and in the Baylor district are scoring well below the state average.

Table 1. N.C. School Report Cards (2008–2009)
Performance of Each Student Group on the ABCs End of Grade Tests Percentage, Ethnicity, and Other Factors of Students Who Passed Both the Reading and Math Tests

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Multi-Racial	E.D	NED	LEP
School	78.9 %	37.6 %	35.5%	72.7%	63.6%	36.3%	63.6%	28.6%
District	79.7 %	39.1 %%	37.5%	75.4%	58.7%	33.7%	66.2%	28.5%
State	76.7 %	43.6 %	48.9%	76.5%	65.5%	48.3%	78.4%	34.6%

ED = Economically Disadvantaged; NED = Not Economically Disadvantaged;
LEP = Limited English Proficiency

Parsons Middle School is clearly struggling to meet the needs of its minority students, the majority of whom consistently fail EOG assessments. Although these data are alarming, targeting effective teaching methods and curricula to address students at risk of failure has been unsuccessful. Amelia and the school's administrative staff have expressed great concern over the practice of tracking students into gifted and low-performing academic teams in the upper grades (7 and 8), which has effectively segregated students inside the school building. Unfortunately, the widespread practice of tracking that, although designed to group students so that instruction meets their specific academic needs, instead exacerbates academic difficulties, often segregates students by race and class, and creates a dual curriculum track inside of a school building (Clotfelder et al., 2004).

The participants.

Amelia.

When she founded Parsons StoryCorps, Amelia had been the technology facilitator at Parsons Middle School for six months. Before transferring to that position, she had taught sixth grade science at Parsons for three years. Amelia trained to become a teacher in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's lateral entry one-year program designed for professionals who are changing careers. She began the Parsons StoryCorps project during her second (final) year of a certification program that prepares teachers and other education professionals for positions as technology facilitators. These facilitators are supposed to work directly with teachers to support the integration of technology into the curriculum.

Amelia's experience co-developing a digital story with her sixth grade student, Sam, was briefly described in Chapter One. The importance of this experience in providing the motivation for Parsons StoryCorps cannot be overstated. In its wake, Amelia was determined to create a project for students who she believed were marginalized in the school because they were both academically at risk and behaviorally challenged. Aside from the Parsons StoryCorps program, Amelia directs several projects that target at-risk students, notably, Triangle Trip for Kids (TTK), part of a national initiative to get urban youth (mostly African American and Latino boys) into mountain biking. Students who participate in TTK have had several suspensions from school. As a result of her close relationship with at-risk Parsons students, Amelia wanted to design a digital storytelling project that would emulate her experience with Sam but broaden it to include many more struggling students.

The participating students.

Amelia had visited each grade-level team, introduced the project to every student, and invited any student who wanted to participate. Initially, 19 students volunteered for a ten-week workshop that met after school in the media center. These students were able to return parent permission forms and a handwritten card summarizing why they wanted to participate. The group was almost equally divided between sixth and eighth graders (only one seventh grade student joined), and between boys and girls. Based on EOG scores and teacher recommendations, Parsons had defined the majority of the group as academically gifted. This designation is not an official classification (i.e., gifted students neither receive extra services from the district nor are enrolled in a special gifted program). According to Amelia, the participants were labeled by the school and tracked internally

into same-ability groupings within their academic teams. This breakdown is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Initial Project Participants by Grade and Race

	African American	Caucasian	Latino	Asian	mixed
6th	2	3	3	1	1
7th	1				
8th	1	6	1		
Total	4	9	4	1	1
Table 2					

After the first month, only one of the eighth graders remained. Amelia attributes the retention of sixth grade students in part to a school policy that prevents sixth graders from participating in varsity sports and afterschool clubs. Consequently, these students had more time to engage in the StoryCorps program. Interestingly, the majority of the students who dropped out were white males, who had a myriad of afterschool commitments that began soon after StoryCorps was underway.

This case study focused on the nine remaining students who completed projects. They were primarily girls, sixth graders, academically gifted, racially diverse, and of mixed economic status (poor, middle- and upper-middle class). Pseudonyms have been assigned to these students so that they cannot be identified. Table 3 lists their names and some of their characteristics.[7]

[7] These data are based on teacher and student reports.

Table 3. Participants by Grade, Socioeconomic Status, and Race

Participant	**Grade**	**SES**	**Race**
Michael	6th grade	Middle	White
Andy	6th grade	Low. Eligible for free and reduced lunch	Latino
Alice	6th grade	Middle	White
Ashland	6th grade	Upper-middle	White
Candace	6th grade	Low. Eligible for free and reduced lunch	African-American
Betty	6th grade	Middle	African-American
Victoria	6th grade	Low. Eligible for free and reduced lunch	Latina
Michelle (sister 1)	7th grade	Low-middle	African-American
Katrina (sister 2)	8th grade	Low-middle	African-American

Data Collection Methods

Several qualitative data collection methods were employed to develop a rich case study of Parsons StoryCorps. These included participant observations, interviews with both Amelia and StoryCorps youth, a technology checklist, and document collection including curriculum and students' multimedia personal stories.

Participant observations.

The primary data collection method employed in this case study was participant observation during project workshops in winter 2009. (The observation protocol appears in Appendix B.) During the project workshops, which were conducted weekly from

January to March, I assisted students in their creations of their personal digital stories and also observed them as they worked. I was present at all workshops and, in addition to taking field notes, offered technical assistance to Amelia as she conducted the workshops. Each session included observations of whole-group work (Amelia used the first 15 minutes to introduce the focus of the day which usually included some aspect of storytelling), informal conversations with students as they worked, troubleshooting technology issues, and observing and note-taking during student conversations. I also observed periods of collaboration between students (for example, when they helped each other at the computer or when Amelia had asked them to work together to flesh out their stories).

More observations were conducted in a public library in Baylor, where I met with the two sisters, Katrina and Michelle. By mid-March they were unable to come to afterschool StoryCorps project meetings due to other afterschool commitments. Therefore, the three of us met at the library every Saturday in April to complete their project.

Interviews.

In-depth interviews conducted with Parsons StoryCorps participants and the participating teacher, Amelia, that adhered to methods outlined by Smith (2002), Mason (2002), and Gerson and Horowitz (2002). (The protocols are listed in Appendix A.) These 60-minute interviews were formally conducted twice during the course of the project, first before the students began work on their stories and second after their stories had been completed. Interview strategies centered on the establishment of a conceptual framework and protocols that were clear and theoretically driven. Some of the authors listed above have contended that unstructured

interviews generally create more problems than they solve (Gerson and Horowitz, 2002, p. 204). According to Mason (2002), "Interview methodology begins from the assumption that it is possible to investigate elements of the social by asking people to talk, and to gather or construct knowledge by listening to and interpreting what they say and to how they say it" (p. 225).

The interviews were conducted and recorded by the researcher on a digital voice recorder. Traditionally, interviews are thought to be an information gathering exercise in which the interviewee occupies the position of informant (Kvale, 1996). However, Mason's (2002) theoretical approach assumes that the interviewer and interviewee are both engaged in a process of co-constructing knowledge. To create an environment conducive to this kind of process, the interviewer needs to "ground the interview dialogue in relevant contexts" (p. 227). To this end both structured and semi-structured interview protocols were used, in order to develop the appropriate contexts and elicit rich responses from teachers and students.

Interviews with students.

Talking with the students themselves was crucial to my understanding of how working with digital media for self-expression affected the stories they chose to tell. Through these interviews I explored their experiences during project meetings, including the decision-making processes they used for story-selection, story construction, and their presentation of the finished products to friends, teachers, school administrators, and parents. In addition, I sat down with students after their autobiographies were completed to walk through the product, including their thoughts and analyses about their decisions relating to the inclusion of media parts (pictures, audios, voice narratives, etc.).

Interview with the participating teacher.

Two in-depth interviews were conducted with Amelia, in addition to my documentation of numerous informal conversations we had during the creation, implementation, and review of the Parsons StoryCorps workshops. The formal interviews focused on her motivations for the project, how she constructed the curriculum, her experience with the students, her reflections on the process of digital storytelling, and her analysis of the students' digital stories.

Think-Aloud Method.

A think-aloud exercise (Someren, Barnard, and Sandber, 1994) was integrated into each study participant's interviews. This method has been used effectively to reveal thought processes, particularly during problem solving (p. 29). In addition, the think-aloud method allows cognitive processes to be revealed as a product is being created, in this case a digital personal narrative. Each student was asked to talk out loud while s/he was choosing media texts, determining sequence, and so forth. The method revealed important details about how youth participants choose media (particularly images) to represent their personal stories and was also very useful in helping them reflect on their projects after they were finished. Overall, the participants were extremely articulate, thoughtful, and able to clearly identify not only why they made their decisions but also how these decisions, in turn, shaped their stories.

Technology-use checklist.

The students completed technology checklists that identified how they were using technology prior to the Parsons StoryCorps workshops. This checklist, which was developed and validated by the Education Development Center's Center for Children and

Technology, provided a baseline profile of the students' technology use and skill. It was also useful for my understanding of what kinds of technology they routinely use and for what purpose (social, school, recreational, etc.). Because the participants were being asked to use digital media and tools to create a personal story, I was interested to see if they were already engaged in activities that involved presenting some aspects of their identities online, for example creating MySpace pages or Facebook profiles.

Document Collection.

Two main types of documents were collected throughout the course of the project: curriculum developed by Amelia (handouts, instruction sheets, etc.) and all-student work (the final digital stories as well as all storyboards, sketches, notes, and printouts of digital media files).

Analytical Framework

Multimodal discourse analysis theories were used to develop the analytical framework for students' digital stories (Gee, 2001; Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001; Kress, 2003; Nelson, Hull, and Roche-Smith, 2008). The multimodal discourse theoretical framework is a direct extension of discourse analysis that applies the notion of double articulation to multiple articulations. "Where traditional linguistics had defined language as a system that worked through *double articulation* (author's emphasis), where a message was an articulation of a form and as a meaning, we see multimodal texts as making meaning in multiple articulations" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 4). Multimodal discourse consists of four essential parts: discourse, design, production, and

distribution. These four elements indicate that current multimodal practices combine social practices and use of resources.

- *Discourse*. This describes the social practices surrounding the production of a text as well as the socially constructed knowledge that forms the bases of such practices.
- *Design*. This central component of all forms of multimodal expressions "stands midway between content and expression." It figures in communication situations (classroom, coffee shop, conference) and translates situational cues into particular kinds of expression that are connected to a particular set of resources.
- *Production*. This is the actual process, in terms of both material and action, of creating a text, also called a "semiotic event." "A whole other set of skills is required here: technical skills, skills of the hand and the eye, skills not related to semiotic modes, but to semiotic media" (Kress and can Leeuwen, 2001p. 6). (A semiotic event encompasses both process and product [a written text, a multimedia slideshow, a short video, a drawing, etc.] including the intent of the author and the materials by which the event is constructed).
- *Distribution*. This refers to the movement of media and meaning, in ways that were once unimaginable, through the use of new information and communication technologies. It has influence on the interpretation (for example, when a media text is posted on a blog, or embedded in a private Facebook site, or sent virally through a YouTube video, it instantaneously

> reaches multiple, diverse contexts) and is used to create an entirely new text for a communication event because of the interactive nature of social media where the text is distributed.

These four parts of multimodal discourse mapped directly onto my main research questions that focused on 1) conditions, 2) design and selection of personal stories, and 3) production of story through the use of multiple media.

The use of discourse theory to conduct close readings of students' multimedia documents provided a framework for connecting their decisions about text, images, and audio to a more complex understanding of representation and articulation. Considering students' decisions in light of discourse theory underscored the discursive properties of cultural production in which they were engaged. Using the concept of discourse allows for an open system that tries to relate language, and the production of signs and meaning, to systems of knowledge and power (Foucault, 1980, cited in Hall, 1997). This emphasis on process—from production to consumption to (re)production—is only understood through its "discursive formation" (Hall, 1996).

> It is in the discursive form that the circulation of the product takes place, as well as its distribution to different audiences. Once accomplished, the discourse must then be translated—transformed again—into social practices if the circuit is to be completed and effective. Discursive formations are sustained through the articulation of linked but distinctive moments. (p. 128)

In the analysis of participants' digital stories, which were also personal narratives, careful attention was paid to the media parts they selected and how these were appropriated and transferred to a new purpose.

Formal analysis of participants' stories considered them in light of Hall's theory of communication and representation. Close attention was paid to how the students had

constructed their stories, the decisions they made about what to represent or not represent, and how they employed intertextual elements (text, audio, video, still image). The question of how the nature of the technologies students used influenced the way they told their stories was paramount at all times. Discourse analysis was useful in illuminating the intertextuality that was central to participants' multimedia production. "Intertextuality is basically the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts, which may be explicitly demarcated or merged in, and which the text may assimilate, contradict, ironically echo, and so forth" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 82, cited in Gee, 2001, p. 47).

Analysis Procedures

Coding and theme identification.

After field notes, interview tapes, and observations were fully transcribed, a complete reading of all was done to uncover themes. Codes were developed according to van Leeuwen and Kress's (2001) four-part multimodal discourse framework of social practices, design, production, and distribution described above. Qualitative data coding software MAXQDA was used because it allows visualization of codes and texts, which in turn allowed easier comparisons and analyses which clearly revealed the dominant themes that emerged in the data. After coding was completed and interview data were divided, themes were identified within each general code. Next, interview data and observational data were categorized by theme. (The coding and thematic schemes appear in Appendix B.) Analysis of technology checklists also provided a baseline of technology use that was compared to descriptions of use revealed in the interviews. This comparison aided a fuller understanding of how participants used technology use prior to the start of

the project; ultimately, it was possible to derive whether their use had or had not changed as a result of the project. After interview codes were developed and data analyzed, the codes were mapped onto the document analysis described above.

Document analysis.

Multimedia autobiographies and curriculum guidelines (handouts, instruction sheets, etc.) formed the core of the data collected for analysis. Evaluating this data involved utilization of multimodal discourse analysis. Other frameworks that were used had been developed by the New London Group (1999) and the Center for Children and Technology (2003). Each of these general frameworks identified digital literacy areas and specific skills to be addressed in the curriculum. These areas were compared to Amelia's curriculum to see how she addressed digital literacy skills in her workshops.

A theoretical framework was applied to analysis of the students' work that drew heavily from critical social theorists including Roland Barthes (1964), Stuart Hall (1996), and Walter Mitchell (1984/1994), that have contributed invaluable insights about the role of visual imagery in cultural production. The work of these theorists provided a wide lens through which to investigate how the participants used visual images to represent themselves and their communities. After the stories had been completed, document analysis was done as a collaborative activity with the students, again utilizing the Think-Aloud process described above. The construction of each autobiography was analyzed and each student was asked to provide a rationale for decisions about why various media (audio, visual, text) were added. Theories of representation in the media (Evans and Hall, 1999) were applied to understand how the students' choices of images, in particular, fit into a larger picture of race, representation, and media in society.

Discourse analysis was used throughout these processes because I was not interested only in the intricacies of the multimedia texts that the students created, but also in how they connected to their own thoughts about their stories' meaning for them and their families, as well as how the use of technology in this project contrasted with their previous school experiences. As Gee (2001) argued, "We are not interested in simply describing data so that we can admire the intricacy of language. Rather we are interested in beyond description, in illuminating and gaining evidence for our theory of the domain, a theory that helps to explain how and why language works the way it does when it is put into action" (p. 8). Developing such an understanding, according to Gee, is necessary in order to take action in a particular field (in this case, education).

In addition to the mapping both the design and production of these stories using multimodal discourse theory, the stories were also analyzed and recoded by matching them with the detailed qualitative data collected from their student authors. This strategy for multimedia analysis, developed by Nelson, Hull and Roche-Smith (2008), deconstructs multimedia text to its individual parts to find "interactions of meaning" between the parts (p. 427). Procedurally, this search was accomplished by creating vertical boxes for two-second frames in which visual image, audio, text, interview data were horizontally stacked so that interactions could be identified. Figure 2 provides an example; data will be formally presented in Chapter Four.

Image	
Text	'When I was a young girl"
Music	Theme from The Princess and the Frog
Narration	"When I was little my dad used to carry me everywhere"
Interview	"I chose this picture because it reminded me…"

Figure 2. Analysis Example

By stacking the media parts and adding interview segments to each box, I was able to easily see how the authors had intended to use each image, audio file, and piece of text to forward their narratives. With this method, it was easy to see the multilayered meanings the Parsons StoryCorps youth had created.

The next section describes the methods used to ensure internal validity and presents each research question with corresponding data collection method; to show how multiple data sources were used to answer the broad research questions that guided the study.

Triangulation and Analysis

The most common procedure for ensuring internal validity is the triangulation of data sources (Creswell, 2008; Stake, 2000; Williams, 2002). According to Stake (2000), "Triangulation has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, and verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation" (p. 443). This is the primary method used by qualitative researchers to ensure internal

validity. Analysis of a range of data was conducted including interviews, observations, and document analysis that were then triangulated to find emerging themes. (Detailed protocols are given in Appendix A.) Table 4 lists the research questions and their corresponding data collection procedures.

Table 4: Research Protocols and Data Collection Procedures

Research Questions	Data Collection Procedures
Question 1: What are the conditions under which Parsons StoryCorps participants created their stories?	1. Technology checklist 2. Interviews (structured/unstructured) with participating teacher 3. Interviews with participants 4. Observations in project workshops and regular classes 5. Data collected from North Carolina Report Cards of Schools 6. Document Analysis of Curriculum
Question 2: What are the stories that participants chose to tell?	1. Interviews 2. Collection of student multimedia products 3. Participant observations
Question 3: How does technology (digital media) influence the Parsons StoryCorps participants' stories'?	1. Interviews 2. Collection of student multimedia products 3. Participant Observations

To improve overall validity, I conducted two member checks with Amelia to 1) share initial transcripts with her to ensure that the written documents accurately represented our conversations and aligned with her recollection of these events; and 2) share the final draft of my narrative to provide her an opportunity to comment on how I had interpreted and represented her role in this project. These member checks involved discussions focused on the themes that emerged from each interview transcript and summaries of field notes. The checks took place in April and October 2009. The final draft of the

dissertation was shared with Amelia in October 2010. These formal member checks were in addition to ongoing informal conversations through the projects' duration in winter and spring of 2009.

Limitations of the Study

Threats to external validity can be problematic in qualitative research. However, as Williams (2002) stated,

> We are attempting to describe the reality of the people we investigate. That the accounts produced are more than a 'text' is verifiable by those investigated, but it is more than this. Those 'realities' as experienced are often the outcomes of processes, the evidence of structures existing beyond the individuals investigated. (p. 138)

The students in this study will be related to a 'wider universe' of students while not directly representing them (after Mason, 1992). Even when unthreatened, external validity is a contentious topic in most qualitative research. Some theorists consider "objective" observation and study impossible (Denzin, 1983, cited in Williams, 2002; Guba and Lincoln, 1982). In fact, Denzin (1983) stated, "The interpretivist rejects generalizations as a goal and never aims to draw randomly selected samples of human experience" (cited in Williams, 2002, p. 128). Denzin drew this conclusion because "experience" is always contextually bound. Nor can generalizations be made across situations, because they are always bound by time and space (Guba and Lincoln, 1982). Although broad generalization cannot be generated from this study's small sample, the qualitative research performed does join the growing number of studies investigating the use of digital storytelling in an afterschool setting. Together, these studies can enhance understanding of this practice and accumulate a more nuanced approach to the field of digital media and learning and to young people's participation in related activities.

Triangulation of data sources in necessary to prevent threats to internal validity. Looking across and duplicating data collections and analysis procedures ensures that the instruments (questionnaires, interviews, observations) measure what they were intended to measure. Participant observations in qualitative studies can increase face validity, because there are few intermediary texts between the researcher and the research subjects (Sanchez-Jankowski, 2002). However, because I am a white, Jewish, female New Yorker studying minority youth in the South, questions can arise about the impact of cultural differences on my ability to interpret observations. Other potential limitations may derive from the sample itself, which is a self-selected group. Due to the cumbersome nature of research (consent forms, etc.), as well as efforts required by the project itself (e.g., transportation to and from project meetings), certain students (most of them under-served) chose not to participate.

Transparent accounting of the role of the researcher is a very important component of qualitative methodology. Unlike a positivist research approach that assumes a position of neutrality on the part of the researcher, the influence of ethnography on the overall methodology employed in qualitative research has revealed how the researcher's perspectives and cultural background, and even the researcher's choice of data collection and analysis methods, can affect not only the actions of research participants during the event under study but even the representation of data findings and conclusions. Therefore, the concluding section of this chapter will briefly describe my participation and positionality and their relationship to the Parsons StoryCorps case study.

Positionality

My relationship with Amelia began in 2007 while she was a student in the MEDX program and I was the TA for the technology cohort, which consisted of 12 teachers. Over two years we worked closely together in each course. Although I removed myself from grading or assessing any work that Amelia produced, she continued to perceive me as part of the program's teaching staff. When I asked Amelia if I could observe her Parsons StoryCorps project, she was happy to help me develop and implement my dissertation research. As she created the project and its curriculum, she asked for my guidance and ideas. Because I have been an education researcher studying technology integration for almost 20 years, I openly shared my ideas, thoughts, and opinions about this work with her. My progressive, critical political viewpoints, particularly regarding education were largely shared by Amelia and may have contributed to her interest in using digital storytelling as a way for students to develop counter-narratives. Amelia also attributed her interest in providing ways for students to develop counter-narratives to her empathy for marginalized youth, which she developed because of her own experiences as a lesbian in the South.

One of the most important results of our collaboration was the change made to Amelia's recruitment procedures for the Parsons StoryCorps project. Although these procedures will be fully discussed in the next chapter, it must now be said that the documentation I needed to fulfill Institutional Review Board requirements affected the ability of Amelia's target student population to participate in her program. For example, the several different sign-up forms for students and their caregivers and her request to students for written documentation of their interests and their reasons for wanting to

participate all created barriers. Specifically, students found it difficult to return papers signed by parents, to generate written statements summarizing their interests and reasons for wanting to attend the workshops, and to make plans for transportation (Amelia could not access resources to support students in this way). I did not ask for students to write down their interests and reasons to participate, but Amelia wanted to be helpful by delivering as much "data" as she could.

Amelia's wish to be helpful caused stress for her that complicated her efforts to spend the time needed to recruit certain students who were often absent or suspended, and whose relationships with the school and their families was strained. For example, she wanted to include boys who were already participating in TTK, the mountain-biking initiative she developed. However, many of these boys were simply unable to get forms signed on time, were sometimes absent for long stretches of time, and were not interested in writing in the first place and so became reluctant to participate.

