Fostering Boys’ Creativity through Digital Storytelling

“It’s a paradise inside a cage”

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Abstract

There are two motivations driving creativity as a 21st century essential skill in national curricula around the world. Firstly, fostering creativity improves students’ self-esteem, motivation and achievement and aids them in being confident and independent learners. Secondly, the ability to solve problems and challenges enables young learners to develop the skills to enter a flexible workforce to compete in a global market. Effective teaching, therefore, requires developing the creative thinking skills of students, despite curricula that focus on more traditional skills in literacy and numeracy. In the context of this conundrum, and within a unit of work, Civics and Citizenship, I integrated digital storytelling technologies into the learning and teaching strategies in my classroom in the hope that these technologies would enhance the boys’ creativity.

Within their unit of work, the boys had to develop short stories based on their study of Civics and Citizenship. Using an action research approach, findings indicated a marked change in the boys’ ability to focus collaboratively, wrestle with problems, take risks and recreate, re-invent and re-vision solutions. Overall, the boys reported being absorbed by the tasks and were prepared to step outside their comfort zone. As one boy put it, “using digital technologies to help me be creative is like paradise .... in a cage!”

Research Question

How can teaching and learning with digital technologies foster boys’ creative writing?

Research Rationale

As learning spaces become more flexible, the opportunity for educators to consider pedagogy that taps into boys’ love of competition, activity, collaborative learning and technology offers teachers a real chance to foster and develop critical and creative capacities in their students. Even if the curriculum remains stringent, digital technologies have the capacity to open pathways which may allow boys to work together, to compete,
to be active and ultimately, to create. At The King’s School, we are given considerable freedom to integrate digital technologies into learning and teaching tasks.

Whilst technology integration facilitates the development of a number of multimodal skills, our focus is seldom on the creativity factor. Encouraging boys to take risks with their ideas, to share their ideas and to offer peer feedback on shared learning, are areas that ask the boys to step out of their comfort zone, welcome failure and take risks. It takes time, however, to get comfortable with a style of learning in which the teacher takes on the role of a meddler-in-the-middle (McWilliam, 2002) while the students design their learning environment and create products that are not prescriptive, but open-ended. I wanted to trial integrating digital technologies to facilitate my Year 7 boys’ creative writing, whilst at the same time apply an action research lens to investigate if indeed such technologies would help unleash the creative verve in my students. With the help of colleagues in the school library who assisted me in learning how to use a number of digital technologies that might promote creative writing, the writing of stories took on a very different focus for the boys.

**Literature Review**

Schools need to become visionary and nurture creativity and innovation to grapple with the contemporary conundrum; eloquently phrased by Ezio Manzini (in Hannon, 2009), “The dream of wellbeing dreamt, until now by a few, is not sustainable for all” (p. 2). World leaders advocate that the pressures of globalization, distressed environments, new technologies, world recession and trends of international demographics are demanding a shift in pedagogy and one of those shifts is founded on the concept of creativity. It is no surprise, therefore, that creativity has become a buzzword and is now central in emerging national curricula around the world. In Australia, Doecke and McClenaghan (2011) support this notion, stating, “Within the discursive world of the Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, the word [creativity] has meaning as one of seven ‘general capabilities’ that boys need in order to succeed in life and work in the twenty-first century” (p. 39). Meanwhile, Ohler (2007) affirms that “success in the digital age, both personal and professional, lies in understanding that digital technologies provide one of the greatest imagination creativity amplifiers humankind has ever designed” (p. 13). In terms of a general capability, this marriage of digital technologies to the unleashing of humankind’s imagination is a powerful concept.
Creativity refers to the processes of deep thinking, crafting, revising and refining, just as much as it relates to originality or inspiration. Glaser (in Lehrer, 2012) explains that creativity requires a great deal of work and that:

> There’s no such thing as a creative type… as if creative people can just show up and make stuff up. It’s about taking an idea in your head and transforming that idea into something real. And that’s always going to be a long and difficult process (p. 69).

