DEVELOPING LITERATE IDENTITIES WITH ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS THROUGH DIGITAL STORYTELLING

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Abstract

Digital storytelling provides an opportunity for children and adolescents to design multimodal narratives that represent and reflect upon their lives and interests. In the article we look at how two English language learners, Diego, a male Mexican-American kindergartener, and Allie Feng, a female Chinese-American junior in high school, drew upon their sociocultural identities, foundational literacies practices, and new literacies competencies to design and present digital stories.

School literacy instruction is often based on a traditional, print-based conception of text (Alvermann, Moore, Hinchmann, Phelps, & Waff, 1998; Hagood, Provost, Skinner, & Egelson, in press). At the same time, children's and adolescents' out-of-school literacies and cultural practices related to popular culture texts (Alvermann et al., 1998; Hagood, Stevens, & Reinking, 2002; Moje, 2002) and multi-modal, digital texts (Lewis & Fabos, 2005; Majar, 2001) are highly motivating, and, as such, can serve as a valuable scaffolds for students' academic learning (Skinner, 2007b; Hobbs & Frost, 2003; Morrell, 2002).

Research on children's and adolescents' new literacies practices outside of school has shown that they read and utilize texts using sophisticated literacy competencies (Mackey, 2003; Vasudevan, 2006). These literacies involve engagements such as those with popular culture (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Dyson, 2003); using visual and digital technologies

including comics (Bitz, 2007), instant messaging (Lewis & Fabos, 2005), and fanfiction (Black, 2005); participating in online social networks (Witte, 2007); and, appropriating and transforming issues and characters presented in television and movies in writing (Skinner, 2007a).

And yet, national policies, state standards and local mandates focus almost exclusively on foundational literacies, the literacies necessary to be successful in school such as: decoding and reading comprehension of print-based texts; written composition of academic texts; and, oral fluency with Standard English grammar and vocabulary.

Our research is grounded in the theoretical perspective that literacy is a social practice (Street, 1995). A social practice perspective of literacy seeks to shed light upon how students' cultures, contexts, and histories are embedded within their literacy learning. Moreover, a social perspective of literacy highlights the idea that students will bring their own cultural resources, agendas, and purposes to literacy learning.

Specifically, our research is situated within a new literacies perspective that recognizes that literacy is no longer singular and print bound; instead the iconic and digital demands of the 21st century have opened up literacies that require transversals across print and nonprint-based formats (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). From a new literacies perspective, text is understood as anything that can be read and comprehended or constructed to share meaning and includes reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing practices. These practices are deeply embedded within students' multiple sociocultural identities and dependent upon context (Gee, 2001).

While new literacies research has been on the forefront of literacy scholarship for the last decade, research concerning the relationship between new literacies and English language learners specifically is in its infancy. Much of the research at this intersection has focused on the ICTs available for assistance with language learning. For example, several studies have

described the implementation of using computer assisted software as a tool for acquiring language (Lacina, 2004; Schwartzman, 2004; Cummins, 1998; Meskill & Mossop, 1997). Also, studies have explored the benefits for English language learners of incorporating information technologies into content area instruction (Egbert, 2002; Kasper, 2000; Meskill & Mossop, 1997; Meskill, Mossop, & Bates, 1998). Some research regarding the pairing of verbal and visual literacies in regards to English language learners has also been conducted (Eakle and Dalesio, 2008; Labbo, Eakle, & Montero, 2002). And, research has further shown the implications of global learning networks for multicultural education (Cummins, & Sayers, 1996).

However, few studies have examined new literacies and English language learners framed from a social practice perspective (Cummins, 2000; Warchauer, 1998; Warschauer, 1996), and there is a dearth of research that explicitly focuses on the intersection between digital literacies, identity construction and/or popular culture (Black, 2005) as forms of new literacies practices.

