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Stories from the Homefront:
Digital Storytelling with National Guard Youth

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Stories from the Homefront:
Digital Storytelling with National Guard Youth

by

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Dedication

This document is dedicated to all of my military brats, near and far. I'm inspired by your honesty, bravery, and resilience. I also dedicate this document to the passionate youth workers who work tirelessly, with smiles on their faces, to support military youth while their parents are away serving our country.

Acknowledgements

I am, by nature, a storyteller. I seek words to put order to my world, to beautify, to celebrate, to memorialize. I believe that everyone's story is worthy, is vital to humankind. Stories help us grow, help us imagine alternate perspectives and universes, help us empathize with others, and challenge us to act. Stories are the beating heart of my practice and my work. This document is the result of a gap, a hole, in the fabric of my field. As I began my research, I sought out the voices and wisdom of applied theatre practitioners writing about their work with military youth. I was met with silence. Over the last three years, the silence—the missing story of these youth in my field—drove me forward. Through government bureaucracy, unanswered emails, a government shutdown, and systemic red tape, I pushed forward, driven by the missing story.

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Abstract

Stories from the Homefront:
Digital Storytelling with National Guard Youth

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Since the beginning of the Global War on Terrorism in 2001, the United States has relied heavily on volunteer National Guard troops to protect our country. Thousands of youth have been affected by deployment, yet we rarely hear their stories. This thesis explores how digital storytelling, as an applied theatre practice, can help increase youth visibility and voice in the Army National Guard community. Through qualitative research methods of narrative thematic analysis and thematic coding methods, the author examines how digital storytelling can be used to build community among Army National Guard youth, as well as provide an agentive space for youth to name their experiences and perspectives while self-advocating for their needs and desires. Their digital stories became a site for youth to play with the complexity of naming their experiences, as well as a way to increase their visibility within military spaces. The document concludes with a discussion of how digital storytelling and applied theatre functions within National Guard youth communities, the limitations of the research and model, as well as a discussion of sustainability for applied theatre programs in this community.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Compass. A small round object charmed into motion by the Earth's magnetic pull—its arms swinging purposefully, its mission: a constant—to always point north. It guides you through the wilderness, leading you back to the path you lost in the underbrush. Maybe preventing you from getting eaten by bears. Or perhaps it's something much less tangible. A gentle presence that carries us through our days, giving us purpose, reason, a safety blanket. You know, in case of bears.

For a group of middle school students in suburban Virginia, *Compass* was the title of a devised theatre piece exploring the ideas of: Where are we from? Where are we going? What happens when we get lost? What or who guides us? Who or what can derail us from our paths? And then, how do we find our way home or make the choice to veer off the path? The directors proposed this theme to honor the various life experiences in our space. We knew about half of our group were transient members of military families and the other half were also transitioning in their own ways, experiencing the disruption of middle school life as they forged their own challenging paths. We devised for weeks, and the stories from the military youth were consumed by cross-county and transnational moves. They shared stories about how their parents broke the news, how they had to tell their friends—goodbyes to family, friends, and significant others. Their brave faces and promises to keep in touch over Facebook, texts, and phone calls. Brave, but devastated that—once again—they would have to shift, adapt, and rebuild a life somewhere new. They shared their own coping strategies as they considered questions such as: How did they survive in yet another new space? What was the first thing they did to claim these

new spaces? And—what was the compass that carved this path for them? For the military youth, the answer was always the same—"my dad's job."

During one rehearsal, the floodgates burst open when we asked them, "Where are all of the places you have lived?" The answers came mechanically, a litany, a checklist ingrained in each of them. They ticked them off without thinking, without pause—

Corpus Christi, Texas. San Jose, California. Utah. Delaware.

Then something shifted as they filled our space with these names. It became a game: Who has the most mundane place?

O'Fallon, Illinois. Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

The challenge built: Who has lived in the most exotic place? Then, they started to leap across oceans and onto other continents. The energy sizzled as they threw out places I've only seen on maps—

Heidelberg. Bangkok. Linkenheath. Guantanamo Bay. Zimbabwe. Beijing. Bolivia. Terceira.

The room stilled, a long pause, then—wait, where's that?

It's a small Atlantic island by the Marshall Islands.

Game over.

This residency in 2008, offered through an afterschool playbuilding ensemble in Fairfax, Virginia, was my first contact with the military community. The entire process opened my eyes to a community of youth I did not know existed. Despite their challenges, these young people proved resilient, determined, and brave. They had an amazing sense of humor about the globetrotting, parental careers that had landed them in Fairfax, Virginia. In this space, I saw these youth connect over shared stories—laugh as they performed the "moving script" of their parents, once again breaking to them the

news of relocation, hug each other and cry as they shared difficult stories about leaving their homes again and again. They tried on the roles of their parents, they struggled through recreating their own moments of loss and longing, they gave their own life stories different endings. They also taught the civilian youth in the ensemble something about what it meant to grow up in the military.

In addition to the constant moving associated with parent relocations, the youth also faced other struggles. Since the backlash from the September 11th attacks in 2001, the U.S military has annually deployed over 180,000 service members. The impact on families and youth is staggering—"At least 2 million American children and adolescents have had a parent deployed at least once in support of the Overseas Contingency Operation" (Aranda, et al. 402). My students were not exempt from this challenge. One young man, Jacob, wrote about his fear of danger when his father, an Air Force pilot, "serv[es] his country, fl[ying] through the sky with ease." Jacob was crushed when he found out his father was to be deployed to Iraq and would miss not only his first year of high school, but our performance, of which he was intensely proud. Now, almost two years later, I remain struck by how this young ensemble supported him as he moved through this difficult time.

Two years into graduate school, I remembered the challenges these young people faced. I began writing a play exploring how deployment affects young children. My work on the play, specifically revisiting the youths' experiences, led me to volunteer with Texas Operation: Military Kids in order to better understand the military community. As I volunteered, I became fascinated by the way military youth are, and are not, given spaces to tell their stories within the military system. I questioned: How might military youth use theatre to express their perspectives on deployment? How could storytelling help to create community among disparate youth experiencing a deployment cycle?

These questions guided me to my current work with digital storytelling and theatre, as well as my desire to study applied theatre within military contexts with youth. This thesis investigates how applied theatre functions within the military community, specifically with youth experiencing a deployment cycle. In this study, I explore three key questions:

1. How does digital storytelling as an applied theatre practice help build community among National Guard youth?
2. How do National Guard youth enact agency through digital storytelling as an applied theatre practice?
3. How does digital storytelling become a space for self-advocacy with and among National Guard youth?

These questions build on my work with the compass project, where I discovered how theatre created a space where youth could name their experiences and share their perspectives on military life with their peers. After seeing student investment in a theatre devising process, I wondered how youth in the midst of the deployment cycle might experience applied theatre, or socially conscious theatre practices that occur outside of traditional theater spaces, with the goal of inspiring change.

For this study, I also chose to utilize digital storytelling as an applied theatre practice, rather than simply a traditional theatre devising process or a traditional digital storytelling process. Applied theatre scholar Megan Alrutz defines digital storytelling as "a wide range of self-produced media—such as blogs and podcasts—that employ story and digital technologies for personal expression" (8). Both her work and this study focus

on a particular kind of digital storytelling, specifically "the creation of short digital videos, or two to three minute personal stories performed through a combination of first-person, narrated voiceovers; still and/or moving images, and music or sound" (8). This definition emphasizes the importance of individuals producing their own media as an act of self-expression.

My use of digital media to tell stories was intentional for a few reasons. First, I wanted to honor the digital literacy of military youth which often develops within military families who use digital media, such as email, Skype, FaceTime, Viber, and others to keep in contact when their service member is deployed. Additionally, digital storytelling produces a tangible artistic artifact that can be shared over the Internet or viewed at home after the initial performance or showing. Therefore, a deployed family member can view and celebrate their child's work from a distant military base or post. I hoped that digital stories might help families connect through stories, dialogue, and emotions, and perhaps, adults might understand their children's perspectives in a new way.

BACKGROUND & SIGNIFICANCE

Digital Storytelling as an Applied Theatre Practice

This research study positions digital storytelling as a practice within the field of applied theatre, a term that has been defined broadly by many scholars and practitioners. Scholar Helen Nicholson posits that applied theatre is defined by "forms of dramatic activity that primarily exist outside of mainstream theatre institutions, and which are specifically intended to benefit individuals, communities and societies" (2). In this

definition, applied theatre takes place outside of traditional theatre spaces with the intention of serving the needs and desires of the participants. Additionally, scholar Philip Taylor offers that "applied theatre is a participatory theatre created by people who would not usually make theatre. It is [...] a practice by, with and for the excluded and marginalized" (15). This view emphasizes participation, often with and for non-theatremakers and/or disenfranchised populations. Taylor also emphasizes that applied theatre is "wedded to vital issues and one that values debate" (16). In other words, applied theatre intentionally investigates critical issues while engaging communities in dialogue. Drawing from Taylor and Nicholson, I define applied theatre as a socially conscious theatre practice that disrupts traditional artistic hierarchies by taking place outside of theatrical institutions and working with non-theatremakers to create community-driven art that explores issues, with the intention of initiating dialogue and possibly change.

In addition to applied theatre, I also draw on practices from digital storytelling in order to achieve applied theatre goals. Digital storytelling utilizes computer-based tools to tell stories in the format of short, autobiographical films which can be streamed on the Internet or television (Burgess 206). This style of digital storytelling originated from Joe Lambert, co-creator of the Center for Digital Storytelling, who defines digital storytelling as 250-375 words of narration and no more than 20 images or video segments (*Cookbook* 21). For the purposes of this study, the images and video segments were original performance pieces created with and by the youth participants through a theatrical devising or story building process. New media scholar Jean Burgess asserts that digital storytelling isn't just a form of media:

> [...] but as a field of cultural practice: a dynamic site of relations between textual arrangements and symbolic conventions, technologies for production and conventions for their use; and collaborative social interaction (ie the workshops) that takes place in local and specific contexts. (6)

It is within this "dynamic site of relations" where my research lies—exploring the relationships between textual narrative and symbolic photographs, the technology and the workshop process of collaboratively creating a digital story through the live, embodied tools of drama.

For this research project, I worked with a group of youth who did not consider themselves theatremakers or filmmakers. According to Burgess, "Digital Storytelling as a 'movement' is explicitly designed to amplify the ordinary voice. It aims not only to remediate vernacular creativity, but to legitimate it as a relatively autonomous and worthwhile contribution to public culture" (6). So, digital storytelling is a practice where the creative activity of "laymen" and their unique perspectives are foregrounded as a legitimate, important voice to add to public culture. This spirit of "amplify[ing] the ordinary voice" is echoed in the participatory ethos of applied theatre where, as Nicholson reminds her readers, practitioners have:

> [...] a political concern to demystify the arts by encouraging people from many different backgrounds and contexts to participate actively in drama and theatre, whether as reflexive participants in different forms of drama workshops, as thinking members of theatre audiences, or as informed and creative participants in different forms of performance or theatre practices. (10)

This "political concern" of demystifying the art form of theatre means that practitioners work to disrupt the hierarchy (and necessity) of talent often assumed in art making—the notion that some people are artists, and some people are not. In applied theatre practices, the goal is often to explore an issue or topic of concern within a community by engaging community members. This participation calls on everyday community members, as

experts in their places of location and specific identity markers, to interrogate their world through theatre. In this view, because of their unique voices and perspectives, community participants are all vital and valued contributors to the artistic endeavor, regardless of their previous experience in art making. Applied theatre practitioners often emphasize everyday people as producers, and this echoes a goal of digital storytelling practitioners, namely to elevate the stories and digital productions of laymen to valuable, societal contributions.

While other practitioners have demonstrated the potential of digital storytelling in education[1] and the ways in which digital storytelling and applied theatre work together,[2] I am interested in how this work specifically functions within the US military community, specifically with Army National Guard youth. It is my hope that this digital storytelling practice brings members of the National Guard[3] community together and invites dialogue among not only youth, but their families and those holding positions of power in the military system. Due to several practical limitations on my project and this study, I did not set goals related to individual or systemic transformation. Rather, I aimed to support moments of transportation, or temporary travel to new places—for all of us involved—"into another world, often fictional, [to] offer [...] both new ways of seeing and different ways of looking at the familiar" (Nicholson 13). Throughout this study, I attempted to build spaces for "new ways of seeing" and to raise questions about what we think we know about life during deployment (Nicholson 13).

[1] For more expansive scholarship on digital storytelling, refer to Burgess; Lambert; Hull & Katz; Davis & Weinshenker.

[2] For more expansive scholarship on digital storytelling and applied theatre practice, refer to Alrutz; Wales.

[3] From this point on, when I refer to the National Guard, I am speaking about my interactions specifically with the Army National Guard.

Background: National Guard & Deployment

As a researcher, I have no direct ties to the military—I am an outsider, a civilian. Because of this, all of my background knowledge comes from vigorous research into the military community—by reading scholarly publications, my personal conversations with members of the military community and my active engagement in military (youth programming) settings. Therefore, my understanding of the community is informed by this research and interactions and is, to some extent, a generalization of military culture and experiences. In this document it would be impossible to capture the depth and diversity of experiences of service members and their families, so please keep this in mind as you move through this document. My understanding of this community is still evolving. Any assumptions or inaccuracies should be attributed to my constant evolution as both a researcher and applied theatre artist working in a community of which I am not a part.

The National Guard is a very specific component of the military called the Reserves. There is a reserve component for each branch of the Armed Forces: The Army National Guard of the United States, The Army Reserve, The Navy Reserve, The Marine Corps Reserve, The Air National Guard of the United States, The Air Force Reserve, and The Coast Guard Reserve ("Guard and Reserves"). These components have a dual mission to serve both the state and federal government, so they can be deployed to duty by the state governor or President of the United States, depending on where they are needed ("Guard FAQs"). Because of this dual mission, they can be deployed to defend the United States both domestically and overseas ("Guard FAQs"). The Army National Guard has a basic commitment of:

> [...] serv[ing] one weekend a month and two weeks a year. [Their] initial training will be broken into two parts. The first part is basic training where [they] learn how to be a soldier. Here, [they] receive instruction in military courtesies and

> history, as well as solving field problems and qualifying with an M-16A2 [weaponry]. The second part consists of specialized training in [their] chosen occupational skill. ("Joining")

The Army National Guard also participates in drills, or training, twice a month. While these soldiers have access to certain military base privileges (if they live near one) such as recreational facilities, libraries, and limited commissary use (grocery and household goods store), unlike active-duty service members they do not have on-base housing ("Joining").

While the military provides many support services to their members, in general, the National Guard and Reservists face different challenges than many of the Army enlisted. More National Guard soldiers are parents—38 percent of the active-duty women serving are mothers, and 75 percent of all National Guard and Reservists are parents (Darwin 434). Because National Guard families generally lack the support system of a military base to help them through the deployment cycle, military service providers often prove hard to locate, and families often live within communities that have little understanding of military life or what the families go through (Houston et al. 806). As a result, these particular military families often have to rely on themselves when it comes to coping with the absence of a deployed family member and maintaining family ties during deployments.

According to the Department of Defense's *Military Deployment Guide*, the deployment cycle for National Guard service members has five distinct phases: pre-deployment: the period of time after the service member is notified they are to deploy, deployment: the departure of the service member to their "designated theater of

operations," post-deployment: when service members return to the demobilization station to undergo evaluations and attend briefings, demobilization: preparation to return to non-active duty status, and reintegration: returning to their home communities, families, and civilian jobs (5-6). While the service member experiences all of these stages, their families only experience the stages of pre-deployment, deployment, and reintegration. Each stage is unique and has its own set of challenges to both the service member and their family, "such as the need for emotional detachment, changes in family roles and routines, emotional destabilization, and reintegration of [the] returning parent" (Lincoln, Swift, and Shorteno-Fraser 985). Due to these emotional challenges, military families must come up with ways to cope individually and as a family throughout the deployment cycle.

Research shows that military families cope with deployment in a myriad of ways, but many of them rely heavily on technology to communicate with their deployed service member. Jaine Darwin works with the Strategic Outreach to Families of All Reservists, a pro bono mental health program for extended family members of Reservists. Darwin notes that new technology has changed the way families deal with deployment because "Soldiers leave for the combat theater with laptop computers, Skype software, and phone cards. The war is in the living room, and the living room is in the war. Families and soldiers communicate through e-mail, instant messaging, videocam, and telephone" (434). The ability to communicate regularly during deployment brings new challenges, such as how much information to share with one another and the desire to protect one another from day-to-day stress and challenges on both ends.

Upon return and reintegration, families can face additional stressors. Reintegration, or the period of time when a service member returns home from deployment, is the final stage of the deployment cycle, and it can last weeks to months depending on "the individual service member, his or her family, their deployment context (combat vs. non-combat), the length and number of deployments experienced, and the family's community context (residence on military base or geographically dispersed)" (Pincus et al.; Gorbaty qtd. in Marek 13). Social work scholar Barbara Leiner identifies one challenge families experience through the reintegration process: service members come back with wartime experiences that are outside of their family's relationships and knowledge. "Memories of war are not easily shared; tension between the spoken and unspeakable creates a wedge in relationships with family and civilian friends" (Leiner 387). Additionally, families have grown and changed during the time period apart, and both sides of the fractured family have learned and experienced new things (Darwin 437-438). While these missing moments can't be recreated, they can be shared as the family rebuilds during the process of reintegration. Service members come back from deployment marked by their service in different ways physically, emotionally, and mentally. Anxiety, depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and sometimes even suicide can follow the service member home (Darwin 437-440). While these conditions originate with the service member, research has found that Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder can be transmitted intergenerationally, from parent to child or between parents (Leiner 378). Deployment and the experience of war alter service members' behaviors in order to keep them vigilant, alert, and safe. However, according to Leiner, when they come home:

> Patterns of behavior occurring in the combat setting may be reenacted in the presence of the child: the parent who startles or panics at hearing a siren, the

> parent who will not go to restaurants unless there is a table with a safe view of the room, the parent who discusses the untrustworthiness of authority figures. These behaviors promote the perception that the world is unsafe. [...] Thus, through interacting with the parent whose worldview is changed by the experience of war, there can be parallel changes in the child's worldview. (378)

So, in this way, a service member can literally bring the war home with them and. in some ways, expose their families to it. As a result, the whole family is impacted by the health and wellbeing of the soldier, and reintegration becomes more than a period of coming together in reunion. While it may seem that reintegration culminates the deployment cycle, it marks the beginning of many families' healing processes. Families experiencing reintegration are still in need of services to cope with the new stressors linked to a service member's return home (Pincus et al. 7; Marek 74).

