Constructing Historical Profiles with Digital Natives

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine a group of fifth graders
experiences, beliefs, and opinions during the construction of digital
historical agent profiles. This research study examined a project in which
students were engaged in the learning of historical content and were
asked to convey information about the life of someone from the past
through the medium of the present and future using a social networking
profile page. The profiles were constructed while examining American
Revolutionary period content, which included a primary focus upon
historical agents from this time period. This study was constructed to
gain a better understanding of how students engage critical historical
thinking skills through investigating and developing conclusions about
the history and lives of historical agents while utilizing technology. It was
found that authentic historical inquiry was achieved, historical thinking
primarily occurred at a novice level, and students engaged with the
technology and found the creation of a digital historical profile to be a
more interesting way to convey their knowledge of the content.

Increasingly, researchers have examined the concept of developing historical thinking in
the K-16 classroom (Brown, 2009; Drake & Brown, 2003; Endacott, 2010; Hartzler-
Miller, 2001; Levstik & Barton, 2001; National Center for History in the Schools, 1996;
VanSledright, 2004). This model refers to the process of allowing students to think and
act like historians by engaging them in the act of "doing history" (Brown, 2009; Levstik,
1997; Levstik & Barton, 2001), embracing the habits of the historical mind, and engaging
in the process of understanding and interpreting persistent historical themes by drawing
connections to contemporary contexts through disciplined inquiry (Drake & Nelson,
2005). History and social studies teachers must find ways to allow their students to
develop historical thinking skills and to engage them in authentic historical inquiry.

A greater emphasis within national and state standards has been on encouraging students to utilize historical thinking skills. For example, the *National Standards for History* (National Center for History in the Schools, 1996) presented history as "a process of reasoning based on evidence from the past" that "must be grounded in the careful gathering, weighing and sifting of factual information such as names, dates, places, ideas, and events" (p. 49). The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS, 1994) standards posited that well-designed social studies curriculum helps each learner construct a blended view of the human condition. In addition, students should be instructed on how to build various personal perspectives that allow them to investigate emerging events and persistent or recurring issues and consider implications for themselves, their family, and the global community.

Researchers have argued that educating students through the use of historical thinking fosters important skills, including critical thinking (Brophy, 1990; Chapman, 2011; Pattiz, 2004; Waring & Robinson, 2010). It is vital for students to have opportunities to evaluate and discriminatingly choose sources (Lee, 2005) and learn how to properly construct historical narratives (Brown & Dotson, 2007; Voelker, 2008; Waring, 2012), as well as how to assess narratives they encounter (Alridge, 2006; Levstik & Barton, 2011; Paxton, 1999).

Unfortunately, traditional methods for teaching history in K-12 classrooms ignore essential elements of the historical thinking process by teaching history in a monocausal format, void of interpretation (Levstik, 1997). Historical issues are often presented as a dichotomous battle between the winners and the losers or one side that is "right" and the other that is "wrong" rather than the study of situated, competing narratives also mediated by the personal narratives of those who teach them (Coughlin, 2003).

Ways to combat this dualistic and static way of thinking must be encouraged in social studies classrooms (Chapman, 2003). In this paper, we describe the ways that innovative pedagogies and technologies can be integrated to promote student engagement and historical thinking.

Emerging Technologies, Content Pedagogies, and Historical Thinking

Researchers have argued that a more effective and engaging method of teaching history allows children to consider multiple perspectives and conduct historical inquiry (VanSledright, 2002; Wyman, 2005). Wineburg (2001) posited that historical thinking is not something to which people attain naturally or easily:

> Its achievement...actually goes against the grain of how we ordinarily think, one of the reasons why it is much easier to learn names, dates, and stories than it is to change the basic mental structures we use to grasp the meaning of the past. (p. 7)

In addition, individuals need to "go beyond our own image, to go beyond our brief life, and to go beyond the fleeting moment in human history into which we have been born" (Wineburg, 2001, p. 24). This framework for historical thinking builds on the National Council for History Education's Habits of Mind (Bradley Commission on History in Schools, 1995), which encourages students to

- Understand the significance of the past;
- Distinguish between the important and the inconsequential;
- Develop historical empathy as opposed to present-mindedness;

- Grasp the complexity of historical causation, respect particularity, and avoid excessively abstract generalizations;
- Recognize the importance of individuals who have made a difference in history. (p. 1)

Although enacting these habits of mind and reaching mature historical thinking in the average K-12 classroom is a lofty goal, research demonstrates that students in the earliest of grades are capable of "doing history" and engaging in historical thinking (Brophy, 1990; Dilek, 2009). Booth (1980) wrote that history is an adductive process, where children as young as the age of 4 are able to ask open-ended questions about historical events and can construct productive answers.