In the article we examine how two English language learners, Diego (pseudonym), a male Mexican-American kindergartener, and Allie Feng (self-chosen pseudonym), a female Chinese immigrant to the United States and a high school junior, drew upon their sociocultural identities, foundational literacies practices, and new literacies competencies to design and present digital stories of Diego's love of popular culture and Allie's "third-culture kid" experiences between life in China and in the United States. Through examining individual interviews with Diego and Allie regarding their textual preferences and digital storytelling design processes in combination with analysis of their digital story artifacts, we explore the intersection of cultural identities, foundational literacies, and new literacies practices of these two English language learners.

<u>Meet the Storytellers</u>

Diego is a 7-year-old Mexican-American student who was born in the United States. Diego's parents are Mexican immigrants who came to the United States from Mexico three years before Diego was born. Diego's family's first language is Spanish. Diego's father currently works in a restaurant as a prep cook and previously worked as landscaper, both jobs where he was surrounded by lots of other Spanish-speaking immigrants. Diego's father is conversationally fluent in English. He says that he understands English pretty well, but has trouble understanding some dialects or when people talk fast. Diego's mother speaks mostly Spanish, but according to Diego's kindergarten teacher, has been learning some English this year.

In an informal conversation with Diego's father, he noted that Diego was born prematurely, only 1 lb. 11 oz., because his mother developed toxemia in the seventh month of her pregnancy, and so, as a toddler Diego was developmentally delayed and not a risk taker like his younger sister. When Diego entered kindergarten he spoke only in Spanish. After completing his first year of kindergarten, Diego's teacher, the school literacy coach and Diego's parents decided that Diego should spend another year in kindergarten with a different teacher acquiring English. In the district where Diego attends a suburban primary school, spending two years in kindergarten is relatively common among boys, especially boys whose birthdates are close to the grade level cut-off date, thus Diego does not appear more mature than his classmates physically, socially, cognitively or emotionally. At the time of data collection for this study, Diego was about to complete his second year of kindergarten and had become fluent in English in regards to his receptive language and expressive language. In addition, he had achieved grade level standards for reading and writing in English.

Diego is a talker. The teacher's assistant noted that he has lots to say and talks so much about his passions such as *Spiderman* that it can be tricky to finish one's lunch when sitting next to him because he is so conversational and expects you to interject when he is talking to you. This is a huge change, she notes, from his first year in kindergarten. Moreover, Diego is happy to share his knowledge, especially his expertise regarding trading cards and movies popular with young boys.

--- [Diego's description of Spiderman](#) (Click to view video) ---

In the embedded interview clip, Diego not only describes his passion for trading cards, but he also articulates how trading cards is a social activity that is played out with friends, namely other young boys, in and out of school contexts, similar to the social literacy practices described by others (Vasquez, 2003). Although Diego situates his textual preferences in relation to other boys, he also notes, "I like everybody in my class," a comment that represents Diego's disposition well. In short, Diego is a young boy who loves popular culture, is fond of all of his classmates, and finds rewarding engagement in merging his love of popular culture, social interactions with his peers, and talking.

Allie Feng is a 16-year-old girl. She loves reading books, and uses books to understand the world around her. She likes to read in English and Chinese, but said "reading in Chinese takes a lot longer."

--- [Allie's text preferences](#) (Click to view video) ---

Actually, her pseudonym for this article was inspired by one of her favorite books. As she

explained,

> I picked Allie because, as weird as it is, he was my favorite character in the book *Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger, 1951). I don't know why; he was dead by the beginning of the book. But the way Holden responded to his death and the way Holden described him really touched me. I liked the character Phoebe too, but I like the name Allie better. I really don't know why I picked Feng. It can mean wind in Chinese, and I just felt like it was appropriate in this situation because the wind can carry so many things away from one spot, but it can also carry things back. (personal communication, June 23, 2008)

Allie is originally from Jinan, an industrial city near Beijing, and the capital of the

Shandong Providence in China. She moved with her parents to the United States when she was

eight-years-old because her father took a job as a researcher in Charleston, South Carolina, and

as she explained, "me and my mom just followed him." Her family thought they would stay in

the United States for six months, but six months soon turned into two years. At the end of her

sixth grade year of school, her family decided to stay in the United States because her parents

knew they could give her (and later her younger sister) a better life in the United States.

