

# Crafting an Agentive Self: Case Studies of Digital Storytelling

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*Drawing on data from a multi-year digital storytelling project, this comparative case study offers portraits of two emerging authors—one a child and the other a young adult—who used multiple media and modes to articulate pivotal moments in their lives and reflect on life trajectories. The conceptual framework blends recent scholarship on narrative, identity, and performance, with an eye towards fostering agency. These cases demonstrate how digital storytelling, in combination with supportive social relationships and opportunities for participation in a community-based organization, provided powerful means and motivation for forming and giving voice to agentive selves.*

Following critical analyses of social power and discourse (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Foucault, 1979, 1980), the social science research of the last two decades has moved toward reconceiving possibilities for agency and change (Bruner, 1990; De Certeau, 1984; Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Scott, 1985; Wenger, 1998).

With few exceptions, however, such moments of agency are sparsely illustrated in the literature, and the discourse of “possibility” is often tentative about its own hopeful assertions. Drawing on data from a multiyear digital storytelling project, part of a larger study on uses of technology and literacy to bridge the digital divide (cf. Fairlie, 2003; Warschauer, 2003), this paper illustrates how adults and youth in one Bay Area community used the powerful multiple-media, multiple-modality literacy of digital storytelling (Lambert, 2002) to articulate pivotal moments in their lives and to reflect on life trajectories. Their stories speak to how conceptions of self have much to do with how and why we learn; the desire to acquire new skills and knowledge is inextricably linked to who we want to be as people. Through an exploration of participants’ processes of authoring multimedia, multimodal autobiographical narratives about self, family, community, and society, we offer suggestions about the creation of invitations for learning that

engage people's senses of motivation and purpose to craft "second chances" (Greene, 1990; Inbar, 1990).

We begin with a conceptual framework drawn from recent scholarship on narrative, identity, and performance, followed by case studies of two individuals—a young man, 24 years of age, named Randy and a 13-year-old girl named Dara. These cases examine the multimedia literacy of digital storytelling and the social context for learning provided through a community technology center called "DUSTY" (Digital Underground Storytelling for Youth). We are especially interested in how digital storytelling within DUSTY helped to position these participants to articulate pivotal moments in their lives and to assume agentic stances toward their present identities, circumstances, and futures. Randy's and Dara's experiences with multimedia, multimodal composing additionally help to blur the lines traditionally drawn between adult and adolescent development. In most conceptions of schooling, learners are compartmentalized according to age, yet a community technology center like DUSTY can privilege projects that cross ages and generations as well as offer the opportunity to consider how people grow and change across the lifespan. In this paper we illustrate how new literate spaces and symbolic tools for learning can result in powerful forms of self-representation for both children and adults, and how authors of various ages can similarly develop agentic senses of self.

### **A Framework for Agency**

We center the theoretical framework that provides the conceptual grounding for our work on ideas about how to foster agency. Debate over structure and agency, over the interplay between lives as controlled and lives as having a semblance of autonomy or self-direction, has been a leitmotif of social science literature during the last half-century. Although some theoreticians find a small space for individuals to shape their life chances, the vast majority are not optimistic. For example, Holland and colleagues (1998) carefully note "the possibility of achieving *at least a modicum* of control over one's own behavior" (p. 175; italics ours). When we turn to educational literature, we similarly see much research that details the reproductive potential of schools and teachers and students' responses to educational institutions and society (cf. Ferguson, 2001; Ogbu, 2003; Willis, 1981). As we will detail below, while acknowledging the unmistakable weighting of the scale toward social reproduction, we have wanted in our work at DUSTY to consciously create a space for fostering agency. Following is the theoretical frame we developed to guide our efforts.

There is abundant research on narrative and the important role that narratives of self—stories about who we have been in the past and who we want to become in the future—can play in the construction of agentic identities (cf. Ochs & Capps, 1996, 2001). Miller and colleagues have done extensive work on the role

that personal storytelling plays in early childhood socialization and self-construction (i.e., Miller, 1994; Miller, Hoogstra, Mintz, Fung, & Williams, 1993; Miller & Mehler, 1994). They suggest that “the narrated self is a relational self” (1993, p. 89). That is, if we believe that “narrative practices are social practices,” then implicitly, “the narrated self is constructed with and responsive to other people” (1995, p. 172). In studies with families from diverse backgrounds, Miller and colleagues examined the social and interactional circumstances in which narratives occurred with young children (stories were told *around* children who were co-present others, *about* children as ratified participants, and *with* children as co-narrators). This work draws our attention to the dynamic nature of narrative practices; stories recur and change depending on who is listening. Thus, how we represent ourselves in storied worlds depends on who we are trying to be in relation to others in the present. Though Miller and colleagues have focused their studies of narrative and identity on children, many of their claims seem to us applicable for older storytellers as well. Storied selves, as they suggest, are multiple and changing within contexts of activity and interaction.

In his studies of narrative—in particular spontaneous, spoken autobiographical accounts by adults—Bruner (1994) commented on the universality of “turning points,” moments when people report sharp change in their lives and demonstrate accompanying dramatic changes in their representations of self. So ubiquitous are such moments in autobiographical accounts that, according to Bruner, “it may well be that the culture’s canonical forms for characterizing the seasons of a life encourage such subjective turning points” (p. 42). Among the features of these turning points are vivid detail and great affect, a connection between external events and internal awakenings, and agentive activity. In Bruner’s words, such turning points are “thickly agentive” (p. 50). Rather than viewing these accounts simply as true reports of past events, Bruner understands them as “preternaturally clear instances of narrative construction that have the function of helping the teller clarify his or her Self-concept. They are prototype narrative episodes,” he continues, “whose construction results in increasing the realism and drama of the Self” (p. 50). These turning-point narratives may thus serve as emblems or tropes for how one thinks of one’s life as a whole.

Moving from studies of narrative to related accounts of voice and discourse, we introduce Bakhtin’s (1981) writings to acknowledge the reproductive powers of discourse while simultaneously allowing a space for self-determination. We have found especially helpful Bakhtin’s metaphor of voice, by which he means the speaking consciousness, which he represents as multiple and dialogic in nature, as suggested by these companion terms: multi-voiced, other-voiced, double-voiced, and re-voiced. For Bakhtin, voices are continually reaccentuated, interanimated, even ventriloquated, as individuals encounter and engage in multiple discourses. The process of constructing agentive identities, then, can be viewed as a linguistic ideo-

logical struggle to make others' words one's own—to create what Bakhtin calls an internally persuasive discourse, perhaps through an orchestration of voices from multiple discourses and social worlds.

To theorize identity and agency, Holland et al. (1998), drawing on both Bakhtin and Vygotsky (1978, 1934/1986), point to what Vygotsky termed “semiotic means” and Cole (1996) reconceptualized as “cultural artifacts.” Holland and colleagues (1998) connect the concepts of semiotic mediation and cultural artifacts with identity formation and agency:

Persons develop more or less conscious conceptions of themselves as actors in socially and culturally constructed worlds, and these senses of themselves, these identities, to the degree that they are conscious and objectified, permit these persons, through the kinds of semiotic mediation described by Vygotsky, at least a modicum of agency or control over their own behavior. (p. 40)

These authors provided several sets of ethnographic and historical data—for example, an account of how women in Nepal “re-authored” themselves through a genre of song—to illustrate how the narratives that people learn to tell and retell about themselves have particular structures, allow particular roles, and promote certain values. The idea that specific instantiations of a genre provide access to particular social-interactive networks is reminiscent of linguistic anthropologist Urciuoli's (1995) ideas about sign systems.

In an essay on indexicality as a feature of all sign systems and signifying acts, be they dance, speech, written language, or visual texts, Urciuoli reminds us of the interpersonal and performative nature of self-construction. To continue, “If all sign systems have in common that they are indexically structured, then all meaningful action is concerned with the interactive construction of a person” (p. 192). She further makes the important point that each action sign system has “a different potential for enacting a self” or “allows a different possible way to ‘be yourself’” (p. 191). That is, “speech facilitates ways of being social, or of understanding, that writing does not, and vice versa; similarly, hand signs and dance facilitate ways to be social or show understanding that speech does not allow” (p. 191). As the literacy field well knows (cf. Leander, 2003; Luke, 2003; New London Group, 1996; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 2005), the enactive potential for different action sign systems is differently valued, with some sign systems having more status in certain societies, communities, and historical moments than others. In western academic culture, linguistic sign systems, writing, and the essay are still the coin of the realm as opposed to photographs, images, and sound (but see Stanczak, 2004).

Finally, while acknowledging that one's sense of self is continually recreated from moment to moment throughout one's life, Urciuoli also claims that some moments are more significant than others and take on a special intensity. She writes, “Any activity that coordinates action to create a unity from many selves—

dance, ritual, religion, sport, even military actions—can generate performative moments” (p. 202).

Urciuoli’s essay pushes us to think about speech as only one of many action sign systems, sharing certain commonalities with other systems for signification, including writing, but offering particular entailments for enacting a self. Although there has been recent helpful work on writing as an act of identity construction (i.e., Ivanic, 1998), few researchers have explored the different possibilities and potentialities for enacting a self in written language as opposed to oral language (but see Stein, 2004), let alone the multimodal possibilities for such enactments that now exist via new digital technologies. We find especially helpful Urciuoli’s notion of performative moments as potent opportunities for self-fashioning. Her formulation of performative moments situates self-construction more collectively, as part of an activity that creates solidarity among a group of people and decreases an individual’s sense of self as autonomous or isolated. It also calls attention to the power of public performance in generating especially intense moments of self-enactment.

As we will discuss in more detail in the methods section below, the work of Bauman and Briggs (1990) has also helped us integrate notions of performance with theories of language, text, and identity. As forms of social interaction, digital stories seem most fruitfully analyzed from a framework that recognizes the dialectical relationship “between performance and its wider sociocultural and political-economic context” (p. 61). In addition, digital stories necessarily expand conceptions of what it means to perform a text. While broadly speaking, dance, music, and poetry might all be viewed as textual performances, digital stories, because they of necessity layer multiple media and modes, complicate our understandings of textual performance as it is linked to the development of identity and agency.