Greenfield (2004) predicted that “education will be transformed entirely into an experience rather than a thought process” (p. 64), indicating that learning will become more focused on creative input and output. Indeed, this transformation has arrived in effective classrooms and asks our students to develop grit and persistence in making sense of problems and refining new ideas.

Powers (2010) reflects that creative geniuses have been celebrated for an unusual capacity to be grasped by some idea or mission and for their inner engagement that drives them to pursue a vision more deeply, undaunted by obstacles. This creative genius is about the capacity to develop depth in our thinking and its commensurate quality of awareness, feeling, or understanding that comes when we truly engage with some aspect of our life experience. Can we foster in our classrooms this general capability, creativity, which has as its centre deep thought? Csikszentmihalyi (1990) considers this state of deep thought as being in harmony with one’s metacognitive capacities and comments that to “experience harmony is to experience the flowing deep state of conscious concentration; thoughts, intentions, feelings, and all the senses are focused on the same goal” (p. 41). Lehrer (2012) acknowledges that there is something frightening about the flow experience; however, the unnerving experience is extremely valuable as a source of creativity (p. 89). Thus, those who experience flow emerge stronger and more confident because their energy has been invested successfully.

How can we as teachers facilitate learning environments in which deep thought and flow flourish when students today have immediate access to mobile technology and anytime, anywhere access – where distraction is real and social media a norm? Carr (2010) warns that “our ability to engage in meditative thinking might become a victim of the ‘frenzied-ness of technology’ as dozens of tasks jostle and compete for our attention on the screen, and both software and hardware are designed to make it easy to hop around” (p. 222).
Similarly, Greenfield (2003) raises concerns for the enveloping and consuming relationship between digital technology and humanity as the catalyst for degeneration of the isolated, private inner world of the individual imagination. Even as recently as the early part of 2013, Google announced the progress of its Glass Project, an innovation that could well see us habituate an information world 24/7 without needing to tap in, dial up, or key in.

According to Grafman (in Carr, 2010), the constant shifting of our attention when we are online may make our brains more nimble when it comes to multitasking, but improving our ability to multitask actually hampers our ability to think deeply and creatively. Grafman also makes the case that “the more you multitask, the less deliberative you become; the less able to think and reason out a problem” (p. 140), and argues that you are more likely to rely on conventional ideas and solutions rather than challenging them with original lines of thought. Powers (2010) agrees and relates this to the notion that boys in their learning need some distance from the highly connected world in private reflection for lovely, pure and clear flow of thoughts (p. 116). A seemingly lone wolf on boys and how they learn, Powers is a proponent of balance and believes that, in order to foster that creative muscle, technologies must be balanced with time being disconnected and in quiet reflection and wonder.

Proponents of the use of digital technologies to engage boys in the learning process believe that these technologies offer boys exciting new modes of expression: short films or games, digital stories, audio/ videotaped performances, illustrated picture books or multimodal interpretations of literature. In terms of boys and learning, this is the ideal climate in which to engage and motivate them in learning tasks (Reichert & Hawley, 2010). How does a teacher of English find this balance, especially when the world of digital technologies offers so much for fostering creativity, yet is so ubiquitous that such technologies also become distractors in the learning environment? Can digital technologies, for example, help foster greater creativity in student writing?

Creative writing is a norm for English classes. Creative compositions illuminate the students’ understanding and knowledge of the ways in which language mediates experience and social relationships. Could digital technologies—tools that enable interconnections of texts and graphics for exploration—germinate the creative seed and bring to life the creative genius in boys? Ohler (2007), an advocate of digital storytelling, argues that such technologies can turn a boy’s pedestrian response to an idea into “an
activity that allows [him] to blend design, creativity, thoughtful expression, and technology skills” (p. 13), compelling thinking out of the box while focusing on goals that we, as humans, value. He cautions though, that technology tends to magnify both excellent qualities of students’ work as well as the flaws, and notes, “If you don’t have a good story to tell, the technology just makes it more obvious” (Ohler, 2007, p. 6). Again, it appears a question of balance. If we want a positive change in the way in which boys approach creative writing, we need to allow them to use the digital tools of their choice to generate ideas, but also ensure their learning environment provides opportunity for time being disconnected and in quiet reflection and wonder (Powers, 2010).