According to Allie, "the competition here [in the U.S.] is much less intense so I can actually

enjoy my middle and high school years, while in China I would have been studying everyday

and still might not be able to get a good job."

> When asked to describe herself, she said,

> I really don't see myself as Chinese or American. There's a joke about how people like me are bananas: yellow (Asian) on the outside and white (American) on the inside. Even though I look Chinese, I think I'm very Americanized and am more comfortable with the American culture than Chinese culture. (personal communication, June 23, 2008)

When Allie arrived in the United States she spoke no English. Her family enrolled her in a local

American public elementary school and in Chinese School on Sundays. Over the coming eight

years, her family became fluent in English. They speak Chinglish at home, which is a version of

Chinese with English sprinkled throughout when Chinese words aren't known. However, she

speaks English everywhere else (at work, at school, with friends).

Allie has been back to China once since she moved to the United States. She went to

Beijing and to Jinan with her mother, father, and sister during her summer break from American

school when she was fifteen. Reflecting on her trip to China, she noted "the whole experience

seemed unreal because I was not used to seeing Chinese culture on the normal streets."

Juxtaposing her differing lives in China and the United States, she discussed how the pressures

of adolescence go up against those related to adulthood and to citizenship.

> There are so many other things (college, majors, SATs) that will affect my life more than
> my citizenship. In my opinion, the idea of citizenship is meaningless. I think my
> experiences coming to America really changed my view on citizenship. I just can't see
> how one nationality can define a person. My friend is American, but she looks Chinese,
> speaks Chinese, and is very similar to me. Also, I have seen families split up going
> through customs at the Beijing airport and I just don't know why. Half of the family
> would wait in one line for the Chinese people while the other half would wait in another
> line on the other side for the American people. They are all in the same family and I can't
> see how they are different because they all look similar and speak the same languages.
> When I went back to Beijing, me and my friend got separated at customs and I don't
> understand how she's so different from me. So right now I don't think I'm going to apply
> for American citizenship because I don't want to do all the paperwork for it. I don't see
> the point of becoming an American citizen and even if I did become an American citizen,
> I wouldn't be able to go back to China without a visa so right now a green card seems fine
> for me. Sorry that answer was really long, but at this point in my life, citizenship seems
> very meaningless in my mind. (personal communication, June 23, 2008)

Allie's reflections are much like those of "third culture kids." According to Pollock and

Van Reken (2001) a "Third Culture Kid" (TCK) is

> a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the
> parents' culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full
> ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCK's
> life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background.
> (p. 19)

The term, *third culture kid*, originated from the work of Drs. John and Ruth Useem who in the

1950s studied American children living in India. "Third culture kid" integrates aspects of a

person's first culture—the birth culture—with the second culture which is entirely new, thus creating a unique third culture (Useem, 1993). For Allie, working in two different cultures— American and Chinese—has resulted in a situated space where she feels comfortable being Chinese in the United States. As a "third culture kid" and exhibited through her self-chosen pseudonym, Allie has forged a space for herself to enjoy her adolescence in an American way and to retain her Chinese culture within it, much like her use of a chosen surname of Feng/wind.

Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling has been described as a process of connection where teachers "work with their students to help them harness the power of voice and imagery to connect people to their community by using technology that is relevant to the way we live today" (Robin, 2007, p. 429). Digital storytelling allows people to construct narrative and expository texts through combining multiple media including images (e.g. photos, graphics), voice, music, video, transitions, titles, and movement. They can then save their digital stories as movie files for playback on a computer or they can export their stories to the internet and/or dvd.