I am interested in how theatre, as a dialogic and questioning medium, can function in spaces around reintegration. This thesis project provides a space for youth perspectives on reintegration to be voiced and heard as part of the reintegration process. In the liminal period of returning from a war zone to a family unit, where people must redefine their family's identity, I wonder how theatre can provide a language to bridge the gaps between people's experiences. I am interested in how theatre artists can use performative digital technologies in order to illuminate new perspectives and deepen family dialogues. How can theatre amplify the voices of military youth within their larger military communities? How might youth reflections on and stories about their deployment experiences impact the greater military system? With this research, I hope to add military youth voices, as well as my own perspective as a teaching artist, to the growing body of scholarship in the field of applied theatre.

Applied Theatre & Military Youth

Due to some of the challenges faced by military families in the US, mental health services are an ever-present resource to help families through the process of deployment and military life. While a paucity of scholarship exists around the practice of applied theatre with military youth, some scholars address the use of the arts in therapy.[4] In the current scholarship on arts therapy, two types of therapy use drama techniques—expressive arts therapy and drama therapy. According to drama therapist and scholar Robert Landy, in drama therapy specifically:

> Drama therapists harness the doubleness of drama for the treatment of individuals in psychological, physical, and existential pain. [It is] not only rooted in the natural developmental processes of play, role playing, and storytelling. [...] But, like theatrical actors, they enact roles and stories, creating aesthetically pleasing images through movement, voice, and a wide range of emotional expression. (xxiii-xxiv)

So, while therapists utilize common drama practices of play, role-playing, and storytelling, they are applied with the intention of treating "psychological, physical [or] existential pain" (Landy xxiii-xxiv).

In my study, I used many of the same type of drama activities, but with the goal of creating art objects in the form of digital stories. While I believe potential exists for this work to become therapeutic to participants, it was never my intention to engage in therapy, or art therapy. Applied theatre practitioner Michael Rohd offers this distinction:

> The key is to remember this work steers away from being psychodrama specific to any one individual because you are not trying to use a group to work through one person's problems. [...] Unless you are trained to do so, this work is not about group therapy through role play. That is a different use for this type of theatre process. This work is group problem solving, exploration and dialogue. (71)

[4] For additional scholarship on art therapy for military youth see Kim, Kirchhoff, and Whitsett; also "Operation Oak Tree Helps Military Families by Integrating Therapy Through Arts."

In other words, the work (of applied theatre and drama) is not focused on helping one individual understand or draw conclusions about their life experiences. Rather, the work forms a community space where people come together to explore their stories, to share and engage in dialogue.

Currently, I have not found research examining the use of theatre as an art-making process with military youth. However, there are theatre practitioners facilitating programs with military youth. One program, created between Kansas Operation: Military Kids (OMK) and Kansas State University, engaged military youth in a playbuilding project. The only written artifact I found about this process is *The SOMK-IT (Speak Out for Military Kids Interactive Theatre) Project Workbook for Leaders*, which was written to provide guidelines for future SOMK-IT projects "to create similar projects creatively, safely, and ethically" (Bailey, Duncan, and Johannes 1). It appears, from the process outlined in the workbook, that this project was focused on using theatre as a communication tool to speak about these experiences in a low-risk way in order to engage the community in a dialogue. The project brought military youth together to create an interactive theatre performance, which explored how the deployment cycle affects military families and the greater community (Bailey, Duncan, and Johannes 1). The play, *Serving at Home*, was based on the youths' shared experiences, but was ultimately a work of fiction.

As I read about these practices and projects, they raised overarching questions for me about the possibilities in applied theatre to function outside of the realm of therapy, while embracing autobiographical storytelling as a way for youth to name and dialogue about deployment. As I worked to build technology into our performance-making process, I wondered, how might the art form of digital storytelling provide a space for youth to express their feelings and ideas about deployment experiences through

photography and video? How can autobiographical storytelling provide youth a space to name their experiences? These questions guided me as I began to envision the structure of my workshop sessions with youth.

PROJECT SUMMARY

In this section, I explain in detail how I came to work with the National Guard community in Texas and how I collaborated with them to conceptualize and facilitate my thesis project. Knowing that I wanted to work with military youth for my thesis project, I reached out to several local military service organizations. I began volunteering with the military community during the spring of 2013 through Texas Operation: Military Kids (OMK). According to their website, OMK is an extension program of Military 4-H, dedicated to "creating awareness and understanding of the issues and stresses faced by military families and youth while building community partnerships to increase capacity for youth and families" ("Overview"). Through their programs, they strive to "connect military children and youth with local resources in order to achieve a sense of community support and enhance their wellbeing" ("Overview"). One organization they collaborate with is the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program. As a volunteer, I assisted during a deployment Yellow Ribbon event, in addition to several day camps. During this period of volunteering, I began to understand the military community better and began to build a relationship with my community partner, the Texas OMK State Coordinator. After a period of four months of volunteering with the organization, I proposed my thesis research to the OMK State Coordinator and her community partner, the Director of Child and Youth Programs of the Texas Army National Guard. Following our initial meetings, I

decided to implement my digital storytelling and applied theatre workshops in the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration event model. This research project took place during several one-day workshops hosted at various Yellow Ribbon (Reintegration and Deployment) Program events for the Texas Army National Guard. These events serve National Guard and Reserve Service Members and their families during the different stages of deployment by connecting them to resources such as finance and marriage counselors, sleep and anxiety centers, and job assistance.

At various points throughout the deployment cycle, the Yellow Ribbon events provide service members and families with information on healthcare, education/training opportunities, and financial and legal benefits ("EventPLUS"). The Yellow Ribbon events take place during the pre-deployment, deployment, demobilization, and reintegration stages ("EventPLUS"). As I stated earlier, National Guard soldiers often live far from military installations and from other members of their units, so these events also provide a space for soldiers and families to connect with one another, as they all experience the same cycles of deployment and generally belong to the same unit.

Young people often accompany their parents to the Yellow Ribbon events and participate in youth programs offered by service providers like Operation: Military Kids, the Comfort Crew, or National Guard Child and Youth Programs. Operation: Military Kids and the National Guard sponsored my digital storytelling workshops as their youth programming during two separate Yellow Ribbon events—one was a deployment event where the soldiers had been deployed for eleven months, the other a reintegration event where soldiers had been home for a period of 30-60 days. The workshops were

specifically designed for the age group of 11 to 17-year-olds. During the workshops that I facilitated, youth participated in a variety of drama, movement, and writing activities around the themes of deployment and reintegration. Participants individually created stories that exemplified their experiences with deployment and reintegration, and then worked with a small group of peers to create a digital story from their narrative. The final digital stories, or short, personally narrated videos, include a combination of the youths' voice-recorded stories with video or photographs of youth-created tableaux (frozen images with their bodies), and, in some cases, music. The workshops culminated with a sharing, where families, volunteers, National Guard soldiers, and employees came together with the youth to watch the digital stories and participate in a talkback about the work.

METHODOLOGY

Throughout the research process, I assumed multiple, shifting identities. I collaborated as a community partner to the Operation: Military Kids and National Guard staff. As a teaching artist, I planned and facilitated the digital storytelling workshops. During the workshops, I also engaged as a participant observer, avidly studying the youths' involvement and engagement and committing these thoughts to my written field notes. Finally, I worked as a reflective practitioner throughout the process, "raise[ing] [...] questions of inquiry, process[ing] how those questions [would] be investigated, and consider[ing] how their emergent findings will impact upon [my] lifelong work" (Taylor 40). In this way, I spent a lot of time reflecting not only on the process of creating and facilitating session plans for my participants, but evaluating and re-evaluating my

research measures to refine the process and to best serve my study and the youth population. This stance also manifested itself in a constant reflection on and revision of session plans and activities, careful crafting and revising questionnaires, and deepening and challenging the definition of digital stories themselves. Thus, my research process constantly evolved as I adapted to the challenges of researching perceptions and thoughts of young people. Throughout this document, I structure my research as modified case studies, telling the stories of several youth participants and analyzing these experiences through the lens of my research questions.

This research study is qualitative in design, employing elements of ethnography, case study, and a modified grounded theory coding analysis. Ethnography is "a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher studies an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time by collecting, primarily, observational and interview data" (Creswell 13). While my limited access to the participants prohibited me from employing traditional ethnographic practices, I borrowed the methods of observation of people and their experiences and recorded these observations in detailed description in field notes. In addition to my field notes, I conducted post-process focus groups to gather data on their experiences as participants and art-makers during the workshop process. In order to gather demographic information, the youth participants completed pre-surveys (see Appendix C) that helped me get a sense of their basic demographic information (age, deployment experience), their communication style with their deployed family member, and their experiences of discussing their feelings about deployment with their families, friends and communities. I also invited participants to respond to post-process

questionnaires with open-ended reflection questions in order to assess their feelings, perceptions, and relationships to the other youth participants and the digital storytelling process (see Appendix D). In order to deepen my understanding of the experience, adult volunteers completed post-process written questionnaires, and my research assistant provided assistance in fleshing out my field notes (see Appendix E).

To organize my data analysis, I employed modified grounded theory—where the researcher "derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action or interaction grounded in the views of the participants" (Creswell 13). In this modified process, I designed an overarching research question to guide my data collection and analysis: What is the experience of Army National Guard youth using digital storytelling, as an applied theatre practice, to share stories? After I collected data (using the aforementioned measures) around this question, three major themes arose as I read through all of the data: community building, agency and self-advocacy. Then I returned to the data and internally coded in finer detail, attending to these major themes. To further analyze the data I developed a system of codes which are a "word, or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña 3). As I coded my data focusing on the notion of community, I looked for how these codes emerged in my data: actions that created community and relationships, and connections between youth. To further understand the theme of agency, I looked for instances of youth exercising both individual and collective agency in varying ways. Finally, to examine self-advocacy I coded my data to determine how youth enacted moments of self-advocacy, specifically in regards to components

knowledge of self, communication and leadership. Then I used the resulting data to write detailed case studies of several youths' experiences during the digital storytelling workshops, which exemplify these codes.

THESIS ORGANIZATION

In the chapters that follow, I examine how youth in this project moved through the digital storytelling workshops, considering how this art form provided a space for youth voices and perspectives within the greater National Guard system. In Chapter 2, I provide a case study of my first Yellow Ribbon Reintegration workshop in order to understand how applied theatre practices helped to create community among National Guard youth. I discuss how applied theatre and digital storytelling practices engaged youth in revealing shared experiences or markings, in physical and embodied ways, as well as through writing, dialogue, and storytelling. In Chapter 3, I offer a case study of two youth participants in the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration and Deployment workshops to examine the ways in which youth named and depicted the deployment cycle through digital storytelling. I examine how youth enacted agency both individually and collectively as they named their experiences in our workshop and through the creation of their digital stories. The case studies also offer a space to further interrogate the risks associated with naming and making youth perspectives public. In Chapter 4, I examine how the youths' digital stories became a site of self-advocacy for both themselves and their peers, communicating their needs and desires to their families, other service members, and service providers connected to the National Guard. In order to interrogate

if and how digital storytelling creates opportunities for self-advocacy, I present a case study of two siblings. I analyze the siblings' digital storytelling work using a framework of self-advocacy, which emphasizes the components of knowledge of self and rights, communication, and leadership. The fifth chapter reflects on outcomes of this research, including the vulnerability of inviting youth to name their experiences, which resulted in a space for youth self-advocacy and, perhaps, activism. This chapter also examines the complications entangled with youth workers continuing applied theatre work without support from applied theatre artists. I also offer suggestions for future research and programming, as well as discuss the sustainability of this workshop model within the structure of the National Guard. Ultimately I wasn't studying sustainability, but I end this document with some ideas about my own personal struggle with the idea of sustainability in relation to working as an applied theatre practitioner in National Guard youth programming.

Chapter 2: Building Community

> Meg (researcher): Are you able to talk about deployment with non-military people?
>
> Elias (youth participant): I don't really try to bring up the subject at all. Unless they ask "Where's [your] dad?" I just tell them, "Oh, he's deployed. He's been deployed for a year now." But I don't try to get into details.
>
> Maya (youth participant): I don't usually try to bring it up, because then they start treating me differently. Like something is wrong with me and trying to give me the nice treatment. And I don't want to be treated differently just because of that. I don't usually want people to know. My close friends, they know and when I'm feeling sad I don't tell them because they don't understand. And some people, I get more mad when people act like "yeah I know, my dad left for like a month one time on a work trip" and it's not the same. You don't understand. And it just really annoys me. (Focus Group 16 Nov. 2013)

In this focus group, these youth participants (from my second thesis workshop) explained how they do and do not share their deployment experience with other youth. This silence or reticence to share with other youth intrigued me as I moved through the research process. It also made me wonder if youth had access to peers who were experiencing deployment as well. If they did not, did they have anyone to talk to outside of their family members? Did they know anyone who was going through the same thing? As I crafted my workshop sessions, I became interested in understanding if and how applied theatre and digital storytelling practices could nurture an environment where military youth could come together and share their experiences with one another and, perhaps, find community with one another as they worked together.

In my research, I faced some challenges when it came to building the support system of a trusting community among participants. First, this project brought together youth who, for the most part, had never met each other. They were gathered in a room together because they were young people and their parents served in the National Guard.

Other than those identity markers, I had no idea what these youth shared in common. Additionally, in order to meet the needs of my community partner and the youth with whom they work, my digital storytelling workshops took place during (two) one-day, 5 to 7-hour workshops with youth from all over Texas. The military youth came to the Yellow Ribbon events with their parents. As an applied theatre practitioner, I was intimidated by the limited exposure to the youth and the fact that, in essence, they were strangers to one another. In my work, I value creating an ensemble, or an artistic community, where participants trust one another and have time to figure each other out—to sort out their roles and functions within a group of people working together and form a cohesive, supportive ensemble. I primarily work in extended residencies of twelve weeks up to a year where I have the luxury of time—to play, to discover, to falter and fail, and problem solve before the next workshop. The exciting challenge of this particular project was to try to build community quickly (over an abbreviated period of time) among youth who, I was told, would not know one another.

In this chapter, I explore the question: How can digital storytelling, as an applied theatre practice, help build community? Communities can be characterized by geographic location, by shared identity markers, or deeply held belief systems. They can also be defined by difference and exclusion. As an applied theatre artist, I am excited about building communities, which I characterize as a group of people often from diverse backgrounds who come together and support each other through listening, empathy, shared power, and trust in order to participate in an artistic process. In my work, being a member of a community is an action one takes, an act of generously giving one's time and effort to the group, rather than a passive role to wear.

I investigate the various ways that I saw this work build community among youth—analyzing my observations as a researcher, the OMK and National Guard staff

and volunteers' post-process questionnaires, and youth perspectives gathered in post-process questionnaires. I also examine challenges to these goals and ways that this work did not ultimately build community in the ways I hoped. I begin by presenting a case study of my first Yellow Ribbon workshop, with youth in Austin who were experiencing reintegration. In this workshop, I worked with eleven[5] youth from various ethnic and racial backgrounds between the ages of 11 and 16. Through the case study, I describe activities and moments where youth appeared to connect through sharing common experiences. In this case study, I include youths' perspectives on community and the shifting of their relationships with others over the course of the day-long workshop. I offer this picture in order to further understand the ways in which applied theatre and digital storytelling can help cultivate community and areas for further exploration.

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

The National Guard & Notions of Community

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the National Guard is a very specific component of the military where families face unique challenges. As a volunteer force, soldiers are generally older than active duty personnel, hold civilian jobs, and spend most of their time living civilian lifestyles. They train less frequently and have fewer opportunities to hone their skills (Pfefferbaum 292). Additionally, families are geographically dispersed and face challenges due to their disconnection from military bases.

> Reserve and National Guard troops tend to have greater non-military occupational responsibilities and stress and to be less integrated into military life. They are likely to live in communities with fewer military families and typically have fewer support services than active duty military families. (Pfefferbaum et al. 292)

[5] There were eleven youth in the workshop, however, one youth left at lunchtime, so she did not finish the workshop and did not complete a post-process questionnaire.

So, while these families have become active participants in military culture through their soldier's deployment, they still retain many civilian responsibilities and aspects of civilian life. Since they don't live on or near military bases, they lack the basic infrastructure of many support resources designed to support families and soldiers. According to Houston et al., this often results in youth and families lacking any real ties with peers within the military community:

> [...] the lack of access to other children who have experienced a deployment in the family may be the clearest difference between children of National Guard families and children of active duty soldiers. For the latter group, living on a military base and being better integrated into military culture likely provides interaction with many peers in the neighborhood or at school who are experiencing similar situations. This may not be the case for National Guard children who live in communities that are not necessarily highly concentrated with other military families; in fact, their family may be the only one in the area experiencing deployment. (810)

So, often National Guard families live in a space where they straddle civilian and military responsibilities, have access to fewer supportive resources, and also live in communities where they may be the only military family. Based on this research, I realized it was possible that my youth participants had never met anyone, outside of their families, who had experienced deployment. While the youth participants in this study shared the identity marker of "military," "National Guard," and "child of a deployed soldier," it was possible they lacked greater context for these identity markers within the larger communities of National Guard and the military.

Although I read about the National Guard's isolation from the military culture and community, I wondered if this would be true of my youth participants in the Yellow Ribbon workshops. To help better understand the community dynamics of National Guard youth in relationship to other military families and civilian communities, I administered a pre-survey (see Appendix C) to gather demographic information. The pre-

survey also assessed if and how youth discussed deployment with family, friends, and non-military people. Within the first set of participants, one youth shared that she didn't discuss deployment with other military youth because she "didn't know any kids who had a family member deployed" (Pre-process Survey 2 Nov. 2013). Similarly, another youth shared that they "didn't know any military kids" (Pre-process Survey 2 Nov. 2013). Yet another offered that "all my friends are non-military" (Pre-process Survey 2 Nov. 2013). After administering the survey at the first event, I looked at these responses and realized I wasn't asking if the youth even knew other military youth—I simply asked if they spoke to other military youth about deployment. I realized I wanted to know something different, and for my second event, I altered my survey to invite youth to respond to the statement: "There are other young people in military families in my community (school, church, neighborhood, etc.)" (Pre-process Survey 16 Nov. 2013). This statement was accompanied by a five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. In this second group of youth participants (discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters), three out of five youth responded "neutral" to this statement, and the two other youth responded that they "strongly disagree." None of the youth elaborated on their responses about discussing deployment with other military youth. The responses to these pre-surveys speak to the isolated nature of the National Guard and youths' lack of access to peers facing similar experiences and challenges. It was my hope that the digital storytelling workshop would help youth see themselves and their stories in each other and support the youth in building a community of National Guard youth in our space.

