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THE RECIPE OF A DIGITAL STORY:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE RESIDENCY,
“THE RECIPE OF ME”

by

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B.A. Susquehanna University, 2010

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the processes and outcomes of “The Recipe of Me,” a digital storytelling residency whose goals were to foster autonomy and community among disadvantaged youth aged twelve to fifteen living in the Orlando Union Rescue Mission. Using on-site experience and data, I explore the possibilities and advantages digital storytelling offered the students living in this population and consider the challenges of creating digital stories specific to this site. This case study provides a portrait of the residency which outlines the phases, techniques, tools and approaches used to create the digital stories and empower youth to create using multiple literacies. In doing so, I intend to reveal the ways in which digital storytelling encourages community, autonomy, agency, and artistic voice within youth at Orlando Union Rescue Mission.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis considers the practical and theoretical methodologies of the creation of personal, mediatized narratives with homeless youth in Orlando, Florida, which took place in the Fall of 2011. As a case study, it follows the progress of “The Recipe of Me,” a digital storytelling residency created in an effort to examine the role of digital storytelling in fostering confidence, autonomy, and literacy awareness. The project allowed the youth to create as artists, encouraging not only the creation of a work of art, but also the formulation of an artistic voice. As all personal digital stories are intrinsically linked to the person who creates them, no two digital stories can be the same, and for this reason this thesis should not be perceived as a definitive or singular way to create or lead a digital storytelling residency. While it details the structure I used to create and facilitate the residency, it also examines the methodology, procedures, and outcomes of the residency process in an effort to reveal the importance of crafting autonomous selves and hopefully inspire similar residencies and practices.

In chapter one, I provide insight into existing research, methodologies, and frameworks of digital storytelling, which currently shape the processes of digital storytelling residencies. I emphasize the theories of Joe Lambert and the Center for Digital Storytelling, Glynda Hull, and Jason Ohler, each of whose work greatly influenced me and structured the foundations of “The Recipe of Me” residency. A specific focus is placed on understanding new concepts shaping literacy theory today and the creation of autonomy thus elaborating on many of the goals the cooperating organizations, my co-teacher and I hoped to achieve with the residency.

Chapter two analyzes the process the youth used for to create their digital stories and is sectioned by the five major steps: writing, recording, storyboarding, finding images, and construction. Each of these sub-sections scaffolds the process undertaken and enhances the

understanding of how we strived to meet our goals by emphasizing the creation of autonomy and confidence and the methods used to broaden literacy awareness. This chapter relates practical experience from the residency using the words of the students and assessing my own observations as a teaching artist. Further, my observations and practical experiences shape chapter three of this thesis, which reviews the challenges we faced during the process of “The Recipe of Me” residency, keeping an eye toward the process of adapting to and overcoming adversity as it arose.

Chapters four and five examine the final showcase of the youths’ digital stories at the “Premiere Party,” along with the outcomes of the project. I assess results seen in the producing and housing organizations, as well as analyzing my own observations. It is important to note that this reflexive process came after experiencing the digital storytelling process from inception to premiere without prior digital storytelling experience.

Having no prior formal education in video production or literacy theory, I approached the process with an earnestness to learn new methods of creating art and artistic voice, while aiming to honor the residency’s youth and instill in them a sense of confidence, courage, and autonomy. From this experience, I take with me a newfound sense of patience for working with youth and disadvantaged populations, a keener understanding of autonomy and identity creation, a better understanding of the ebb and flows of communication in the classroom as well as in the creation of artistic works, and a new appreciation for literacy, its multiple forms, and the future uses and combinations of said forms. The overall focus of my research centers on the aspects of identity creation, literacy understanding, and the procedures used to create the digital stories during the residency, “The Recipe of Me.” I use this guiding framework to enlighten and effectively study the process and outcomes of the residency experience.

Please note, whenever possible, I have included the original student-composed examples from their recipes as they were written in the writing process. As a final written draft was not needed for the project's completion, spelling, grammar, and writing conventions were not stressed. In the instances where the original written version of the recipe is not available, I have translated the audio.

Useful Words and Phrases Defined

- **Assets**: the acquired elements to be used in video creation; for example: digital still images, text and sound
- **Agency**: following Freire's model, explained in his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, simply stated, the capability and action taken toward the creation and re-creation of one's community and world
- **Autonomy**: an independence from outside influence; in this thesis, specifically relating to identity creation and definition
- **Digital storytelling**: while this can have a wide assortment of meanings, for the purposes of this thesis, *digital storytelling* represents a method of video creation using readily-available software, still images, and personal narratives to produce short, personalized works of art
- **Mediatized stories**: using the precursors defined by Knut Lundby in his book *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories*, stories told using digital media (1)
- **Multimodal**: of or relating to multiple modalities, specifically relating to the many modes of expression and literacy

Project Background

In the summer of 2011, Orlando Repertory Theatre (The REP) enlisted my help in creating and implementing a digital storytelling residency for youth, aged twelve to fifteen, living at the Orlando Union Rescue Mission (O.U.R. Mission). Since 1948, O.U.R. Mission has served Orlando's homeless community by providing them with their immediate physical needs such as food and shelter. The REP, in addition to providing a full season of professional productions for family audiences, offers residencies and workshops for underserved communities in the greater Orlando area throughout the year. Working together, O.U.R. Mission and The REP hoped to create a space where youth could discover their unique artistic voices by creating personal narratives in the form of digital stories to be presented at O.U.R. Mission for family, friends, staff, and residents.

The resulting digital storytelling residency, entitled, "The Recipe of Me," spanned twelve weeks, during which time the youth wrote, recorded, and constructed their own short, expressive, digital stories based on individually created "recipes." In these, students devised recipes of themselves, using both abstract and concrete concepts, symbols, and objects, thus creating an abstract personal record of their identity. In this way, we hoped to use performance to build community, foster autonomy, agency, artistic voice, and promote literacy awareness within the youth as a group and as individuals.

So why digital storytelling? As a family theatre, The REP promotes performative practices to encourage growth and development among youth. At its roots, theatre is a means of storytelling. Digital storytelling is the intersection of the age-old device of storytelling with the new reality of digital media, making it a performative, theatrical study in and of itself. Utilizing multimodal forms of communication including written, oral, and visual literacies, students share

their own, unique voices with their world. This grants them a sense of autonomy in a productive, creative environment within their community where the students can feel liberated and important.

Neither The REP nor I had ever previously constructed or undertaken a digital storytelling residency, yet the art of digital storytelling is gaining major headway in “an age in which technologies for multi-media, multi-modal authorship proliferate” (“At Last” 230). This authorship permeates many layers of literacy and understanding. Today’s cultural assets inherently include digital technologies that allow us to create and communicate within a combination of literacies. Carmen Luke suggests, “Digital technologies have remediated traditional text genres and forms and have generated new modes of textual practice and immediacy” (38). The construction process which ensues in the creation of a digital story enhances literacy learning beyond typical print-based literacies, expanding youth’s understanding of literacy and empowering them to create and perform within many contexts, thereby granting them a sense of agency over their work. This agency, we hoped, would help nurture confidence within the youth. This confidence could then be used to support the confidence and growth of the youths’ peer community and the community in which they lived, fulfilling the many goals we hoped to achieve over the course of the residency.

CHAPTER ONE: METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Origins of Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling is a relatively new phenomenon, but it “emerges from a diverse lineage of cultural production, among which we could include home video, photoessays, [etc.]” (Fletcher and Cambre 114). This lineage allows digital storytelling to have a broad range of meaning, encompassing a wide variety of frameworks ranging from small-scale narratives to large video game productions. In “The Recipe of Me,” students created digital stories on the smallest scale of this spectrum—short videos created using *over-the-counter* technologies, i.e., readily available tools that require no special authority to access them. While scholars debate the boundaries of the term, for this thesis, I am using Nick Couldry’s definition which defines digital storytelling as “the whole range of personal stories now being told in potentially public forms using digital media” (qtd. in Lundby, Ed. 42).

Digital stories of this nature are often very short, only three to five minutes in length, and frequently depict personal narratives. Scholars attribute this framework to the founders of the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS) in California. Theorists Christopher Fletcher and Carolina Cambre elaborate:

In recent years, the “digital story” genre has become associated with a specific style of popular media work developed in California in the early 1990s. A small group of visual artists, designers, performers, and videographers became interested in fostering the production and dissemination of personal stories, marginal histories and counter narratives in the emerging social space of the World Wide Web. Members of this group ultimately formed the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS). (113)

At the helm of the CDS is Joe Lambert, whose definitive *Digital Storytelling Cookbook*

offers those interested in creating a digital story an invaluable wealth of knowledge and tips. Lambert's *Cookbook* offers novices to the digital storytelling field guidelines and advice for creating and working with others to create digital stories in the style set forth by the CDC. As I began my process to develop the curriculum for "The Recipe of Me," I found this text invaluable. In it Lambert not only provides technological help for using both Windows Movie Maker and iMovie (both easily accessible video editors), but he also shares his methods to create different types of stories and how to cultivate them. This was helpful in finalizing the boundaries of the stories I wanted to produce with the youth, as a number of options seemed possible. Lambert explains,

As we are made of water, bone and bio-chemistry, we are made of stories. The students that share their stories in our circles recognize a metamorphosis of sorts, a changing, that makes them feel differently about their lives, their identities. (Cookbook V)

Reading his book as a first time digital storyteller made me want to work with youth in my own region to tell their stories as well. This "how-to" guide became the backbone for my curriculum. That is not to say that each component was taken directly from the work. Lambert notes, "You can take this recipe and adapt it to your own tastes. We encourage you to make the digital story you're hungry for" (V), a compelling metaphor when placed alongside the residency's theme, "The Recipe of Me."