Digital storytelling can be used across grade levels and content areas to address a multitude of foundational and new literacies. For example, Ranker (2008) studied how two twelve-year-old students produced digital documentaries as part of an inquiry project about the Dominican Republic. In addition, Hagood and Skinner (in press) explored how a sixth grade social studies teacher facilitated students' construction of digital stories at the beginning of a unit of study about classic Roman civilization in order to help his students build schema around this unfamiliar content. And, Ware (2006) examined the narrative choices and social interactions enacted by two nine-year-old children during their participation in oral and multimodal

storytelling that was part of Digital Underground Storytelling for Youth (DUSTY) literacy and technology program at Southern Methodist University.

There is a variety of digital software available including *MovieMaker, iMovie,* and *Photostory. MovieMaker* and *iMovie* which are included with recent versions of PC and Apple? basic software packages. *Photostory* is a PC compatible software that can be downloaded for free from the internet. The following case studies illustrate how Diego and Allie Feng used *Photostory* as a tool for creating digital stories that integrated their cultural identities, foundational literacies, and new literacies.

Drawing Upon Popular Culture to Design a Digital Story: Diego's *Spiderman Photostory*

Diego's *Spiderman Photostory* exhibits the intersection between his sociocultural identities as a 7-year-old boy, his competencies with foundational literacies related to writing, reading, and oral language, and his understanding of new literacies including comprehension and construction of visual design elements including image and color.

--- [*Spiderman* Photostory](#) (Click to view video) ---

Emily met with Diego at his school, for a one-hour, one-on-one period to work together to create a digital story about *Spiderman,* a topic that Emily knew was of interest to Diego based on his classroom teacher's description of Diego's favorite activities. Diego's affinity for *Spiderman* was apparent to Emily one afternoon when she went to his house to discuss the consent forms for this research with his father and was greeted by Diego decked out in a complete *Spiderman* costume. Diego immediately led Emily to a desk where his Chaotic trading cards were located, eager to show her the cards he had told her about during his interview.

Because of the time and district filter constraints, and having learned from other teachers' uses' of digital storytelling with students (Hagood & Skinner, in press), Emily pre-selected images of *Spiderman* online before the digital storytelling design session. After Emily explained how *Photostory* worked and the intent of this digital storytelling project, for Diego to create a movie about *Spiderman* using images and narration, Diego selected the images he wanted to include in his digital story and sequenced them in the order that he wanted them to display during his digital story. Diego then dictated the text he wanted Emily to scribe with each image.

Emily's initial plan had been to use the digital storytelling session to scaffold Diego's oral vocabulary in English. After listening to Diego launch into a two-minute retelling of *Spiderman III* without any coaching from her, Emily realized that she was not in the position to scaffold Diego's elaboration of vocabulary in relation to *Spiderman—*Diego already had plenty of language to describe *Spiderman*!

--- [Diego's description of *Spiderman*](Click to view video) ---

Through composing sentences such as, "*Spiderman* is squatting down waiting for the bad guys," and, "*Spiderman* is rescuing Mary Jane Watson," Diego demonstrated his oral fluency in English. Furthermore, Diego used his retelling of *Spiderman* to exhibit his knowledge of science content area vocabulary as well as to validate his topic when he composed the sentence, "Dr. Octavius has *Spiderman*. Dr. Octavius is a scientist. In science you do experiments." Furthermore, through making connection to science, Diego's classroom teacher's favorite content area to teach, Diego validated the content of *Spiderman*.

In addition, Diego easily selected images, sequenced images into a logical retelling of *Spiderman* that developed story elements including: character, plot, movement through time, theme, and change (Calkins, 2000), and confidently dictated what was happening in each image for Emily to type in as text on each frame.

Fortunately, there are many possibilities for scaffolding foundational literacies with digital storytelling (e.g. writing process, writing craft, encoding and decoding, story comprehension, reading and writing fluency, content area vocabulary, etc.). Thus, Emily had the flexibility to both observe what Diego was able to do with digital storytelling, drawing upon foundational literacies he already exhibited (e.g. comprehension and retelling of *Spiderman* using story elements and appropriate vocabulary, composing text including elaboration with details), as well as scaffolding him within his zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Drawing upon informal observations of Diego's decoding and reading fluency during class as well as knowledge of Diego's kindergarten curriculum and his classroom teacher's instructional practices and goals, Emily decided to focus her scaffolding during this session on decoding and oral reading fluency.