Proper and effective historical instruction must begin at the earliest possible age (James & McVay, 2009). Delay has no benefit, as children at the youngest of ages are capable of making basic distinctions in historical time (Brophy & VanSledright, 1997; Dilek, 2009) and are able to determine differences between the present day and events in the past (James & McVay, 2009). According to Barton (1996), when children are given the opportunity to learn about the past from familiar sources such as family members, visual images, and tangible objects, they understand history more clearly than when the focus is upon institutional developments.

By the time students have reached the third grade, they are able to distinguish between different time periods, but typically not until reaching the fifth grade are students able extensively to connect particular dates with specific background knowledge (Barton, 1996; Barton & Levstik, 1996). This progression calls for innovative pedagogies that foster student learning and improve learning outcomes.

Over the past decade, K-12 social studies teachers have increasingly integrated technology into their classroom history instruction to improve student-learning outcomes (Berson, 2004; Danker, 2000; Green, Bolick, & Robertson, 2010; Hakes & Eisenwine, 2003; Hernandez-Ramos & De La Paz, 2009; Ray & Shelton, 2004; Shiveley, 2004; VanFossen, 2004). Researchers predict that technology use in education is increasing and will continue to do so, particularly given the mandates of state and national standards (Green et al., 2010; International Society for Technology in Education [ISTE], 2004; Kleiner & Farris, 2002; Newburger, 2001) and as the price to acquire hardware becomes more affordable for the average school budget.

As access to technology increases, many educators argue that, in order "to live, learn, and work successfully in an increasingly complex and information-rich society, students must be able to use technology effectively" (ISTE, 2004, p. 1). Similarly, the NCSS (1994) standards asserted that technology and social studies together prepare students to become productive and informed citizens in the 21st century.

Despite these encouraging trends, most teachers are ill prepared to integrate technology in meaningful, innovative ways that engage students in the learning process (Stoddard, 2010). More specifically, technology is often used in traditional ways, such as lecture and other modes of direct instruction, and its availability has not produced major changes to practice (Swan & Hofer, 2008). To further complicate this problem, the growing availability of technology adds increasing pressure on classroom teachers to find creative ways to use technology to teach content mandated in state and national standards. Additionally, teachers must find approaches to use technology in ways that foster content-specific best practice and improve student learning (Deaney, Chapman, & Hennessy, 2009). Identifying more meaningful approaches has become increasingly

difficult given 21st-century students' exposure and access to mobile technologies in a digital age.

Life for digital natives, those individuals born into the digital world of computers, video games, and the Internet, is different than for children from previous generations (Prensky, 2001). They have learned to utilize a variety of social networking sites, such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and others, to keep in touch with friends, to learn more about personal interests, and to let the world know additional information about them. Researchers posit that the emergence of "ubiquitous mobile technologies" will continue to transform the ways students learn, and in turn, the structure of schooling (Bjerede, Atkins, & Dede, 2010).

Social networking is arguably one of the most prolific of these mobile technologies. Students are constantly inundated with embedded badges and hashtags across varied media, including television, the Internet, and even consumer packaging. Yet, the social network format has not been fully utilized as an instructional tool to foster student content learning, specifically historical thinking.

This research study explores a project, The Digital Historical Agent Profile Project, in which fifth-grade students engaged in the learning of historical content and were asked to convey information about the life of someone from the past through the medium of the present and future: a social networking profile page.

Method

This qualitative case study examined fifth-grade students' capacities for historical thinking, as the class constructed a technology-enriched Digital Historical Profile (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Working with the researchers, student participants conducted historical investigations based on a historical inquiry model, one that necessitated the use of various sources, sourcing, contextualization, analysis, and corroboration of sources, and the construction of original narratives (Martin, Wineburg, Rosenzweig, & Leon, 2008), to explore the following research questions:

- How can technology be seamlessly integrated into historical inquiry through digital historical profiles?
- In what ways do participants' engagements in a digital historical profile project foster critical historical thinking?

This participatory research project aimed to provide students with innovative and interventionist instructional opportunities designed to foster better understandings of the American Revolutionary period historical content and learn about various historical agents from this time period through the utilization of technology. This activist-oriented and participatory project followed a technology-assisted model that involved students in the process of investigating and developing conclusions about the past and the agents who impacted it.

We were interested in learning about students' capacities for historical thinking as they interacted with various technologies during the historical inquiry process by observing the phenomenon (i.e., historical thinking) and examining the final products constructed (Marshall & Rossman, 2010) over a 6-month period. Specifically, our focus was on the ability of the students to access various sources, analyze the sources, and then construct an original narrative.

Site and Participants

Case study relies on bounded systems, wherein researchers may seek to describe "the process by which a particular innovation had a particular effect on the participants in the setting" (Gay et al., 2009, p. 427). A technology-assisted model for classroom teaching bounded the phenomenon under investigation and historical thinking. As such, we purposely selected a fifth-grade classroom at Oak Brook Elementary, an urban school located in a major metropolitan area of over 2 million people.

