Integrating Digital Technology into the Language Curriculum: Understanding Information and Communications Technologies in the Media Literacy and Digital Storytelling Classroom

By

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Integrating Digital Technology into the Language Curriculum

Abstract

Information and communications technologies (ICT), as described by the Ontario curriculum for language arts regarding grades 1-8, “provide a range of tools that can significantly extend and enrich teacher’s instructional strategies and support students’ learning in language” (2006, p. 30). However, with the multitude of ICT currently available to educators across the province and around the world, the question remains: what technologies and strategies are best suited for developing engaging, multimodal learning experiences in the media literacy classroom and how can these instruments help develop reading and writing proficiency? This research paper reports how primary teachers, as well as extracurricular educators, in the Greater Toronto Area utilize ICT in their media literacy and language instruction while interpreting the Ontario language curriculum through the use of digital storytelling tools and strategies. Employing qualitative research methodologies, including characteristics of narrative research, grounded theory, and ethnographic study, this research paper explores the practices and methodologies of several primary teachers in York Region, as well as extramural educators, in order to outline and detail challenges that a comprehensive media literacy program faces when it includes digital storytelling as its core tenet.

Key Words: media, literacy, information and communications technologies, multimedia, technology, digital storytelling, and filmmaking.
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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction to the Research Study and Context

Media literacy, as defined by the Ontario Curriculum for Language Grades 1-8, “explores the impact and influence of mass media and popular culture by examining texts such as films, songs, video games, [and] action figures…Skills related to high-tech media such as the Internet, film, and television are particularly important because of the power and pervasive influence these media wield in our lives and in society” (2006, p. 13). Non-linear digital video editing software (such as Final Cut Pro or iMovie) and the creation of short digital videos in the classroom as an educational information and communication technology (ICT) combines an analysis of, as Burn (2009) states, the identity, production, and consumption media artefacts (digital videos), and uses multimodality theory – the study of meaning creation – when discourses around the design, production, and distribution of digital videos evolve as a part of the curriculum. Non-linear digital video editing software can be used within the media studies program of language arts curriculum, and it is an ICT that research has begun to investigate. Burn (2009), for example, studied secondary students’ use of Media 100 to construct a teaser trailer for Alfred Hitchcock’s thriller Psycho (1960) and found that students developed skills including setting up sequences and re-working ideas while balancing a variety of narrative decisions. In this qualitative research study, I set out to examine how a sample of elementary teachers are using a range of ICT to develop students’ skills with digital storytelling and narrative decision-making.
Research to date has found that educators face hindrances when developing an ICT based media literacy program focused on digital storytelling. As Hammett and Barrell (2002) point out, some teachers are reluctant to use film editing, comic strips, and technology in their classroom due to the fact that they feel unprepared to properly represent the technology knowledge new ICT requires of teachers. Furthermore, traditional school practices, embedded in a hierarchy of bureaucracy and nostalgic cultural understanding, reinforce a gap between those teachers who see the existence of new technologies and those who take their existence and availability for granted (Hammett and Barrell 2002). Smith (2002) states, “students feel connected to their culture through the exploration of new literacies available in media and electronic texts” (p. 191). This results in a challenge for teachers: a bridge must be built in the media literacy classroom between the technological worlds the Millennial generation has always lived in and the classrooms we expect them to learn in.

1.1 Research Problem

Three dominant challenges that teachers are confronted by when integrating ICT into media literacy include: 1) the disconnect between the range of new media technologies and devices that students are using in their everyday lives and the frequently out-dated and under-resourced technologies available in public schools, 2) the heavy restrictions typically placed in schools on access to the internet and social networking sites such as MySpace, YouTube, and Facebook, under the guise of student safety, and 3) the multiplicity of literacy learning opportunities that digital storytelling provide when framed with the goals of creative expression and social empowerment (Considine, Horton, and Moorman, 2009; Skinner and Lichtenstein, 2009). The resulting problem for
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teachers requires them to be able to determine what types of ICT to use in their media literacy programs, how to use it, how to program for prior student knowledge, and what options are available for professional development to address a lack in their own prior understanding of digital technology.

1.2 Research Purpose and Topic

This research paper is focused on discovering how a sample of teachers and media literacy educators incorporate digital storytelling as a part of their media literacy instruction. Particular attention is paid to how digital film editing and video recording skills are taught to students in order to construct narratives, analyze the importance of media texts in print, oral, visual, or electronic form, and critically deconstruct mass media messages with as per the Ontario curriculum guidelines (2006).

1.3 Research Questions

Understanding that media and literacy educators would best be served by a combination of pedagogical considerations from both the media studies and semiotic strata, the main question this research paper aims to answer is: how do a sample of elementary teachers and educators in York Region incorporate digital storytelling as a part of their critical media literacy instruction?

I will also focus strongly on the following subsidiary questions:

- Based on the implementation of an ICT focused curriculum, what impacts on students’ literacy practices, engagement and achievement do these educators observe in the children they teach?
What support structures and/or hindrances do educators face when developing an ICT based media literacy program focused on digital storytelling?

From these teachers’ perspectives, does using ICT in the classroom create or strengthen a learning community in the classroom and how?

From these teachers’ perspectives, how does the use of ICT in the classroom, particularly non-linear digital video editing, engage with multiple intelligences?

What types of school board resources support these teachers’ work incorporating digital storytelling as a part of their media literacy instruction?

1.4 Reflexive Positioning Statement

Throughout my experience in the field of education and the creative industry of filmmaking, I have witnessed what I believe to be a need for wide-ranging media literacy integration in every day classroom teaching. Many teachers are limited in their ability to implement ICT in their classrooms, due to budgetary restraints or simply not knowing how, and many struggle to understand and interpret media texts as required by the media literacy and language curriculum in Ontario. To clarify, media texts, as defined by the Ontario curriculum, “can be understood to include any work, object, or event that communicates meaning to an audience” (2006, p. 13). It is my belief that the vagueness of this definition causes confusion amongst professionals by not clarifying the role the Internet and digital technologies, such as digital storytelling and YouTube, play in the social lives and mental growth of Millennial children.

I am very passionate about media literacy in the Ontario curriculum. I am writing this research paper because I believe that a strong media literacy curriculum contains the
necessary keys to unlocking our codified world of signs and signifiers, of advertiser intentions and 24-hour news discourse.

In 2011, I graduated with honours from Ryerson University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in the discipline of film studies with a strong focus on screenwriting and direction. Years earlier, in 2003, I attended Unionville High School and was a part of a short-lived New Media curriculum, an application-based secondary school program that focused on integrating ICT with storytelling in order to create a unique multimedia experience of literacy and the media arts. It was there, under the guidance of department head, Jerry Berridge, that I learned to operate my first digital movie camera, set up and take down studio lights, edit short films and animations, and absorb industry lingo like an IATSE (International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees) union member.

I recall wrapping cables around my arms and hanging them above the camera equipment, batteries charging in their packs, all plugged in and humming low. I was 14 years old, but I felt like a professional worker. For me, an engaging media literacy curriculum is about more than just learning about photographic composition, thematic relevance, character, setting or plot; it is about understanding the importance of creative autonomy, leadership and work ethic.

Days on film sets are long and arduous. Your mind wanders between takedowns and set ups. Sometimes, you consider how you got to this point, on set behind lights so hot you could cook breakfast on them. After high school, on the set of my own short film, standing in charge of a crew of a dozen or so and a cast of four talented actors, I recalled my background and instruction at Unionville High School and the influence of my instructors and peers. It was then, in the middle of directing a take, that I finally
understood how much a comprehensive media literacy program had prepared me for. In the course of my post-secondary studies, I received a Universal Studios Canada Scholarship for Filmmaking and a Kodak Film Grant that covered nearly half of my 16mm colour film budget in 2011. It was because of the work of a few teachers in a publicly funded communications technology program that I was able to pursue my dreams of writing and directing a short film. It is because of these experiences that I am driven to write this research project and seek to understand how primary teachers in the GTA can use digital storytelling as a part of their media literacy instruction in order to bridge the disconnect that Millennials experience in public school with regards to the language arts.

1.5 Overview

To respond to the research questions I have posed, I conducted a qualitative research study in order to learn how two educators are creating opportunities for digital storytelling in their media literacy programs. In chapter two, I conduct a review of the literature in the areas of language arts and media literacy, including an examination of the challenges and pedagogical understandings behind digital storytelling and ICT based learning plans. In chapter three, I elaborate on my research design. In chapter four, I report my researching findings and discuss their significance in light of the existing literature in the areas of media literacy, digital storytelling, and ICT. Finally, in chapter five, I discuss the implications of the findings for the education research community and for myself as a beginning teacher.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

In order to begin my examination of how a sample of elementary teachers in the GTA incorporate digital storytelling as a part of their critical media literacy instruction, I first bring into focus an examination of the current discussions about pedagogy that surround critical media literacy through the lenses of experts and researchers in the field. Next, I focus on multiliteracies-based instruction, an aspect of critical media literacy pedagogy in action that affects a positive difference in the language arts curriculum, and focus on how various semiotic modes, or sign-making systems, enable students to make meaning of mass media messages.

2.1 Critical Media Literacy and the Effective Use of ICT in the Classroom

School literacy practices are generally comprised of reading and writing activities, and are most often located within the timetable of English language arts classes (Hammett and Barrell, 2002). These classes typically feature reading as a process of decoding and understanding text and writing as print and type assignments. In comparison, media literacy, as it pertains to the English language arts educator, is centered around two influential schemas: the schema from Cultural Studies proposes that the representation and communication of a media artefact move round cyclically between different nodes in the life of that media artefact (representation, identity, production, consumption, and, regulation), while multimodality theory – stemming from the semiotic strata, the study of meaning creation – revolves around the discourse, design, production,
and distribution of media artefacts, as well as the further layer of how those media artefacts are to be interpreted within the social contexts of audiences and government policy (Burn 2009). Together, both models of literacy represent how a media artefact, such as a film, comic book, or video game, can be identified for what it is and how the meaning behind a particular media artefact is created. As Burn (2009) describes, both theoretical models, the aforementioned schema as proposed by Cultural Studies and the multimodality theory stemming from semiotics, are “incomplete, and the media and literacy educator would best be served by a combination of the two.” (p. 7)

Making meaning through the examination of visual recording methods and techniques, discussing and analyzing understandings of framing and angle, and the analysis of character motivation and social context are a few examples of a critical media pedagogy in action and a combination of the Cultural Studies and semiotic approaches to media literacy as proposed by Burn (2009). Kellner and Share believe that critical media pedagogy “promotes the use of diverse types of media and information communication technology (from crayons to webcams) to question the roles of media in society and the multiple meanings of the form and content of all types of messages” (2007, p. 3). Kellner and Share define critical media literacy as emanating from the scholarly field of cultural studies and having “at least five basic elements: (1) recognition of the construction of media and communication as a social process, as opposed to accepting texts as isolated neutral or transparent conveyors of information; (2) some type of textual analysis that explores the languages, genres, aesthetics, codes, and conventions of the text; (3) an exploration of the role audiences play in negotiating meanings; (4) problematizing the process of representation to uncover and engage issues of ideology, power, and pleasure;
and (5) examination of the productions and institutions that motivate and structure the media industries as corporate profit-seeking business” (2005, p. 370).

Share (2010) states that now more than ever, “young children need to learn how to critically question the messages that surround them and how to use the vast array of new tools available to express their own ideas and concerns. Since television programs, video games, computers, cell phones, music, and even toys have become our current transmitters of culture—tellers as well as sellers of the stories of our time—it has become imperative to teach critical media literacy to children as early as possible” (p. 126-127). Kellner and Share posit that ICT have now provided ordinary people with unprecedented opportunities to take on the dominant educational power structure and pedagogy, declaring that:

The uncontested monopoly of knowledge and the institutionalization of education can now be challenged by new media technologies, which make possible decentralized and interactive communication and a participatory model of culture and democracy, with multiple voices and an expanded flow of information, thus creating a new field for the conjuncture of education and democracy (p. 616).