To summarize our framework on agency: We believe that individuals and groups can learn to fashion identities as competent actors in the world able to influence the direction and course of their lives. Our conception of identity is inherently multiple and dialogical. We enact the selves we want to become in relation to others—sometimes in concert with them, sometimes in opposition to them, but always in relation to them. Our sense of self-determination at any given moment is tempered by the constraints of specific social, cultural, and historical contexts, and especially for children and adults who are members of oppressed or disadvantaged groups, these constraints can seem, and can be, overpowering. Yet, we argue that people can develop agentive selves, using the unique repertoire of tools, resources, relationships, and cultural artifacts—the semiotic means, if you will—that are available at particular historical moments in particular social and cultural contexts. Traditionally, primacy has been given to narrative in oral and written forms as the semiotic means most central for the creation and enactment of identities. However, other semiotic systems can be primary as well—dance,

music, images. In our particular context, as we will illustrate in the case studies that follow, multiple media and modes, in combination with supportive social relationships and opportunities for participation, can provide a powerful means and motivation for forming and representing an agentive self.

## **Methodology**

### ***Setting for the Study***

While the San Francisco Bay Area is often associated with the vast wealth that was once generated in the Silicon Valley, just down the road from the chip manufacturers and software companies are urban communities in the grip of poverty and the educational and social inequities that accompany it. West Oakland, the setting for our project, is one of these communities, and has in fact, been designated a federal empowerment zone. Here African Americans have long been the majority population, though they have been joined of late by immigrants from Southeast Asia and Latin America. Even as well-heeled newcomers purchase properties and a contested gentrification of the neighborhood begins, unemployment rates here have recently been among the highest in the US. Educational statistics in West Oakland have been similarly grim. At neighborhood schools the majority of children depend upon free or reduced-price lunches, and over three-quarters of fifth graders have recently scored below the national median in reading (cf. Rhomberg, 2004).

To be sure, today in West Oakland there are few signs of the city's rich history, which included an active economy mid-century when the city's dry docks, railroad system, and factories attracted immigrants from throughout the world, and an activist culture during the 1960s that played a pivotal role in the Civil Rights Movement. Yet, recovering and preserving that history, revitalizing the community, and empowering residents educationally and economically are the ambitious aims of many private citizens, local businesses, schools, and nonprofit agencies. Our modest contribution to these efforts has been to help establish in this community a technology center, where instruction on writing and literacy is combined with digital storytelling as well as digital music-making. This instruction is offered via after-school and summer programs to children and youth and via workshops on weekends and evenings to adults and seniors.<sup>1</sup> Called DUSTY, "Digital Underground Storytelling for Youth"—underground because of its location in the basement of a former convent and Victorian home—its programs aim to provide a new literate space and an alternative place to learn. In particular, and as detailed in this article, DUSTY has wanted to provide the material tools and symbolic resources and to foster the social relationships and forms of participation that would make it possible, even likely, for individuals to envision and enact agentive selves.

Like most nonprofits, DUSTY has depended greatly on volunteers, including undergraduates from the University of California, Berkeley, who join the children and youth from the community as tutors, mentors, and friends. These undergraduates are enrolled in an Education course focusing on literacy teaching and learning and the intersection of literacy with race, ethnicity, and identity. Through field notes and case studies, as is illustrated in the section on Dara in this paper, they explore their experiences of working with children and youth at the Center. Thus, one label for the project is “service learning” (see, for example, Adler-Kassner, Crooks, & Watters, 1997; Cushman, 1999; Flower, 2002), although its equal focus on creating and sustaining programs in the community, in addition to linking undergraduates to service opportunities in community-based programs, makes it somewhat unusual.

The DUSTY project might also be categorized as a “design experiment” (cf. Shavelson, Phillips, Towne, & Feuer, 2003), whereby researchers actively involve themselves in creating as well as studying and assessing activities, participant structures, and organizations. However, this designation does not fully capture the nature of many DUSTY participants’ motivations, relationships, and purposes. A good example is Randy, whose case (in addition to Dara’s) we present below, and the sustained set of interactions that he has had with many DUSTY staff, but primarily Hull, across time (cf. Miller, 1994). In an important sense, DUSTY became the principal audience for Randy’s work, the social others for whom he created digital stories and with whom he imagined different social futures, and this was the case despite the fact that face-to-face contact was intermittent and distributed over long periods of time. A supportive audience and a sense of sponsorship (cf. Brandt, 1999) were undeniably important to Randy’s creative work, and these were roles that people at DUSTY fulfilled.

### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

These case studies are drawn from a larger ethnographic research project spanning three and a half years at DUSTY. For the first case of Randy, our data consist of (a) field notes detailing a two-month writing class and two weekend digital storytelling workshops in which Randy participated; (b) Randy’s writing from that class as well as the scripts he composed for his digital stories; (c) two hour-long, transcribed interviews with Randy, conducted eight months apart, focusing on his digital storytelling projects, his history of work and schooling, and his plans and hopes for the future; (d) six digital stories created by Randy over a period of one year; (e) and field notes on conversations and interactions with Randy over a period of three-and-a-half years. For the second case of Dara, the data consist of (a) field notes on Dara’s participation in DUSTY and at school, notes written by four different researchers over a period of two and a half years; (b) four story scripts and three digital stories created by Dara during this same time period; (c) two interviews



with Dara; (d) interviews with the teachers who had worked with her; (e) and field notes and case studies written by UC Berkeley undergraduates who were Dara's tutors and mentors at DUSTY. For both participants, we had field notes about the public showings of their digital stories at a local theater, as well as our ongoing ethnographic data on establishing a community technology center jointly via university and community participants.

As will be apparent in the cases that follow, the data sources for Randy and Dara that we feature differ somewhat, and these differences parallel the divergent ways in which adults and youth participated at DUSTY. While children and youth typically attended formal after-school classes or summer programs, usually with regularity across a discrete segment of time, such as a semester, adult patterns of participation were different (cf. Comings & Cuban, 2003). With Randy and with other adults at DUSTY, participation in a workshop was often followed by intermittent contact over a period of months or sometimes years, as people dropped by in order to socialize and to maintain contact, to inquire about leads and assistance for schooling and jobs, or to participate in other digital story-related activities, such as public showings. Consequently, we have abundant data for children and youth on their work with their peers in classes and programs across time, but our data on adults tend to cluster around specific events, meetings, or interviews.

To analyze the data for this study, we transcribed audiotapes of interviews, observations, and digital stories and assembled the transcripts together with other data, including researchers' field notes, undergraduates' field notes and case studies, and drafts of digital stories and other writing. In the case of Randy, since the focus of our analysis was his digital story and his enactment of authorial agency, and because his composition was a complex blending of multimodal elements, we also devised a pictorial and textual representation of those elements—that is, columns of the spoken words from his recording juxtaposed with his original written text, the images from his movie, and his interview comments on segments of his story (See Figure 1). This graphic representation was a tool that enabled qualitative analyses of patterns. However, it is much less explicit and complex than the systems of representation needed in order to analyze the aesthetics and meaning-making potential of multimodality (see Hull & Nelson, 2005).

In the case of Dara, since the focus of our analysis was the social context of developing a sense of authorship, we made fine-grained transcriptions of conversational interactions that revealed nuances of intonation, inflections, and pauses; these allowed us to capture, moment-to-moment, Dara's representation of self in relation to others, and to more confidently interpret Dara's writing as it developed in the context of social relationships with DUSTY peers and mentors.

Our analytic methods included thematic coding (Miles, 1994) and critical discourse analysis (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2001; Duranti, 2001; Fairclough, 1995). Having assembled our data, we read and coded major themes and sub-



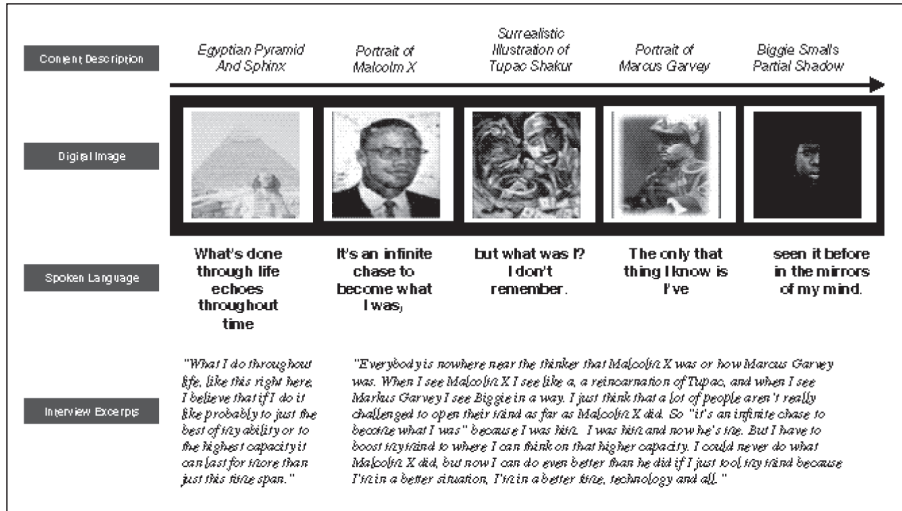


FIGURE 1: Screen Shots from “Lyfe-N-Rhyme” with Transcription Format: Images, Spoken Words, Interview Excerpts

themes across data sources, and as more themes emerged, we revised and expanded these codes. We were especially interested in moments that could be construed as “turning points” (cf. Bruner, 1994) in the representation of identity; for Randy, these centered on discussions of his digital stories in public forums and with individuals at DUSTY, and for Dara, they centered on interactions with peers, tutors, and adults around the composition of her digital stories. The transcription of one such interaction, included later in this article, illustrates how an analysis of conversational features, such as turn length, the initiation of turns at talk, and overlapping and latching speech, can reveal much about an individual’s roles and relationships with others (cf. Gumperz, 1982a). Having identified potential “turning point” moments, we juxtaposed them longitudinally to begin to create a narrative line to organize the cases. We note, however, that while we organized our cases as narratives, the construction of these narratives was itself part of our analytic process. Although the cases have a plot line (in the first, a history of schooling, and in the second, participation across time in after-school programs), these are constructed accounts based on diverse sources of data.