We selected the classroom at Oak Brook Elementary given the diversity of the school, coupled with a commitment to excellence and improvement in reading for all students but especially for Hispanics and English language learners. The commitment to reading corresponded with our interest in understanding how technology-assisted models, as instructional interventions, can promote critical thinking skills (i.e., historical thinking), practices often linked to reading comprehension (Mendenhall & Johnson, 2010).

Oak Brook Elementary is an A-rated school serving over 350 students from diverse backgrounds, but it struggles to make Adequate Yearly Progress in reading, as required by the *No Child Left Behind Act*, when student performances for Hispanics and English language learners are disaggregated. According to federal race and ethnicity categorizations, 77% are White, 9% Black, 1% Native, 8% Asian, and 4% Multiracial; 59% are Non-Hispanic and 41% Hispanic. In addition to racial and ethnic diversity, 42% of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, and 12% have identified learning disabilities.

We selected the specific classroom at Oak Brook Elementary due to the willingness of the classroom teacher to adopt the technology-assisted model as an instructional intervention into classroom teaching, the teacher's emphasis on historical thinking through traditional modes of instruction and reading comprehension, and the availability of technological resources. Consequently, the participants in this study consisted of the 18 fifth-grade students who were working with the identified classroom teacher on a unit focusing on the American Revolutionary period.

Although we worked collaboratively with the classroom teacher, she was not included in data collection or analysis, since teacher efficacy or pedagogy were not under investigation; rather, the students' capacities for historical thinking as they interacted with various digital technologies were the focus of the study.

Role of the Researchers in Instructional Interventions

Under the traditional instruction of the teacher (i.e., assigned textbook readings, lecture, primary document analysis and other archival research, and independent and guided practice with print documents), each student completed a brief historical biography for an assigned figure from the American Revolutionary period. Figures were identified by the teacher and ranged from key political leaders, such as George Washington, to more minority activists, such as Crispus Attucks and Deborah Sampson. After completing this traditional activity, we provided the students with a brief lesson on media literacy. In so doing, we collaborated with the teacher as participant observers (as defined by Plano, Clark, & Creswell, 2010) to teach the students how to use various digital technologies, including word processing, Internet searching techniques, social networking formats, and Windows Movie Maker.

Once students were taught how to use the technologies, we provided them with a historical figure profile worksheet (see Appendix A) that contained all of the field information found in an identified social networking format. Students were told to use their biographies and previously collected research as the preliminary source to complete the worksheet; they were then told to continue their research using a prescribed Internet search engine.

After completing the questionnaire, students were provided with the social networking profile template and were taught how these digital technologies could be used to represent the traditional historical research and biographical writings previously completed under the teacher's instruction using the historical profile worksheet. Students were asked to construct a complete profile that included synthetic and evaluative elements, including notable achievements and discussion threads, to extend beyond the knowledge/recall information that appeared in the original biography. Students were given an opportunity to mine for additional information about their individual and to think historically by constructing an interpretative profile that did not rely solely on factual information (i.e., date of birth, occupation, education, etc).

The students met in the instructional technology laboratory 1 day per week for approximately 45 minutes over the course of 2 months to complete the template. Once the template was completed, students were given the option to create movies of their profiles using Windows Moviemaker. After implementing the interventionist instructional unit, the researchers analyzed the data collected during instruction to create a grounded survey designed to promote interpretive validity (Maxwell, 1992). We then met again with the students to administer the survey.

Data Collection

Multiple methods of data collection were used during this study—observational data, informal interviews, surveys, field notes, researchers' logs, and document analysis—so that we could compensate for the fallibility of any single method (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Using a variety of data collection methods and data sources and making sure that patterns and categories repeat (*triangulation*, Patton, 2002) will bring credibility to the findings and strengthen reliability as well as internal validity (Merriam, 1998).

This participatory research project aimed to provide students the opportunity to learn about the past through a historical inquiry approach to learning about historical content through digital technology integration. As mentioned, we built on this activity by teaching students how to represent the material through innovative technologies. Students learned how to use a variety of technological skills, including how to create a website, use digital image and video editing software, connect peripheral devices to a computer, and conduct authentic digital history. We documented student engagement in the creation of the Digital Historical Profiles through qualitative observation and informal interviews (as described in Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). We also employed document analysis to explore participants' capacities for historical thinking.

