

# *Amazing Technologists Think Teach and Create Stories of Excellence*

Dr. Candace Figg

Assistant Professor, Department of Curriculum & Instruction  
Brock University

Dr. Robin Ward McCartney

Associate Professor, Department of Curriculum & Instruction  
University of Louisiana at Lafayette

Dr. Walter B. Gonsoulin

Assistant Professor, Department of Curriculum & Instruction  
University of Louisiana at Lafayette

Marlene Beard, M.A.

Department of Curriculum & Instruction,  
University of Louisiana at Lafayette

---

## **Abstract**

Teacher candidates, student learners, parents, teachers and researchers collaborated in constructing digital video stories while integrating critical literacy, technology, and diversity. This is the second year of a three-year longitudinal study using the same middle school student learner population. Findings from year two indicated that student products yielded results that promoted a variety of critical literacy components such as advocacy, recognition of real world problems, and connectivity to the reality they described in their stories, as well as some solutions to dilemmas they encountered. Data collection included digital artifacts, interviews, exit surveys and student and teacher candidate journals.

---

## **Introduction**

The effectiveness of the A.T.T.T.C.S.E. project lies in the heart of the partnership and collaboration between the University of Louisiana at Lafayette and a non-profit faith-based community summer enrichment program that provided the project with our student learner population. The focus of this collaborative effort was to enhance critical literacy using digital video skills augmenting academic achievement for a diverse population of primarily low SES middle school students. Researchers agree students who are critically literate are not only fluent in all six language arts skills but they also learn how to address societal issues such as communication and problem solving. Language is the vehicle that affects the relationship between a child's *school esteem* and *self-esteem*, or neighborhood and school (Tompkins, 2005). Clearly, self-respect has everything to do with how one views and communicates with the world and how that reality influences how a child is valued. The initial focus questions for this research study were:

1. What impact does the process of learning how to create digital stories have on middle school student learners after they teach these skills to their VIP's (adult significant others)?
2. What impact does the process of learning how to create digital stories have on teacher candidates who are facilitating the learning process between middle school student learners and their VIP's?

3. What impact does the process of learning how to create digital stories have on adult VIP's with whom the middle school student learners are teaching?

## **Participants and Setting**

Year one focused on a series of workshops with teacher candidates, representing a variety of majors ranging from Early Childhood to Secondary Education, Kinesiology, English, Social Studies, Math, Music and Home Economics mentoring diverse elementary and middle school student learners in the creation of digital stories. Year two expanded the study and encompassed a two-week preparation period that tapped into the prior knowledge base established in year one but only focused on the middle school population comprised of 14 students. This two-week preparation period concentrated on combining all six language arts skills and technology as part of the summer enrichment program. This program was implemented in a rural community off campus where these children lived. The program involved all subject areas but only the technology and language arts classes were combined in order to give the teachers more flexibility with time constraints and enable them to focus on this digital writing project with the university. The actual workshops took place on campus with the teacher candidates working with each student one-on-one in order to fulfill the field experience hours required in the university's technology course. The collaboration served a twofold purpose allowing teacher candidates to practice teaching technology with real children as the vehicle to drive home their major field of study and giving the student learners the opportunity to be exposed to a real campus classroom, which would hopefully influence their decision to go to college in the future.