Through our analyses, the creation and enactment of authorial agency came to the fore as a principle category. Subsequently, for additional analytic tools that would allow us to identify the display and exercise of agency through various semiotic systems (oral language, writing, images, music), we turned to linguistic anthropologists Bauman and Briggs (1990) and their “agent-centered” view of verbal performance (pp. 67-71), adapting their framework for delineating the ways

in which speakers can establish textual authority. Bauman and Briggs assign special importance to the dual processes of “decontextualization” and “retextualization,” or removing a text (or portion of a text) from one setting and recentering it in another. They explain, “To decontextualize and recontextualize a text is thus an act of control, and in regard to the differential exercise of such control the issue of social power arises” (p. 76). We extended Bauman and Briggs’ helpful work to include not only speech, but the multiple modalities that are a part of digital storytelling (cf. Dyson, 2003). That is, to look for evidence of authorial agency, we examined how and to what effect our case study participants borrowed and repurposed texts, images, photographs, and music in their multimodal compositions.

For example, as we will see below, Randy’s decentering of a photograph of Malcolm X from the Civil Rights movement and recentering that photo within his own digital story, for his own purposes, demonstrates what an author with the right tools can do, to paraphrase Randy’s account of his own composing process (see Figure 1). In reflecting on how digital stories as performative speech events exemplify such recontextualizations, it is interesting to consider, as Bauman and Briggs do, “what the recontextualized text brings with it from its earlier context(s) and what emergent form, function, and meaning it is given as it is recentered” (p.75). DUSTY participants’ digital stories, we want to argue, embody the kinds of performative opportunities that enable young people like Randy and Dara to take on agentic stances toward themselves and their social worlds through “recontextualization” or “recentering,” and through rearticulation and realignment of selves in the digital storytelling process.

### **Randy and the Art of Digital Storytelling**

We met Randy while he was participating in a community-based job-training program on information technology. Our community technology center, DUSTY, was located in the same building as the job training program that Randy was required to attend by a social service agency, and during that same period, we offered a writing class and a digital storytelling workshop for adults in the job program. Randy participated. But “participation” is too bland a word for his engagement, for he seemed to find what for him at that moment was a close to ideal means of self-expression and self-construction through multimedia, multimodal composing. He also found a supportive social space within DUSTY that included interested colleagues, cutting-edge technological resources, and enlivening social practices associated with writing, poetry, and digital media, and the sharing of digital products with others. These converged to engage his sense of motivation and purpose in ways that resulted in rich learning, creativity, and enactments of self, despite his positioning within challenging economic and social worlds.

**Background: “I don’t have to be in the street”**

The area of Oakland in which Randy lived is a dangerous place. The eastern sections of the city, as well as the western edge where our technology center is located, have had in recent years shockingly high murder rates, among the highest in the nation. As a young African American man in his twenties, Randy was very much aware of the pull of the streets and was looking for ways to resist their lure and to create a different destiny for himself. He viewed this time in his life as pivotal, as a crossroads reminiscent of the “turning points” that Bruner observed in adults’ narratives. Randy commented that “it was a point in my life where . . . ‘something needs to change.’” (See Appendix A for the Transcription Key.) Then he revised his wording and cast himself as the change agent, albeit an uncertain one: “I need to change something, somehow” (interview, 10/31/02).

Randy viewed the opportunity to be involved with digital storytelling as a path for change, literally a life-saving change, and he told us that we had no idea of the personal importance to him of DUSTY:

It made a way for me to put this stuff {*his creative bent, his musical talent in particular*} to use, so I can be here {*inside his apartment*} and not miss nothing. I can do what I want to do. I don’t have to be in the street. It {*the opportunity to be in DUSTY*} was like RIGHT on time. Because that was when the murder rate was getting [high], you know what I’m saying? My partner got killed around the corner, another one around here. And it just took me off the street. (interview, 10/31/02)

Randy clearly had a conscious desire to take charge of the course of his life, but he also worried about the likelihood of being able to change personal circumstances and habits. One line from his digital story entitled “Lyfe-N-Rhyme” states that “the older we get the harder a habit is to kick,” while a photograph of an old man smoking cigarettes came on the screen. (See Appendix B for the script of this digital story.) In commenting on this image and line, Randy recalled that his grandfather still smoked and that he doubted whether he could stop even if he wanted to. Randy then noted that he figured his grandfather (and the man in the picture) had simply “chilled and watched his life go by” (interview, 1/14/02). Randy was trying not to take the same path and thus felt some urgency about the process of crafting a different future (cf. Greene, 1990).

After attending high school, Randy told us, he took classes at a nearby community college, including courses on creative writing and photography. Recently he had an interview with a private graphics college, during which he showed the members of the admissions committee one of his digital stories. In Randy’s words, “They were like sprung” and wanted him to enroll immediately in their 18-month program. But tuition was \$26,000, a figure that might as well have been a million. “You know I’m coming from nothing . . . I’m going to bury myself even deeper?” he commented to one of us incredulously, thinking the college recruiters surely

had to be daft to expect to exact so high a price (interview, 10/31/02). Randy moved from one part-time job to another, and on a number of occasions he expressed his dismay at not having been able to find steady, full-time work, a theme to which he returned in a digital story devoted to that topic. Perhaps one day, he said with some wistfulness, he could get paid for doing something like digital storytelling.

One other powerful constraint weighed on Randy, curtailing his sense of agency, and that was what he regularly experienced as police harassment. Here is his account of an encounter with police that put him on probation:

I was coming from the wash house, so I had a backpack loaded with clothes, walking over the hill and the officer stopped me . . . They said they have me on camera trying to sell some weed to somebody. I'm like "I ain't got no money on me" right? I ain't got nothing on me but like 75 cents because I was just washing clothes and I've got a backpack full of clothes. But they weren't hearing that. And then they got to asking me about murders and do I know anything about murders or anybody that got dope in their house. I'm like "I don't know." 'Cause I don't know and even if I do I'm not about to tell. Yeah. (interview, 10/31/02)

Even though Randy felt unjustly accused of possession with intent to sell, he nonetheless thought of this encounter as part of a positive spiritual plan: "I think it was just for a reason 'cause it changed my direction. I had to square up, I had to go to school" (interview, 10/31/02).

And Randy continued to look for possible openings, new directions and fresh beginnings, as his "it was for a reason" comment implies, and his experience with us at DUSTY will illustrate. In addition to searching for jobs and trying out courses at community colleges and vocational programs, Randy was immersed in living another identity, that of an artist—a writer, poet, videographer, and musician. As we will see below, when Randy learned to combine his words and music with visual images and narrative to create digital stories, he was able to author an identity in very powerful ways, enacting the kind of agentive self that we and others (e.g., Greene, 1990) believe is necessary if individuals are to construct and make use of second chances (Inbar, 1990) to redefine their life trajectories. As we will later describe, so striking were these compositions that they offered Randy what we would term, borrowing from Urciuoli (1995), "performative moments," when an intense awareness of the opportunity to enact one's identity to self and others comes to the fore.

***Writing In and Out of School: "That's all I have really, just my writing."*** Randy defined himself as a writer, began writing when he was quite young, and while he later developed expertise at other forms of signification, especially music-making, writing had for a long time been for him a primary mediational means and creative outlet. He wrote as part of the class we provided on digital storytelling,

but he let us know that, regardless of the class: “I always write”; “I do a lot of writing”; “I write poetry, I write raps.” Most memorably, he explained, “I always wrote because . . . I don’t know, that’s all I have really. Just my writing” (interview, 1/14/02). Up until the time he attended DUSTY, virtually all of Randy’s writing had been self-sponsored, rarely shared with others, and separate from school. He reported that one “hecka cool” teacher in high school had tried to “tap into” his out-of-school writing in the classroom, and he also recalled appreciatively a creative writing teacher from a community college who “accepted what I wrote” and “listened to what I wrote” (interview 10/31/02). But with these exceptions, no teachers knew that he enjoyed writing or that he filled notebook after notebook with feelings and ideas. A receptive, accepting audience was very important to Randy, and something that he had not experienced with much frequency. He noted that for a long time a lot of his writing had not been heard “because I’m protective about it”; he added with a laugh that “a lot of people just don’t want to hear it anyway” (interview 1/14/02).

A turning point for Randy as a writer and artist came when he was introduced within the context of DUSTY to technologies and social practices—including the sharing of writing within a group, the provision of supportive feedback, and public viewings and discussions of individuals’ movies. Once a part of DUSTY, he began to take his creative abilities in new directions, developing a startling expertise at multimedia, multimodal composing. At DUSTY digital stories most often began with written texts, usually narratives, and the narratives began at writing workshops in which participants first shared their ideas for what would become their multimedia compositions (cf. Lambert, 2002). Randy attended a Friday evening workshop with a few of his classmates from the vocational program, the first part of which consisted of watching digital stories and discussing what stood out about them and accounted for their power. Then the participants listened to each other’s ideas for their own movies. When his turn came, Randy read a poem he had composed especially for the workshop entitled “Lyfe-N-Rhyme.” After each person read a draft or ventured ideas for one, the workshop leaders provided a lot of positive feedback, praising participants’ accounts, and gave suggestions on how to shape the stories to maximize their dramatic effect for the genre of digital storytelling. As was the case in most of these workshops, participants listened intently to each other and responded respectfully and with encouragement. Then, over the next two days, they turned their written narratives into digital stories: recording their voices as they read their stories; locating or taking photographs to accompany their words; finding other images on the Internet; digitizing snippets of video; laying down a soundtrack; and finally, bringing these multiple media together to make a short digital movie.

Randy completed his first digital story that weekend, attended another workshop two months later to create a second story, and then produced five others over

a period of four months, and two others the next two years. As we will see below, Randy authored himself (Bakhtin, 1981; Holland et al., 1998) through his digital stories in agentive ways, representing himself as social critic, digital artist, and loyal son. His movies, we want to argue, were performative moments (Urciuoli, 1995) which resulted in especially intensive acts of self-articulation and self-construction. They were also agent-centered performances (Bauman & Briggs, 1990) in which Randy engaged in textual practices that signaled an awareness and exercise of social power and that indexed him as a legitimate and artful author.