Observations. Observations of the students occurred in the instructional technology laboratory. Observations lasted approximately 45 minutes during 1 day per week over a span of 2 months. Spradley's (1980) matrix of participant observation was employed in order to identify ways in which the participants interacted with each of the technologies used during the project and how their use impacted their understandings of the historical content intended to be learned. The following nine questions (Spradley, 1980) were used to assist the researchers in the observation process:

- **Space**: What is (are) the physical place or places involved?
- **Objects**: What are the physical things that are present?
- **Activities:** What is the set of related acts the actors do?
- **Time**: What is the sequencing that takes place over time?
- **Actors**: Who are the people involved?
- **Goals**: What are the things people are trying to accomplish?
- **Feelings**: What are the emotions felt and expressed by actors?
- **Acts**: What are the single actions that people do?
- **Events**: What are the sets of related activities people carry out?

Informal interviews. Informal interviews were conducted with all 18 participants to determine the participants' prior experiences and beliefs before the onset of the Digital Historical Profile project. The duration for each interview varied from 5 to 10 minutes, according to the depth of prior experience. Interview data were documented through field notes. Additional interviews were conducted to gain particulars as to the experiences and content gained by each of the participants during the process of the project (see Appendix B). These interviews, during which the participants were asked to reflect upon their experiences, the content gained, and the nature of technology integration throughout the project, were used as a foundation for the formation of the surveys.

The initial interviews were also utilized as guides to the focus of observational sessions during the construction of the Digital Historical Profiles (Savenye & Robinson, 1996). Spradley's (1980) Matrix, outlining the elements of an ethnographic interview, was utilized to construct a framework for each of the interview sessions.

Surveys. An anonymous grounded survey (Appendix C) was used as a strategy for member checking and ensuring interpretive validity (as recommended by Maxwell, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The questions were constructed to compare researchers' analysis of students' experiences with the project based on observation and interview data, and the Digital Historical Profiles against students' thoughts and reactions to the construction of their profiles. Given the member checking and grounded quality, we developed the survey after data collection, analysis, and interpretation; questions on the survey, thereby, reflected the researchers' analysis of the data.

Field notes and researchers' log. Field notes were kept to document observations during data collection. These notes were used to trigger memory, depict the setting, portray the participants, and add understanding to the data collected. The researchers' logs (Patton, 2002) contain reflections, connections, new questions, and realizations made by the investigators while collecting data that were helpful in the data analysis process.

Student products. The electronic and nonelectronic documents created and collected throughout the project were analyzed. These included all activities and data collected by participants (e.g., electronic primary and secondary sources, digital history websites, etc.), as well as the completed Digital Historical Profiles. These products assisted us in understanding how the teacher and the students were incorporating technology in the project and how historical content gained was being conveyed.

Data Analysis

All of the data were analyzed, coded, and categorized. Analytic induction (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Erikson, 1986; Patton, 2002) and content analysis (Patton, 2002) were

employed in the analysis and interpretation of the data. Together, these approaches allowed us to follow a flexible and recursive process consistent with case study that permitted themes and categories to develop. During this time, data were examined to support or dismiss formulated themes. Efforts were made to minimize intrusion of researcher bias during the analysis process (as recommended by Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and to understand the intended conveyance of the data. In addition, multiple forms of triangulation were used during this study to improve the validity of the findings (see Denzin, 1978; Marshall & Rossman, 2010).

The first interviews and early observations allowed initial salient themes and reoccurring ideas to emerge. Throughout the study, emerging themes were added, modified, and eliminated. Attention to internal convergence and external divergence were crucial so that each theme remained internally consistent while being mutually exclusive (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). The data from later interviews, field notes, researcher's log, and continued observations were used to adjust the initial themes that emerged and allowed for alternative ideas and explanations to be examined.

The 18 completed Digital Historical Profiles were analyzed utilizing five of the National Council for History Education's Habits of Mind (Bradley Commission on History in Schools, 1995). This framework for analysis provided a methodology for indentifying places where historical thinking occurred in the construction of the profile. To declare that historical thinking occurred, the student had to convey

- The significance of the past;
- Differentiation between the important and the inconsequential;
- Historical empathy as opposed to present-mindedness;
- A grasp of the complexity of historical causation, respect particularity, and avoidance of excessively abstract generalizations; and
- Recognition of the importance of individuals who have made a difference in history.

Each Digital Historical Profile was examined, with attention to the five habits of mind (see Table 1). Average scores for each habit were calculated. Finally, the survey data were examined using simple descriptive statistics to determine mean, range, and standard deviation for each question given its function as a member checking instrument.

Table 1
Coding Scheme for Digital Profiles

1 Not Observed	2 Deficient	3 Developing	4 Expected	5 Exemplary
Content (Focus) is not evidenced	Content (Focus) is difficult to discern; students (participants) have made little attempt to develop content	Content (Focus) is poorly articulated or too broad; development is incomplete or inconsistent.	Content (Focus) is evident and all elements are adequately addressed.	Content (Focus) is sharply defined and thoroughly developed.