Therefore, by integrating critical media literacy pedagogy into the instruction of digital storytelling and the language arts curriculum, teachers can go beyond the overall expectations of media literacy curriculum in Ontario and students can view themselves not only as media interpreters and creators, but as agents of creative transformation and active participants in a global discussion regarding the changes and challenges current institutions and governments face around the world.

Research confirms that integrating critical media literacy pedagogy into the instruction of digital storytelling and the language arts curriculum is possible when
teachers use ICT instruction to motivate student learning. The use of ICT in the classroom, combined with sound technology and pedagogical knowledge, allow teachers to create or strengthen a learning community as reported by Edyburn (2007) who reports that digital tools can support the interest and success of learners in literacy. In addition, research by Sider and Maich (2014) also indicates that Ontario teachers that can effectively incorporate ICT when they participate in the following: provide students with regular opportunities to use the available technology; use assistive technology as part of the regular rhythm of the class (Ruffin 2012); evaluate various assistive technologies and teachers’ readiness to effectively use it (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005); and build a supportive school environment where teachers and other educational specialists collaborate with and mentor each other, as that environment is best suited to support the implementation and use of assistive technology (Reed & Bowser 2012). Furthermore, student success can be improved if efforts are made by teachers to put into action board approved technologies. ICT use has shown to enhance language acquisition and student independence (Sider & Maich, 2014).

Additionally, Nightingale (2007) states that the Canadian education system should continue to bridge formal learning from the classroom to the real world and input media content into the classroom for analysis, evaluation, and discovery: “In research conducted by Media Awareness Network in 2005, 88% of teachers see a critical role for themselves in developing media literacy skills in their students, and 81% felt that media literacy should be an important part of a student’s education” (p. 30).

Speaking from the post-secondary level, Herrington and Parker (2013) examined student responses to the infusion of emerging technologies in a large first year teacher
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education program over two full graduating cycles using a design-based research approach. The difference between Herrington and Parker’s (2013) research and the research of critical theorists is that Herrington and Parker warn that “failure to embrace emerging technologies in higher education courses can lead to pedagogies that risk alienating a generation of learners, some of whom demand basic instruction in new technologies, and others who are technologically literate but increasingly see a disconnect between the tools they use to learn and the tools they use to live and operate in modern life” (p. 608). In their research study, first year bachelor of education students were required used web-based technologies to solve problems or create opportunities in their everyday social and family lives, such as creating a family tree using a website like Heritage.com, or a social bookmarking site on jazz music using Diigo or Delicious. Herrington and Parker found that student responses to the use of these technologies ranged from enthusiasm and confidence to apprehension, slight anxiety, negative beliefs and at the extreme end, sheer technophobia. This research study showed that large first year teacher education cohorts over two full graduation cycles were defensive or fearful about the use of ICT in their practice. Failure to embrace emerging technologies in teacher education courses leads to underdeveloped technology pedagogies in the workplace that risk alienating future generations of students and professionals.

2.2 Critical Media Literacy in Action: Examining Multiliteracies in the Classroom

Multiliteracies is defined by Graham, Benson, and Fink (2010) as a flexible method of ICT instruction that focuses on how various semiotic modes, or sign-making systems, enable students to access meaning and examples of include art, film, drama, and
other non print-based design activities that help students explore and critique their individual perspective on life and culture. According to MediaSmarts.ca (2014), an examination of the use of multiliteracies in the Ontario classroom began in 1995 when media education was introduced into Ontario’s Common Curriculum: Policies and Outcomes for Grades 1-8 (Curricular Overview section, para. 1). In 2006, Ontario introduced a new Language curriculum for Grades 1-8 which encouraged teachers to “plan activities that blend expectations from the four strands in order to provide students with the kinds of experiences that promote meaningful learning and that help students recognize how literacy skills in the four areas reinforce and strengthen one another” (Curricular Overview section, para. 2). This section of the literature review will examine how the integration of critical literacy strategies in the classroom supplements the use of ICT and engages students through the practice of multiliteracies.

Koehler and Mishra (2009) describe teaching as a “complex, ill-structured domain. Underlying this complexity, however, are three key components of teacher knowledge: understanding of content, understanding of teaching, and understanding of technology” (p. 8). Engaging in critical media literacy through the use of a variety of multimedia tools and applications in concordance with Koehler and Mishra’s (2009) pedagogical notions of technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge requires teachers to plan experiences that advance learning without forgetting to engage students in the practice of critical investigation: “It is not uncommon that teachers doing excellent work in media production fail to engage their students in critical analysis of the very media they are creating” (Share, 2010, p. 133). What then are some of the best practices
available to teachers in order to engage and merge critical literacy pedagogy with ICT and storytelling in order to create an authentic multiliteracy experience in the classroom?

According to Galt (2011), the best resource that exists for teachers in their school board to help them incorporate digital storytelling as a part of their media literacy instruction is their own initiative to seek out new technology knowledge and frame it within a curriculum context that makes sense for themselves, their administration, and their students because every board has different technologies and software packages (Planning for Flexibility section, para. 3). Galt (2011) also states that teachers also “look at the cost structure and the benefit structure and see if it has an impact on the curriculum, the results and the performance of students” before seeking to place a request for the purchase of new technology from the school’s technology lead teacher (Parents Push, Students Respond section, para. 4).

Graham, Benson, and Fink (2010) also offer practical examples for teachers wishing to implement multiliteracies in their classroom: ask students to gather examples of film clips that employ the same dialect students themselves use (situated practice); talk with the class about how linguistic and social definitions of dialects differ, with a particular emphasis on how certain dialects often become stigmatized (overt instruction); lead an exploration with students regarding why such stigmas exist and how students might respond to the stigmas (critical framing); and encourage students to analyze their beliefs about dialect stigmas and develop some specific steps they can take to communicate their knowledge about the linguistic equality of dialects to another audience (transformed practice).
Graham, Benson, and Fink (2010) also cite the New London Group, a team of academics concerned with how a shift in literacy pedagogy might tackle new issues of globalization, technology, and growing cultural and social multiplicity, when including four pedagogical elements in their approach: situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice. They explain: “As with the larger goal of multiliteracies, the emphasis is on thinking in as many ways as possible and including as many people as possible in the process rather than mastering a set body of knowledge. Everyone can contribute” (p. 94). These elements encourage multiple viewings of TV shows and movies and the use of the Internet in order to locate additional information regarding the context of the media viewed.

Goble (2010), agrees with Graham and Benson’s “everyone can contribute” model when he states that, “students have spent so much time engaging with film that they are generally willing to interact with complicated non-print texts and are excited about the possibility of creating films for class assessments” (p. 32-33). Goble breaks down the academic vocabulary used to define multiliteracies into a few key “layers” that most educators are familiar with: a. literary: character, plot, setting, dialogue; b. cinematic: shot composition; c. theme: essential question, big idea, or scientific/ethical quandary; d. production: who produced it, how, and why; e. connections and synthesis: between any or all of the elements above (2010). Banaji (2010) supports Goble’s layering academic vocabulary to define multiliteracies when he reports that that children learn more when actively engaged in doing or making something, like a movie trailer or a news production (2010). Whitney (2010) also confirms that teachers support connecting media production definitions as stated by Goble (2010) through the construction of movie
trailers as an effective way of engaging critical media literacy and multiliteracies: “Discussing the ways that films are put together, examining decisions made by the director about camera angles or to what effect a close-up has been used, are all useful methods through which to evaluate the effect of a text on the viewer” (p. 80). However, upon further examination regarding how learning about moving-image media has become established in Lincolnshire schools, Whitney (2010) states that “to use film only as stimulus would be to deny the potential of the moving image for developing skills, such as textual exegesis and narrative composition, that are relevant to any medium” (p. 79). This research demonstrates the need for students to connect the role audiences play in negotiating meanings when watching, reading, or analyzing any text, digitally produced or otherwise, and to use critical media skills to recognize mass media as an amalgamation of languages, genres, aesthetics, codes, and conventions.

2.3 ICT in the Ontario Classroom: Examining the Bring Your Own Device Policy

There is extensive evidence that young children are immersed in a wide range of media-related practices in homes on personal electronic devices from an early age (Marsh et al., 2005; Rideout et al., 2003). In an examination of the social networking practices in homes and schools, Marsh (2010) states that children aged eight and under frequently participate in online virtual worlds, such as Webzinz, Neopets, Club Penguin and Barbie Girls: “In a study of 5–11 year-olds' use of virtual worlds, it was found that of 175 children completing a survey, 52 per cent reported using virtual worlds on a regular basis” (p. 27). Marsh (2010) also states that a range of literacy practices is involved in the
use of these virtual worlds as children engage in instant messaging using chat facilities and can also send each other postcards, and read in-world texts or instructions for games and ultimodal skills are developed as users navigate complex screens and integrate different modes when they read the various in-world texts (2010).

As a means of promoting the prior experience students have with ICT at home, as well as reducing the cost of purchasing new computers and other devices for the Ontario classroom, York and Peel Region District School Boards have embraced a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) program:

Peel District School Board in Ontario worked with York University’s Jennifer Jenson, a Professor of Pedagogy and Technology in the Faculty of Education, during 2011 and 2012 to conduct a review of the board’s successes and challenges in integrating digital technology before implementing BYOD. After researching similar programs in other countries and reviewing Peel’s own process, the researchers had some suggestions for the board: allow students to BYOD, provide teacher support and training, and install a board-wide Wifi network (Beach, 2014, p. 7).

Beach (2014) states that York University’s research on behalf of Peel Region District School Board found that much of student learning is informed by a mutual sharing of information, meaning that students can succeed in a media literacy curriculum that uses ICT even if they have a 2:1 or 3:1 ratio with tech tools as that is a comfortable amount of time spent with the technology so that students can easily collaborate and discuss with colleagues.

Another area of significance for teachers presents itself in the form of establishing a set of rules and guidelines for the safe and effective use of electronic devices in their classroom in conjunction with a BYOD program. A sample set of guidelines for reflective students that aim to be critical of the media messages they might send and
receive in class and comes from the European Charter for Media Literacy (2004). Merchant (2010) describes the European Charter “more explicitly educational, describing its aims in terms of literacies, while at the same time underscoring the importance of criticality” (p. 114). The charter identifies three interrelated strands of learning relevant to teachers: the Cultural strand encourages teachers to broaden learners' experience of different kinds of media form and content; the Critical strand states learners' should critical skills in analyzing and assessing media outputs; lastly, the Creative strand encourages learners' to develop creative skills in using media for expression and communication, and for participation in public debate.

2.4 Overview

In order to contextualize my qualitative research study designed to explore the practices and methodologies of several primary school teachers in York Region, this chapter has defined critical media literacy as a foundational pedagogy, multiliteracies as a theory for putting a critical media literacy pedagogy into action, and has addressed some of the challenges of teaching media literacy, such as the lack preparation given to new teacher candidates with regards to media literacy instruction.

What is known to date about engaging students within a thriving critical media literacy program is that successful students construct and examine short digital videos and other media artefacts. Furthermore, children benefit when they are actively engaged in doing or making something, like a movie trailer or a larger scale production (Banaji, 2010). In order to facilitate this learning, successful teachers implement the critical literacy strategies of situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed
practice (Graham, Benson, and Fink, 2010). Critical media literacy revolves around two central schemas: the schema from Cultural Studies proposes that the representation and communication of a media artefact move round cyclically between different nodes in the life of that media artefact, while semiotics’ multimodality theory focuses on the discourse, design, production, distribution, and social context of media artefacts (Burn 2009). The challenge teachers face when constructing a unified critical media literacy program is defined by how well these two approaches are blended for students as they engage and construct a variety of media artefacts. Opportunities are given in the critical media literacy classroom for students to create their own media artefact, such as a short digital video. The new research outlined in this paper will add to the conversation regarding what successful critical media literacy approaches look like in the classroom by detailing how a sample of elementary teachers in the GTA incorporate digital storytelling as a part of their instruction through the use of digital video production.
Chapter 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I identify the nature of my study as a qualitative research inquiry, which includes a review of the literature as well as face-to-face interviews with York Region teachers who are using information and communications technology in order to integrate digital storytelling into their language and media literacy curriculum as set out by the government of Ontario. I also identify the instruments of my data collection and give some sample interview questions from my protocol. I describe the number of participants in my research study and give a detailed account of their backgrounds and experiences relevant to my research focus. Toward the end of the chapter, I explain how I analyzed the data I collected. Finally, I also describe the ethical review procedures as established by the University of Toronto Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) and identify the strengths and limitations of my research study and design.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

This research study examined how a sample of elementary teachers in the GTA incorporates digital storytelling as a part of their instruction through the use of digital video production.