### ***Digital Artist: "Sitting on the porch just watching my hood"***

We will focus our analysis on one of Randy's digital stories, "Lyfe-N-Rhyme," referencing some of his other compositions more briefly.<sup>2</sup> "Lyfe-N-Rhyme" is an approximately two-minute video. Randy narrates the movie, performing his original poem/rap to the beat of a Miles Davis tune playing softly in the background. He illustrates, complements, or otherwise accompanies the words and the message of his poem/rap, along with the Miles Davis melody, with approximately 80 images. Most of these images are photographs taken by Randy of Oakland neighborhoods and residents, while others he found on the Internet, and a few screens consist solely of typed words. The pace and rhythm of the piece varies, as does Randy's speaking voice, in keeping with the background melody and the message. In this digital story Randy used no visual transitions, such as fading one screen into another. Instead, the images change precisely in time to the beat, a technique which emphasizes the rhythmical and musical quality of the narration and the union of spoken word with background melody.

Aesthetically, then, "Lyfe-N-Rhyme" comes across as a self-consciously artful performance. Randy brought to bear in this composition techniques he'd used in previous raps or poems. For example, he made conscious and effective choices in matters of genre, poetic technique, and even spelling. He chose the unique spelling of "lyfe" and "n" instead of "in" or "and" because, as he said: "I like to make up words or sometimes I spell stuff *different* . . . everybody has their own preference I guess, when they're writing but me that's just how I do mine (.3 pause). I want to spell how I want it to sound when I say it" (interview, 1/14/02). He also experimented with patterns of alliteration:

That's just something I like to do in my writing sometimes but I really thought it was cool that I did it like that. Like in the first one, I was like "love, truth, trust." At first I did it in two's and then when I moved on it was "murder, money, miseducation." All those three's and it's just rotating. You know it's cool like that (interview, 1/14/02).

Randy also contributed an innovation that he'd personally never seen before but was inspired to do in this digital story. In explaining the line from "Lyfe-N-Rhyme," "some rules are meant to be broken," a line that was accompanied by an

image of a “no trespassing” sign in a park, Randy noted the rule he had broken was genre-related. He had combined two separate genres, poetry and rap, an amalgamation he compared to old-style blues artists’ combination of poetry and prose: “It was not a rap, I believe that it was a mixture of the two [rap and poetry], and I did not really see anybody do that before” (interview, 1/14/02). He also commented, with a definite sense of satisfaction at his innovation, “Who would ever think to twist poetry and rap in the same thing?” (interview, 10/31/02). Thus, Randy demonstrated in his digital story his control of poetic and other literary techniques, conventions, and genres.

While some of the literary and literate expertise Randy demonstrated in his story was carried over from his years of writing raps and poetry, we were especially interested in the combination of word, rhythm, rhyme, music, and message together with image, which is the “pictorial turn” that distinguishes digital storytelling from composing in other genres (cf. Mitchell, 1994). Randy’s use of images, linked to words, music, and voice, allowed a very powerful interweaving or juxtaposition of forms of signification. Deftly orchestrating multiple symbolic and semiotic systems, Randy was able to enact an agentive self—a self that we would argue was less visible in his raps and poetry. In Bakhtinian (1981) terms, he was able through multimedia composing to populate others’ words (and images) with his own intentions, pressing them into his own service and toward his own aims. In Bauman and Briggs’ (1990; cf. Dyson, 2003) terms, Randy was able to decontextualize and recontextualize his performed discourse, processes linked to the construction and assumption of authority. To illustrate this powerful form of authoring, we will introduce some key images and lines from “Lyfe-N-Rhyme.”

The digital story begins with a title screen of red words on a black background and a Miles Davis tune as background music. The second screen is a picture of a sphinx and the pyramids, which is paired with the line, “What’s done through life echoes throughout time.” The third screen shows a well-known portrait of Malcolm X, with Randy’s voice narrating, “It’s an infinite chase to become what I was.” The fourth screen, a Picasso-esque portrait of the late rap artist Tupac, appears as Randy intones, “But what was I? I don’t remember.” (See Figure 1.) Suddenly, the beat quickens, and images or words flash second by second on the screen, each suggestive of the words Randy speaks: “Life, love, truth, trust, tribulation, that’s what’s up.” (For “tribulation” Randy chose the infamous image of a plane crashing into the Twin Towers.) The ninth image is a picture of Marcus Garvey, the 19th century African American leader who advocated repatriation to Africa, and it is followed by a photograph of Biggie Smalls, another late rap artist. Randy’s narration for these two pictures states: “The only thing I know is I’ve seen it before in the mirrors of my mind.”

This remarkable opening lasts for less than twenty seconds, but it introduces in powerful fashion an authorial stance and set of motifs as well as performative



techniques that recur and are developed throughout the story. This movie is about Randy, and in it he enacts several senses of self, including talented artist. He enacts himself as artist, not just directly through his artful use of poetic and aesthetic techniques, but by implicitly connecting himself with works of art and African American icons, past and present. He also decenters (Bauman & Briggs, 1990) these famous figures, removing them from their particular historical contexts, and recenters them, recontextualizing them in his own creative universe of this digital story and his own social world of Oakland, California. In an interview Randy explained that he used the image of the sphinx because it represents a timeless wonder, and that he expects his work to have a similar longevity:

You know that's {*the sphinx and pyramids*} been sitting for just like hundreds of just STUPID years. But it still echoes through time and people still wonder and look at it like, "Damn, how did they DO this without electricity?" . . . That's just to say . . . what I do throughout life, like this right here {*his digital story*} . . . I believe that if I do it like probably to just the best of my ability or to the highest capacity that . . . it can last for more than just this timespan. (interview, 1/14/02)

Continuing the theme of his own power as an artist with the subsequent images of Malcolm X and the others, Randy explained that he sees the rap artists Tupac and Biggie as reincarnations of Malcolm X and Marcus Garvey, and himself as part of this tradition, too. Strikingly, he added that although he could never do what Garvey and Malcolm did since they lived in a different time, he could do something bigger and better, provided that he could "tool his mind" and take advantage of what we might call current mediational means like digital technologies (cf. Cole, 1996; Holland et al., 1998). In Randy's words, "I could never do what Malcolm X did but now I can do even better than he did . . . if I just . . . tool my mind . . . , just be more, just more smarter, and use my mind more as a weapon . . . because I'm in a better situation, I'm in a better time, you know, technology and all this" (interview, 1/14/02). Thus, Randy connected older African American political leaders with the rap artists closer to his own historical moment (and by implication, musicians like Miles Davis and himself), and positioned himself not only as continuing their lineage, but adding to it and even surpassing their considerable achievements. Significantly, this entire level of meaning resides in the juxtaposition of the words of his narrative with the images that he selected, or the combination of multiple forms of signification.<sup>3</sup>

In the opening to his digital story, with his references to Malcolm X and other African Americans who had levied strong social and political critiques, Randy signals his own identity as a social critic and his desire for social, political, and economic justice, especially for African Americans in urban, low-income America. Through the remainder of his story, he enacts that self by providing a litany of problems—urban poverty, education, drug use, racism, the criminal justice sys-

tem, weapons and war, urban housing, and television. Here is an example, two photographs that Randy took of a homeless man sitting outside a public transit station in the neighborhood. The man lives on the street, and people pass him by without noticing that he exists. His home, described in the line “heart of the street,” is on the street, even though his presence there isn’t acknowledged. The greater irony, as Randy pointed out to us in an interview, is that there is a “billion-dollar company” promoting itself on a billboard behind the man also visible in the photo. In Randy’s words, “We got this billion-dollar company . . . that’s promoting in my neighborhood, but what is it *doing* for these people in the neighborhood? Nothing” (interview, 1/14/02). Following the image of the homeless man is a picture of a littered sidewalk with broken concrete lined by a chain-link fence. With this image goes the line “step by step on poverty’s concrete.” Randy’s comment on this pairing was that this sidewalk was right down the street from our technology center, and that “when you go to Alameda”—a mostly upscale neighborhood on a little island next to but separate from Oakland—“you don’t see too many sidewalks looking like that” (interview, 1/14/02).

The metaphor of “seeing” was a central one for Randy—seeing the world, his world, and making what he sees visible to others through writing, music, and now, digital storytelling. Threaded through his interviews were references to sight (*italics ours*):

Sometimes I like to walk out of the house like around twelve, one o’clock and just walk the streets and walk the (*dope*) tracks and walk the (*ho strolls*) and whatever and just *look*, you know what I mean. And just *see* what I *see*.

I’m sitting on the porch eating chicken from the liquor store just *watching* my hood and as the cars go by so does time, you know what I mean, and it’s like . . . the life of rhyme . . .

Who can tell you better how to drive a Bentley than somebody who drove a Bentley? So who can tell you more about where I’m from and my neighborhood and what I *see*, and what me and my community *see* as a whole is ME, you know what I mean, ’cause that’s me. (interview, 1/14/02)

Digital storytelling, with its emphasis on the visual, seemed an especially good vehicle for Randy’s truth telling, his critical rendering of his world, by providing space for material and symbolic images and thereby additional layers of meaning. It’s noteworthy that Randy could include his own photographs, juxtaposing those to famous pictures such as the one of Malcolm X, or a still frame from the well-known video of the beating of Rodney King. “Justice is a contradiction,” Randy narrated, as the frame from the Rodney King video flashed on the screen, and then was replaced by the same image with a razor superimposed upon it. “Living

on a razor,” Randy rhythmically narrated. Thus, Randy demonstrated that he could appropriate well-known images and messages, that he had the power and authority to do so, and that he could recontextualize them (cf. Bauman & Briggs, 1990) for his own purposes. He demonstrated the legitimacy of his own images and his own authorship (cf. Bakhtin, 1981) as well by placing the photographs that he took, and his own role as a poet and critic, on an equal level with authoritative images and figures like Malcolm X.