In his more theoretical work, *Capturing Lives, Creating Community*, Lambert identified numerous ligaments within a single digital story that connect layers of semiotic and contextual meaning, juxtaposing literacy modes and creating new meaning in the process. Lambert defines multiple layers that are used to create a single story:

Digital stories contain multiple visual and audio layers. The visual layers are:

- *The composition of a single image*
- *The combination of multiple images within a single frame, either through collage or fading over time*
- *The juxtaposition of a series of images over time*
- *Movement applied to a single image, either by panning or zooming or the juxtaposition of a series of cropped details from the whole image*
- *The use of text on screen in relation to visuals, spoken narration, or sound*

The audio layers are:

- *Recorded voice-over*
- *Recorded voice-over in relation to sound, either music or ambient sound*
- *Music alone or in contrast to another piece of music (44)*

In “The Recipe of Me”, students shaped their digital stories with written text, images, and speech to reveal their unique understanding of themselves and their identity to a wide audience, using multiple modalities.

The above list of layers developed the conceptual framework of “The Recipe of Me.” I worked to give students the tools and technologies they would need to create their own multimodal layers for their recipes. The layering process became a period of “construction” (Lundby 5), where students created visual and verbal representations of self, from their perspective of who they were at the time and how they wanted to be remembered in the future. Participants then fine-tuned and honed their constructions until they appeared as they envisioned and desired. In this definition of themselves, they were able to literally *author* themselves, free from overt external influence. Although a certain amount of pressure was to be expected within the peer group itself, we encouraged originality and honesty in the students’ creations, in an

effort to limit what Paulo Freire calls *prescription*: “the imposition of one individual’s choice upon another” (29). Freire suggests that the “freedom” needed to create autonomy beyond the limitations of prescriptions “must be pursued constantly and responsibly” (29).

The youth in “The Recipe of Me” residency were acutely aware of their prescriptions, although they never used such wording. Youth in our society are often influenced by prescriptions, often by parents, supervisors, elders in the community, and the media. On top of that, the youth participating in our residency lived within a shelter designed to help struggling families regain their grounding in society by assisting with job searches, child care, and finding permanent homes. These economically disadvantaged populations have many prescriptions of their own, giving the youth in the residency multiple prescriptions through which to sort. To help prevent prescriptions from arising in the recipe writing, we instructed students to focus on writing about their emotions and their likes and dislikes. By personalizing the recipes, we hoped to eliminate many outside factors.

Still, the layering process is a formulation of participants’ self-representations and can be seen as a reflection of the students’ views of themselves during the twelve-week process, in which time the students used speech, text and image to fashion quasi-tangible collages of self. Participants were instructed to explore different moments and events in their lives, in addition to everyday events and hobbies. In this way students delved into the inner depths of their multifaceted realities, in an effort to create a personal, narrative work of art in which they describe the many aspects of their understandings of themselves. By defining their *selves* for themselves, the participants can claim complete ownership of their works, an import aspect for a culture that traditionally owns very little. The students’ recipes center on their own lives and identities, emphasizing the key characteristics of their individual personalities they wished to

acknowledge. Just as a cookie recipe involves certain ingredients, each student's recipe contained ingredients, which, from his or her point of view, would be needed to recreate him or herself. Those assisting the students helped them discover their inner storyteller and encouraged the students to explore both the surface facets of their personalities and their deepest understandings of themselves.

Understanding Literacy and Multimodality in a Changing World

With the dawn of the technological revolution, the concept of literacy has morphed and broadened into a much-debated methodology. Since print-based text became the cultural literacy norm centuries ago, it has held fast as the leading form of communication and literacy. In some ways, this thinking still permeates our culture, especially in the educational world where written text is often still recognized as the only relevant and valid form of literacy. Many scholars including Jason Ohler, Glynda Hull, and Donna Alvermann suggest the need to bridge traditional academic literacy modes with those of students' everyday worlds, specifically those found within the technological landscapes of computers, television, and video games.

Technology introduced a wave of modalities that can be considered as literary modes given that they provide a symbol and context for meaning-making. While the use of image and sound are not new modes of meaning-making, technology allows for a wider span of literacy understanding as it redefines our ability to "see" and "read" these literacy modes and the possible combination therein. Both aural and visual literacies have the ability to convey meaning to an audience without the addition of text-based language. This plays a large role in digital storytelling where aural and visual modalities often convey the majority of the work.

In his book *Digital Storytelling in the Classroom: New Media Pathways to Literacy, Learning, and Creativity*, Jason Ohler explains, “Students inhabit a largely oral and digital world” (10) and goes on to suggest

Students today are not the passive media consumers of the past. While they consume their share of TV, they also use the Internet to develop and share original video, photography, music, chatter, and other digital creations. For many, digital is the language they speak, media is the environment in which they feel comfortable, and the multimedia collage is the new global language. (11)

Understanding Ohler’s position and recommendation of digital storytelling was pivotal in my crafting of the residency, “The Recipe of Me.” It afforded me the confidence I needed to build dynamic lesson plans with the hope of realizing Ohler’s same revelation: “Digital stories combine traditional and emerging literacies, engaging otherwise reluctant students in literacy development” (11). While I cannot judge whether or not the students were fully engaged in the process, I did see indicators of engagement such as students’ continual efforts to coalesce and perfect their work, unsolicited peer discussions about recipe-creation, and the frequent return of students to our sessions. To me, this indicates motivation and interest on the part of the students.

The first of these indicators—students’ continual efforts to coalesce and perfect their work—is perhaps the most relevant to the discussion of multimodal literacy, since this effort spanned the entirety of the process. While several students appeared to struggle with one or more modalities, it also appeared as if they mastered others with ease. For example, one student, Antonio, whom I will discuss in-depth in a later chapter, almost withdrew from the residency entirely due to his struggles in the creation of text-based recipe elements. Yet, he excelled in the visual phase, easily intuiting the images he wanted and gaining confidence as he moved into the

computer lab to complete his project. The promise of the next phases helped this student return, as did individualized support moving through problematic literacies. In offering this support and connecting with students in different phases of the digital storytelling process, I believe the project afforded students the chance to effectively explore of multiple modalities of meaning-making.

Glynda Hull corroborates Ohler's thoughts on technology saying, "Ours is an age in which technologies for multi-media, multi-modal authorship proliferate" ("At Last" 230). Hull, whose work in defining the intersections of technology and literacy is prolific, greatly influenced the way I understood and taught multimodalities in digital storytelling. Perhaps the best explanation of her theory I discovered comes from a paper she wrote with colleague Mark Evan Nelson, in which they suggest,

It is possible now to easily integrate words with images, sound, music, and movement to create digital artifacts that do not necessarily privilege linguistic forms of signification but rather that draw on a variety of modalities—speech, writing, image, gesture, and sound—to create different forms of meaning. (1-2)

This idea exemplifies my reasoning behind giving students special instruction and aid when they expressed concern about one or more of the literacy modes. A digital story exists within the artistic combination of assets and modalities that together "create different forms of meaning." It was my hope that by giving the youth a multimodal project, they would engage in the use and combination of multiple literacy forms in ways they perhaps had not previously explored. Indeed we discussed many other projects, which could use the same multimodal ideas, and the youth named several projects—school related and otherwise—that could be completed by using multiple literacies and digital storytelling. By exploring other avenues in which to

create, I hoped to show the youth they could author multimodal works, thereby instilling a sense of agency.

Ola Erstad and Kenneth Silseth, whose chapter in Knut Lundby's *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories* greatly influenced my goals for the project, suggest, "When young people are given the opportunity to blend the informal 'cultural codes' with the more formal ones in their own learning processes, agency might be fostered in a new way, with implications for democratic participation" (214). While my initial goals were not politically inspired as this quote suggests, I finished the residency process with a newfound appreciation for Erstad and Silseth's "implication." The more powerful and confident the youth become authoring in multimodal formats, they stand to gain more influence within their society. This becomes especially important and relevant when considering the large number of multimodal texts which exist in their daily lives, namely via television and the internet.

Yet, multimodality, as a form is far from a recent development. It is important to note that although the technological revolution of the past few decades has created new implications for multimodality and aided its mass consumption, as Ortutay notes, "Composition across modes is nothing new. Even oral storytelling may apply a range of modes in a complex whole, as a composition of tale, ballad, melody and text" (Qtd. in Lundby 8). Ortutay also suggests "the multimodality offered by digitalization" is the more significant impact of digital storytelling (Lundby 8), and Lundby himself further defines this phenomenon by advocating Kress' theories which proposes "through digital technologies multimodality is made 'easy, usual, [and] 'natural'" (8).