This study was conducted by reviewing the literature surrounding critical media literacy, and then through establishing access and conducting face-to-face interviews with teachers, extra-curricular educators, and digital literacy resource instructors in the York
Region District School Board (YRDSB) and GTA. The present research was conducted as a qualitative research study, including a review of the relevant literature regarding critical media literacy pedagogy and semi-structured interviews. The participants in this study were a primary school teacher in a publicly funded school, a former primary school teacher who has since gone on to establish a company focused on implementing digital filmmaking day camps throughout the GTA, Ottawa, Alberta, Vancouver, and Florida, and a digital literacy resource teacher working in the YRDSB. The participants offer unique perspectives with regards to how the public and private education sectors view best practices with regards to media literacy education, digital storytelling, and the use of ICT with students. The data that was collected during these interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed via a word processing program.

Qualitative research is an appropriate and relevant approach for my specific study because it allows me to use multiple methods, such as interviews, and documents, rather than relying on a single source of data collection. This research method also allows me, as a researcher, to involve myself as a key instrument in the collection of data, allowing me to place emphasis on the process of my research as moving from general assumptions about ICT proficiency and its use in the classroom to more specific and definitive benchmarks during the integration of digital storytelling into the language arts curriculum. Creswell (2013) defines qualitative research as beginning with assumptions and interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems to address the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. In this study, I begin with critical media literacy rationale that states children need to critically question the messages that surround them and use the new tools to express their own
ideas and concerns (Share 2010, p. 126). I use that guiding framework to examine how a sample of elementary teachers in the GTA incorporate digital storytelling as a part of their instruction through the use of digital video production. Carr and Kemmis (1986) state that, from the perspective of the organization of educational provision to an expanding number of potential ‘clients,’ “it is natural to think of education as a commodity (or an investment) and to think of educational organizations as delivery systems which make the commodity available to the ‘clients’” (p. 23). The commodity under examination in this study is media literacy education through the use of ICT in the classroom. The delivery systems I will be examining range from non-linear editing programs, such as iMovie and Final Cut Pro, to stop-motion animation software, such as iStopMotion. My study sought to examine how a sample of elementary teachers in the GTA incorporate digital storytelling as a part of their instruction through the use of digital video production.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The method of data collection used for this research included face-to-face, informal, semi-structured interviews grounded in qualitative research procedure. Interviews are a valuable investigative method because direct questions targeted toward experts, in this case, teachers, who work within a particular field of study illicit valuable information. Regarding one-on-one interviews, Creswell (2013) states that the researcher “needs individuals who are not hesitant to speak and share ideas, and needs to determine a setting in which this is possible” (p. 164). With regards to this concern, I have
developed mutual access and established a communicative rapport with my interview subjects while developing clear research questions related to their area of expertise. My interview subjects were not hesitant to detail their experiences working in the public and private education sectors and have taught media literacy and digital storytelling through the use of information and communication technologies with students whose ages range from 6-14.

Note taking and audio recording were also used as a method of interviewing during this research. King and Horrocks (2010) state that, “it is always preferable in qualitative research to obtain an audio- (or video-) recording of the interview… You could not, for example, carry out conversation analysis or discourse analysis without a full, accurate record of what the participant said, and it is hard to see how a phenomenological or narrative analysis could be completed without a verbatim transcript” (p. 47). The role I took as a researcher stems from a contextualist approach and assumes, as King and Horrocks (2010) point out in a summary of epistemological positions, that context is integral to understanding how people experience their lives (p. 20). The authors continue to state that rather than remaining neutral, as in a realist approach, the role of the researcher in a contextual approach is to communicate the perspectives from which they approach their work, including gender, age, ethnicity, and social status so that the audience can appreciate the situated position from which the researcher writes (p. 21).
3.3 Participants

In this section, I introduce my participants, detail the sampling criteria for this study, describe my sampling procedures, and outline my participant biographies.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

In this section, I detail my sampling criteria for this study. I selected my participants based on the following criteria:

- Participants have a minimum of 10 years experience working in the public education system, not just accessing ICT, but also being leaders in media literacy education in the Ontario public school system.
- Participants have witnessed and evaluated students who have used non-linear editing software (such as iMovie) as part of a short-term (1-2 week) digital storytelling project or assessment.
- Participants were chosen to be a part of this research study because they provide insight and share relevant experiences with regards to being able to identify what technologies and strategies are best suited for developing engaging, multimodal learning experiences in the media literacy classroom.
- Participants can also testify as to how particular technologies help develop reading and writing proficiency in students. Teachers were also selected because of their experience in primary school classrooms in Ontario in a publicly funded board of education.
The goal of these interviews was to obtain an understanding of the technologies (hardware) and applications (software) teachers used as resources during their media literacy instruction in order to examine how these teachers incorporated digital storytelling as a part of their media literacy instruction.

### 3.3.2 Sampling Procedures

In order to recruit my interview subjects, I sought recommendations from colleagues, friends, and family members. Creswell (2013) states that samples can change during a study and that researchers need to be flexible while still planning as ahead as possible for their sampling strategy (p. 156). As such, to best satisfy the requirements for this study within the time limit allotted I have employed a criterion-based convenience sampling strategy. With regards to this combination strategy, Miles and Huberman (1994) state that convenience sampling saves time and money while criterion sampling ensures that all research participants meet a criterion that is useful for quality assurance. (p. 28). During my criterion-based convenience sampling, I met Jim (pseudonym) in 2013. The year I met Jim, I volunteered in his York Region classroom over a 4-week period and worked with him to develop a media literacy unit focused on deconstructing media messages via advertisements, such as posters, billboards, and radio spots. Through Jim’s recommendation, I met Ryan (pseudonym), a former public school teacher who now owns and operates his own company that offers full day digital storytelling summer camp experiences and in class media literacy workshops. By identifying relevant skills I obtained during my BFA program in film studies at Ryerson University, Ryan employed me as a media workshop instructor. I worked under Ryan during the summer of 2014 and 2015.
3.3.3 Participant Biographies

Jim

At the time of the interview, Jim was a grade 6 teacher in the York Region District School Board. He had taught for 11 years and employed ICT in his classroom through narrative storytelling projects. On several occasions, he had used Ryan’s company to help him achieve media literacy goals as outlined by the Ontario Ministry of Education Language curriculum (2006). Jim embraced his board’s BYOD policy by encouraging students to bring their own devices to school for use in his classroom under his guidance. Jim also discussed with students the appropriate use of their technology at school and established a set of guidelines for ICT use in his classroom.

Ryan

At the time of the interview, Ryan was a former public school teacher who left the profession to establish a company focused on providing digital storytelling experiences to children ages 6-14. Ryan’s company offered students the opportunity to learn how to make their own stop motion animation, music video, or live action short digital movie. Something that is unique about Ryan’s instructors is that they taught students how to use green screen effects similar to those used in Hollywood to composite an image or background onto a physical space in order to communicate a story element within the scene of a short film or mock news broadcast. Ryan’s company grew from operating exclusively within the GTA to Ottawa, Edmonton, Calgary, Vancouver, Boca Raton, FL and Coral Springs, FL.
3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The data during this process was collected using face-to-face, informal, semi-structured interviews. Interviews with the participants were conducted after school and off-site, away from OISE, at mutually convenient locations as selected by the interviewees and confirmed by myself, the researcher. The scheduled times of these interviews depended on the availability of the participants and were planned no later than a week in advance of the target date and time. Each one-on-one interview was approximately 30-45 minutes in length. Each interview was conducted in person and recorded using a digital recorder. All recordings were later transcribed using a word processing program. Each participant signed the Letter of Consent for Interview (Appendix A) in advance of the formal beginning of the interview process. Each participant was also asked all 26 research questions (Appendix B) and relevant, probing questions were added to the interview depending on the nature of the participant’s response or the direction the dialogue was heading in.

Once the interview process was finalized, and all recordings had been transcribed, I read each transcript several times in order to re-familiarize myself with each unique discussion. I used different coloured highlighter markers in order to draw attention to important quotes and illuminations obtained from the interview data. These quotations were then copied, cut, and reorganized into charts that ordered responses together. I wrote notes to myself in a separate notebook regarding the data I was collecting. This ensured that I was able to identify and record relevant themes. I organized my data into the following initial categories of data: how teachers incorporate digital storytelling as a part of their media literacy instruction; pedagogical considerations; ICT impact on student
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literacy practice; support structures/hindrances faced when developing an ICT based media literacy program; strengths/weaknesses in the learning community as a result of ICT implementation; ICT impact on multiple intelligences; additional resources supplied by the YRDSB to assist teachers. As I continued to collect and organize my data, I refined the categories identified broadly above and selected quotations that best illustrated each theme as set out by my guiding research questions. In some instances, quotations were paraphrased in order to generalize responses to larger themes.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

To ensure the privacy of the participants, all correspondence and face-to-face meetings between the research participants and myself has been kept private and confidential. A Letter of Consent for Interview (see Appendix A) was provided to the interviewees and the terms of the research project agreement were reviewed and signed off on before meeting for the interview. The participants were asked if they had any questions or concerns with the Letter of Consent for Interview, and it was reviewed with them thoroughly, signed, and dated before the interview commenced. I gave participants a copy of the Letter of Consent for Interview for their records. I also informed each participant that they had the right to withdraw from the study up to the day it was submitted and that a copy of their interview transcript and a full summary of the final project would be provided if they were interested in the final findings. To ensure additional confidentiality, I assigned each participant a pseudonym. Anonymity was assured, as no one other than the researcher knows the original names of the participants. All legal names and any identifying schools or institutions have been removed from the
transcripts. There are no known risks to participants involved in the study. The benefit of active participation in this project was to allow participants to reflect on their own teaching practices regarding their implementation of the media literacy curriculum and share their experiences in the field of teaching in the hopes of raising awareness of issues as it pertains to the use of information and communications technologies and digital storytelling in the media literacy classroom. Data will be stored for up to 5 years after the submission date and will be stored digitally on a password protected hard drive. While I had been previously employed by Ryan, one of the research participants, I was not employed by him between the time the interview was held and the time of the research findings were submitted for evaluation.

The interviews were accurately transcribed and each interviewee was offered an opportunity to review their transcript in order to consider and confirm their responses. Called “member checking,” this process is, as Carlson (2010) describes, an opportunity for members (participants) to check (approve) particular aspects of the data they provided to the interviewer, commonly through transcript form or particles from the narratives they contributed during previous interview sessions. (p. 1105) Carlson (2010) builds from Creswell and Miller (2000) when she states that member checking is largely determined by the incorporation of three unique lenses: the self as researcher, the participants of the study, and the external readers of the final research report. (p. 1105) Carlson (2010) also points out that these lenses are the three entities for which “the researcher desires trustworthiness approval, and the lenses through which researchers should view and interpret their work. Data should be continually revisited and scrutinized for accuracy of
interpretation and for meaningful, coherent conveyance of the participant's narrative contributions.” (p. 1106)

3.6 Methodological Strengths & Limitations

This qualitative research study was conducted from September 2014 to April 2016. However, the interview and transcription process took place from September 2015 to December 2015, a period of only 4 months. While time constraints were a limitation, they also encouraged me to focus on a manageable sample size given the goals of the research project. The goal of this research was not to find broad themes that could be generalized across all teachers in all elementary schools in Ontario; the goal was to examine how a sample of elementary teachers in the GTA incorporated digital storytelling as a part of their media literacy instruction. Given the time restraints as set out by the Masters of Teaching program, and the goals I established before beginning the interview and transcription process, I constructed 26 direct, probing questions that I felt would assist me in achieving the answers to my research questions. Given the inability to speak with students or conduct classroom observations, one-on-one interviews with teachers were the next, best option for this research study.