Miller and Mehler (1994) have written that the narrated self is a “relational” self, that it is defined in relation to others, and certainly, we’ve already seen Randy define himself powerfully in relation to revered African American leaders and figures from popular culture. He also defined himself in relation to the people from the neighborhood whom he photographed or who provided motivation or inspiration for his compositions. Randy, as mentioned above, conceived of himself as the voice of his neighborhood, a person willing to say what others didn’t; he said he liked to write about that “untouched ground” that people chose not to speak about or were afraid to point out. And in doing so, Randy was speaking for the homeless and the poor, for people who were out-of-work, abused, or neglected. One of his most poignant stories was entitled “For that Girl,” inspired by a stripper who’d been raped as a child, but addressed as well to other women and girls who had been abused, including one woman whose story he had heard at our digital storytelling workshop.

In defining himself in relation to others through his digital stories (cf. Miller & Mehler, 1994), Randy also authored relationships with family and friends. A photo of Randy and his mother appears twice in “Life-N-Rhyme,” once when he states “family first,” and another time with the memorable line: “Mama’s only son is mama’s only gun with a guillotine tongue.” He told us in an interview that “I’m the one who’s gonna blast for her, I’m the one that’s gonna get her off Section 8 living, ME” (interview, 1/14/02). Randy was deeply concerned that his mother had never owned a home and that she suffered indignities as a result of having to live in low-income housing. In his digital story it’s noteworthy that Randy’s weapon of choice is his words, his ability to tell stories, to craft a self and represent self and others through narratives.

Randy defined himself in relation to one other group of people in “Lyfe-N-Rhyme”— his writing teacher at DUSTY, the leaders of his digital storytelling workshop, and his fellow participants at the workshop. At the end of the story, he stated that “Some rules are meant to be broken/some doors are meant to be opened/and regardless of race/we all mostly come from the same place/Love. This is life in rhyme.” With the phrase about race, Randy introduced a series of photographs that he’d taken at the digital storytelling workshop. These photographs, which included people of different races and ethnicities such as comprised DUSTY staff and participants, were Randy’s surprise for the group. Through these photos, he

explained to us, he meant to suggest that love should transcend race and that since we all have in common that we originated in love, there shouldn't be so much room for hate or stereotyping based on skin color. We interpreted this ending to Randy's story as a signal that he valued the relationships he had made at DUSTY and that he wanted to include them in the social world created through his digital story.

### **Dara and the Social Contexts of After-School**

In our second case study of 13-year-old Dara, we see a young woman similarly concerned with family, relationships, and with her sense of belonging to a community.

A lively and affectionate girl of Guatemalan and American heritage, Dara likewise found ways to reposition herself through digital storytelling both in relation to the people she loved and admired, and in relation to institutions, like school. In the DUSTY context, Dara was able to negotiate what she wrote about and how she represented herself to the world. She accomplished this not only through her digital stories, but also through her social relationships with DUSTY peers, mentors, and facilitators who helped build Dara's perception of herself as an expert digital storyteller and a skilled writer possessing technological savvy who could assist her friends in creating digital stories.

Below, we juxtapose her sometimes meek and discontented school identity with the confident author and active community participant we knew Dara to be during a period of years in DUSTY's after-school program. Let us be clear at the outset that we don't want to imply that children cannot develop positive identities within traditional schooling, or that, conversely, all children develop agentive senses of self after-school (cf. Hull & Schultz, 2001, 2002). However, we do want to illustrate how alternative spaces for learning can sometimes effectively support adolescents' interests in literacy and foster their developing sense of agency. We should also note that many of the youth and adults who came to DUSTY had poor experiences in school and tended to speak about themselves as poor students. As Miller and Mehler (1994) caution, personal stories can aid in the creation of school-based identities that are less than powerful or positive. "There is just as much potential," they write, "for undermining as for supporting identity, both at the content level [e.g., by repeatedly recounting experiences of failure, making invidious comparisons between the child's past experiences and peers' experiences or between home and school] and at the discourse level [e.g., by using styles of discourse that interfere with those that children bring from home]" (p. 51).

In exploring the connections between Dara's social life at DUSTY and her sense of herself as a maturing writer and storyteller, we reflect on aspects of DUSTY's environment—the social and textual practices that characterize the pro-

gram on a day-to-day basis—which we believe were critical to helping Dara, Randy, and children and adults like them, embody more agentive stances toward themselves and their social worlds. Dara’s case serves as a composite “day in the life” of DUSTY’s after-school program, highlighting the kinds of literacy activities, technological opportunities, and social relationships in which young people regularly participated. Like Randy, Dara too engaged in agent-centered performances (Bauman & Briggs, 1990) that signaled an awareness and exercise of social power, indexing herself, like the subjects in her stories, as a legitimate and artful actor and author.

### *Perceptions of Dara at St. Anthony’s School*

In the winter of 2002, a few months after we first met Dara, several members of DUSTY’s after-school program paid a visit to St. Anthony’s school. In one of the most impoverished parishes in Oakland, St. Anthony’s, right across the street from DUSTY, sent many of their children to our after-school program. On this particular afternoon our program director and coordinator, accompanied by a researcher and an undergraduate mentor, went to the school to make a presentation about DUSTY and show students and teachers several digital stories that St. Anthony’s students had created the previous semester. The stories garnered enthusiastic praise, and students whose stories were shown, although a little embarrassed, savored their classmates’ approving hoots and applause. But as DUSTY staff prepared to leave, one teacher’s parting comments about Dara surprised us; Mr. W., impressed by the work that had obviously gone into Dara’s story, quickly pointed out to us in Dara’s presence how uncharacteristic such hard work was for the young lady he encountered in his classroom every day.

One researcher recorded the following field notes:

[At St. Anthony’s,] M showed Dara’s story about her grandfather who passed away. During this time Dara was slowly trying to hide underneath the table. When her credits came on, the students started dancing to the Madonna background music. “That was good Dara,” one girl called out. Dara smiled. The Vice-Principal also commented that that was a good story. So did Mr. W. Mr. W., with his arm wrapped around Dara’s shoulder, told [DUSTY staff] that he was surprised at Dara’s story because she never did any work in his classroom. No homework, no schoolwork, nothing. A student walking by joined in with “nope, never.” Dara appeared uncomfortable and looked like she wanted to cry. [The DUSTY coordinator] smiled and put an arm around Dara. She told Dara that they could work on it together. Dara smiled and nodded her head. Mr. W. continued, “Maybe you could use it like a motivating factor. She seems to enjoy doing it very much and it could help her do her work.” [The coordinator], with her arm still around Dara, stated that they would work on it like they had been working together in the past. (S’s field notes, 1-31-02)

### *Dara at DUSTY*

We were surprised by the juxtaposition between this particular teacher's perception of Dara and the bubbly, cheerful, and engaged writer we knew her to be at DUSTY. For example, one undergraduate volunteer wrote in her case study about Dara:

My initial meeting with Dara was during the DUSTY orientation when [the program coordinators] were giving a presentation at St. Anthony's. Dara is a bright, outgoing, affectionate, and friendly student. Before the presentation, Dara ran up to [one coordinator] to hug her and told [her] how much she missed her. During the orientation I saw Dara's first movie, which is about the death of her grandfather, Papido. After seeing it I felt impressed with her . . . Luckily, I got an opportunity to work with Dara on her [next] movie about Sailor Moon on my first day. It was then that I reaffirmed she was outgoing, friendly, and affectionate. (H's case study, May 2002)

### *Narrative Alignment: Digital Stories and Transforming the Self*

Although Dara remained quiet in her teacher's presence, she unreservedly shared how she felt about school with DUSTY staff. In fact, her feelings about school figured prominently in her second digital story about Sailor Moon, a female cartoon character originating from the Japanese manga and anime traditions who Dara claimed shared her aversion to school. In an end-of-semester case study about Dara, one undergraduate wrote:

In her movie [about Sailor Moon] she commented on hating school, homework and teachers; therefore, I assumed she might not have received good grades. To find [out] the truth I decided to question Dara about school.

ME: Do you like school?

DARA: No.

ME: Why do you not like school?

DARA: Because they tell you to do stuff and I can't do what I want.

ME: What grades do you get?

DARA: F's, D's [observation 4-22-02]. (H's case study)

Although it would have been helpful to know more about the "stuff" her teachers told her, and what she couldn't do that she would have liked to, an interview about her Sailor Moon story provides some sense of her displeasure with school and its demands:

S: How would you describe your [Sailor Moon] story? Is it funny, sad, exciting?

D: Hmm, funny and sad.

S: What makes it funny?

D: Because when I say she likes sleeping, and um, homework and schoolwork—those are things she hates, that may be funny.

S: And why is it sad?

D: Because they cancelled the show when a lot of kids liked Sailor Moon.

{Portion of transcription omitted}

S: What's *your* favorite part of the story?

D: When I say that she don't like school, homework, and schoolwork.

S: Why do you like that part the best?

D: Because it [school] makes us sleepy.

S: It makes you sleepy? You say that you don't like school like Sailor Moon, how come you don't like school?

D: Sometimes it makes me sleepy and sometimes I get in trouble. (interview with S, May 2002)

In Dara's second digital story script, "Me and Sailor Moon," she begins by consciously aligning herself with this fictive cartoon figure, saying, "I wanted to write about Sailor Moon because *she is just like me*." Dara's digital story script describes all of the preferences she and Sailor Moon share: "She likes the things I like. She likes junk food, pizza, ice cream, candy, soda, and things like that. Besides junk food, she likes volleyball, sleeping, art and much, much more." Dara then catalogs their common aversions: "I will move on to the things we hate. We hate school, homework, and schoolwork because they are boring and they make us sleepy." Dara's appropriation of Sailor Moon's tastes seems to be a way of sanctioning her own feelings toward school; such an alliance invites credibility. This alignment with Sailor Moon's likes and dislikes exemplifies Miller and her colleagues' (1993) description of children's abilities to revoice others' stories for innovative purposes, or in a Bakhtinian sense to make them their own. "A child might appropriate and use for his or her own purposes someone else's experience, someone else's story. Framed in this way any story has the potential to be a personalized story, a story that is personally meaningful or useful to the narrator" (Miller et al., 1993, p. 91). Such a reading is also supported by Bauman and Briggs' (1990) idea that by decentering and recentering texts (in this case excerpts from the Sailor Moon stories), performers like Dara create (verbal) art which can "transform, not simply reflect, social life" (p. 69). Dara's narration, then, seems both selective and strategic.