So that the students didn't feel overwhelmed by the vocabulary, I didn't use the term multimodality when facilitating the residency. Rather, I focused on each modality as a layer of a

construction. I likened the process to one of building blocks to help the students visualize the creation process. The students and I discussed the ways the individual layers could serve to further define their work (and therefore themselves) by the layering of mirroring or contrasting imagery, sound, and text.

By identifying the relevance of multimodal texts that proliferate the youth's everyday existences, I hoped to capture enthusiasm for the project and encourage the youth to find new avenues in which to participate within their culture. Namely, I wanted to show the students that by authoring their own definitions of themselves using multiple literacies, they could take advantage of various layers of meaning-making to identify and defend their understandings of themselves, a process which they could then remodel to generate and make known their future insights and ideas.

Crafting Agency

The phrase "young, impressionable minds" is common in American society. The thought behind it suggests, younger brains are more malleable. To this point, the phrase is often used when steering a conversation or events away from society-deemed sensitive topics and actions considered unsuitable for children to hear and see. Yet, the truth of the phrase remains relevant regardless of topic. Youth will learn, associate, and make connection based on what they see and hear in their everyday lives. Because of this, close family, peers, and other constant factors in a youth's life are the main influencers of the youth's identity.

Paulo Freire, while writing from political exile noted the differences between the *oppressor* and the *oppressed*. The oppressors create and control societal structures, while the oppressed live within the confines, adhering to the structures put in place by the oppressors. Identity creation is a struggle which I posit can be related to this notion, as society creates

stereotypes and structures for identity depending on gender, sexuality, physical appearance, age, economic status, social status, political status and the like. To fit in with a specific group of people, a person often associates him or herself into those structural constructs of said group. Social theorists, Andrea Carnaghi and Vincent Yzerbyt suggest,

When some social identity is being activated, group members strive to reach a consensus with other members of their group on relevant issues. This process transforms an idiosyncratic perception about the social environmental into a shared and subjectively valid point of view on social reality. (905)

In this case Freire's notion of the oppressed parallel identity creation: "the oppressed [have] internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines" (Freire 29).

In "The Recipe of Me," students often wrote about ideals or the qualities for which they strive, qualities which they recognized in some respect in themselves as they wrote. While some of these qualities are specific to their peer group—for instance, "swag" and "hip-hop"—students often spoke of qualities, which many groups strive to achieve and honor such as "kindness," "love for family," and "self-esteem." The students admitted to me that they struggle to actualize some of these societal ideals and also struggle to resist unattractive qualities such as "anger." The ability to make real the desirable qualities and release the undesirable impact a person's understanding of self-value as related to their ability to align him or herself with societal norms. Scholar John William Somers suggests, "The most fundamental psychological need humans have is to know 'who we are'. Our personal identity is painstakingly built throughout our lives, and embedded in it are our notions of self-worth" (64). In "The Recipe of Me" students were asked to identify those qualities they felt were needed to replicate themselves. Often the students compared traits and likes with each other, appropriating lines when they heard a quality they

wanted to attribute to themselves as well. In this way, students exchanged ideas and created identities that aligned with their peers', identifying the standards of their peer-group.

When I first began the process of "The Recipe of Me," I viewed the creation of the youth's recipes as an individual experience. While I anticipated a peer sharing experience, I expected this to happen after the students had finished their first completed drafts of their recipes. This was the case for some; however, I quickly discovered that within the community of students we had established, the majority of the students were eager to share their recipes during the process of creation with one or two other students. My first revelation that students were sharing and questioning the writing process with a peer was when I overheard one girl say to another girl, "You wrote about anger? I'm angry too." This process seems to be one of affirmation or identification with the peer-group specific to the experience of the youth at O.U.R. Mission. Although the girl had already written anger into her poem and was not appropriating the idea, it became apparent to me in that moment that the students in the room were not only creating an identity of themselves, but a group identity as well, giving voice and definition to their peer-group within their social surroundings.

While students chose many qualities admired by their peers, social groups, and society-at-large, they were still able to create an autobiographical depiction of themselves over which they could claim personal ownership by encouraging reflexivity among the youth. Reflexivity is a process by which the youth explore what and why their actions, reactions and emotions are by turning inward and investing themselves as the subjects. It involves processing in the moment. The students' recipes thus become a definition of themselves as they view themselves during those moments of reflexivity. The students were asked to write about themselves, which automatically invites self-analysis amongst the authors as they consider the traits and desires

which quantify them as unique individuals. It becomes a task of self-presentation, a process that makes an author question how they would like to be presented and often encourages the authors to explore and understand why they would like to be presented in such a way.

By reflexively identifying the components of their individual identities, the students became authors of their own definition of self. Sociologist Paul Heelas, speaking of self-reflexivity, proposes, “People have to turn to their own resources to decide what they value, to organize their priorities, and to make sense of their lives” (qtd. in Adams 513). On the other hand, some theorists argue merely choosing from a collection of traits cannot afford agency since the collection was previously structured outside of the individual. Beverly Skeggs in her research argues the women she studied

...are not the originators of their identities but are located in temporal processes of subjective construction (Bhabha, 1994). There are limitations on how they can be. Within these constraints they deploy many constructive and creative strategies to generate a sense of themselves with value. (162)

Reflexivity does not denounce outside influence. Instead, it proposes a way of understanding that raises awareness to those influences. By inviting reflexivity, the students received the capacity to independently determine their recipe ingredients, thus creating a sense of agency and authorship amongst participants. Glynda Hull suggests, “The ability to render one's world as changeable and oneself as an agent able to direct that change is integrally linked to acts of self-representation through writing, as Freire taught us long ago, and through other semiotic systems” (“At Last” 232). By composing an understanding of self in multiple modalities, students have a greater capacity to understand themselves and the society surrounding them.

Hull furthers her argument by pinpointing digital storytelling as “moments of self-representation [which] are intensely performative...[and] can be especially powerful” (“At Last” 232).

The model I used when exploring the creation process of a digital story, is eloquently displayed in Lundby’s book *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories: Self-representations in New Media*. In their chapter, “Agency in digital storytelling,” authors Ola Erstad and Kenneth Silseth depict a historical understanding of the term agency and apply their research to create a functional definition of agency for digital storytelling. When planning my work with the students, I used their model to create my lesson plans.

Some seek to locate the origin of agency in various relationships between self and structure (Cooren, 2004) or explicate various forms of agency, including the technological, human, and textual (Hardy, 2004), or various dimensions of the agentic process. We interpret the concept of agency as ‘the capacity to make a difference’ (Castor & Cooren, 2006) linked to certain institutional and cultural practices. The concept of agency might be perceived as closely connected to the concept of identity (Hull & Greeno, 2006); in our context it implies a focus on the stand people take when working with, and expressing themselves through, digital storytelling. Through composing these stories they get the opportunity to ‘craft an agentive self’ (Hull and Katz, 2006), where they actively take part in a social construction of their own identity. (216)

The idea of students “constructing their own identities” struck me as one of the most important components in the digital storytelling process. In “The Recipe of Me” I wanted to give the students the chance to symbolically fuse together written, aural, and visual elements that were wholly their own. By asking the students to work individually before reflecting with their peers, I gave the students a chance to envision themselves abstractly and reflexively before comparing

their creations to social groupings, affording the students an agentive approach to their creations of self.

CHAPTER TWO: THE CONSTRUCTION PROCESS

The Writing Process

One's identity is in constant fluctuation. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the self of a teenager. During these years, it is common to constantly define and redefine yourself, your appearance, your attitude, and your beliefs in an effort to discover your true identity. Knowing this, it seemed appropriate to give youth a chance to create a work in which they define themselves for themselves and by themselves. In doing so, we grant the youth a creative outlet to visualize their sense of self, meditate on the person they want to project, and lead them to discover a voice and authority that is utterly theirs. No symbol is more relatable than a recipe when discerning key components that make a whole. Because of this, students were asked to create portraits of their identity in the form of recipes. Their writings became short memoirs of who they envisioned they were during the residency and the person they wanted to project to society.

In writing the recipes, we asked each student to list ingredients, concrete and abstract, which we would need to combine in order to recreate the student. Their ingredients ran the gamut from the tangible (basketballs, colored pencils, and New Smyrna Beach) to the abstract (patience, fear, and "sparkles of love.") Further examples of ingredients used by the students include creation, self-esteem, beauty, sass, attitude, swagg [sic], anger, love for family, care, and silliness [sic]. Optional ingredients, often notated at the end of recipes, give insight into the youth's understanding of their ever-evolving identity. Examples of this phenomenon include: "add 4-5 books, as needed" and "add one cup of awkwardness (optional)."

We encouraged youth to think about the amount each ingredient necessitated and the ways in which the ingredients needed to be put together, and challenged them to write creative cooking

instructions. During the revising period we discussed the ways different ingredients might interact with each other, which caused some students to re-evaluate their ingredients or the amount of their ingredients. We discussed how measurement quantities might affect or overwhelm the recipe and asked students to carefully meditate on the required measurements for each ingredient. A similar conversation took place again during the recording stage, as we asked youth to convey the size of the amount in their voices.