Given the limited capacity of this research project, I decided to focus my literature review on defining critical media literacy and on writers for whom critical media literacy and the use of ICT in the classroom was key to establishing how students develop and retain proficiency related to high-tech media, such as the use of digital film editing and recording skills to construct a narrative short film. My research is principally concerned
with the current settings in which a sample of elementary teachers in the GTA incorporate digital storytelling as a part of their critical media literacy instruction. There are many perspectives regarding media literacy and the use of ICT in the classroom and not all were taken into consideration, as that was not a feasible goal given the scope and time frame as established by the Master of Teaching program at OISE.

3.7 Conclusions

In conclusion, this qualitative research study sought to determine how a sample of elementary teachers in the GTA incorporate digital storytelling as a part of their critical media literacy instruction. Next, in chapter 4, I report the research findings, which identify four major themes.
Chapter 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I detail the findings of my qualitative research inquiry. I include descriptions and elaborations of crucial themes that emerged and analyze the significance of these findings given what I reported in the literature review while incorporating additional research to contextualize the significance of my as face-to-face interviews with York Region teachers who are using information and communications technology in order to integrate digital storytelling into their language and media literacy curriculum as set out by the government of Ontario. I identify four major themes from my findings: 1) teachers differentiate instruction through information and communication technologies provided by the school board and third parties to engage and assist students with multiple intelligences and learning disabilities when programming their language curriculum; 2) teachers embrace critical media literacy strategies to promote agency and self-directed learning with students through media content production; 3) teachers recognized the importance of safe, digital footprinting before using ICT in the classroom in conjunction with the Internet as per school board policy in order to prevent bullying and harassment online; 4) the most common challenges in ICT integration identified by teachers involve intermittent network signals and lack of support from administration and colleagues.

4.1 Teachers differentiate instruction through information and communication technologies provided by the school board and utilize third parties to engage and assist students with multiple intelligences and learning disabilities when
programming their language curriculum.

Based on interviews into the implementation of an information and communication (ICT) focused media literacy curriculum, one impact on students’ literacy practices, engagement, and achievement teachers have identified is the need to provide specific assistive technologies to aid students identified with a learning disability. Sometimes those teachers will bring in additional support from outside of the school board in the form of third party support, meaning that students, parents, and part of the school’s technology budget will have to accommodate the payment of special consultants with expertise in the areas of digital filmmaking. Several subthemes were also identified. Firstly, as a means of strengthening the classroom learning community with regards to the use of ICT, teachers noted that it was important to accommodate for students who lacked the ability to access technology at home by providing additional time at school to assist in the completion of work that may not be able to be finished without the use of a particular technology, e.g. non-linear digital video editing software such as iMovie.

Secondly, teachers recognized the importance of creating collaborative learning experiences and differentiating ICT instruction for learners who struggle with behavioral disorders. Teachers described that collaborative learning experiences, particularly when using non-linear digital video editing, such as iMovie, engaged multiple intelligences and decreased classroom management issues.

Thirdly, teachers expressed that technology lead teachers act as the main conduit between integrating digital technology and the media literacy curriculum. However, teachers also indicated that technology lead teachers are largely unfamiliar with digital video editing and, as a result, may need to call in third party support or consultation
during media production projects, such as the creation of a movie trailer or a news broadcast for students.

4.1.1 Teachers recognized the need for third party support when setting expectations for digital storytelling curriculum in their classroom.

Jim, a teacher for 11 years, is an ICT lead, or “tech lead,” for his school in the York Region District School Board. Some of his responsibilities include organizing a budget for the whole year with regards to the purchase of new technology and addressing the whole school to find out the technological interests and needs of staff. “Every school has a technology lead teacher,” Jim said. “That technology lead teacher is responsible for ordering technology for school, but that tech lead teacher is also there to support teachers who are unfamiliar with certain technology.” If there is a new application or hardware being used in the classroom, one of the responsibilities for a tech lead teacher is to reach out to other interested staff members and provide an opportunity for teachers after school hours that are unfamiliar with the technology to learn more about it. During such an opportunity to incorporate digital storytelling as a part of his media literacy instruction, Jim decided to reach out to a private company for third party support and equipment, such as digital video cameras, camera stands, and Apple laptops, as he recognized he lacked particular software proficiencies and requisite hardware in the classroom needed to engage his students in the process of digital storytelling.

Jim contacted Ryan’s company, Kid Film (pseudonym), for some assistance in running a digital storytelling workshop. “They went through the whole production side,” Jim recalled. The third party support provided by Ryan’s company allowed Jim to
structure his classroom into small production teams that used storyboards in order to brainstorm ideas for a movie trailer, as well as decide upon camera angles, music and sound effects, and role casting. This permitted students to participate in the role of a film director, cinematographer, and actor while learning new cinematic language and engaging in the process of digital storytelling. “Particularly with the camera angles,” remembered Jim. “In terms of angles, you wanted to shoot things from different perspectives: high angle, low angle, a close up, a wide panel shot… I would write it down that [students] are following all the different camera angles and remind the students, ‘What the expectations in terms of the camera angles that you were to use in your trailer?’”

Third party support, like that from a school board technology consultant or a private company, can enter classrooms to coach a teacher through a new experience, such as setting up a detailed workshop regarding how to use a particular piece of technology or creating a collaborative experience with digital video cameras and non-linear editing software. Ryan’s value when providing support to teachers in the field is that he has 8 years of teaching experience in Ontario. He left the teaching profession to found his company and act as a third party consultant to public schools and privately led summer camps to make a living.

I run a company called Kid Film, Ryan recounted. We’re multi-faceted across North America, but specifically in Canada. We do in-class media literacy workshops. So, basically, what we do is go into a classroom for a full day. We provide all the technology and provide professional instruction [through] our staff, which we call Imaginators. The reason we call them Imaginators is because we want them to be able to use the technology to engage the kids to tell stories. And we provide, again, all the equipment, curriculum, and grade-specific workshops to classrooms.
Ryan’s specific focus is to provide a service that mentors young people via professionally trained filmmakers who possess the technical knowledge and critical pedagogy to analysis and create cinematic productions using film and digital video. Ryan’s hook to current teachers is that is company brings people with real work experience in the film and television industry into classrooms in order to engage students and get them excited about the prospect of making a digital video production. He indicated that students have seen success when creating films with working professionals because students are more apt to take chances when engaging with ICT, make mistakes, and act upon constructive feedback from the facilitator when revising errors.

If they’re taking it as a part of a culminating event, explained Ryan, they’ve done a novel study, for example and instead of doing the traditional book covers and things like that; they want to make a movie trailer. We provide that experience and, finally, before they go film, we provide them with opportunities to learn about camera angles, shooting for emotion, why different camera angles happen for different reasons. We provide an editing experience so that they’re shooting for purpose, not just going out there and not knowing what they’re shooting for…Our goal is to provide them with as much information so they can be independent in the process.

When third party support enters the classroom, learning materials in the form of storyboard templates and evaluative rubrics are typically sent ahead of time to teachers before the third party begins their work with students. The idea behind this level of support is that the teacher can take a subject that they’ve already taught and weave digital technology into it as a means of assessing a culminating product in the form of an educational video, a movie trailer, or news broadcast, for example.
4.1.2 – Teachers recognized the importance of accommodating students that do not have access to certain technologies used at school when completing assignments at home.

A challenge that teachers recognized when developing an ICT based media literacy program is the issue of technology equity and the opportunity for equal, fair access to technologies at use at home and in the school. Jim stated that there is “a handful of students that don’t have the technology at home, don’t have smart devices of their own, but then, to address that, the school does.” Students who do not have access to technology at use in the school at home are given first access when participating in media literacy projects. Furthermore, Jim stressed the need to be flexible in terms of the due date of any potential ICT-related assignments and provide extra time to work on projects at school. “Another challenge that comes to mind are students who don’t have the technology at home,” stated Jim. “You need to know your students, you need to know their backgrounds, you need to be flexible and provide the opportunity for students to use the technology at school.” This opportunity to use the technology at school comes in the form of sharing devices and using technology at recess time in order to complete assignments.

4.1.3 – Teachers recognized the importance creating collaborative learning experiences when differentiating ICT instruction for multiple intelligences and learners who struggle with behavioral disorders.

Jim said during his interview that he worked with four students identified with a learning disability and under the guidance of an independent education plan (IEP).
“Those students have access to technology,” said Jim. “[Teachers] call it ‘assistive technology.’” These assistive technologies stay with the student as per the needs outlined in their IEP until they finish high school, upon which the technology is returned to the board. Students with access to assistive technologies use programs to help them organize their ideas for reading and writing. One of the popular programs that he uses with students is called wordQ (http://www.goqsoftware.com/), which is word prediction software that benefits children that have difficulty spelling or identifying words beyond their vocabulary range. The software’s word prediction function works even if words are spelled resourcefully or have parts omitted while its text reading software speaks back to the user through the device in a understandable tone of voice as the user highlights text it would like the program to read aloud. Another ICT application used in the classroom is called the SMART Ideas program (http://smart-ideas.software.informer.com/5.1/). According to Jim, this software “allows the students to create a visual organizer, mind maps, without worrying about their fine motor skills so they’re using the mouse or the track pad on the laptop.” As a result, students who use assistive technologies are more integrated into the classroom learning experience and can participate with their peers without worrying about learning anxieties, such as spelling, pronunciation, or handwriting.

Using ICT instruction to motivate student learning is important for teachers who want to create or strengthen a learning community in the classroom. Ryan noted that behavior issues in classrooms are caused because of the way teachers teach. “I believe that engaging students and having them walk around and do things really decreases [negative] behavior in the classroom,” said Ryan. “I wanted to act on that and, from my
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experiences, I was right. A lot of kids in my class who were diagnosed ADD, ADHD, when they’re given tasks like [digital film production], they shone at it because they were active, they were talking to others, they were explaining their issues, and I just saw a massive success in it.” Teachers recognized the importance of creating collaborative learning opportunities when using ICT in the classroom. Ryan continued to expand on his beliefs in collaboration this way: “I believe in collaborative technology. I don’t believe in one person using a laptop to reach a goal. I think in media literacy, specifically, it’s fantastic to have different minds thinking together to create something because it challenges people to think different, it challenges people to accept things or not to accept things.”

Teachers also stressed the importance of supporting a collaborative learning environment where children work in small groups and share technology equally. Jim especially found that classroom management issues, such as students talking out of turn or disrupting peers during group work, were mitigated when students were given the power to promote their own sense of order self-imposed through the digital storytelling experience and organized structure of a film production. Ryan supported Jim when he said, “kids need to collaborate with each other, they need to talk about what makes things work and what makes things not work, and the reasons why. They need to be able to critique each other and feel comfortable doing so.” Educators also noted an increase in responsiveness, participation and engagement from English language learners (ELL) when creating group tasks using ICT. ELL students inquired about definitions, technical language, and procedural requirements when engaged in digital storytelling activities.

When I looked at the expectations, what they were addressing, I could see them use the language, definitions,
Jim reflected. Walking around and observing, they’re using the lingo, they’re using the terminology and they showed that they understood by applying and creating a piece of media literacy. It really improved their critical thinking.