Moreover, like her teen counterparts in Fisherkeller's (1997) study of adolescents and television culture, Dara seemed to find models with whom she identified in the world of popular culture. While two of her story scripts focused on family (specifically on the importance of various family members to Dara—what



each relationship offered her), the other two were multimedia digital biographies—the first about Sailor Moon (described above), and the second about Tejano female vocalist Selena. In both of the biographies, we were struck by Dara's conscious self-positioning in relation to her biographical subjects (cf. Miller & Mehler, 1994), and by the sociopolitical dimensions of each story. She wrote the Sailor Moon story, as she told one of our researchers, "Because they cancelled the show when a lot of kids liked Sailor Moon." Dara continued, "I wanted to write about her 'cause I wanted to send it to the people who cancelled the show" (S's interview, May 2002). In addition to this social project, as we have seen, Dara drew on Sailor Moon's social status and tastes to carve out space for her own feelings.

Dara's fourth story celebrating the life of Selena also mourned her untimely death. Part of Dara's script read: "When I heard that Selena was murdered by her associate Yolanda on March 31, 1995, I was very upset. I started crying." As narrative scholars have pointed out (Bruner, 1990, 1994; Miller, 1994), stories provide people with cathartic outlets that help them make peace with upsetting events and resolve intrapsychological conflicts. Miller (1994) suggests that "by replaying or reenacting for the self some troubling experience from the past, children seem to come to an acceptance of or reintegration of past experience" (p.174). While there was a dimension of this in Dara's account of Selena's death, perhaps more significant was Dara's self-alignment with the artist, reminiscent of the alliance she sought to create between herself and Sailor Moon. Dara saw Selena as someone in whose steps she might follow, saying, "Even though she passed away, I still see her as the first Mexican singer and my memories of her will always be with me. She's still my role model to this day on." Selena, like Dara, was a young woman for whom family and relationships were critically important. She lived life fully and embraced her public visibility as Dara did herself in the performative act of (re)telling, or, as Bakhtin might say, appropriating Selena's story. By exercising her own performer's voice, Dara also acted upon her "right to control the recentering of valued texts" (Bauman & Briggs, p. 77), in this case, the text of Selena's narrative.

We turn now to explore how Dara's developing sense of self actually took place through the process of authoring digital narratives at DUSTY. We focus on the social contexts in which youth like Dara (and adults like Randy) were learning to write, and on the interwoven processes of identity development and multimedia composing as they occur in the context of daily activities at DUSTY.

### *Being an Old Timer*

One afternoon during fall 2002, two neighborhood girls came to visit DUSTY to see what it was all about. That day, Dara and several other students were present, and the program director asked everyone to introduce themselves to the visitors. When Dara's turn came, one of us wrote the following field note:

Dara introduced herself, and said that she had been here “for three years.” [The program director] corrected her and said three semesters, and she gave him a glaring look and said, “No, don’t say that—I like to say that I’ve been here for three years!” [He] laughed. Then he said that she had made 2.5 stories, but Dara countered that she had made three. They argued playfully about this for several more turns at talk. (M’s field notes, 10-10-02)

In this exchange, the ease with which she refuted the director’s attempt to accurately (factually) represent how long she’d been at DUSTY and how many stories she’d made, indicates both Dara’s interactional comfort and her investment in projecting an old timer identity. Although the director seemed amused by her antics, he let her assertions stand, perhaps because he sensed how important to Dara it was to represent herself to newcomers as an experienced digital storyteller within the DUSTY community.

Her veteran status was further confirmed by the frequency with which same-age peers and even undergraduate and graduate student mentors relied on her help to solve technical problems encountered while making digital stories. As we sat observing Dara at the computer that day, two girls on either side of her working on their own computers called to her several times: “Hey Dara. How do you . . . ?” “Dara, can you show me how to . . . ?” At one point, she leaned over and whispered, “They’re always asking me questions!” We sympathized, telling her it was tough being the one who knew how to do everything because that meant people were always asking for help. After a pause, one of us asked if the other kids’ questions disturbed her. She sighed as if she were going to say “yes” but surprised us with an upbeat “not really.” Our sense, then, was that the benefits of her role as expert digital storyteller clearly outweighed the burdens of assisting others. A lively, engaged, and hard-working girl, Dara saw herself as a valued and knowledgeable DUSTY community member who had “been around for a long time.”

The following scene from DUSTY, in which Dara worked with an undergraduate mentor named Jeannie on editing her fourth digital story, illustrates how the writing process and the social relationships in which it was embedded helped to shape Dara’s developing sense of authorial capability. The conversation typifies the kinds of interactions we witnessed daily between DUSTY youth and their college-age mentors.

### ***Developing Selves through Digital Stories***

The subsequent discussion traces Dara and Jeannie’s work on the fourth draft of her Selena story. We will begin with some general comments about the editing exchange as a whole and then analyze one episode more closely. (A transcript of the episode is provided in Appendix C.) The exchange lasted approximately 20 minutes, and although Dara attempted to end the editing session twice by saying “I’m done,” Jeannie’s persistent yet respectful approach to mentoring kept the two

engaged. Jeannie asked many questions; some aimed to clarify her understanding of Dara's ideas and intentions, and others served to instigate the ongoing possibility of making modifications and revisions. For example, she queried, "Okay so is there anything you wanna like change that sounds weird to you?" "Anything else you wanna change?" "What did you wanna say here?" Or, "It seems like you're saying, but then . . ." She also checked in to make sure Dara was happy with the changes: "Was that better for you to say?" (Meaning, did it roll off your tongue more easily? For an oral script, sound is key.) Jeannie also asked, "Is this the only thing you wanna add?"

Other questions served as requests for factual information. For example, there was a discussion of how many people were in Selena's band, and who in the band did what. Jeannie assumed that Dara was knowledgeable about the subject (see Appendix C, lines 1-10) and, throughout the following exchange, the extensive latching of turns suggests both mutual comfort and a shared agenda.

JEANNIE: All right. This seems good. Anything else you wanna change?==

DARA: ==Yeah {*pointing to script on computer screen*} this part right here. See it's really getting see {*reading*} "Selena y Los Dinos. Amazingly, even at the young age of four, in the group" that's kind of like messing me up.

JEANNIE: Yeah I know. What did you==

DARA: ==I just wanna fix that.==

JEANNIE: ==what did you wanna say here like==

DARA: ==well I can say {*reading and revising*} "Amazingly even at that age {Jeannie: um hm} at the at that age four {Jeannie: uh huh} (XXXX) together.

JEANNIE: Like, 'cause it seems like you're saying about Selena but then here you're saying like the group. So,

DARA: Well {*pointing to script on computer screen and reading*} "Selena y Los Dinos" this part leaves me alone. But it's this part {*pointing elsewhere*} that's REALLY getting me confused.

JEANNIE: Maybe "even at the young age of four"

DARA: "In the group's first year together."

For writers, knowing where the problems lie is key to successful editing. Above, Dara jumped quickly to the parts that were "messing her up" and "getting her confused" when she read her script aloud. In the final portion of their exchange, Dara and Jeannie took up each other's words, phrases, and ideas, showing not only the security Dara felt working with Jeannie, but also Dara's growing willingness to play with language and make changes (see Appendix C, lines 36-52).<sup>4</sup> In addition to signaling her comfort level working with her mentor, we also saw Dara's latched turns as evidence of her growing confidence as a writer. Out of a total of

10 invitations to make revisions, most of which were introduced by Jeannie's use of questions ("Anything else you want to change here?"), Dara accepted seven. Of those seven offers, all were ultimately conceived and executed by Dara. Her certainty, evidenced by the speed with which she pointed to the words, phrases, and sections that needed to be "fixed" also reflected her developing sense of authorship. Bauman and Briggs (1990) suggest that, "Performers extend . . . assessments [of recontextualized discourse] to include predictions about how the communicative competence, personal histories, and social identities of their interlocutors will shape the reception of what is said" (p. 69). Dara was certainly also becoming increasingly adept at foreseeing and anticipating her digital storytelling audience's needs and knowledge.

She was also giving thought to her future interlocutors' auditory and aesthetic needs and preferences. In the above exchange her evaluation of the story script's fluency was based in large part on its oral coherence. Knowing that her script would soon become the voice track for her digital narrative, she attentively deliberated over the rhythm of her prose. Finally, throughout the exchange with Jeannie, the highly negotiated nature of their interaction kept Dara in the driver's seat, always directing—a role she seemed quite at ease with—while Jeannie acted largely as scribe. Although we've often seen mentors take over the writing role, commandeering the computer mouse or the pencil, this was certainly not the case with Jeannie, who was especially respectful of Dara's authorial position throughout the exchange. This too, we think, supported Dara's developing sense of herself as a competent and knowledgeable writer.

## **Discussion**

We have presented two case studies that illustrate how two individuals, a young adult and an adolescent, authored themselves by means of multimedia, multimodal storytelling, and the social and material resources of a community technology center. Despite the material and social constraints within which he lived—a low-income neighborhood with high unemployment rates, a poor educational system, racism, violence—Randy found ways to create a social world through multimedia composing in conjunction with music-making that positioned him as an agent. He constructed his authority through poetics, his consciously artful and aesthetic use of language, image, and music. He constructed his authority as well through his appropriation and recontextualization of images linked to words and music, and through his juxtaposition of his own images and authorial stance to authoritative images and authors. He also constructed supportive social relationships through his storytelling—with famous figures, with ordinary people from the neighborhood, with family, and with new DUSTY friends.

For her part, Dara too was building a positive sense of self, one that posed a contrast to at least one of the identities that she seemed to wrestle with at school,

where some perceived her as unmotivated and lazy. Dara certainly harbored her own share of ambivalence about school, as interviews and her story about Sailor Moon suggest, but at DUSTY, through her writing and her relationships with peers and staff, Dara agentively negotiated an identity as author and storyteller, and as a skilled peer willing and able to share her technical expertise. An integral member of the DUSTY after-school community, Dara learned not only how to tell stories about others, but to rearticulate her sense of identity in the process.