Key linkages (Erickson, 1986, p. 147) were sought throughout and assisted in the construction of several assertions; these linkages connected themes and pieces of data to the assertions, which helped to validate the assertions. Evidentiary warrant was established for the assertions through an additional review of the data corpus, with efforts to find confirming and disconfirming evidence in order to increase the validity of all of the claims (as also in Milman & Heinecke, 1999); any inaccurate or misguided assertions were eliminated. All assertions were carefully examined and confirmed from a variety of sources, as the ability to eliminate rival explanations strengthens the validity of the findings (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Finally, assertions were examined against a participant's survey, which served as a tool to ensure interpretive validity (Maxwell, 1992). Ultimately, the data supported the construction of three empirical assertions that are discussed and substantiated in the next section.

Findings

Following the analysis of the data, three empirical assertions materialized from the data collected through informal interviews, observations, surveys, and examination of student-produced documents, websites, and videos. First, we found that authentic historical inquiry occurred during the construction of the historical profiles. Second, historical thinking occurred primarily at a novice level. Third, students engaged with the technology and found the creation of a digital historical profile to be a more interesting way to convey their knowledge of the content.

Authentic Historical Inquiry Occurred

Data collected from our observations, interviews, field notes, and document analysis indicated that all of the students experienced elements of authentic historical inquiry. From a review of the data, we determined that what students felt made our approach effective and engaging is that, unlike a traditional book report, the act of constructing electronic-based historical profiles gave them an opportunity to conduct authentic historical inquiry and display the content learned in a variety of ways and through a medium with which they are largely familiar. More specifically, the format gave them opportunities to engage evaluative and synthetic writing through discussion threads, activities not always emphasized in traditional, elementary-level writing activities. By documenting information about a historical agent and through the use of blogs and conversations written from the historical figure's perspective, the students noted, they had an opportunity to show they truly understood the historical content.

More importantly, they were able to convey important elements about what their chosen individual experienced or believed in a format participants overwhelmingly described as being "cool." Students took the information that they gathered through research and created from them unique and original writings based on primary and secondary sources found during historical research.

These writings also offered students an opportunity to engage in historical empathy, a practice deemed desirable by educators and historians, but often elusive to classroom teachers (Brooks, 2009). Although scholars have not come to complete agreement on how to define historical empathy (Yilmaz, 2007), we see historical empathy as "a reconstruction of others' beliefs, values, and goals, any or all of which are not necessarily those of the historical investigator" (Riley, 1998, p. 33).

For example, while constructing a digital profile for Crispus Attucks, one participant expressed frustration with the lack of material available. Although he understood why

the primary sources were limited (Quarles, 1996), he asked, "How can I answer these questions? I can't find the answers. NO one knows who his friends were or who he'd like to meet." The reply "Well who do you think he might *want* to meet?" prompted him to suggest, "Martin Luther King, Jr.—because they both wanted freedom."

Here, the technology-assisted social networking format, which included knowledge/recall biographical information often emphasized in traditional instruction, also asked participants to think historically (see Figure 1). Although this activity is anachronistic, a stance often viewed in opposition to traditional historical processes, it resonates with arguments for thematic historical inquiry with elementary students. Teachers provide students with opportunities to learn how persistent historical themes occur across time, actors, and contexts to promote critical historical thinking and connect to the lived experiences of their students (Henry, 2008). Thus, the opportunities for authentic historical inquiry were available through this approach.
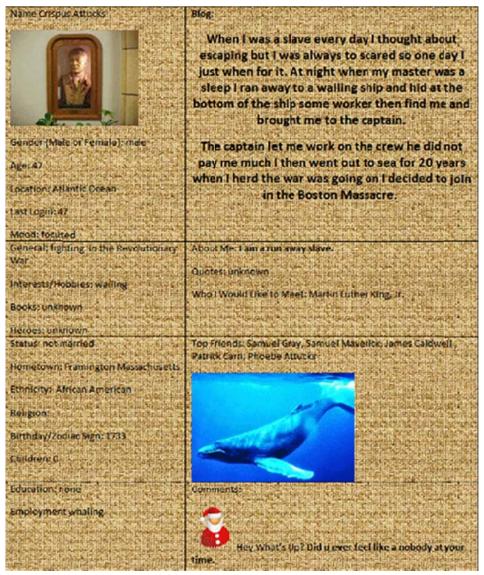

Figure 1. *Historical profile of Crispus Attucks.*

Some of the profiles themselves did not necessarily indicate that opportunities for historical thinking were available, as several mimicked textbook passages, but elements within most, like that of Crispus Attucks, revealed that authentic historical thinking occurred. The following excerpt, from a profile about Samuel Adams, displays an example of how a student was able to present the information gained from his engagement with various sources:

> I am the person who comes to mind when people think of the American Revolution. I was born Boston, Quincy Massachusetts. I went to Harvard University and then I went to law school. Then I turned to business and lost all the money my father gave me. I was then very poor. Once I was free of my parents obligations I turned to politics. Later I wrote the Circular letter. With the help of John Hancock I organized the Sons of Liberty. Then we dressed as Mohawks and dumped tea into the Boston Harbor. This came to be known as The Boston Tea Party.

