Introduction

Teaching with technology for over 10 years, I have noticed that computers and boys, like dogs, are man’s best friend. I wanted to help boys discover digital storytelling with computer science, offer new mediums of self-expression that stick and have real potential in developing long-lasting empathy for multiple perspectives, especially when boys share personal narratives.

The Research Question

How might producing digital biographies encourage boys’ development of empathy in a Grade 5 Computer Science class?

Research Context and Participants

The Browning School has 400 boys in Grades Kindergarten to Form VI. The fourteen participants in this research were boys in the fall semester of Grade 5 Computer Science & Engineering.

The Research Action

The change implemented in this action research was students’ creation of digital artefacts with MIT’s Scratch programming language to tell a personal story about a classmate in Computer Science class.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected on the following and then analysed:

• How did the boys respond to learning about and with others through exchange of personal background knowledge?
• What was their engagement and joy programming digital narratives in Scratch?
• What changed with boys’ attitude and empathy for others?

The boys shared their experiences via semi-structured and informal interviews (recorded, transcribed, and tabulated), reflections, Likert rating scales, and classroom artefacts.

Conclusions

The findings were encouraging in the way they shed light on how the boys used digital storytelling to discover personal interests, new relationships, and empathy for others.

Incorporating storytelling and personal background knowledge during Computer Science class for the boys was justified as benefits included a general improvement for empathic concern, joy for learning with others, and improved engagement in the production (making) process using multimedia, digital technology.

Key Readings