To discuss the features of DUSTY and digital storytelling that seemed to position Randy and Dara to author powerful multimedia pieces, and to represent and reposition themselves, we return to work on performance by Bauman and Briggs (1990). These authors have helped us to think about how digital stories, as instances of verbal performance, do not simply reflect social life, but have the capacity to comment critically on it as well. Like other forms of verbal art, digital stories reposition both authors and the texts (words, images, music, voices) they appropriate and recontextualize or recenter during performance. Because of our interest in the relationship between performance and agency, we have found useful Bauman and Briggs' discussion of "entextualization," which they define as "the process of rendering discourse extractable, of making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit—a text—that can be lifted out of its interactional setting" (p. 73). Bauman and Briggs claim that "if we consider what becomes of text once decontextualized, we recognize that decontextualization from one social context involves recontextualization in another" (p.74). In the DUSTY data, Randy's use of photographs or Dara's alignment with Sailor Moon's likes and dislikes show how these digital storytellers engage in such textual extractability or "entextualization."

In Dara's case we perceive her concerns with family, relationships, and her desire to belong to a community. Through her social work around writing at DUSTY and by borrowing from or "re-accenting" the stories of others (Miller et al., 1993), Dara constructed a sense of herself as an able writer, valued community member, and even a social critic. The level of her critique reflects a 13-year-old's concerns, just as Randy's critique in "Life-N-Rhyme" reflected the apprehensions of a young man in his mid-twenties finding a strong voice in an often hostile world. What we see in both cases is that "when messages are packaged in self-relevant ways . . . the consequences . . . include not only the acquisition of discursive skills, but the creation of self and identity" (Miller et al., 1993, p. 88). We believe that participation in the literate art of digital storytelling, and the social practices that accompany it at DUSTY, as discussed below, have provided both Randy and Dara with the means to reposition themselves as agents in and authors of their own lives.

We find it interesting that as different as Randy and Dara are, they shared certain formative experiences, such as not being fond of school and not having

positive experiences around writing in school contexts. Nevertheless, both of them loved to write; Randy wrote at home, and they both did so at DUSTY with enthusiasm. We are aware that part of that enthusiasm and willingness to work at composing came from their comfort in an atmosphere where people actively encouraged them to speak their minds, genuinely wished to hear what they had to say, responded respectfully to their ideas, and treated them as knowledgeable members of their peer groups and communities. In such an atmosphere, not only did both Dara and Randy master the technological skills necessary to create digital stories, but they also paid increasingly close attention to the technical aspects of language—to its sound, to genre, to its poetic dimensions, and to textual images as messages of another sort. And they masterfully combined image, sound, and text into powerful and personally meaningful multimedia narratives that also clearly and movingly spoke to others. These others included their DUSTY peers and friends as well as a larger social world that might not otherwise have listened to what they had to say; the fresh nature of the multimodality and multimedia itself appeared to lend their ideas both currency and urgency.

In addition to harnessing digital storytelling as a means of engaging in social critique, Randy and Dara both found it a natural medium for paying homage to family—for making public statements about the private world. And finally, Dara and Randy used digital stories to align themselves with public figures and causes. Randy saw himself as continuing the tradition of social critics like Malcolm X and others, while Dara aligned herself with persons—fictive and real—who either shared her views on topics such as school, or who represented admirable causes. In appropriating (Bakhtin, 1981) the viewpoints of Sailor Moon and Selena, Dara constructed an authorial stance that lent credence to her own beliefs.

But what made such appropriative performances possible for Randy and Dara? We believe that, in part, the social environment at DUSTY provided a number of things that Bauman and Briggs (1990) see as critical to such a process: access, legitimacy, competence, and values. “Access depends upon institutional structures, social definitions of eligibility, and other mechanisms and standards of inclusion and exclusion (even such practical matters as getting to where the texts are to be found)” (p. 76). In addition to having access to a community that supported them, Randy and Dara had entrée to technology and cultural artifacts (Cole, 1996) that enabled them to create digital stories—performative speech events with high political-economic value. In the act of appropriating and “decentering discourse,” digital stories can be seen as “acts of control,” agentive and constructive performative moments. Second, and critically, at DUSTY they were “accorded the authority to appropriate” texts, and Randy and Dara’s recenterings of those texts, to use Bauman and Briggs’s terms, were seen as legitimate by other members of the community. Third, both Randy and Dara were given the means to acquire and display the knowledge and competence they needed “to carry out the decontext-

ualization and recontextualization of performed discourse successfully and appropriately” (p.77). And fourth, their texts were valued. Bauman and Briggs (1990) note: “All of these factors—agency, legitimacy, competence, and values—bear centrally on the construction and assumption of authority” (p.77). And the “authoritative voice of the performer . . . is grounded at least in part in the knowledge, ability, and right to control the recentering of valued texts” (p.77). Randy and Dara were given the space and support to create authoritative texts which embodied agentive selves. As Miller reminds us:

Selves, like cultures, are not so much preserved in stories as they are created, reworked, and revised through participation in everyday narrative practices that are embedded in and responsive to shifting interpersonal conditions. Memories of self and other provide a constantly updated resource that narrators exploit in projecting tellable and interpretable selves.” (Miller, 1994, pp. 175-176)

Miller and colleagues (1993) also maintain that although speech is never free from generic constraints, . . . speakers can achieve some individuality of expression by creatively appropriating and re-accenting existing genres, and by orchestrating particular voices” (p. 98). Both Dara and Randy clearly found ways to appropriate, orchestrate, and recenter texts and use them for novel, meaningful purposes.

## Conclusion

We expect, in our future work on literacy, identity, digital technology, and community storytelling, to continue to explore how to create learning spaces where individuals and groups can define and redefine themselves, voicing agentive selves through the creation of multimodal texts. As part of this work, we are especially interested in thinking about development as a sociocultural process (cf. Miller & Goodnow, 1995; Rogoff, 2003) that extends across the lifespan. In institutions of schooling and other educational settings it is customary to separate youth and children from adults and seniors, distinguishing rather rigidly what counts as learning and development at different life stages. Yet, as we have seen from the cases of Randy and Dara, “what develops” as individuals participate in the social and intellectual worlds of a community technology center can be similar for youth and adults. We are beginning to understand, as we hope we have illustrated in this paper, how pivotal the enactment of an agentive self can be for learning and motivation, and conversely, how the opportunity to be successful as a learner and doer can foster a view of self as agent, able to influence present circumstances and future possibilities, and to situate self in relation to others in socially responsible ways. It is such a view of self, and continual opportunities to enact this self in relation to new skills, technologies, knowledge, relationships, and practice that we see at the center of development for both children and adults.



We also hope to explore the role of multimedia and multimodality as a powerful form of communication and means of representing self, family, community, and social worlds. Already there are helpful theoretical accounts of the changing face of literacy (e.g., Kress, 2003). But to date there have been few empirical on-the-ground accounts of what might be thought of as a new literacy (Hull, 2003) and how it relates to essays and other linguistic texts. We would argue that digital storytelling and the social practices that encircle it, as illustrated through the work at DUSTY, are one example of mediational means that will soon constitute an expected part of a person's literate repertoire. We hope that researchers will begin to characterize the "different potential for enacting a self" (Urciuoli, 1995, p. 191) afforded by such tools. In addition, it is especially exciting to us that digital stories, through their combination of image, music, sound, and text, seem to engage young communicators and to provide an especially potent way to perform a self.

One looming question, given the emphasis at the current moment on accountability and testing mandated by federal and state policies, principally No Child Left Behind, is what place multimodal composing such as digital storytelling can claim in school-based curricula so differently directed by standards and narrower conceptions of literacy and performance. Our firm answer is that we cannot afford to neglect such new mediational means, and that to do so will only widen the literacy and achievement divide. However, we would also argue that the issue is larger than the technologies available for literacy, important though it is always to ensure equitable access to material resources. Additionally, we must find ways to make possible personally and socially meaningful uses of literacy, even and especially in the current climate, uses that allow young and older authors alike to engage in agentic literate practices such as the recontextualization of symbolic resources.

One context in which these practices are currently possible is after-school programs and other community-based organizations, where many youth spend considerable non-school hours and where opportunities for a variety of forms of academic and cultural enrichment are beginning to become available. It is, however, important not to place too great a burden on these consistently underresourced institutions (cf. Halpern, 2002), and we must be mindful as well of the increasing pressure on after-schools to serve as extensions and reproductions of the school day. Yet, there is evidence that powerful social and cognitive growth and identity development have been fostered in out-of-school settings across a range of youth development organizations (cf. Eccles & Templeton, 2002; Heath, 2000; Heath & McLaughlin, 1993). Our hope is that educators, in schools as well as outside them, in these challenging times of standards-based constraints, scripted curricula, and a zeal to test, rank, and calibrate, can manage to hold onto the humane dimensions of teaching, to remember why most of us became teachers in the first place—because we believe in our students and their "possible lives"

(Rose, 1995), and we want to support them academically as learners, and socially as human beings. Now more than perhaps ever before in the history of American education, it is critical that we stand our ground as humane facilitators of learning and development, taking seriously our roles in our students' "turning points" (Bruner, 1994)—in their abilities to agentively engage in learning and shape their social futures.

## Coda

Bruner has helpfully defined "agency" in psychological terms as "the initiation of relatively autonomous acts governed by our intentional states—our wishes, desires, beliefs, and expectancies" (1994, p. 41). Others frame this concept more politically as a belief in and the activity around remaking one's world (cf. Freire, 1970). In most western discussions of education, individual development, and social change, the desirability of an "agentive" stance for learners is taken as a given (cf. Hull & Greeno, 2006), even though the theoretical literature is less than optimistic about this possibility. We ask, then, how might we conceptualize spaces for the development of agency in what Giddens (1991) has called "our runaway world"?