Language Experience Approach (LEA) (Stauffer, 1970), a common practice in early childhood classrooms, entails having students dictate texts on topics of interest to them and then asking them to read these texts to practice decoding and reading fluency. Digital story telling, through incorporating computer technologies as an integral part of the LEA process, offered a new format and mode for this practice (Labbo, Eakle, & Montero, 2002). After composing his *Spiderman* digital story, Diego read it back multiple times. While reading, Emily first coached him in decoding his way through the text, suggesting typical early childhood decoding strategies and questions (e.g. read through the word, what would make sense here, point to each word as

you read, etc.). Once Diego was able to read the text independently, defined by correctly

decoding a majority of the words (Clay, 2000), Emily shifted the focus to reading fluency.

Emily scaffolded Diego's development of reading prosody (expression) through coaching him on

articulating and projecting his voice clearly and loudly into a microphone headset with the

motivating goal of playing Diego's digital story back for an audience of his classmates.

In addition to practicing foundational literacies, Diego also engaged in new literacies

practices while constructing his digital story. First, he read and comprehended the images of

Spiderman available to him. Diego's reading of images first entailed selecting out the images he

wanted to include in his digital story that conveyed important *Spiderman* story elements

regarding plot, character, and change (e.g. *Spiderman* flying as he holds onto Mary Jane Watson,

Spiderman looking at his hands distraught). Next, Diego displayed his comprehension of images

by retelling each image as he composed the text for his digital story with narration such as,

"*Spiderman* is rescuing Mary Jane Watson," and, "*Spiderman* is losing his powers."

Also, while composing his text, Emily coached Diego on selecting appropriate font colors

that would be visible when displayed on top of his selected images. Diego quickly caught on and

took over initiating the editing process in relation to text color choice through evaluating the

contrast between the printed text and images and making changes to color choice for individual

frames when necessary.

Diego's ability to perform these different literacies, both foundational literacies and new

literacies concurrently, as he constructed his *Spiderman* digital story, we believe, is scaffolded by

the sanctioning of his topic, *Spiderman,* a text that is popular with young boys like Diego.

Children's and adolescents' lives are saturated with popular culture texts that they find

compelling. Allowing—even encouraging—students to draw upon their knowledge of popular

culture as they construct texts in school can be an empowering method for validating their sociocultural identities.

Specifically, research with adolescent girls writing in an after-school popular culture/writing club demonstrated how the girls drew upon popular culture texts to represent character's sociocultural identities and critique issues related to sociocultural identities (Skinner, 2007a; 2007b). Dyson's (2003; 1997) research with young children and popular culture texts illustrated how popular culture texts lend students agency in constructing their imaginations, their identities and their social worlds. Newkirk (2003), likewise, argued that embracing popular culture as a resource for writing in school expands what counts as literacy and leads to empowering boys, like Diego, who revel in nontraditional school text, like *Spiderman*.

<u>Reflecting on Multiple Cultural Identities: Allie Feng's Third Culture Kid Autobiographic Photostory</u>

Margaret met Allie Feng through Allie's close friend, a high school student that Margaret mentors on a senior thesis. Margaret explained via e-mail to Allie that she was exploring the uses of digital storytelling with English language learners, and Allie offered to meet to discuss the project. The two met at Margaret's office where Allie learned of the project, brainstormed her ideas for creating her own photostory, and had a brief 20 minute tutorial on using the *Photostory* software. Over the next three weeks, Allie wrote a narrative of her experiences of going to China, shared it with Margaret via e-mail, and then put it together with pictures and music to create a photostory that explored her transcontinental journey during the most influential developmental years of her life, between the ages of eight and 16. After completing the photostory she sent it to Margaret via e-mail. Then the two met for a follow up interview that

Margaret video-taped, and Allie and Margaret continued their conversations about cultural

identities through e-mail discussions thereafter.