Due to the isolated nature of National Guard youth and families, researchers have found that community-building and connecting youth/families to resources is important in the design of successful youth programming in the military in order to help youth and families cope with the deployment cycle. In their report, "Coming Home: The

Experiences and Implications of Reintegration," Lydia Marek and the Family and Community Research Lab at Virginia Tech share results from a study of military family experiences in conjunction with deployment, specifically reintegration. They administered surveys which were answered by the service members, their spouses, and children. Through the research, they investigated the stressors of deployment, coping mechanisms for managing stressors, and the role of programming in helping families cope with stress and build resiliency (Marek 24-25). In the study they found that:

> Youth programming needs to focus on healthy communication, provide opportunities to meet others experiencing deployment, provide fun activities that help increase their sense of military pride and connection to the military, include ways to help them plan for reintegration, provide information they consider helpful, opportunities to help the family get along better, include ways to help them feel better about deployment and help their family does not feel so alone. (13)

While the researchers do not use the word "community," they reference attributes that I, as a teaching artist, use to cultivate community, including dialogue, fun (drama and digital) activities, interacting with other youth, and building connections to things they care about. Many of the researchers' suggestions for youth programming were also echoed in my discussions with my community partner at Texas Operation: Military Kids (OMK), Gina[6]. Her goals for Yellow Ribbon events are:

> To give kids a sense of belonging.
> To give kids an outlet for communication.
> To connect kids with like situations.
> To provide support from the community for the kids.
> To provide recreational activities—having fun while they're doing it.
> (Field Notes 30 Aug. 2013)

[6] I have assigned pseudonyms to all National Guard Child and Youth Programs staff and volunteers, as well as Texas Operation: Military Kids staff to protect their privacy.

These goals mirrored my own as I created workshop plans which I hoped would cultivate a space of possibility where youth could connect with their peers, share stories, and work together to create art and have fun. Through all of this research—both on my own and through conversations with my community partners—I began to understand the importance of Yellow Ribbon events as a space for youth to come together and, perhaps for the first time, meet others who shared like experiences of belonging to a military family and experiencing deployment.

Markings & The National Guard

Applied theatre scholar James Thompson asserts that we are marked as human beings, and "different forms of human interaction simultaneously affect and are dependent upon the way we have embodied (mentally and physically) past experience" (52). So, the way we have moved through our lives in the past—through feelings, experiences, heartbreaks, and even characteristics deep in our DNA—has created marks on our bodies that we carry with us which affect future actions. These marks can come from positive or negative moments, and they carry different weight for each person. As I moved into working with National Guard youth, I knew their past markings of deployment and belonging to a Reservist family would impact how they expressed themselves, how they engaged with the work, and how they interacted with each other. I hoped these markings would help us create a community, or a collective of people bound together by emotional connections, location, or shared experiences, but I questioned if youth would connect to one another merely because they shared these identity markers. I wondered: What are the risks or challenges of using applied theatre to reveal common markings among military youth? Would the youth want to publicly reveal their markings?

Would sharing or performing these markings through a devising process be enough to build community?

BUILDING COMMUNITY BY UNCOVERING MARKINGS: A CASE STUDY

Before this workshop, I was nervous. As an outsider of the Military community, I lacked confidence in initiating a conversation about something with which I had no experience. How could I be sure I wasn't taking our group into overly vulnerable territory by asking youth to share too much? Would the youth want to talk about their experiences with the deployment cycle? Would it feel unnatural and forced? Worse, even—would they think the workshop was boring or shut down immediately? With these questions and insecurities in mind, I remained cautious about bringing the topic of reintegration and deployment into the room too early. I consciously spent an hour at the beginning of the day facilitating energizing ensemble games to break the ice. After I felt like the group had built some initial connections with each other and the facilitators, I finally felt comfortable introducing the topic. I then used a few different drama and creative writing strategies to gently bring the topic of reintegration into the space.

The first activity that invited the group to discuss deployment was a sociometric activity where youth physically placed their bodies on a continuum according to whether they agreed, disagreed, or were somewhere between the two responses with some statements. During this activity, I began with more personal statements such as "I consider myself an artist," then progressed to topical statements such as "I have experienced deployment," "There was a special moment in my life that my parent missed," and "Life has changed since deployment" (see Appendix A). After each prompt, we asked for volunteers to share why they had responded in a certain way or how they

felt about the statement. One young man, Sam[7], enthusiastically shared his thoughts and experiences with the group during this activity. During our discussion, he shared that he had gone through five deployments. This seemed to spur other youth to share their number of deployments aloud. Another youth had experienced five deployments, and another youth replied he had been through multiple deployments. Because they had to initially respond to the prompt by only moving their bodies, they created a clear physical and visual map of how deployment had affected all of the youth in the room. When we asked them to respond to the statement, "My parent/loved one has missed a special moment in my life," they all moved to the positive (yes) end of the spectrum, signaling their agreement. I noted the result in my field notes:

> This sparked a deluge of youth wanting to share special moments that their parent missed. One young man began rattling off a list—my birthday, Christmas, holidays, the list went on. One youth spoke about her parent missing her getting her driver's license, another shared about her father missing her first band performance. In this moment I felt like they were starting to see themselves in each other. There was laughing and talking. Many of them wanted to share out why they had moved to their specific space. (Field Notes 2 Nov. 2013)

This embodied discussion strategy allowed us to paint a visual map of the youths' similarities and differences, which then stimulated dialogue around shared experiences. It opened the door for youth to begin sharing nuggets of personal story with each other. The youth were not sharing fully detailed stories with one another—yet. But the potential began to emerge. By embodying their experiences and engaging in dialogue around them, the youth started the process of unveiling the group's common experiences, as well as their unique situations, contexts, and stories.

Our next activity in this workshop was a collective brainstorming activity called a poster dialogue where I invited youth to share their experiences through writing and/or

[7] All youth have been assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity.

visual art. Around the room, we hung three pieces of butcher paper with the prompts: "Before they left," "While they were gone," and "Now that they're back." We encouraged youth to grab a marker and visit each paper, responding to each prompt with words, sentences, images, or anything that reminded them of this moment in their lives. If the youth agreed with something someone else wrote, we invited them to respond to it by writing a check mark next to it. In this way, the youth recognized and acknowledged each other's experiences on paper. The following statements represent the responses that garnered significant support:

Statement	Checks of Agreement
Before they left I got lectured a lot about responsibilities.	9
While they were gone I was lazy.	10
While they were gone I was in charge and had responsibility so everything was blamed on me.	10
Now that they're back I lost my position of responsibility and am no longer in charge.	6
Now that they're back [I am] forced to clean.	12

Table 1: Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Poster Dialogue Responses

These are only a selection of the youth responses, but with only eleven participants in the workshop at this point, the high totals of individual check marks point toward a group consensus around the experiences of deployment and reintegration. Since there are 12 checks for the statement, "Now that they're back [I am] forced to clean," it appears that some youth agreed with the statement multiple times.

In addition to the amount of check marks signaling agreement, I saw some common themes arise: shifting roles in families, "responsibility" (both gained and lost), and being "in charge." Youth shared ideas which reflected a shift in their family structure and hierarchy to youth having more responsibility and assuming the role of being "in

charge," as well as the shift to having less authority when their soldier-parent returned home. There was also one comment which challenged the narrative of increased household duties, "I was lazy." While this was the only comment that deviated from the overarching idea of gained responsibility and authority, nine of the youth agreed with this comment. This activity allowed us to further investigate what markings, or experiences, youth had in common through a different visual and symbolic language of writing. Similar to the continuum activity, the poster dialogue allowed youth to both physically identify (through writing) and visually observe and assess their similarities and differences compared to other youth. By checking experiences they agreed with, they also had the chance to semi-anonymously affirm one another's experiences.

While this activity allowed us to continue visually drawing connections among youth experiences, the discussion that followed laid the groundwork for storytelling and dialogue. After everyone had time to visit each poster, recording their responses and reading their peers' responses, we brought all of the posters to the center of the room and sat in a circle around them. As a group, we read each response aloud—alternating who was speaking and reading whatever response resonated with us, not necessarily the ones we (the youth) had personally written. Reading each response aloud provided space for youth to vocally mark and validate their own and others' experiences. Then, we talked about what we had in common based on the responses from the poster dialogues. Much of the discussion revolved around specific responsibilities the youth had to assume while a parent was gone—cleaning, taking care of younger siblings, even getting blamed for things siblings did. In conjunction with this idea, the idea of getting lectured before parents left—to behave, to help around the house, to not give your mother trouble (all of the deployed soldiers were male)—resonated with most of the youth. They also admitted to being lazy, explaining that if the disciplinarian parent was deployed, they got away

with more (unacceptable behavior). As we talked about these experiences aloud with others, I felt a tangible shift in the room, which I discussed further in my field notes:

> I felt like this was a big moment when they all came together through dialogue. The energy was buzzing as they all murmured agreement and laughed about common experiences. The feeling in the room was "Oh, that happens to you too?!" They told stories about not doing the dishes, lying around, playing video games and, in general, not doing the typical household chores. (Field Notes 2 Nov. 2013)

At first, the discussion revolved around pretty superficial associations to the prompts and closely reflected what was written on the poster dialogues. But then, one of the participants, Caleb, started sharing more specific experiences through animated storytelling. In my field notes, I reflected on how Caleb's stories seemed to further change the space:

> Caleb shared a story about how his Dad has a gun safe and had the keys with him while he was away [deployed], "Now that he's back, he locks up our electronics when we're being bad." He continued to spin the story of the family's X-Box and kids' iPods being locked away if they got in trouble. He was very generous with his story sharing. He also talked about how one of his four dogs ran away because one of his sisters, who was also in the workshop, (he teased her multiple times by slyly looking over at her and saying "I'm not naming any names") left the gate open. Because the dog ran away and his dad was gone, Caleb had to run after it to catch it. It was clear from Caleb's stories that he had become the man of the house and was in charge of making sure his sisters listened to their mother and took care of their chores. But, even as he shared these stories, he seemed to do it with a good temper and a teasing nature of a big brother and his sisters were very good-natured about the ribbing. Caleb was so open in sharing stories, it felt contagious. He filled the room with stories and the other youth nodded and listened in agreement. He was a strong storyteller—very engaging and vibrant, gesturing and re-enacting the stories as he spoke. He really pulled everyone in and had us laughing together. (Field Notes 2 Nov. 2013)

For me, this moment of storytelling was a crucial turning point in our day together. We went from discussing deployment in a general sense, relating to each other in peripheral ways, to digging into specific personal experiences and stories. The other youth listened

intently as Caleb spoke, nodding in agreement and laughing as he drew us into his family's experiences of locked-up electronics and runaway dogs. His dynamic storytelling began to cultivate a space where youth shared stories with one another and the group, while everyone listened and affirmed their experiences. An OMK volunteer also noted her perception of this moment in the workshop:

> I felt the group was most connected when they were discussing the "when they left," "while they were gone," and "now that they're back" written entries. They could all relate to one aspect or another that one of their peers had written down and it gave those with different experiences from the rest of the group a chance to "air their grievances" to people who could understand more than most individuals their age. (Post-process Questionnaire 2 Nov. 2013)

In this response, the volunteer notes the feeling of connection she observed as youth verbally reflected on their poster dialogue responses. She also notes that while the poster dialogue and ensuing conversation provided a space for youth to come together over common experiences, it also invited youth with different experiences to talk about the challenges of the deployment cycle with peers who actually understood the experience. This applied theatre strategy of poster dialogue invited youth to acknowledge their similarities while both respecting and validating their differences. After this activity, other youth began to open up and share in the telling and relating of family experiences to the group.

In their post-process questionnaires (see Appendix D), the youth validated what the adult facilitators and volunteers witnessed in the room as moments of connection. As youth answered the question, "After participating in this workshop, has your relationship with the other youth in the room changed? If yes, please explain how," the most common response in their questionnaires was the recognition of common experiences, with three out of ten youth noting this in their responses (Post-process Questionnaire 2 Nov. 2013).

Here are some examples which illuminate different perspectives on the recognition of common experiences:

> Matt: I realized that they've been through what I've been through.
> Charlie: I now know that others are going through the same and or more than me.
> Ellie: It made me realize that there are more kids like me out there and I can now better relate to others because of this experience.
> (Post-process Questionnaire 2 Nov. 2013)

These youths' responses revolve around the uncovering of their common markings and the recognition that other youth were experiencing similar challenges. For National Guard youth, often lacking ties to a greater military community, this recognition of peers experiencing similar struggles is a revelation in and of itself. Due to this revelation, Ellie offered that she could "better relate to others." So, not only was there a realization of having peers within the military community, she believed the quality of her connection with others shifted. The youths' experiences, which, according to the youth, were largely silenced or misunderstood in their respective (civilian) communities, were able to breathe and live within our co-constructed community of National Guard youth.

After our large group discussion, we asked everyone to find a comfortable spot alone in the room. We gave everyone a notecard and a pen and asked them to "Write a story about a moment that defines/exemplifies reintegration/deployment. The challenge is that you can only use five words to tell this story" (see Appendix A). We explained that this story would serve as the basis for the narrative, or script, of their digital story. After everyone wrote their five-word story, we asked them to turn over their card and imagine what the beginning, middle, and end would be to this story. Then, we came back to the large group and introduced a modified approach to a digital storytelling exercise called a story circle. In a story circle, participants bring a story (or a story idea) to the group and

share it for the first time in order to further shape the idea and gather feedback from the facilitator and other storytellers (Lambert, *Capturing Lives* 77-79).

Our story circle was modified due to time constraints and the desire to create an intimate space for youth to share their stories with one another prior to shaping it into a fuller narrative. We formed two concentric circles, with youth facing a partner to tell their story. They shared their stories for one minute, concentrating on telling the story with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Then, their partner gave them feedback guided by these questions: What questions do you have? What were you curious to know more about? We rotated partners, working on different details each time—first, beginning, middle, and end, then adding clear sensory details, and finally focusing on a strong first and last line of the story. One OMK staff member shared her experience watching the youth share their stories:

> In sharing their stories, they seemed to be a little bit nervous to explain their one big experience to their peers, especially in the beginning stages of the five word sentence and the one-on-one story telling activity which was a little difficult because they had to explain their story to one other individual, and then be asked questions, as well as receive feedback. I felt that after a couple of the instances of sharing their story with an individual, they became more relaxed and confident in their cherished memory. (Post-process Questionnaire 2 Nov. 2013)

This staff member observed that the youth became "more relaxed and confident" as they shared their stories. My co-facilitator for this workshop also echoed this feeling as we reflected in our field notes. During the story circle, "They were actively listening to each other. [The activity] made them comfortable to share the stories multiple times" (Field Notes 2 Nov. 2013). So, perhaps it was not just the sharing with another individual aloud that relaxed the youth and inspired confidence, but also the repetition of sharing the story to multiple people. Another volunteer offered, "When they were doing their sharing in circles, it was good to hear them giving each other positive feedback and encouragement,

which I heard each time" (Post-process Questionnaire 2 Nov. 2013). The story circle became a more intimate place for youth to verbally share their stories as well as vocally affirm and validate each other's experiences through their feedback.

Afterward, when youth described how their relationships with peers had evolved within our workshop, some youth referred to their interactions with other youth. These two responses reveal the varying ways youth talk about their interactions:

> Daniel: I am more comfortable with them because of how we interacted together.
> Whitney: We became closer by sharing our stories.
> (Post-process Questionnaire 2 Nov. 2013)

Daniel reports that the way he interacted with others resulted in a feeling of increased comfort. As he doesn't elaborate on the specifics of interaction, I can only speculate about which interactions he is referencing. The ensemble nature of applied theatre activities provides a space for youth to interact again and again and begin to depend on each other in new ways, which could have resulted in a feeling of developing closeness and comfort. In contrast, Whitney's response of an increased closeness due to story sharing names a specific activity that built community. The sharing of stories operated in multiple ways in the workshop: physically and verbally through the continuum exercise, physically written in the poster dialogue, verbally in the discussion and story circle activities, and a combination of verbal and physical in their digital stories through the pairing of their verbal narration and their physical bodies in the photographs. Storytelling provided youth with various possibilities in this workshop—to share their truths aloud, to be heard by others, to listen to others, and to have their stories acknowledged and validated in the space.

As the workshop continued, we began to integrate the digital media tools in the storytelling process. Over the course of the workshop, we created one full-group digital

story, and then each youth contributed their own short story to create a small group digital story with 3-4 other youth. To teach the various functions of the iMovie application on an iPad device, the youth worked together to create a short, full-group digital story. To create this digital story, we used their poster dialogue responses as our script, creating a digital story with only three images, one depicting each of the categories: "Before they left," "While they were gone," and "Now that they're back." The youth had to work together to create the images for this full-group digital story to accompany the voice-over, or recorded narration of the story. After they learned how to use iMovie, they went back to their smaller groups and had to work together to take photographs to visually represent or perform their individual stories.

Looking over all of the images from this workshop (both from the full group and the smaller group digital stories), some similar physical vocabulary and characterizations arose. Below, Figure 1 shows a group of similar images. The full group created the first two images for their digital story. The third image was created by one youth, Audra, for her small-group digital story about cleaning.

In the first image, the youth are clustered in three distinct groups. In the farthest group to the left are three youth. The most dominant figure in the image is a young woman, who portrays a parent lecturing a child as she stands pointing her finger at another youth, in role as a child. The other young woman in the picture also embodies a child character as she stands with her arms crossed in a petulant pose, avoiding eye contact with her parent. In the center of this photograph, we see three youth surrounding one young man in role as another child who is on his knees as though scrubbing a floor. He is stopped mid-chore to look imploringly up at two other youth who are obscured in the photo and hard to see. The clearest character in this image is a young man, portraying a parent character bent over, pointing toward the floor and appearing to be giving orders.