When Amelia opened up participation to any interested students, large numbers of academically successful students were able to deliver this documentation. As a result of this interest, and to expedite the project and the companion research, Amelia quickly decided to stop actively recruiting the very students she had most wanted the project to serve and whose needs she had fore grounded while developing it. The change from students she perceived as most in need to students who were already academically successful decreased her overall interest in and satisfaction with the project. Exploring both my effect on the project's implementation and Amelia's reaction to mandatory research procedures contributes important insights to the field of digital media and learning. Adults' roles in young people's digital storytelling practices, and their use of

technology in general, are too often missing in descriptions of such projects or are only listed as impediments to the young people's free expression. In truth, the roles of both teachers and researchers are more complicated. They define through curriculum, materials, and facilitation both the possibilities for and the constraints upon young people's ability to author in the digital medium.

The next chapter will consider the roles of adults as important aspects of the project's implementation and present overall findings from Parsons StoryCorps. The findings are divided into three sections that align with the broad research questions that have guided this study.

Chapter Four: The Setting and The Stories

This chapter presents findings from a case study of Parsons StoryCorps after-school project. It details the school's contextual factors and conditions under which the student multimedia autobiographies were developed. These include:

- Technology use at Parsons Middle School
- The background of the project teacher, Amelia
- Amelia's motivation for this project (a co-constructed digital story created by her and a sixth grade student, Sam)
- Recruitment procedures that determined the profile of the students who volunteered and also influenced the stories they created

This section will also include Parsons StoryCorps participants' technology backgrounds and their motivations for building digital personal stories. The inclusion of Sam's story in this chapter is necessary because it contains an important factor that contributed to the shaping of students' projects, both in terms of Amelia's expectations for their work as well as for the curriculum she designed and implemented.

This chapter will also detail the process of story creation, including a description of students' interest in participating in the afterschool program, their initial story ideas, and how they decided which media to use in the construction and representation of their stories. The goal is to provide a concrete picture of how the student multimedia stories were conceived and developed, to highlight how the youth selected the stories they told,

and to explain how the use of technology and digital media shaped their narratives. Multimodal discourse analysis (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001) supplied the framework used here to analyze participants' process and products. The findings presented in this chapter are the results of analysis of interview data, field notes, and content analysis of work produced prior to digital production (storyboards, written notes, ideas, etc.) in addition to the digital stories themselves. Because analysis of the multimedia products is complicated to accomplish in text, some multimedia tables that help capture the multimodal nature of these projects are included. Analysis strategy that incorporates multimedia tables was a technique developed by Nelson and Hull (2008) to reveal multimodal literacy practices. The protocol used here required the overlay of media parts used by the students with interview data collected with the think-aloud method. The interview data revealed the participants' thinking and the rationale behind their media choices.

The findings will be organized around the three research questions that guided this study and that directly align with the three main elements of multimodal discourse theory (Kress, 2001): discourse and social practices (the conditions under which the Parsons StoryCorps project was developed, implemented, and experienced); design (the stories that the children selected to tell); and 3) production (the technological resources used to create the digital story). As explicated in the previous chapter, the use of multimodal discourse analysis provided the framework through which themes emerged across data sources (interviews, observations, students' digital stories) and aligned with each of the three broad research questions just described.

Discourse and Social Practices: The Conditions Under Which Stories Were Created

To understand the conditions under which Amelia developed Parsons StoryCorps and the young participants developed and built their stories, three main areas were considered: 1) preexisting technology use at Parsons Middle School, which provided a central motivator for Amelia to develop the project; 2) the curriculum that Amelia developed and implemented to scaffold the students' production of their personal digital stories; and 3) interactions and relationships among the curriculum, the teacher, and the participants that strongly affected both the stories and the project. Kress (2001) described these contextual practices as "Discourses [that] are socially constructed knowledges of reality. By 'socially constructed' we mean that they have developed in specific social contexts, whether these are very broad contexts, or not, explicitly institutionalized contexts or no, and so on" (p. 4). Through understanding the specific social conditions and practices of the school where Parsons StoryCorps took place as well as the project itself, a deeper analysis of the participants' digital stories is made possible.

Technology use in the school building.

Parsons StoryCorps was implemented at Parsons Middle School, which considered a successful school compared to schools with similar demographic profiles in Baylor, N.C. Parsons is rated well even though the majority of poor and minority students there are struggling academically (data about these conditions was presented in Chapter Three). While Amelia did succeed in recruiting racially and socioeconomically diverse students, they did not fit the profile of marginalized, academically struggling students whom Amelia had initially wanted to reach. The majority of students who participated in the Parsons StoryCorps project were academically gifted, highly motivated to participate,

and eager to engage in an activity they believed was missing from their standard curriculum. The profile of the student volunteers also changed the nature of the project, from one designed to reach marginalized, struggling students to an afterschool project that supported digital storytelling by academically gifted and technologically proficient students. Two additional primary conditions affected the purpose, implementation, and structure of Parsons StoryCorps: technology use in the school building and recruitment strategies.

Parsons Middle School may have been adversely affected by the recent opening of a nearby charter school. According to Amelia, many white, middle-class, and academically gifted students have left Parsons for this charter school. Although not substantiated by demographic data presented in Chapter Three from NCDPI, Amelia's perception was that the student population at Parsons changed from one that was diverse, both racially and socioeconomically, to one predominantly made up of minority and poor students. From Amelia's perspective, this shift directly corresponds to her perception that students are arriving at middle school with inadequate digital literacy.

> I think you could correlate it directly to socioeconomic status. You could probably look at our free and reduced lunch numbers and know that these kids are not technologically literate. So we went from, in 2005, when I started, it being 55–45% minority to, I think we're at 70–30% or 80–20%.
>
> (First interview, March 2009)

Technology is available throughout the Parsons building, from computer labs in the media center (where Parsons StoryCorps meetings were held), to laptop carts and ActiveBoards. However, Amelia describes the technology use at her school to be minimal. The prior principal, who had been at the school for more than a decade through 2008, purchased computers and other learning-related technology to keep pace with other

schools in the district; however, no corresponding emphasis was placed on professional development. This principal was considered effective by the district because during his tenure more than 75% of Parsons students functioned at or above grade level but did not place a strong emphasis on technology. Amelia's concern over the purchase of ActiveBoards provided a good example.

> For some reason there was this huge push because Canterbury Middle School had gotten all of these ActiveBoards that Parsons had to get ActiveBoards. And so we spent a lot of money this past summer and bought them. And there are eight or nine of them, and eight or nine of them are in the media center available for check out 99% of the time.
>
> (First interview, March 2009)

This observation corresponds with Amelia's description of technology policy at the district level. When asked about Baylor Public Schools' vision for technology, Amelia laughed and said:

> How do I answer that question? In 2005 we got a lot of money and we got laptops. Every teacher, every core teacher got a laptop. We spent millions and millions into modernizing the technology in our schools. The technology plan has not been updated since 2005 and there was no forethought in the actual plan on what to do when that 2005 technology is no longer under warranty and doesn't work.
>
> (First interview, March 2009)

In addition to the lack of professional development training provided at Parsons, Amelia found very few other professional development opportunities. She believes these might have been offered but no information was ever provided to her and other teachers. No training at all was offered when laptops were distributed, for example, and only a five-minute presentation was available when the school received the ActiveBoards.

In most schools and districts, new hardware and software are purchased at substantial cost with no accompanying plan for upkeep and upgrade (Benton, 2004). Similarly, these staggering investments are not accompanied by professional

development resources or articulated vision of how the technology aligns with current curriculum or the school's long-term educational vision (Cuban, 2004; 2000). However, the new principal who started in the fall semester of 2008, during Amelia's first year as technology facilitator, fore grounded the use of technology in expectations for teachers, (by adding technology use as a benchmark in teacher evaluations). This principal asked Amelia to be involved in this aspect of teacher evaluations and has also made sure that Amelia is available during a substantial portion of her time at school for teachers who need support as well as training on hardware and software.

Amelia once hoped to pursue a higher administration position. But after working as the technology facilitator for six months, she decided to abandon that professional route.

> You know I feel like I have the perfect job now, because I get to be a school administrator but I don't have to call the parents and tell them their kid has been suspended. And I get to do really creative things with the kids, and I am using the technology more in a multicultural way. (Second interview, April 2009)

During our second interview I pressed Amelia to unpack what she meant by this statement, particularly what she meant by working with technology "in a multicultural way." Her response revealed the heart of Amelia's motivation, both for this project and for her career as an educator.

> Obviously being in education and being gay, I kind of know what it feels like to be marginalized. I want to use my time to effectuate change for, oftentimes, kids who I don't feel get that opportunity; not that I am here to promote my agenda or any of that. But I kind of reach out and try and find kids in different marginalized cultures and give them the opportunity to feel safe and feel appreciated and, in this project that we did, have an opportunity to tell their story.
> (Second interview, April 2009)

As a result of the way digital media are used at Parsons, Amelia feels a strong responsibility to provide students access to a wide variety of technologies. In her role as

technology facilitator she faces two major dilemmas: 1) lack of adequate access to hardware and software for both teachers and students; and 2) a teaching staff that is reluctant to integrate technology into their curricula. As a teacher, Amelia was focused on providing access to students who she saw as victims of the digital divide: With no access at home, they lacked many technology skills she saw as common for children from middle- and upper-middle-class families. She stated, "I would make them take notes using PowerPoint, and you'd think, in sixth grade they [already] know how to do it. At least with the socioeconomic class that I teach or taught, that is absolutely not the case. So that is really beneficial for them." As a teacher who incorporated electronic note taking, PowerPoint, and movie making as well as Internet research in her science curriculum, Amelia worked on a grade-level team that did not use technology to support their curricula. At most, these teachers would use streaming video (which, Amelia said, "is really just the new version of putting a VCR tape in").

These concerns all contributed to Amelia's desire to develop Parsons StoryCorps. She contended that a complete shift in the curriculum was necessary, and hoped that Parsons StoryCorps could provide a project example that might help initiate such a shift. Amelia wanted to her project to be "something authentic that the kids created and [owned]. And by doing that the kids [would be] engaged because they were dictating exactly what it was that they were learning." Amelia's concerns over the use of technology at Parsons Middle School centered on the prescribed learning environment that was hampering rather than helping students to both think about and use technology critically. Not only did Amelia see little to no professional development, she felt that teachers were generally hesitant to experiment with technology because they were

ultimately accountable only to test scores. Their reluctance, in turn, restricted the implementation of more progressive, project-based curricula. These observations duplicate evidence in several notable studies which have confirmed that teachers and administrators are reluctant to implement any change to the curriculum, even when technology is ubiquitous in a school (Culp, et al., 2005; Cuban, 2000; Dede, 2004; Tyack and Cuban, 2004).

Amelia's concern about the lack of technology use at her school is echoed both in research about education technology in grades K–12 and in policy advocacy efforts, some of which frame this dilemma in stark terms. Over the past several years, alarm bells have only grown louder as philanthropic and policy initiatives redouble their efforts to align curriculum with the transformational changes brought about by new social media in the larger society. If these transformations are not addressed in the classroom, advocates claim, students' ability to effectively participate socially, politically, and economically in the twenty-first century will be undermined (Buckingham, 2008; Davidson, 2010; Hawkins, 1997; Honey, 2005; MacArthur Foundation, 2010; NRC, 2005; New London Group, 1996; Presidential Commission, 1997). Like the majority of schools and classrooms in the country that these reports identify, Amelia finds that technology use at her school is limited at best. She is concerned about the absence of critical technology use in the formal curriculum at Parsons, believing that this gap will prevent her students from being successful in a society that requires advanced digital literacy skills.

Although the objective of Parsons StoryCorps was to provide the unrestricted use of technology for creative use, the choice to implement the project in the school's media center constrained this vision. The restrictive culture of technology use described above

impacted the project in key ways, primarily in the technology that was actually available (older computers that made video editing difficult) and security filters that made Internet searches extremely difficult and cumbersome.

Recruitment for Parsons StoryCorps.

In order to recruit students for the Spring 2009 StoryCorps project at Parsons, Amelia visited classrooms at every grade level to talk with the students about Parsons StoryCorps. During her recruitment presentations she emphasized the importance of the eighth grade technology skills test and also stressed the unique opportunity the project would provide to use technology creatively and build skills at the same time. To stress the creative potential of the Parsons StoryCorps project, Amelia showed the digital story that she had co-developed with Sam, one of her sixth grade students. The use of this graphic, dramatic product as a recruitment tool sent a clear message about what kind of stories Amelia was looking for from StoryCorps participants. Although Amelia's initial intent and recruitment efforts targeted students she believed were marginalized, her school wide recruitment, requests for parent approval, and request for students to write down why they wanted to participate may have inadvertently excluded her target group.

> For example, I said, if you're interested in doing this you need to let me know by writing a letter, by writing something and letting me know what your idea is. Well then I probably alienated a whole group of kids who can't write very well. It probably would have been different if I asked for it in a text message. So...it was the academically gifted, motivated kids who got me something by the due date. (First interview, March 2009)

Although Amelia did not intend to create this situation, her recruitment and prerequisites for participation (written description of interest, parent permission forms) determined the kinds of students who volunteered to participate. It should also be noted that while Amelia and I were willing to provide some transportation, students were expected to

arrange their own ride home. This requirement also contributed to the inability of some students to participate, because they relied on the school bus or public transportation. Working with the students that she felt most connected to would have required much more support from Amelia, particularly contacting family members and providing transportation—things she did not feel able to do at the time. As Amelia herself noted above, these factors entirely changed the nature of the project from how and for whom she had initially designed it.

Amelia's role, her background, and her motivations for creating the project were all central to the conditions under which students created their stories. Therefore, the next section will detail Amelia's background as a teacher with a particular focus on her motivation to develop Parsons StoryCorps. Her motivation stemmed from two main sources: 1) course requirements for the Masters for Experienced Teachers program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which gave her the opportunity to co-create a digital story with a student; 2) her experience at a school that she believes marginalizes poor and minority students and that does not support technology use or integrate it into the curriculum.

Amelia's background.

Amelia is a lateral entry teacher[8] who has been teaching in the classroom since February 2005. Her undergraduate major was biology; after working in a lab for a year, she decided to pursue a more lucrative career and sold insurance for the next five years. After the 2004 elections, she felt politically motivated to help change what she saw "as a country going down the wrong path." Her motivation to teach was simply about "wanting

[8]An education certification program designed for professionals who decide to change occupations and teach.

to be a part of tomorrow and to have a hand in what we were teaching our kids." After she completed her degree in the lateral entry program at Chapel Hill, a faculty member in the Education Leadership program suggested she pursue administrative licensure. Her mentor saw the Instructional Technology certification, a new program being offered through the MEDX, as a good path for Amelia to take on her way to becoming a school administrator.

Project motivator: *Sam's Story*.

In the fall of 2007, Amelia, then a sixth grade science teacher, began the MEDX program in Instructional Technology. The MEDX is a two-year program that offers degrees in multiple content areas: math, science, social studies, literacy, and technology. The curriculum includes core courses in theoretical and social foundations of education during the first and second summer, and focuses on content areas during the school year. According to Amelia, the first core courses that she took through this program had a great impact on her and fed her desire to work with at-risk and minority students. "It seems like that was our first class coming out of the summer, which was a diversity-filled summer. I loved that first summer. That first summer, I mean those were the classes that I could go sit in grad school and take for the rest of my life" (March, 2009). Before she took these classes, she did not have enough language or perspective to help her understand or explain how students are sorted and treated in the school environment. The classes also helped her reflect on her personal background and its impact on her relationship with her own students. These core courses not only led her to develop the project that is the subject of this research, they also sharpened her focus on students that she believed were being marginalized at her school.

In her first content course, Technology Across the Curriculum, Amelia and Sam co-created a digital story. The assignment to complete a digital imagery project required teachers to work on a project that either connected to their curriculum or allowed them to experiment with new technologies.

> The project actually came to fruition, what, a year and a half, two years ago, when I did a project in Dr. Bolick's class, the digital imagery project. And I wanted to, again, kind of harness the power of technology to allow in a multicultural-type manner. And then a young man named Sam, who was one of my students, had had just this incredible story. I wanted him to have the opportunity to tell that story. And through the creation of basically his digital autobiography, it just got huge response, positive response. (First interview, March 2009)

Amelia had heard about Sam through the language arts teacher on her team, for whom Sam had written an autobiographical essay about his escape from Liberia when he was just 6 years old. Now, living a middle-class life with his aunt and uncle, both engineers in Baylor, Sam described himself as quiet and was having difficult time adjusting both in and out of school. By the time he reached middle school, Sam felt that other students saw him as "weird." Amelia approached Sam to work on this digital project without a clear plan of what shape or form it would take. The story immediately connected several themes that were beginning to emerge as important for Amelia as a teacher: the experience of minority students and technology use in schools.

The project, which became a multimedia story about Sam's exodus co-constructed by teacher and student, is now posted on YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/user/a100mark#p/a/f/0/2V_q29lbvxY). Sam's Story has also been shared directly with hundreds of Parsons students and faculty as well as his own family. Neither the project nor its eventual distribution was achieved without controversy, however. The Parsons principal was extremely wary of the story's graphic

content. Although she was able to prevent Amelia (and Sam) from displaying their story in school, Amelia would sometimes circumvent this directive if students wanted to see Sam's Story and were unable to access it elsewhere.

Both Amelia and Sam describe the experience of developing this digital story as transformative. For Amelia, this quality emerged from the potential of digital technology use to provide an uncommunicative, socially isolated student with a outlet that not only developed his technology proficiency and engaged his creative potential but also gave him a way to display both for large audiences in the school and community. For Sam, the transformational effect of this project was gaining the ability to tell his story in a way that connected to his peers and seemed to have an immediate influence on the way he was perceived at school. That Sam and Amelia were both affected so strongly by their collaboration points to the specific affordances of new media technology: shareability and layered meaning. Sam had already written this story for his language arts teacher but it did not produce a similar effect. It was only after this story was constructed with digital media and shared with multiple audiences through YouTube that Amelia and Sam perceived the project experience as transformative. They both believed that the written word did not carry the same power as when those words were enhanced by visual imagery, narration, and music.

The digital story chronicles Sam's flight from Liberia during its 1999 civil war, on his own, at the age of 6. It must be noted that at this time, Liberia had been engulfed in a series of bloody civil wars for almost two decades; new hostilities in 1999 resulted in a death toll of more than 200,000 and created more than 1 million refuges, many of them children. Sam was one of the "Lost Boys" —children who escaped front lines on foot and

managed to make their way, singly or in small groups, to camps in neighboring countries. Sam noted that he was one of the "lucky ones," because he was released into the custody of relatives in North Carolina. The story's introduction consists of his explanation, on video, that Amelia will read his narration because of his discomfort with his accent. Amelia's reading of lines written by Sam underscores the close and collaborative nature of the story construction and the relationship between Sam and Amelia that developed as a result of their experience in making the story. Some of the images they chose are quite jarring (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Image of Conflict (collected through an undocumented Google search by Sam)

Most of the images are stock photos of conflict in Africa (in fact, the photographs were pulled from Google searches and in most cases were not from Liberia). Amelia's voice speaking Sam's words accompanies the images, interspersed with a song by the accomplished singer/songwriter Tracey Chapman "Talking about a Revolution." This song was chosen by Amelia, with Sam's approval, for the first part of the story. Sam chose the other songs, mostly by the late rap artist Tupac Shakur, whose work describes violence and social challenges faced by young people growing up in urban ghettoes. Amelia was concerned about some of these songs because of their graphic content, but for the most part gave Sam freedom to choose the media parts. Sam's is an incredible story filled with heroism, violence, and triumph. When Sam shared this project with other

students, according to his recollections, he was immediately seen in a new light. Amelia said it gave him "street cred." According to Amelia, other students were astonished at what Sam had been through and were also incredulous that he had witnessed such violence and survived.

> And so as the peers are, unfortunately, gangs—there's a lot of recruitment in middle school and so this gangster lifestyle that a lot of these kids try and portray and act like, you know. Sam experienced what it's like to live in violence and live, you know, be next to your best friend who has just gotten shot in the head and killed. And what it looks like to have little kids with guns shooting at people. And so, his perspective on, you know, the gangster lifestyle, I think he also felt like he had a positive message to send. And he still talks about it to this day. I mean that project had as big an influence on him I think as it did the majority of the folks who watched it. He wants to organize and do, he wants to talk, send a positive message. He wanted to send it to Oprah.
>
> (First interview, March 2009)

For Amelia, the experiences of working with Sam on his story connected directly to her motivations to become an educator and work with students whom she felt were "silenced." However, her voice narrating Sam's story and her contributions to the soundtrack, both of which influence the story's content, raise the question of how much of this story (as with any collaboratively produced story) is purely autobiographical and how much of the narration is a co-construction between teacher and student. Answering this question engages and clearly represents the theoretical positions on the genre of autobiography presented in Chapter Two—mainly that autobiography is always a co-construction between the teller and an audience. In this case, Amelia functions as both teller (through her narration and because she made other choices about the story's digital construction) and audience (because the subject of her collaboration with Sam was his personal story). This dual relationship and the influence Amelia was able to exert because of it reveal the extent to which an adult can both assist and shape the stories a child or student tells.

The experience of working with Sam on this project confirmed Amelia's belief that technology must be given a larger role in her students' formal and informal education. This belief was central in shaping her ideas about how to implement a larger project that would include more students; it also affirmed her decision to leave her science position and become the technology facilitator at Parsons.

Amelia's motivation for using technology with her students were 1) sociopolitical (to give voice to student populations who she considered marginalized both in school and in the larger society; and 2) educational (to provide students with access to varied technology for a purpose both creative and skill-based, at a school without comprehensive technology use). Co-constructing *Sam's Story* provided a vehicle for her to attain her pedagogical goals and also to design the basic structure of Parsons StoryCorps. When asked if she wanted to expand this project to give other students an experience similar to Sam's, she replied:

> Well, Sam is one in a million. And not everybody is going to have a heart-wrenching story as he does. That said, any story can be made very cool and unique. And so I was hoping to allow—first of all, to create a safe environment, because they don't get that. They don't get that at school. They don't get that at school where any and all are welcomed and encouraged to be themselves.
>
> (Final interview, June 2009)

In summary, Amelia's background as a teacher and MEDX student contributed to the development of her two primary passions as an educator: 1) working with marginalized youth, and 2) building technology skills through creative digital storytelling. Her experience with Sam provided the mechanism and inspired a curriculum through which these two passions could be addressed in a learning environment.

Parsons StoryCorps: the participants.

As previously described, the participating students were primarily sixth graders, academically gifted, and racially and socioeconomically diverse. Participants were asked to describe their prior digital technology background (i.e., how often and for what purposes they used it in school, at home, with friends) to help clarify how prior use might influence their experience in Parsons StoryCorps and well as their self-created digital stories. Participants' reasons for joining Parsons StoryCorps were also documented before the workshops began.

Students' technology backgrounds.

As a data collection component of the case study research, participants were given a technology checklist developed by the Center for Children and Technology (2008, 2000), the first day of Parsons StoryCorps. (The checklist is reproduced in Appendix A.) Students were asked to identify where they used technology most often, as well as how often and what kind of technology activities they engaged in. Similar questions were asked during the interviews. With the exception of one student, all participants had access to computers at home and reported using them every day, or at least weekly. Of these eight, one participant reported having a computer in the home but no Internet access from home.