While further opportunities for authentic historical inquiry are needed for this student and his colleagues, this student displayed his engagement with various sources at every stage during his inquiry. Another example, focusing on the life of Patience Lovell Wright, displays elements of how this student was engaged in authentic historical inquiry, as well as experiencing some sense of historical empathy:

Today King George the third and Queen Charlotte invited me to the Windsor castle to sculpt wax figures of them. Upon arrival I overheard the King talking to one of his servants. What I heard was that they were planning a surprise attack on the colonies. When I finished sculpting the King and Queen's wax figures I rushed home and sent word to Benjamin Franklin who could warn the colony. But I couldn't just send the letter sealed with wax oh no not the way England is checking every letter going to the colonies. So I simply sculpted a hollow wax head and put the letter inside, shipped it off, and hope that it will make it to Benjamin intact.

The survey data added credibility to our findings in that the students felt they could learn more about history by conducting research on the computer rather than using a textbook alone (average of 3.71).

Historical Thinking Primarily Occurred at a Novice Level

The intent of this participatory research project was to allow these students opportunities to engage in historical inquiry and develop mature levels of historical analysis and thinking. We wanted to encourage mature historical thinking and engage students in critical thinking by asking them to "go beyond our own image, to go beyond our brief life, and to go beyond the fleeting moment in human history into which we have been born" (Wineburg, 2001, p. 24) and engage them in various stages of historical thinking: sourcing, contextualization, close reading, and corroboration (Martin et al., 2008). This goal was not achieved.

Evidence from observational data, interviews, field notes, and researchers' logs showed that students were not thinking critically or at a mature level as they engaged with various sources encountered during their research and utilized in the construction of their historical profiles. After analysis of the profiles, focusing on the five chosen historical habits of mind, we found that students were not displaying mature levels of historical thinking in the presentation of their narratives. For example, when asked to post threaded discussions between their historical figures and selected "friends," most of the

conversations centered on factual or recalled information rather than inference. Most did not display thinking even to this level, as they resembled the following hypothetical blog conversation conducted between Patrick Henry and George Washington:

> Patrick Henry - Hey What's Up?
> George Washington - Nothing much you?
> Patrick Henry - ok, I am writing a speech for a case
> George Washington - Oh no, I have to get I have some papers to do.
> Patrick Henry - alright let me finish bye.
> George Washington - bye
> The conversation is then interrupted by King George:
> Patrick Henry - hello?
> King George - Ah Henry I finally found you!
> Patrick Henry - not you again!
> King George - Yes it is I king George the third!
> Patrick Henry - I told you already we won so leave me alone!
> King George - I will be back I tell you!
> Patrick Henry - ok good bye!

Here, students did not show that they understood the significance of the past.

One of the higher quality examples, one on James Otis, Jr., shows how one student who was fully engaged in the historical inquiry process and displayed mature thinking throughout the project chose to present his findings:

> I still remember when I fought against the stamp act. It was a difficult argument to win but I won it. People considered me to be the acts most vocal critic. I published in the Boston Press against Parliaments rights to tax other citizens and I without representation. This is where my quote "No taxation without representation!" comes from.

Coded profiles (See Table 1) corroborated analysis of interview and observation data. Although students were given opportunities to conduct authentic historical inquiry, the majority were unable to analyze the source or compile historical narratives at a more mature level (see Table 2).

Table 2
Profile Coding for Five Habits of Mind (*n = 18*)

Habit of Mind	*M*	Range
Understanding of Historical Significance	3.39	2-5
Differentiation between Important and Inconsequential	3	2-4
Complexity of Historical Causation	3	2-4
Historical Empathy as Opposed to Present Mindedness	2.89	1-4
Recognize the Importance of Individuals	3.06	1-5

One particularly intriguing outcome was that through the construction of their narratives, several students found ways to connect persistent historical themes across time. Specifically, students constructed narratives between historical agents from varying time periods that they believed shared similar values, political positions, democratic competencies, or civic visions. As noted earlier, one student writing a narrative for Crispus Attucks elected to include Martin Luther King, Jr., in this conversation, given their perceived shared vision for equality and democracy. A profile created for James Otis, Jr., showed that he would have liked to have met Abraham Lincoln.

