Writing at School: Test-Prep Writing and Digital Storytelling

Patricia A. Jacobs PhD
P.K. Yonge Developmental Research School, patrjac1991@gmail.com

Danling Fu PhD
University of Florida, danlingfu@coe.ufl.edu

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Cover Page Footnote

This article is in APA format.

Most of the writing that children do in school today is driven by the demands of high stakes testing (Higgins, Miller, & Wegman, 2007). This type of writing carries the weight of institutional pressure and accountability (Campbell, 2002), but may limit students' progress by confining them to a restricted format and genre. Students, especially struggling ones, find themselves disinterested and lost with academic and formatted writing in school (Allington & Cunningham, 2002; Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2006) because they have difficulty meeting the expectations of prompt driven essays. Despite their struggles with school- required writing, many students are found to be gifted learners in modern technology and highly fluent in the multiple literacies they use at home, such as video and computer games (Gee, 2007). Unfortunately, when students struggle and can not meet the demands of the curriculum, they run the risk of tuning out and distancing themselves from classroom learning. When children do not develop strong literacy skills, they are at increased risk for school failure (Zimmerman, Rodriguez, Rewey, & Heidemann, 2008). Allowing students to develop writing and literacy skills using a combination of print, visual, sound, and other digital technologies gives them the opportunity to make progress, find purpose in their writing, be fully engaged learners, and accomplish success in the school curriculum.

Study

This study, which focuses on two fourth grade students, is part of a larger study that contrasts the writing experiences and progress of fourth graders in two different writing situations: writing for test preparation and writing with personal choice for digital storytelling. Both students, Francis and Steven, live in a small city in Florida. They come from working-class backgrounds and were nine years old at the time of the research. Francis is Hispanic and speaks Spanish at home. Steven is Caucasian and lives with his mother and two younger siblings. This study focused on two boys from low-income families because the research shows that boys tend to fare behind girls in their school writing (Fletcher, 2006; Newkirk, 2000) and the students from working class backgrounds encounter more challenges in their literacy learning (Hicks, 2002) than those from affluent family backgrounds. Research was conducted at a school affiliated with a state university. The school enrolls approximately 1,150 students in grades K-12. The population is 24% African-American, 51% Caucasian, 16% Hispanic, 3% Asian, and 5% multi-racial, very much representative of the local demography. For four

months, the first author observed the boys during writing time to learn about their behavior, attitudes, and writing processes. During the first ten weeks of the research, the writing instruction in this classroom focused strictly on a prompt driven five-paragraph format to prepare students for the upcoming state writing test. For the following six weeks, students were guided to write with personal choice for digital stories published in an iMovie format.

Methods

The first author conducted formal and informal interviews with students and the teacher and collected samples of the students' prompt writing, digital story writing, and final iMovie publications. The second author advised the research design and assisted with the data analysis. The data from interviews and observations were categorized and analyzed with constant comparative methods using the principles of grounded theory (Best & Kahn, 2003). The grounded theory analysis began with an initial phase of coding that attached a code to small sections of text and identified actions and processes. During this first phase of initial coding, the researcher remained open to the data for surprises, stayed close to the data, and chose precise codes in order to preserve actions (Charmaz, 2006). The next step in the analytic process was to compare data to data and actions to incidents to identify focused codes and conceptual categories (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010). Selective codes were then used to name the categories of focused codes. These selective codes helped to organize and make sense of clusters of data. At this point it was necessary to understand the relationships that existed between the focused and selective codes in order to build a conceptual framework. The core theoretical code moved the data to an analytic phase and allowed the analytic story to take form (Charmaz, 2006).

Writing samples were analyzed using holistic scoring methods based on the 6 + 1 Traits of Writing (NWREL) that is a widely respected and used scoring system for writing. Writing was assessed on ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, and presentation. Writing behaviors such as attitude toward writing, stamina, risk taking, willingness to share writing with others, and ability to revise were observed and analyzed as part of writing progress.

Plugged in at home, unplugged at school: Struggling with school writing

Writing is a complex process and students who struggle with writing may have trouble generating topics, planning and organizing, revising, editing, monitoring the writing process, and transcribing words (Patel & Laud, 2007). All aspects of writing including transcription, handwriting,

grammar and spelling can be difficult for struggling students. They have fewer strategies with writing, less knowledge about writing, and their resistant behavior and low motivation to learn impede their school success (MacArthur, 2009).