Based on these self-reports and initial interviews, all of the Parsons StoryCorps participants described a versatile knowledge of technology and use of a range of tools. The majority of participants (seven out of nine) used these tools at home, but several also accessed computers and the Internet in libraries and in afterschool programs. The latter group reported communicating with friends using e-mail, texting, and social media such

as Facebook; downloading music from the Internet, using MP3 players, conducting Internet searches related to hobbies, and playing video games. The student with no home access reported only occasional engagement in these types of technology-related activities, but displayed significant technological ability and fluency during project workshops. Similarly, the student with a computer at home but no Internet, who reported limited use of technology with the exception of video games, was versatile and felt comfortable using a range of hardware and software to build her project.

Confirming Amelia's assessment of technology at Parsons, all participants reported sporadic classroom use. This was confirmed in interviews both prior to and after completion of the StoryCorps project. Students reported regular movie watching and word processing, but only rarely engaged in project-related activities such as Internet research, or the use of presentation and multimedia software. Katrina felt that the school had not prepared her adequately to use computers.

> I think we should know how to use certain technologies because I am bad with computers and it would be better if they prepared us on how to use computers. We would handle them better if we knew more about them.
>
> (Katrina, March 2009)

Although the Parsons StoryCorps students were tracked into advanced classes, where more sophisticated technology use might be expected, instead they used it only to support discrete tasks. Technology-rich, project-based curricula were clearly absent from their descriptions of classroom activities. In each interview, students advocated for more sustained use of technology as well as a desire to use multiple tools to support their class projects. The picture they presented at Parsons affirmed research conducted by Culp, Ba, Tally, Nudell, and Gersick (2005). The findings gathered from interviews with these students suggest that Parsons could be classified as a Superficially Integrated Technology

(SIT) school, as defined in Chapter Two. The curriculum and technology use described by students clearly supported discrete skills over "resourcefulness" with tools.

Participant motivation.

Amelia's application process, described above, included asking students to write on an index card why they wanted to join the Parsons StoryCorps afterschool program. Responses started with the simple wish to learn more technology skills, represented by Betty's comment: "I would like to be in StoryCorps with Mrs. H [Amelia] because I think it will be a good experience to learn more about technology" (November 2008). At the other end of this range were the students who wanted to create stories about difficult moments in their lives, such as Candace: "The reason I want to do this is because when my dad left he left a hole in my heart and I think I need to talk about it. BUT NOT PUBLICLY" (November 2008; Candace's use of capitals and underline). Another student wanted to make a movie about a break-in at his house when he was 4, and the motivation of another student was to communicate to other students how hard his life is.

The two sisters, Michelle and Katrina, came to the program through Katrina's eighth grade language arts teacher, for whom Katrina had written an essay about her grandmother's role in the Civil Rights Movement. This teacher felt that it would be a great StoryCorps project and strongly urged Katrina to participate. Katrina agreed and brought along Michelle, a seventh grader. (The girls' mother was overjoyed at the prospect of a multimedia story documenting family history.) Finally, a couple of students expressed very similar sentiments: "I would like to do this autobiography project because I really enjoy writing stories about myself and sharing stories about myself."

In summary, the setting of Parsons StoryCorps influenced the project in several key ways. The lack of technology use at the school that spurred Amelia's original motivation for the project was confirmed by participants' own descriptions. This lack provided the impetus for many of them to participate; they were eager to use technology for creative purposes. However, Amelia's recruitment practices influenced the types of students who volunteered to participate. While diverse racially and socioeconomically, the eventual participants were academically gifted and had considerable technology skills. They came to the project from quite different goals, however, that ranged from wanting to share difficult moments in their lives, to building additional technology skills, to the simple desire to tell stories about themselves with no specific theme in mind.

Parsons StoryCorps: the curriculum

Amelia's experience with Sam and her new position as technology facilitator led her to develop a more structured project and implement a curriculum that would allow students to tell their own stories and experiment with digital technology and new media. In order to develop the curriculum for a larger program, Amelia conducted an initial pilot in spring 2008, with five students from her sixth grade science class who met after school to create their stories. According to Amelia, the most important thing she learned from this pilot program was that she had focused too closely on technology. Although the students were engaged, and learned important skills, her observation was that they had so quickly become immersed in the process of finding pictures, music, and other digital media that they lost sense of the story they wanted to tell. However, Amelia still felt that her first attempt was a success: The students created stories that ranged from profiles of parents serving in Iraq to memorable family vacations.

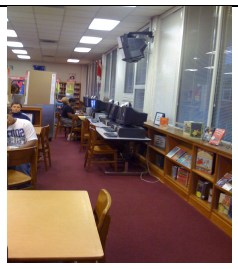
Amelia's initial desire to reach kids who she believed were marginalized and at risk in her school, which only used technology for basic skill development, aligns with other digital storytelling initiatives in informal learning organizations that have similar goals (Nixon and Gutierrez, 2008; Nixon, 2008; Nelson, 2006; Nelson, et al., 2008). The other programs all use the practice of digital storytelling to build digital literacies and technology skills, and to increase opportunities for individual expression for students who are considered under-resourced at school. These projects have been designed to counteract the significant differences in use of—not access to—technology found between well-resourced and under-resourced schools (Becker, 2004; 2000; Culp, et al., 2005; Margolis, 2008). In schools that serve poor and minority students, technology use is often associated with rote, skills-based work whereas more privileged students at these schools tend to use technology in ways that are integrated into thematic, project-based curricula. These students tend to use digital technology as production tools, not just to consume media. To counteract this divide, community-based storytelling projects are specifically designed to provide under-resourced students with access to these kinds of pedagogical approaches in informal, supportive, and intimate learning environments (Goldman and McDermott, 2008; Nelson, 2008; Roche-Smith, 2005).

Although the projects cited above and Parsons StoryCorps have provided informal learning opportunities for their participants, few other similarities are found between their curricula and their project structures. For example, Amelia's use of the media center in her school for project workshops, that only included students from Parsons, resulted in the StoryCorps project being closely aligned with the school. This relationship is quite different than other storytelling projects that draw children from neighborhoods and are

less connected to the formal curriculum of any particular school. Amelia often told her students that this project would help them with the North Carolina eighth grade technology test that they would have to pass in order to graduate (several participants had mentioned this kind of preparation as central to their interest in Parsons StoryCorps). Because of this motivation on the part of some students, the project's connection to school and district-based curriculum mandates and the use of the school's facility resulted in a context that offered less freedom, time, and available technology resources to do the kind of project work with technology that Amelia had envisioned when she designed the program.

Amelia constructed a ten-week program that culminated in presentations of participants' stories at the Baylor Public School Technology Fair. The StoryCorps participants met every Wednesday from 2:40 p.m. to 4 p.m. in the media center. Illustrations of the media center and a typical meeting are given in Figure 4.

Parsons Media Center



A Parsons StoryCorps meeting

Figure 4. Parsons StoryCorps meeting place

Amelia's experience with the pilot project led her to construct a structured curriculum centered on the storytelling process: "I thought, for it to be a legitimate

project, it needs to be based in some kind of curriculum and there needed to be some type of lesson plan" (March, 2009). The 10-week program emphasized the storytelling process for five weeks by asking students to spend time finding a story, constructing a story, scripting a story, and storyboarding it. This work had to be completed *before* they started working with the computers. The syllabus is listed in Figure 5.

StoryCorp Syllabus	
Time	*Activities*
• *Week 1* • *Week 2* • *Week 3* • *Week 4* • *Week 5* • *Week 6* • *Week 7* • *Week 8* • *Week 9* • *Week 10*	*•Introduction* *•Finding Your Story* *•Constructing Your Story* *•Scripting Your Story* *•Storyboarding* *•Digitizing Story Elements1* *•Digitizing Story Elements2* *•Photoshop Elements* *•Digital Video Editing* *•Peer Editing* *•Presentation*

Figure 5. National StoryCorps Syllabus

The emphasis on storyboards originated in Amelia's wish to ensure that her students produced "good stories." As she remarked during an early workshop:

> I felt like…well…Since I have the kids in here, it would be really important for them to learn how to tell a good story and what a good story is. I think selfishly, honestly I don't want to produce crap. And you know, maybe that hampers some of the impact of Parsons StoryCorps' ability to be 100% the kids being able to tell their story. But it's also a reflection of me, especially if it is going to be shown to other people.

Amelia shared the CDS outline of what constitutes a good story: "short, emotionally engaging for an audience, and try[ing] to focus on a dramatic event." Amelia also presented stories from the National StoryCorps website, which presents stories that range from the everyday (reminiscing about a special Christmas present) to the emotional and/or dramatic (death of a loved one, family separated by war). In her workshops, Amelia kept the focus on eventful stories but always repeated, "Keep your audience in mind, you want to keep them interested." During the first two weeks Amelia structured activities in which the students learned about personal storytelling. She engaged them in brainstorming activities and began each session with PowerPoint presentations that unpacked autobiographical story elements. Examples of these prompts and exercises are given in Figure 6.

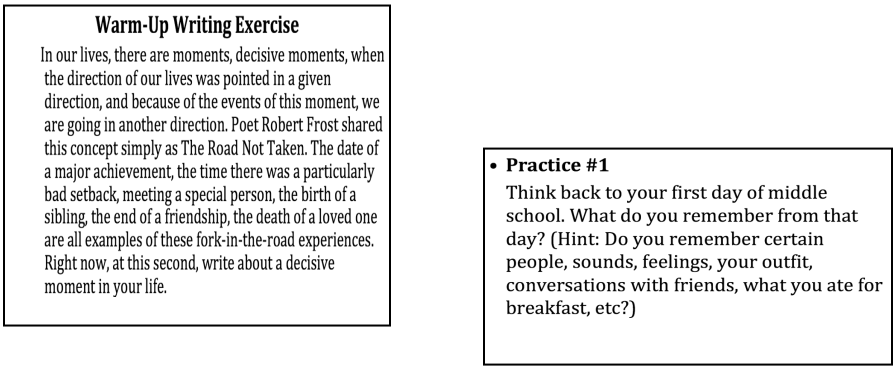


Figure 6. Warm-up Exercises

Because many of Amelia's students were resistant to writing at first, many of the activities in the early sessions were structured as group discussions. In these discussions, the young people were encouraged to remember and share their first day of middle school as well as other decisive moments in their lives. Some students did write out these exercises, however (some are presented in Figure 7). Although most of the participants

had good writing skills, they perceived Parsons StoryCorps as a place where they were free from "regular school work." Any attempt by Amelia to impose structure was met with resistance; the participants wanted to make stories using technology and did not want the story building to appear like "school" (field notes, March 2009). When students jotted down ideas for stories—or used a preexisting class essay, as the sisters did—Amelia did not collect these or give structured feedback during the pre-production phase of the digital storytelling process.

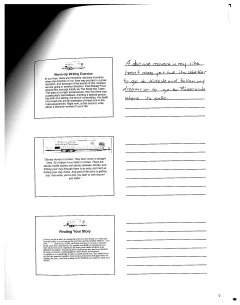
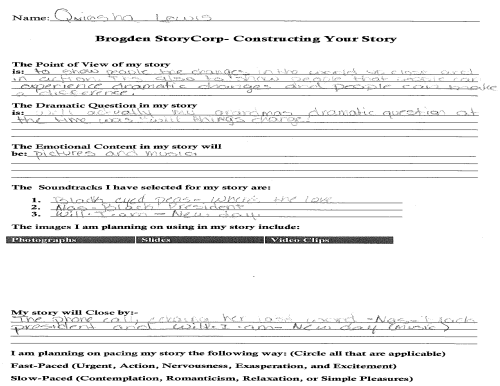


Figure 7. Story Writing Exercise Sheet

After the students had jotted down their initial ideas or chosen a prewritten essay, they were given storyboarding worksheets so that they could sketch out their stories with drawings and text boxes (similar to cartoons). Some used written worksheets instead to create outlines (a sample outline is presented in Figure 8).



Name: Quiesha Lewis

Brogden StoryCorp- Constructing Your Story

The Point of View of my story is: to show people the changes in the world up close and in action. It's also to show people that people can experience dramatic changes and people can make a difference.

The Dramatic Question in my story is: well actually my grandmas dramatic question at the time was "will things change."

The Emotional Content in my story will be: pictures and music

The Soundtracks I have selected for my story are:

1. Black eyed peas - Where is the love
2. Nas - Black President
3. Will. I. am - New day

The images I am planning on using in my story include:

Photographs	Slides	Video Clips

My story will Close by:- The phone call, [illegible] her last word - Nas - black president and Will. I. am - New day (music)

I am planning on pacing my story the following way: (Circle all that are applicable)

Fast-Paced (Urgent, Action, Nervousness, Exasperation, and Excitement)

Slow-Paced (Contemplation, Romanticism, Relaxation, or Simple Pleasures)

Figure 8. Story Outline Writing Exercise Sheet

For inspiration and to give students an idea of what could be accomplished, Amelia presented *Sam's Story* and other autographical digital stories posted on YouTube. She asked students to unpack one of these, a beautiful story written by a man recently made homeless, as practice for dividing a narrative into story elements and media parts. The storyboard Michelle created for this tale is shown in Figure 9.

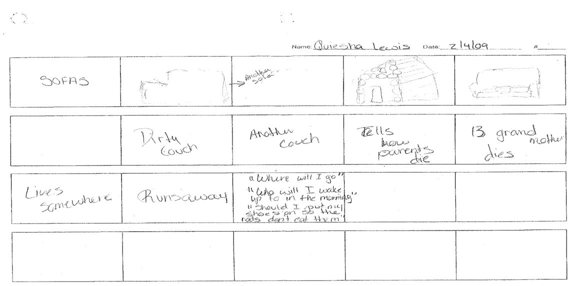


Figure 9. Michelle's Storyboard

Because of time limitations, these activities had to move along quickly. They also shifted focus between the young participants' own stories and the examples Amelia presented from YouTube. Amelia later admitted that this section of the program was put together in haste, in part because she was not an English teacher trained in the elements

of literary genres; in fact, she often felt somewhat lost as she guided her students through the storytelling process. Although several participants created storyboards, they did not consult them after they began building their projects using MovieMaker software and Google Images.

After four weeks of one-and one half hour sessions focused on story building, students began to work with technology. This compressed schedule allowed them very little time to learn new technologies and experiment with video and sound editing. In order to complete their projects in time to present them at the Baylor Technology Fair, the students created slideshows (an activity with which they were already familiar and comfortable). Although Amelia and I were able to assist students in the use of audio, more technology support would have given the students sufficient instruction to build the cinematic products they had initially envisioned.

Amelia and the youth participants had lofty expectations for the Parsons StoryCorps projects, but the end results were shaped by the structure of the curriculum. The curriculum supported slideshows, and the students created excellent ones. But the group conversations facilitated by Amelia ceased when the students began working on their individual projects. Thus, as students began appropriating images and audio bits for their projects, no critical conversation took place that could have helped them understand how young people tend to choose media for self-representation and make sense of the media they consume as they make these choices. These kinds of teacher and adult-facilitated conversations are critical (Herring, 2008) but did not take place during the latter meetings.

At the end of the Parsons StoryCorps project, Amelia reported feeling dissatisfied with the participants' stories and attributed their lack of creativity to the structured curriculum, which focused on story building not actual production. As described above, the participants spent the first several sessions writing down their ideas and sitting through workshop sessions that described the storytelling process. Amelia reflected on the influence this part of the curriculum had on the stories that were eventually created, and said:

> [The Parsons] Story Corps curriculum this year, or this past year was definitely more structured than it had been the year before [during the pilot project]. And I did that probably based on the fact I had more time to actually do—I mean being in graduate school I was kind of forced to read a lot of research. And through that, I found a lot of resources. And I guess I fell into somewhat of a trap of feeling that the only way that the project was really going to be successful was if I was able to kind of give them a lot of scaffolding on what is a good story. And it's interesting, you know, as I'm being reflective, that I chose to do that on AIG kids because that, honestly, is exactly what they didn't need. They didn't need to necessarily have it laid out that this is what constitutes a good story.
>
> (Final interview, June 2009)

Amelia's dissatisfaction was a result of her belief that she had over-structured her curriculum. Not only had she ended up recruiting students who were academically successful, which was not what she had originally planned to do, she felt that the stories themselves (described in the following sections) lacked creativity and daring. It must be noted, however, that at least some of these difficulties were due in part to the overall project timeline, which allowed only 80-minute sessions over a period of 10 weeks for story development and construction. This short schedule may have undercut the more in-depth creative process seen in other digital storytelling projects, which take place over many months and have the advantage of close collaborative relationships with university students and faculty (Center for Digital Storytelling, 2009).

In addition, technology difficulties at Parsons were so time consuming that project participants were often forced to re-import media or redo sections they had already completed. Parsons students also faced significant challenges because of security filters put in place by the district, which routinely blocked them from innocuous Internet sites containing material that could have been useful to them. All of these conditions and obstacles can negatively impact curriculum by subverting even the most thought-out, purposely structured activities. Making sure that there is adequate time to solve such problems is a central requirement for all technology-rich projects (Dede, 2008).

The following sections present the Parsons students' story building process in detail. They will highlight how the youth selected their stories and how their use of technology and digital media affected their narratives; specifically, how the integration of imagery, audio, and text influenced the ultimate meaning of the stories they had intended to tell. Findings have been organized under sections that address both the broad research questions as well as sub-areas of investigation that seek to unpack both the process of story creation and the final digital story product. These findings have emerged through the analysis of interview data and field notes, and content analysis of work produced prior to digital production (e.g., storyboards and handwritten notes). Because communicating text-only analysis of multimedia products is complicated, the presentation relies upon tables that refer to numerous media elements and upon CDs that contain the actual stories. These approaches were developed by Nelson and Hull (2008) to reveal multimodal literacy practices; here they will also reveal the media parts (images, music, etc.) that the Parsons students used as well as interview data collected through the think-aloud method.

The Process of Design: The Stories[9]

Similar to other research projects that engage young people in storytelling in which dramatic and/or traumatic events tend to play a central role (Nixon and Gutierrez, 2008; Roche-Smith, 2004), the majority of Parsons StoryCorps participants wanted to tell such stories. As one participant described the story she wanted to build around her father's abandonment of the family:

> Um, well, he hasn't been in my life since I was two years old and how it affected me. It affected me dramatically. So, I wanted to express, you know, the things—some of my morals and values and some of the ways I act came from his absence. So, I wanted to do a story on that, you know, kind of give people a better feel of how I am and some of my values and things like that.
>
> (Field notes, February 2009)

The range of narratives represented in these stories has been categorized into two main types: 1) family biographies tied to larger cultural and historical events; and 2) dramatic family stories that included personal account (parent abandonment and a home break-in). The fact that each participant presented a narrative that conforms to the genre of triumph over adversity (McLean, 2008) suggests that genre, master narratives, and cultural cues were all strongly influential. For example, the arc of these students' stories always seemed to be structured in three parts: 1) a happy start; 2) adversity and conflict; and 3) final resolution. Resolution could involve Black Americans' civil rights struggle, which resulted in the election of the nation's first Black president, or a family successfully coping with a home invasion. Michael said of his story's ending: "Like in the last slide my brother is smiling. And it's all happy stuff again so it kind of shows like that we got through it like and we're still happy and stuff." Although some of the stories

[9] Appendix C contains full descriptions of individual stories.

ended unhappily, the authors tended to pair some of the slides with upbeat music and images to imply a positive resolution.

Through the investigation of sub-areas of the three broad research questions that guided this study (for example, how Amelia influenced the stories that participants chose to tell) and by closely examining the story creation process (for example, observing whether students used storyboards to map out their stories beforehand, or used a less-structured approach and built projects as they found digital media), two overall themes emerged. These were: 1) finding a dramatic story, and 2) family involvement in story selection. A central component to each of these themes is the co-constructive nature of storytelling, which involves both autobiographical theory and sociocultural identity theory. The stories Parsons students selected and built were, in many ways, collaborations that involved the students' families, Amelia, the curriculum, and even myself because I worked closely with them.

The two major findings related to the research questions had to do with story selection. The processes of finding a sufficiently dramatic story and negotiating family involvement demonstrate the important aspects of theories on personal storytelling, revealed through the processes participants engaged in as they picked and chose personal stories to fit the contexts in which those stories would be told (Bruner, 1994; Holland, et al, 1996; Ochs, 1996; Olney, 1984). The story selection process of these young participants also demonstrates the second theoretical principle of multimodal discourse, design, as developed by Kress (2001): "Designs are [uses of] semiotic resources, in all semiotic modes and combination of semiotic modes. Designs are means to realize discourses in the context of a given communication situation" (p. 5). The stories that the

children chose to tell fit established patterns in storytelling, which suggests that the role of genre is quite central both in the literary understanding of the term and also as the semiotic theory of speech genre (Bakhtin, 1925/2000).

Directly connected to these theories of autobiography are new sociocultural frameworks in social psychology that centralize the role of situated stories in identity development (Fivush, 1993; McClean, et al., 2007). These frameworks also confirm that cultural cues influence not only the stories students choose to tell but also the narrative arc they use. These particular social cues are defined as master narratives, whose functions are to inform and shape the structure of the students' stories (MacAdams, 2008; McClean, et al., 2008). Although the frameworks emerge from distinct theoretical traditions, they combine understandings of the role of genre, autobiography, and master narrative to better illuminate how students choose particular stories, the involvement of family and teachers in that selection process, and the narrative structure of the stories themselves.

Finding a dramatic story

As previously mentioned, Amelia presented *Sam's Story* to the Parsons StoryCorps group as an example of the projects that could be produced by other students at Parsons Middle School. The influence of *Sam's Story* on participants' story selection was mentioned by Candace during our final interview: "When she [Amelia] showed *Sam's Story* and showed what he went through, I said 'Hmm, maybe I should talk about my life and what I went through.'"

After Amelia introduced the Parsons StoryCorps project to her class, Ashland went home to talk over project ideas with her mother. She told me that her soccer

playing, an extremely important part of her life, was an acceptable subject for autobiographical assignments in her language arts class bug did not fit the criteria of "one big event." She believed that building a story around such an event was central to StoryCorps's mission, adding that she was very influenced by watching *Sam's Story*.

> Ashland: For language arts class, you had to pick a theme and I picked soccer because I play a lot of soccer in my life.
>
> Julie: When you decided to do a story about your grandfather for StoryCorps, did you think about doing a story about soccer?
>
> Ashland: No, I was trying to think about a big thing that happened in my life. I wanted to have one big thing not just about my life, but one big event.
>
> (Second interview, June 2009)

Ashland decided to do a story about her grandfather who was captured by the Japanese in the Philippines during World War II. He was forced to march during one of the most horrific events of the war, called the Bataan Death March. Ashland's mother suggested this story when Ashland asked her for ideas that would be more dramatic than one focused on soccer. Michael was also looking for a dramatic story that he considered life changing, "I was trying to think about a big event in my life and that was like the biggest one…that really changed me kind of." These conversations clearly showed that participants were influenced by how Amelia introduced the program. Because they wanted to meet her expectations, they recruited their parents into their search; their parents supplied stories with the dramatic quality the students were looking for.