Allie's photostory illustrates the transversals of her sociocultural identities as she has

negotiated Chinese and American influences in her move from Jinan, China to Charleston, South

Carolina. Her construction of this photostory shows her abilities to meld foundational literacies

of the writing process in her second language, English, with her digital literacies competencies

including visual design elements, scanning and uploading pictures, selecting and uploading

background music, and producing a visual text—through *Photostory*—that encapsulates new

literacies. Her product is an adolescent's purview of life as a "third culture kid".

--- [Allie's Photostory](Click to view video) (Click to view video) ----

Allie's story is an interesting demonstration of her foundational and digital literacies

competencies that allows for the exploration of cultural identities through photographic

interpretations. Related to foundational literacies, Allie needed little assistance to compose her

text. As an accomplished student taking several advanced placement classes in high school, she

independently wrote about her travels to China and the emotions it evoked for her. Her drafts

were all completed using word processing, and she used a recursive and overlapping approach in

her writing process.

---- [Allie's written story](Click to view video) (Click to view video) ----

Once she completed this writing, she shared it with Margaret via e-mail, and then put together the photostory. In a follow-up interview, she discussed her writing process and the construction of the photostory.

---- writing process (Click to view video) ----

Allie's product is a well designed narrative that incorporates both written words and visual images. Her exploration of cultural identities includes the difficulties she experienced during first two years adjusting in the United States and learning the English language while yearning to return to China. However, as her photostory shows, over time her language difficulties flipped: language was initially a barrier in the United States, but became a barrier in China when she returned to visit. Through persistence, time, and commitment, Allie negotiated these literacies and became adept at communicating with others in both contexts.

It is important to note that the highlights from Allie's journey to China were not the tourist sights such as the Great Wall, which draws hordes of people to visit yearly. Instead, she preferred places she had experienced herself as a child: her elementary school, a favorite restaurant, a six-story Chinese bookstore, and her old neighborhood. Furthermore, her reflection of differences between her childhood and that of contemporary Chinese children only eight years later speaks to her views of the societal changes resulting from life in a global world. That children spend less time outside with peers in China is not so different than trends seen in the United States where children likewise spend hours once spent outside now inside on literacies that involve visual entertainment (e.g., television, movies, computers, and video games) (DeBell & Chapman, 2003; Fromme, 2003).

From an adolescent's perspective, Allie felt quite at home in China after having been

away for seven years (at the time of her storytelling). She and her Chinese friends and relatives

had similar interests and found similarities in their experiences with schooling, teachers, and life

in general. However, it is interesting to note that people in China noticed Allie's "third culture

kid" attributes, saying that she had become more outgoing since leaving China. Allie chalked up

these observations to the influences she's felt in her second culture—being shaped by an

outgoing American society.

Allie's use of photographs and music gives insights into the cultural identities she values

as a "third culture kid." Use of photographs as a literacy text helped Allie to shape her story and

to construct identities that were important to her. As Mendelson (2008) noted, "In essence,

photographs are the ultimate quote out of context, needing a viewer at a specific time in history

to fill in the blanks" (p. 27). The blanks Allie filled in give viewers glimpses into the literacies in

Allie's life and the notions of self she finds relevant and important.

As Allie explained, creating this photostory was helpful for her to reflect upon her

identities across spaces. Using the photographs evoked emotions and memories that she had

forgotten or had shelved away.

----- reflective process (Click to view video) ----

Allie's digital literacy practices as she constructed her photostory allowed her access to

the new literacies in her life that play out across contexts. Coupling photographs, storytelling,

and digital literacies gave Allie space to reflect and to design a product that reflected where she

was at a that particular moment in time, juxtaposing her Chinese and American identities. Using

photographs helped in that process. Mendelson (2008) explained that photographic

representation assists in creating a story, stating,

> While it seems that meaning ultimately lies within the viewer, it is the end product of a cascade of events that began before the photograph was taken. These events are shaped by the psychology, culture, and innate perceptual tools influencing the photographer and the subject, the interaction between the photographer and the subject, and the particular historical and viewing context. (p. 34)

Allie took the photographs and wove together a story that assisted in her journey of

exploration of cultural identities.