Yet these same students who are struggling with a print-based curriculum may be highly fluent in multiple texts at home that use a combination of print, visual, sound and other digital technologies that are available and accessible on computers, the Internet, and the television. The literacies that children use at home tend to be highly communicative and engaging. Home literacies that youth often engage in are social media such as Facebook, email, and texting. The writing that takes place during these interactions may not follow standard conventions of the English language, but may be used to document experiences, share information, plan events and meetings, and comment on the happenings and trends of every day life. Another home literacy that is extremely popular with young people is playing video games. Gamers engage in reading manuals, games texts, and "cheats" (Gee, 2007). School literacies on the other hand tend to be more distanced and often less communicative in nature. Topics for writing assignments are often dictated and most frequently students are required to write in a five-paragraph format. While school literacies are certainly valuable, they may not do much to spark the interest, creativity, imagination, passion, and spirit of young people, thus leaving them feeling indifferent and bored. This increasing gap between the multiple literacy activities students engage in out of school and the required literacy activities of the school curriculum may cause children to disconnect from and resist their schooling. This issue has urged education professionals to think about drawing on students' strengths and home resources to help them develop literacies required in school. Inviting children to use multiple technologies in school may help them to be more successful literacy learners (Kadjer, 2006; Labbo & Place, 2010; Newkirk, 2006).

Use of multiple forms of literacies is in fact essential to future success in the workplace in this information era (New London Group, 1996), yet these literate practices are often not recognized and valued in schools. Multiliteracy theory argues that literacy can no longer be narrowly defined as the ability to master print text, but as a broader ability to navigate multiple texts (Kress, 2003), yet schools in general have not adopted a wider definition of literacy and for the most part consider digital literacies as alternative (Sanford, 2005). Excluding multiliteracies that permeate students' lives out of school indicates our formal education is trailing behind the times. Broadening our concept of school literacy to include home

literacies in our school curriculum is imperative to address the needs of diverse learners. What may be perceived as a lack of interest in school writing and literacy events may in fact be the result of a narrow curriculum that fails to engage students in learning.

Test-prep writing

It was a month before FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test) and the writing drill was becoming more intensive. The fourth grade students appeared more and more disengaged and bored as the test day approached. The class began with students gathering on the floor in a circle for writing instruction, which was usually on topics such as how to identify prompts, how to begin a piece, how to select details, how to make transitions, and how to write a conclusion. For weeks, the students had been hammered with these "how-tos" by writing to one prompt after another every day. Today's prompt for test-prep writing practice was:

> *We have heard it is important to be a good reader. Think about why it is important to be a good reader. Write to explain why you think it is important to be a good reader. Complete this piece in 45 minutes.*

Francis stared blankly at the prompt, and then slowly wrote on his piece of paper: it was as if he lacked words and ideas for the topic. When he heard the reminder of "10 minutes" left, he rushed to finish the work. For this prompt, Francis wrote:

> *If you want to be a good write then you have to be a good reader. Also you have to Pass a writing test so you can move on to the next subject. Plus you have to make good grades and make it to the next grade level. And when you pass the grade then you can make good friends.*

Francis received a 2.0 for this piece, a failing grade; 3.5 is the passing grade for the FCAT. Before letting students write on the "good reader" prompt, the teacher had actually reviewed with the class "what makes a good reader," but Francis was unable to make any connection between the lesson and his current writing practice. Reading this piece, we can tell that he wrote little about being a good reader as the prompt required, but fixed his mind on passing the writing test: to "Pass" the test so that he could move on to the next grade and "make good friends." This, including his use of capitalized

"Pass", revealed his concern about passing the test. His struggle to put words down might indicate his heavy drag about his anticipated failure, and a fear of not being able to move on to the next grade and make good friends, as he wrote in this essay.

Francis' struggle with this topic may suggest that he lacked personal connection to it. Among the prompts the children were asked to write about were "choosing a classroom pet and explaining the choice"; "explaining a favorite time of year"; and "telling what happens when you walk inside a mystery door." Francis failed one prompt after another throughout the test-prep period. He became more and more disengaged in writing with each failure. Both Francis' teacher and his mother expressed in their interviews that Francis "hated" writing because he felt that he could never succeed. His teacher was concerned with his lack of engagement and progress. She said he often sat, stared, and did nothing when faced with a writing task.