Adult expectations that shape young people's stories often go unmentioned in research studies about youth and digital storytelling (Nixon and Gutierrez, 2008). These studies often emphasize only the freedom that young people have in such programs to tell whatever story they want; and if adult involvement is considered, it is presented as censoring the otherwise free expression of ideas (Nelson and Hull, 2008). The

involvement of teachers, parents, and or community in children's storytelling is not necessarily negative, however. Instead, it should be understood as one component of the collaborative and interactive functions of storytelling (Bruner, 1994; Fivush, et al., 2003; McAdams, 2003; McLean, et al., 2007). This connection particularly underscores the importance of context. Children's choices of which stories to tell are highly influenced by the adults around them; in this case, the Parsons students were influenced by the way their teacher introduced the project and by the story she showed as a worthy example.

Ashland's decision to search for a story that she felt fit Amelia's expectations can be interpreted as an example of how people play with different identities, depending on the social contexts they find themselves in (Holland, et al., 1996). Ashland's decision can also be interpreted as an example of a situated story (McClean, et al., 2006), specifically, of a story that is chosen for a particular social context. Over time, the story Ashland chose might take on a more central role in her self-understanding and self-portrayal, but in this context this story was one she decided to use as a personal story to fit the particular circumstances of the project and its requirements as she understood them. Awareness of the social context in which storytelling takes place is essential to autobiographical theory, because social context provides essential cues that help determine how one choose to tell one story over another, and why and for whom that choice is made. As Bruner stated:

> Telling others about oneself is, then, no simple matter; it depends on what *we* think *they* think we ought to be like. Nor do such calculations end when we come to telling ourselves about ourselves. Our own self-making narratives come to reflect what we think others expect us to be like.
>
> (Bruner, 2003, p. 211)

Amelia sincerely believed that she provided her students with the freedom and flexibility to tell any story they wanted; however, she also thought that their projects were

driven by what they thought she wanted and that they were unable to take real risks as a result. Although the Parsons StoryCorps participants chose dramatic stories, Amelia believed they were playing it safe, as she noted in her final interview:

> I think they all still chose very safe stories; stories that they knew they didn't have to worry or get anxious about how it was going to be taken or perceived by a teacher. So, anyway, and I think that just the curriculum in AIG and the structure of those classes really, unfortunately, promotes those kinds of kids. You know, the ones who play school are the ones who do well. (Amelia, June 2009)

Ultimately, the participants and Amelia had different impressions of the stories created through Parsons StoryCorps. On one hand, participants felt that they chose stories that fit the project's dramatic, open storytelling environment, while on the other hand Amelia believed that the academically successful students were playing it safe by choosing subjects that they felt were less risky, in order to please her. Essentially, Amelia believed that her students were treating Parsons StoryCorps as a traditional school project despite her attempts to structure and present a different alternative.

Family involvement in story selection and construction.

Several of the Parsons StoryCorps participants included their families in both the process of story selection and in the story building process.

> I was talking to my mom about it and we were…kind of like…brainstorming, thinking of stuff. She gave me a couple of ideas and I just chose one. My mom told me that she has a lot of pictures and information that I can use and so I used that. (Ashland, final interview, June 2009)

Family members are extremely important in young children's construction of memories (Fivush, 1993). The detailed descriptions given by Parsons StoryCorps students of their story selection process affirms that young people with close family ties collaborated on the choice of story they would use. It is interesting to note that both

Michael and Candace deviated from the established account of facts, causing one mother to express concern to Amelia. (Parent and teacher agreed that Michael should have license to create the story he remembered.) Adults certainly have influence on youth storytelling but do not control all aspects of their process. The episode of Michael and his mother confirms that family members have an important role in the selection and general outline of a story, but it also raises questions about the role of parents in determining all aspects of children's memories. Research documenting the nature of childhood memory has found the role of the mother to be central (Haden, 2003). However, both Michael and Candace had their own versions of events that did not completely match their parents' recollections. This divergence indicates that their motives to create a digital story may have included making independent meanings from significant events in their lives. As Michael recounted:

> Just because it like it is [pause] just because it kind of like in the back of my head kind of and it is just is really scary. And there are just some things of it I remember really welly or clearly. And there are some things that I faintly remember. There are some things that I remember really well and there are some things that my mom told me about that I don't remember at all.
>
> (First interview, March 2009)

The family photographs Candace used to tell the story of her father's abandonment signaled, to her, loss of an easier and happier life. (Some of the photographs are shown in Figure 10.) Her mother found this association quite surprising, as her memories were quite different: She was amazed at the power that these photographs seemed to carry for Candace. Admittedly, because Candace did not quite recall these supposedly happier times, these photographs became a stand-in for distinct memories. Candace's use of photographs to bolster her version of memory is example of what Van Dijk (2005) called "technologically mediated memory."

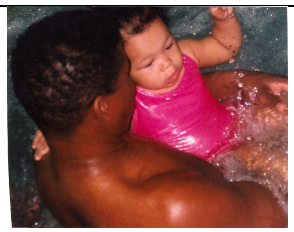
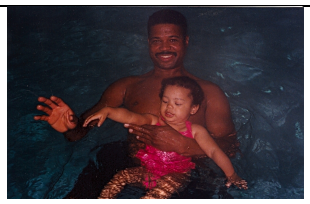




Figure 10. Technology Mediates Memory

Candace: I just chose baby pictures. I wanted to match what I was saying.

Julie: What do these pictures make you think about?

Candace: Happy times.

Julie: Was that [recollections of happy times] driven by pictures or memories?

Candace: Probably both because sometimes I didn't remember it because I was so little. (Final interview, June 2009)

The use of multiple media to recount important and dramatic family events may prove to be a new area for exploration in the role of personal stories in the development of self-understanding. As suggested by Fivush (1991) and McLean and colleagues (2007), longitudinal research would be required to better understand how the Parsons StoryCorps participants' digital stories might, or might not, become repeatable stories, told throughout a lifetime (thus fulfilling the theoretical criteria of a "self-defining" story).

Autobiographical narratives that contribute to self-concept and self-understanding are often repeated and told to multiple audiences (McLean and Nelson, 2004; Nelson and Fivush, 1993). Although some of these stories may not have been told and retold by an individual, nonetheless they are stories that are central to a family narrative. As such, they are stories that one might hear from family members on multiple occasions.

However, several students revealed that the stories suggested to them by family members had not been fully related to them before they decided to create a digital version.

> Ashland: I really didn't think about [the event] much because I couldn't really understand it. But now that I have done the story, I want to learn a lot more about it. Now it is kind of big and I have taken a lot of history classes and it would help me learn more.
>
> Julie: Great. So you feel like it educated you more about this period. But it is not necessarily a story that your mom told or your grandmother told you?
>
> Ashland: Uh…no. No. (Field notes, March 2009)

Ashland cared about this story and was personally invested in its creation, but it was not a story that she had grown up with, nor had anyone in her family talked with her in depth about her grandfather's experience. Her motivation for creating a digital project based on this story seemed to come from 1) the desire to select a dramatic story to fit a perceived theme of Parsons StoryCorps; and 2) the desire to create a commemorative gift that she could give to her family—almost as a personal family archive.

Michael, Alice, and Candace selected stories of dramatic and even traumatic events in their lives, but ones that they had not told to anyone before, and in some cases found out about only recently. As Alice recounted, "I was very little and I have ear pains. I asked my parents why do I have this pain. I just found out about this story last year. (J: So this is not a story that you knew about all of your life?) No, I just heard it last year."

Michael also sat down with his parents to brainstorm. The story he eventually chose was an event he had experienced but barely remembered. In fact, at the final presentation of the story at the Baylor Technology Fair, his mother told me that they had never discussed it before Parsons StoryCorps because she had always felt that he was too young. When he became insistent, however, she and Michael's father described the event to him. At several points during the project workshops, Michael's mother contacted

Amelia with concerns about how the story was being presented. When she said that the digital version Michael was creating "did not conform to the facts," Amelia reassured her that the point was for Michael to have the space to create whatever iteration of the story mattered to him. Michael described the process this way:

> At first I didn't really know what I'd do it on and then I told my mom and dad kind of and they listed a few things and then I kind of remembered that and like I didn't know that much about it and I kinda wanted to know more about it. And like they said they couldn't tell me all about it because like…they just couldn't. but until I was older. But like…They kind of jolted back the stuff that I could remember from it. (First interview, March 2009)

The central role of parents and family members in these stories demonstrates developmental psychological theories that place parents and caregivers at the center of story and memory construction in children (Fivush, 1993; MacAdams, 1994). However, as mentioned above, these were stories that had been selected both for their dramatic potential and to align with what students considered to be the expectations of Parsons StoryCorps as communicated by Amelia. They also chose stories that they seemed to want to explore. Candace made a statement similar to Michael's: "Around the time that [the event] was happening she talked to me about what was going on, but I didn't understand" (March, 2009).

Amelia identified Candace's story as the strongest of all the stories. She felt that it was remarkably personal because Candace coupled personal photographs, a song specifically applied to the story, and personal narration. The subject of this story was a traumatic, emotional event in Candace's life, which matched Amelia's expectations and goals for Parsons StoryCorps projects.

> Candace did a really good job putting together a kind of heart-wrenching story. And out of everybody, Candace bought into it the most and this was something she really wanted to do and I think healing actually occurred because hers was very personal. (Second interview, June 2009)

Amelia's satisfaction with Candace's story underscores her intent for Parsons StoryCorps. She wanted stories that were emotionally raw, identified a personal and dramatic event, and focused on hardship.

The sisters' story selection process was not only quite different from those of other participants but also illustrated another aspect of family involvement in storytelling. In this case, the sisters co-constructed the story in addition to efforts by their mother and grandmother to affect its structure. As previously mentioned, after Katrina was recruited for Parsons StoryCorps by her eighth grade language arts teacher, she and her mother asked Michelle, a sixth grader, to help translate her already written essay about their grandmother's experiences in the Civil Rights Movement into a multimedia biography. Although Michelle initially agreed to participate in Parsons StoryCorps as a co-producer of what she described as her older sister's story, later she wanted to create one of her own (about her father's abandonment of her family when she was just 2 years old). However, after she consulted with her sister she decided not to create this story and instead collaborated with Katrina in making the historical biography of their grandmother. Michelle described her decision to not create her own story:

> Well, because, you know, it was with my sister and I have to talk to her about it because she didn't want—I guess she didn't want to put that out there 'cause it affected her too. So, she was kind of—if I was gonna do it, I would have to get her permission. That's how I felt 'cause I wouldn't want somebody, if it did affect me, to put a story out there that I felt not comfortable to share with everybody yet. So, I talked to her about it, you know. She was like "Well, I'm not too comfortable with that, you know." So, I was "OK," that I just put aside and decided to help her with her story. But I understood where she was coming from. She wasn't ready for people to know that, you know.
>
> (Final interview, June 2009)

This was the kind of decision-making process that frustrated Amelia. She felt that families were guiding the participants to the point that they were being prevented from making family stories their own. She also felt that the stories were influenced too strongly by families. To Amelia both stories in Theme 1 (Ashland's, and Michelle and Katrina's) were really done for their families instead of being told for the girls' personal reasons. She noted:

> It was this—you know how in school you make holiday gifts and they bring it home and it's this ceramic pumpkin for Halloween. Ashland's project to me was very sweet but somewhat prescribed in the story of her grandfather. And again, not taking anything away from it, but if she did, if there was healing or she was excited about it as Chelsea was. (Final interview, October 2009)

Of Michelle and Katrina's project she said:

> I believe there is a lot of pressure to do well at home and I am not so sure that a lot of the reasoning about this project didn't come from that. Because it seemed to me like it was mom… and mom wanted this to be done.
> (Final interview, October 2009)

Amelia recognized that some of her students' "family" and "personal" stories were not in fact stories that the participants were making themselves. Nonetheless, they were engaged in the processes of selecting, negotiating, and creating stories that made sense given the contexts and dynamics of their personal lives—where their familial relationships play a central role.

Once their decision to work together was finalized, the sisters created an ambitious project consisting of a personal family story placed into the context of a larger historical narrative. It also served as a personal family archive that became extremely important for the sisters to complete, almost as a gift to their mother and their grandmother. They approached the project as a responsibility. Katrina noted: "Well,

because it is a story that I never told. I wanted people to be more aware of it" (June 2009).

The sisters' roles in the production of their digital story reflected their relationship and mirrored their roles within their family. Both sisters remarked that the original vision was Katrina's, as she was the author of the essay that the project was built upon. However, once Katrina agreed to create a multimedia story she immediately recruited her younger sister. They both described, in separate interviews, a similar version of their roles. According to Michelle, the younger sister:

> My mom, you know, my grandma, they pretty much know I'm more creative. Like when it comes to putting things together and having thoughts, you know, putting it on paper and stuff like that [indicates by gesture that this is Katrina's role]. I helped my sister with more of the creative parts of her project. So she's a good writer. She is you know, I'm not. But when it comes to art and being creative, I have more of the creative mind. So, you know, would tell me what she'd want and I'd put it together. So I put it together mostly because I see it, it's a vision and I go after it. (Final interview, June 2009)

Katrina shared similar views:

> I mean we decided to work together because this is both our grandmother. Ms. H (language arts teacher) asked me but I knew that I could not do it myself and [Michelle is] like the artist in the family like the creative one. (Final interview, June 2009)

During the project sessions Katrina was clearly uncomfortable working directly on the project, for example using iMovie, although she was involved in some of the Google Image searches. I tried to encourage her to import images and text and to edit the audio; however, she was always reluctant and after only a few minutes would hand over the controls to Michelle, who was always eager to be producing the project. Katrina revealed some of her reasoning in our final interview in June.

> Katrina: Where we grew up you didn't touch things because they would break and we didn't have the money to fix it…so I didn't touch 'em if you

didn't know how to work them. I was a little scared that I would mess up something so I didn't touch them.

Julie: Michelle didn't seem to have that problem. Do you think that is because you are the older sister?

Katrina: Yes.

The sisters' co-construction mirrored the dynamics of their sibling relationship imported from home and clearly revealed the influence that family plays in the creation of digital stories. The presence of these dynamics and influences illuminates the complexity of personal storytelling and also confirms theoretical understandings of these processes as described in both psychology and literature studies. This knowledge should be incorporated into current research on the process of digital storytelling, which often references oral storytelling traditions while simultaneously treating it as an entirely new phenomenon (CDS, 2010). Storytellers' use of digital media changes their process but does not fundamentally alter the nature of personal storytelling.

My role in the construction of Michelle and Katrina's project should be noted. By the fourth week of the workshops, both sisters' scheduling conflicts prevented them from attending the afterschool meetings. Therefore, I made arrangements to meet them every Saturday at a public library near their house. In this location we had no time constraints, had more access to technology, and I was able to provide one-on-one technical support that helped them create a more ambitious project. In addition, I was able to engage them in critical conversations about issues of representation as they chose images and audio.

Production: The Role of Digital Media in Youth Narratives

The effects of technology on the stories outlined above centered on three main affordances of new digital media: 1) the ability to insert additional layers of meaning and

representation, intended and unintended; 2) changes in the storytelling process as students moved away from a linear process to one that emphasized circularity, eclecticism and the use of remix and strategies of bricolage as they mixed and matched digital artifacts, jumping across the project as opposed to following a set pattern; and 3) the enhanced role of the audience due to increased shareability across multiple formats such as YouTube and DVD. These affordances were observed through observations of students during project workshops and engaging students in the think-aloud process. This data collection method gave them the opportunity to walk through their projects at various stages and think out loud about, as well as reflect upon, their authorial decisions about music, images, and text. The think-aloud method also proved to be a useful way to reveal how young people think about media as they pull from multiple sources to create a personal story.

Both the think-aloud process and multimodal discourse analysis addressed the sub-areas of investigation designed to help answer the broader question of the effect of digital media on Parsons StoryCorps participants' stories. Specifically, the research design sought to develop a more detailed picture of young people's use of media for personal storytelling and for this purpose studied several areas: 1) how media affected the actual structures of the story; 2) how students interpreted the media they appropriated for their story; and 3) the role of each individual media part (images, audio, and text) in the telling of the story. I also argue that the role of popular culture in the practice of digital storytelling is a central one that contributes additional meaning and representations to narratives (although these may detract from instead of add to the intended message of the story).

The ease with which digital material was inserted into these young people's narratives is one of the fundamental differences between multimedia storytelling and oral or written stories. Pulling, mixing, and interspersing media bits can spark a conversation between youthful authors and the larger cultural narratives that are swirling around them. However, more accurately, it may not spark a "conversation" because young authors may in fact contradict or counter the messaging initially intended by the original author. This reaction would probably not engender a back-and-forth between the two parties; however, deconstruction does add children's voices to larger cultural narratives. Enabling this type of interaction requires unpacking the media parts that are used and should be specifically addressed in the curriculum (for example, students should be required to discuss these interpretations in an open forum, facilitated by an educator). Without this unpacking, it can be argued that young people continue to be passive participants in today's heavily technology-mediated culture and are thus prone to using material that has been created for them, not by them.

Several theoretical and methodological frameworks were used in the analysis of participants' digital stories. Analysis primarily entailed deconstruction of the products into their parts (image, music, voice narration, and text) as well as the authors' reflections. This type of analysis was done to better understand why the storytellers chose one image over another, selected particular pieces of music, and layered meaning by having media pieces "converse" with one another. This section will intersperse larger theoretical concepts with the media modes that participants employed during the phase of the digital storytelling process described by Kress (2001) as the third phase of multimodal discourse: Production. "'Production' refers to the organization of the

expression, to the actual material articulation of the semiotic event or the actual material articulation of the semiotic artifact" (p. 6).

The use of observations and the think-aloud process revealed evidence of the young people's ability to author with multiple media and also revealed areas in which guidance and curriculum support could have engaged them in a critical reading of the media they were using. Most of the participants felt that the use of technology affected their stories' ability to deliver a clearer message and made them describe her experiences more accurately.

> If it was in a journal then I wouldn't show everyone my journal. If it was like this then I would show people like family and stuff. This is more visual so they could see what was happening and not just try to so they wouldn't have to visualize it in their mind. They would know more about what it was like.
>
> (Candace, April 2009)

The process of story construction.

Once the youth had completed the planning stages and started to actually build their stories, they worked alone on computers and used most workshop sessions to gather images and experiment with MovieMaker. During these sessions Amelia left them to work on their own and only helped students who were having technical difficulties. This activity was a continual source of frustration for Amelia, who had to deal with the technology constraints of the school's media center—including the district's security filters, aging computers, and school network glitches that caused participants to lose work stored on their shared hard drives. All of these problems interfered with the lofty goals Amelia had for the project.

The level of technology support and expertise required for a project like Parsons StoryCorps, inarguably an important component, has long been cited in educational

technology research (Culp, et al., 2004; Dede, 2004; NRC, 2005). Too often technology is purchased and implemented in schools without the necessary support, which requires teachers and staff to learn difficult technology skills, and to resolve technical issues while they are trying to implement complicated, multi-step projects with students.

After the students started work on their individual projects there were no more whole-group discussions or structured collaborative activities. Although they had access to video and audio equipment, there was no direct instruction on how to use these devices—let alone how to import media. The lack of instructional information was very frustrating for Amelia, who had intended to provide such guidance. However, time was limited because the group only met for one hour and 20 minutes per week. The latter stages of working with digital media required more technical support than was available. As a result, students stuck to creating slideshows without video. Betty reflected during her final interview: "When I decided I didn't want the video, I was like I had to do something still kind of cool but funny. So I put together a little kind of pictures making it funny." Fortunately, the majority of participants were able to import audio that they had found or recorded with Amelia's and my assistance.

Several students did work together, mostly to share resources and to offer each other advice and critiques. Ashland, Betty, Alice, and Victoria, who were all close friends, would often collaborate to find music and images. Betty remarked during one project session: "We showed each other everything that we had every step of the way. And we did a little thing 'no, you shouldn't put that in' and 'you should put that in'. But I think that made our projects better."

Imagined story to final product.

Four of the nine project participants created notes or sketches that they then translated into multimedia formats. For example, the sisters based their project on an essay that Katrina had written for a language arts class. Overall, the sisters felt that the project was consistent with what Katrina had written but that it was greatly enhanced by the inclusions of their grandmother's voice and iconic photography. The presence of the interview was the most significant difference between the essay and the digital story because it allowed the sisters to place their grandmother in the middle of the historical narrative of the Civil Rights Movement. Michelle directly addressed this placement during the think-aloud process:

> It made a big difference because when she had the conversation on the phone, that was just us hearing her. But on this project, you know, everybody can hear her. You know, like my grandma, she's been through a lot. I mean she's very interesting to listen to, her childhood stories and everything. You know, it's very interesting just to hear her. But we're used to that. Not everybody else has a chance to listen to what she has to say and, you know, what she does say is very important in my eyes. It's very important. (Michelle, April 2009)

The affordance of technology that enabled shareability and publication of this story was extremely important, as the girls' grandmother's participation in the Civil Rights Movement needed to be documented almost as an historical archive, certainly as more than a family story.

Ashland also mapped out her story in detail, in a journal she kept throughout the project (Figure 11).

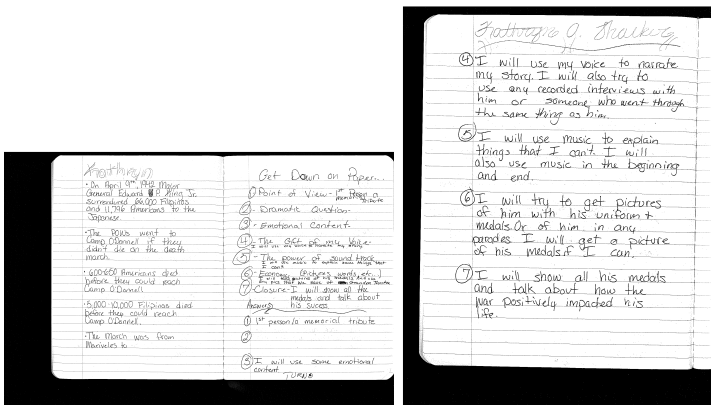


Figure 11. Ashland's Journal

Ashland primarily used the journal to identify what music she was going to use and to record text for a narration that would accompany the images. The writing samples depicted in Figure 11 show that narration was an important element in her story, as well as her notion that music would be used to "explain things I can't." In conversation during a workshop when Ashland was about midway through her story construction she explained:

> Ashland: In here I wrote the kind of music I was going to use, how long it was going to be and I wrote the speech thing that I was going to include in the typing. So I figured out what I was going to do.
>
> Julie: Did you feel like this was a different experience? Was this close to what you intended to make?
>
> Ashland: In my mind I imagined it to be more like a movie and less like a slide show. I also pictured audio, but I think it turned out with the text because you can focus on the text. (Field notes, February 2009)

Ashland had definite ideas about the flow of her story. Hopes that her project would have more of a cinematic feel drove her decision to search for and use music that had already been used in a film. She had intended to record the narration herself but problems with the recording device, software limitations (which kept her from loading music and voice-

over as dual audio tracks), and time constraints led her to use only text instead. Although Amelia and I had offered to assist Ashland in condensing the two tracks of audio into one, by recording her voice while music was playing in the background, she chose to work with text only and seemed to want to complete the project on her own. Ultimately, she felt that text-only was better because it would allow her audiences to focus on the information contained in the story. Aural narration, she felt, would have been distracting.