Student Engagement

In comparison to traditional methods for teaching and learning about history content, the creation of the Digital Historical Profiles was preferred in comparison to more traditional methods. This was consistently present in the data collected from our observations, interviews, field notes, and researchers' logS and is well documented in the literature (Campbell & Jane, 2012; Frye et al., 2010; Watson, Mong, & Harris, 2011). For example, the following excerpt from the researchers' logs, details an informal interview with a student while constructing the comments section of the profile:

> Researcher: Okay. Now you need to think about what King George might say.
> Participant: You mean, like what the book says he said?
> Researcher: You might include that information, but you can also find other sources or even put the pieces together yourself.
> Participant: So I can go back on the Internet and look for more stuff?!
> Researcher: Of course. [Participant is smiling; immediately goes to Google and begins searching for additional information.] Do you want me to get your book/folder for you as well?
> Participant: No…I'll look here for now.

Although the participant did not specifically state that he preferred using the technology, his facial expression and gleeful tone, coupled with his lack of desire to use his textbook or worksheet materials indicated a preference for technology resources. Results from the surveys substantiated this finding, indicating that the students believed that creating the historical figure profiles was an interesting way to learn more about a person in history (average score of 3.88) and that creating the historical figure profile was more interesting than reading about a historical agent and answering textbook questions or completing worksheets (average of 4.53). Students generally felt that researching history on the computer was more fun than reading about it in their textbook alone (average of 3.95) and that the integration of technology into the learning of historical content makes learning "fun" (average of 3.53).

The students indicated on multiple occasions during the construction of their profiles that they liked creating the historical figure profile (average of 3.94) and would like to create more historical figure profiles for future assignments (average of 3.71). Additionally, students consistently noted that they would like to have an opportunity to share their historical profiles and the research they conducted by posting it on the Internet (average of 4).

Discussion

This project utilized popular media and ubiquitous technologies to engage students in innovative and meaningful ways, keeping curriculum-based standards in mind. It also relays promise for the larger goal of using historical inquiry to foster critical thinking and

tap into capacities for empathy. Equally as important, students truly enjoyed engaging in the historical inquiry process and learning about the life of a previously unknown historical agent.

Authentic historical inquiry was achieved during the construction of the historical profiles. Students successfully planned and implemented historical inquiry through researching and reporting on the life of a historical agent. Unfortunately, historical thinking occurred primarily at a novice level. Since lessons specifically focused on developing historical thinking skills had not been conducted prior to this project and these students had few, if any, prior opportunities to conduct authentic historical inquiry, the results were not surprising. Overall, the results were encouraging. These results could be due to time and curricular constraints and the methods typically utilized by this and previous classroom teachers. Although a brief lesson on media literacy was taught, these students would have benefitted from more detailed instruction and experiences engaging them in various stages of historical thinking: sourcing, contextualization, close reading, and corroboration (Martin et al., 2008).

Interestingly, students were able to find ways to connect persistent historical themes across time. Examples showed that this format for displaying content knowledge provides educators with a means of approaching historical inquiry through theme as well as period-based or chronological approaches to the study of history. This is particularly important in the elementary grades for students who often feel exceptionally detached from the adult lives of past individuals (Henry, 2008). Here, social media provides students with a familiar and asynchronous format to grapple with the ways people make choices in context and across competing narratives.

Last, students engaged with the technology and found the creation of a digital historical profile to be a more interesting way to convey their knowledge of the content. On multiple occasions, students discussed their enjoyment of the project with us, the classroom teacher, and their classmates. This fact resonates with the assertion that effective technology integrations engage students in the learning process (Campbell & Jane, 2012). The critical element for history instruction rests in the finding that students believed the profile to be a better way to demonstrate understanding of the content, versus traditional instructional strategies. This finding supports the claim that history should be taught in dynamic, interpretive ways that require students to consider competing narratives (Coughlin, 2003; Levstik, 1997) and that technology, in particular social media, can be used to do so.

Implications

The Digital Historical Agent Profile Project provided students who were engaged in the learning of historical content with an instructional intervention designed to convey information about the life of someone from the past through the medium of the present and future. Specifically, this instructional strategy tapped into the lived experiences of students by adopting a social networking format. Social networking formats are not only ubiquitous, they are increasingly defining 21st-century communicative practices. Yet, the format of these networks is often viewed as antithetical to traditional historical instruction and process, given their asynchronous and chunked style.

This research demonstrates that this format not only engages students in historical inquiry but also has the potential to elicit historical empathy, a habit of the historical mind difficult to foster. It is clear that additional research needs to be done not only on the use of these formats but on ways in which historical process is taught with 21st-

century students who value differing communicative practices and representation narratives.

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Appendix A

HISTORICAL FIGURE PROFILE SURVEY

DIRECTIONS: DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME! This is an anonymous survey. We would like to learn more about your reactions to the historical figure profile and moviemaker. Respond to the statements listed below by circling the appropriate response for you or writing down your thoughts. <u>Please note that there is not one "right" answer for any of the questions</u>! If none of the responses fit, please feel free to write in a response that best represents your experience.