Steven, another boy in the class, had also often failed test-prep writing. He showed neither like nor dislike for writing, but simply plugged along mechanically with writing assignments. He did what he had to, and followed the rules he had been taught for writing. During writing circle he frequently sat hidden in his hood playing finger games with Francis to help pass the time. To the "favorite time of year" prompt Steven wrote:

> *Last Christmast was the best time of the year. I got preasent's like a bb gun, shirts, 2rc plane's, lrc landrover, wll games and gift cards. Also christmast is the best for the year because you get to spend time with you family to. Christmast is Also fun because you get to play with your family play with presents and celebrate jesus's birthday. Christmast is also good for bord people because after Christmast you will have presant's to play with. I think that Christmast is awesome because you get presents, you go out to get a christmast tree and you also get to spend with your family. Last Christmast a got a lot of stuff but my favorite is my mini dirt bike because it can go in trails and it is also fun to just ride around. So that is why I think that Christmast is the best time of the year.*

Steven received a 3.0, also a failing score for the FCAT. In this piece, Steven followed the instructions to write an introduction and a conclusion and to give as many details as possible. He listed five reasons for why he thought Christmas was the best time of the year. He was "puzzled" by why he did not

get a passing score for this piece. The teacher's comments for this piece were "list-like, lack of feeling and authenticity." In the interview, he stated that he couldn't understand what reasons would be more authentic than what he had written because Christmas was indeed his favorite time of the year, when he could receive presents and spend more time with his family than at any other time. He was frustrated by constantly failing to get passing scores and adopted a "just do as you're told" attitude. From reading Steven's "Christmas" piece, we agreed with his teacher that it lacks a writer's emotional engagement with the topic, Christmas. Steven wrote this piece as an assignment and was told how to format it, rather than being able to let his emotions and desire for expression drive him to compose a piece about his favorite time of the year. Being told what to write and how to write it might be the reason that this piece lacked feeling and voice. We posit it may be the prompt that lacks authenticity to the writer as he expressed in an interview that he preferred a topic that was "actually like real and most of the writings I do are like fake." Even though Christmas was Steve's real favorite time of the year, he had no desire to write about it. Therefore to require him to write about a topic he is not interested in disconnects his heart from his words.

Francis and Steven's struggles, disengagement, and low test scores on prompt writing assessments represent a current trend that students are not doing well on school writing. The FCAT results of 2013 in Florida show that only 57 % of fourth graders and 54% of eighth graders received a score of 3.5 out of 6.0 for the writing test, which alarmed both policy makers and disheartened the public. Florida has implemented FCAT 2.0 writing test for fourth and eighth graders since 1998, and after over a decade, little progress has been shown in students' writing improvement. Instead, test-driven approaches dominate school curricula across the country are detrimental to meaningful teaching and learning (Shelton & Fu, 2004).

When the curriculum is driven by a test, children do not engage with a real purpose for writing and teachers often become pressured taskmasters, fearing that their students might fail (Shelton & Fu, 2004). Because the topics children are asked to write about have little to do with their personal experiences or interests, students cannot make emotional connections to them or build upon their own knowledge, making it difficult for them to succeed. This type of environment causes stress and anxiety and can lead to a dislike for and dread of writing--an attitude that leads children to unplug, to disconnect from, and resist school writing (Kohn, 2004). Teaching to the test has caused writing to be taught as an exercise in filling in a template. Students are instructed to write in a five-paragraph formula with strict time and word limit. A test-driven approach to teaching writing does not help

children to express themselves well in writing or learn about meaningful ways to find voice and style. In addition, students do not have the chance to play with language, refine their thoughts, and go through a critical process of learning to revise and improve their writing as real writers do (Calkins, 1994). Needless to say, teaching to the test and prompt writing do not foster a love of writing in any child.

In order to learn how to become proficient writers, students need a variety of opportunities that engage their interests and help them to become skilled at writing for diverse purposes and audiences. Allowing children to pick topics that are personal and relevant helps them to find meaning and purpose for their writing. Making space in the writing curriculum to include students' home literacies may bring students' identity, energy, and passion into our classrooms (Ergle & Fu, 2011). While test-driven writing fails to engage many students, writing for a digital publication may draw on out of school literacy experiences for their success. Teachers need to provide a wide range of opportunities that allow all children to develop their writing identities rather than limit them because of personal preference. Widening literacy experiences to include a broader range of topics and new technologies will not only engage children in school learning today but will prepare them for the 21st century information era (Sanford, 2005).