Teachers also model effective practice when they adjust programs for the literacy level of ELL students based on feedback from their ESL teacher, e.g. providing a word bank of cinematic terminology when working on a movie trailer support students in understanding of the medium of digital video and photography. Moreover, teachers used self-assessment strategies to evaluate student’s understanding of the learning expectations:

Another great benefit is that…even for the weaker students that have difficulty with writing, this is a great outlet for them to express themselves. We do have some kids that are weaker writers, but when using ICT to create something visual…it’s a great outlet and an opportunity for them to really get involved and enjoy literacy.

When entering into a classroom as third party support, one of the most common responses from teachers regarding classroom management and the setting of behavioral expectations for their students is that those children diagnosed with ADD or ADHD will act disruptively when learning and using new ICT. However, Ryan believes that traditional classroom setups do not favor children with behavioral disorders and states that there is an increase in focus and on task work when a new ICT is explained and used in the classroom with high expectations:

Kids who are outside of — I’ll call it, the box of learning — they excel at [digital storytelling] because they’re comfortable, they’re engaged with others, they’re aloud to make noise, they’re allowed to express their ideas, they’re moving around – they’re doing something!
4.1.4 Analysis of Significance

Research confirms teacher claims that using ICT instruction to motivate student learning is important for teachers who want to create or strengthen a learning community in the classroom. Research by Edyburn (2007) supports that digital tools in the form of assistive technologies can support the interest and success of learners in literacy and, to benefit from having these assistive technologies available, teachers should format their lesson plan templates to intentionally incorporate assistive technology tools to differentiate their instruction for students with multiple intelligences and learning disabilities. Citing additional research, Sider and Maich (2014) indicate that Ontario teachers can effectively incorporate assistive technology with the needs of all students in mind when they participate in the following: provide students with opportunities to use the available assistive technology; use assistive technology as part of the regular rhythm of the class (Ruffin, 2012); evaluate various assistive technology and teachers’ readiness to effectively use it (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005); and build a supportive school environment where teachers and other educational specialists collaborate with and mentor each other, as that environment is best suited to support the implementation and use of assistive technology (Reed & Bowser, 2012). Furthermore, this intersection of research, produced by a partnership between the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat and the Ontario Association of Deans of Education, reveals that there is persuasive long-term data that student success can be enhanced in the course of the suitable use of assistive technologies if efforts are made by to put into action board approved assistive technologies. When done effectively for student use, these technologies can enhance literacy acquisition, adaptable and differentiated learning practice, and student self-
sufficiency (Sider & Maich, 2014).

The research conducted by the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat and the Ontario Association of Deans of Education suggests that strengthening a classroom learning community can occur by providing additional time at school to assist in the completion of work, creating collaborative learning experiences, differentiating ICT instruction for learners who struggle with behavioral disorders, engaging multiple intelligences, and building an encouraging professional setting where teachers and other technology specialists can collaborate with and mentor each other. However, within the domain of teaching there are pedagogical factors to be aware of when programming and integrating digital technology into the language curriculum. The difficulty of technology amalgamation comes from understanding how the various connections of knowledge among these three components interact with each other and how they can be applied in active classroom environments. The notion of technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge (TPACK) is a framework for understanding the facets of knowledge teachers need to be aware of when they program ICT use for students. Teachers need to be aware that technology knowledge (TK) “is always in a state of flux — more so than the other two core knowledge domains in the TPACK framework (pedagogy and content). Thus, defining it is notoriously difficult. Any definition of technology knowledge is in danger of becoming outdated by the time this text has been published” (Koehler and Mishra, 2009; p. 5).
4.2 Teachers embrace critical media literacy strategies through peer assessment to promote media content production and self-directed learning with students.

Teachers indicated that digital video editing and production procedures contain different processes than writing an essay or a test and, as such, need to be assessed differently. Teachers acknowledged the value of peer assessment in the evaluation of summative assessments, as in the case of movie trailers or news broadcasts. In addition, teachers used pre-production, production, and post-production organizational steps, similar to that of a film crew, to structure the student learning experience when engaging in digital storytelling practices. Teachers recognized the importance of examining message creation through an examination of visual recording methods and techniques when engaging in digital storytelling productions, either through the creation of a movie trailer on iMovie or through stop-motion animation using Boinx’s iStopMotion software. Teachers discussed with their students the concepts of visual framing and camera angle, as well as an analysis of character motivation within a set narrative context. Respondents also critically analyzed media production software to explain to students how technology is being used to construct gender identity and, in a detailed case, worked with larger government agencies to develop a body image focused curriculum.

4.2.1 – Teachers prefer to use peer assessment when assessing digital video productions created by students.

When it comes to assessment, teachers preferred to use peer assessment when assigning digital video productions to students because peer assessment spoke to the
larger collaborative efforts and overall group work of the students. “Movies can’t be made by yourself,” Ryan said. “You need to work with other people. Sitting down and getting a storyline together, working through that process, building characters and then editing it — the process contains such different tasks than what we do when we write an essay or a test.” As a result, when assessing non-linear digital video editing assignments, Ryan refers to use peer assessment. “I like peer-to-peer [assessment] because films, when you look at films and the history of movie critics, everybody has a different opinion about a film because, again, it’s an experience. When kids watch others kid’s films, they’re able to pick out some neat things that [teachers] might miss and, traditionally, when kids are making films, they’re making them for one and other. But I like that. And then, of course, we provide standard rubrics, checklists for teachers to use.”

Research confirms that the use of non-linear digital video editing software does confirm a number of benefits that align with the responses of teachers interviewed. Research by Burn (2009) substantiates that a professional packaged called Media 100 used with 16-year-olds from 1999 did confirm a number of positive factors that were not found in analogue systems used previously. His research found that because “strips of digital video can be stored in bins and trimmed to fit the desired sequence, the early stages of selection, ordering, constructing a sequence or montage (both audio and visual) can be much more ambitious” (2009, p. 45). This aligns with what teachers had said with regards to the flexibility and manipulative quality of digital systems when students collaborate on media projects, such as movie trailers or news productions. Burn’s research also detailed the construction of a “teaser trailer” for the millennium re-release of Alfred Hitchcock’s thriller classic Psycho (1960). The author stated that student
groups could collaborate to set up visual and action sequences and re-work narrative designs without delay. This is significant for new teachers entering into the public school as research supports that students in the junior, intermediate, and senior grades that work with non-linear editing software show the ability to order a narrative and assemble digital footage in a way that makes sense sequentially in order to satisfy media literacy curriculum requirements. For example, the creation of a movie trailer satisfies all the overall curriculum expectations for grade 6 in the Ontario language curriculum: the selection, ordering, constructing of a sequence or montage demonstrates an understanding of a variety of media texts in the way that actions, symbols, music interplay with each other to convey meaning; the flexibility and manipulative quality of digital systems when students collaborate on media projects helps students identify some media forms; the explanation of how a movie trailer can hook audience interest or increase the sale of movie tickets introduces students to cinematic conventions and techniques associated the creation of meaning; the final product is a polished media text that targets a specific audience with the purpose of hooking their interest and making them desire to watch the whole film; and finally, peer assessment allows students to reflect on and identify their strengths as media interpreters and creators, identifying areas for improvement with regarding to editing and sequencing video, and allows students to discuss with peers various storytelling strategies they found most helpful in understanding and creating their movie trailer.
4.2.2 – Teachers use cinematic storytelling organizational strategies, such as pre-production, production, and post-production, to structure the student learning experience when engaging in digital storytelling.

When asked to define media literacy, Jim stated that is “anything that uses technology and combines it with texts, visuals, even music.” While Ryan felt that media literacy and the use of digital technologies could be used to define the needs of a generation of learners:

It’s the voice of the new generation. The camera lens is what gives youth a voice and I look at it that the majority of people that we work with have had the experience of videotaping or taking pictures on some type of mobile device. The question becomes: what are the reasons, what are their motivations, and are they doing it right? The goal of what media literacy means to me is providing opportunities to showcase how [students] can do things to develop their voices in a broader sense that the society and community will really listen to them.

One example of how media literacy provides opportunities to showcase student’s voices is through non-linear digital video editing and multimedia productions. Jim, who works with grade 6 students, stated that, “as the students get older you can start to create short films, commercials…I feel that, in order to address the media literacy expectations, you need to have the technology component as well.” Jim also embraces a critical media literacy strategy as he builds his literacy program. Students create advertisements, both digitally and through traditional paper and pencil, that are primarily focused towards selling a product. In Jim’s class, students examine advertisements on various websites and ask the question, “What are you trying to sell?” As an assessment of learning, students in small groups deconstruct how the ads target a specific audience through images, texts, or sounds. Finally, they will create their own advertisement piece. Students
are given the task of creating advisements of common objects found in the classroom or at home and identify a method of targeting a specific audience for that object. While explaining this assessment task, Jim stated that a student could take pictures of different angles of a pencil case, for example, and insert texts or additional images on to their photograph to create an advertisement that focused on the needs of a particular target audience. Stressing the importance of creating specific assessment tasks, Jim stated, “You need to be able to have your assessment pieces be able to justify your the final grades that you give a student at the end of the year. So you need to be able to back up your assessment…The curriculum expectations, I find, are the foundation for holding a teacher accountable to teach media literacy.”

Ryan’s approach to media literacy is focused around content development as organized by pre-production, production, and post-production stages. He defines content development as teaching students in a method that allows them “to be able to tell a story to get their point across – whether it’s making a movie, whether it’s making a commercial — whatever type of thing that they’re actively participating in, it’s all about developing content and getting their point across to audiences.” The assessments and evaluations that Ryan provides through his company brings media literacy and stop motion animation together while providing teachers and students with expectations and guidelines for the three production stages: storyboarding a narrative; building characters out of clay; constructing sets out of construction paper and file folders; proper use of sound effects in a scene; voiceovers for character speech; and selecting appropriate music to engage the audience given the genre or scene action of a particular story idea.

In Ryan’s work with children, he takes time to discuss about the important of pre-
planning a story idea, the selection of a variety of camera angles, and lighting choices. These decisions prepare students to embark on a cinematic experience that exposes them to the processes and stages of production of a small movie crew. In order to focus on specific, sequential storytelling, Ryan groups students into production units before taking a look at digital video footage of a man performing specific actions as he begins his day. The video footage contains a man walking out from his apartment, locking his door, walking to the elevator, getting in his car and driving away. This specific strategy takes away the production element and focuses specifically on the student’s ability to sequence a story and arrange stock footage in a way that makes sense sequentially in order to limit anxieties about acting and starring in the film and, instead, practice the pre-production element of storyboarding. “The ability to sequence their ideas is very difficult,” Ryan said. “The neat thing about a program like iMovie is that you have that storyboard right in front of [students]. The interface is where they have to take boxes and sequence their ideas to make sense…The technology component – like the drags and drops, the cutting – they get that.”

4.2.3 – Teachers recognized that the creation of movie trailers and news broadcasts were effective means of engaging students in digital storytelling and media literacy.

Teachers helped students use non-linear digital video editing software, such as iMovie, to create a movie trailers using pre-established templates. With iMovie, students are able to select a genre template unique to their specific movie trailer after their group has come across a narrative idea worth pursuing. The template gives students the opportunity to order the preset video edit, filled with predetermined types of fades, cuts,
wipes, and other transitions, with their own unique video footage and narrative structure. After the footage is recorded using a handheld digital video camera, students can order and reorder the movie trailer as they see fit. Jim described the use of the software as “very, very user friendly.” Ryan supported Jim’s perspective with this explanation: “The screen is split. There’s a timeline and then, above or below that, depending on how you want to put it, are the movie clips. Once you take one, you can drag and drop the movie clips, or cut them, by creating a box around them and then drag them down into the timeline. From that point on, you can move them around in the timeline to make your story make sense logically.”