Michael also had cinematic visions before he started to actually build his project and wrote out his story before starting the digital building process. His storyboard is shown in Figure 12.

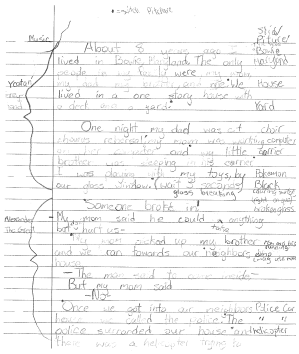


Figure 12. Michael's Storyboard

Michael had imagined asking his mother and brother to act out the events of that night as he remembered them, but ultimately decided to tell his story through still images. To that end he spent most of his time focusing on his voice narration and music written by his father many years prior to this project. Figure 12 shows how he wrote out the story in the middle of the page and then marked the accompanying music in the left margin, pictures in the right.

Michael worked on image selection during project workshops. This entailed Google searches using simple terms such as "chorus," "handbag," SpongeBob," and "police at night." Michael chose the first two images that resulted from each search.

> These images just came off the Internet. It was just the ones that like a lot of them like were like policemen. There weren't that many pictures of like police at night like driving their cars at night. They were hard to find. So whenever I found one I just kept it. (Final interview, June 2009)

These images, which matched the text of the narration, were imported during StoryCorps sessions. In some cases these Michael described selecting images to illustrate a segment of the story (police cars) and in other cases images represented more of a memory and an emotion as in the case of SpongeBob. Michael described a more extensive process with his music selection, which he always did at home. At each project session, I would ask Michael about his process of collaborating with his father on music editing and voice recording in their home studio. Michael described these collaborative sessions as a process through which he would explain to his father the emotional tone of a particular story segment and either music was selected or composed to transmit that particular feeling. This process illustrates an important influence of digital media on the storytelling process, notably the non-linear nature of the production. Michael used a linear process when he created storyboards (beginning, middle, end), but when he searched for images or when he selected music clips, he ended up building different segments out of order as he found digital material. Ashland and the sisters followed similar patterns. This suggests a strong influence of digital media on storytelling that differentiates it from the oral and written storytelling tradition. There is an inherent circularity in its construction that was reflected in participants' creative process.

By contrast, Candace was not interested in writing down her story ideas before she began the building process and felt that her final product was exactly what she had intended:

> It was the same thing that I got. I was going through my mind what pictures I was going to use. I knew it was going to pictures and no text. Because I didn't want to write anything down cause I like visual more than I like text.
>
> (Final interview, June 2009)

Other participants who followed Amelia's instructions during storyboarding activities shared this sentiment but in general, their storyboards were unrelated to the final form of their projects. They preferred to go directly to the computer and start building their story. Therefore, during sessions in which computers were not used, they mostly talked about ideas with their friends and resisted writing them down. This resistance to structure also reflected their demarcation between this experience and school. Parsons StoryCorp was an afterschool project, and therefore the participants challenged traditional tasks that they associated with schooling.

The participants who did write out their story ideas and developed storyboards did not use them when it came time to work with MovieMaker. Also, once the students started building their stories they did not refer to their written notes (this suggests the resistance just described and also is similar to Michael's construction process). As a result, their analyses did not compare their written stories to their digital slideshows. While it is questionable whether such before-and-after comparisons of multimodal projects are useful, a broad comparison can be made that reveals differences between linear storytelling and one that resembles bricolage and remixing strategies (Lessig, 2004; Levi Strauss, 1966) In order to fully understanding multimodal design, it must be

analyzed in terms of its unique qualities—that is, the qualities that truly distinguish it from oral or written storytelling.

It is also a core argument of this research that genre centrally influences how students create multimedia work, which means that comparisons of written essays to digital stories are not useful. When young people appropriate media for their personal storytelling, it is the multiple meanings and cultural cues that are identified via this material that need to be dissected. How the presence of digital media affects a personal account of participation in a larger historical event when iconic images that are part of all of our cultural narrative are dropped in, for example, is a relevant issue.

The presence of digital media not only affects the structure of a story, it also directly influences audiences' interpretations. Each image and each piece of music brings additional meaning and cultural cues. Given the ready access to this cultural material in America today, it is necessary to explore the kinds of literacy practices that are (or need to be) implemented in a particular curriculum, how these practices can be used to support student authors' understanding of how such media were initially produced, how they have been used in other media forms, and how students can use them for their own purposes.

Building the story: the use of mixed media.

Each of the stories created in Parsons StoryCorps contained multiple media, including visual images, audio, and text. A few students also used the Internet to conduct research, particularly the ones who constructed a personal family story connected to a cultural and historical narrative. For example: Ashland had very definite ideas about her media choices, was clearly comfortable with digital technology, and easily able to pull

pieces of media from a variety of sources. She combined her discoveries both to establish her storyline and to move between inserting her grandfather's history into two larger narratives (war and the Bataan Death March). In conversations during workshops and interviews, Ashland often repeated her rationale for combining instrumental music and text slides: to keep audiences focused on the content of her story.

Ashland pulled from many different sources to build her story of her grandfather's experiences. When I asked how she learned the details about the Bataan Death March, she said that her parents gave her some details but that to learn more she did her own research using books and the Internet. She also consulted newspaper clippings kept by her grandmother about the march (Figure 13). Ashland's provision of interesting details about her information sources illuminates the difficulties children face when using the Internet for research. This work is often done in classrooms, without an educator who can scaffold such activities focused on the accuracy of Internet-based information sources (Bransford, 2000; Dede, 2004; Honey, 2005). Ashland explained:

> My parents told me about it…about the march but they didn't know all the details. So I went on Google. I found 30 miles, 60 miles, 90 miles, no one was specific. So that was hard – so I just settled on 70-100. I went on Wikipedia, Yahoo, Ask, any two websites said two different things. It was difficult.
>
> (final interview, June 2009)

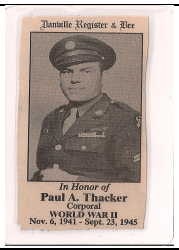
One of Ashland's text slides suggests that Ashland's grandfather suffered serious physical torture. I asked her to tell me about how she learned about what happened to him:

> Julie: Wow, this is all very dramatic. Did your grandmother tell you about [your grandfather's drastic weight loss]?
>
> Ashland: No, this was all in the newspaper articles. There were 3 or 4 articles that all mentioned that in them—so they could get how they tortured them..how they didn't feed them well or anything. They were forced to dig coal and the roof of

> the mining tunnel collapsed and [my grandfather] got a really bad back injury so he couldn't go outside so he had to stay inside in the building cleaning.
>
> Julie: How did this impact the rest of his life?
>
> Ashland: I'm guessing…I mean I didn't really know about it much…my parents didn't really tell me about it much but he was in a wheelchair.

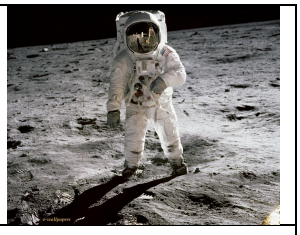
During several informal conversations and formal interviews, Ashland stated that she had not consulted her grandmother about her grandfather's experiences, even though her grandmother was still alive and had archived so much material. Given the number of local newspaper articles about her grandfather that Ashland's grandmother had saved, and her grandmother's sharing of these materials for Ashland's project, I found it interesting that an interview with her grandmother had not been included, particularly considering Ashland's admitted difficulty with finding consistent and accurate information online. When I asked her about this, she said, "It is just not something that we focus on when we talk." This suggests that the process of creating a personal family archive with digital media, with its inherent access to unlimited material about a given historical event, allowed Ashland to make meaning of a family story through her own process of discovery that was not dependant upon her family. The opportunity to construct this story and the availability of material about the period (such as images and audio from popular culture in the 1940s) and the particular historical event created a window through which Ashland could participate—even when family dynamics may have prevented open dialogue about her grandfather's experience.

Table 5. Personal Family and Historical Photographs

	Ashland	Michelle and Katrina
Image		
Music track	"Underwater March" from *Pirates of the Caribbean*	
Interview	I know that he talked with a lot of newspaper interviews and that is where I got a lot of the pictures from.	It was actually Katrina's idea because she was in it, you know, my grandma was in the story, you know, mixing with the civil rights 'cause she was talking about civil rights. And she wanted to get my grandma's story—she initially wanted to make the whole story of her an interview kind of thing.

Michelle and Katrina, however, built their project around two main sources that directly involved their grandmother: an interview conducted by Katrina for her school essay, and an interview conducted by both sisters immediately after President Obama's inauguration, specifically for their digital story. By far the most ambitious project of Parsons StoryCorps, this multimedia story is more than 9 minutes long, includes more then 40 images as well as music, narration, and excerpts from the two interviews. Table 6 shows some of the juxtapositions of these elements.

Table 6. “My grandmother was there”

Image				
Narration	Her, her brothers and sisters grew up extremely poor in Birmingham, Alabama		At 62 years old, my grandma had seen and been through a lot. She has her share of love and loss. She was there when blacks weren’t allowed to sit in the same restaurants with whites. She was there when man first walked on the moon and has seen America change in good and bad ways in 50 years, from Miles Davis to 9/11.	
Music	“Wake up all the teachers time to teach a new way maybe then they’ll listen to what you have to say” (“Wake Up Everybody” by Harold Melvin and The Blue Notes)	“They’re the ones that are coming up and the world is in their hands” (“Wake Up Everybody” by Harold Melvin and The Blue Notes)		

The media pieces were chosen very early in the process, according to Katrina's vision and Michelle's aesthetic taste. The emphasis on multiple audio, song, and narration was partly shaped by the essay itself; for example, the opening line refers to a song and the sisters immediately ordered that song from iTunes.

The contrast between Ashland's and the sisters' stories shows the different roles these narratives played in the girls' lives; the reflections they shared in interviews and their think-aloud process confirmed these differences. Ashland told a story that she had recently heard for the first time, while the sisters had been living with their grandmother's story their entire lives and wanted to share it with as many people as possible. However, both stories shared the goal of embedding their family member's role in a larger historical narrative. The use of multimedia, according to the girls, allowed for this "mixing." Michael also utilized multiple media, voice narration, and audio as well as a mix of personal photographs and stock images, which he combined to reconstruct a difficult family story. His efforts to visually represent each aspect of the story included asking his mother and younger brother to reenact a scene, which he captured in a still image.

Michael divided his story into three main parts. The first part, which depicted a happy, innocent family living in a town in Maryland, included details about what family members were doing when the home invasion occurred. This part is charted in Table 7.

Table 7. Happy Innocent Family

Image				
Narration	"About eight years ago I lived in Bowie, Maryland. The only people in my family were my mom, my dad, my brother and me. We lived in a one-story house with a deck and a yard."		"One night my dad was at choral rehearsal. My mom was working on her computer and my little brother was sleeping in his carrier. I was playing with my toys by our glass window."	
Music	Upbeat string music composed by father		Upbeat string music composed by father	
Interview	It was kind of happy. It was basically just like me my mom and my dad. We were just happy knowing that we could just play around, you know. I didn't have sports then and I only had to go to day care every once in a while so it was kind of like a happy song.		My dad was at chorus rehearsal. I remember my mom was on the computer and I was right in front of it. Like I saw that I there was blackness moving in front of it and I went over and told her and that is when he broke in.	

Michael's father wrote the music used in this section, an uplifting string composition that is burned onto an accompanying CD-ROM. Transition into the second part is signaled by a blank, black frame; at this time, the music changes to hard rock by Black Sabbath that is meant to signal invasion. The use of this Black Sabbath song is important because it is the only music in this section that was *not* composed by Michael's father. Michael chose it to emphasize the alien quality of the home invasion and its disruptive role in a formerly happy, safe family environment. In the third part of Michael's story, his mother saves everyone by standing up to the invading criminal. Last, Michael remembers watching

cable TV for the first time and all ends happily. The three parts contain only stock images collected from Google searches, but Michael chose personal family photographs to depict his family's return to normalcy. Michael transitions from the Black Sabbath song that accompanies the home invasion to a softer Led Zeppelin track to transition away from the invasion toward the resolve of conflict and the safety of his family. Last, he matches the family images with a lullaby composed for him by his father.

The stories with the fewest media choices included images from Google and Yahoo searches, music included in the MovieMaker software, and text slides; not coincidentally, these stories seemed to exhibit a surface narrative. Alice, Betty, and Victoria had difficulty developing their storylines and ultimately strung slides together with text to create products that were not necessarily stories, but rather slideshows with more general content. In some cases, the images were randomly chosen and had only a tangential relationship to the narrative (Table 8).

Table 8. Stock Photographs, Disjointed Messages

Alice	Betty
	
Text: When I was little, my father and I were hiking.	Text: That is how a cookie is made.

As the next section illustrates, the projects that included carefully selected audio and voice narrations showed a more deliberate, sophisticated use of multiple media.

Despite placing a disproportionate amount of emphasis on the visual, the participants who paid more attention to their audio choices were trying to reach their audience more effectively.

Before moving onto the next section, my own bias regarding the analysis of Betty, Alice and Victoria's stories must be noted. My emphasis through these pages on Michael, Candace, Ashland, and Michelle and Katrina's stories may indicate my own compelling interest in these students' personal stories rather than an unbiased analysis of their digital media use. Betty's interest in just talking about cookie making, particularly, did not interest me as much as the sisters' critical reflections about civil rights history and their family's participation. Amelia and I shared similar sentiments about this in my final interview with her. We both agreed that, while we want to give students free rein to play with technology and provide them with opportunities for creative expression, our judgment of their work can be tempered by our own desires.

The importance of sound: making the story personal.

The most notable example of audio use in a Parsons StoryCorps project was the interview with the sisters' grandmother on Inauguration Day. In her final interview, Michelle stated that she and Katrina had wanted everyone to hear their grandmother's voice and that that wish was more important to them than the inclusion of personal family photographs. Because they did not have access to pictures of their grandmother in her youth, they used her voice to mark both her and their family's role in these events. The inclusion of the grandmother's voice also effectively positions her personal history and experiences alongside the historic moment of President Obama's inauguration as well as the Civil Rights Movement that had, for her, culminated in this event. The sisters'

relationship is also woven into the story by their use of Michelle's narration to accompany images that are meant to illustrate Katrina's essay.

Music was also important in the sisters' project because, like the images, it fleshed out the written story. Katrina's essay opens with quotation of lyrics from "Wake Up Everybody" by Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes. Michelle remarked on the sisters' decision to insert the song at the beginning of their project as a way to bring that section to life:

> [Katrina] wrote that song in [her essay]. So, we thought, you know, it would be kind of cool to actually hear it for those, you know, who probably never heard the song to hear the song because when you're reading the words, then that's not really the whole song. (Final interview, June 2009)

Katrina carefully selected the other songs for the project as well. The use of "Wake Up Everybody" led to inclusion of the title song from the movie *Life* (1999) whose plot depicts two African American men in the 1920s who are framed and unjustly imprisoned for the murder of a white policeman. They are released at the end of the twentieth century, having missed many of the era's major historical events, most notably the Civil Rights Movement and the end of Jim Crow segregation in the South. Making the film and "Wake Up Everybody" part of the story Katrina and Michelle were telling about their grandmother's life illustrates transference of media literacy skills (Nelson, 2008). Katrina deliberately took part of one film (its title song) and linked it to her own, similar story. She did this not only because the narrations were associated in her mind but also because, as she confessed, "I have been watching this film my entire life." The film not only clearly influenced her, she made it a part of the historical narrative she wanted to present.

Targeted use of music was also central to Ashland's project. A Glenn Miller song, "Moonlight Serenade," is used to contextualize the early 1940s, before the United States entered World War II, to depict a happy time as well as a time that was relatively naïve (unaware of the impending conflict and hardship). Ashland also placed "Moonlight Serenade" at the end of her story, to signal the story's resolution. Although she did not fully explain the music switch, she clearly wanted to end the story on a lighter note that conformed to a narrative arc consisting of build-up, dramatic break, and finally a happy ending. Without using text, Ashland is authoring with multiple media and moving her story along with music.

Two other projects utilized personal narrations and carefully selected soundtracks. Michael spent a lot of his time thinking about the music in his story. Like several other participants, he used audio to place a personal stamp and to anchor the project more firmly than he could have by using only visual media.

> Michael: I know that I wanted to use some of my dad's music because it was right after he made his first CD.
>
> Julie: You mean after the burglary?
>
> Michael: Yes.

Michael described why this untitled song, written by his father, was used in the initial segment; his reflections reveal how much meaning was behind this choice.

> It was kind of happy. It was basically just like me, my mom, and my dad we were just happy knowing that we could just play around, you know [before my other brothers came along]. I didn't have sports then and I only had to go to day care every once in a while so it was kind of like a happy song.
>
> (Final interview, June 2009)

Michael's use of personal narration over this music helped to further emphasize his personal voice in his story, particularly when he used digital images that were not family

photographs of the event, but had been selected via Google searches to explicate segments of the narrative.

Candace used the song "Ooh Child" by the Five Stairsteps as well as personal narration. Her use of the song contributed additional meaning that she felt furthered a particular interpretation of her images. Her narrative focused on a happy beginning, a tough event, and then hopefulness about the future; the song was chosen to enhance that message and to provide cues about how the images should be read. As Candace explained, "You know how the song goes. So I knew that what [the singer] was saying was true to my pictures and what I was talking about so I knew that it was perfect."

The Parsons StoryCorps participants' use of multimedia extends Mitchell's (1994) concepts of nesting, which occurs when a particular medium is combined with another, and braiding, which is occurs when "one sensory channel or semiotic function is woven together with another more or less seamlessly" (p. 262). At the same time, the students' use of sound combined with personal narration delivered a more powerful autobiographical (and biographical) message than would have been possible if these media choices had not been made.

The participants who incorporated both music and narration into their stories believed that the use of these media would fix interpretation for their audiences. In the case of Michelle and Katrina, Katrina's written essay was transposed into narration that tied images to specific meanings and interpretations that the sisters determined. The girls spoke almost in pedagogical terms when describing their desire to educate an audience they believed lacked understanding of the important events of the Civil Rights Movement.

Fleshing out the story with use of the image: communicating to an audience.

Several students felt that the use of digital media allowed them to clarify their messages and to ensure their audience's comprehension of their intended meaning. As Michelle said, "And these are the things I wanted pictures just to match, you know, what I was saying to make things more understandable, you know, because it's a big concept to grasp for some people." She added, "You know, to make it simple, but complex, you know?" This statement, which is illustrated in Table 9, seems to explain her reason for including this archival footage: to take a complex moment, and use an image to convey that complexity in simple terms. Here, Michelle displays an understanding that a visual image is "complex" but may be still have the mistaken impression that visual images retain the salience they once had in Americans' cultural readings of images, summed up in the old adage "A picture is worth a thousand words." Images do not carry inherent meaning—instead meaning is ascribed to them (Benjamin, 1936; 1985; Mitchell, 1994).

To build upon Michelle's interpretation of the power of the images she chose, a curriculum exercise could incorporate Hall's (1985) conception of articulation. This exercise could require the sisters to identify exactly how the images in their project connect to their grandmother's experience. To elicit a thorough response, the exercise could be designed using Hall's understanding of representation. For example, image analysis activities could require unpacking the "when" and "where" of these photographs, including their location; the photographer's purpose, which may have included bearing witness, artistic representation, journalism; identifying how these images have been used to represent the Civil Rights Movement over time; and how these meaning have changed in the public's eye, as well as how they have been extended or altered by the sisters use

as illustration of a personal story; and, finally, how the sisters' particular use clarifies the message to an audience they consider either misinformed about the Civil Rights Movement or in need of an interpretation that can be easily understood.

Table 9. Big Story, Simple Message

Image				
Narration (written by Katrina, spoken by Michelle)	These words, sang by Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes in 1975	are words that blacks like myself, 50 or 60 years back, only dreamt about at night and whispered about during the day	because the idea of change, like climbing mountains today, was thought to be crazy, reckless, highly impossible and would end up in death.	So was change during the civil rights, all starting with my brave grandma.
Music	Wake up everybody, no more sleeping in bed	The world has changed so very much from what it used to be	There is so much hatred, war, and poverty	Oohhhh

Interview with Michelle	And, you know, the meaning behind the song fits well with her paper. So, she thought to put the song in, you know, so people can actually hear it and hear the meaning of the words. And the picture was, you know, just so they can know what they look like.	And these are the things I wanted pictures just to match, you know, what I was saying to make things more understandable, you know, because it's a big concept to grasp for some people. Like, I wanted people, you know, to kind of make it simple but complex, you know. I wanted the pictures to match what I was saying and the lyrics.		

Candace also believed that the inclusion of visual images more effectively delivered and clarified her message: "This is more visual so they could see what was happening and not just try to so they wouldn't have to visualize it in their mind. They would know more about what it was like." She was also very deliberate in her image choices and where in her story specific photographs of her father would be placed. Candace's story situated the images of her father to coincide with her narration and to introduce the audience to what he looked like as she began talking about their relationship (an example is shown in Table 10). It is this use of media layering that young people are quite comfortable with. In this instance, Candace used an image to remove the possibility that a particular audience would have to imagine what her father looked like, or what they looked like together as father and daughter. According to Candace, the photograph displays that relationship.

Table 10. "When my dad was here"	
Image	
Music	"Ooh Child things are gonna get easier"
Voice narration	Sometimes I wish I can go back to when my dad loved me like I was the only person in the world. But then I realize my mom, she never left me. So, it's better off being with her than somebody that you don't know if they're going to leave you.

The role of the image: archives and representation.

Images were utilized in students' projects for different purposes. Several student authors used images to signal story changes and moods. For example, Ashland decided to use a stock digital image to portray her grandfather and to signal that story's focus was about to shift to the war. (This and other images choices are shown in Figure 13.)