Small quantities of ingredients, such as “a dash of crazy,” “a pinch of hateful,” “a teaspoon of sarcasm,” and “a pinch of procrastination,” provide examples of traits that students want to acknowledge, but downplay; although, some students admitted to less desirable traits in bigger quantities, such as the student who acknowledged needing “eight quarts of clumsiness” in her recipe. For the most part, larger-quantity ingredients were socially-desirable traits or traits that the students hoped to project to their families and friends who would ultimately watch their recipes. Examples of these ingredients include: “1 cup of hope,” “1 cup of creativity,” “three cups of math,” “six cups of joy,” “eight pots of sweetness,” and “two whole bags of humor.”

We also encouraged youth to complete their recipes by detailing the cooking and serving instructions at the end of their recipes. Examples of cooking instructions include, “Shape Like Dough, Do not rush: TAKE TIME!!;” “Do not 4get any ingredients;” “Caution! DO NOT HEAT;” “Just let it sit after mixing;” and “cook at 350 in oven, eight on stove, ten minutes in microwave, fifteen minutes in the toaster, and get a beautiful, talented girl.” Others included the cooking instructions with each ingredient, as in the following recipe:

Sprinkle in one cup of attitude

Beat in five cups of basketball

Boil two cups of family

Steam one and half cups of courage

Freeze gold, silver, ruby colored pencils

Microwave four cups of hip-hop

Bake two cups of football

Add three cups of swimming pool water

Plate ingredients and serve with a side dish of video games.

Serving instructions varied from the most simple, “serve on a plate,” to the instructions for dining company, “serve with family,” “Made to Be shared,” and “serve to haters.”

The writing process was our first task with the youth towards the completion of the recipe. It was helpful to look at this project as a series of steps leading to a whole, and not to overwhelm the students at once with the prospect of the entire digital story. Still, we stressed to the students that their recipes would eventually become their voiceovers for their digital stories. As the first step in the process, the creation of the recipe meant we were starting with perhaps the most familiar and traditional literacy, written text. This served as both an advantage to some students—granting them a familiar path into the project—and an ominous task for others.

In a chapter about digital storytelling in an educational context, Ola Erstad and Kenneth Silseth quote a grade school teacher, identified as Mary, who noted:

For [low-performing] students, there exists an empowering and agentic potential in digital storytelling; they are low-performing in regard to the traditional written assignments, but get the opportunity to express themselves in new ways by using technologies other than the written text. (Qtd. in Lundby, Ed. 220-221)

While we were not able to discuss the students’ academic performance levels with their school teachers, Mary’s insight certainly proved true in the work of some youth.

One such student was Antonio, whose name has been changed for the purposes of this thesis. When Antonio first arrived in our classroom, he was eager to participate in our community building games, but would leave as soon as we announced any writing assignments. His interest in our programming was apparent, but it still took a significant amount of communication to gain his trust. He enjoyed engaging in our community-building games and activities, but was prone to coming and going from the classroom as he desired. Getting him to remain in the classroom was a huge challenge, especially with writing tasks or less energetic activities. Still, we persuaded him to stay on the day we wrote the recipes.

As the other students were finishing their recipes, I noticed Antonio only had two lines written. His paper was pushed aside, and he was playing with his pen. I approached him, and he confided in me that it takes a lot of effort for him to write and that he was concerned because he often spelled words wrong and didn't write "good." I asked him if he had other thoughts for his recipe. He shrugged. I was interested in seeing Antonio succeed, and I felt certain that he was too. As opposed to other days, Antonio hadn't walked out of the classroom when we announced the writing assignment, nor had he left when the assignment became too difficult. He didn't ask for help outright, but his physical presence in the room suggested that he wished to continue with the assignment.

I sat down across from Antonio at the table. Other students continued to finalize and revise their recipes. I encouraged Antonio to re-establish his writing space, reassured him of my confidence in his abilities, and told him I wouldn't leave until he was satisfied with his project. Together we worked to complete his recipe. He would brainstorm ingredients and then ask me how to spell the words. Eventually his recipe was complete.

Over the next few sessions we worked together to finalize the wording of his recipe and to

transfer the words onto his storyboard. It occasionally proved stressful—Antonio was not eager to engage in word-based text activities—but once we completed the written recipe and transferred the words to the storyboard, Antonio’s creativity and excitement grew. He eagerly jumped into crafting images on his storyboard and imagining the overall outcome of his final product. He became so invested in his project that he spent time working on the project outside of the facilitated sessions, and soon moved ahead of his peers on the production timeline.

Ahead of the others, he decided he wanted to make his project even more personalized. He re-envisioned his images so they included photographs of him engaged in his favorite activities. For his ingredient, “two footballs,” he staged a picture where he was in the act of throwing a football. He employed one of the facilitators to help him stage and capture the moment. When he had compiled the photos he wanted, he anxiously went into the computer lab. Within just three sessions, Antonio’s digital story was ready to be published. He had persevered through the difficulties of the written-based text and went above and beyond using other literacy modalities.

For the next few sessions, as the other students worked to construct their digital stories, Antonio would walk in and out of the computer lab. He lamented that he wanted to be there and be involved, but he didn’t have any more work to do on his project. He frequently inquired how much time remained until the other students would be finished so we could progress to the next project. Antonio’s progress in the creation process of his recipe would not have been achieved, had it not engaged in multiple literacies. As he had with previous writing assignments, we can assume he would have abandoned this one too, if the promise of the digital story were not initially exciting. For Antonio, the opportunity to work in media and combine multiple literacies to tell a story, instead of being limited by the word-based text with which he struggled, allowed him to find his own creative voice and create a work in which he was able to define himself and

communicate that definition with a large audience.

Voice Recording

When the students completed the written portion of the digital storytelling process, they then worked with teaching artists who had substantial acting and voice training to learn how to give body and emotion to their words using only their voices. In the two days of vocal work we allotted, we challenged students to highlight operative words from their recipes, distinguish the quantity of ingredients, and speak the ingredients as if they were onomatopoeias, so the words would sound like the objects they represent. In the recording process, students were able to give richness to their recipes through their unique voices, thereby “[capturing] the essence of the narrator, their unique character, and their connection to the lived experience” (Lambert 40). In these textual performances, participants could emphasize certain moments, phrases, or words and further encompass the semantic nature of their writing.

To bring students to this place, we first asked them to subdivide their recipes into the phrases that could stand alone as individual frames. We instructed them to imagine an image for each frame and decide which words they wanted to be placed with each image. The students subdivided their recipe drafts predominantly by ingredient line and noted the most important words in each phrase—the words they wanted to emphasize—and other vocal notes they wanted to make to help them with their verbal performance.

The idea of the voiceover was the only instance of physical performance, and many of the students with whom I worked expressed concerns about performing. Since this residency was borne from a performative ideology, it was vital for me to stress the importance of self-expression through performance. While ultimately the students’ stories would be told through a digital platform, the inclusion of their voice gives a physical body performance to their works. I

strived to ease tensions by reminding the students the recordings were going to be made in advance and no live performance would be asked of them during the “Premiere Party.” For most students, this did ease the discomfort, and while some voiceovers remained rigid, I recalled what Lambert wrote on performance style:

Everyone has a unique style of expressing him or herself that can jump off the page or resonate in a storytelling presentation. Realizing your voice, and making it as rich and textured as you are as a person, takes time and practice. (Cookbook 3)

Unfortunately, due to time constraints, we were not able to give each student the time he or she needed to find the confidence and natural ease of animated storytelling. Because I felt this hindered the creative process, I devoted more time and assistance to creating the confidence and comfort for which this process called before recording in subsequent digital story residencies I led.

While the students and I discussed the performative quality of the voiceover, we also reminded the students of their audience. As with any performance, the audience plays an important role. The students and I brainstormed the people who might attend our party: other youth, parents, family, friends, and the O.U.R. Mission staff. Since these people are significant in the students’ lives, it was important to the students to make a good impression with their digital stories, and it was imperative their words were audible. As the youth were authoring their own definitions of self, they were especially adamant their words reach the audience. As theatrically-trained facilitators, we presented ways in which to accomplish this, emphasizing the importance of enunciation, projection, tempo, and rhythm within the vocal performance. I explained to the students that the audience would appreciate a chance to soak in the information as well as hear the words clearly enunciated in order to grasp your full meaning.

A recording of the student's vocal performances were then edited and formatted for use as the foundation of his or her digital story. I chose to edit their voiceovers at home because the computers in the computer lab were not equipped with sound-editing software. This also provided ample time for the students to focus on the construction and layering of their digital stories when they moved into the computer lab. To edit the works, I listened to numerous versions of the students recording their recipes and pieced together the lines with the most vocal clarity and animation. I aimed to keep the rhythm and flow of the recipes intact and natural. I finalized the process by saving the edited voiceover as an MP3 file, which could be easily transferred and used on the youths' computers. This way the students received their voiceovers as another asset they could access in their digital archives and layer into their digital constructions.