Teachers also participated in the development of breaking news workshops with students. With his media literacy camp, Ryan takes the opportunity to teach students about the history of news and the role of the anchorperson. “When I was younger,” Ryan said, “on television and radio — that’s where the news broke. That’s when something good or bad was happening it would break into our favorite program and we’d have the anchorperson talk. And I talk about it to them; I ask them, where do you get your breaking news from now? And then there’s still the television, but…more often we’re seeing kids as young as fourth grade say that they get their breaking news from Facebook and Twitter.” Teachers identified that because young people have their own mobile devices now, by virtue of controlling the access to a recording device (a cell phone) and an audience (the internet) students can become a breaking news reporter. “They’re not cognizant of the fact that they’re these agents, but they are,” Ryan said. “It’s simple. Everybody who has that technology, they’re the anchorperson now. But when a student makes that connection, it’s real for them.”
4.2.4 – Teachers used critical media literacy to explain to students how technology is being used to construct gender identity.

Teachers identified the importance of using critical media literacy to engage students, particularly girls, and inform them about how technology is used to adjust and alter the way that a female body appears in the media. Jim used Dove’s *Campaign for Real Beauty*, which is a 2011 study and global marketing campaign focused on studying women’s relationship with beauty as outlined in their report *The Real Truth About Beauty: Revisited*. The campaign reports “only 4% of women around the world consider themselves beautiful, and that anxiety about looks begins at an early age. In a study of over 1,200 10-to-17-year-olds, a majority of girls, 72%, said they felt tremendous pressure to be beautiful. The study also found that only 11% of girls around the world feel comfortable using the word beautiful to describe their looks, showing that there is a universal increase in beauty pressure and a decrease in girls’ confidence as they grow older” (2011). Jim discussed these findings with the class and paired them with a video entitled *Dove Evolution / with some images, all is not what it seems* (2014). The video details, in a time-lapse method, the transformation of a model without facial makeup or hair styling to a completed billboard advertisement. The transformative process, which features Adobe Photoshop edit, lighting adjustments, makeup selection, and hair styling, attempts to highlight the purposeful public distortion of perspective when it comes to public expectations of female beauty. “When they see the commercial of the transformation of a normal, regular female and how technology is used to alter the way they appear — it’s very eye opening,” reflected Jim. “By the end [of the unit], I felt that
my students were more confident with who they were, especially with body image. That was another component.”

Continuing to focus on the construction of gender identity, Ryan also discussed his partnership with the National Eating Disorder Information Center (NEDIC) and involvement in the creation of the Beyond Images curriculum. According to their information page, NEDIC, established in 1985 is Canada’s “only national organization dedicated to helping those impacted by eating disorders and body-image issues by providing information, resources, referrals and support” (2013). The organization was founded as a self-regulating non-profit institute and is supported by the University Health Network in Toronto and the Ontario Ministry of Health.

The curriculum is www.beyondimages.ca, discussed Ryan. It’s a body image curriculum and that’s been quite interesting because it allows kids to look at how people are — how the media perceives body image and how they deploy advertisements toward body image. We found that type of curriculum to be a little bit longer lasting. It always brings back the teachable moments.

Sponsored in part by the Dove Self Esteem Project, the curriculum gives students an opportunity to “learn how media messages are constructed both mechanically and symbolically – then learn to make their own media messages about beauty beyond the obvious. Beyond Images explores current concepts of male and female beauty and what it means to ‘fit in’, helping students understand and develop resilience against negative messaging” (2013). The curriculum is free to download for registered teachers and includes lesson plans, worksheets, assessment tools, and evaluation rubrics in .pdf and .docx files for Adobe Reader and Microsoft Word users. The online lesson plans include
material for grades 4-8 and include activities that combat appearance-based bullying and negative stereotypes. The program presents an opening to investigate important concerns regarding body image and self-esteem as well as media messaging, while developing critical thinking skills.

4.2.5 Analysis of Significance

It is important for educators to know not all literacy programs will use cinematic storytelling organizational strategies, such as pre-production, production, and post-production, to structure the student learning experience when engaging in digital storytelling, nor will they rely strictly on film as a guideline for teaching literacy. School literacy, as defined by Hammett and Barrell (2002), are generally comprised of reading and writing activities that feature reading written texts as a process of decoding and understanding. As it pertains to the English language educator seeking to integrate digital technology into their language curriculum, most assignments pertaining to the curriculum revolve around the schema of the representation and communication of a media artifact to an audience, meaning that students are engaged in the examination of particular intersections in the life of a sample of media artifacts as they deconstruct their representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation as consumable product (Burn 2009).

When teachers identified the importance of using critical media literacy to engage students, particularly girls, and inform them about how technology is used to adjust and alter the way that a female body appears in the media, research supports that it is effective practice when students learn about how media messages are constructed, in
terms of the physical mechanics of their creation and symbolic representation of gender identity and expectations, and practice those very mechanics. A curriculum such as the Beyond Images program, as promoted by NEDIC, can effectively assist teachers in exploring concepts of male and female gender identity and help learners comprehend and extend a cultural resistance against negative messaging through the creation of media messages or advertisements. Time constraints are a factor in whether or not a teacher is able to use the organizational structure of film production to reinforce critical thinking about media productions. As a part of a large evaluation project (Buckingham et al., 2007) in an inner-city west London location with a culturally diverse and socially working-class population, and another primary school in Kent with children aged nine to ten, Banaji (2010) found that that children learn more when actively engaged in doing or making something, like a movie trailer or a news production. The author also stated that production work, including pre-production, production, and post-production stages, “appears in most cases to be somewhat stifled by more controlled primary school environments. But where it is carried out, it is one of the most successful aspects of teaching and learning about advertising, and facilitates different kinds of learning and success for children sidelined by those who place their emphasis mainly on talk or writing that displays ‘media’ or ‘consumer’ literacy” (2010, p. 73).

4.3 Teachers recognized the importance of safe, digital footprinting before using ICT in the classroom in conjunction with the Internet as per school board policy in order to prevent bullying and harassment online.

When beginning a media literacy program that integrates ICT and other forms of
digital literacy, one of the learning goals teachers identified is that students are able to identify and differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate methods of accessing and posting information on the Internet when engaging in academic work. Some of the safety concerns that teachers have include searching and sharing pornography, password theft, and the cyberbullying of students. In order to prevent bullying and harassment online, teachers also recognized the importance of discussing and setting classroom expectations regarding the appropriate use of ICT in the classroom. Furthermore, despite board policy disallowing the use of electronic recording devices in the workplace to record any interactions between two or more parties unless all parties explicitly consent, the YRDSB engages in a Bring Your Own Device policy that puts pressure on teachers to explicitly communicate board technology use policy to their students in a simple, straightforward way and report any suspected inappropriate use of Board technology or technology services to the principal (YRDSB)

4.3.1 – Teachers’ beliefs in student responsibility of appropriate device use align with the technology policy in their board.

Teachers identified the importance of communicating appropriate technology use with parents from the very beginning of the year. Jim stated that at the beginning of the year the children are sent home with a document from the board requiring their parent’s consent to access Internet resources at school. Students and parents sign the document and agreeing to a list of responsibilities and acceptable behaviors when using the Internet and technology services. “Students learn about being safe on the Internet,” said Jim. “Kids are taking pictures of themselves these days. Like taking selfies, using SnapChat or
Instagram and you’re putting yourself out there and some of the kids don’t realize that it could come back and really hurt you. I’ve had to have talks with students in the classroom because they’re taking selfies and, you know, that’s one thing we don’t allow in the school setting because you’re taking pictures of other students that you’re not allowed to put online.”

York Region District School Board’s policy regarding the appropriate use of technology in the classroom, also known as Procedure #194.1: Use of Non Board Devices, states that students will “advocate for and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology; understand and follow the Information Technology Acceptable Use Agreement; and only use Board and personal technologies for educational purposes as defined by the teacher and instructional purpose in Board facilities” (YRDSB, p. 10). Furthermore, the YRDSB requires all teachers and administrators to take rational actions to administer and keenly oversee student use of computers, ICT facilities, and other digital media resources when teaching or acting in a decision-making role, meaning that it is up to teachers to inform their students about acceptable use of technology in the classroom before those technologies are used. “I’ve had a couple issues with students taking selfies in the classroom with their friends and you can’t have that,” expressed Jim. “[Students] think they can do whatever they want, when they want, with their devices because it’s theirs…Some of the kids are just very naive and sometimes don’t think about the outside world in terms of the dangers of, you know, posting things online and how that could lead to, you know, being a victim of something, that’s when you find bullying.”

Teachers responded that if students were to bring in technology from their home
that they are also aware of the potential for damage occurring to their devices. A non-board device (NBD) is defined by the YRDSB as “any computing device not owned or provided by the Board to a user that is brought into a Board building or to a Board event, activity or program by any user whether used for instructional or personal purposes… even if they are not connected to the Board’s network” (p. 41). Teachers recognized situations where non-board devices could become damaged and wanted to distance themselves from being responsible for damages that occur to NBDs. “If kids bring their own technology, they’re not taking it out at recess time, they’re not taking it out at lunch recess,” stated Jim. “It stays in the classroom where the doors are locked and where things are kept safe. We always talk about appropriate — being responsible with the technology handling. We don’t let the students do damage to the technology. They understand that it’s there for the whole school year — and it’s not their own.” As a third party support to educators, Ryan also expressed concern when bringing in NBDs to a school environment. “We tell them we’re bringing in pretty expensive equipment,” Ryan said. “We want them to be independent users of it. But the expectation is that they treat it with care. We provide guidelines on how to treat it with care and we don’t usually have issues with kids mistreating technology.”

4.3.2 Analysis of Significance

As Jim stated previously, new teachers should, at the beginning of the year, send their students home with a document from their school board or the school administration requiring their parent’s consent to access Internet resources at school. Students and
parents should co-sign the document together and agree to a list of responsibilities and acceptable behaviors when using the Internet and technology services. However, Davies and Merchant (2009) suggest that some measures taken by educators in the name of e-safety may actually hold back the educational uses of the Internet by unconsciously denying the right to use to research driven sites. Teachers will want to be reassured that the use of social media will not expose children to risk. The difficulty here is that the default assumption in social media is that published material is open to all. Uploaded material is public in the widest sense. However, some sites allow viewing by invitation only (you can mark your material as private) and others allow you to moderate comments” (p. 115). Digital classrooms, such as Edmodo (https://www.edmodo.com/) create an invitation only space online that allows students to communicate with other students in their classroom on a message board forum. Students can post pictures, ask questions regarding homework assignments, and take a digital poll of their peers. This is significant for teachers as they can assume the role of a class moderator and edit posts that are not appropriate and control what students can or cannot link their peers to outside of the Edmodo digital classroom. Teachers with access to a Wi-Fi network who engage in BYOD practices in their school board can decide for themselves whether or not they want students to leave behind a large or small digital footprint when they return home from school by choosing how to restrict access to social media platforms with a network administrator, setting up a public or private digital classroom account or online blog, and establishing a set of rules, restrictions, and acceptable behaviors with regards to the use of electronic devices, board owned or otherwise, that is co-created with students in the classroom and is in line with board expectations around acceptable use.
4.4 The most common challenges in ICT integration identified by teachers involve intermittent network signals and lack of support and understanding from administration and colleagues.

One of the main challenges teachers identified during the integration of ICT into their media literacy programs is intermittent network access, delays with logging in to student accounts, and the frequency of Wi-Fi shutdowns. If a classroom’s Wi-Fi signal is not strong enough, or if the YRDSB network goes offline, classrooms cannot use most technology accessed through network portals, such as Google Classroom or wordQ. Jim said, “If the network is not working then we can’t use anything at all…It was more like, once every couple of months the network was down and, you know, we would just have to be flexible and move on…Last year, I think we only had maybe two days when the network was down out of the whole school year.” Teachers distinguished that the role of a teacher is unique in that it requires educators to be flexible and anticipate disruptions in their teaching plan.

4.4.1 – Teachers seek mentoring opportunities from their school’s tech lead with minimal support for professional development.