The final group, the farthest right in the image, shows another group of three youth. Two of them portray child characters—one with arms crossed and an averted gaze, and another stoically looking out past a parental figure who has one hand pointing with a single finger extended and the pointer finger of the opposite hand touching it, appearing to be ticking off points, or a list of statements, on her fingers (see first photograph in Figure 1 below). In the second image, from the same full-group digital story, the same two categories of characters are depicted. Some of the youth embody child-like characters, positioned down on the floor on hands and feet, scrubbing the floor. One youth on the far right stands, but appears to be pushing a mop or broom. The other youth embody parent characters, standing above and around the hard-working child characters pointing at the ground or the children, and in some cases yelling. The last image, created by Audra to accompany her final (small-group) digital story about cleaning responsibilities, depicts similar physical vocabulary and characterizations as the first two images. Again, there is a child character kneeling on the ground scrubbing the floor. The parent character stands above the child, looming over him while pointing his finger and yelling.

All three of these images have a couple of elements in common, both in the characters they chose to portray and the ways in which they physically embodied them. One element is an authority figure in the form of a parent character. This character always seem to hold the most power in the photos as he or she points fingers indicating lecturing or directing the other characters in chores. Often, this parent character appears to be yelling. The other character depicted in the images is a child character who always appears to hold less power. These characters are often embodied with crossed arms and petulance, sometimes donning impassive expressions while they listen to the adult character. Youth also embody the child character through the action of chores: scrubbing

the floors and sweeping/mopping. Through these three images, the youth created a cohesive physical (or embodiment) vocabulary to depict some of their shared experiences.

Context of Image	Image
Image from the full-group digital story, based on "Before they left" poster dialogue responses.	
Image from the full-group digital story, based on "Now that they're back" poster dialogue responses.	
This image is from Audra's digital story, which tells a story about cleaning and reintegration. (This story is examined at length in Chapter 3.)	

Figure 1: Images of Shared Physical Vocabulary

The rest of our time together revolved around youth working together in smaller groups to craft a collective digital story which strung together 3-4 individual digital stories into a short narrative that was connected by the line, "Reintegration is." By the end of the day, youth were working together to create photographs, record their spoken narration, and edit their stories together. After they created their digital stories, we shared them for a semi-public audience of families, OMK and National Guard staff and volunteers, and some additional service members.

As youth reflected on their experience of working with others in their post-process questionnaires, the last theme that emerged was a shift in comfort. Youth used words such as getting "closer" to one another, feeling more "comfortable" with each other, and "getting along" with other youth. Audra tracked the progression of her relationship throughout the workshop, sharing that she "only knew, really knew, one person ([her] sister) and recognized another" (Post-process Questionnaire 2 Nov. 2013). "But by the end of the day I could easily talk to almost everyone and I would recognize them" (Post-process Questionnaire 2 Nov. 2013). She named her shift toward others through the ease with which she could interact verbally with others and the fact that she could recognize them. This response speaks to the possibilities of community-building within engaging in dialogue both as a group and with each other on a one-on-one basis. Another young man shared that his relationship to other youth changed because "it was less tense" (Post-Questionnaire 2 Nov. 2013). This response implies that the beginning of the day felt tense, but shifted to something else. Lastly, two of the youth used the language of "[becoming] friends" to describe their final relationships with the other youth. Overall, out of ten youth responses, only one youth reported no change in their relationship with others.

REFLECTION: MARKINGS & COMMUNITY BUILDING

I started this project believing that the form of applied theatre and digital storytelling supports youth in coming together to begin building a community space. According to Thompson, during applied theatre projects:

> [...] the web of interrelations between groups is examined and new yet fragile interconnections can be built. Applied theatre can be an experience that develops links between people – above, around and through the existing shapes of the participants' lives. (53)

In other words, the practices of applied theatre encourage people to consider their relationship as a group and begin to construct new bonds, or "links," with each other—based on their current life experiences, their past experiences, and their shared participation in the process. I hoped youth in my workshops would explore their shared markings and begin to build new connections with one another through the collaborative nature of an applied theatre workshop.

The moments of recognizing their experiences in another person seemed to open up the possibility for youth to create community with each other. Prior to the poster dialogue, the youth were playing alongside each other—engaging in activities together, but not seeing or hearing themselves in each other. After the continuum activity helped them visually map their similarities (and differences), the energy in the room shifted, becoming energized with a sense of knowing—a sense of "Oh, you did that...me too...how about?" This shift in our group dynamic allowed us to deepen our engagement with personal story—sharing more general details in the poster dialogue where youth chose how much or little to share in response to the prompts, then youth physically affirmed and agreed with one another's experiences by checking the responses. These moments of agreement during the poster dialogue inspired verbal dialogue and storytelling, further deepening youths' capacity to trust their personal stories with the

group. In both of these moments, youth actively built connections with one another by not only sharing stories, but listening to one another. Lambert stresses the importance of telling our stories, but also of taking a moment to stop and hear each other:

> We need to stop and listen to each other's stories as daily ritual, as life process. Which is why listening is the hallmark quality of positive social engagement. Listening, making space for the silenced, making room for the nobodies in mind to find their somebody at heart so they feel like anybody else, makes us dignified. It allows us to check our status at the door. (*Capturing Lives* 3-4)

As the youth worked through the workshop, they began not only building connections through their story sharing, but making space for themselves and each other's stories in the ways they interacted. Both the OMK volunteer and I reported how these activities literally shifted the energy of the space, opening up the room for story sharing and encouraging youth to verbally acknowledge their similarities and differences. The open sharing of stories and experiences started to inform a community space where youth perspectives were accepted and valued by their peers and the adults in the room. One example of this was noted by the OMK volunteer when youth actively engaged and listened to each other's stories during the story circle. In this moment, I saw youth relax into our work, open up to one another, and begin building connections amongst one another. They shifted from strangers to tentative acquaintances. Finally, I saw trust evolve in the space, and I believe the youth formed bonds of community.

In addition to revealing youths' markings, the continuum and poster dialogue activities helped youth establish a shared language around their markings. This shared language included words and phrases to describe their experiences, such as responsibility, and a "cast of characters" including parents lecturing, younger siblings to keep in line, and a stern father figure. This vocabulary evolved as youth discovered a shared history of markings which stemmed from similar experiences around the deployment cycle.

Applied theatre practices, including active ensemble games, open dialogue, and storytelling, encouraged the youth to create webs of connection with each other, including a common vocabulary reflected in their similar experiences. The youth returned to this shared vocabulary as they referenced their experiences and the storied characters throughout their time together. The shared language manifested verbally through our dialogues, through the text of their stories, and the physical embodiment in the photographs which accompanied their digital stories, particularly in the full-group digital story and the individual story about cleaning. As they created this component of their community, a shared language, youth participated in inscribing new markings to carry with them past this workshop.

As youth participated in the workshop together, opportunities arose for the youth to create new markings to carry with them as they moved beyond this experience and into the world. These newly created markings—of seeing themselves in one another, of sharing their stories, and being heard—developed the "links" that Thompson discusses which supported the youth in working together to create digital stories. For National Guard youth with limited military peer interactions, I believe these moments of connection inspired a space where they felt comfortable telling their stories and naming their perspectives for themselves, their peers, and, eventually, a public audience. In this workshop, if only for a moment, we created a community of military youth who saw themselves in each other and affirmed each other's experiences.

CONCLUSION

In my work as an applied theatre practitioner, it is vital to consider how we build community among youth participants. In my research, sharing stories and unveiling common and unique markings of the participants offered important steps towards this

goal. Discovery of common markings can occur when practitioners provide spaces for participants to visually map their connections to others—symbolically through visual art, photography, or writing, as well as through embodied ideas and responses. With this group, the verbal sharing of stories also facilitated community building, as in the story circle, as well as when we discussed common experiences through frameworks such as the poster dialogue reflection. By exploring varied ways of acknowledging personal markings in the collective space, youth in this workshop were able to visually track their similarities and differences with others and verbally communicate them with some level of comfort.

Through the activities, games, and dialogue we engaged in throughout this event, we unearthed markings specific to the experience of deployment among military youth. Acknowledging and honoring those markings in our space allowed youth to see their common identities and experiences and move toward building aspects of community among them. Youth also reported a shift in their relationships to other youth over the course of the workshop. Based on the moments I witnessed, as well as the perspectives from adult volunteers and youth participants, I believe, in our short time together, we began to build the foundation of a community based on markings often related to experiences of deployment.

The community we began building embodied some of the values I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. Throughout our time together, youth supported each other by listening as they both shared stories with one another and served as an audience for one another. As they shared stories, I believe they also exercised empathy by listening and respecting one another's stories, even when those stories weren't in line with their own experiences. Over the course of the workshop, youth also shared power with each other and the facilitators as they assumed artistic control over their stories and their

participation within the group process. As they unveiled their shared and different markings, a great deal of trust was cultivated in the space as youth decided how much to share about their experiences and they began investing in deeper relationships with one another.

Unfortunately, we did not necessarily build a sustained or long-term community due to the structure of the Yellow Ribbon Program itself and the realities of the youths' lives and locations across the state. However, I think it's important to consider how storytelling and applied theatre practices can create spaces for youth to acknowledge their unique experiences while relating to others with similar and differing experiences, and only then can I begin to imagine more long-term or sustained elements of community.

Chapter 3: Naming, Agency, & Visibility

The youth returned from lunch, sluggish from eating, but eager to sit down at the tables. A National Guard staff member drew them close around the tables and sat in a chair facing them. He waited until everyone had trickled in to begin. Then, he asked, "Who is nervous about their dad coming home?" He encouraged them to raise their hands in response.

The room stilled and quieted. The younger youth squirmed in their chairs. The older youth looked around to see who would respond first, or looked away—picking at tablecloths, looking deep into their laps. A beat. A slow, silent moment passed. I could feel my heart beat in agony for them. I cringed; I curled inside of myself. In this moment, the space felt like it pulsated with risk, with raw skin, with soul baring vulnerability. I found myself holding my breath, my chest tightening.

Then a couple of hands rose tentatively.

He acknowledged the raised hands, but appeared surprised that not every hand was raised. "Aren't you really nervous about your dad coming home?" he prodded again. I winced as I tried not to visibly react to my own discomfort to this line of questioning. I could feel the air stiffen further with the youths' discomfort—the same air we had warmed with our laughter and infused with our storytelling an hour earlier.

The youth politely responded by raising more hands. He appeared happy with this response and began speaking about how they would feel when their fathers returned—he articulated the emotions and experiences they would have in a few short weeks. Kind and reassuring as he spoke, he shared his experience of having his father deployed as a kid. He reminded them that as National Guard kids, they are tough and resilient. They are BRATS—brave, resilient, adaptable, and tolerant. He offered them a metaphor: "You

National Guard kids need to be the tennis ball and not the egg," because when an egg hits the floor, it shatters, but when a tennis ball hits the floor, it bounces back. Although he seemed to mean well, I wondered if anyone else recognized the power dynamics at play when telling the youth how they would feel.

The moment finally ended, and my body physically sank back into its familiar arrangement of bone and muscle and released the invasive tension that had overcome it. He left, and we played an ensemble-based theatre game—recharging the air with our laughter and energy.

This was the second time I witnessed this type of lecture at a Yellow Ribbon event. The first time, I was volunteering, and it left me with big questions about the possibility for youth agency and youth voice in the military, specifically in youth programming during Yellow Ribbon events. I left wondering if all military programs for youth perpetuated the narrative of adults as wise and all knowing, the youth as empty receptacles, waiting to be filled with adult knowledge and feelings. Both moments, both lectures, signaled to me that youth perspectives may not be valued or known within this system or the military structures at large. Additionally, these "talks" with the youth seemed to imply that all youth would experience and move through deployment in exactly the same way. Such perspectives on youth agency disregard individual youth perspectives, and position youth as a homogenous, troubled population in need of adult intervention. Yet, I realize that my perspective on the military is fairly limited, and in many ways assumes that all military-centric spaces work with, or value, youth in the same way.

In the moment I describe above, I believe the staff member genuinely attempted to connect with the youth—explaining his perspective as a military brat and how deployment affected him. His voice was kind, and based on his body language and his

interactions, I believe he cares deeply for the youth and wants the best for them. My discomfort with the adult-centered lecture, as an applied theatre practitioner, lies not in the intention, but rather in the impact of his actions. His engagement with youth—a monologue directed at them (albeit a well-meaning monologue), rather than an active engagement in dialogue—pushes against my pedagogy and practice of creating youth-centered spaces devoted to sparking dialogue and valuing youth feelings and voices. I wondered how interactions such as these serve to homogenize youth perspectives and hide individual experiences within the overarching deployment narrative designed to support soldiers.

In this chapter, I explore how digital storytelling as an applied theatre practice can create a dialogic space where military youth can assume the agency to name their own experiences and perspectives while gaining visibility within military-centric spaces. First, I explain the context of the case studies and methods I used to gather and analyze data. Then, I introduce the theoretical frameworks with which I examine my data. Then, through two case studies, I observe how youth named the deployment cycle through dialogue, written stories, and the production of their digital stories, including visual representations through still and moving images. Each case study is followed by analysis, where I investigate how naming and agency functioned with the participants. In the analysis, I also process the challenges of youth both participating in an applied theatre workshop and articulating their individual perspectives on deployment. I believe understanding the importance of youth agency and perspectives in programming, as well as the related challenges, can help inform future programming with military youth.

CONTEXT & METHODS

To examine how digital storytelling and applied theatre provide opportunities for military youth to exercise agency, I offer two case studies addressing how the youth participants named their experiences in our project. These case studies illuminate common themes and experiences that occurred through digital storytelling workshops which took place at a reintegration Yellow Ribbon event in Austin, Texas and a deployment Yellow Ribbon event in San Antonio, Texas. The first case study follows two sisters, Audra and Sarah, as they engaged in a day-long digital storytelling workshop during the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration event. (For the sake of clarity, Audra and Sarah were two of the youth who participated in the workshop described in the previous chapter.) During this event, I collected information on youth participation in creating digital stories in the form of field notes, creative writing samples from the youth, completed digital stories and their associated assets, and pre- and post-process questionnaires filled out by the young people. My second case study examines a set of siblings, Isabel, Elias, and Tomas, as they participated in a similar workshop at a deployment Yellow Ribbon event. I continued to collect data in this workshop through the above methods, but for this second workshop, I also added a focus group with the youth participants to deepen my understanding of the ideas they wrote about in their post-process questionnaires.

As part of these case studies, I analyzed my narrative and arts-based data through an applied narrative thematic analysis. Through this narrative analysis, I studied the lives of my participants and invited them to share autobiographical stories which I then "retold or restoried [...] into a narrative chronology" (Creswell 13). I focused on these questions in my analysis of the workshops and the youths' experiences: How do youth name their experiences of the deployment cycle (pre-deployment, deployment, and reintegration)?

How do youth exercise agency through their engagement in a digital storytelling workshop? How do various processes of naming provide spaces for visibility for young people in the military culture and discourses?

BACKGROUND & THEORY

Based on my experiences volunteering and working with the National Guard over the last year, I witnessed what I view as challenges with the pedagogy of youth programming. As evidenced by the opening example with the director, some challenges exist around the ways in which youth are and are not engaged in dialogue and given opportunities to enact agency in communicating their perspectives. With this project, I wanted to contribute to a community where youth could come together and name their experiences and perspectives in their own words, rather than accept the labels bestowed upon them from the adults in their lives. In this way, youth would embody agency in revising dominant narratives and providing their own names for their experiences, and possibly increase the visibility of those experiences and feelings within the National Guard community.

For the first step in this process, I aimed to create a youth-centered workshop experience. In order to craft this type of experience, I considered educational theorist Paulo Freire's theories about how power functions in teaching and learning, as well as in state-sanctioned social control and oppression. Freire's theories underpin much of the pedagogy and scholarship of applied drama and theatre (Nicholson 42). While I don't believe the military actively or intentionally oppresses young people, the systems in place have been created to support the overall success of the military's strategic objectives, which shift depending on the current political climate. The closer you are to that strategic objective, as service members are—the greater your value to the military. Therefore, the

wellbeing of service members to ensure their emotional, psychological, and physical fitness for potential military operations is of upmost importance. As military programs were designed to sustain the adult service members' wellness for military duty, they are by necessity a system which revolves around a commitment to the overarching strategic objectives. The programs which care for youth and families were created in order to support their primary focus of maintaining prepared armed forces. Due to this focus on adult needs, youth needs and desires become secondary when they do not align with this mission. Considering this perspective, I believe the adult-youth power dynamics in military youth programming are important to consider in the pedagogy of youth programs. Freire was critical of "banking education" where the "narrating subject" of the teacher fills the "listening objects" of students with deposits of knowledge (71-72). He proposed that, to combat this system, teachers must engage students in dialogue and invite them to become co-investigators in the quest for knowledge, where both parties challenge and educate each other (80-81). In my thesis project, I embodied this pedagogy and worked to become a co-investigator with my participants. As such, I moved through artistic, logistical, and emotional challenges with the youth and searched for solutions through active dialogue with them and my own reflection.

It was this pedagogical process and theory that influenced my understanding of what it means to assign names to our experiences. Freire posits, "To exist humanly is to name the world, to change it" (88). So, as humans, we exist to make meaning of the world around us, which, in turn, empowers us to enact change. Theatre artist and clinical psychologist Ted Rubenstein further offers that:

> Naming is a process of knowing and of agency. Once we put a name to something, we can begin to understand it and exert some agency, if not control, over it [...] Once we begin to name things, we have some power to affect them. (176)

In other words, naming is a gateway to understanding and knowing, which allows us to take action and affect the very things we're naming. Considering both of these perspectives, I define naming as a process through which people interrogate their relationship to their life experiences while self-defining their point of view for themselves and for others. This process of naming can also involve gaining power over your experiences in order to shift your perspectives or make change.