> What I was hoping was that in the beginning I wanted to talk about how everyone was happy and in the '40s that was when he was in the army when I started talking about how it got darker. There were a lot of people in the war and a lot of people dying and I kind of imagined it as a mood change—transition to a darker experience so pictures of happy people and then change.
>
> (Final interview, June 2009)

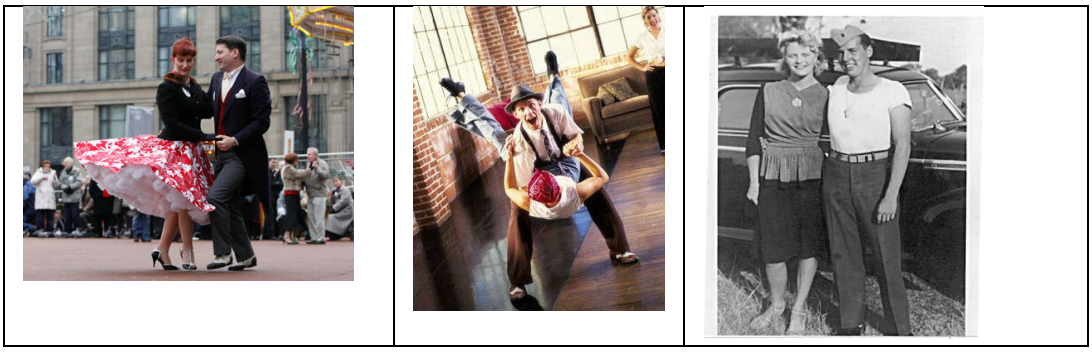


Figure 13. The Happy Days

Michelle and Katrina were unable to gather personal photographs of their grandmother for the project, so they chose archival footage that, for them, effectively positioned their grandmother's story inside the larger historical narrative of the Civil Rights Movement. To solidify the connection between personal and historical, they inserted their voice narration over iconic digital archival footage. Michelle thought about the use of the digital image as a way to "fill in the blanks and also match what I was saying" (June 2009). However, she alluded to more complexity by adding, "Well, the family we didn't want—well, we also felt it wasn't about us. We shouldn't be nowhere near—I mean, we made it but it was for [our grandmother]. And we felt like we should be nowhere near, like our faces or anything." This comment alluded to still another dimension of this project, namely its creation as a commemorative gift to their grandmother and the rest of the family. Table 11 shows a juxtaposition of narration and image from Michelle and Katrina's story.

Table 11. “We shouldn’t be nowhere near.”

Image	
Interview Michelle	Pictures that took place in time. Like we wanted to go mainly after the black and white pictures because it fit what I was saying. Civil Rights, you know, a while ago, Martin Luther King and we wanted pictures that actually fit back in time instead of in the present, you know.

The sisters’ decision to build their project visually, using images found through Google searches, resulted from their lack of access to a family archive. Their decision also exemplifies of the contribution of publicly accessible digital media to shaping the final project. The laborious process of searching for images on the Internet was not only beset by technology challenges, and revealed the limitations and structures of the Google search, it also fore grounded issues of representation and race. Searching with Google requires users to type in key words; although their searches brought up hundreds of photographs, the sisters spent many hours carefully selecting and saving images that showed the version of the Civil Rights Movement they wanted to represent.

Finding images of Black Americans, however, often required the girls to type in key words that directly mentioned difference and otherness. For example, when they were looking for simple images to illustrate the phrase “dreamed about at night and whispered during the day,” Michelle would type in “girls sleeping” and “children whispering.” The images brought up by the Google search engine in response, however,

were all of white children. During one particular work session where this racially imbalanced depiction had been a problem, Michelle and I had the following conversation with Katrina looking on:

> Julie: Hmm..what do you think of this selection of images?
>
> Michelle: They are all white people. I guess I will have to add black to the search terms.
>
> Julie: Why do you think that is?
>
> Michelle: Well...probably white people put these images in there.
>
> (Field notes, April 2009)

The same situation was repeated several times as the girls searched for images of the Jim Crow South. If they wanted images that depicted ordinary Black Americans, they had to specify "black" in the search terms. To find images of Black schoolchildren or Black family life, the terms "poor" and "black" had to be included; otherwise, the images selected by Google would depict white, rural children and families. In Internet culture as constructed by Google, images of white people are the norm but representations of people of color must be searched for specifically, after being identified and marked. This requirement suggests that images of Blacks are signs of difference and otherness on the Internet, in a way similar to older media formats such as print and TV (Hall, 1997).

Another example of how the girls responded to stock Internet representations of race and African American political leaders was their selection of the Huey Newton image (see Table 12). Katrina selected this picture because, as she said, "it was the only picture that didn't show him as a gangster or a thug. They showed him as a person." The image, an artistic representation, provided the girls with a counter-narrative image, one that aligned with their characterization of the Civil Rights Movement in which they

compared the heroic actions of its leaders with the terroristic strategies of White Power movements. Katrina's statement above signals her understanding of the fact that most photographs of Newton are used to represent the stereotype, not the real person. To capture her understanding of Huey Newton as a person required the use of an artistic rendering. Unknowingly, Katrina has replicated deBord's (1967) argument that the photograph is not a semblance of the real but of the spectacle.

Table 12. Representations of Black Power

Image		
Narration	"The Black Panthers claimed to be about brotherhood, often promoting black unity throughout the communities and providing protection for blacks in the community from the prejudice brought about by the KKK."	
Interview: Katrina		Yes. It was the only picture that didn't show him as a gangster or a thug. They showed him as a person.
Interview: Michelle	And the fist, we actually didn't know where to put it but we didn't want to get rid of it because it was a nice photo. So, you know, we just found a place to stick it, but we really didn't know where to put it at first.	Katrina chose this But I went along with it because I like more art pictures than actual faces because it says a lot. And, you know, it inspires me. I like to draw in detail more than, you know, take photography.

	For me, the art, the drawing and, you know, black power. It stands for so much, you know, in that look, in that one photo.	

The opportunities and challenges posed by new technologies are, according to Van Dijk (2006), related to their limitless capacity to store "bits of life" (p. 313). However, challenges also arise during the processes of collecting, authoring, and sharing personal stories that related to specific historical moments, particularly as young people gather media fragments to represent personal constructions of their histories and their family's histories. The ease with which young people can access archival materials on the Internet and use multiple media to author their own stories seems to alter practices that were once limited to personal family collections. The sisters, for example, deliberately built an archive. They took on the responsibility of connecting their family story to a larger cultural narrative. Not surprisingly, a certain version of history is privileged in this project: a seemingly radical one that the girls also learn at school, of a nonviolent, calm, white-endorsed movement. The girls' elucidation of this contested history can be seen as an example of rearticulation (Hall, 1985). Their inclusion of the Black Panthers, Angela Davis, and Malcolm X alongside leaders privileged in mainstream media, such as Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks, reposition not only these leaders but also their points of view as important parts of official civil rights history rather than simply as radical political figures on the sidelines of the movement. The images of these leaders were carefully selected and represented as thoughtful and intellectual, never angry or violent , as shown in Figure 14. Michelle and Katrina also chose graphic displays as symbols of

the Black Panthers because Google searches seemed always to supply images that showed them, according to Katrina, as "criminals" (some of these images are shown in Figure 15).

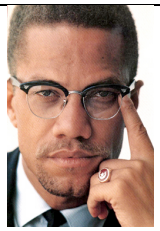
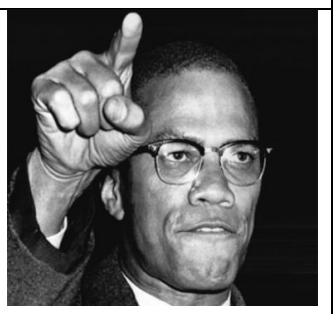
Selected for story	Not selected
	

Figure 14. Which Malcolm X Should I Use?

Figure 15. Black Panthers: The Counter-narrative

In addition, Katrina's original essay mentions Angela Davis, labor unions, and class struggle and illustrates these political figures and themes in the digital adaptation. Both the original essay and the digital version are intended to present multiple stories and to exhibit an expansive view of the movement, not one that simply jumps from the "I have a dream" speech to the election of Barack Obama. Although these digital images of

the Civil Rights Movement have indeed jumped around in literally countless ways since they were produced more than 40 years ago, the girls' use replants them in a new context—a rearticulation of a familiar narrative to include their own family history. The girls not only wanted everyone to know about their grandmother, they took on almost as a responsibility the task of sharing this history as more than a family story. The use of family photos would have limited their product to a personal story when in fact they were creating a public archive.

Stuart Hall (1996) developed a thorough, systematic understanding of how the history of the Black image—through colonization, slavery, the Jim Crow South—can be traced to, and are intact in, all forms of current mass media representation, including journalism, advertising, and entertainment. Through these representations, race becomes a floating signifier and can be manipulated as a language (p. 37). Michelle and Katrina's project seems to exemplify this notion, as viewers are walked through multiple images of iconic figures and symbolic imagery of the American Civil Rights Movement. Most notable is the image of the Black Power fist. Although they do not explicitly discuss their views on race and power sharing, the girls seem to have adopted Hall's position of race as discursive. Their use of image and song place race in the context of a pivotal American historical period and place racialized images alongside iconic signs to present the chronological narrative that was first outlined in Katrina's written essay. Each image is used to move viewers along a continuum, from segregation and the Jim Crow South to the March on Washington and the roles of the Black Panthers and Ku Klux Klan, which is resolved by the election of Barack Obama. Furthermore, the photographic images that these girls have used throughout this project should not be understood as having meaning

in each individual case: theirs is a cumulative message. "[Iconic images] gain in meaning when they are read in context, against or in connection with one another. This is another way of saying that images do not carry meaning or 'signify' on their own. They accumulate meanings" (Hall, 1996, p. 223).

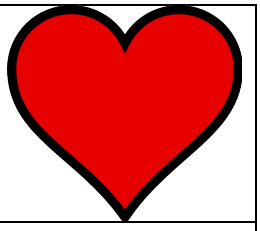
Mitchell (1984) contended that instead of looking at images in purely semiotic frames, viewers should realize that "[i]mages are not just a particular kind of sign, but something like an actor on the historical stage that parallels and participates in the stories we tell ourselves" (p. 504). Parsons StoryCorps participants displayed a competent reading of the imageries they used. Although more discussion with them about the messages they were receiving, (re)interpreting, and then using for their own purposes would have been preferable, I do not think that the story creation process prevented them from understanding various media pieces and incorporating them into the structure of their own stories. Each young author chose images that s/he believed brought a particular meaning to his or her story. In Ashland's case, the use of scanned newspaper articles underscored the important historical event in which her grandfather participated. The sisters used iconic images of the Civil Rights Movement, Black Power leaders, and Barack Obama alongside images of other important events such as the moon landing and 9/11 to reinforce the main message of their narrative: that their grandmother's story was part of a major historical event and that she, their family member, was an active participant in that event. As Parsons StoryCorps participants repeatedly explained their choices, particularly regarding images, it became clear that choices they made were intended to make things more understandable for their audiences.

Candace, unlike the majority of Parsons StoryCorps participants who primarily

utilized images from the Internet, built her project using personal photographs. As a result, her project was considered by Amelia to be more personal and closer to what she had expected Parsons StoryCorps projects to look like. The other students, notably Ashland, Michael, Alice, and Adam, digitized a few personal photographs but relied primarily on digital images found through Google to represent personal experiences and/or family stories. "Together private documents and personal collections of cultural content constitute what I call 'mediated memories'; memories recorded by and re(collected) through media technologies" (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 312). Amelia thought that the use of stock photos to illustrate aspects of the stories (for example, the picture of SpongeBob that Michael used to indicate his memory of watching TV after the home invasion), detracted from their dramatic tone.

Unlike the sisters' deliberate selection process, images for some of the projects were selected haphazardly. As a result, these projects seemed to lose a close connection to the story being told. Ashland, for example, spent considerable time scanning journal articles that had been archived by her grandmother; yet, when she decided to end the story with a depiction of her sadness at her grandfather's death from cancer, she chose cartoons. This use is charted in Table 13.

Table 13. The Use of Cartoons

Image		Text slide with information about cancer	Dedication text slide	
Sound	"Underwater March" from *Pirates of the Caribbean*	Music continued	Abrupt music switch back to Glenn Miller track	
Interview	Julie: Why did you pick that picture? Ashland: To show that it was such a sad thing so that everyone would know. Umm it might be kind of humorous but after seeing that sad video…	Julie: So you want to keep them in the mood, but you want to start to lighten it up. So it was intentional not to find a photograph of a sad person." Ashland: Yeah, I wanted a silly sad picture.		

Immediately after this "silly sad" image, still accompanied by the "Underwater March," Ashland abruptly switches to her final images: a dedication slide, a slide depicting a heart, and a final titles slide. The use of clip art here is somewhat strange and doesn't fit into the aesthetic of the rest of the story, although it does seem to stem from Ashland's interest in quickly picking an image that illustrates a word, such as "sad" or "love," and her lack of interest in fitting these concepts into the visual flow of the story by using more explicit images or music. However, it could also be argued that these selections were quite deliberate and reflect Ashland's desire to lighten the story and end it happily.

Further, she inserted her own visual aesthetic, another illustration of a remixed cultural production where visual montages are created that pull from multiple sources of image ranging from animation to archival footage to personal photographs.

Audiences ultimately make decisions about how or whether images work to flesh out or detract from the message or emotional impact of a story. When Amelia reflected on the projects themselves she remarked that when Michael chose images for his story, particularly stock photographs collected through Google Images, his choices diminished the story's meaning:

> Just the very stock images that were chosen. You know, when the robber broke into the house and stole the purse, he chose to kind of illustrate that part of the story by having a poorly focused purse on the screen rather than maybe a picture of somebody, some face expressing fear or maybe what somebody would look like after they've been robbed. You know, when he was visualizing the story, he saw the purse. He saw like facts which, again, may really come back to the AIG. It's facts. So, his mind didn't capture the, I guess, expression of that moment in time, of the emotion of that moment. (Second interview, June 2009)

This interpretation of stories again reflects a reaction to a young person's storytelling processes with digital media where montage and engaging bricolage are the strategies that are in place to create stories. Michael used a collage of images to represent his story. For our part, it is probable that both Amelia and I made assertions about students' media choices based on our interests in their stories. I made similar conclusions when I viewed Betty's story about making cookies: the visual she had chosen simply didn't interest me as much as images of Huey Newton that had been incorporated into the sisters' civil rights project. This bias may have influenced my positioning of these participants regarding their ability to express themselves with digital media rather than as a direct result of my strategies of representation of the data.

The appropriation of popular culture.

A common critique of youth media authoring focuses on the extent to which they have "control" over the messaging in their work and argues that the use of media limits any real agency over the meaning of the media products that have been produced (Herring, 2008). Amelia felt that when Michael inserted images of SpongeBob into his story he lost ownership of it on a personal level. If this is true, if adults are creating the media parts with which students are building digital stories, the question of what actually constitutes authorship must be considered. This confusion, in turn, brings up an important feature of authoring with digital media: the use of popular culture to represent personal experiences. In Table 5, both Ashland's use of audio and Michelle and Katrina's use of iconic photography explicitly incorporated popular culture in the telling of their personal stories. In the sisters' story, images from the Civil Rights era drawn from actual historical footage were incorporated to help tell the history of the movement, along with their own personal narration as well as clips of their interview with their grandmother. Thus, when Katrina's narration "You know, my grandma was in the story, mixing with the civil rights…" is heard, the layering of other media allows both of the sisters to speak directly to the larger historical narrative and "mix" in their grandmother's story.

Ashland accomplished a similar effect by using a newspaper clipping instead of a personal photograph or even an interview clip of her grandmother talking about World War II, the Bataan Death March, and so forth. The use of newspaper gives the project the look of archival footage that can be interpreted as placing her grandfather inside a larger historical narrative, much as the sisters did with their civil rights images. Ashland's ability to choose photographs and music representative of 1940s popular culture allows

her to exploit actual artifacts from that period and thereby enhances the archival nature of the project. Although Amelia considered Michael's use of stock images and SpongeBob to be detractors from his dramatic story, it could also be argued that he deliberately searched for SpongeBob because the character was part of his memory of this event. His family's escape to another house was condensed into one vivid memory of being allowed to watch cable TV for the first time. The image of SpongeBob was not just an illustration of the show he watched but a marker for a complete memory that reflected feelings of safety and resolve of a traumatic event.

The use of cinematic music in these projects represents another direct appropriation of popular culture. The score from *Pirates of the Caribbean* in Ashland's story was chosen to increase its emotional effect and to create a somber feel; it was, therefore, a purely aesthetic choice. The music added emotional meaning but the context in which the music was created did not directly connect to the story that Ashland was telling about her grandfather's participation in the war. However, her use of Glenn Miller connected to her desire to depict the time period and her assessment that American culture of the time was "innocent" and "carefree," without the knowledge of how the war would affect the nation.

The sisters also incorporated a song from a movie; however, this song was deliberately used because it came from a movie that drew heavily from the history of the Civil Rights Movement and because its content as a song evoked that historical period. Katrina linked the movie to her own digital biography of her grandmother's participation in the Civil Rights Movement. This linkage added a layer of meaning by connecting the storyline of the sisters' project to a movie that featured a similar narrative. The sisters

created an historic arc between their grandmother's childhood in the Jim Crow South to the election of Barack Obama. The integration of popular culture into digital stories, however, was not directly addressed in Amelia's curriculum. To make the argument that youth practitioners of digital storytelling are actually authoring with digital media, unpacking and deliberately facilitating a process of "reading" the material these authors choose for the construction their personal stories is a necessary first step.

Overall, the students who participated in the Parsons StoryCorps project were able to use of variety of media to tell their stories. With some projects, particularly those by the sisters (Michelle and Katrina), Ashland, Candace, and Michael, more thought went into the structure of the narrative as well as the role of each media part in presenting the story and also in providing additional layers of meaning. Audio, narration, and music were central to the personalization of these stories and in contextualizing the visual imagery that moved them beyond a simple slideshow.

According to Van Dijk (2005), digitization is changing the ways that cultural memories are being produced shared and stored. Saving personal items (photographs, old recordings, audio cassettes, etc.) has always been part of how individual people developed their personal cultural identities and attached them to particular historical periods (p. 312). The students who participated in Amelia's curriculum were engaged in the activity of producing cultural memories. Although the digital technologies they used are still relatively new, these young people engaged in cultural production with the tools available to them (Holland, et al., 1996). What is different about these technologies, and is exemplified in the Parsons StoryCorps project, are the immediate ways that children can leap into a conversation with larger cultural narratives using material that was simply

not available to them prior to their access to new media.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The Parsons StoryCorps study began as an investigation that sought to better understand how young people use digital media. However, after observing Amelia and her students, a more complicated picture emerged of how young people use and consume media through the creation of digital stories in an educational setting. Understanding the complex nature of Parsons StoryCorps participants' interactions with digital media further illustrated the role that curriculum and educators play in developing multiliteracies—a role that is critically important as young people become more immersed in a technologically saturated and mediated culture. For almost two decades, I have been involved in research that investigates how to engage children in meaningful, constructive, critical, and imaginative experiences with technology in school. This project continued my prior work and also provided an opportunity to incorporate diverse theoretical and analytical frameworks; in addition, these offer insights into a growing field of research that focuses intently on youth and digital culture (Buckingham, 2008; MacArthur Foundation, 2010).

Recording Amelia's critical reflections and observing her as she developed the project curriculum provided useful data that can inform the overall practice of digital storytelling. For example, the goal of the storytelling projects cited above is to focus less on the consumption of digital media and more on children as authors. This new emphasis depends on the assumption that, as a result of simply getting the opportunity to tell their stories using digital media, children's relationships with digital technology are changed

for the better. Research conducted in many of such project settings highlights the emancipatory nature of young people's experiences but contains little to no critical analysis of what the adults are doing within these settings and what roles they might play role in structuring the kinds of stories that children tell (Nelson, 2006; Nelson, et al., 2008; Roche-Smith, 2004). Nor is much attention given to the curriculum employed, which feeds the mistaken assumption that kids are immediately able to use these tools to tell whatever story they choose (Gutierrez and Nixon, 2008).

Current research and theoretical developments in new media have revealed the ways that young people are using digital tools to represent personal stories and have also been invaluable in revealing the complex interactions between youth and digital media (boyd, 2008; Buckingham, 2009/2008; Livingstone, 2008). These frameworks by themselves, however, were insufficient for analysis of the present study. The level of understanding I sought about Parsons StoryCorps participants' creation of autobiographical stories required that I draw from sociocultural psychological and autobiographical theory to frame how students described their decisions regarding story selection and construction (Olney, 1982).

After the stories were created, I drew upon seminal texts in the fields of cultural theory and discourse analysis to unpack issues such as representation and genre, which are particularly relevant because Parsons StoryCorps participants used media from popular culture to construct personal autobiographical and family biographical stories.

Often, educational technology research and advocacy have fallen into the trap of being "edutopian" visions that uncritically embrace technology in education, or that resist the use of technology to support the curriculum; if the latter, the classroom and the school

are isolated from the larger culture in which they are situated (Cuban, 2004; Dede, 2008). Both perspectives do little to prepare teachers or their students for the critical work they need to engage in to make meaning in a technologized culture. This concluding chapter will offer an overview of findings and contributions of theoretical frameworks towards the goal of applying these frameworks to better capture and further develop young people's work with media and technology.

Before the final sections that summarize findings and suggest recommendations for curriculum, it is essential to acknowledge an important element in the design of this study that resulted in a certain amount of disappointment on Amelia's part in the program overall. The broad research questions focused entirely on the students' experiences with digital storytelling—not Amelia's storytelling practices. But *Sam's Story* needs to be understood as Amelia's story as well as his. Her experience co-constructing this one student's autobiographical story initiated her desire to replicate the experience with other students. Ultimately it was her story with Sam, along with her desire to reach underserved students that led to her failed expectations. For my part, my biases led to the foregrounding of certain stories over others in a way that implied my own compelling interests in particular participants and their narratives, rather than conducting an entirely objective analysis of their abilities to author with digital media. Time spent with the sisters in a one-on-two setting, which resembled Amelia's experience with Sam, particularly impacted my ability to treat all of the Parsons Storycorps participants' digital stories equally.

The findings of this study reveal how important the roles of teacher and any adult are in the youth digital storytelling environment. Whether or not this equation is

acknowledged, the adults are storytellers as much as the children are. Sidelining the teacher and/or facilitator by placing her in the role of curriculum enforcer/bystander will only serve to perpetuate a binary understanding of technology in educational settings: as either a tool for children's liberation or an ominous presence that needs to be ignored. Both of these possibilities abdicate the central educative role teachers play in developing children's critical digital literacies.

Summary of Findings

As detailed in the methodology and findings chapter, multimodal discourse theory was utilized for all data including interviews, observation notes, curriculum artifacts, and participants' digital stories. Each data point was coded according to the three main elements of multimodal design (discursive practices, design, and production) and mapped directly onto the three main research questions. These were:

1) *What are the conditions under which participants made digital stories?* (i.e., discursive practices, after Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001).

- **Recruitment Procedures.** The students who participated were considered to be academically gifted. Amelia had initially designed the project for students who were struggling in school and had been marginalized by the school in a way that left many (predominantly minority boys) frequently facing disciplinary action. Her experience working with Sam on his digital story further increased her interest in using technology and helped her see its potential to provide opportunities for creative expression and access to students who were not able to have such experiences during the school day. However, the requirement of written forms determined the types of students who volunteered and ultimately joined.

These students were not considered to be at-risk but instead were academically successful, which diminished Amelia's enthusiasm for the project.