Many media literacy programs do not involve ICT and, yet, can still successfully fulfill Ontario curriculum requirements. Teachers recognized that they needed to be trained after work hours in ICT in order to engage students effectively but were not able to participate in professional development due to a lack of support from administration. Ryan detailed a concern when he stated that there is a systemic issue at play when professional expectations indicate that teachers are expected to perform a digital
storytelling curriculum and use ICT during the literacy timetable without being consulted with professional training. Ryan explained:

I think there needs to be a change from how we graduate university students from teacher’s college. Potentially, there’s a stronger learning opportunity at that level, mentoring opportunities at that level. Bringing in experts in ICT to talk and take them through [digital storytelling] processes so that, when they get into the school, they have that experience. Not just teaching about a language or storytelling experience, or how to make a movie, but actually bring in someone to do that, or people to do that. That ability to engage in a process and see the validity of it, understand it, and make key notes with it — that’s a starting point.

Another challenge expressed by teachers occurs when a new teacher attempts to integrate ICT into their literacy curriculum without the support of staff, the tech lead in the school, or their grade partner. “It’s a good conversation to have with other teachers,” Jim said. “We can share ideas or just ask for each other’s opinions… When you collaborate with others, I find that it improves your teaching and it improves other’s teaching and creates an overall positive effect.” Teachers recommended that new educational professionals speak to their grade partner and find a common ground before teaching a media literacy curriculum that focuses on digital storytelling or is heavily reliant on ICT as there may be misconceptions about what technologies are available to the educator.

Grade partners or technology lead teachers may not be particularly strong with using ICT in their instruction. “Teachers that are not strong with technology, they’ll find ways to get out of it,” Jim observed. “They’re very quick to come up with excuses, like saying, ‘oh, it didn’t work,’ or ‘this didn’t work,’ or ‘this didn’t connect properly.’ I think that’s one of the things that teachers who don’t use a lot of ICT — they’re afraid to do the
setting up, the hooking up of wires and cords.” New teachers are encouraged to start with small steps and build confidence with a chosen ICT before expanding their reach to other, unknown technologies. Teachers recognized that selecting everyday technologies, such as a document camera, Smartphone, or laptop and becoming proficient with that technology is a good way of getting colleagues involved with using ICT in their literacy programming. “One of the essential things is that teachers are confident and aware of technology,” stated Jim. “If a teacher is confident with how to use a document camera with their projector, with their laptop, it’s easier to teach to the kids.”

New teachers that desire to use ICT in an attempt to program a digital storytelling curriculum for their literacy instruction may find resistance from other colleagues. Teachers acknowledged that not all educators are supportive of using ICT in the classroom. “In my previous experience, getting buy-in from other teachers, was very difficult,” responded Ryan.

My ability to showcase film and media as positive learning tools was nixed by many of my colleagues. They didn’t see the value in it. I actually got some teachers that said, when I was using pop culture songs in the classroom, that there was no place for them…It’s stuff like that caused me to leave the teaching profession and that’s what prompted me to start my own company. I saw the value in it.

Despite some resistance from other colleagues, teachers stressed that new educators not be afraid to put themselves in the position of a learner in order to develop the ability to use and program effective curriculum that uses ICT. “Don’t go in thinking that just because you’re the teacher that you can’t mentor skills from your kids,” stated Ryan.

Your kids will not look down upon you by taking their opinion and asking questions on that — they actually like that — and they’ll have more respect for you. We so often see that the teacher is like, this is how we’re gonna do it
and this is the technology we’re going to use, and the kids are like, yeah…but we should try something different.

Teachers emphasized that new educators seek to understand and familiarize themselves technologies pushed by administration. “Have a strong methodology,” expressed Ryan. “Okay, here’s the equipment, here’s the people with strengths who can actually teach it and get on board with it.” Whether it is new laptops, tablet carts, or SMART Boards, there’s an opportunity to seek strong mentoring. Ask yourself: what is my goal when using this particular ICT in the classroom with students? What do you want students to learn and accomplish do? What do students need to produce in order to evaluate and assess their learning as per the curriculum and how can it be tied to media literacy?

4.4.2 Analysis of Significance

Research indicates access to preparation, time spent training and using digital video, curricular support, and support from school boards and administration plays a factor in whether or not teachers will seek to understand and familiarize themselves new ICT in the classroom. Bruce (2010) confirms Ryan’s testimony regarding a systemic lack of professional development opportunities and administrative support when he states:

One of the more unfortunate problems I have seen from teachers who have received [digital video] training is the resistance encountered from their school district. While the teacher has experienced the value of [digital video] – particularly how their students have positively engaged with the reading of and writing with video – for a variety of reasons their school culture has not. While this often happens at department level with colleagues who may be resistant to non-print or perceive video literacy as a threat to their understanding of ELA, more often the resistance happens at a larger level (p. 122).
The significance for teachers who desire to integrate digital technology into their language curriculum and strengthen the learning community around ICT in their workplace comes down to the fact that time spent learning new technology and programming effort put into curricular changes are not promised to be appreciated by principals and colleagues. If discouraged by influential peers, teachers will be unlikely to continue working with digital video. To mitigate discouragement, research (Cradler, 2002) denotes that when educational professionals take part in training and mentorship programs established by a third party or school board, teachers are able to: effectively demonstrate new methods of using ICT in the classroom on a regular basis; hone and refine their technical knowledge; utilize technological pedagogy as per the curriculum; remember fundamental concepts of ICT use; and expect to communicate new technology practice with students in an effort to solidify assessment goals and success criteria. The importance professional development on the integration of digital technology into curriculum programming decisions is reflected in research conducted by Leh and Lee (2009) found that, when given access to high quality curricular resources and professional development training, “seventy-three percent of the teachers spent 76% to 100% time on using the technology in their instruction. These technologies were all new to the teachers, but through the training, the majority of the teachers became familiar with their use” (p. 614). Students also showed an increase in their participation and classroom disruptions were perceived to be low. The research by Leh and Lee (2009) revealed the success of the professional development strategies during the first stage of program implementation of technology education and new media literacy.

Despite the potential for resistance from the use of ICT in the classroom from
other coworkers, educators interviewed stated the need to put themselves in the position of a learner in order to develop the ability to use and program effective curriculum that use digital technologies. Teachers also sought opportunities for professional development in the form of after school workshops and mentorship from technology lead teachers while also embracing the prior knowledge of their students to help facilitate classroom learning when engaging with new ICT.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this qualitative research study found that a sample of teachers in York Region are using ICT in the classroom to create unique possibilities for digital storytelling activities and assessments that blend the literary and the cinematic together within a critical media literacy framework. These findings make a new contribution to the existing literature in the area of digital storytelling in the critical media literacy by detailing how teachers: 1) helped students use non-linear digital video editing software, such as iMovie, in a critical manner in order to facilitate the creation of short videos and movie trailers through the use of pre-established templates; 2) applied critical media literacy strategies to explain to students how technology is being used to construct gender identity; and 3) detailed the challenges overseeing student use of computers, ICT facilities, and other digital media resources when teaching; and described ways in which teachers can strengthen their workplace by learning new technologies and directing effort toward establishing a common understanding of ICT use and misuse amongst staff and students. Next, in chapter 5, I speak to the implications of the research findings for the education community, beginning teachers, and myself as an educator, and I identify a
range of concrete recommendations and areas for further research based upon what I have learned from this qualitative research study.
Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter is devoted to summarizing key findings of my qualitative research study and expands upon findings from the inquiry process and interviews with professional educators as highlighted in chapter 4. In this chapter, I review the findings concerning research participants’ experience with integrating digital technology into the language curriculum. I also illustrate questions, concerns, and future areas of research that could benefit new teachers, educational stakeholders, and students living and working in Ontario with regards to the use of ICT in the elementary classroom.

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

My qualitative research has found that teachers using ICT and other digital technologies (such as video cameras and non-linear editing software) to achieve digital storytelling and literacy curriculum goals in Ontario believe that strengthening a learning community centered on the effective use of ICT occurs when additional time during school is provided to struggling students or students without access to technology or the internet at home. Teachers also indicated layers of difficulties exist when attempting to integrate new technologies in the classroom without a common standard for professional development amongst co-workers. These difficulties stem from a variety of understandings regarding technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge amongst students, co-workers, and administration. Finally, educators stated that there is a tendency
for school boards in the Greater Toronto Area to overspend on ICT without supplementing teachers and staff with necessary professional development opportunities in order to effectively implement new hardware and software into the language curriculum.

Research found that teachers differentiated their instruction by arming themselves with technology knowledge of selective software and hardware as it pertained to the preparation of a digital storytelling program. Teachers also required additional support from school board consultants and third party curriculum programmers to engage and assist students with multiple intelligences and learning disabilities when integrating digital storytelling into their language curriculum. Overall, teachers embraced critical media literacy strategies to promote agency and self-directed learning with students through media content production and recognized the importance of establishing rules and regulations regarding the use of non-board devices within the classroom as per school board policy in order to prevent bullying and harassment online. The most common challenges in ICT integration identified by teachers involved intermittent network signals and lack of support from administration and colleagues.

5.2 Implications for the Education Community

Teachers interviewed in this research study believed that strengthening a learning community occurs when additional time during school is provided to struggling students or students without access to technology used in the classroom. Another barrier to success identified in the research is access to the Internet at home. Therefore, additional time can be given to students in the classroom to assist in the completion of work, use the
Internet for research purposes, cement collaborative learning experiences with group members, and differentiate ICT instruction for learners who struggle with behavioral disorders.

Teachers also indicated layers of difficulties exist when attempting to integrate new technologies in the classroom without a common standard for professional development amongst co-workers. These difficulties stem from a variety of understandings regarding technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge amongst students, co-workers, and administration. Educators found it difficult to engage the multiple intelligences of students and build a positive professional environment where teachers can mentor students and co-workers to become technology specialists that share and collaborate without proper professional development. Underlying this complexity is the constant state of flux regarding technology knowledge, more so than technology framework (pedagogy and content). As a result, teachers indicated that the best source for professional development in the realm of technology knowledge and application stems from school boards. Interview subjects stated that school boards should more frequently schedule and fund or, at the very least, subsidize professional development sessions during school hours to assist teachers in the incorporation of digital storytelling technologies and techniques as a part of their media literacy instruction.

Educators indicated that there is a tendency for school boards in the Greater Toronto Area to overspend on ICT without supplementing teachers and staff with necessary professional development opportunities in order to effectively implement new hardware and software into the language curriculum. New teachers are encouraged to consult their lead technology teacher within their school in order to examine the budget
available to them at the beginning of the school year and request to administration that all
teachers give their input to the technology lead regarding how funds should be divided
between professional development opportunities and the purchasing of new hardware and
software.

5.3 Implications for Beginning Teachers

It is important for new teachers to know that the majority of literacy programs
deployed in the Ontario classroom will not focus on using cinematic storytelling
organizational strategies, such as pre-production, production, and post-production, to
structure the student learning experience when engaging in digital storytelling, nor will
programs rely strictly on principles of filmmaking as a guideline for teaching writing.
School literacy programs, as defined by Hammett and Barrell (2002), are generally
comprised of reading and writing activities that feature reading written texts as a process
of decoding and understanding. As it pertains to the English language educator seeking to
integrate digital technology into their language curriculum, most assignments pertaining
to the curriculum revolve around the schema of the representation and communication of
a media artifact to an audience. This means that students are engaged in the examination
of particular intersections in the life of a sample of media artifacts as they deconstruct
their representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation as consumable
product (Burn 2009).

However, not all literacy programs are alike in their focus on the examination of
media artifacts as constructions of identity and culture. Interview subjects have stated that
students in the junior (grades 4-6), intermediate (grades 7-10), and senior (grades 11-12)
levels working with non-linear editing software demonstrate the ability to order a
narrative and assemble digital footage in a way that makes sense sequentially in order to
satisfy media literacy curriculum requirements in Ontario. For example, Jim and Ryan
have successfully used the creation of a movie trailer as a major assessment product in
order to satisfy the overall curriculum expectations for grade 6 in the Ontario language
curriculum.