## **Procedure**

The on-campus workshops were designed for the students to bring in their artifacts collected during the two-week preparation period. These artifacts included tape recorded interviews, still image photographs, a well written story about their VIP and their relationship to that person, music to accompany their narrative and a Movie Maker product created at the community site as a practice piece to elaborate upon during the workshop session with the teacher candidate as the facilitator. In training, student learners participated in activities that included learning to operate a video camera so they could videotape each other while interviewing their parent or significant other. This person became known as their VIP (very important person). They had to write and design their own interview questions and orally practice prior to the actual event. Other digital tools were used such as cameras and scanners to promote skills involved capturing still image photographs. They took 1-3 photos of their favorite places, applied the rule of thirds and practiced proper subject placement and selective focus of images. They used the Figg Model (2005) to create well-written descriptions to accompany their vivid pictures. The teachers at the enrichment center used a variety of methods in order to help these children in getting the oral story to the paper by storyboarding, writing, and sequencing which would eventually transfer to their iMovie. Student learners were then required to learn the digital video skills involved in the movie making software programs. They used Movie Maker and PC's off campus and iMovie and Macintosh on campus and transported knowledge from one program to another with ease. Last, but definitely not least, children taught their VIP how to create a digital movie. Educators recognize that learning and retention increase with the use of one's senses and that when socialization takes place, learning opportunities are maximized (Moore, D.M. & Dwyer, F.M., 1994). Vygotsky (1978) noted that when children are placed in groups or are under the guidance of an adult they are able to perform at levels higher than were possible when working alone. For this reason the researchers thought this exposure to practicing teachers would be a valuable experience for both parties involved.

Hence, the name of the project was established when the researchers coined the following ellipsis, which encompassed the entire spectrum from creating the activity structures for digital story making to combining digital imagery skills with writing skills using the Figg Model (2005). The tangible steps for creating a digital movie are embedded in this acronym:

**A**—Amazing [Artifacts (import images into video editor)]

**T**—Technologists [Timeline sequence using storyboards]

**T**—Think [Transitions added]

**T**—Teach and [Title & “silent screen” slides added]

**C**—Create [Credits created]

**S**—Stories of [Sound, including music and narration, added]

**E**—Excellence [Effects added & Export Video]

The researchers and teachers reiterated this slogan and used it on all paperwork, CD covers, and during instruction so that the student learners would remember the process for movie making as well as increase their self-esteem.

## **Results**

The research findings were gathered from artifacts such as student products, pre-and post-tests, retention tests, interviews, student and teacher journals of conversations and reflections, and triangulation of analysis on the part of the researchers which were all on-site. The student learners were enthusiastic, responsive, eager to work with the VIP, capable of multitasking, and excited to be on a university campus. The students demonstrated sound prior knowledge and were excited about technology. They were comfortable but needed guidance and had little trouble transferring knowledge from a PC to a Macintosh computer. The teacher candidates were initially uneasy and nervous but found this experience to be pleasurable, motivating, positive, rewarding and reinforced the idea that the teacher can learn from the student. The VIP's felt special and were excited to learn technology (although some were anxious about using technology). They thought the experience was fun, very educational, and, they were excited about learning technology and how to make a movie. Many VIP's were shocked about how much their child actually knew since they rarely had a chance to join them in activities at school. One hundred percent of the VIP's thought this project would help their children in school, would influence their child to go to college one day, could influence their career choice. They fully supported the entire program.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the focus of this project was initially to enhance critical literacy using digital video skills in order to advance academic achievement for a diverse population of middle school students. However, the developments in year two extended the focus and added another dimension to the project. Another question began to emerge from our results. How can we as educators bridge the gap between schools and communities so that children feel valued? We realized that many of these same students failed in school but performed far beyond our expectations in this study. As the student learners progressed from learner to teacher as they taught the project to their significant others, amazing yet subtle attitudes and dispositions began to show on their faces as well as in their actions. In a final interview a participating parent captured the essence of the project when he witnessed his own child become the knowledgeable other. The researchers agree that his analogy not only captures the essence of the project but also “says it all” when he defined the experience as “the top of the food chain!”

## References

- Figg, C. (2005). *Activity types that make digital storytellers out of digital techies: A Hierarchical framework for developing writing and digital storytelling skills*. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Moore, D.M. (Eds.) (1994). *Visual literacy: A spectrum of visual learning*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Educational Technology Publications.
- Tompkins, Gail E. (2005). *Language arts patterns of practice* (Sixth Edition). Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall: Upper Saddle River New Jersey.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (M. Cole, V. John Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman, Eds.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.