- **Lack of Innovative Technology Use in School.** Amelia's motivation focused on what she described as the "dismal state of technology use" in Parsons Middle School. She observed that many of her students had little to no technology access during the instructional school day. When students were engaged in digital activities, these were usually for the sake of basic skills, not project based. Amelia felt she had a responsibility to provide access to a technology-rich afterschool program that would build technological skills and literacy and also engage students in a creative process in which they would be authors using digital media. The school conditions that motivated Amelia are similar to conditions that researchers and advocates in the field of education technology have observed and reported for more than 20 years: 1) the resistance of educational institutions to meaningful integration of technology; and 2) the urgent need to help students develop multiliteracies, particularly digital literacy, as they encounter complex media environments in their daily lives.
- **Technology Constraints.** These affected the kinds of stories participants made. For example, participants faced significant obstacles related to security software installed on the Baylor Public Schools computers. Students were blocked from many sites that prevented them from selecting certain images and audio. In addition, glitches in software and our (my and Amelia's) inexperience with particular software requirements often resulted in students' work becoming lost or inaccessible and therefore having to be recreated.

- **Structure of curriculum, Timeline of Project.** Both of these allowed students to create slideshows and experiment with creative use of digital media. However, the relatively short duration line of 10 weeks made it difficult to engage in direct digital literacy activities, such as structured sessions that focused on deconstructing and discussing participants' media choices as they built their stories.

2) *What are the stories that participants choose to tell?* (i.e., design, after Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001.)

- **Co-Construction of Narrative**: Each participant described a process that included in-depth involvement of their family in either choosing a story to tell or in assistance in recalling past events that would be included in the narrative. In addition, Amelia's and my role in structuring activities in project sessions influenced the stories that were selected for this project. This finding confirms both psychological theory that incorporates sociocultural perspectives and literary theory that underscore the role of family and context in the co-construction of all personal narratives.
- **Selecting a Dramatic Story to Tell.** Contrary to other research on digital storytelling projects, in which children's freedom is extolled to tell any story they want, Parsons StoryCorp participants' desire to meet Amelia's expectations influenced the stories that were selected (as described by these authors in their final interviews). Participants described a process whereby they deliberately avoided stories that focused on their interest in certain topics, such as sports, and instead consulted family members about choosing stories that included a more

dramatic narrative. Often participants described this procedure as a result of watching *Sam's Story* during Amelia's recruitment presentation. These stories focused on family stories embedded in larger historical and cultural events (World War II, Civil Rights Movement) and traumatic events (father's abandonment, home break-in, and injury).

- **Master Narratives (positioning) and Genre.** Across story themes, each story created in Parsons StoryCorps highlighted adversity or a traumatic life event that was ultimately overcome. Ashland, Michael, Candace, Michelle, and Katrina structured their stories in the same way: 1) happy beginning, main characters living life happily; 2) event that interrupts this life; 3) struggle and adversity; and 4) challenge overcome and resolved. This pattern fits into a genre that responds to cultural cues about the kinds of stories that are acceptable. These stories conform to master narratives that are conveyed in multiple contexts. In addition, participants tried to follow film genre conventions by choosing cinematic music to accompany image slides. This finding has implications for curricula that are implemented as digital storytelling projects, including that knowledge of genre, such as personal narrative, can enhance and support digital literacy (as per the discussion of the Global Action Project earlier in this chapter). Through the process of deconstruction of genre conventions, students can gain a better understanding of narrative and have more control over their own authorial intent. (It should be noted, however, that findings resulting from investigation of the third research question might challenge the influence of genre structures.)

3) *How Do Digital Media Affect Stories*? (i.e., production and distribution, after Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001).

- **Inserts Multiple and Layered Meaning.** The intermixing of image, audio, and text all serve to create nested meaning (Nelson, 2004). As participants inserted an image, overlaid text, and then matched it with music, multiple messaging resulted. For example, Ashland could have used a picture of dancing couple from the 1940s to signal a cultural period, but the emotional meaning of the image is enhanced by the use of Glenn Miller's music, which provides a more complete rendering of the period. Text was used by participants to direct a potential audience to the particular message being communicated; however, this message was nested inside other meanings carried by image, music, and voice narration. This type of multimedia authoring is now commonplace and participants were comfortable with the incorporation of multiple, simultaneous streams. However, participants needed additional support in making more deliberate choices about how each media piece enhanced or detracted from their central storylines.
- **Cyclical, Non-Linear Storytelling Processes.** Although findings attached to Research Question Two suggests the importance of genre and autobiographical storytelling processes to the structure of digital stories, the use of digital media strongly influenced how Parsons StoryCorps students approached their narratives as they pulled media for their construction. Even stories that had been written beforehand in essay form (the sisters' civil rights project) or storyboarded (Ashland's and Michael's stories), were abandoned once work on the actual digital stories began. As they pulled material from Google searches or recorded

audio, participants worked from the middle, end to beginning, and so forth, without attachment to conventions of linear storytelling.

- **Use of Image.** Students easily appropriated images for self-presentation. When they were unable to draw from personal photographs to construct family archives, access to digital images allowed them to make personal discoveries independently of family dialogues, as Ashland did. Her family never spoke of her grandfather's horrific experience in World War II, but her easy access to archival information through the Internet provided avenues to this story.
- **Youth Participation in Cultural Production.** The structures of new digital media technologies provide a direct avenue for youth participation in cultural production. Each story (with the exception of Candace's) appropriated iconic images of historical events or used images straight from current popular culture. This use seemed to cause some dissatisfaction for the adults involved in the project (Amelia and myself). What we saw as distraction from main narrative, potentially revealed participants' more eclectic aesthetic senses of visual imagery. The use of SpongeBob in Michael's story, for example, signaled a complicated personal memory of a traumatic event; he did not merely plop it in without thought. His use of SpongeBob is an example of bricolage, a process in which texts are re-appropriated to produce new meanings that are detached from their original and intended uses (Levi-Strauss, 1966, cited in Skaar, 2009).
- **Role of Audience.** Throughout the curriculum, Amelia addressed the importance of keeping an audience engaged. The participants all mentioned the influence of digital media, particularly imagery, in ensuring that the "audience" (often

unidentified) would understand the messages of their stories. The assumption by participants was that the use of imagery would clarify meaning in a way that would not occur if they shared their stories in writing only. There is an assumption about "conversational nature" of new media (YouTube, Wikipedia, etc.) but often the curriculum doesn't address how images and sound from popular culture will be read and interpreted. Participants' assumptions were that pictures clarified the meaning, when often a particular audience will have their own relationship or understanding of an image, especially those that are iconic and shared widely through cultural messaging.

The next section briefly reviews the contribution of each theoretical framework to contextualizing these findings, followed by recommendations for curriculum development, teacher education, and further research.

The Contribution of Theoretical Frameworks

Three main conceptual frameworks were incorporated for this study: 1) the use of technology in education and schools and the role of curriculum in developing critical digital literacies; 2) the importance of genre and nature of autobiography and self-presentation through stories; and 3) understanding multimodal discourse analysis and critical theory that help identify the effects of technology on personal storytelling. These frameworks connected directly to research questions that guided this study (the conditions under which Parsons StoryCorps participants told their stories; the nature of the stories that participants selected to tell, and the roles of digital media in their storytelling).

The use of technology in education: Multiliteracy curriculum.

Amelia successfully engaged students in a creative project in which they had opportunities to build digital technology skills in the process of constructing personal digital stories. However, the labor-intensive nature of creating multimedia stories did not permit more critical conversations about the multimedia that participants were using. For example, when students began choosing images for their stories, whole-group discussions could have been facilitated that might have enhanced the students' digital literacy building. The simple activity of providing the rationale for why one image is chosen over another engages young people in thinking about the messages that images convey (Buckingham, 2007; Hall, 1997). Amelia had only enough time to implement a 10-week program, a limitation that did not permit in-depth discussions or extensive story building. Although the first several weeks were dedicated to story construction and storyboarding, after the storytellers started using digital media the earlier activities and discussions were no longer referenced. Students primarily worked on their own and were not engaged in facilitated sharing sessions, although they did pool resources and critique each other's work.

Digital storytelling: The role of master narrative and genre.

The two main narratives used by Parsons StoryCorps participants, personal story connected to historical-cultural narrative and dramatic family story, illustrate how the role of master narrative (MacAdams, 2004; McLean, et al., 2007) and genre (Bakhtin, 1928/2004; Kress, 2003) affect the stories that youth tell. These main narratives also underscore a social theory of text and speech genres that incorporates the social conditions in which digital texts are produced. Because semiotic understandings of genre

are tied to both social conditions and political perceptions, understanding genre conventions is pedagogically necessary. As Kress (2003) stated:

> Insofar as the school sees as its task to provide young people with the resources to act in their societies with maximum potential for autonomous action, the young will need to understand the constraints and limitations as the potential and possibilities for action. It is then inescapable that genre knowledge needs to form part of the curriculum of literate practice. The really important questions arise at a different point: Are genres to be taught as ideal and stable forms? (p. 85)

Understanding genre also reveals the institutional structures and social practices in place within the educational environments that shape texts (in this case, personal digital stories). By extending the notion of literary genre to everyday speech and language, Bakhtin (1928/2004) provided clues as to how the story lines in each of the children's stories (which ranged from the Civil Rights Movement to the Bataan Death march, a father's abandonment to a home invasion) can all carry similar structures and narrative arcs. "The speaker's speech will be manifested primarily in the choice of a particular speech genre. And when the speaker's speech plan with all of its individuality and subjectivity is applied and adapted to a chosen genre, it is shaped and developed within a certain generic form" (p. 102). In the study of master narrative positioning in their research, McLean and Thorne (2003) claimed that

> Vulnerable position narratives were more often rejected than accepted by listeners, who preferred Vulnerability to be laced with concern for others, or to be dismissed altogether in lieu of action-packed plot. Tough and empathetic positions seemed to place fewer burdens on listeners because the teller seemed to have resolved the crisis more successfully. (p. 183)

Amelia's dissatisfaction with the stories resulted from her feeling that the kids were playing it safe by letting her expectations guide them and were creating stories as commemorative gifts for their families. She had hoped for products that were more raw and dramatic. Although it remained unspoken, Amelia had a master narrative structure in

mind when she worked with these students; when their stories did not conform to this structure, she felt that the goals of the program had not been achieved. Had the students delivered more dramatic stories, Amelia might not have identified their academic status as inhibitors to their creativity and honesty. This reaction similar to Seven's story described in Nelson, Hull, and Roche-Smith (2008). In that study, youth were caught between two competing master narratives. One of these narratives was rooted in strength and resolve in the face of adversity, similar to the stories created in Parsons StoryCorps. The university volunteers who assisted in that study, however, wanted to support a story they considered to be closer to Seven's true authorial intent: the difficulties faced by a poor African-American boy raised in foster care in the inner city.

The use of storytelling as a component of self-presentation is supported by empirical psychological research (Fivush, et al., 2003). This body of work has also provided evidence about the effects of family and cultural narratives on the stories that all people choose to tell. The concept of master narrative articulated in the psychological literature revealed that stories are often culturally bound and conform to genre rules. In addition, storytellers change a particular story line based on how they perceive the audience will react. As children produce digital stories, the tendency by adults to present utopian visions of these experiences often frames the work as revolutionary, new, and unique. However, understanding the roles of both master and cultural narratives indicates more about why young people structure stories in a particular way. Considering both master and cultural narratives can also lead to more measured analyses of the potential digital storytelling projects offer to marginalized youth via their involvement with project volunteers and other personnel, such as researchers.

The function of the master narrative is not to judge the (sometimes competing) intents and expectations of adults who assist youth with digital storytelling projects. Instead, the point is simply to acknowledge that autobiographical work always includes complex interactions between storyteller and audience. A transparent acknowledgement of these processes may help in the construction of a curriculum that both accounts for these complexities and helps students develop a deeper understanding of the autobiographical genre. The importation of multiple media from popular culture may increase influence of master narrative and genre on young people's creative work. Attention to the conventions under which chosen media are first created, as well as how images, sound, and text are deployed through media outlets, all enhance stories' multiple meanings because audiences have preexisting relationships with iconic signs of popular culture. Each image of the Civil Rights Movement chosen by Michelle and Katrina, for example, carries one or more master narratives that the sisters integrated into the new narrative they created, whether or not they were aware of every potential meaning.

Understanding autobiographical storytelling.

The findings from this study underscore the co-constructive nature of autobiography. The established understanding that the telling of autobiography is always a collaborative act between author and audience was an essential component in my theoretical framework. If this component had not been included, the influence of both Amelia and the participants' families would have been misunderstood. Too often adults in storytelling projects are seen as censors instead of as essential contributors to how children tell stories both in and out of school (Nelson, et al., 2008). The findings from the present study do not suggest that adults never inhibit or place limitations on the stories

that children tell. Instead, the findings presented here contribute to the conclusion that involving family members in story selection, as many Parsons StoryCorps participants did, is characteristic of autobiographical storytelling practices. Similarly, participants' desires to find dramatic stories to match what they perceived to be Amelia's expectations, based on her presentation of *Sam's Story*, is reflective of the conversational nature of autobiographical work. Another important factor is what happens when expectations and final reflections on the experience of storytelling don't converge. At the completion of the project, Amelia noted:

> So, you know, yeah, I say that it's open and you can make it anything you want to be. And then I hear myself now going "guess she really didn't get it." Well, I'm not so sure that I'm being really honest with myself that it doesn't matter what story that you tell if I'm looking at how to bake chocolate chip cookies and going "No, that's not what I was looking for."
>
> (Personal communication, October 2009)

Amelia's acknowledgement of her dissatisfaction raises two important questions: To what degree are students, even in an informal environment, able to express themselves freely? And how do the adults around such students shape, limit, and constrain storytelling and form expectations that are not easily acknowledged? As participants described their processes, which included their motivations to participate, the conversations they reported having with their families (or, in the sisters' case, the impact of their family roles on how they co-created their grandmother's biography) substantiated theoretical positions that explicated how relationships and context shape the personal storytelling process.

The stories told by the young people in the Parsons StoryCorps afterschool project reinforced the understanding of personal storytelling as a co-construction between the teller and their social world(s). These stories and their co-construction with family

members also demonstrate the validity of new social cognitive theories about the role of personal narratives in the development of self-understanding. Parson StoryCorps participants involved their families and were affected by their perception of Amelia's and my expectations. As their stories embodied major themes of historical and cultural narratives, master narrative and genre were central to how the stories were told and to the overall structure of the narratives.

Effects of the medium: audience, representation, articulation.

Too often, digital media work is locked in a modernist paradigm that treats everything as "new" and different. New media theories, however, often fail to draw from existing frameworks to assess current phenomena. As Buckingham (2005) noted, "New media typically build upon existing forms of children's and youth culture, rather than eclipsing or displacing them, and as such, it makes little sense to discuss 'new' media in isolation from 'older' media" (p. 79). According to Buckingham, people understand new media not as new but as a convergence, a "blurring of boundaries" between older and newer cultural practices. By drawing from theories of autobiographical genre and socio-cultural psychology that centered on personal storytelling, a more nuanced view of children's use of media for self-(re)presentation is made possible. Although the use of Google Images, multimedia software, and audio introduces new dimensions to children's personal stories, existing theoretical perspectives on representation and articulation that have been developed through many decades of the study of popular culture clarify the influence this use might exert upon the shaping of personal narrative (Hall, 1985/1997).

The strategies that Parsons StoryCorps authors appropriated to tell their own stories reveal both the possibilities and the constraints of new technologies for young

people creating their own digital narratives. Educators and curriculum developers can play important roles in making these possibilities and constraints transparent so that digital storytelling can truly be a vehicle for young people to build critical multiliteracies, technology skills, and creative voices. Specifically, if an educator facilitates an image search through Google with a group of students and asks students to dissect both the search terms and the results that the search engine provides, students can begin to understand the processes behind a routine that appears to be automatic, and to ask questions: Who decides what images appear as a result of a search, and what do the answers to that question say about cultural practices? Who is represented in these images? Whose knowledge and view of the world seems to be privileged?

Reading images requires extensive unpacking because they carry ideological messages. Many would contend that unless young people are supported and taught how to read digital information, they are simply being manipulated and are unable to understand what kinds of messages they are sending or receiving. Debord (1975) theorized that the use of imagery is a central strategy of removing people from participating in real life; everything becomes part of the "Spectacle" (p. 279). Because the sisters used Google Images to represent their own family's story, their work can be read as a mediating device that may distance them from their own history.

Authoring personal stories using visual imagery from the Internet seems to suggest that "mediated memories" have become even more mediated. Here too, curriculum can help make children aware of their cultural practices. Projects in which students deconstruct popular media can give them the tools to appropriate this material for their own authorial intent, as opposed to passively incorporating signs from popular

culture without a rationale.

The specific affordances of new media are the prominence of audience and the ability of young people to connect to and create cultural products that were simply not possible a short while ago. Judgments of how media contribute to or distract from a story are subjective, but resolving such ambiguities is exactly where curriculum and educators can make the most important contribution. By creating space for intentional dialogue about the use of different media (how a particular image, piece of music, narration, or text captioning changes, adds to, or subtracts meaning from a particular story) supports young authors' abilities to make deliberate decisions and concurrently builds their digital literacy.

Hall's theory of articulation in the field of communications was invaluable to my ability to expand notions of both critical literacy and media representations in this study. Hall suggested: "It is also possible to think of this process in terms of a structure produced and sustained through the articulation of linked but distinctive moments—production circulation, distribution/consumption, reproduction" (1985, p. 128). Hall emphasized that because the forms of communication are bound by the means with which they were produced, it is only through the discursive formation that circulation can be understood (1985). The transmission of the initial message is irrelevant without consumption, interpretation, and translation into social practices. Using TV and its function as a transmitter of records of historical events as an example, Hall wrote:

> A "raw" historical event cannot, *in that form* (author's emphasis), be transmitted by, say, a television newscast. Events can only be signified within the aural-visual forms of the television discourse. In the moment when a historical event passes under the sign of discourse, it is subject to all the complex formal "rules" by which language signifies. To put it paradoxically, the event must become a story before it can become a communicative event. (p. 129)

In the context of this research, Ashland and the sisters, Michelle and Katrina, recounted not only historical events but also their family members' participation in those events. By using MovieMaker software and choosing images found through Google searches to represent historical events as well as for personal identification, these student creators were governed by the rules of the software and the media bits with which they were authoring. As children work and play in areas of communication, using media that were produced for different and perhaps oppositional purposes underscores the role that curriculum must play in creating possibilities for (re)articulation. Hall's understanding of articulation as the specific connection among cultural practice, ideological purpose, and historical and social context, positions curriculum and the teacher/facilitator in central roles. Without help and guidance, young authors become passive consumers rather than producers.

Implications for Curriculum and Educator Development

Several curriculum frameworks already exist to address these core digital literacies. A primary example is *A Framework for 21st Century Learning*, developed by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills. This framework is focused on specific skill building, but frameworks developed in Great Britain more broadly consider critical media education (Buckingham, 2007). To be useful, such frameworks must incorporate design concepts that address how children read, interpret, and produce media texts. An example of this curriculum can be found at the Global Action Project (G.A.P.) in New York City (illustrated in Figure 16).

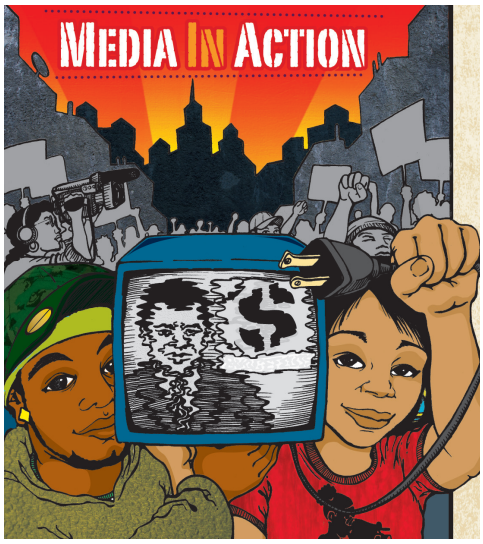


Figure 16. Useful Digital Media Curriculum

The Media in Action curriculum is transparently political and is intended to teach young people how to use media for community organizing. Certainly, this curriculum fits into a particular genre of media use, in which youth-produced media are built around an agenda for social change and political participation. However, the curriculum also engages young people in a study of the genre within which they are going to create their own documentary texts. More formal school-based curricula designed to integrate digital storytelling could incorporate the aspects of this approach that specifically educate students about the structures of the medium in which they are preparing to author. For example, in each G.A.P. module, a particular media practice is deconstructed so that students can understand how each is used to further a narrative (these can include camera angle, framing, use of music, images for advertising, and visual messaging for public health). Technical training with cameras, visual and audio editing software, script development, and so forth, are also offered. After G.A.P participants complete these modules, they begin to play within the genres of moviemaking and digital storytelling, in

a way that may resemble the practices of remix culture (Lessig, 2004), in which young people select existing conventions, pull them apart, and combine them anew in order to author media texts for their own purposes. This curriculum is designed to give students a media literacy foundation that allows them to author with intent. Ideally, they will have an understanding of conventions but not be constrained by them.

Throughout this study I have drawn heavily from multimodal discourse analysis (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001; Kress, 2003). This framework can also begin to identify components of a digital storytelling curriculum that underscores the development of children's critical media literacy skills. The four areas of multimodal analysis (discourse/social practices), design, production, and distribution/audience) can be referenced directly in the curriculum of a project similar to Parsons StoryCorps. As Amelia designs the next phase of this project (already underway) for implementation in both in-school and afterschool environments, she will concentrate on how her expectations and what the students want to create will be openly discussed instead of ignored (under the pretense that the teacher's "story" is irrelevant). The social space in which digital storytelling is situated must be understood as a place where stories are told by all participants—not just the young people but the teacher as well. By beginning with this assumption, the autobiographical genre can be better understood as a co-constructive practice.

The three remaining elements of multimodal discourse (design, production, and audience) can be woven into a program of media education of the type that David Buckingham (2008) considers a basic educational entitlement. Such a program

> involves the rigorous analysis of media texts, in terms of the visual and verbal languages they employ and the representation of the world they make available;

> the study of companies and institutions that produce media and how they seek to reach their target audiences; and the creative production of media in a range of genres and formats. (p. 145)

Digital storytelling provides the potential for young people and educators to play with new media for critical and creative purposes. Clearer understandings of the convergence of and blurring of boundaries between older forms of autobiographical storytelling and the possibilities that new digital technologies afford can redirect "21st century skill building" toward a critical media education that truly develops digital literacy. When children are given opportunities to unpack and deconstruct multimedia texts, and to use digital media tools to create, they become critical consumers and cultural producers. The ability to act in these ways is vital because children's participation in society is often evaluated in terms of their consumer characteristics (Klein, 2001).