With this definition in mind, the process of naming can't happen without people enacting and claiming agency for themselves. To define agency, I turn to scholar Albert Bandura, who posits: "Agency refers to the human capability to exert influence over one's functioning and the course of events by one's actions" (8). In other words, people exercise agency when they regulate their choices and actions, in turn affecting or altering the "course of events" (8). Education and digital technology scholars Ola Erstad and Kenneth Silseth draw on Glynda A. Hull and Mira-Lisa Katz to apply the concept of agency to the act of creating digital stories:

> In our context it implies a focus on the stand people take when working with, and expressing themselves through, digital storytelling. Through composing these stories, they get the opportunity to 'craft an agentive self' (Hull and Katz 2006), where they actively take part in a social construction of their own identity. (216)

This perspective looks at agency in conjunction with identity formation and offers that agency happens when people express their ideas through digital stories, thereby participating in the act of constructing their individual identity. For the purposes of this research, I define agency as an individual's ability to influence or control their actions and choices in order to express themselves through drama and digital storytelling.

Bandura further offers that there are several forms of agency: personal, proxy, and collective (8). According to Bandura, personal agency is "exercised individually, people bring their influence to bear on what they can control directly" (8). In this way, people

are responsible for their own individual actions. However, if this isn't possible, they will exercise proxy agency "by influencing others who have the resources, knowledge and means to act on their behalf to secure the outcomes they desire" (8). Proxy agency is characterized by an individual depending on another person to act for them. The last kind of agency is collective agency, where people work together to:

> [...] pool their knowledge, skills, and resources, and act in concert to shape their future...participants have to achieve a unity of effort for a common cause within diverse self-interests...they have to distribute and coordinate subfunctions across a variety of individuals. (9)

Collective agency relies on a group of people coming together to share their talents and resources in order to achieve a common goal. In this chapter, I will explore how youth embodied personal and collective agency through naming.

The National Guard has a lot of names for the deployment cycle. However, in my work with the Yellow Ribbon events, the adults often created most of the "names" surrounding deployment experiences, and the youth consumed them. In the workshops for this thesis, I was excited about the possibilities within applied theatre for youth to follow their own curiosities to discover their point of view, feelings, and opinions about deployment while investigating questions such as: What does it mean to you to have a family member deployed for an extended period of time? How does your life change when a family member is deployed? What experiences define deployment for you as a young person? How do you move through these experiences? I hoped for this creative process of naming—through words, photographs, video, and embodied representations—to celebrate and make youth perspectives visible within a military event for families.

To venture into this endeavor of naming, I approached the workshops as a space to play with different ways of naming while cultivating a culture of shared power between participants and adult facilitators and volunteers. Creative writing, storytelling,

and group discussion were integral to the process. Since we were engaging in the exploration together, the youth participants and I disrupted traditional power dynamics of the student-teacher relationship and worked alongside each other to learn from one another. The youth also had control over the artistic products themselves and were in charge of the written and recorded narrative, the visual life of the digital story, and the editing that brought it all together for an audience. Freire notes the importance of shared power in the process of naming in order to avoid oppressing others:

> Because dialogue is an encounter among women and men who name the world, it must not be a situation where some name on behalf of others. It is an act of creation; it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another. (89)

In other words, dialogue occurs when people come together and construct meaning as a community, but it should not be determined by one person for another as an oppressive act.

At the Yellow Ribbon events, I used digital storytelling and applied theatre to create a space where the youth and I engaged in a dialogic encounter in order to celebrate unique perspectives and experiences of the youth and, ultimately, to build opportunities for youth agency and visibility of youth experiences. Through these workshops, I saw youth embody personal agency as they investigated their relationship to deployment through drama and digital media. I witnessed moments of collective agency which arose out of the nature of creating group digital stories. I also observed some challenges that resulted from taking action and naming these experiences and how the act of sharing these new names can become risky and vulnerable.

RISKS IN NAMING: A REINTEGRATION CASE STUDY

The morning of the Yellow Ribbon event, the host hotel swirled with activity. Resource tables lined the hallway, accompanied by friendly attendants boasting brochures and sharing information. The adult program was about to begin, and the halls were abuzz with service members and their families bustling to make it to their respective locations. During this workshop I was joined by my co-researcher, Spring Snyder, two Operation: Military Kids employees, and several National Guard adult volunteers. We also had access to a military family life counselor, who spent part of the day with us as a resource to the youth in case they needed access to a greater support system during the event.

Three sisters approached the youth check-in table tentatively. Their mother was flustered—they were running late, and she told me her husband didn't want to miss anything. She agreed to her older daughters participating in the digital storytelling workshop and research and sent her younger daughter to another event for younger children. The two older girls, Sarah, aged 13, and Audra, aged 14, joined us for the digital storytelling workshop. Their stepfather had just returned from Afghanistan, where he was deployed for nine months. In their pre-surveys, both youth reported feeling neutral to the statement, "I belong to the military family" (Pre-survey 2 Nov. 2013). However, Audra reported that she "didn't talk about deployment to other military youth because [she doesn't] know any other military youth" (Pre-survey 2 Nov. 2013).

The sisters stuck together for the first part of the workshop, talking amongst themselves, their body language closed off. Quiet and polite, their body language seemed to project shyness, but they readily answered questions when asked and willingly participated in activities. They seemed separate from the other youth in our workshop, but I wasn't clear why.

Soon, I learned that Sarah and Audra were new to the National Guard community and related experiences. Their mother recently remarried to a soldier in the National Guard, who deployed very shortly after the wedding. The girls' experience with the military was carved out by these very specific, life-changing events: a new marriage, moving to a new house with stepsiblings, and being thrust into the military culture at the time of a deployment. For these two participants, deployment itself represented multiple, disruptive life changes for these youth.

After playing some ensemble games and warming the space, the youth started interacting with each other—laughing and joking while working together to play the games. At this point in the workshop, we started some brainstorming activities to get the youth thinking about their experiences with deployment. Sarah and Audra opened up during an activity called poster dialogue. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, around the room, we placed three large pieces of butcher paper with the prompts: "Before they left," "While they were gone," and "Now that they're back." We invited the youth to visit each poster and take some time to respond in any way they would like—a word, a phrase, a list, an image, or a quote. If they agreed with another person's offering, they were encouraged to write a check mark next to it. During this exercise, I noticed a shift in the sisters' participation and engagement with the other youth and the theme of deployment. On the "Before they left" poster, one of the sisters wrote: "It felt like my mom preferred him over us (recent marriage)." Beside this statement was one check, presumably from the other sister. This was the first time in our workshop the sisters revealed their experience with divorce and remarriage and how these life changes affected them. In this moment, the sisters appeared to let their guard down and brought their unique and possibly challenging experiences into the room.

Once we completed this exercise, we brought all of the posters together and read each of the statements aloud. We talked about what we had in common based on the check marks. This table represents the responses from all of the youth for the "Now that they're back" prompt:

Statement	Checks of Agreement
There's more trash to clean.	3
I lost my position of responsibility and was no longer in charge.	6
Forced to clean.	12
Have to do stuff.	3
I get yelled at for nothing.	3
I got my own room! And I'm happy he's safe.	2
I have to share a room with my little sister.	0

Table 2: Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Poster Dialogue Responses

In this poster, there was total group agreement (since we only had 11 participants) with twelve check marks to the response "forced to clean." Other themes that came up revolved around chores and responsibilities gained and lost, as well as shifts in living situations. There was laughter and agreement among the group as youth shared specific chores and responsibilities. Sarah and Audra pushed the conversation further when they brought up the idea of parents yelling. The sisters shared their experience, and it was met with silence. On the poster, three youth put a check next to the statement, "I get yelled at for nothing," and yet, in our dialogue, no other youth ventured to talk about this aloud in the space. We moved on to another topic of discussion, and the sisters appeared unruffled.

After this activity and dialogue, we led youth through an exercise to focus their thinking on a specific moment or story of reintegration from their lives. As previously

mentioned in the last chapter, I began by asking the youth to write a short, five-word story that encapsulated the moment. The stories spoke of missed sports games, being accepted on sports teams, getting into trouble, and extra chores. Both Sarah and Audra wrote stories that depicted the series of life changes that they had undergone as a result of divorce and remarriage, which also coincided with their entry into military life. Sarah quickly began writing: "New house, neighbors, & environment." While she didn't directly reference a specific story, she painted a general picture of big life changes. As Sarah expanded her five-word story into a longer narrative for her digital story, she wrote about her parents' divorce, her mother's remarriage, moving in with her new stepfather, and leaving behind a small apartment while gaining stepsiblings. Her story came quickly, and she didn't stop to edit. When we asked the youth to share with a partner, she was very willing to do so.

Audra's five-word story was: "You shouldn't think; **JUST CLEAN**." The five words read like a command, and she covered the whole index card with these five words, choosing to write "**JUST CLEAN**" in all capital letters, bolded, and underlined. Like her sister, she wrote her story quickly, and she was willing to share with the group. However, Audra began to struggle when it came time to articulate this five-word story into a longer narrative for her digital story. During the writing process, she threw out several drafts and started over, crumpling the paper into balls. When their mother picked up the sisters early for lunch, Audra hadn't finished writing her story. After lunch, the other youth finished writing their stories, and she was still working—asking for more paper, sitting by herself, and scribbling furiously. She wrote several drafts before she felt she had it right. This is the final version of the story that Audra wrote:

> Cleaning. What is cleaning? I have plenty of experience in this, I can easily tell you what cleaning is.

It's dusting, polishing, pick-up-ing, sweeping, washing, wiping, mopping, organizing, vacuuming. Cleaning is the act of returning something to its original position or quality. There's also some life lessons in the action. It teaches you responsibility, respect, appreciation and organization. ~~And most importantly, You shouldn't think; JUST CLEAN.~~ I know this because my stepdad has been back for a month-month and a ½ and likes cleanliness. ~~Yelling is heard throughout the empty-ish house.~~

An angry man is yelling at his son. He starts off calm.

"Son, can you wash the dishes?"

"Sure, Dad, just give me a minute."

He grows angry and begins raising his voice.

"A minute? A MINUTE?! Do you not respect me enough to sacrifice a little of your time to wash the dishes?"

The son recoils slightly at the volume.

"I-I-I'm sorry. I'll wash them now." He scurries off into the kitchen to help.

To clean.

To wash and scrub and

Rinse and

CLEAN.

He's learning a life lesson.

You shouldn't think;

JUST CLEAN. (Student Journal)

In this story, Audra names reintegration, and her particular relationship to it, in several ways. First, she introduces the idea of her stepbrother gaining responsibility around the house in conjunction with the return of her stepfather. In her view, the responsibilities come with the high expectation and upmost priority of cleanliness. Audra describes this moment through her word choices: "polishing," "recoils," "scurries." She creatively alters words to help tell her story, defining cleaning as "pick-up-ing" and speaking of the house as "empty-ish." In addition to word choice, Audra also plays with structure in the way she wrote the story on the page, playing with spacing, bolding, italicizing, capitalization, and punctuation to emphasize parts of the story. It's also important to note that while this was her final written version, Audra was still making edits to her story, as evidenced by the phrases she crossed out. Her naming of reintegration exists through her

definition of cleaning, as she provides her audience specific examples and draws conclusions about the life lessons inherent in the act of cleaning and, perhaps, reintegration. The story itself switches quickly from a father figure's calm request to a quickly growing anger that ends with yelling. Through her use of creative writing techniques and bold storytelling, Audra's naming of reintegration is richly textured with action and emotion.

After the youth had written their stories, we asked them to consider the prompt, "Reintegration is…," and respond to it in a few different ways. Then, they chose which responses or lines they wanted to use as transitions between their own story and the next participant's story. Audra added these lines to follow her story: "Reintegration is getting back in the habit being around things you were used to in the past prior to separation. Reintegration is when you're reintroduced to life before and you are re-learning habits." These lines further name reintegration as a time when you have to adapt to a person, place, or thing which has been outside of your daily life for a while. After the participants wrote stories and reflective lines for transitions, we began creating the digital stories based on the youths' writings. I explained, once again, that the stories they wrote about their experience with reintegration were the script for their digital story, which we would share with their parents at the end of the day.

This was met by a quick verbal response—some questions, mumbling, and surprise. Suddenly, some of the youth decided they didn't want to share their stories anymore. The public nature of the sharing with families seemingly heightened the stakes of our workshop. Audra, among others, refused to share her story. I was not anticipating this challenge—especially because I had already announced multiple times the plan for the day: we would tell and write stories, create digital stories, and share them with families. It was clear that we had accessed something risky, something vulnerable. I

could feel my own body tense as some of the youth pulled back from our work together. In another situation, I would have had a plan A, B, and C. However, this was my thesis research. The stakes felt so much higher than any other applied theatre workshop. I had promised a parent sharing. I had brought six-dozen cookies to celebrate the youths' work. I tried to stay calm as I faced this tension between what Audra and the other youth wanted and my own desires, hopes, and expectations around sharing the work. I reflected on this moment in my field notes later that day:

> I racked my brain for a solution. In the moment, I decided to do a vote with your feet to assess how many people felt the same way. Out of the 11 participants, about 4-5 of the youth felt that they didn't want to share their stories. Based on this information, I broke them up into new groups around whether they definitely wanted to share, did not want to share, or were neutral. Then they went off in their groups to write more one-line statements in response to the prompt: "Deployment is…". Once they finished these pieces of text, we came back to a circle and in the moment, I thought of another solution. I offered the option of de-identifying the stories by having some youth switch stories and perform someone else's. Two people took this option. Two youth decided not to share at all, but still participated in helping other youth create images and edit their stories. And then there was Audra. (Field Notes 2 Nov. 2013)

Audra decided she did not want to share her story with the public, but unlike the other students who opted out of the sharing, she still worked with a small group to create her own digital story. Despite removing her story from the public sharing, she continued creating photographs and images for the other youths' digital stories. Her group worked together to create two collaborative digital stories—one version contained Audra's story, and the other did not. Later, she told me she wanted me to have her story for the research, but did not want to share her digital story during our public sharing.

Below is a storyboard of Audra's final digital story.

Cleaning. What is cleaning? I have plenty of experience in this, I can easily tell you what cleaning is.
It's dusting, polishing, pick-up-ing, sweeping, washing, wiping, mopping, organizing, vacuuming. Cleaning is the act of returning something to its original position or quality. There's also some life lessons in the action. It teaches you responsibility, respect, appreciation and organization.

I know this because my stepdad has been back for a month-month and a ½ and likes cleanliness. Reintegration is getting back in the habit being around things you were used to in the past prior to separation or change.

Figure 2: Audra's Digital Storyboard

Prior to recording her narrative, Audra significantly edited her final written story, removing all details of the interaction between her stepfather and his son. The final version has no mention of yelling and conflict, resulting in a story which focuses on defining cleaning and the benefits of the act and identifies her stepfather as the person who taught her these lessons. However, a tension exists between Audra's edited text and

her final digital story. When directing the video images to accompany her edited text or narrative, she chose to recreate the moment of conflict through an image of her stepfather yelling at a young boy, presumably his son. While Audra isn't verbally narrating the conflict of this moment, the audience can see the conflict manifested through the actors' physical choices—the son kneeling on all fours scrubbing the floor, the stepfather hovering over him, open-mouthed yelling, his arm tensely pointing at the ground. The images communicate aggressive and angry feelings through the character's face and body language, while Audra's sweet voice narrates a seemingly uplifting story about the life lessons of cleaning and upbeat instrumental music plays.

While creating their digital story, Audra's group worked with an Operation: Military Kids staff member. This staff member helped Audra make decisions about whether or not to share her story and helped her group craft both versions of the collaborative digital story. The staff member shared her reflections on Audra's story with me in her post-questionnaire:

> Sarah and Audra stood out to me quite a bit. I had some time to work one on one with Audra and she divulged to me that her mom and step dad got married one month before he left. In my mind marriage to a new parent is a challenge, but to marry a soldier that was deploying is a HUGE challenge. It was interesting to hear how Sarah and Audra interpreted their step dad as "strict, clean, tough, and a rule follower."
>
> Coming from a perspective of these are the kids that I work with, I think Sarah and Audra have a tough road, being that they are new to the Military World. Many of the kids that are brought up in the military family seem to know what to anticipate and understand their role (Post-process Questionnaire 10 Sept. 2013).

This response sheds light onto some of the specific tensions both sisters might have been facing as they moved through workshop—namely, existing both as insiders to the experience of deployment and as relative newcomers to military culture.

REFLECTION ON AGENCY

Audra exercised personal agency in many aspects of her participation over the course of the workshop, revolving around her choices around what to share, how to share it, and her overall level of participation in the digital storytelling process itself. The first demonstration of personal agency occurred when she brought up the idea of parents yelling. In this moment, she wasn't met with group agreement, however, she still made the decision to further explore and write about the moment of her stepfather yelling. This moment speaks to the agency required in naming something for yourself, rather than allowing others to do it for you.

I believe Audra exhibited high levels of personal agency when she decided not to share her full story during the public sharing. Despite the fact that her voice wasn't "heard" in the final sharing, she still became visible to her peers and the adult facilitators through her participation in the workshop—discussing her experiences with deployment, writing her story, and sharing it with her peers. Despite the fact that Audra didn't share publicly, she still directed two other youth in creating the images of her story while working with two OMK staff members. Her naming of deployment became visible to the youth and adults in her small group, as they embodied her story and helped her in the editing process. She was also increasingly visible in the role she played in supporting other youths' stories by acting as characters in their images. In this way, her agentive act of naming did not have to manifest itself in a public sharing in order to be validated, and her perspectives were still intimately visible within her peer group and adult facilitators, as well as within this research document.

Audra's decision not to share her digital story complicates my previously held idea that visibility would be a positive, perhaps empowering, experience for youth. Performance scholar Deirdre Heddon asserts that "autobiographical performances

provide a way to talk out, talk back, talk otherwise," however, she contends, building on Peggy Phelan's work on the politics and ideology of visibility, that "visibility, *per se*, does not mean political power or equal rights" (3). So, while Audra was speaking out in our protected workshop space and gaining visibility among her peers, this action did not gain her political power or access to greater rights outside of our community. Because of the uneven power dynamics of youth in adult-centric spaces such as the military, Audra's choice could be seen as an act of self-protection. There is significant risk in the act of sharing and revealing intimate details about family life to the public, not only due to repercussions within the family unit, but possible repercussions from the military culture the family belongs to. In this moment, it is possible the risk of negative visibility for herself, or her family, prevented Audra from sharing her story in a public setting. Audra's journey during the workshop brought up interesting questions for me around the risks that are tied to naming and visibility. It led me to question: What are other risks of becoming visible? What aspects of youth identity and experiences can we choose to make visible, and which aspects are out of our control? What might youth lose in becoming visible? How is becoming visible and/or invisible an inherently political act?