Discussion

The multiplicity of foundational literacies and new literacies that Diego and Allie Feng

drew upon to construct their photostories illustrate the possibilities for educators to incorporate

digital storytelling into instruction to scaffold English language learners' development.

Diego's digital storytelling episode illustrates the possibilities for coaching children in

early childhood settings in important foundational literacies including story comprehension,

decoding of print-based texts, reading fluency, oral and written vocabulary, and writing process.

At the same time, Diego's digital story displays the possibilities for teaching and learning of new

literacies elements of design including the juxtaposition of images, narration, and printed text.

Moreover, Diego's *Spiderman Photostory* shows how digital storytelling offers another format

and context for bridging out-of-school literacy engagements with popular culture with in-school

production of story.

Allie Feng's photostory construction illustrates her foundational literacies of the writing

process. Specifically, through drafting, editing, and revising on the computer, she created a print-

based text of her experiences. Adding pictures and music, and arranging these texts in *Photostory*

to accompany her printed words brings forth a second layer of meaning making through digital

literacies. The combination of foundational and digital literacies gives a multilayered representation of Allie's new literacies skills and practices that reflect the social literacy practices of her life and that relate specifically to her cultural identities.

Perhaps more importantly, Diego and Allie Feng's photostories represent the possibilities for digital storytelling as a venue for helping English language learners to acquire more than just English as a second language, foundational literacies or informational technologies skills, per se, but also to use English to make sense of their lives as inclusive of intersecting cultural identities and literacies. Reflecting upon the relationship between their cultural identities and literacies can further promote the development of empowering critical literacies for English language learners. Cummins (2000) posits,

> Although there are many societal forces that would limit IT [Information Technology] to the transmission of sanitized information and skills, there is also ample evidence that IT can be employed to build community across geographical, ethnic, and linguistic divides and to enable social action to address social inequities… IT can amplify the power of transformative pedagogy to develop students' academic language and critical literacy. (pp. 545-546)

Diego's photostory illustrates the depth and breadth of understanding that a kindergarten English language learner was able to construct in relation to his favorite popular culture superhero, a level of comprehension that when recognized and validated by educators holds promising opportunities for transforming the perception of English language learners' pre-existing competencies with both foundational literacies and new literacies. Allie Feng's photostory demonstrates the transformative power of reflecting on one's own autobiography, the compilation of a person's *stories,* in both words and images, to make sense of the often blurred mirror that simultaneously absorbs language learning and reflects identity construction.

Implications for Research and Practice

This study, like others (e.g. Ranker, 2008; Waire, 2006), describes how two case study participants constructed and produced digital stories with the availability of one-on-one software use, training, and scaffolding. This research also serves as an exploratory study that presents many possible foundational literacies that could be developed when children and adolescents construct digital stories, and as such, more research on each of these areas (e.g. writing process, fluency, vocabulary, etc.) would be beneficial. This study illustrates the intersections of literacies, identities, and texts of two children labeled English Language Learners. As is seen in Diego's superhero digital story, his engagement in digital storytelling is situated in the particular intersection of his aged and gendered identities. As is evidenced in Allie Feng's deep reflection on her identity as a "third-culture" Chinese-American, her experiences are situated in her particular intersection of ethnicities. These cases demonstrate how the particular sociocultural identities of the participants lend themselves in different ways for analysis. More case studies of children and adolescents from a diversity of sociocultural backgrounds are necessary. And further research concerning digital storytelling implementation in classrooms contexts—with the challenges of many students, oftentimes incompatible technology and district filters—is necessary.