For most students, the audio element of their digital stories ended with their voiceovers. However, some students did alter their vocal track and a few augmented their voiceovers with instrumental underscoring. One student, whom we shall call Bubbles, did not feel comfortable using her raw vocal performance as a part of her final digital stories. Bubbles joined our program at the very beginning, and instead of using her real name, asked us to refer to her as Bubbles, the name her friends used for her. Bubbles defined her own name in our classroom, yet it seemed as though she were constantly hiding, as evidenced by the masking of her given name. When we presented her with her edited voice recording, she wrinkled her nose and stated that she couldn't stand to listen to her own voice. After many attempts to persuade her, I finally brought her into the voice editing process. We sat at my laptop, listening to different sound effects to layer onto her vocal recording. She finally settled on a GarageBand effect called "Telephone Lines." The effect added reverb and echo to her original recording, ultimately

leaving traces of the previous words lingering over the next. In addition, she enhanced her vocal recording with a driving hip-hop beat to underscore her recipe. In this way, she hid her voice under layers of masking.

With the sound augmentations, we may have lost some of the “essence of the narrator,” (Lambert 40) those insights which are brought forth from the vocal pitches and rhythms. However, it is important to note, that in another sense, Bubbles’ altered voiceover enhanced her “essence.” Bubbles’ voice, hidden beneath multiple layers of sound effects, mirrored the Bubbles we saw in our sessions, shy and uncertain, but wanted to be heard. In her piece, Bubbles choose to use only two images of herself—a self-portrait she took in front of a mirror, where the camera blocks the majority of her face, and a photo-edited baby picture. Neither of these showed Bubbles in the entirety of who she was at the time, but neither did they deny key aspects of her personality. If anything, by reading between the layers of Bubbles’ digital recipe, which included the ingredients “1/2 a cup of creation” and “1 tablespoon of fear,” you get an accurate picture of a girl who is still in the process of defining herself. Ironically, the multiple sound layers in Bubbles’ digital story made hers stand out from the rest of the digital recipes, perhaps not keeping her as hidden as she would have liked, but placing her in a new category altogether.

Storyboarding

The storyboard is the first place where students are able to envision the overall appearance of their digital story outside their minds. It asks the students to structure their works into a tangible timeline of activity. The storyboard is a process of two-dimensional pre-planning, where students layer the text of their audio recordings with their envisioned images onto paper in order to discover and shape the flow of their story. Edward Tufte, a noted professor who

researches information design, sums up the challenges of information design on a two-dimensional space, or what he calls “flatland”:

Effective layering of information is often difficult; for every excellent performance, a hundred clunky spectacles arise. An omnipresent, yet subtle, design issue is involved: the various elements collected together on flatland interact, creating non-information patterns and texture simply through their combined presence. (53)

This is a perfect example of the layering process for a storyboard. The elements, with which the students sculpt, interact with one another, even though the interaction is an abstraction of the end product. The final technological interaction of layers, while still ultimately two-dimensional, looks and sounds fundamentally different than the two-dimensional planning the youth created on their paper storyboards.

In “The Recipe of Me” the students had already shaped their digital stories to some extent, when they revised their writing and recorded their audio. With the students’ audio recordings completed, we asked the youth to position the words of their recipe onto the storyboard format. The students then visualized the images they desired to place with each section of their recipe and the method for moving from one image to another. We used a basic storyboard template with three main components:

1. Recipe Text lines: where students wrote the words from their recipe divided into frames
2. Image box: where students could write a description of or draw the picture they wanted to find or take and use for that frame.
3. Transition box: where students envisioned the type of transition or movement to take the audience from one frame to the next

Each of these three components existed within a series of six frames on each sheet of paper. As the students envisioned the images they wanted to use, it was added, either pictorially or in words, to the appropriate text to the storyboard. Many students worked in chronological order throughout their storyboards, but some worked randomly, knowing without question the images they desired for some frames, but deliberating longer over others.

Some students needed special attention to make their storyboard a reality. Let's revisit Antonio, for whom text-based processing made him feel uncomfortable. As I mentioned earlier, Antonio and I spent time working on his storyboard together, but this came from a late attempt to keep Antonio engaged. Having made huge strides in the recipe writing process, I wanted to see if Antonio would continue his work on his own. I gave the storyboard instructions to the class and made my rounds as any teacher would to ensure students were on the correct path and answer questions when they arose. In order to give Antonio a chance to work, I determinedly waited to pass his table until some work time had passed. When I finally did arrive at his table, I noticed he had one or two frames attempted, but was not engaged in the process. When I reached Antonio, he was staring out the large windows hanging over the tables, playing with his pencil.

I sat down across from Antonio, but couldn't get him to explain his reservations about the project. With only a short amount of time before the end of class, I asked Antonio to help me brainstorm avenues that would enable him to finish his storyboard. He shrugged, and so I prodded him further, asking if he was struggling to find the right images in his mind. "No," he said, "I know what I want." At that point I realized the process of copying the words from his recipe into a new format felt like an insurmountable problem to Antonio. From watching his writing process in previous sessions, I knew it was a slow, time-consuming process for Antonio

to formulate letters and words on paper. What I found most intriguing is that in his statement, “I know what I want,” Antonio had already done the storyboarding process. He had created an entire storyboard in his mind, but couldn’t translate that storyboard onto paper. I asked him if he would be willing to draw the pictures for the frames, if I helped him write down the lines from his recipe. He agreed, and I slipped into the seat beside him so we could finish his storyboard together. As this was the last text-based task the digital story process required, it was also the last time I needed to help Antonio, who moved rapidly through the remaining visual and technological components of the process.

As a facilitator, one of the most important and challenging pieces of the storyboarding process, beyond the translation of the visual and text-based layering process, was the collation of all the storyboard pages. It was important to make sure the frames stayed in the order of the recipe and the students’ recipes didn’t get mixed together. We asked students to number their frames and pages, but as many students were so focused on envisioning their images, this step became a low priority for them. A big lesson learned on the first day of the storyboarding process was to bring a stapler to storyboarding classes. We did not have one available during this process, which resulted in an organization process I completed outside of O.U.R. Mission by listening to the student’s audio recordings to recreate their storyboard’s structure. This proved a useful tool for me to have, but as I listened to the recordings, I also realized that by creating them first, I might have limited the student’s creativity in the storyboarding process.

When I designed the project structure for “The Recipe of Me,” I placed the audio recording before the storyboarding. I structured the process in this way because it seemed like a logical process and allowed time for sound editing before we moved our sessions into the computer lab. While I do not think this hindered the process, I do not think it enhanced it either. While many

processes use the storyboard as the outline for the audio recording, I asked students to revise their original writings to use in the recording sessions before completing their storyboards. Students made notes of the words and phrases they felt needed extra emphasis in the margins of their recipe drafts. When the recording was complete, the students copied their final versions onto the storyboard.

Reflecting on this process now, I realize having the students use their storyboard as a process of revision by placing the storyboarding process before the audio recording process could have saved time and been used by the students as another way to visualize the overall arch of the story. I believe this would also open avenues for students to reflect and consider other important components of how to structure their digital story. As Edward Tufte notes, “visual displays of information encourage a diversity of viewer styles and rates of editing, personalizing, reasoning, and understanding” (31). By using the storyboard to organize their thoughts, the students would have to structure not just their spoken words, but also their envisioned images and the flow of visual and aural information. I believe the structural switch would expand the youths’ understanding of the digital story and give them an earlier chance to create the whole, while still enabling them to view the sum of its parts.

Choosing Images

Our goal was to move into the computer lab once all the students completed their storyboard; however, at the end of the first three weeks when we were supposed to move into the lab, many of the students were still working to complete their storyboard. We decided to move into the computer lab anyhow, in the hopes that our project could stay on schedule. O.U.R. Mission has a computer lab that comfortably seated all fifteen participants of the digital storytelling residency. One of my reasons for approving this move into the computer lab was a

lack of awareness on my part. I made two assumptions in which I did not adequately anticipate the methods of the digital storytelling process, having never before experienced the facilitation of this process. First, I assumed the students would continue to work on their storyboards while in the computer lab before beginning their search project on the internet, and second, I assumed that if students did jump ahead to their internet searching, they would envision their desired images in their head before searching.

Neither of these two assumptions proved true. The students had little interest in completing their storyboards once we entered the computer lab. Naively, I didn't persist enough in my urging their completion. My second assumption kept me from adhering to the need of the storyboard. I believe this second assumption was the worse of the two. If I hadn't assumed they would sit down at the computer with ideas in mind, I would have fought harder for the completion of the students' storyboards. However, I imagined, that the students, even if their ideas were not written down on paper, would still be able to envision the images they desired before beginning to search, which is something I would have done. From this I learned it is important not to assume the course of action the students will take and to acknowledge there is more than one way to pursue an assignment.

I don't mean to imply the students were no longer interested in the project at all. It was just that at the time, they, like I, didn't see the value and necessity of the paperwork. Instead, they began their searches using the first words that came to mind, rather than well-planned search words. While this may have led to some fortuitous finds, it also led to a prolonged search process due to a process of trial and error for salient search words. However, not all planned searches went accordingly. Some students who had planned their storyboard meticulously also struggled to find the image they envisioned. In other cases, the image they envisioned no longer

portrayed what they desired. Overall, the students who completed their storyboards before entering the computer lab were more deliberate and quicker in defining and locating the images they desired than those who browsed Facebook, Myspace or image search engines such as Google and Yahoo.