SIBLINGS & COLLABORATIVE NAMING: A CASE STUDY

The San Antonio Yellow Ribbon Deployment event took place at a local hotel where most of the National Guard families were staying. We had a slow start to the morning as youth trickled in and I individually discussed and reviewed the research process and consent forms with both youth and their mothers (again, all of the deployed soldiers were fathers or stepfathers). We started our day with a small group—mostly younger youth and a couple of older siblings who were participating in the digital storytelling workshop. For this workshop I was joined by a co-facilitator, Chad Dike, and

a National Guard volunteer. The National Guard Child and Youth Programs Director was also there to lend support, but was working in a separate room with the younger children as we simultaneously worked with the older youth (aged 11 to 17).

We jumped in with some ensemble theatre games to get the group energized and working together. As soon as I started facilitating the first game, three new siblings arrived with their mother. I handed off the game to my co-facilitator and checked them in. The siblings were spread out in age—Elias, the oldest brother, was 15, the middle sister, Isabel, was 13, and their younger brother, Tomas, was 11. With the addition of these siblings, we worked with five youth total for this workshop, which included two sets of siblings from different families. Elias, Isabel, and Tomas' stepfather had been deployed for a year, and they were about a month away from reintegration. The siblings shared that they were very excited that their stepfather would be home in time to celebrate Christmas with the family. In their pre-workshop surveys, Elias and Tomas shared that they discuss their feelings about deployment with other family members. Tomas added "Cause I get sad" in response to the linked question, "Why or why not?" Isabel circled neutral under the statement, "I discuss my feelings about deployment with my family members" (Pre-process Surveys 16 Nov. 2013). So, according to the youths' surveys, this family was divided in the way they spoke about deployment and their feelings with one another.

By the time I rejoined the workshop with Elias, Isabel, and Tomas, the group was playing an ensemble game, People to People, which required them to work with other youth to navigate bodies in space while physically responding to prompts (for further description of this activity, see Appendix B). Despite the fact that the siblings missed the first few ensemble games, they jumped right in. This activity led into a partner story sharing, and they easily fit themselves into the group dynamic. After playing ensemble-

building games, we moved on to the same poster dialogue activity that I led in the earlier workshop with Sarah and Audra. For this case study, I isolated the three siblings' responses to our creative writing prompts, but included the check marks signaling agreement that came from other youth in our workshop.

> Before they left...
> Isabel: We always spent time together. (2 checks)
> Elias: He always used to comfort me when I was feeling down. (1 check)
> Tomas: He always made us laugh. (1 check)
>
> While they were gone...
> Isabel: We miss him every second.
> Tomas: We miss him very much we were sad.
> Elias: He missed my important events that happened in my life.
>
> When they come home...
> Isabel: I want to spend time with him as a family.
> Tomas: I want to see him, go out to eat, talk about how Matt Scaub [sic] can't throw.
> Elias: I want to have a long talk with them.
> (Field Notes 16 Nov. 2013)

Unlike the previous case study, the responses from these siblings were very closely tied to emotional connections with their stepfather and his absence. Through descriptions of a stepfather who spent a lot of time with the youth—attending events, eating out, and talking—the youth paint a picture of a family with close bonds. They characterized deployment by the hole that was left when their stepfather deployed and the resulting emotions that came with the family separation. I reflected on this in my field notes:

> It was interesting that in this group, there were a lot less answers or responses surrounding the idea of parental lectures, chores and responsibilities. This group seemed to more readily share their emotions around deployment. I wonder if this is a difference in the place they are within their deployment cycle. They are a month away from their fathers returning home (they are scheduled to return Dec. 20), and they have been through a year-long deployment already. The youth in my previous workshop were much more focused on the day to day changes in their lives and less on the emotions behind these changes. (Field Notes 16 Nov. 2013)

As I reference in my field notes, this activity revealed that the emotional side of deployment was on the minds of these youth. This emotional landscape and the youths' family dynamics significantly shaped our workshop.

After the poster dialogue activity, the youth participated in an individual brainstorming activity to get them thinking about their personal stories linked to the deployment cycle. On a piece of paper, they drew a horizontal line to represent their deployment storyline. On this timeline, they identified various moments or memories from throughout their deployment cycle, starting at pre-deployment. I prompted them to think specifically about the moment you found out your family member was deploying, a funny thing that happened while your family member was gone, a moment where you had more responsibility, a big event your family member missed. I then invited them to imagine the moment when their family member gets home and think of something that they were excited to do with the family member. Then, they chose which of these moments was most exciting to them, and they used that moment to craft their stories.

Once the youth identified their stories, I guided them through a process for fleshing out the stories and painting a vivid picture of the moment they chose to narrate. Because we only had five youth in this workshop, we were able to move among them and help them craft their stories individually.

Isabel's Story

On her timeline, Isabel chose to focus on the moment when her stepfather would return. While she was excited to tell the possible story of this moment, she had a hard time putting words to paper. In my field notes from that day, I remember:

> Her story was all about missing her dad. There's no action, no events. Everything she wrote was about missing him. We encouraged her to think more deeply about

> this moment with the prompt of envisioning what it would be like to have him back. (Field Notes 16 Nov. 2013)

My co-facilitator for this workshop, Chad, worked one-on-one with Isabel and encouraged her to think specifically about their reunion and describe what she imagined would happen. He guided her with questions, such as: "What would that day look like? What will you do when he gets back?" She still struggled as she tried to name and envision this future day, and Chad prompted her with new questions. Here, I outline some of their conversation:

> Chad: What do you do with your dad?
> Isabel: We go to waterparks and go on trips.
> Chad: So when he gets back, do you think you'll go to waterparks?
> Isabel: OH YEAH, we're already going!
> (Field Notes 16 Nov. 2013)

Despite her clear identification of these activities they have and will continue to do together, Isabel's narrative continued to reflect on her current emotional state. While we aimed to help her create a vivid story of the moment of reuniting with her stepfather, the final piece was vague in detail but full of emotion. This is the final version of her story:

> When he gets home I want to spend time together as a family. I want to tell him everything that has changed or has happened. Go to waterparks or out of town to different places. He missed a lot of family time with us. My mom has been supporting my brother and I ever since he left. She's the best. I miss him making us laugh and going out all the time. He missed events. We miss him very much and I can't wait for him to come home. We are going to have a huge party for him. It's hard for him leaving for a year and I can't wait until he comes back to be a family again. (Student Journal)

In Isabel's reflection on reintegration, she begins by naming how she is going to welcome her stepfather back into her life. She names two concrete activities—going to waterparks or on trips, which leads directly into a description of the state of deployment she is currently in. She zooms out of the moment of reunion to examine what life has been like during deployment, literally switching into past-tense verbs—how he missed family time

and big events and her mother has been filling in the parenting gaps. She then returns to a brief imagining of the future, describing that they will throw "a huge party for him" when he returns. In this narrative, Isabel's naming of deployment focuses on the importance of family support during this time and how much she misses her stepfather's presence in their family life. Her forecasting of reintegration names this as a time to catch up and welcome her stepfather back into their family life. Although Isabel made the choice to focus on and write about a future moment of reintegration, she did not stay present in that story or fluidly move back in time to her current state. Her story reflected where she was in the moment of writing, despite the fact that she was eagerly awaiting the homecoming of her stepfather.

Elias' Story

The oldest brother, Elias, also struggled to articulate his story. His story focused on how his stepfather, who he called Dad, missed his homecoming football game. The story began very simply with: "I miss him during my sports games," and I worked with him by asking questions to guide him in clarifying the details and painting a vivid picture of that moment. This is the final narrative of his story:

> Before my father was deployed he would go and support me at all my football games. Now that he's been deployed my mother has been trying her best to show support for me. We had a better season now, we beat all the teams we lost to last year and he tried his best to show his support by face-timing or calling me. We beat Marvel High, a team we never beat before. I wish he was there to see all the great things I did to help my team win. I forced fumbles and made some touchdowns. I also made huge hits. I wish my father was there to watch me do it. (Student Journal)

Even with my individualized dramaturgy, Elias struggled to clearly define and recreate the moment that his father missed. He focuses less on a specific moment, but rather on a big idea of his father missing football games. Elias couldn't recall the details of the game

itself when I asked him, but repeated twice in his story how he wished his father could have seen him in action. Elias chose to name this deployment experience through the multiple games his father missed, noting that his mother tried to support him from home and his father tried to support him from afar. Elias' use of the word "tried" to qualify the ways in which he was supported during deployment are a distinct departure from the way he names his father's active support before he left for duty.

This focus on his father's absence is echoed in the images he chose to accompany his story. Elias connected his iPad to the hotel Internet and pulled images off of Facebook and Isabel's Kindle to help him visually illustrate his story. Of the three images, or photographs, that Elias chose to depict his story visually, two of the three show him with his siblings video-chatting his stepfather on Isabel's Kindle. The first time we see this image, the camera peeks over Elias' shoulder. He holds a Kindle with an image of his stepfather video-chatting him. The viewer cannot see any of the youths' faces, but Isabel and Tomas sit beside Elias, huddled close to get into the camera's lens. The siblings chose to recreate this particular moment by positioning themselves in an exact mirror of a screenshot they pulled off of Facebook. For the next image, Elias chose to use the same shot, but zoomed in so that the focus is on his stepfather's image on the Kindle. In this shot, the viewer can only see Elias' jawline, his ear, and his hands holding the Kindle. The final image Elias chose to use is a short video of his younger siblings, myself, and two other adult volunteers on our project in which we cheer, applaud, and call out Elias' name. When Elias was directing and filming this shot, he instructed us to be over the top and "go crazy." We stand in a line—as if in the bleachers at his game—and the energy is frenetic, excited and celebratory. You can hear us saying his name, yelling "GO, GO, GO!" and cheering "YEAH!" and "WOO!" as we clap and point to the action on the football field.

Tomas' Story

Tomas, the youngest sibling, chose to recount a story that happened the evening before, after the family had driven to San Antonio for the Yellow Ribbon event. He recounted a moment at a restaurant when Elias was being silly at dinner:

> It all started at Salt Grass [a restaurant] in San Antonio on the River Walk. My brother was acting like a turtle. Rob [his stepdad] would have been laughing. He would have ordered a steak. We would have been having a good time. He would have made my mom really happy. (Student Journal)

Tomas' narrative describes a moment in time where the family was happy and having fun, yet he missed the presence of his stepfather. This moment lives in the everyday—a joke shared over a family meal. As he was relaying the story to the group, Tomas could barely contain his laughter as he and his siblings reenacted the moment for the group. In the story, Tomas marks his stepfather's absence by imaging what he would have done if he was there—what he would have ordered, how he would have interacted with the family, and even how he would make Tomas' mother feel in this moment. His story lives in very clear, succinct details, but the only emotion he writes about is in reference to his mother's feelings. Tomas' naming of his feelings are absent from this narrative. But, from seeing how the siblings laughed and joked about the moment, it appeared to be a moment of joy—a moment of joy that his stepfather missed. While his written identification of feeling is missing from the story, his naming of deployment is a sense of absence coupled with the imagining of what his stepfather and his family are missing because of deployment. In this story, as well as Isabel's, Tomas spoke about his parents' relationship with one another.

Siblings' Collaborative Digital Story

Once each youth's story was written, we brought several narratives together into one digital story. In order to do this, I gave the youth four prompts to complete:

"Deployment is…," "Deployment looks like...," "Deployment feels like…," and "Deployment sounds like…". After the youth wrote responses to each prompt, they looked at their individual stories and put them together into an intentionally created order. They then recorded voice-overs of their short writing prompts around deployment, which served as transitions between their individual stories.

In this moment, the three siblings struggled with bringing together their ideas. They had spread out all of their transition lines and were deciding on in what order these lines would accompany their story. I recorded these thoughts and moments of dialogue in my field notes:

> There was a lot of policing in that family group that might not have happened in a group of kids who weren't related, in terms of accepting or rejecting each other's ideas. My co-facilitator, Chad, was trying to help them figure out how their one-line statements worked as transitions. Isabel had written a statement that said "Deployment feels like that special person is not going to come back." Elias did not want to use that line; he wanted nothing to do with it. This is the conversation that took place:
>
> Elias: I think we should get rid of this one.
> Chad: Does everyone want to get rid of that one?
> Elias: (Didn't wait for anyone else to answer.) Yup.
> Isabel: (Shrugged her shoulders and conceded.) That's fine.
>
> Elias' reaction was strong and immediate—he didn't wait for Tomas' opinion. At that moment, the other group asked for Chad's help, so then I went over and checked in with the siblings about it because I overheard the conversation and felt some surprising tension between the siblings. And I said,
>
> Meg: Isabel how do you feel about it?
> Isabel: It really means something to me, I'm scared of that.
> (Elias expressed emphatically that he didn't like it.)
> Meg: Well, that is one perspective. You all have different ideas about what this is. Do you think it would be okay if she included her perspective?
>
> They begrudgingly agreed, while I was standing there. That family is so close knit and they share so many things. In that moment I wondered: Why didn't Elias

> want to include Isabel's perspective? Was it the content of the line itself? There was no other time where they expressed fear or concern for their stepfather, only how they missed him. (Field Notes 16 Nov. 2013)

During this conflict, the older brother, Elias, exerted his power as the oldest sibling by vetoing his younger sister's idea. But, when I interceded and tried to mediate, he conceded. Elias never verbally expressed why he didn't want to include his sister's line, but it was a very powerful moment of rejection. Until this moment, I hadn't seen the siblings disagree on anything or treat each other with disrespect. Throughout the workshop they were really emotionally connected about missing their stepfather, and all appeared to feel similarly about his deployment. But, in this moment when Isabel expressed this fear, her brothers did not outwardly acknowledge it other than to eliminate it from their narrative. I thought as I left them that they had sorted it out—that Isabel's line would be included in their narrative. However, this line does not appear in the final version of the siblings' collective digital story.

REFLECTIONS ON AGENCY

Elias, Isabel, and Tomas all exercised personal agency in different ways throughout the process of writing, creating images or photographs, and editing. In this section, I further examine how each sibling enacted agency in naming deployment and crafting their digital stories. I will also interrogate how collective agency was at play in the siblings' group digital story and how this influenced the visibility of their individual names of deployment within their final product.

Agency in Artistry

Digital storytelling provides various opportunities for youth to exercise agency in the artistic choices. Since it is a multi-layered artistic medium, composed of several digital assets: a voice-over (verbal narration), music and/or sound effects, and visual

assets (photographs or short videos), youth are presented with multiple artistic choices to make throughout the creation process. Additionally, youth must craft their written narrative prior to recording their voice-over. They also have to consider how to edit these elements together to produce a cohesive story—especially in this particular workshop, as youth worked together to bring three individuals' unique stories around deployment together into one short digital story. In this workshop, these siblings exercised personal agency in many of their artistic choices.

Elias exercised personal agency in several ways throughout the process of creating his digital story, focusing on his artistic choices. Originally, I had instructed them to create three images to illustrate their story. Elias opened up the original instructions by activating the representation of his football game through the use of video. During the process of creating his video, Elias confidently stepped up to direct us and realize his vision of an active moment of cheering—giving us verbal directions, placing our bodies in space, and creating a unique camera angle by standing on a chair. For his images of FaceTime-ing, he also figured out how to access the hotel's wireless Internet on the iPad and pulled images of his stepfather and family from Facebook. Throughout the process of creating the digital story, Elias exercised personal agency in artistry, particularly in exercising choice to visually represent, or name, his experiences of deployment.

Tomas exhibited personal and collective agency in different ways throughout the process. As the quietest and youngest sibling, he often deferred to his brother and sister's ideas throughout the process. His story reflects this, as he wrote about an event he was present at, but it revolved around his older brother's actions and his family's reaction as a whole. I believe Tomas exercised personal agency in naming deployment for himself through his relationship to his family and siblings. He also exercised collective agency

when he sided with his older brother, agreeing that Isabel's line should be eliminated from their digital story. Overall, Tomas' moments of agency were more subtle than his outgoing siblings, but they still happened.

Though Isabel experienced challenges in the writing process, she still crafted a narrative that named her current relationship to deployment, exercising personal agency through her writing. Her choice to write more generally about the emotions of deployment, rather than invent a story to depict the moment of reunion, names deployment as an emotionally charged experience. In contrast to Tomas' vivid imagining of events that hadn't happened, Isabel had trouble projecting herself into the future of reintegration and imagining the story of that moment. Isabel's personal agency in this moment revolved around telling the story she needed to—the story of an emotional period in her life where she needed to talk about how much she missed her stepfather, rather than write a fictional narrative of his safe return. Although we, as facilitators, were trying to help her think more deeply about the moment she chose to write about, Isabel wrote what she needed to, despite our attempts to "help" her.

Agency in Editing

When the siblings brought their stories together to create their group digital story, personal and collective agency came into conflict. Elias exercised personal agency in voicing his discomfort with Isabel's statement, "Deployment feels like that special person is not going to come back," and Tomas joined him in agreement, resulting in collective agency between the brothers. Isabel's personal agency existed in the moment when she identified this fear and put it forward to her brothers. Alternately, her brothers worked together to exercise collective agency through the decision to omit this line from their story. The art form of digital storytelling provided them the space to explore a multi-

faceted naming of deployment, which would consider and present all of the siblings' perspectives. However, in omitting Isabel's line, they rejected a perspective that was contrary to their dominant narrative. The brothers' collective decision to omit the contrary perspective was agentive, but also presses against Freire's assertion that we cannot name things for others. The siblings worked together to name their experience, however, Isabel's perspective was somehow invalidated or ignored by her siblings. This act of collective agency actually resulted in the exclusion of one their group member's ideas. This moment sparked a lot of questions for me about how naming functions: How does applied theatre provide a space for young people (and others) to voice their fears? What is the risk of naming a fear in public? In naming deployment, how do we encourage a multi-faceted perspective which includes everyone's voices?