This new venue of digital storytelling is motivating to children and adolescents because it offers opportunities to compose/design with the keyboard, an oftentimes less laborious process than with a pencil. Also, digital storytelling incorporates multimodalities (Siegel, 2006) that expand the possibilities for children and adolescents' expression and exposition. Furthermore, digital storytelling offers a new and engaging format for children and adolescents to build their identities as authors/designers and enhance their participation in the literacy club (Smith, 1988) through sharing their writing with an authentic audience of their peers.

As a digital technology, the possibilities of digital storytelling for sharing are extensive. Students could present their digital stories to their classroom peers for discussion and feedback. Teachers also might take advantage of the digital format of digital storytelling to build their classroom libraries with high-interest, appropriately leveled texts for students to read during independent reading in the readers' workshop (Calkins, 2000). Finally, children and adolescents could share their digital stories online and participate in broader digital, global communities that might include children and adolescents with similar backgrounds and experiences.

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<u>**Figure I: Allie Feng's Digital Story**</u>

I've always loved pictures. Not the professional ones that make everything look too perfect, but the ones with imperfect lighting, awkward framing, and people scratching their noses or talking in the background. To me each of these pictures tell a story, like the picture that shows the time we laid out on the bright green grass under a crisp blue sky during lunch or the picture that shows the crowded bus I had to squeeze into in Beijing. The best part of these pictures is that no matter how much the images in your memory fade as time goes on, they will always remain the same in pictures. I think that's why I took so many pictures during my trip to China, because I didn't want to forget all the fun I had and all the people I saw there. When I first got to China, I could not stop taking pictures of Beijing because the experience was unreal. Even though I had gone to Chinese School every Sunday ever since Middle School, I realized that I still knew absolutely nothing. It was very weird hearing so many people talk in Chinese at the same time and in the beginning of the trip, I often had to ask people to say things twice because I wasn't used to processing Chinese while out in public because for 7 years I've only spoken Chinese at home and at Chinese School. However, this got better very quickly and by the second day I could have long conversations with people without asking them to repeat many words. I never thought that I would say this, but I wish I worked harder in Chinese School or tried to speak all in Chinese to my parents (right now we speak Chinglish, which is essentially mostly Chinese with a few English words littered about) because in Charleston when I didn't know how to say something in Chinese, I could just say it in English, but I couldn't do that in China, which led to a lot of "um"s and "eh"s during conversations. Even though language was a barrier to me, I still loved my experience in China. To me, the best places weren't Tiananmen or Yuheyuan, which both were very nice, but were places like my old elementary school, the place where we used to get breakfast every Saturday, and the six story bookstore in Beijing. The bookstore was the biggest Chinese bookstore I've ever seen and beat out its competition, a 2 story bookstore with overpriced books in the Chinatown in New York.

Back in my hometown, Jinan, everything changed but also didn't at the same time. My elementary school still looked the same, but it housed a new generation of students as my friends graduated and went on to other schools. My neighborhood still looked the same, except for a few new buildings, but my friends and I aren't running around it anymore. What upset me the most about the changes in my neighborhood is that on the summer nights, little kids aren't coming out onto the plaza in my neighborhood to play anymore. That to me is tradition and the epitome of childhood. I spent so many summer nights with a bottle of cooled green pea soup (without the peas because I always thought they were nasty) sweetened with sugar cubes that look like ice, playing tag or riding a bike with my friends in the dim street light with grandparents watching over us and I feel so sad when I see that the so-called tradition isn't continued anymore. It's hard to think that the friends I used to play tag with are juniors or seniors in high school now just because the only memory you've had of them are from when they are 8 or 9.

Turns out, no matter where you are teenagers are pretty much the same everywhere. It was very easy to talk to my old friends again and felt like I never left. We complained about school and talked about people we used to know. They told me about all the bad teachers they've had and all the annoying things about their school and I told them about my school. It was nice

talking to someone about the "good-ole" days when we took the public bus every morning to school and played outside in the afternoon.

Even though all of we all looked different on the outside after these 7 years, I don't think we've changed very much on the inside. Our personalities were pretty much the same, though a lot of people in China told me that I've gotten a lot more outgoing, but that might just be how I was shaped by the outgoing American society.