Taking note of the need to balance the learning environment so that digital technologies become meaningful as tools in which young boys can feel free to express their creative verve, Curwood and Gibbons (2010) comment that, “young people can employ digital tools to tell a story of their lived experiences by using multiple modes to express a certain kind of self” (p. 69). Employing digital technologies to help young boys feel comfortable in writing imaginatively will also enable them to connect texts to graphics, since, as Norfleet James (2007) notes, boys tend to be very visual learners. It is Reichert and Hawley (2010), however, who present rich research on the role of digital technologies in providing visual stimulus and enabling boys to be producers of their knowledge that is important here.

If we want boys to engage in imaginative writing, whilst at the same time have access to tools to help scaffold that writing, then we must provide learning opportunities that resonate with their life world. Gannon (2011) observes, “Young writers take up these resources [digital technologies] not as ‘products’ like books but textual ‘assets’ for playing with and generating new textual artifacts” (p. 187). These meaning-making opportunities blossom in boys’ social contexts, and involve talking and listening, interacting, collaborating and working towards agreed goals. Curwood and Gibbons suggest that, “[digital] tools allow students to express their identities, reflect on their lives, and share their stories with an audience… consequently, narrative is both an exploration and an expression of identity” (p. 60). That is, digital technologies allow boys to create their worlds using tools they can manipulate, explore with and become lost in deep thought as they challenge themselves to write creatively. Hence, the question to ponder is, “How can learning and teaching with digital technologies foster boys’ creative writing?”

Research Context and Participants
The King’s School students come from diverse ethnic backgrounds and represent a blend of rural and urban cultures. Integrating learning technologies into effective pedagogy is a recent priority at The King’s School. As part of our integration of the ICT strategic planning process, our school introduced a one-to-one laptop program into Year 9 in 2011, and launched an interactive community portal in 2012. Over one hundred classrooms are fitted with interactive whiteboards combined with Notebook and Smart Response technologies. My role as a teacher and my relationship with the students continue to change as I learn to appreciate the power of technology in motivating and fostering creativity in boys.

The students of my Year 7 English class, who were deemed to have below-average knowledge and skills in English based on their performances in national standardized tests and preliminary assessments at The King’s School, were invited to participate in the study. Parents were sent an Information Sheet about the research and asked to sign a form agreeing for their son to participate. All 22 boys returned signed Permission to Participate forms. The permission forms guaranteed that no boy would be disadvantaged by participation, all would have equal class time to use the digital technologies offered, and none would be identified in any subsequent publishing of the research. Each boy was also given the choice to withdraw and to remove any data (comments, products, survey responses) if he so desired at any stage of the research.

Methodology

“The practice of education is a thoughtful and creative endeavor. The tool of action research is a flexible and pliable tool toward that end” (Sagor, p. xii). Flexibility and pliability are two characteristics that fit well into today’s classroom as teachers in tune with their practice reflect, consider strategies, observe, adjust, observe and reflect once more, ensuring that their practice fits the students they are teaching, and not the other way around. Action research, therefore, “offers a way to interrogate accepted practices with a view to turning normal practice into exceptional practice” (Lipu, Williamson, & Loyd, p. 75). As an informed way to improve my teaching practice, action research drives a dialogue between my action and the intentions them (Waters-Adams, 2006). That is, research develops the teacher’s understanding and knowledge of emerging theories of best practice, and the action fosters intervention in the classroom. Because action research is a naturalistic inquiry process, student voice becomes an important element, highlighting the interpretive value of qualitative data that allows detailed descriptions of
behaviour/ attitude change (Stringer, 2004). This is exactly what I was seeking.

**The action – intervention**

Ultimately there are three spirals of rigorous action research in this project: the impact of digital technologies on teacher creativity, the impact of digital technologies on student creativity, the impact of digital technologies on storytelling and multi-modal literacy. Initially, I monitored and observed the boys as they embarked on their secondary school experience of studying English. I gave the participants an open-ended survey (providing objective and subjective responses) to establish baseline attitudes and knowledge about creativity. In addition, my analysis of students’ responses to their early coursework aided me in assessing how creatively they approached set activities. I reflected upon the ideas of digital technologies and began planning changes to my teaching practice with this cohort.