---

1. Technology is a necessary part of school.

Circle ONE:

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

1. Technology makes learning "fun."

Circle ONE:

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

2. You learn *more* about history by researching on the computer than using your textbook alone.

Circle ONE:

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

3. Researching history on the computer is *more fun* than reading about it in your textbook alone.

Circle ONE:

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

4.   Creating the historical figure profiles is an interesting way to learn more about a person in history.

Circle ONE:

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

5. Creating the historical figure profile is *more interesting* than reading about a person in history and answering textbook questions or completing worksheets.

Circle ONE:

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

6. Creating the historical figure profile is a fun or creative way to share your research.

Circle ONE:

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

7. Creating the historical figure profile is a *more* fun or creative way to share your research than answering textbook questions or completing worksheets.

Circle ONE:

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

8. Creating the historical figure profile made me think *more* about my historical figure, including the kind of person he or she was and what life may have been like for him or her.

Circle ONE:

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

9. I did not like creating the historical figure profile.

Circle ONE:

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

10. I liked creating the historical figure profile.

Circle ONE:

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

11. I would like to create more historical figure profiles for future assignments.

Circle ONE:

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

12. I would like to share my historical profile and the research I conducted by posting it on the internet.

Circle ONE:

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

13. Creating the historical figure profile made me wonder more about the life of my historical figure.

Circle ONE:

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

14. Creating the movie is an interesting way to learn more about a person in history.

Circle ONE:

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

15. Creating the movie is *more interesting* than reading about a person in history and answering textbook questions or completing worksheets.

Circle ONE:

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

16. Creating the movie is a fun or creative way to share your research.

Circle ONE:

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

17. Creating the movie is a *more* fun or creative way to share your research than answering textbook questions or completing worksheets.

Circle ONE:

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

18. Creating the movie made me think *more* about my historical figure, including the kind of person he or she was and what life may have been like for him or her.

Circle ONE:

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

19. I did not like creating the movie.

Circle ONE:

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

20. I liked creating the movie.

Circle ONE:

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

21. I would like to create more movies for future assignments.

Circle ONE:

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

22. I would like to share my movie and the research I conducted by posting it on the internet.

Circle ONE:

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

23. Creating the movie made me wonder more about the life of my historical figure.

Circle ONE:

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Appendix B

HISTORICAL FIGURE PROFILE

DIRECTIONS: Using your historical narrative, create a profile of the individual. If you do not know the answer to question, search the internet. You must use at least THREE sources that provide the correct information. You may use additional paper if necessary.

NAME:

_____

---

1. What is the full name of your individual?
    _____

2. Is your person male or female?
    _____

3. How old is your person or was your person when he/she died?
    _____

4. When did your individual die? (list month, day, and year)
    _____

5. Why is your individual famous?
    _____

6. What is your individual interested in doing or learning more about? Provide at least ONE example._____

7. Has your individual written any books or other publications? Did your individual read any notable books or authors? Provide at least TWO examples if applicable.
    _____

8. List any persons that your individual may have looked up to or has based his/her own ideas, thoughts or writings.
    _____

9. Is your individual married, single, divorced, etc?
    _____

10. List how many children he/she has and list names if possible:
    _____

11. List his/her place of birth.
    _____

12. What is his/her ethnicity and/or national origin?

    _____

13. What is his/her birthday? (day, month, year)

    _____

14. What is his/her zodiac sign?

    _____

15. Where did he/she go to school? What did he/she study?

    _____

16. What is his/her primary occupation?

    _____

17. Is there any other important information about your individual that was not included in the questions above?

    _____

18. Find at least TWO famous quotations by your individual.

    i. _____

        _____

    ii. _____

        _____

19. Name at least FIVE people who were your individual's friend or colleague.

    i.   _____

    ii. _____

    iii. _____

    iv. _____

    v.   _____

Appendix C
Individual Information Interview Protocol

Individual Interview Questions

Approximate Time: 10 minutes for each student

1. What is technology?
2. Do you think you are good at using technology?
3. Do you own something on which you play video games (Sony, Xbox, Nintendo, computer, etc.) Which one?
4. How often do you use technology in school? For what purposes?
5. What do you enjoy about discussing/learning history?
6. Have you been using technology more that you were when we first talked?
7. Have you learned any new techniques or used any new programs since our first lesson?
8. What programs that you have been using are most helpful and most fun?
9. Do you think you've become quite skilled on any technology or any program since we been here?
10. How have you discovered that technology can benefit in the research of historical figures?
11. What was your favorite piece of technology you have used/are using during this project?
12. How could you apply technology used for this unit to future assignments?
13. How did using technology to create/research this unit help you better learn/digest the information on your figure's biography?
14. How can technology help you to share the information that you gathered in this project with others here or those who are in distant locations?