CONCLUSION

In the context of these Yellow Ribbon workshops, the practice of digital storytelling and applied theatre carved out a space in which youth were charged to enact agency in the exploration of deployment, as well as the analyzing of their relationship to deployment. The digital storytelling process encouraged youth to exercise personal agency in naming and depicting the experience of deployment and reintegration for themselves as individuals, with adults as allies and guides rather than the source of all the answers. Because youth were in charge of creating their artistic products and curating their own story sharing, they exercised agency in their moderation of how much or little to share, how to tell their story through writing and verbal sharing, as well as how to visually represent their experience. Personal agency manifested itself in the artistic choices made throughout the process, such as Elias' choices to pull images off of the Internet or film instead of taking a photograph. The process also provided moments for

youth to exercise personal agency in defining deployment through fears or ideas that may have been challenging, as Audra and Isabel both did. Additionally, the group digital stories also became a site of collective agency, where youth worked together to pool both their skills and resources to create an artwork. Youth also enacted collective agency, as Elias and Tomas did, to suppress unpopular ideas. In these ways, collective agency was both inclusive and exclusive in our space.

The multi-modal structure of digital stories provided youth with a concrete space to identify and voice their perspectives as young people, using various media—text, image, sound—in order to make their perspectives visible. The various media also provided them opportunities to play with both literal and abstract representation in their naming process. Because of the multi-modal art form of digital stories, youth were able to name their experiences in multi-faceted ways instead of being confined to just the written or spoken word. For example, in Audra's final cleaning story, her images were pushing against her spoken text and inviting the viewer to imagine how Audra learned these lessons about cleaning. If we viewed either of these digital assets without the other, it would greatly alter the story and, possibly, rob the story of its depth and complexity. Viewing these elements together encouraged tension within naming and helped complicate relationships, ideas, and experiences. In these ways, digital storytelling can operate as a multi-dimensional art form for youth to play with, challenging and expanding their notions of storytelling and naming, while honoring their diverse perspectives.

As a researcher, I was excited about creating digital stories that would honor youth perspectives in a "theatre of celebration" (Thompson 16). But, I was surprised by some of the challenges I encountered through the work. I realized that naming is not always a place of celebration and safety as we encountered danger and risk while youth,

like Audra, struggled to share their own their perspectives in a public, political space with adult audiences. I came to see how asking youth to voice their perspectives, to name their world and become visible in a military-dominated space, was a political act in itself. Because they were revealing their stories, they crafted a narrative which pushed against and illuminated holes within the dominant, adult-oriented narrative about the military and deployment and military families. While the youth may not have been aware of the politics entangled within their stories—youth perspectives that may counter or conflict with the accepted adult, and, specifically, official military narrative—this tension is something that youth workers and applied theatre practitioners need to be aware of and continue to interrogate How do we create agentive spaces for youth to explore and communicate their perspectives about the world and/or name their experiences without necessarily performing them for an audience? This chapter leaves me thinking about how I can ethically invite youth to speak their truths, with the understanding that there may be risk for them and their families within a greater political system of the military.

Chapter 4: Digital Stories as an Act of Self-advocacy

> Gina: Video games and all this technology is the rage so whenever you incorporate [...] the tools that they're good at to express their feelings and put them in a safe environment where it's safe for them to do so...I think it's very helpful. You prompted them with items that they had probably never thought about until it was put in front of them. They just go through the paces of deployment and being separated. But when it's put in front of them they have to really think about "when I was nine I felt like this, but now that I'm sixteen I feel like this," [it's] bringing out the different emotions in the kids, which I think they completely bottle up. That's another issue you face in my job. The kids don't self identify. They don't identify as military. They don't want to. They don't want to stand out. They don't want to be different. But they are different. They are experiencing things at home that the Smiths aren't experiencing. And dad's not there or dad's wounded... (Personal Interview 17 Dec. 2013)
>
> Meg: As you think about our work over the last five months, is there anything you want to take with you as you continue to work with youth?
>
> Laurie: Not pressuring them to feel any way. I think it's kind of silly that people say "you should feel sad because your parents deployed" and sometimes they're just fine. [...] Sometimes adults...say "If you're feeling sad" and I know it's an "if" [...] but then they [the kids] are like: "Am I supposed to be feeling sad? Am I supposed to do this?" (Personal Interview 16 Dec. 2013)

In these separate closing interviews with my community partners at Texas Operation: Military Kids (OMK), we talked about our journey using digital storytelling workshops over the last five months. These two comments illustrate the ways the work functioned for Gina and Laurie—creating "safe environments" to talk about how youth feel and using digital stories as a way to communicate those emotions and tell their stories. As I moved through this research, I came to realize that promoting youth voice in military-centric spaces was more than just those things. We created safe spaces for young people to express their feelings through dialogue and digital stories—and we accomplished this within the highly political structure of the military. By creating the digital stories and moving them into a public military space through a final sharing, youth

not only told their stories and illuminated their experiences for an adult audience—they actively engaged in acts of self-advocacy.

SHARING DIGITAL STORIES AS SELF-ADVOCACY

In both of the Yellow Ribbon workshops, the ultimate goal was to create digital stories to show in a community sharing at the end of our day-long events. Gathering youth and their families for a shared event was a new practice for the community, as they generally spent the day in their respective youth and adult spaces and reunited at the end of the day when it was time to go home. The community sharing was for an audience made up of parents and siblings, as well as OMK and National Guard volunteers and staff members. I planned to share our process with the audience, invite the audience to view the digital stories, and participate in a talkback where they could ask questions and the youth could share their process and ideas. I intended for the sharing to celebrate the youths' artistry and provide an opportunity for youth to share their perspectives with the Yellow Ribbon community.

During our first workshop, we had an unlikely visitor join us—the Brigadier General in charge of the National Guard troops in Austin, TX. His presence in the audience, as a military figure with power in this system, shifted the power dynamics in the room and raised critical questions for me about what it means to screen the youths' stories in this setting with families and high ranking military officials. Author and (self-proclaimed) military brat, Mary Edwards Wertsch, writes:

> Life in the military is about fronts. Appearances. Masks. The stage persona. That's an important part of military life. Our parents were always obsessively concerned about how things looked. When we were growing up, every aspect of personal and private life was a measure of our fathers' professional competence. (1)

In other words, any deviation from order reflects on a service member and speaks to their ability to not only keep their family in line, but their ability to manage others and keep people safe during combat. Therefore, any deviation from order could harm the service member/parent's chance of advancement. With the top-down structure of the military, a service member's commanding officer isn't just their supervisor, but the person responsible for a service member's entire career. Having their commanding officers in the room as their children shared experiences of reintegration had the possibility of reflecting well or poorly on not just the families, but the service members themselves.

As a result of witnessing the General's power as an audience member, I began to see the youths' digital stories in a new light. While I never intended to use the digital stories to inspire youth self-advocacy, the addition of an audience—particularly an audience of high-ranking military adults—framed the stories in a new way. It led me to wonder: How do autobiographical digital stories become a site of self-advocacy for youth? How does the practice of digital storytelling create opportunities to promote self-advocacy?

According to scholars in the field of special education, David Test et al., the notion of self-advocacy originated as part of a civil rights movement for people with disabilities[8] and has since been investigated by many scholars and researchers as a necessary skill to develop in youth and adults with disabilities (43). Balcazar et al. define self-advocacy as "the ability to communicate with others to acquire information and recruit help in meeting personal needs and goals" (31). Additionally, Furney et al. offer that self-advocacy is "an individual's ability to speak for oneself and one's own needs" (1). Currently, I have not found scholarship naming a connection between applied theatre

[8] Test et al. draw on scholarship from Longhurst and Williams & Shoultz citing the evolution of self-advocacy as a civil rights movement from the People First movement.

or digital storytelling and self-advocacy.[9] This encouraged me to research outside of these fields and consult self-advocacy scholarship from the fields of counseling, social work, and disability studies. Applying definitions from the disability movement to my work with young people, I define self-advocacy as the ability for youth to understand their needs and have the confidence and resources to communicate them to others in order to achieve personal fulfillment, and, in turn, help others in their same position. During my research on this project, military youth created autobiographical digital stories which articulated their needs to themselves and others. This process revealed moments for exploring how self-advocacy was at play in their digital storytelling process and products.

In the article, "A Conceptual Framework of Self-Advocacy for Students with Disabilities," Test et al. conducted an in-depth literature review of articles and data-based intervention studies around the topic of self-advocacy. Based on their research, which included 20 research studies and the feedback of seven stakeholders, the authors created a conceptual framework of self-advocacy (51). While this framework was devised to work with individuals with disabilities, the researchers offer that the framework itself:

> [...] need not be limited to students with disabilities, but rather includes components and subcomponents that can be goals for all students. All students need to be effective advocates for their interests, needs, and rights. All students can benefit from knowing how to advocate for the interests of the group. (52)

As the researchers explain, this framework offers youth educators tools for teaching all students to become self-advocates. In this chapter, I use this framework to analyze how military youth might become self-advocates "for their interests, needs, and rights" and

[9] In both the digital storytelling and applied theatre communities, scholars talk about related ideas, such as agency (Hull; Hull &Katz; Lambert; Erstad and Silseth 213-232) and artivism (Sandoval and Latorre).

also how they can become advocates "for the interests of the group" through the practice of digital storytelling (Test et al. 52).

Test et al.'s framework delineates four components of self-advocacy: knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication, and leadership (45). They define "knowledge of self" as the ability "to gain knowledge of one's own interests, preferences, strengths, needs, learning, style, and attributes of ones' disability" (Test et al. 50). The next component, knowledge of rights, they define as "know[ing] one's rights as a citizen, as an individual with a disability, and as a student receiving services under federal law" (Test et al. 50). Test et al. suggest that the within the component of communication individuals learn to "communicate effectively," including the subcomponents of "negotiation, persuasion, and compromise as well as body language and listening skills" (50). The last component is leadership, which they say "involves learning the roles and dynamics of a group and the skill to function in a group" (Test et al. 50). Some of the studies they reviewed noted that individuals can become self-advocates without needing to lead others, however, Test et al. suggest that leadership is necessary for individuals to advocate for themselves at a systemic level (51).

In this chapter, I use Test et al.'s framework and definitions around self-advocacy to investigate the ways in which self-advocacy played out during the second workshop, in which the youth were in the process of experiencing deployment. The following case study focuses on a pair of siblings and their journey throughout the day-long applied theatre and digital storytelling workshop. These two siblings, Maya and Nico, initially expressed their lack of desire for talking about deployment and the resulting emotions, but as the workshop progressed, I saw a shift in their participation as they became more actively engaged in the process. By the end of the workshop, they demonstrated several aspects of self-advocacy both through their participation in the workshop and the

resulting digital stories themselves. I chose to focus on these siblings as I saw how digital stories could become an active site of self-advocacy, exploring components of self-knowledge and communication, as well as leadership.

BREAKING THE SILENCE: A CASE STUDY

Maya and her brother, Nico, came to the Yellow Ribbon Deployment event together with their mother. For the sake of clarity, Maya and Nico were the additional participants of the Yellow Ribbon event mentioned in the previous chapter which also included Elias, Isabel, and Tomas. Their father had been deployed for 11 months and was set to come back in four weeks, just before Christmas. Maya was the oldest in our small group of five youth (two sets of siblings from different families) at 17-years-old, and Nico was 12-years-old. From the beginning of the day, Maya was wary of sharing her feelings about deployment. In her pre-survey, she stated that she did not share her feelings about deployment with her family members "because I don't like to get too into my thoughts" (Pre-process Survey 16 Nov. 2013). In the same pre-survey, she also mentioned that she discusses her feelings about deployment with non-military people: "I usually talk the most to people who haven't been through the same experiences as myself" (Pre-process Survey 16 Nov. 2013). While Maya reported that she shares her experiences with non-military people, as quoted in Chapter 2, she also shared her difficulty in talking about deployment with her friends (who are all civilians):

> I don't usually try to bring it up, because then they start treating me differently. Like something is wrong with me and trying to give me the nice treatment. And I don't want to be treated differently just because of that. I don't usually want people to know. My close friends, they know and when I'm feeling sad I don't tell them because they don't understand. And some people, I get more mad when people act like "yeah I know, my dad left for like a month one time on a work trip" and I'm like it's not the same. You don't understand. And it just really annoys me. (Focus Group 16 Nov. 2013)

Here, Maya expresses frustration in being treated differently because of her experiences and confiding in friends who have not shared the experience of deployment. Her overall frustration with talking about deployment became apparent early in the workshop when she expressed that she didn't like going to Yellow Ribbon events because "they are emotional and people cry" (Field Notes 16 Nov. 2013). When she said this, I explained that we were creating an environment where if anyone needs to cry, it's okay, but that this wasn't our goal for the day. Rather, I shared that our goal for the workshop was to bring together people who are all experiencing similar challenges and to share stories about those experiences.

While Maya was quite verbal about her reservations in sharing and discussing deployment, her younger brother, Nico, was quite indignant about the fact that he was not fazed by deployment at all. In his pre-survey, he stated that he never discusses deployment with family members because he "doesn't want to," and he never discusses it with friends because "they wouldn't care" (Pre-process Survey 16 Nov. 2013). He seemed hesitant to join in our activities and was fairly quiet compared to the other participants, clinging to his sister throughout the morning.

Despite their reticence to share their experiences with deployment, both Maya and Nico warmed up over the course of the morning, playing ensemble games and interacting with the other three siblings in our workshop, Elias, Tomas, and Isabel. Mid-morning, we shifted from building an ensemble and speaking about deployment in general terms to connecting personally to the experience of deployment. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, each youth created a deployment timeline and charted their various experiences with deployment on the timeline. Then, I encouraged them to choose one of their experiences to expand into a full story. This story would become the voice-over for their digital story.

Both Maya and Nico struggled in different ways when it came to sharing their experience of deployment. In the following sections, I offer a description of Maya and Nico's individual storytelling process, as well as the process they moved through to combine their individual stories and experiences into one, cohesive digital story. Finally, I discuss the semi-public sharing of their digital stories and how it shaped Maya and Nico's perceptions of the digital storytelling workshop. This case study illuminates Maya and Nico's journey throughout the process—from reluctant participants to engaged artists, embodying self-advocacy through their process and their digital story products.

Maya's Storytelling: Revisions & Clarity

Once all of the youth had settled on a story of their own, I walked them through a structured writing process for expanding a moment from their lives into a story. I encouraged them to write a sentence for the beginning, middle, and end of their stories, and then fill in supporting detail sentences to help clarify and deepen the story. Maya decided to tell the story of getting her driver's license. After she constructed her beginning, middle, and end sentences, Maya struggled to integrate supporting details in shaping the full story. I intended for this clear structure to streamline the storytelling process, but it seemed to hamper her creativity and ability to write the story naturally. Later, I asked the youth what we should change in the future, and Maya shared:

> Have different ways of writing the script. A different way that people could do it because people have different ways of learning things. So maybe you could be like try to have them free write a story, like a scenario. Write a story, then create a script so it's easier to perform. (Focus Group 16 Nov. 2013)

She spent some time working on a first draft by herself, and then I came over and asked her specific questions about her story to help her think through the details. I asked: How does this story relate to your dad's deployment? Would it have been different if he was

home? These questions cracked the story open and revealed Maya's disappointment about her father's absence. She told me about how her older sister got her license, and her dad celebrated by taking her sister out for ice cream. But, according to Maya, when she got her license, her dad was deployed, and her mom had to work. Her eventual celebration involved her mom taking her to Starbucks. Maya shared that she was disappointed because she "doesn't even drink coffee" and ended up getting water. Following the Starbucks moment, her mom had to go to work, so Maya was by herself at home after this big, exciting milestone.

While the connection to deployment was hazy in Maya's initial narrative, as she shared more details, I could see that this was an upsetting memory for her—a big moment in her life that would have been different if her dad was not deployed. In the telling of this story, Maya expressed resentment towards her mom, who had no choice but to go to work. Maya's story felt fraught with disappointment, especially from a younger sibling who had seen her older sister celebrated for this same achievement. In Maya's mind, she had gotten little acknowledgement due to her dad's deployment.

Maya's story shifted greatly through her process of writing and talking through her story. Below is her first draft of the story:

> While he was gone, I changed from a teen/child to a young adult. I began taking classes and learning how to drive without my dad. When I finally got the courage to take my test, I was tested by an old grumpy lady. She kept telling me that I was doing things wrong, then eventually told me I passed. That kept tricking me into thinking I failed, but I didn't! I got my license and no one was there to celebrate getting my license. She constantly insulted my driving, however in the end I passed! After, I sat at home by myself because my mom had to go to work. While my dad was gone, he missed a lot of parties and celebrations. If my dad was there, my success would have been celebrated. (Student Journal)

In this narrative, Maya shares her memory of the driving test—describing the woman administering the test and how she made the process difficult for her. In this version of

the story, Maya's timeline gets confusing, first the driving instructor "kept telling [her] that [she] was doing things wrong," then she was awarded her license and had "no one there to celebrate." She then jumps back to the same thought of the woman "constantly insult[ing] [her] driving." The details she shared with me about the disappointing Starbucks trip didn't make it into the narrative, but Maya does explain her mom's obligation to work. She generalizes her dad's absence by offering that "he missed a lot of parties and celebrations," and she then ties it to the thought that if he was home, her "success would have been celebrated."

In the next version of the narrative, Maya continued to refine her story by clarifying the details and the timeline:

> While my dad was deployed, I transformed from a child to a young adult. I began taking classes and learning how to drive without my dad. When I finally got the courage to take my test, I was assigned an old grumpy lady. During the test, she constantly insulted my driving. However, in the end, I passed. After receiving the delightful news, I sat in my room blankly looking around. If my dad was there, my success would have been celebrated. (Digital Story Transcription)

In this latter version of the story, Maya shifts the focus of her growth and aging from notions of "changed" to "transformed." She consolidates and streamlines her account of taking the driver's test with the "old grumpy lady." She omits the detail of her mom's work obligation and focuses on a vivid solitary image of herself "[sitting] in [her] room blankly looking around." This version of the story hinges on the disappointment and lack of celebration from other members in her family. It is impossible to know if it was intentional, but Maya's removal of her mom's work obligation paints a very different picture of this event, in which Maya's success was ignored totally by the family. Maya was aware that we would be sharing these digital stories at the end of the day and her mom would be in the audience, and this knowledge may have shaped her choices and focus with the story.