Creativity requires three general components: expertise, motivation and creative thinking skills. I sought relevant digital tools that fostered creative approaches to each of the five-step processes of storytelling: 1) The interactive whiteboard was used to introduce sound files, film trailers and images; serving to exercise the creative muscle, awaken their ideas. 2) Software programs such as Story Mapping, Visual Thesaurus and Inspiration helped the boys shape and plan the story they wished to tell. 3) Students were introduced to and given some ‘play time’ with a range of digital publishing options such as Prezi, Voicethread, Storybird, Story Scrapbook, Generator and Comic Life before selecting their own digital tools to compose their digital story. 4) An online forum was created, within the school’s collaborative learning platform, where students could peer review and share their reflections on using these technologies. 5) After reading peer reviews and editing their work the boys published and presented their digital stories in class.

**Data Collection Techniques**

Creativity is not measurable per se. However, elements of creativity can be measured to some degree, such as deep thinking, crafting, revising and refining; collaborative endeavour, degree of decision-making, and possibly risk-taking, fulfilment, absorption (flow), and originality. To measure such elements, qualitative data needs to be gathered from the boys to reveal, for example, to what extent they felt challenged, or nervous, or committed to the development of the story. I had a number of techniques to choose from and subsequently used convergent interviewing, a focus group, questionnaires (which also
gave me some quantitative data), online forum and blog entries, a sample of student products, film recordings during classroom work, field notes and a teacher reflection journal.

As the boys’ teacher, I recognised that my qualitative data analysis and interpretation might be influenced by my judgments, biases, and values. Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman (1987) consider such openness, the teacher’s perspectives to be professionally voiced, to be useful and positive. It is vital to involve the practitioner in searching for insights into teaching and learning. It is also important that perspectives offered by the teacher are authentic and trustworthy. Creswell (1994), therefore, outlines the importance of triangulation and receiving feedback from the participants about the accuracy of the teacher’s interpretations. I triangulated, or found convergence among, the different sources of information as categories emerged within the data to ensure interpretations were reliable and valid. Furthermore, as themes emerged I asked probing questions of the participants for verification. In the process of data analysis, I also sought professional guidance from my IBSC action-research team leader and mentors at The King’s School.

**Data Analysis Techniques**

This study drew on thematic approaches to data analysis. As Williamson & Bow (2002) note, there are “no strict rules which have to be followed in qualitative analysis” (p. 293), and so I iteratively interpreted and coded the data as it was collected and transcribed. The most practical way to bring order, structure and meaning to the qualitative data was to colour code text as similar themes began to emerge. Saldana (2013) describes a code in qualitative data analysis as a symbol assigned to each individual datum in order to identify emerging patterns, categories and theories. This type of interpretational analysis allowed me to organize data in an intuitive manner, and I added categories as they arose within the data. I transcribed students’ comments under materializing sub-categories. As Saldana (2013) notes, some categories may be refined into sub-categories as participants’ processes, emotions and values become apparent and the data progresses towards “the thematic, conceptual and theoretical” (p. 12). The analysis of visual data, including student work, was documented through textual narratives and analytic memos in a teaching journal. According to Saldana (2013) researcher reflections are valuable datum; “thinking critically about what you are doing and why, confronting and often challenging your own assumptions, and recognizing the extent to which your thoughts, actions and decisions shape how you research and what you see” (p. 42). Throughout the study, I
added analytic memos and reflections from my teaching journal to the emerging categories.

The following threads emerged from my data analysis: grit, grappling and wrestling; collaborative, cooperative and playful; absorption, immersion and flow; re-creation, re-inventing and re-envisioning; unrealism, dreamy and escapism; extra-ordinary and elevated capacity for creative expression; and finally, self-actualization, fulfillment and confidence.

**Findings and Discussion**

Unpacking creativity into five elements for my analysis, I was able to triangulate my findings into the seven categories that provide a framework for the following discussion.