In his book, *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community*, Joe Lambert notes, “Well-chosen images act as mediators between the narrative and the audience...images have the power to reveal something to the audience that words just can't say” (39). For example, the student whose recipe included the warning, “Caution! DO NOT HEAT,” used the well-known caution symbol above the written word “flammable.” The addition of the visual words added more information to the spoken text of the recipe. Taken by itself, the written text, “Caution! DO NOT HEAT,” only tells the audience what not to do. It does not tell us why. The addition of the word “flammable” enhances the audience’s understanding of the line’s meaning. In my opinion, it also invites the audience to gain deeper meaning of the student, whose temperament has a reputation for being somewhat, “flammable.”

Adding new information to the spoken words using visual literacies was a conversation throughout the process of the storyboarding. Lambert suggests many different usages of images to enhance and enlighten the spoken text, which can be categorized as either as “explicit” or “implicit” images. An explicit image, Lambert defines, is “an image that mirrors each of the different points throughout their entire narrative” (*Digital Storytelling*, 38). For the most part, these are the images the students chose: literal representations designed to give the audience additional understanding by connecting the spoken text to an associated image. Lambert’s implicit images are those which “[convey] another layer of meaning” (*Digital Storytelling*, 39) to the spoken text, as was the case with the addition of the word “flammable.” It is interesting to

note, the flammable image included the written words “flammable” and “caution” in addition to the flammable fire symbol. By adding the written word to the image, yet another literacy layer is added to the digital story.

While students made use of both explicit and implicit imagery, they chose explicit images more regularly. Yet, while the images most commonly represented the item described in the recipe, the images did not always adequately represent the demographics of the youth. Many of the students’ images were photographs of people displaying an emotion or accomplishing a task, but students chose these images with no regard for race, ethnicity, and/or age. However, images of people were often gender specific matching the author’s gender. The realities of students’ economic status also failed to be represented with their images. Instead, there seemed to be a focus on the desired status in life, in a way, which was dissimilar to the non-biased approach to race, ethnicity, and age.

Using a combination of personal images and images found on the internet, the students were able to create a series of pictures, which represented and enhanced their recipes. On average, there was one image per ingredient; however, some students did have more ingredients per image and some students had multiple images for one ingredient. One particular image sequence of note spelled the word “special” using block letters in rapid succession to enhance the audience’s visceral understanding of the concept of a food “special,” usually indicating a delicacy or a monetary deal. In addition, some students felt that additional images, usually of themselves, needed to be added to their recipes, but didn’t feel that the pictures matched or enhanced any of the previously written lines. To incorporate these images, the students added them to the end of their digital stories, after the spoken text had ended. The students used their judgment to decide whether to add these additional pictures or not, and none of the students used

the images as a means to elongate their recipes; instead they served as a piece of the recipe, so they did not feel as if they were merely tacked onto the end for good measure.

The thoughtful process with which the students approached the image phase surfaced toward the latter half of the time period allotted in the computer lab. As previously mentioned, some students were not as prepared as I would have hoped when they entered the computer lab, and more time than anticipated was spent browsing the internet and social networking sites like Facebook for images. However, once students became immersed in the construction process, the first part of which is layering the images together sequentially, the youth became more focused and detailed in their image choices. Several students changed images they had previously chosen when they found that those particular images no longer suited their desired outcome. It is possible that the addition of the images enhanced the students own understanding of their recipes, which when reflected upon, as in the process of choosing images, asked the students to re-evaluate their initial decisions.

This process could have taken a very different path during the image collection stage if the technology had been available for the youth to capture their own images instead of those found on the internet. These images would have undoubtedly reflected more of the student's day-to-day life, matching with more of their socio-economic realities. In addition, students would have been able to capture their physical selves displaying emotions and actions, instead of relying on the internet to find such examples. This could have added an even more personal experience to the creation process and given the youth more ownership over their projects as they were now also creating the visuals to work in conjunction with their spoken text.

Additionally, students' definitions of their selves gain another layer of meaning by showing the performativity of their physical bodies as a part of their understanding of self.

Indeed Antonio, whose work I previously discussed, after progressing rapidly beyond his peers asked my co-facilitator to assist him in staging and capturing images in which he showcased himself playing basketball, throwing a football, lifting weights, and playing video games. When watching Antonio's completed digital story, it is possible to imagine Antonio in his living environment performing each activity while listening to his voice as he identifies the activities.

Construction

In the previous subsections I have discussed the individual elements that combine to create a digital story, yet their combination is just as important as the individual assets. Glynda Hull and her colleague, Mark Evan Nelson, observe, "images, written text, music, and so forth each respectively impart certain kinds of meanings more easily and naturally than others" (6), but together, these assets create new, more complex meanings. One of the most important ideas to remember when merging assets, however, is also one of the most difficult to master. When unifying the assets, it is sometimes easy and often appealing to add too much spectacle to the digital story. Spectacle is not the goal of the project, and often muddies the story's clarity. In my work on "The Recipe of Me," I found myself constantly reminding the students to simplify their work in order to allow the story and "text" to stay at the forefront of their projects.

Telling the story digitally was the method by which to produce the story, but the focus needed to be on the story, not the technology. Storytelling exists throughout the entire process of creating a digital story, yet the digitization does not. While I acknowledged the educational value of using technology to help the students become computer literate, it was never intended as one of the main goals as our emphasis was geared toward the creation of a performative showcasing of an agentive self.

During the construction process in the computer lab, as the students worked to interlink

their aural and visual components, I continually reminded the students the technology must work to tell the story, and the story should never be structured to meet the technology. Before beginning the construction process in the computer lab, I anticipated students who would be overwhelmed by the amount of spectacle available to them and also students who would be very eager to incorporate as much spectacle as possible. For this reason I decided to spend one of our first class periods together solely dedicated to the viewing of previously created digital stories. In an effort to showcase effective storytelling, I brought in examples of previous digital storytelling projects from students across the United States whose work I hoped would inspire and clarify the necessity of simplicity in the storytelling process over spectacle. We discussed how although some students had images in their videos which changed color, used music behind their voiceovers, and incorporated film into their works, the story was able to be clearly understood. When the students relayed the story verbally to me after seeing another youth's work, I felt confident they understood the principal and importance of sharing the story first.

Effective storytelling is an essential part of a digital composition. Even though the creations for "The Recipe of Me" were more closely crafted to that of a poem than a story, similar principals apply. I stressed to the students that their imagery and creative voices needed to come across before their digital stories became overwhelmed with spectacle. Additionally, I reminded students that their videos would be shared publicly, thus calling for clarity in their writing, organization, and construction. The entirety of the construction process needed to relate to the core story the author was attempting to tell. Ohler suggests imparting this goal to the students is the "special responsibility" of the facilitators (6).

One way I discovered to maintain an understandable through-line of the students' digital stories was to encourage the youth to define the relationship of the words to the images as they

began creating their final videos using Window's Movie Maker. While this specific process began when the youth first visualized their desired images, it came to light again as they finalized their image choices. By asking the youth to consider the connection between image and text, I wanted the youth to define the relationship for themselves. This would facilitate their understanding of the relationship between multiple modalities, their relationship to the overall story, and the ways in which an audience might interpret the combination.

Tufte suggests, "The point is to find design strategies that reveal detail and complexity—rather than to fault the data for an excess of complication" (53). I hoped to prevent this "excess of complication" within the works of the youth by constantly reminding the youth to streamline their projects and highlight the overarching story. For the most part, the students were successful with this task. Complications arose when students tried to add too much spectacle to their videos. The most telling sign of these complications are the two videos whose words and images do not align due to the use of image transitions without regard for the specificity of their timing.

Another common struggle for digital storytelling facilitators is to convey to the students the importance of simplification and limitations within the story, so the story streamlines in one direction rather than diverging into tangents. Since "The Recipe of Me" required students to create very brief works more closely related to poems than stories, this struggle was not one I encountered. However, throughout my research—both before the project and in retrospect—I have ascertained this to be a common problem in the construction process that contributes to one of the biggest elements of editing in the construction phase. Lambert further defines this situation saying, "A complete telling of every bit of detail is never really "complete," and in the process we begin editing, choosing which details we feel are the most necessary to include in order to construct meaning" (*Digital Storytelling* 42).

My approach when envisioning the products created during “The Recipe of Me” strived to place storytelling as the main goal. Because I struggled to find success with this in the storyboarding phase, I sought to reconnect the stories during the construction phase. Certainly editing takes place in the construction process regardless of the efficiency of a storyboard, but I do believe it would have been lessened had I further prepared the students during the storyboarding process. Students with completed and detailed storyboards were able to envision the whole story and how it flowed, allowing them to move more rapidly through the composition process than the students who did not complete their storyboards.

Many of these students spent significant time exploring the transitions available to them in Windows Movie Maker. The students who had previously developed their storyboards displayed a more intuitive selection process than those who did not finish their outlines. While I believe this can be attributed to the work they did on their storyboards, it is not impossible to surmise that their efficiency with the ultimate look and flow of their digital stories could be the result of the time they gained by pre-planning images. Unlike the youth who spent hours searching for the perfect images, these students had more time to develop their digital stories in the computer lab, assessing timelines, flow, and movement of their works.