Digital storytelling

Digital storytelling is a form of writing which combines narration, visuals, and sound through technology. After students go through the rigors of editing and revising a written script, the final publication is a digital media production such as an iMovie, MovieMaker, or PhotoStory. Students often discover personal power and creativity in telling their own stories and using digital tools to present their voices to a larger audience. Digital stories can be used as learning tools in almost any subject area and can be modified based on curricular needs and the availability of technology. For students who struggle with academic and formatted writing, the ability to write about a topic that interests them can give them the sense of identity and the confidence to succeed. In addition, a connection is fostered between out of school multiliteracy practices and school literacy. This type of activity creates space and opportunity for transforming writing experiences, while at the same time meeting the demands of the school curriculum.

However, technology alone cannot simply invite students to write and will not in itself improve students writing abilities. Teachers need to ignite students' potentials and guide them into their school writing. Students who are used to being given a prompt or topic to write about will find it difficult

to choose a topic on their own. Through modeling, teachers can guide students to see significance in their daily lives and discover meaningful topics for writing from their seemingly ordinary life experiences (Calkins, 1994). Once students see meaning in their daily life experiences, words and descriptions will come more naturally and easily. Students will be excited to learn that they can tell a story about four-wheeling with their dads, or write about a sports event, or describe the new family car, or a new baby that was just born to the family. When students have the chance to choose a topic for writing, they are able to draw on background experience and are able to write with more confidence and passion. Because this type of writing is "real," students are able to engage with writing, to develop stamina, to form a positive attitude, and to take risks as writers. Working on revisions is less stressful to students when they are motivated to write and eager to express what they know. All of these factors help students to improve the quality of their writing. In addition, the use of visual materials may help students find precise terminology and appealing discourse for their stories. The use of technology to create a final publication can be highly appealing and as a result, a satisfying accomplishment for students.

Francis and Steven: Engaged in digital story writing

Francis and Steven's teacher decided to try digital storytelling in her class as a way to bring students back to life with writing after they had been drilled with test-prep for months. When the students first heard the mention of writing after their FCAT week, they whined, "Are you going to torture us again? We just had our test." They dragged their feet to the circle for a writing lesson. However, while listening to information about digital storytelling, the students appeared enthusiastic. Francis listened attentively during the lesson and raised his hand many times to ask questions, quite different from the blankness that permeated his behavior during test prep time. When asked to get into groups to discuss their self-chosen topics, preferably with others who shared similar interests, no one showed any hesitation or lack of ideas. Francis and Steven sat together on the floor and talked about ATVing with their dads and how enjoyable time with their family sports activities were for them all. The boys' faces and bodies were animated while telling their family adventure stories in preparation for writing: their stories were filled with excitement (and sometimes the room was filled with loud laughter). All the children in the class were equally excited about their first experience in digital story writing, and no child was left behind.

Francis and his story: "A Four Wheeler in the Air"

Francis was able to write his first draft with ease—the story was his and the words flowed quickly onto the paper. The intensity with which Francis worked was obvious as he ignored everyone around him and refused to talk to anyone including the adults in the room who came to check on him. He seemed to be experiencing pleasure at remembering his ATV adventure and having the opportunity to commit the story to paper. When it came time to revise his work, Francis did so enthusiastically. After a mini-lesson on using interesting verbs, Francis promptly went back to his seat and circled all the verbs in his text and replaced some of them with more vivid ones.

Another day, Francis worked with the teacher on "show, don't tell," finding a place in his story that needed more details. He wrote:

> *I crashed into the swings in the backyard. They had just put them there. By the time I was only an inch away, it took a long time for the four-wheeler to stop so I couldn't stop in time—CRASH! I crashed into the swings. I felt like a bird flying in the air with duct tape on my belly because the seat of the swing was on me. Really fast bumping in my heart my eyes got real wide popping out of my head! I felt scared because of the trees but I flew about ten feet and landed on my friend's trampoline! Everyone was amazed and relieved I didn't get hurt too bad.*

After several drafts, Francis was ready to create an iMovie to share his story with a wider audience. As he found pictures on the Internet, Francis thought about his story and picked visuals that "popped" in order to express the action that he had written about. It took quite a few days for Francis to find the right pictures to use for his story. He began putting together a storyboard (matching visuals and sound with text) so that production could begin. This task provided Francis with a number of challenges, such as going through a round of final revisions in his story and arranging pictures from both home and the Internet, but Francis never gave up. He sought help from his peers, the teacher, and other adults in the room. When Francis finally completed his storyboard, he was satisfied with his efforts.