1. **Grit, Grappling and Wrestling**

The participants were aware that being creative is hard work. Participant A suggested, “It can be difficult to extend an idea, even to create them.” Observing students constructing digital short stories in the classroom offered insight into how students grapple with both technology and creative tasks. Frustration was evident as Participant J exclaimed, “The technology hates me” and Participant A reflected, “It can get a bit messy at times.” The final reflective survey that participants completed demonstrated the challenges that working in a creative mode brought, both emotionally and practically. Participant S commented, “Sometimes it feels that my brain is a factory in overdrive, but producing nothing. But if I do get something that is worthy, the small snowball of momentum starts rolling until it reaches the perfect size. Starting the snowball is the hardest thing.”

Participant M openly recognised how digital technologies can assist in the realization and publication of ideas and noted, “being creative is hard to get it from your head out onto paper. Digital technology helps you to show your work creatively, find a creative word and creatively express yourself.” Although the boys embraced digital technology, they also recognised that their greatest obstacles to overcome were technology-related issues. There were times when programs did not save, software did not function in the way that it should, and the school’s servers created difficulties. Participant V explained, “We are having a failure inside. The Internet is down and we cannot log into our network.” I found my role in the classroom was to encourage perseverance and offer suggestions as students developed the will to play, learn and master a range of programs. Basically, the boys found working with digital technologies paradoxical—both an enabler and an inhibitor.
This paradox was expressed beautifully by Participant S, who commented that “Digital technology limits you to its boundaries; it’s a paradise inside a cage. You can enhance what you have with the paradise, [but] you’re still limited to the cage.”

2. Collaborative, cooperative and playful

In time the boys began to see collaboration as something beyond working together and sought inspiration from each other. While Participant K shared, “Most of the time my friends inspire me”, Participant I reflected, “When I see people my age being creative in many different ways I want to be like them.” They found themselves sharing ideas on the topic beyond the structure of the classroom, which indicated that they were engaged in their creative writing. Participant M explained, “I spent about an hour a day [outside class] doing work - probably more talking to [my classmates] about how theirs was going.” Blended learning arose naturally and at one stage Participant N mastered features of programs quickly and emerged as our class technical support.

“Play” and “fun” were words that 19 of the 23 participants repeatedly used in their reflection on what it was like to be creative, beautifully articulated by Participant D: “Creativity feels like there are many ideas and you want to use them all. It feels fun and it makes you want to express in any way. It feels like there are so many ideas, which are wonderful.” Participant A commented in class, “The ideas are endless... there are so many things you can choose from and so many ideas that just create magic.” The classroom atmosphere was invigorating as the students were simultaneously wrestling with tasks or were in a state of rapture.

3. Absorption, immersion and flow

Participants were alert. There were moments when students were very quiet and very still: deep in thought or listening attentively. In contrast, on other occasions the classroom was very busy and loud with spontaneous questioning and discussion. When Participant J arrived to class on a ‘blue card’, a school formality designed to support students who are struggling in areas of organisation and completing homework, or are distracted, I registered surprise. This student was one of my most enthusiastic and committed students who sent draft work ahead of schedule and regularly met with me in his own time. Evidently Participant J was immersed in our creative task to the detriment of his other studies, a clear example of being in Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) sense of flow. 13 of the 23 participants identified and articulated an experience of immersion when creating their
digital stories. Boys who found themselves immersed while creating signalled that they felt an almost slowing of the passage of time or as Participant U explained, “Being creative means to be more colourful and more imaginative. When I’m creative it feels like there is endless time in the world.” “Flow” was a word repeatedly used by students to explain the feeling of being creative. Participant W shared that being creative “is a fun process that you should relish because it flows out of your mind. I feel focused and attentive. A way to describe it would be all my thoughts like water flowing out of my mind through my hands and eventually coming out and it doesn’t stop until I cannot think anymore.” Similarly Participant L commented, “When being creative you feel like whatever you’re doing is flowing and going the right way.”

Not only were students absorbed or immersed in their own creative processes, but they were enchanted by what their peers were producing. How lovely to hear Participant I praise his classmates, “The class presentations were very interesting and entertaining because I loved to see how anyone can be a good citizen, no matter what their profession” and witness Participant W’s frustration that “it was annoying not seeing everyone’s full short story. Some of them were really well done.” Clearly, the boys were absorbed when working on their digitally developed creative tasks and engrossed when viewing the creative responses of others.