The process of construction is one that required the students to imagine themselves as builders as well as authors. Their assets—sound, image, and text—become the building blocks of their digital stories, which the youth use to stack and remold to shape their stories. Many times these building blocks would remain in place for a period of time before being replaced or repositioned. Sometimes these elements, most often imagery, would be revised before they were imported into the editing software. Other times assets would remain in place until the final edit. With this ability to construct and deconstruct the students became agents of their own work,

assembling the components until they created the desired effect and told the desired story.

As Ohler says, “the media production requires students to synthesize imagination, creativity, research, and critical thinking in order to translate their ideas into some form of media-based expression” (11). It is in this process where I saw students truly begin to take ownership over the outcome of their digital stories. Hull and Katz suggest, “digital stories, through their combination of image, music, sound, and text, seem to engage young communicators and to provide an especially potent way to perform a self” (72), and in taking ownership of works that urge student-created definitions of themselves, the students constructed pieces which speak to each of them individually and express their understanding of themselves to a wide audience.

CHAPTER THREE: CHALLENGES

As with many new programs, we faced challenges along the journey of this residency. The combination of these challenges ultimately resulted in the postponement of the final showcase. The original time constraints—which my co-facilitator and I had previously approved with the community engagement coordinator at The REP and the staff at O.U.R. Mission—proved to be too difficult to master. A lack of technological awareness and literacy on the part of the students and the inconsistency of student attendance pushed the time frame of our process, which drastically slowed when we entered the construction and layering phase inside the computer lab. While certain students struggled with individual literacies beforehand, when we entered the computer lab, the students' questions quickly overwhelmed the amount of computer staff and teaching artists available.

The original timeframe of the residency was to span over a period of eight weeks, during which time we met with the youth for an hour and a half twice a week. Having never completed a project like this, we were estimating the time we would need to make the project happen. We estimated that the writing process (writing, revising, peer reviews), recording, and storyboarding could be completed within six, one and a half hour sessions spanning three weeks. The remaining ten sessions, again each lasting an hour and a half and spanning over five weeks, would be used working in O.U.R. Mission's computer lab, to find digital images and construct digital stories by layering sound and image into a video using Window's Movie Maker.

During the first phase of the residency, in which students wrote, revised and reviewed their recipes, recorded their voiceovers, and created their storyboards, we were able to maintain our three-week schedule, despite the troubles created by students whose print-based literacy skills threatened to exclude them from our residency. After three weeks—six hour and a half

sessions—with the youth writing, editing, rewriting, recording, and storyboarding, we moved into the computer lab for our meetings, in order to begin working on the layering and construction process. It was in the computer lab where we began to experience situations, which threatened the project’s completion within the confines of the pre-imposed time structure.

Another hindrance to our timeframe was a lack of commitment on the part of the students. The youth with whom we were working were not accustomed to maintaining commitments to lengthy projects, rather their focus was in the present, particularly on determining ways to meet the immediate needs of their day to day life: food, water, shelter, etc, as is common with economically disadvantaged populations. Furthermore, the youths’ parents often did not appreciate the time the students needed to complete their projects within the residency’s hours, resulting in the removal of students from sessions before their end. An additional immediate need was the time needed to complete homework, a factor that varied from week to week, inhibiting participants from joining one week, but not the next. These factors attributed to the lack of consistency in youth attendance.

When the residency began, the students were not previously familiar with digital-storytelling, a process that involved numerous steps and lasted over a three-month period. Many youth who attended our residency sessions were unfamiliar with the nature and time requirements of these steps. In addition, the youth were battling other commitments—mostly school and family related obligations and needs—and many had missed one or multiple residency sessions, sometimes sequentially. The inconsistency of returning students hampered the flow of the creation process. This resulted in students who were at varying levels of progress toward the completion of their digital stories, and ultimately, only thirteen of the fifteen participants completed their digital recipes.

Our first indication that our time frame would need to be revised came during the first phase of the recipe process, specifically the storyboarding period. Some students were ready and eager to move into the construction phase; others had not even begun their storyboard. With five weeks to go in the residency, we decided to provide the students additional time, if they required it, to complete their storyboards. We worked with the students to understand the layout of the storyboard and how they could use it to incorporate their ideas. However, since we were already seated in the computer lab, students working on their storyboards were working at desks that also held computers, creating additional distractions and pulling focus away from the task of storyboarding. Having never completed a project like this before, I did not realize how significant the storyboarding process was to the projects timely completion.

When the students began using the internet to search for pictures, instead of visualizing the images they wanted to find beforehand and building their storyboard, it became apparent they were less deliberate in the searches than were those youth who had already completed their storyboard. Students who had not completed the storyboard searched for images using broad terms such as “love” and “beauty” rather than searching for specific images and symbols such as a heart or an idol who they found beautiful. Because of the extra time spent searching, many of the students were pushed even further behind schedule. We had hoped the students would find their images within an hour, but in actuality it took an average of two sessions (three hours) for the youth to find their images. For some students it took upwards of four class sessions, a total of six hours.

Additionally, many of the youth were not well-versed in the technology we used to complete the digital stories. The majority of them were familiar with the search engine Google, and several of them had accounts with the social networking site Facebook. These were the two

primary sources from which the students found images. The students knew how to find the images, yet many of them did not know how to save the image once they found the one they wanted. This was not something for which my teaching partners and I had prepared. We had assumed these students, all in middle school, would be equipped with basic computer skills. Over the course of the fourth and fifth week of the residency, we spent many hours teaching youth how to use the technology in O.U.R. Mission's computer lab.

We began with the basics, exploring the internet in a safe and decisive manner, creating folders, manipulating the mouse, right clicking to copy and save the necessary images. We discussed saving high-resolution images and images without watermarks; however, neither of these seemed to deter youth from an image once they had chosen it. With the fifth week coming to a close and only five sessions to go before our initial date of sharing, we were concerned we wouldn't make our deadline, and so we decided to extend our deadline by two weeks. During the next two weeks, weeks six and seven of the residency, when we were originally scheduled to start concluding the final edits of our digital stories, we explored the basics of piloting Window's Movie Maker. Our goal was to create a grounded understanding of the program within the residency group, which would empower the youth to help their peers when asked. None of the students had ever used Window's Movie Maker before, and the layout took several days and significant adult communication for the youth to master. As students began to comprehend the program, they worked to add images, text, and sound to their digital stories.

Perhaps the most difficult part for the youth to achieve was the syncing process. Having spent so much time planning the story in their head and on paper, the youth were concerned with the way the words, text, and voiceover ultimately matched together. Indeed, this was one of the key factors for The REP in determining completion for showcasing. A few youth required extra

attention towards the end of our sessions. My co-teacher and I spent extra hours working with the youth in the computer lab after our class sessions, in order to facilitate the completion of their projects. Once we were committed to the youth, and they had committed to us, it was important for us to honor their efforts. At some point along the way, these last students had fallen behind. The remaining students were finalizing the synchronicity of their films. To be fair, timing the perfection of the interdependent relationships between the images, sounds, and transitions is perhaps one of the most difficult tools of the editing software to master.

Challenges arose not only from the students' inexperience with the process, but from mine as well. When I began this process, I was unaware of what to expect. During this process, I learned invaluable lessons about working with youth to create digital stories. For example, in subsequent digital storytelling residencies I created, I allowed for more time and was more adamant about the storyboarding process. I now require students to complete a working version of a storyboard before they enter the lab to search for or capture their images. In addition, to generate interest in and commitment to the process, the digital storytelling residency I created immediately following this process opened with a schedule specifying the structure of the creation process, in hopes that participants would visualize and comprehend the forthcoming tasks.

To help students understand the importance of the time structures in place for the project, I made an effort to seek them out before each session, looking for them in the communal spaces of O.U.R. Mission and asking their peers and guardians for their assistance. I called students by name and reminded them how important their voices are to their community. At the start of each session, I prepared the students for the night's activities and goals, and at the end of each session, I let students know what they could expect to happen in the following session.

In order to help students manage the technological processes in this residency, my co-teacher and I afforded each student the time he or she needed to complete the project within the confines of our extended time frame. We worked with students to learn to move files from one location to another, teaching them the basics of the computer mouse, creating and using folders, and the process of downloading and uploading the required assets. In addition, we helped students become more computer literate, specifically with the technology of Window's Movie Maker, a program that comes pre-installed on most Windows-based computers. In this program, we helped students to collect, arrange, and organize assets, create a linear display of their images in conjunction with their voiceovers, and decide on and incorporate transitions before teaching them the ways to lengthen and shorten the images so they would align with the correct text. For many of these tasks, I first performed the activity myself and then encouraged the student to follow suit. Some students were eager to learn on their own, and in these circumstances, I let the student control the mouse while instructing them in the correct sequence of movements and actions.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE FINAL GATHERING

In *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories: Self-representations in New Media*, author Knut Lundby suggests, “‘Storytelling’ implies the shaping of the story as well as the sharing of it with others afterwards” (3). The sharing of the students’ digital stories allowed for the opportunity to build community between the students and O.U.R. Missions, their housing community which consists of their parents, peers, other family members, and organization staff. In addition, the “Premiere Party” gave an opportunity to promote community and strengthen the partnership between O.U.R. Mission and The REP.