After the collecting and organizing phase was complete, it was time to move to production. Putting the iMovie together was not an easy task for Francis, but it turned out to be a rewarding one. Moving through the technology, Francis worked daily with two other boys. For several weeks they were engaged in serious work. Francis learned how to use new software

tools such as Garage Band (a sound effects feature), and compose the information he had gathered—print, visuals, and sound into a digital story. Most notably, the boys worked non-stop in collaboration with one another. Francis was happily engaged as a member of this learning community.

When Francis was interviewed about creating his digital story, he expressed satisfaction at picking a "cool" topic and said, "You can hear every single adventure and it is very exciting." He was able to articulate not only his process for choosing a topic and writing a story, but also his learning about the use of new technology. Through creating his digital story, Francis had developed the ability to work between print and digital literacy. His mother came to the Digital Story Open House, and commented that the digital storytelling unit was a turning point for Francis in his experience with writing. "Up until that point," she said, "he felt like a failure. Now he has become a passionate author and cannot wait to share his 'true' story with the world."

Steven and his story: "My Dad's Fourwheel Drive Landrover"
Steven dove into writing a digital story the first day the teacher introduced the project. He was actively engaged in discussion about his topic—ATVing—when he met with a group of several other boys to brainstorm ideas. He made an "OFF Road" list to generate ideas for his story. It looked like this:

> *Land rovers, rock crawler, super swapper boggers, Lake City, rockgarden, sliplock, Tellico, north Carolina, 4x4, 2x2, gears, power stearing, rollcakge, garage, dad's landrovers*

He had personal knowledge of his topic and the ability to write about it easily. Steven generated vocabulary and ideas with the confidence of an expert, because he had lived the experiences and had memories of adventures that he could draw upon for his storytelling. One day, after a mini-lesson on starting a story with an interesting lead, Steven immediately revisited his story, changed his first line and added some words such as SPLAT! YUCK, etc. to "make the reader feel all muddy and dirty." He worked steadily on his story with serious engagement, by erasing words throughout and adding more details. The beginning of his story read:

> *Vroooom!! Vrooom!! Splish! Splash! There's mud everywere. Here we are at Lake City about to cross the car wash. The car wash is where a river crosses the trail*

and it's about 5 feet deep. My dad goes first in his old 4x4 land rover because his truck is the best. Everybody watches in amazement as most of his Landrover disapeers under water only to reimerge on the other side.

Steven was able to capture a moment on paper to share with his readers. He started his story with gusto to grab the reader's attention! Steven moved happily to the next phase of creating a digital story—finding visuals. Because he and Francis had the same topic, they worked together for several days looking at ATVs on the Internet. Steven was beaming as he worked through the process of finding pictures, working on his storyboard, and creating his iMovie. One day he brought in photos from home and began the process of storyboarding in a way no other child in the class had done. He understood the concept of organizing all of the elements and worked alone on the floor to prepare for production. His teacher was surprised by his attention to detail and by a personality she had never seen before. Steven completed a form detailing every aspect of his digital story and how transitions would take place—a task no other child was able to accomplish.

Steven was the proud presenter of his iMovie on the day of the open house for parents. His dad reported that Steven's digital story had become a family process of remembering good times. He said they had watched videos of ATVing together to find the right photos and had enjoyed reliving the memories. This digital story writing not only brought out great potential in Steven, but also created meaningful whole family togetherness.

For days Steven couldn't stop talking about his dad having the "best truck" and sharing details about how other trucks got stuck and his dad had to pull them out. He said that he loved the writing because it was real, while most of the writing he did during the test prep time was "fake" and was just for a grade. It was easier and more enjoyable to write his "Fourwheeler" story. He expressed pleasure at using technology because, "You could see everything better and it was a lot fun."