Some readers may wonder, given our focus on Randy and Dara, two individuals, what kinds of claims we might make about the development of agency and identity that participants experienced through digital storytelling at DUSTY. Although human lives can never be reduced to simple cause and effect explanations, we certainly observed Randy and Dara, and other participants whom we have described elsewhere (Hull & James, in press; Hull, Kenney, Marple, & Forsman-Schneider, in press; Katz, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c; Roche-Smith, 2005; Wing, 2004) enacting agentive selves in their digital stories and in their relationships at DUSTY, and we witnessed as well how community involvement and storytelling became powerful and sustaining forces in their lives. While it would be impossible to fully tease apart such influences and their consequences, there exists an abundant theoretical literature, and also a striking, although less abundant, empirical literature that illustrates how important it is for people to be able to influence their own lives. We know from this literature and from our own research, especially for people living in disenfranchised or disadvantaged communities where they are often segregated from the material and social resources of our society, how critical it is to have access to tools and technology, and to believe in their own present capabilities and imagined futures.

At this writing, Dara, who was a vibrant and central member of the DUSTY children's program for several years, has moved on to high school, where we hope she will continue to flourish by drawing on the positive sense of herself as a writer, thinker, and agent that we saw her developing at DUSTY. Randy was laid off from his job at a warehouse, but found a better position at a local computer company,

and he has been blessed by the birth of a child, a son. His artistic life remains a major part of his identity; he continues to rap, to make beats, and to create digital stories, and he has ventured of late into videography, filming his own performances at local venues, and recording life on the streets of Oakland.

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### NOTES

1. This community technology center was founded in 2001 by Glynda Hull and Michael James and became a non-profit in 2004 called the Oakland Technology and Education Center (OTEC). It is affiliated with a statewide and international network of community/university after-school collaboratives (cf. Cole, 1996, for a discussion of the “5th Dimension” project, and Underwood, Welsh, Gauvain, & Duffy, 2000, for an account of UCLinks). For a more detailed account of the origins of DUSTY, the larger community in which it is situated, and its relationship to the University of California, Berkeley, please see Hull and Nelson (2005) and Hull and James (in press). Also see DUSTY’s website: [www.oaklanddusty.org](http://www.oaklanddusty.org).
2. To view Randy’s “Lyfe-N-Rhyme,” please visit the DUSTY website, [OaklandDusty.org](http://OaklandDusty.org). To protect children’s privacy, our policy is not to make available on our website those children’s stories that we have analyzed or described in detail in academic publications. However, a variety of examples of digital stories by children are available for viewing on the website.
3. See Hull and Nelson (2005), where we provide a framework for and example of analyzing the “braiding” of modalities in multimodal texts, in particular Randy’s “Lyfe-N-Rhyme,” and we demonstrate how such texts can result in different forms of and an intensification of meaning. See also Kress (2003) and Mitchell (1994).
4. Although Dara’s use of the expression “to cut an album” is accurate (see Appendix C, lines 37-43), she perceived that it was confusing to her audience (her audience being Jeannie at that moment) and changed it to “made their first album” to facilitate understanding. Dara’s concern with “making sense” is apparent throughout the sequence.

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## APPENDIX A: TRANSCRIPTION KEY

==	Indicates latched turns
[xxxx] [xxxx]	Indicates overlapped turns
CAREful	CAPS indicate increased speaking volume
:	Colon indicates elongated vowel pronunciation as in Lo:vely da:y
(XX)	Conveys indecipherable talk – each X equals one syllable
(hope)	Conveys best guess at almost indecipherable talk
.	Period indicates sentence final intonation
?	Indicates rising intonation
!	Indicates phrase or sentence final emphasis
,	Indicates a short pause in talk
...	Indicates omitted speech
{description}	Indicates relevant non-linguistic information
“quotes”	Indicates text being read from the computer screen

Please note that in transcribing excerpts of conversations we have taken the liberty of deleting some of the typically repetitious oral uses of words like “um” and “uh” in order to make the transcripts more reader-friendly.



## APPENDIX B: SCRIPT FOR LYFE-N-RHYME

What's done through life echoes throughout time  
It's an infinite chase to become what I was  
But what was I? I don't remember  
Life, love, truth, trust, tribulation  
That's what's up  
The only thing I know is I've seen it before in the mirrors of my mind  
The older we get, the harder a habit is to kick  
Damn! Pleasure, pain, purpose, prison  
Justice is a contradiction  
Living on a razor, fell into a felony  
And handled what was left of me  
Life is a lesson  
Groove with me  
Move like a millipede  
Thousands of lands controlled by one hand  
Yes, mama's only gun is mama's only son with a guillotine tongue.  
Murder, money, mis-education  
Mill gives an incarceration  
Urban voice, heart of the street  
Step by step on poverty's concrete  
Choice, change, crack cocaine  
Capitalism in my veins, yeah, that's what I'm talking about  
A page full of rage!  
Wait! How does a cage rehabilitate?  
Next, America's new war  
Billion dollar weapons don't feed the poor  
But then again, who cares?  
All we do is breathe what they put in the air, yeah  
I said it before, I'll say it again  
Contradiction, Section 8 living  
Society's rival, freedom of speech, who are we to teach  
Heart, body, mind, soul  
So many different worlds in one planet going on  
Youth neglected, expected to listen, born and raised on television  
Friction, failure, function, worth  
Me and Mom Deuce, family first  
Some rules are meant to be broken  
Some doors are meant to be opened  
And . . . regardless of race  
We all mostly come from the same place . . . Love  
This is life in rhyme.

## APPENDIX C: PARTIAL TRANSCRIPT OF AN EDITING SESSION ON DARA'S STORY ABOUT SELENA

- 1 JEANNIE: All right. This seems good. Anything else you wanna change?==
- 2 DARA: ==Yeah {*Pointing to script on computer screen*} this part right here. See it's really getting see {*Reading*} "Selena y Los Dinos. Amazingly, even at the young age of four . . . in the group" that's kind of like messing me up.
- 3 JEANNIE: Yeah I know. What did you . . . ==
- 4 DARA: ==I just wanna fix that.==
- 5 JEANNIE: ==what did you wanna say here like==
- 6 DARA: ==well I can say {*Reading and revising*} "Amazingly even at that age {Jeannie: um hm} at the at that age four {Jeannie: uh huh} xxxx together".
- 7 JEANNIE: Like, 'cause it seems like you're saying about Selena but then here you're saying like the group. So,
- 8 DARA: Well "Selena y Los Dinos" {*Pointing to script on computer screen and reading*} this part leaves me alone. But it's this part {*Pointing elsewhere*} that's REALLY getting me confused.
- 9 JEANNIE: Maybe "even at the young age of four"
- 10 DARA: "In the group's first year together."
- 11 {*Various interruptions by DUSTY staff to talk about taking pictures and distribution of cameras.*}
- 12 JEANNIE: Okay what if we just cut the whoo::le young age thing
- 13 {*Dara starts talking to staff member again about taking pictures*}
- 14 JEANNIE: {*Tape was off, turned back on to catch*} cut this whole sentence?
- 15 DARA: uuu::h==
- 16 JEANNIE: ==Like just say "In the group's first year together Selena da da da da da cut their first album xx==
- 17 DARA: ==How about you say "amazingly at that age . . . of four, amazingly"
- 18 JEANNIE: Selena was in a group?
- 19 DARA: of four. I could put "of four" in there 'cause there was four of 'em. It was her, her brother,
- 20 JEANNIE: Okay.
- 21 DARA: XX three of 'em wasn't it. Her brother and sister and Selena. That's three.
- 22 JEANNIE: Wait. Her brother, her sister, no there were four. Kay her sister was the drummer==
- 23 DARA: no her brother was the guitarist, her sister was the drummer.
- 24 JEANNIE: Right. Her sister was the drummer, her brother was
- 25 DARA: the guitarist and==
- 26 JEANNIE: ==wait who plays the piano.
- 27 DARA: Nobody. They added. They were added so it was three. Not four.
- 28 JEANNIE: Okay. {*Reading*} "Amazingly even at the age of four Selena . . ."
- 29 DARA: No we have to change the four to three.
- 30 JEANNIE: No but you're saying at the young AGE of four.
- 31 DARA: Oo::h. That's the age they were.

- 32 JEANNIE: Yeah. *{Laughs. Typing}* At the young age of four Selena called  
 33 DARA: called Selena y Los Dinos.  
 34 JEANNIE: Okay there we go.  
 35 DARA: Called Selena y Los Dinos.  
 36 JEANNIE: Okay. Um  
 37 DARA: Wait. When they cut their first album and performed . . . WHEN they cut their  
 first album and performed live for the first time  
 38 JEANNIE: *{Typing}* when they cut their first album, *{To Dara}* what does it mean by they  
 cut their first album.  
 39 DARA: Like they made their first album.  
 40 JEANNIE: Oh.  
 41 DARA: *{Suggests changing word}* When they MADE. How about when they MADE their  
 first album.  
 42 JEANNIE: Okay. Yeah.  
 43 DARA: Does that make sense?  
 44 JEANNIE: Yeah.  
 45 JEANNIE: When they made their first==  
 46 DARA: ==When they made their first album they performed live for the first time.  
 47 JEANNIE: Okay.==  
 48 DARA: ==Does that make sense?==  
 49 JEANNIE: ==Yeah. Was that better for you to say?==  
 50 DARA: ==Yeah. Yeah ‘cause I was the one who made it up. *{both laugh}* I had to. Okay.  
*{Reads smoothly and with emphasis}* “Amazingly, even at the young age of four, Selena  
 was in a group called Selena y Los Dinos. When they made their first album, they  
 performed live for the first time.”  
 51 JEANNIE: That sounds much better  
 52 *{portion untranscribed}*  
 53 DARA: I think I wanna go do my voice capture now.

### 2006 Promising Researcher Winners Named

Deborah Bieler, University of Delaware; Victoria Haviland, University of Michigan; and Jessica Zacher, California State University, Long Beach, have been named the 2006 NCTE Promising Researchers, an award for articles based on a dissertation, a thesis, or an initial independent study after the dissertation. The NCTE Standing Committee on Research sponsors the Promising Researcher Award in commemoration of Bernard O’Donnell.

Beth L. Samuelson was selected a finalist for this award. The 2006 Promising Researcher Award Committee Members are Deborah Hicks, Chair, Colette Daiute, Joel Dworin, and Lesley Rex. Sarah Freedman is the Chair of the Standing Committee on Research.