In a culture saturated with media, where children (and adults) are on one hand threatened by rampant commercialism while provided the tools for open dialogue and creative expression on the other, media education that incorporates critical reading and design principles is the vehicle through which students can truly develop a relationship with technology that is active, not passive. As political and cultural discourse increasingly occur in digital space, the development of critical and active participants is essential. The classroom, whether during informal creative digital media play or formal instructional time that incorporates digital texts, can provide the environment in which deconstruction and construction of media further the goals of transforming "21st century skills" into meaningful digital literacy development.

Appendix A – Research Protocols

Student Interviews #1 and #2 conducted at Brogden, with access to computer

Student Interview #1 - Computer use at school

How do you use technology in school?

Where?

How often?

Do you use technology with other people at school? With whom?

How did you learn how to do the things you do with computers at school? When?

What are the most important things you need to be able to do with technology in school? Why?

Where else do you use computers and/or the internet? Why?

What kinds of things do you do? With whom? How often?

Computer use at home

Whom do you use the computer with? How do you use it? When do you use it?

Why do you do it together? What is this experience like? What do you talk about?

Do you use the computer together to do your homework? What do you talk about?

Is this helpful to you?

Have you shared what you've made with any member of your family? Who? How?

What is their reaction?

Researcher sits at computer with student and looks at autobiography **(Child doing, and thinking aloud)**

Can you tell me why you decided to participate in the StoryCorps project?

What story did you decide to tell?

Why?

Is this a family story?

How did you want to tell this story? What images did you have in mind?

Did you want to use any sound? Music? Voice narration?

Tour

Can you show me some of the main things you have on your computer related to your autobiography (images, text, audio files)?

Can you please walk me through all of your decisions related to the pieces of media you have chosen? (walk through each piece: audio, text, image).

Why did you decide to put the slides in this order?

What was the main idea that you want to get across to your audience?

Why did you decide to tell this story about yourself (or family member)?

Was this the first time you created an autobiographical story? If not, tell me about

those other projects? How was this one different/similar?

Do you think participation in this project has changed your use of technology in any way?

Has it changed anything about your experiences in school?

If you can remember, how does this product look similar to, or different from, the story you had in your mind in the beginning?

If student has essay and or storyboards that were created prior to technology work began, walk through this material and ask the following:

Can you recall your vision for this project prior to starting work on the computer?

What images came to mind when you thought about this story?

How do you think this changed as a result of the media you have now added?

Tell me about any challenges that you faced creating this autobiography?

Student Interview Protocol #2 - Semi-structured exit interview

Review completed autobiography.

What changes have you made between this version and earlier versions that I have seen?

What was the decision making process that led up to these changes?

Where has the work been presented? At school? At community center? To a wider audience through YouTube?

Why did you decide (or not) to share work?

Review questions from protocol 2 related to technology use.

Has participation in this project changed the way you use technology? Are things at school/home any different after participating in this project? Why/Why not?

Has this affected how you use technology at home?

How do you think technology should be used in school?

How important do you think technology is for your future? What is good about technology? What are some problems with it? What kind of role should it play in your life?

If you could change any aspect of this project what would it have been?

Think-aloud prompt

What I would like you to do is work on this project as you would ordinarily. The only difference is that I am going to sit next to you and record you talking as you think and work. Please do not feel like you have to speak in complete sentences. I only want you to think out loud. For example, if and when you are searching for images, I would like you to talk out loud as you make your decisions about what to copy and paste into your project. This may seem strange but as you select different things to include in your project try and talk through your decision making process. This includes decisions about text if you want, or music, or the use of your own voice. If this gets too difficult, please tell me and we can stop. If you would like, I will show you what I mean (model the process).

Project Observation Protocol

Before technology is introduced:
How does Amelia (project teacher) arrange tables? (Draw diagram.)

How do students decide to arrange themselves (who do they sit with)?

How does Amelia introduce day's activities? What are her prompts (stories they should create, who their audiences are, stories she presents as models)?

How do students seem (engaged, tired, interested, bored, etc.)?

How do students describe the stories they have chosen to build?

How do they storyboard (draw pictures, use text)?

What conversations do they have with each other and with us about the stories they want to tell and create?

After technology is introduced:
What do they do first on computers?

What are search criteria when looking for images?

Do they decide to work alone or do they work with friends?

What does their relationship seem to be with Amelia? What support does she provide?

Self-reflections to be completed after each observation:
What am I doing? What technical support am I providing? How do I help them flesh out stories (if asked)?

Document all informal conversations

StoryCorps Project Teacher Interview Protocols #1 and #2

Project Teacher Interview Protocol (#1)

Background

How many years have you been a teacher? At this school?

What are your teaching responsibilities (grade level and subject areas)?

Technology Background

Can you briefly describe your general use of technology? (For how many years have you been using technology, how comfortable do you feel using technology?)

How often do you use technology for work-related and personal tasks? For what types of things (record keeping, internet research, lesson planning, e-mail to communicate with colleagues)?

Would you consider yourself a technology expert in your school? In what ways do you help other teachers use technology in their lessons? What do other teachers ask for your help with?

Has your approach to using technology in your teaching changed over time? If yes, how? If no, why not?

School and District Vision and Practice

What is your school administration's vision of using technology in school/classroom instruction? How do or don't they support that vision? (Do they provide or require related professional development opportunities, are technology skills and technology integration considered a priority?)

How aligned is the school's vision with the district's vision of technology use? How does the district support the school's vision of technology? Explain.

How is the staff supported to achieve the school's vision for student learning? (Are they provided with tools, time, guidance, progress reports?)

What is the history of the school's approach to technology instruction? Is there a set technology curriculum? How did it develop? Is it required? If not, why not? How is technology addressed?

In what ways/to what degree is the technology initiative in the building part of something that goes beyond this school (community partnerships, parental involvement)?

How does the school at large think about technology and technology integration?

What changes would you make in regard to technology use and integration in the school?

School Technology Infrastructure

Can you briefly describe the technology resources available at your school (approximate number of computers, where you have access, quality of Internet access)?

Can you describe your current role and job responsibilities at the school? How are you currently supporting other teachers' use of technology in their teaching?

Student Skills

What range of technology skills do students tend to come to school with?

How do student technology skills compare to your own? Do you learn from students, or are you the main tech resource?

Besides you, where do students typically go for help with technology (other teachers, other students, family, afterschool program)?

In addition to school, where do you see students acquiring technology skills?

What roles do you see family members playing in student technology learning?

What obstacles do you think students encounter? What makes the task of acquiring technology skills difficult for them?

Technology Teaching and Learning

How do you use technology in your teaching (in place of another lesson, as an add-on, a reward, to enhance or improve an existing lesson)?

How often do you typically do technology-related activities with your students? What types of things do you do with your students (word processing, Internet research, production or multimedia tools)?

How do you collaborate with other teachers around technology use and instruction?

Where and when are students expected to complete technology-related assignments (all in the lab, at home, in their regular classrooms)?

Why do you use technology with your students? How do you think your students benefit from lessons that use technology? Do you think using technology motivates, increases engagement, teaches basic skills, teaches analytic skills?

What vision of teaching and learning does your technology efforts support?

What kind of obstacles have you faced using technology with your students?

What kind of opportunities do you think technology affords your students?

Is there anything else you would like to say about what it means for your students to be "technologically literate"?

Project-related questions

How did you develop this project?

How does it differ from the technology activities that you did in your classroom? How does it differ (or how is it similar to) what your students do with technology in school?

What do you think the students will get out of it?

What were you hoping to get out of it?

What kinds of technology skills do you think this project will help students develop?

How did the pilot project conducted during the 2007–2008 school year affect you as an educator?

What impact did you see on the participating students?

Curriculum development questions

What did you learn as a result of the pilot that contributed to your curriculum decisions? Where did you get material? How did you choose personal story models to show students? How did you decide to balance storytelling with technology skill building?

Project Teacher Interview Protocol #2: Semi-structured Interview

Reflections about project: Probes

Overall, how did the students do? What kinds of stories did they create? What surprised you, if anything about what they accomplished? What did you learn about them that you did not know before?

What changed in their story, in your view, when the technology was introduced (images, audio, text)? Do you think it enhanced their story? If yes, in what way? If no, what was different? How did the technology potentially detract from the story they were trying to tell?

What technology skills did they kids accumulate as part of their participation in the project?

Did you think this project had impact on them beyond gaining skills? On overall relationship with technology (more active relationship as opposed to more consumptive perspective)?

Did it impact their relationships with other students and teachers?

Would you have done anything differently?

Will you do this project again?

Are other teachers interested?

Has participation in this project changed how other adults in the school see the participating students? (Probe: Did it change how teachers perceived students who were struggling academically or socially)?

YOUNG PEOPLE AND TECHNOLOGY

You and Computers

1. Where do you use computers and how often do you use them?

Check the ones that are true for you:

	Never	Once in a while	Every month	Every week	Every day
a) My classroom					
b) School library/media center					
c) School computer lab					
d) An afterschool program in my school					
e) Other computers in the school building					
f) My home					
g) Homes of friends or family					
f) Public library					
h) Community technology center					
i) Afterschool program outside of school (like a Boys and Girls Club)					

……

2. Do you use computers in other places we haven't listed? Tell us!

3. What do you use computers for and how often do you do those things on the computer?

Check the ones that are true for you:

	Never	Once in a while	Every month	Every week	Every day
Related to School					
a) Doing work in class					
b) Doing homework					
c) Communicating with teachers and other students about school work (like by e-mail)					
d) Communicating with friends and/or family (like by e-mail)					
Recreational (ie, having fun)					
e) Working on hobbies (photography, making movies, making music, making websites)					
f) Social networking (facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc.)					
g) Playing games					
h) Communicating with friends and/or family (like by e-mail)					
i) Doing activities with my family					
Related to work					
i) Doing work for my job					

4. Do you use computers for other purposes we haven't listed? Tell us!

5. What kinds of things do you do with computers and how often do you do them?

Check the ones that are true for you:

	Never	Once in a while	Every month	Every week	Every day
a) Research on the Internet					
b) Social networking (Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc.)					
c) E-mail					
d) Chat online					
e) Play games					
f) Use graphics software					
g) Use music software					
h) Use a word processor (like Microsoft Word)					
i) Use presentation software (like PowerPoint)					
j) Use multimedia software (like Kidpix or Photoshop)					
k) Use animation software (like Flash)					
l) Create videos and upload to YouTube					
m) Create web pages					

6. Do you do other things with computers that we haven't listed? Tell us about you.

7. How do you spend your time besides going to school?
Check the ones that are true for you:

❍ I work part-time
❍ I care for relatives (like a sister and/or brother; cousin; grandparents)
❍ I go to an afterschool program

❍ I do sports
❍ I take music classes
❍ I take dance classes
❍ I work with a tutor
❍ I tutor other kids
❍ I'm in an academic enrichment program
❍ Other _____

_____

……

8. What <u>year</u> were you born? _____

……

9. Are you female or male? I'm female I'm male ◯ ◯

……

10. What languages do you speak at home? _____

……

11. Which of these would you say comes the <u>closest</u> to describing your ethnicity?

☐ African American
☐ other African descent
☐ Asian American
☐ Pacific Islander
☐ Native American
☐ Latino (Dominican; Puerto Rican; Cuban; Central or South American)
☐ Caucasian
☐ Other

……

……

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey! If there's anything else that you would like to add, please do so in the space here or on the back.

Research Questions – Corresponding Protocol Questions

- **Within the practice of digital storytelling, what shapes the personal narratives that middle school students create?**

Student Interview Protocol

Can you tell me why you decided to participate in the StoryCorps project?
What story did you decide to tell?
Why?
Is this a family story?
How did you want to tell this story? What images did you have in mind? Did you want to use any sound? Music? Voice narration?

Observation Protocol

How does Amelia introduce day's activities? What are her prompts (stories they should create, who their audience is, stories she presents as models)?

How do they storyboard (draw pictures, use text)?

What conversations do they have with each other and with us about the stories they want to tell and create?

Teacher Interview Protocol #2

Overall, how did the students do? What kinds of stories did they create? What surprised you, if anything about what they accomplished? What did you learn about them that you did not know before?

- **Under what conditions could the activity of digital storytelling amplify students' self-expressions?**

Observation Protocol

How does Amelia introduce day's activities? What are her prompts (stories they should create, who their audience is, stories she presents as models)?

How do students describe the story they have chosen to build?

How do they storyboard (draw pictures, use text)?

What conversations do they have with each other and with us about the stories they want to tell and create?

Teacher Interview Protocol #1

How did you develop this project?

How does it differ from the technology activities that you did in your classroom? How does it differ (or how is it similar to) what your students do with technology in school?

What do you think the students will get out of it?

What were you hoping to get out of it?

What kinds of technology skills do you think this project will help students develop?

How did the pilot project conducted during the 2007–2008 school year affect you as an educator?

What impact did you see on the participating students?

How did you develop the curriculum? What did you learn as a result of the pilot that contributed to your curriculum decisions? Where did you get material? How did you choose personal story models to show students? How did you decide to balance storytelling with technology skill building?

Teacher Interview Protocol #2

Overall, how did the students do? What kinds of stories did they create? What surprised you, if anything about what they accomplished? What did you learn about them that you did not know before?

What changed in their story, in your view, when the technology was introduced (images, audio, text)? Do you think it enhanced their story? If yes, in what way? If no, what was different? How did the technology potentially detract from the story they were trying to tell?

- **What role, if any, does technology play in storytelling and in the ultimate structure and meaning of the story?**

Student Interview Protocol 2
What changes have you made between this version and earlier versions that I have seen? What was the decision making process that led up to these changes?

Observation protocol
What do they do first on computers?

What are their search criteria when looking for images?

Do they decide to work alone or do they work with friends?

What does their relationship seem to be with Amelia? What support does she provide?

- **To what extent do the use of storyboarding and other aspects of the storytelling curriculum influence how the technology is used?**

Student Interview Protocol # 1 (Walk-through with autobiography)

Can you tell me why you decided to participate in the StoryCorps project?

What story did you decide to tell?

Why?

Is this a family story?

How did you want to tell this story? What images did you have in mind? Did you want to use any sound? Music? Voice narration?

Tour
Can you show me some of the main things you have on your computer related to your autobiography (images, text, audio files)?

Can you please walk me through all of your decisions related to the pieces of media you have chosen? (Walk through each piece: audio, text, image.)

If student has essay and/or storyboards that were created prior to technology work

began, walk through this material and ask the following:

Can you recall your vision for this project prior to starting work on the computer?

What images came to mind when you thought about this story?

How do you think this changed as a result of the media you have now added?

Tell me about any challenges that you faced creating this autobiography?

Teacher Observation Protocol

How does Amelia introduce day's activities? What are her prompts (stories they should create, who their audience is, stories she presents as models)?

What do they do first on computers?

What are their search criteria when looking for images?

Do they decide to work alone or do they work with friends?

What does their relationship seem to be with Amelia? What support does she provide?

- **What role does students' previous experience with technology play?**

Student Technology Checklist

Student Interview Protocol #1

Computer use at school

How do you use tech in school?

Where?

How often?

Do you use technology with other people at school? With whom?

How did you learn how to do the things you do with computers at school? When?

What are the most important things you need to be able to do with technology in school? Why?

Where else do you use computers and/or the internet? Why?

What kinds of things do you do? With whom? How often?

Computer use at home

Whom do you use the computer with? How do you use it? When do you use it?

Why do you do it together? What is this experience like? What do you talk about?

Do you use the computer together to do your homework? What do you talk about?

Is this helpful to you?

Have you shared what you've made with any member of your family? Who? How?

What is their reaction?

Student Protocol #2 (Impact on future use)

Has participation in this project changed the way you use technology? Are things at school/home any different after participating in this project? Why or why not?

Has this affected how you use technology at home?

How do you think technology should be used in school?

How important do you think technology is for your future? What is good about technology? What are some problems with it? What kind of role should it play in your life?

Teacher protocol

What range of technology skills do students tend to come to school with?

How do student technology skills compare to your own? Do you learn from students, or are you the main tech resource?

Besides you, where do students typically go for help with technology (other teachers, other students, family, afterschool program)?

In addition to school, where do you see students acquiring technology skills?

What role do you see family members playing in student technology learning?

What obstacles do you think students encounter? What makes the task of acquiring technology skills difficult for them?

Appendix B: Coding Scheme

Code System [434]: Based on multimodal discourse framework (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001): Discourse (social practices)/Design/Production

other tech use [4]

other tools such as cell phones, videocameras, MPS players, etc.

Digital story [1]: Design and Production (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001)

technical issues that impacted story [2]

contributes to a better understanding [4]

connection to memory [11]

elements of written story upon which it is based [2]

archival [2]

sister relationship/impact on story [7] (discourse/ social practices)

evidence of multi-literacy [3]

author control [7]

comparison with written stories [6]

story aligns with how it was imagined [4]

story not aligned with how imagined [4]

not aligned due to tech constraints as well as lack of instruction

connection to family [7] – (discourse/ social practices)

reflections on story meaning/import [6]

comments about information sources [6]

fleshing out contents of story [26]

may or may not be included in actual story.

representation [7] (Design/ Production)

story building [13]

storyboarding

story mapping

see Matt's transcripts re: parent involvement in building of story (both content and tech support)

reflections on visual media [42]

comments about tech employed for story [5]

sharing story [19]

consideration of audience [5]

decisions about media [40]

targeted use to present personal identity [4]

representation [9]

related to content [7]

pickign a picture because it extends story line

aesthetic [3]

Storycorps [0] (discourses/ social practices)

story selection [16]

inspired by Sam's Story [1]

teacher involvement [4]

meaning of story for self [2]

contrast with autobiographical story in LA class [2]

finding story that is dramatic [3]

parental/family involvement in story selection [4]

first time telling story [5]

family story [11]

opportunity for storytelling [2]

build technology skills [4]

motivation to participate [11]

community access [2]

Perceived effects of storycorps [2] (discourses/ social practices)

family reaction [7]

story [1]

comments about story's impact on family members, friends, etc.

tech skill [8]

includes changes in tech activities as a result of participation

Technology use in school [5] (Discourses/ Social Practices)

amount of use [5]

tech would like to use in school [4]

group projects [2]

individual work [3]

access in school [2]

teacher ability to use tech [2]

teacher use [1]

dissatisfaction with use [5]

satisfaction with use [3]

types of activities [22]

home access [5] (Discourses/ Social Practices)

reflections on relationship with tech [1]

using computer with family members [3]

using tech alone [2]

fear of public presence on Internet (facebook, etc.) [5]

parental involvement [4]

how often [2]

types of activities [15]

decision-making about why to engage in certain activities [2]

Sets [0]

Appendix C: Story Summaries

Theme One: Stories about family members and their participation in major historical events. Two stories fit this category.

Ashland told the story of her grandfather who had been a prisoner of war, captured by the Japanese and forced to march in the infamous Bataan Death March in the Philippines. Ashland was unfamiliar with this story before she developed her digital story, which chronicles her grandfather's experience in a brief slideshow that uses music from the era, a dramatic music score, and text slides to provide information both about her grandfather and the march itself.

Michelle and Katrina developed an ambitious multimedia project based on an essay Katrina had written for her eighth grade language arts class that described her grandmother's experiences in the Civil Rights Movement. (The assignment had asked students to interview a family member who had been apart of, or lived through, an important social movement.) The sisters' story spanned from the bus boycotts to Barack Obama's inauguration. This essay initially drew from an interview Katrina conducted with her grandmother who had personally marched with Martin Luther King, Jr. and who for most of her life had been actively involved in political struggles for civil rights. Katrina's teacher brought this essay to Amelia's attention, and both teachers strongly recommended that Katrina participate in Parsons StoryCorps. The sisters used text, music, and images, and also included an interview they conducted with their grandmother on Inauguration Day. This project used a wide range of audio material: contemporary songs, voice-over narration, and audio clips of the interview with their grandmother. The sisters chose not to include personal photographs and used digital photographs found

through Google Images, many of which are iconic, archival footage from the Civil Rights Movement.

Theme Two: A defining family event. Five stories fit this category.

Michael detailed a home invasion when he was four years old. This was a traumatic experience for the family, according to his mother, who had been home alone with Michael and his baby brother. The story that Michael recounts is focused on his mother's bravery as she managed to escape with him and his brother to safety at a neighbor's house. Similarly to the sisters, he worked very hard on the audio components of his digital story. For example, in addition to narration, the story is accompanied by music that was mostly composed by Michael's father, a professional musician. Michael included personal family photographs that were scanned, as well as stock digital images found through Google searches.

Andy also described a burglary, although his story was incomplete by the end of the project. He struggled the most during the course of the workshops. Although Andy is a good student, his home life is extremely chaotic due to his foster child status (he was moved to two different homes during the course of the project). Although he fits the profile of the kind of student that Amelia had hoped to work with through Parsons StoryCorps, she seemed to have little investment in his involvement in the project. In one notable incident, Andy borrowed personal digital audio equipment from Amelia to record an interview, but her iPod was stolen at school due to his carelessness. Amelia was extremely angry and no longer engaged with Andy, either through discipline or by providing support during the construction of his digital story. After this incident, he did manage to record his narration with my assistance and used stock music clips included in

MovieMaker. These clips were overlaid on digital photographs that illustrate the items stolen during the burglary. The decision to share this particular story was somewhat influenced by his relationship with Michael. They talked extensively about their initial stories and Andy was often vague during these conversations. After Michael detailed his story during an early workshop, Andy exclaimed, "That happened to me too! I will also tell the story about that."

Candace's story describes her father's abandonment and its effect on her and her family. This was the only digital story built solely with personal family photographs. It included voice narration chronicling her happy days as a toddler (which she admits she only really remembered through photographs because she has very little memory of her father in the house). It is a brief story that moves from her happy memories as a baby when her dad "gave her anything she wanted" to the struggle her family faced when he left. However, Candace ends the story describing her mother's and older brother's strength and dedication that helped her whole family survive the crisis.

Victoria created an informational slideshow about Honduras that was initially focused on her move to the United States. After the first few sessions, she narrowed the story's focus to the town in Honduras where her grandmother still lives. According to Victoria, she worked closely with Ashland and Betty who supplied help and critiques as she developed her project ideas. After she had difficulty finding information on the Internet about her grandmother's town, Victoria built a less specific project about Honduras that included images from Google and Yahoo, and some text slides with general information about the country. Ultimately she created the project for her family, as she said during one project workshop: "At first I was gonna do it for my grandma, like

where she lived. You know, I didn't find no information. So, I just decided to deal with the whole country. And I just did it like for my family and me since we're from Honduras."

Alice initially decided to focus on her multiple childhood accidents, presented as a narrative. However, a couple of weeks into the project, she developed painful earaches and after talking with her parents she discovered that this was a result of an accident involving her father when she was a toddler. Her final project included images of broken bones, text slides describing an incident, and music that came with the school computer's software.

Theme Three: a personal interest. One story fit this category.

Betty simply wanted to present her favorite activity, which is baking cookies. She initially wanted to develop a cooking show. However, she soon felt that this goal was too ambitious and the available technology instruction could not support this kind of story building. She therefore stuck with a slideshow that included stock images from Google that show the process of baking chocolate chip cookies, step by step.

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