Success with writing for digital stories

While the writing test stresses students and constrains their potentials and creativity, digital story writing gives children the opportunity to excel. Steven and Francis had difficulty preparing for and taking the FCAT because they frequently were asked to write about topics they did not care about or had no personal connection with. They saw no real purpose for test writing and had difficulty complying with the requirements of format and style. The FCAT preparation made them disengage with writing and tune out

as learners. The constraints of working alone on the prompts did not allow them to feel part of a community or club of writers or foster any opportunities for them to think and share like real authors do (Smith, 1988). Isolated learning and writing time robbed the children of social interactions that could have helped them to grow in language learning and development (Bruner, 1986; Dyson, 1993; Vygotsky, 1978).

In contrast, while writing their digital stories, they both felt at ease. They wrote with passion and were able to write fluently, skillfully, and emotionally. They became involved in the process as real authors do and had the opportunity to revise and grow as writers. There was a real sense of determination during the time the boys were writing stories. Writing on a topic that holds personal meaning and comes from lived experience engaged the hearts and minds of the boys. In addition, the digital aspect of writing these stories generated further excitement. On days when the laptop cart rolled into class, the students jumped from their seats to get the first computer. The room was filled with conversations and collaborations on digital story writing. Because of the animated nature of the digital publication, the students invested their passion, knowledge, and experience in sharing their best effort with others. Steven and Francis both had expertise with the symbols and ways of learning in the digital domain and were able to use this knowledge to learn and participate in a digital community of learners. In a familiar zone with literacies that combined print, visual, sound, and digital technologies the boys happily worked together discussing their writing, helping each other evaluate and choose visuals, and learning new technology tools. They proved themselves to be "digital natives" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p.22), able to present information to their audience with a type of expression, knowledge, and skills with which they have expertise. Their task required the ability to assemble knowledge, evaluate information, and navigate hypertext. They demonstrated mastery of complex texts and grew in their knowledge and skill of confidently while working across these domains (Gee, 2007; Yelland, 2007). Feelings of pleasure and satisfaction arose for these boys as they were learning because they found a connection between schoolwork and home life. They knew they could succeed and didn't have to worry about passing the test and getting higher grades. Coupled with the choice of interesting writing topics, the digital tools sparked the students' creativity and imagination. The opportunity to navigate multiple layers of texts successfully gave them a chance to work with their peers, connect with their families, and grow and develop in their mastery of 21st century skills.

Conclusion

Educational researchers James Gee, Colin Lankshear, and Michelle Knobel advocate that the time has come to think more broadly about literacy learning in today's world. The multiliteracy theory of learning supports the concept of literacy learning which takes into consideration the broad context of a globally and linguistically diverse society that interacts with a variety of text forms including print and multimedia (New London Group, 1996). In order to be successful today it is necessary to master multiple modes of texts such as audio, visual, and spatial. Multiliteracy learning needs to continually make adjustments to the rapidly changing world of technology and literacy. When we create learning conditions so students can participate fully in multiple roles as students, citizens, and in time as employees, we give them the chance to become competently multiliterate in the school environment. In order for schools to integrate the new demands of diverse literacies, educators need to think about creating a framework that focuses on designs of meaning-making versus teaching rules of standard use in reading, writing, and math (Kalantzis, Cope, & Harvey, 2003) and that opens up the curriculum to include students' literacies, home values and discourse (Hicks, 2002). Creating changes in education that develop new relationships between youth literacy, schools, global communication, and other means for social communication and meaning making will help children to become successful users and producer of knowledge (New London Group, 1996).

Digital storytelling allows children to bring their interests in digital technologies to school and to engage collaboratively in working with multiples texts (Vasudevan, Schultz, & Bateman, 2010) where they feel a sense of empowerment and the ability to be in command. The power of writing for digital stories is that it builds a bridge between traditional print literacy and digital literacy. Children are able to collaborate as learners, to talk like authors and to write like writers. Unlike writing to a test, this type of writing gives students personal purpose and meaning, and values their home lives and literacies instead of concern that they might lose the game. Children quickly find themselves feeling like experts accessing, communicating, creating, and sharing knowledge across multiple texts. When children work in this zone with others who may be more skilled than them—either peers or their teacher, they are able to move to higher levels of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Both Francis and Steven had contrasting experiences as writers within a school year: first they struggled with standardized testing, became disheartened and disengaged, and later, excelled as passionate authors through the writing and production of their digital stories.

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