As a beginning teacher looking to emphasize digital storytelling principles in the
language arts curriculum, lessons that focus on the selection, ordering, and construction
of a sequence or montage make for effective guidelines to activities that allow students to
demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts. Video recorded dramatic
presentations that show how actions, symbols, music interplay with each other to convey
meaning, much like a music video, are also effective methods to highlight principles of
digital storytelling. Non-linear editing software, such as iMovie or Final Cut Pro, allow
for the flexibility and manipulative quality students need in a digital system when
collaborating on group media projects, so ask your technology lead for access to similar
software that has been purchased by the board or inquire about the potential for
professional development opportunities that utilize these types of software.

While the use of ICT is an important aspect of media literacy and digital
storytelling, teachers who have limited access to technology or budgetary resources can
help students identify some media forms by asking them to bring in a variety of print
media they have seen, purchased, or borrowed in order to examine the influence and
power of mass media and popular culture texts over a variety of target audiences. Access
to the Internet and the exploration of a variety of current movie trailers can hook the
interest of students. Through the repeated viewing of movie trailers, discussions can be
framed around how certain genres of filmmaking utilize certain narrative tropes, main
character roles, or colour schemes in order to increase the sale of movie tickets and target
a specific audience. Discussions about the power and pervasive influence of Internet,
film, and television allow students to be introduce in a subtle way to cinematic
conventions (such as close ups, wide shots, and shot/reverse shot dialogue scenes) and
techniques associated the creation of meaning.

New teachers looking to build toward to creation of the final product can present
students with the opportunity to showcase polished media text that targets a specific
audience with the purpose of hooking the interest of an audience. This can take the shape
of a dramatic presentation mimicking a television advertisement, the audio recording of a
public service announcement, or the photographic presentation of a series of target
billboard mockups. Interview subjects also indicated that peer assessment helps students
to reflect on and identify their strengths as media interpreters and creators while
identifying room for development with regards to editing and sequencing video and
collaborative group work. Peer assessment also allows students to discuss with their
group members various storytelling strategies, narrative ideas, and creative solutions that
they found most helpful in understanding and creating their movie trailer, advertisement,
or public service announcement.

Teachers recommended that new educational professionals speak to their grade
partner and find a common ground before teaching a media literacy curriculum that
focuses on digital storytelling or is heavily reliant on ICT as there may be misconceptions
about what technologies are available to the educator. Another recommendation for new
Integrating Digital Technology into the Language Curriculum

Teachers would be to reach out to a technology lead teacher as those particular educators are in that role to be a technology specialist and provide specific support when using new technologies in the classroom or recommending that a new piece of software or hardware be purchased under a licensing agreement with the board.

5.4 Implications for Me as a Beginning Teacher

This research study greatly impacted me, personally, as I forged many professional relationships and learned a great deal about the connection between digital video production, reading and writing proficiency, and engaging multiple student intelligences. Through this qualitative research study, I have learned that the use of ICT needs to be grounded within realistic, achievable goals based on access to hardware and software that has been purchased for the school. The technology lead in the school I may be working in, particularly with regards to the YRDSB, is only able to support my use of new technologies insofar as the school board has previously purchased the technologies or software licenses, or there is room in the budget allocated for the purchase new technology and allow for professional development for staff. I think that an effective way to implement ICT in the language curriculum as a new teacher is by becoming an expert on the ICT that a school has at their disposal and stretching the limits of those technologies to enhance student and teacher learning experiences. Becoming an expert positions me as a reliable source of information regarding ICT. That position of intellectual capital can help me encourage other teachers to take advantage of the ICT around them to better benefit their instruction and student learning experience.

I realize now that teachers, inexperienced to experienced, are reluctant to use new
technologies on a number of different levels; some teachers might not be fully aware of the creative potential of ICT while others feel that ICT distracts from the manual practice of writing and recording lesson information via traditional pencil and paper methods. The solution is not to bombard teachers with new technologies if their barrier to use is personal preference. The solution is to take what is commonplace, the smart phone, Google Classroom application, or document camera, and create opportunities for teachers to use what technologies they feel comfortable using. For example, if a teacher can use the camera on their phone, they can create a class Instagram in order to document student learning within the classroom. If a teacher can send instructions to the whole class via Google Classroom, they can operate a private message board for parents and students through Edmodo. Finally, if a teacher can turn on a document camera to project last night’s math homework for take up, then they can turn the camera on themselves to record videos or tutorials for their students. For me, the effective use of ICT is all about building upon previous areas of content knowledge with regards to the use of available technologies within the classroom and acting as a conduit through which reluctant teachers can be directed toward parallel avenues of content knowledge in order to add variety and differentiation to student learning experiences when using ICT.

5.5 Recommendations

I recommend that:

- Teachers contact their technology lead in order to learn what hardware and software is at their disposal in order to effectively implement ICT instruction during their literacy block.
Teachers propose that students who cannot bring their own device to school ask teachers if they are able to share with peers who have their own device and collaborate with those students on group assignments.

Teachers assist experienced staff reluctant to use new technologies by acting as a conduit toward parallel avenues of content knowledge in order to add variety and differentiation to student learning experiences when using ICT in the classroom.

Teachers help parents utilize ICT in the classroom by asking parents to explain to teachers what applications their children use at home so that teachers may find ways of connecting student experience to curriculum expectations.

Teachers co-create student behaviour expectations, guidelines, and consequences regarding the use of board and non-board devices connected to the Internet on school property. In addition, teachers should stress the importance of concealing private information regarding board and non-board email accounts and passwords.

School boards effectively implement new technologies faster by providing more subsidized professional development sessions for teachers during school hours or PA days.

Ministries of Education support teachers looking to implement ICT in their digital storytelling programs by providing access to a list of school board approved technologies and applications in curriculum documents.

Teacher education programs continue to give student teachers the ability to work with ICT in a group setting with the goal of creating and sharing detailed lesson plans that utilize specific technologies and connect to curriculum guidelines.

Administration promote the use of ICT by maintaining an online presence through
popular Internet applications, such as Twitter and Instagram, in order to familiarize the use of digital technologies in a respectable way amongst students and teachers throughout the school year.

5.6 Areas for Future Research

Some important areas requiring further research attention include:

- An exploration of how co-created classroom guidelines regarding ICT use and misuse do or do not reduce cyber bullying and student suspension. Do co-created classroom guidelines effectively reduce the misuse of ICT in the classroom and over what time frame are results observable?
- Some of the most common challenges in ICT integration as identified by teachers involve intermittent network signals and lack of support and understanding from administration and colleagues. Therefore, research into how network administrators, administration, Internet service providers, and school boards can equip schools in Ontario to overcome these challenges is recommended.

5.7 Conclusion

Integrating digital technology into the language curriculum is a difficult and challenging process as teachers have indicated. Teachers emphasized that the key to successfully integrating ICT to meet curriculum guidelines occurs when educators seek to understand and familiarize themselves with technologies pushed by their administration and school boards. Whether those technologies are new laptops, tablet carts, or SMART
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Boards, there is an opportunity to seek strong mentoring from technology leads in schools or become an expert yourself with regards to a particular hardware or software. As for using digital cameras and non-linear editing software with students to embrace digital storytelling opportunities in the classroom, teachers need to ask themselves, “What is my goal when using this particular ICT in the classroom with my students?” There is a significant learning curve for students in the primary and junior grades when it comes to pre-planning for dramatic productions, operating digital cameras as a production team, and editing video content for presentation. Interview subjects indicated that the integration of digital technology into the language curriculum needs to have a strong methodology attached to curriculum expectations so that students understand what they need to do in order to plan, produce, and self-evaluate their learning as per the curriculum and media literacy guidelines. In addition, teachers are encouraged to keep an open mind when utilizing ICT in the classroom and request that students present them with their previous experiences regarding the use of technologies at home or in school in order to better facilitate and plan lessons that activate a classroom’s prior knowledge and build upon previously established strengths. Students interact with digital media devices through smartphones, computers, and tablets every day. It is important that teachers and schools learn to integrate these types of ICT into teaching and learning in order to effectively connect to the lived experience of students and harness their strengths by encouraging them to share what they know about the use of ICT in the classroom in order to promote a positive and engaged learning community.
REFERENCES


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Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: ___________________

Dear ___________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying integrating digital storytelling and information and communications technologies into the media literacy curriculum for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for my program. I believe that your knowledge and experience in media literacy education will provide many valuable insights into this topic for research.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the writing and research process this year is Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic. The purpose of this academic requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection will consist of a 30-45 minute interview that will be digitally recorded.

I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer based on your schedule.

The contents of this interview will be used for my research assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or
potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the digital recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Nicholas D. Michelis

Home: 416-422-1431
Cell: 416-807-8586
Email: nicholas.michelis@mail.utoronto.ca

Instructor’s Name: Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic

Phone number: _________________ Email: angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca

Consent Form
I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Nicholas D. Michelis and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: ________________________________

Name (printed): ______________________________

Date: ________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Statement of Intent

Over the course of this interview, I will be asking you questions related to how you incorporate digital storytelling and information and communications technologies as a part of your media literacy instruction. The questions will be divided into five sections: background information, teacher practices, beliefs and values, influencing factors, and next steps. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Section 1: Background Information

1. What subjects and grade levels do you teach? Where in Ontario do you teach?

2. How many years have you worked as a teacher? How many years have you been teaching at this school?

3. How did you become involved in implementing information and communications technologies in the classroom? What experiences and/or related education inform your interest and involvement in this area?

4. Who are the students you teach? Are they required to take the courses you teach or have these students elected to take these courses? (Probing: what interests and/or experiences do these students typically bring with them to your course(s)?)
Section 2: Teacher Practices

5. What does digital media literacy mean to you and why?
6. What does narrative storytelling mean to you and why?
7. How do you understand the relationship between media literacy and ICT? Where do you see it fitting in the English language arts curriculum?
8. What are your learning goals when introducing media literacy in your teaching? Why are these your learning goals?
9. What kinds of opportunities for learning do you create for students to achieve those learning goals?
10. Can you give me an example of a lesson that you conducted to achieve one (or more) of those learning goals? What did you do? What did the students do?
11. How do you introduce media literacy in your classroom? How do you initially introduce students to the range of ICT that you use in your classroom teaching?
12. How do you currently implement your preferred ICT in your media literacy program? How do students generally respond to the instruction they receive when engaging with your preferred ICT in relation to the learning goals you’ve set?
13. What are the indicators of learning you observe when student begin to understand how to use your preferred ICT?
14. How do your students respond during the creative process of digital storytelling through the use of non-linear editing software, such as iMovie? What indicators do you observe?
15. How has the use of this ICT impacted the way students view narrative storytelling?
16. What goals do you set with your students with regards to the use of ICT in your media literacy instruction?

17. Tell me more about how you assess proficiency with ICT in your classroom as it pertains to digital storytelling? What methods and means of assessment do you find to be the most effective when evaluating students’ understanding? Why do you assess the way you do?

Section 3: Beliefs and Values

18. What benefits do you observe from using ICT to teach narrative storytelling?

19. What do students gain through the use of ICT in your media literacy classroom? Tell me what goals your students have achieved through the use of new media skills, such as digital video editing.

20. What do you believe about the role of ICT in education and learning and why?

Section 4: Influencing Factors

21. What types of resources exist for you in your school and/or school board to help you incorporate digital storytelling as a part of your media literacy instruction? What about resources for other types of instruction with ICT?

22. What kinds of obstacles or challenges have you faced when incorporating digital storytelling in your media literacy instruction or other ICT? How do you respond to these challenges?

23. What kind of feedback have you received from colleagues or parents outside of the classroom with regards to your use of ICT in the classroom?

Section 5: Next Steps

24. What advice would you give to a beginning teacher looking to include ICT and
digital storytelling in their media literacy instruction?

25. What recommendations do you have for the school system more broadly in terms of how to further support teachers and students in this area?

26. Where do you see the integration of digital storytelling and ICT fitting within the existing curriculum policy framework?