4. Re-creation, re-inventing and re-envisioning

Students’ perception of what creativity is changed as they found inspiration from a wide variety of sources. Participant S revealed:

“I thought creativity was your idea - original. Now I think it is basically what I need to create my story - look at everything then grab what you might think... now I think [creativity] can be original but it can be taking what is already out there and mixing them so that it becomes your own. Being creative means think of your own recipe and form your own product or take several elements from several things and mash, blend and mix them so that the final product is unrecognisable.”

Students began to question and challenge their own work. The digital technologies gave many of the boys the confidence to try and try again. Participant S felt confident to change and change again – he was not fixed on one outcome but prepared to use the power of the digital tools he chose. “I just filtered it again and again... Change this and
take out that, arrange it better... I think about it and do I like it? or Would it work? or would it capture it?” When asked about the ‘filtering’ process, he explained that it was hard work but that it “feels good when I do that [filtering] because it is getting renewed and occasionally I feel like it’s been in a shell for a few years.” Students really discovered their untapped potential in the flexibility of this digital playground. Many participants, however, indicated that their best insights about their storytelling project occurred away from the computer and at quieter times of their day, subconsciously thinking about their digital short stories. Participant L reflected, “Later in the day when I didn’t have as much going on I sorta thought about it more. That’s before prep when we are just relaxing and don’t have to do anything.” This endorses Powers (2010) contention that boys need escape from the constant stimulation and fast track of the digital world and perhaps tells us that being creative is not always about being stimulated to think and do.

5. Unrealism, dreaminess and escapism

Students developed an appreciation that being creative can be an emotional experience and a form of escapism. Participant V suggested, “Feelings are the tracks to creativity. A way to get out of troubles.” This form of escapism led to some participants feeling a sense of relief when engaged in problem-solving and other creative endeavours. Participant L said, “It feels like you are not thinking about it because it’s out there... it’s like carrying a load but you have taken off a bit... taken off a bit of distraction... and just letting it out there. It’s a relief.” The experience of purging was surreal for students. “When I’m being creative I feel more artistic and a bit more wild,” admitted Participant U. The process of creativity offered students limitless possibilities that fostered a refreshingly courageous approach to activities. Participant G shared, “Being creative feels like you are taken to an imaginary world where you can do anything. Relaxation. I am basically taken to another world where everything is possible. I feel calm and free as I can create whatever I like.”

So many of the boys shared similar ideas and were empowered by their escape into a dreamy unreality as they created their digital stories.
6. Extra-ordinary and elevated capacities for creative expression

Students identified creative work as being distinctive and praiseworthy. According to Participant W, “being creative is to make something fascinating, interesting and impactful.” Students began to respond to surveys and questionnaires in an extra-ordinary manner. They were approaching a range of tasks in increasingly innovative and risk-taking ways. For example, Participant V’s response to Q4 is illustrated in Figure 1.

![Participant V’s response](image)

Figure 1: Participant V’s response

Participant E added, “Being creative is when you use whatever ideas you can come up with and put them all into a bigger idea.” By weaving threads together creatively, the boys recognised that their outputs grew in stature.