The showcase at O.U.R. Mission had nearly one hundred O.U.R. Mission residents, staff, and friends in attendance to support the students and their digital creations. The “Premiere Party” offered a chance to expand the building of community from the one developed within the residency classroom, to also include the housing organization of O.U.R. Mission, namely the bond connecting the students and their families, peers, and the O.U.R. Mission staff, within our shared community. In order to invite the audience into our community and let them experience more of our class, we began the party with a warm-up game. As this was the game we used every day to warm-up our classroom, the youth felt it appropriate to also warm-up the auditorium prior to presenting their digital stories. For the audience, it gave insight into our class sessions, which vastly differed from the showcase that followed.

Showcasing is an important culminating piece. The unspoken rules of the audience, the call for openness and respect, created a rare opportunity for the youth to present their own perspectives, thoughts, and definitions in front of the most influential people in their lives. Psychologists Andrea Carnaghi and Vincent Y. Yzerbyt note, “the confrontation with an audience provides people with an ideal opportunity not only to think of themselves as group

members but also to secure acknowledgement of their depersonalized self-views from others” (905). The residency afforded the students an opportunity to present their original artwork defining themselves and their artistic voice, granting them autonomy within their community and freeing them from external definitions and expectations. The showcase of the students’ digital presentations of self-combined with an audience of their family and peers created an “intricate intertextual dynamic” where students “perform their own histories’, thereby discovering more about and placing themselves within the community’s identity [involving] a productive collision of the personal, the community and context” (Somers 65). The intertextual dynamic in regards to “The Recipe of Me” connects the text of the audiences’ histories, the audiences’ and performers’ previously conceived notions about self, and the students’ understanding of themselves. As Paulo Freire notes, “The oppressed, [have] internalized the image of the oppressor....Freedom would require them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy” (29). Certainly it would be impossible to remove all internalized expectations from the youth over the course of twelve weeks, yet the student-created works were definitions of and by the individual, not created for them by another individual.

By showcasing their original works, the residency youth defined themselves not only for themselves, but also for their family, peers, and community members. By creating DVDs of the students’ works, the students created lasting memories of themselves as they understood themselves in the period of the residency’s twelve weeks. Each student received a copy of this DVD with his/her digital story as well as the stories of his/her peers. The DVD is a treatise of the youth’s perspectives of who they were at the time and how they wanted to be remembered. As Carnaghi and Yzerbyt note, “a number of studies indicate that people are not only concerned with their individual reputation but also care about how others see their social self” (905). The

DVD provides the youth with lasting members of their peers in their peers' own words, making it possible for a student's peer's reputation to outlast his or her association with said peer. In addition, the physical possession of the DVD made the youth's ownership of their projects tangible and complete. They now own their stories and can re-watch or share it as they desire, giving them an ownership over their autonomous creations.

Each student received a DVD along with a certificate of completion immediately following the premiere of the students' digital stories. The students were called by name and asked to come to the stage to receive the items. The audience was delightfully responsive as each student walked to the stage. A camera-person waited to take pictures of each student before the student returned to his or her seat. This processional individualized the achievements of the group by acknowledging each student for his or her efforts throughout the residency.

A reception followed the premiere of the students' digital stories and the certificate ceremony, which solidified the connection between residency participants and the O.U.R. Mission audience through continued dialogue about their projects, process, and final showcase. This collective performance experience provided insight into the community and gave the youth, who traditionally have less voice within the community, a chance to be seen, heard, and understood in their own terms, thereby giving autonomy to participating youth inside their families, peer groups, and the O.U.R. Mission family. In this way, the project invited the audience to become active members of the audience in order to engage in discussion and critique with the residency's youth.

The shift from a conventional passive audience behavior—what scholar Stephanie E. Pitts calls “Listening Behavior” and acknowledges is “designed to promote an absence of movement or noise during performance” (257)—to an engaged and active audience was mirrored with a

location shift from the auditorium to the reception lounge. This shift happened collectively, with the artists and audience changing venues at the same time, thus creating a neutral and equal ground for participation. The audience and the youth entered the next phase of the evening ready to discuss and reflect upon their process and the final product. While we did not specify that the audience was to interact and engage in conversation about the project with youth following the showcase, an unspoken assumption was in place as the audience consisted of the students' family members, peers, and mentors, each of who has a relationship and interest in the students' work and voice.

Additionally, the "Premiere Party" strengthened the relationship between The REP, who produced the "The Recipe of Me" and "Premiere Party," to O.U.R. Mission, who hosted them, by bringing together several influential staff members from both organizations for a chance to gather and celebrate the youth of Orlando. During the "Premiere Party" members of both organizations spoke to the importance of the community's youth and the power they bear. The success of this initial residency between the two organizations has led to the continuation of both digital and performance-based residencies.

CHAPTER FIVE: MOVING FORWARD AND CONCLUSIONS

For weeks after the showcase, youth at the Mission approached my colleagues and me about upcoming residencies and the age requirements for involvement. After “The Recipe of Me” residency, there was significant interest for future residencies from the youth at O.U.R. Mission, and The REP and O.U.R. Mission were happy to oblige, leading to numerous collaborations between the organizations which continue to this day. Much of this is indebted to generous funding from Disney’s Helping Kids Shine program, which more than doubled its funding to the Arts and Character Training program at The REP after receiving copies of the digital stories the youth created in my residency. With their generous contributions, I was able to satisfy the youths’ desire and continue facilitating residencies.

Because of the success of “The Recipe of Me,” I choose to facilitate another digital storytelling residency. The residency built upon the partnership I helped establish between O.U.R. Mission and The REP and served high school students at the Mission. It centered on the theme, “The Truth About Me...” This second digital storytelling residency allowed me to re-examine the processes and procedures I used to teach and influence the youth with whom I worked. Reflecting on the residency process of “The Recipe of Me,” I discovered ways to make better use of the time I spent instructing and the practical time needed to create. By further structuring the procedure and redefining my priorities within the creation process, namely placing the storyboarding process before the audio recording, I was able to create a more concise, exact, and cumulative process. To better establish the expectations and the timeline of I provided the high-school students a schedule of the lessons at the first gathering. The students proved highly responsive to the schedule, perhaps feeling empowered with the knowledge of the days goals ahead of time. During the residency, the students were more committed to attending

all lessons and remained enthusiastically goal-oriented, adhering to the lessons' deadlines established in the schedule.

I instructed the youth to spend more time envisioning the information of their digital stories as a whole, giving more emphasis to the storytelling process with in both the storyboarding phase and the construction process in the computer lab. I used terminology to outline the storytelling process that remained largely the same throughout both processes, so as to allow the students to make connections between the two processes and providing them a clearer understanding of how the two work towards a common goal. Using the storyboarding process as the initial place to envision the entirety of the information in their digital stories helped the youth to define a clearer and more designed path of creation. Their work was more intentional and ambitious, compared with the previous residency, once they visualized their final project. This showed in their determination in the computer lab and their desire for near perfection for their completed digital stories.

In an effort to give more autonomy to the youth created pieces in “The Truth About Me...,” we allowed the students to use digital cameras to capture their own images. We spent time working on the visual composition of an image, breaking from the construction of information as a whole, to envision each aspect of information in itself. In doing so, this second digital storytelling residency saw a greater emphasis on the students' personal life and a more accurate socio-economic depiction of the students' cultures. By instructing the youth to envision the whole and asking them to structure the components of the whole, the students took more ownership over the process and became more detailed and methodological in their work.

As an educator, my work on “The Recipe of Me” taught me new ways to create using multimedia and multimodal literacies and instruct the combination of said literacies. I learned to

work with students of differing literacy aptitudes in ways that inspired them to continue searching for their artistic voice, highlighted their personal fortes, and challenged them to strengthen other literacy modes. I faced instructional difficulties that led me to re-envision the methodologies by which I facilitate my class sessions and layout of the residency lesson plans. Additionally I faced population challenges, which I overcame by redesigning the necessary length of the residency. At the “Premiere Party” the students encouraged me to return to O.U.R. Mission to facilitate further residencies with them. They thanked me for my time and for teaching them how to create a digital story. Student parents and O.U.R. Mission staff also shared with me enthusiastic remarks for my work with their students. Their kind words encouraged my love for a process, which at times was stressful, but wholly inspirational, and reminded me of why I began the program.

APPENDIX: IRB OUTCOME LETTER



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901, 407-882-2012 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

From : **UCF Institutional Review Board #1
FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To : **Amanda S. Hill**

Date : **January 07, 2013**

Dear Researcher:

On 1/7/2013 the IRB determined that the following proposed activity is not human research as defined by DHHS regulations at 45 CFR 46 or FDA regulations at 21 CFR 50/56:

Type of Review: Not Human Research Determination
Project Title: The Recipe of Me
Investigator: Amanda S. Hill
IRB ID: SBE-13-09038
Funding Agency:
Grant Title:
Research ID: N/A

University of Central Florida IRB review and approval is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are to be made and there are questions about whether these activities are research involving human subjects, please contact the IRB office to discuss the proposed changes.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 01/07/2013 11:03:28 AM EST

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Joanne Muratori'.

IRB Coordinator

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