7. Self-actualization, fulfilment and confidence

The students definitely enjoyed the challenge of using digital technologies to create a short story. Participant S commented, “It felt good again to actually crank my brain into creative writing again, but this time, with a touch of enjoyment as well. The last time I did something like that was in Year 3.” Students discovered that being creative required them to extend themselves whilst offering an opportunity to reveal themselves. The combination of the two left them with a feeling of pride. Participant J reflected, “To be creative is to expand your range of ideas and original thoughts. It feels individual and your own person... I feel good and smart and original.” Students were left feeling fulfilled and yearning to share their creative ideas and creative work with others as Participant M suggested, “Being creative is to express things that come into your mind so everyone else can see. It feels like I’m showing everyone my imagination.” Being creative left students feeling empowered. Participant A suggested, “It [being creative] makes me feel powerful and that I’m in charge.” Thus it would seem that boys who experience ever-increasing development of their creative capacity also develop confidence with their learning.
Hard work, being absorbed in the moment, playfulness, taking chances, being able to change and mix and mash and re-design, becoming competent and confident, knowing that you can share and re-imagine with a peer, and explore the quiet around the creative moment were experienced and commented upon by the boys as they immersed themselves in their digital storytelling. There were moments of wisdom when comments were heard such as those from Participants F and Q respectively: “Digital technology doesn’t help you be creative. It just helps present creativity” and “Digital technology doesn’t help because the story was created by using my mind.” These were sage comments from two boys who understood that their mind was the creator of ideas and dreams and imaginings and that digital technology helped to move those ponderings into the realm of the conscious world.

The quality of the boys’ stories exploring ‘Good Citizenship’ was profound. The digital stories explored a range of good citizens in very unique ways. Their multi-modal compositions were focused and engaging; the presentation of stories often evoking laughter or teary-eyes. Two of the boys’ stories became popular amongst the staff at The King’s School because of their ‘wow’ factor.

**Conclusion**

Digital technologies are enablers for student risk-taking, decision-making, and self-actualization. Creative storytelling through digital technologies motivated students as they were ignited by the ‘fun’ and ‘playful’ experience. Students indicated they had an experience of absorption and flow, and it was rewarding to see them collaboratively solve problems. The project enabled students to develop and showcase their digital literacy skills and their understanding of key concepts in creative ways, with students demonstrating that their particular expertise served to both inspire and spark competition amongst their peers. A blended-learning approach to teaching and learning emerged in the classroom as those students, who were wrestling with an idea or computer program, were often mentored by their peers who had readily learned to navigate the digital tools. Indeed I was learning from the students as much as I was guiding them. The class became a team, bouncing ideas off each other and delighting in others’ creations. Students’ perceptions of what being creative meant changed. Students experienced immersion, or deep-thought, in the process of creation and reflected how professional they felt and how proud they were of their work. As well, students developed confidence in their creative writing through working with digital technologies.
What proved interesting and important to note were the creative approaches that students took with the next unit of work. At the conclusion of this particular action research project students commenced a “close study of text” assignment and approached activities with arresting confidence in their creative abilities. Students worked with digital technologies that I was unfamiliar with to produce sophisticated projects that were beyond my imagination. It was evident the students had experienced a transformative learning experience.

**Implications for Practice**

The initial step into action research, as my planned change was implemented, monitored and analyzed, has helped me realize the power of using digital technologies to foster creative approaches to teaching and learning. It is important to allow time for students to explore and play with programs and texts, to mix and mash, as well as to share ideas with each other. Being flexible with students’ selection of digital tools and fostering collaboration as they compose digital stories allows boys to express themselves in creative ways. Teachers become students alongside students as they mentor and support boys’ grappling with concepts and work through solutions.

If students seem to work best collaboratively and with digital technologies to construct creative responses that bolster confidence and pride with their abilities, why is this platform too often denied under formal assessment? Having observed enriched learning experiences of students working collaboratively with digital technologies to creatively express themselves I became keen to further investigate how we can incorporate this approach to assessing students’ performance.

**Reflection**

*This study was the second of a trilogy of action research projects that has ignited my passionate inquiry into how digital technologies are changing the processes of teaching and learning. It was during my first action research project that I observed how boys wanted competitions, wanted to play games and wanted to build: they wanted to leave their own ‘mark’ and wanted to create. As a teacher-researcher embarking on a second action-research project, I was more prepared to get my hand dirty and dirty they got! I amassed more data than I thought possible in my first cycle and consequently struggled to keep my findings and*
discussion succinct - there was so much I could tell and so much I needed to share. It seems the more I get involved in action research, the deeper I go into my own reflective practice. Certainly for me, as a teacher, being involved in this second action research project has been a fulfilling professional learning initiative and has given me the courage to embark on a Masters by Research degree. I feel myself growing as teacher, being able to reflect and critically examine my own practice – and for that, my teaching has taken on new dimensions.

References