Nico's Storytelling: Digging into Details

While his sister struggled to fit her story into the prescribed outline, Nico struggled with the stillness of the brainstorming and writing process. He squirmed and fiddled with his pen, his energy barely contained within his chair. After watching him for a few moments, I sat next to him and asked how it was going. He talked about how he didn't really miss his father and how he knew he wasn't in danger (due to the nature of his position in the National Guard). His timeline of deployment memories revolved around things like having no emotions, keeping the house safe, winning a laptop, the time when he accidentally ate dog treats, when he won and lost soccer games, and when his dad returned, he was excited to eat Taco Bell and celebrate holidays with him (Student Journal). Finally, Nico landed on telling the story of winning a laptop through a school-wide videogame creation contest. While Nico had a vivid memory in mind, he struggled to commit this moment to the written page. He wrote the beginning, middle, and end sentences, and then got stuck on adding details to the story. He began fidgeting and doodling in the margins of his paper.

It was clear to me that Nico needed to move around—with his whole body or just his hands—in order to think and write. So, as he steadily shuffled and reshuffled a deck of Uno cards, I ask him to orally tell me the story. I guided him with questions to bring the memory to life: How did you feel? Tell me more about the videogame—what was so exciting about it? As the colorful Uno cards flicked from hand to hand, he thoughtfully responded to my prompting, and I scribed his story. His story emerged with some of the clearest details after this individual dramaturgy, or one-on-one story development. Below is Nico's final story with the bolded sentences indicating the beginning, middle, and end sentences that he wrote. He dictated the rest of the lines to me, and I wrote them down.

> **While you're sitting or standing reading this, watch the video for something entertaining. This will share the memories** about the time I won a laptop. So, I signed up for a class at school called Global Oria. Out teacher assigned us to teams and I got two partners named [Ben] and [Ella]. We had ideas of games and we came up with the idea of Constellations. So we split up the sections of levels—while I did level 1, [Ben] did level 2 and [Ella] did level 3. I wanted it to have more pizazz; so I added sound, animation and music. **We finished our video game and sent it in to the judges. After that, we waited for a reply.** We had to wait three months then we got a reply. After we read the letter we were so happy because we got first place. **After I won that laptop, I noticed my dad wasn't there to see the whole thing.** At first I didn't notice, because we usually Facetime**. So dads that are deployed can always miss something important in your life. THE END.** (Student Journal)

As Nico told me his story, he elaborated and added clear details. In his final story, despite the fact that Nico had originally expressed resistance to the idea of missing or worrying for his father, he still chose to write: "So dads that are deployed can always miss something important in your life." The way the sentence is constructed embodies the feeling of advice that one child might offer another as they moved through deployment. It also reveals that, despite the fact that he usually FaceTimed (a video-chat on an iPhone) with his father, the awards ceremony marked a moment where his father's physical and technological presence was missed.

Maya & Nico's Collaborative Digital Story

Despite their individual challenges in the brainstorming and writing process, Maya and Nico worked together very well when it came to capturing and editing their photographs and recording their voice-over of their narrative. While they individually wrote transition lines to connect their stories, they worked together to decide the order of the lines and where they would best support both of their stories. Throughout the process of building the beginning, middle, and end of their digital stories, the siblings came up with innovative ways to clarify the digital images that would accompany their stories.

Nico was invested in the images that he created to tell his story, despite the visibly static appearance of his photographs which lacked variation (see Figure 3). In the photographs, Nico sits while planning his videogame, then he sits while creating levels for the videogame, then he sits while adding "pizazz" to the videogame. While his photographs all look similar, Nico was innovative in the way he used the iPad as a prop. In the second shot, he included an image of the videogame he created. Then, in the third shot, he pulled up an image from the Internet of the levels his team created for the videogame. Nico enabled the wireless on the iPad and searched for the images online, without any help from me or the other facilitator.

In Maya's story, the siblings continued to think intentionally about how to clarify the visual world of their images. For Maya's story, Nico acted as the character of the "old grumpy lady" who conducted the driving test. Nico decided that he needed a head scarf to embody the character, which he paired with the prop of a clipboard with a handwritten checklist for Maya's test. Maya and Nico made the choice to design a prop in order to create the environment of a car. They searched the Internet for an image of a steering wheel, and within the images representing Maya's driving test, she holds the iPad in front of her as though she is gripping a steering wheel.

In addition to using our limited resources to refine the visual assets for their digital stories, both of the siblings also expanded their visual representations by taking short videos rather than simply still photographs. After taking still images to depict the process of creating his videogame, Nico took his visual storytelling a step further. Without any prompting from the facilitators, he decided to reenact his awards ceremony by creating a video. I asked a lot of questions to help Nico direct the content of the video, but he easily took charge. He requested assistance from all of the youth in our group, as well as the volunteers and facilitators. Nico told us to sit, how to react, and gave us

dialogue. The process took some time, but Nico took total ownership over the video production and directed every aspect of his short scene. While Nico was quiet and appeared pretty underwhelmed throughout the workshop, by contrast, in this moment, he appeared very excited about creating this video.

Like Nico, Maya also turned to video to help further her storytelling. During the editing process, Maya decided that they needed an extra image to punctuate the transition lines she and Nico wrote. In our room, she found a small American flag and took some pictures of it. However, she disliked how static the images looked and expressed a desire for some movement. I offered to hold the flag and wave it as she took a video. She took several videos until she decided that the waving did not work, either. In the end, I blew the flag to stimulate movement as she filmed. In the final digital story, the transitions between the siblings' stories are represented by short video clips in which the American flag flaps in the wind.

After the siblings created the photographs and video, they recorded the voice-overs for both stories. At this moment, Nico balked at performing. He did not want to read his story. Instead, he asked Chad (my co-facilitator with whom Nico bonded during our workshop) to perform the voice-over for him, offering Chad pointers and background information to inform his vocal telling or performance of the story. Despite Nico's desire to avoid the spotlight in vocally performing his full story, he decided to voice the shorter transition lines throughout his and Maya's digital story. These lines are distinctly marked in the storyboard below. By contrast, Maya confidently performed her story's narration.

Throughout the process of creating their digital story, Maya and Nico stretched themselves to think about how to accurately tell their story through the medium of digital technology. Not only did they have to work together through the process to create a cohesive digital story, but they pushed each other to think about how to use different sign

systems (props, costumes, and video) in order to articulate their ideas more clearly for themselves and their eventual audience. Maya also used the narrative devices of symbolism and repetition through the use of the American flag video. Throughout their story, the American flag symbolized patriotism. They say: "Deployment is when soldiers go and fight for our country." Here, the flag symbolized a disruption to their routine: "Deployment looks like a lot of responsibilities for everyone." It also symbolized intense emotions: "Deployment sounds like a crackling fire that is about to explode." Their narratives, coupled with their chosen imagery, made me consider how digital storytelling lends itself to symbolism, and what the implications are for using digital media in applied theatre and devising with young people. The use of symbolism and metaphor allows youth to access a vocabulary of abstract sign systems which provide aesthetic and, perhaps, emotional distance from the story being shared. This allows them to self-advocate from a remove, providing an alternative to the vulnerability tied to literal representations, which we often see in photographs and video.

Figure 3: Maya & Nico's Collaborative Digital Storyboard

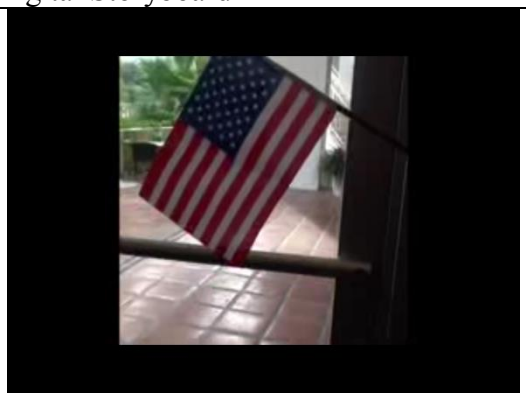
Maya: Deployment is when soldiers go and fight for our country. Nico: Deployment is when a family's soldier leaves to a different place for a long time. Maya: Feels like a very long break from your loved ones.	

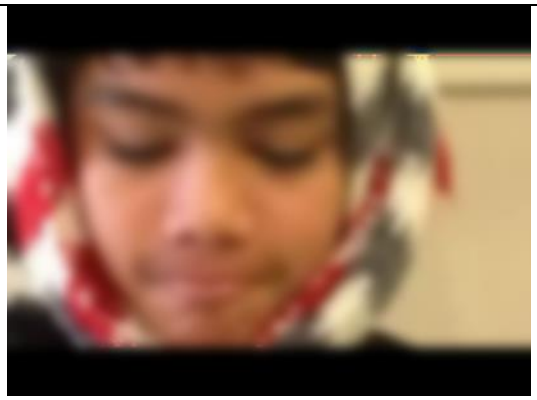
Figure 3: Continued	
Maya: While my dad was deployed, I transformed from a child to a young adult.	
I began taking classes and learning how to drive without my dad. When I finally got the courage to take my test,	
I was assigned an old grumpy lady. During the test, she constantly insulted my driving. However,	

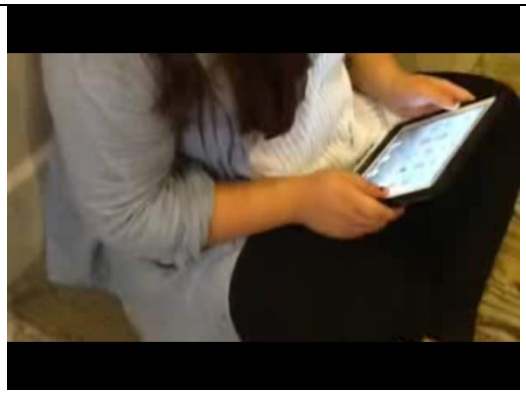
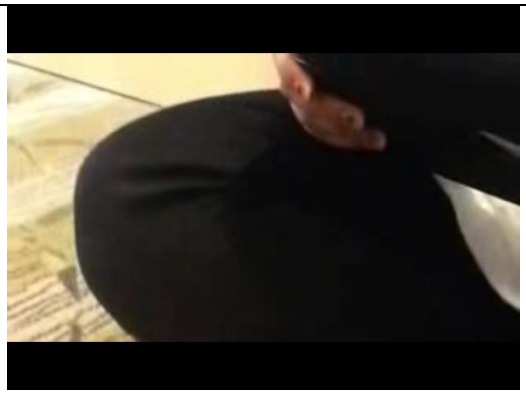
Figure 3: Continued	
in the end, I passed. After receiving the delightful news,	
I sat in my room blankly looking around. If my dad was there,	
my success would have been celebrated.	

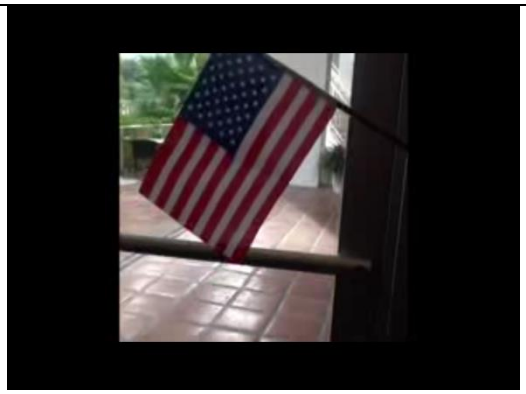
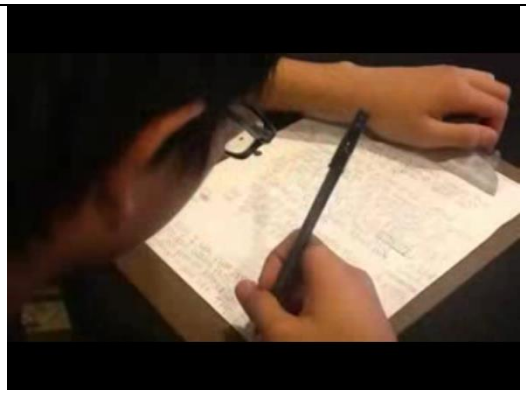
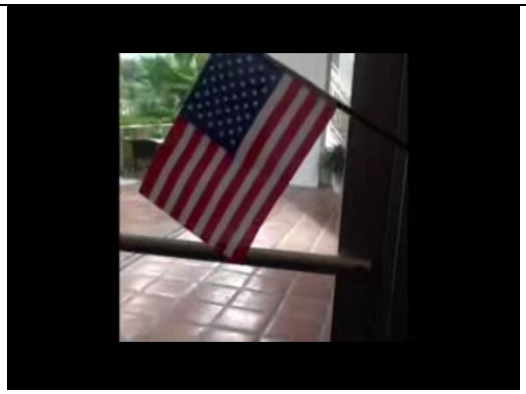
Figure 3: Continued	
Nico: Deployment feels like I have no emotion for this since he's really not going to do combat. Maya: Deployment looks like a lot of responsibilities for everyone.	
Chad (performed for Nico): While you're sitting or standing watching this, I hope that you find something entertaining. This will share the memories about the time I won a laptop.	
So, I signed up for a class at school called Global Oria. Our teacher assigned us to teams and I got two partners named [Ben] and [Ella]. We had ideas of games and we came up with the idea of Constellations.	

Figure 3: Continued	
So we split up the sections of levels—while I did level 1, [Ben] did level 2 and [Ella] did level 3. I wanted it to have more pizazz; so I added sound, animation and music. We finished our video game and sent it in to the judges. After that, we waited for a reply. We had to wait three months,	
then we got a reply. After we read the letter we were so happy because we got first place. After I won that laptop, I noticed my dad wasn't there to see the whole thing. At first I didn't notice, because we usually Facetime.	
So dads that are deployed can always miss something important in your life.	

Figure 3: Continued	
[Video] Chad (as Judge): And the winner is Nico Powell! Congratulations! Here's your iPad! Audience: WOOO! Nico!	
[Video: Nico walks up to the front of the room from the audience and accepts his award (an iPad as a stand-in prop for the laptop he really won), holding it over his head as the judge applauds and the audience cheers for him.]	
Nico: Deployment looks like doing a lot of chores and not enough video games. Maya: Deployment sounds like a crackling fire that is about to explode. Nico: Deployment sounds like people saying good bye and not a lot of music playing.	

Youth Reflections on the Workshop

In order to deepen my understanding of youths' experiences throughout the workshop and especially in relationship to their enactment of self-advocacy, I made two important changes in my data collection protocol for this workshop. First, instead of

simply giving the youth a post-process questionnaire, I also conducted a brief focus group with the youth to invite them to verbally articulate their experience. I hoped that a verbal interview might elicit more in-depth responses and further illuminate the youths' experiences with the workshop. Then, I intentionally shifted the focus group to the end of the day so they would experience the sharing before we reflected. I was interested in hearing how they felt about their work after they experienced it with an audience. These two shifts in data collection greatly affected the depth of engagement and response from the youth. Conducting a focus group also provided an opportunity for the youth to activate self-advocacy through self-knowledge and communication.

During the focus group, Maya shared a lot about her experience as a member of a military family and her feelings about the digital storytelling process. When talking about her experience of sharing her story, Maya focused on how she felt:

> It helped me feel appreciated because we're always being "the tennis balls" or whatever. Being the rock. We just do it. We don't do it to be praised...or to write it on our resume or anything. It was just nice today to have people appreciate what we go through because no one understands. But today people were like crying for us and that was weird—I don't see that ever. (Focus Group 16 Nov. 2013)

In this quote, Maya acknowledges the metaphor offered earlier in the workshop by the National Guard staff member about being resilient and bouncing back. She illuminates the way that military youth move through deployment with a sense of duty and obligation—"we just do it. We don't do it to be praised...or to write it on our resume or anything." She expresses surprise about the reactions from the adults in the audience that it was "weird" to see audiences moved by their stories. Tomas, Elias, and Isabel's mother and the volunteers were crying as they watched the digital stories, as were some younger children (family friends) in the audience.

During the focus group, Maya and Nico both shared the challenges and risks of sharing their digital story with an audience—particularly with their mother in the audience.

> Maya: It was a bit intense to show it in front of my mom because we don't usually get emotional at the house...I have to be a rock at home because I don't want her to feel like she has to worry about me. I don't talk about it with her because I don't want to see her cry. It was hard because I didn't know how she was going to take it because we don't usually talk about things like that because we're both emotional and I don't want us both to be sad at the same time. Because that would be bad.
>
> Nico: [It was] weird because I've never done it before. I've never shown it in front of my family. That is why I stay inside of my room and play computer games. Because...
>
> Maya: Because we don't get into our emotions very much. I felt like I didn't know at all how she was going to react. I knew she wasn't going to cry because she doesn't cry. But I thought I was about to cry when my little babies [a family friend and her children were in the audience] were sad because I don't want them to be sad. We don't usually talk about stuff with her [her mother] so it could have gone either way. I wouldn't know at all. (Focus Group 16 Nov. 2013)

Maya and Nico's reflections show some of their hesitance tied to sharing their stories and admitting that deployment affected them at all. It appears that Maya has chosen to hide her emotions at home to protect her mother and keep her family's spirits up. Following Maya's reflections, Nico explained why he doesn't share his feelings around deployment. For most of the focus group, Nico spoke very little, however, in this moment, he opened up about why he avoids the topic of deployment. Nico didn't reiterate his earlier explanation of not having any emotions, but rather offered the reason he escapes to his room to play videogames. Maya confirms Nico's explanation, saying: "we don't get into our emotions very much."

SELF-ADVOCACY FRAMEWORK

Below is a chart, Figure 4, which outlines the self-advocacy framework I will use to analyze Maya and Nico's case study. Test et al. proposed this framework and introduced this chart in their article, "A Conceptual Framework of Self-Advocacy for Students with Disabilities" (49). I have adapted this chart from its original format, focusing on subcomponents which apply to applied theatre work with youth. I have also proposed some additions to the chart based on the findings of my research. These additions are designated by an asterisk, and I will discuss them further in the following analysis.

The chart outlines the four components which, together, constitute self-advocacy. People begin at the level of achieving and expressing a knowledge of self and knowledge of rights. Then, they can progress to learning how to communicate their self-knowledge and rights to others. Finally, after achieving the first three components of self-advocacy, people can begin engaging in leadership. Test et al. offer, "the conceptual framework reflects the fact that self-advocacy occurs at various levels, not that individuals must master all components, including leadership, to be self-advocates" (52). So, while self-advocacy develops, people may exhibit varying levels of these components and do not need to "master" all of them in order to become self-advocates. In the following discussion, I examine how Maya and Nico embodied each of these components during their participation in the workshop and through the creation of digital stories.

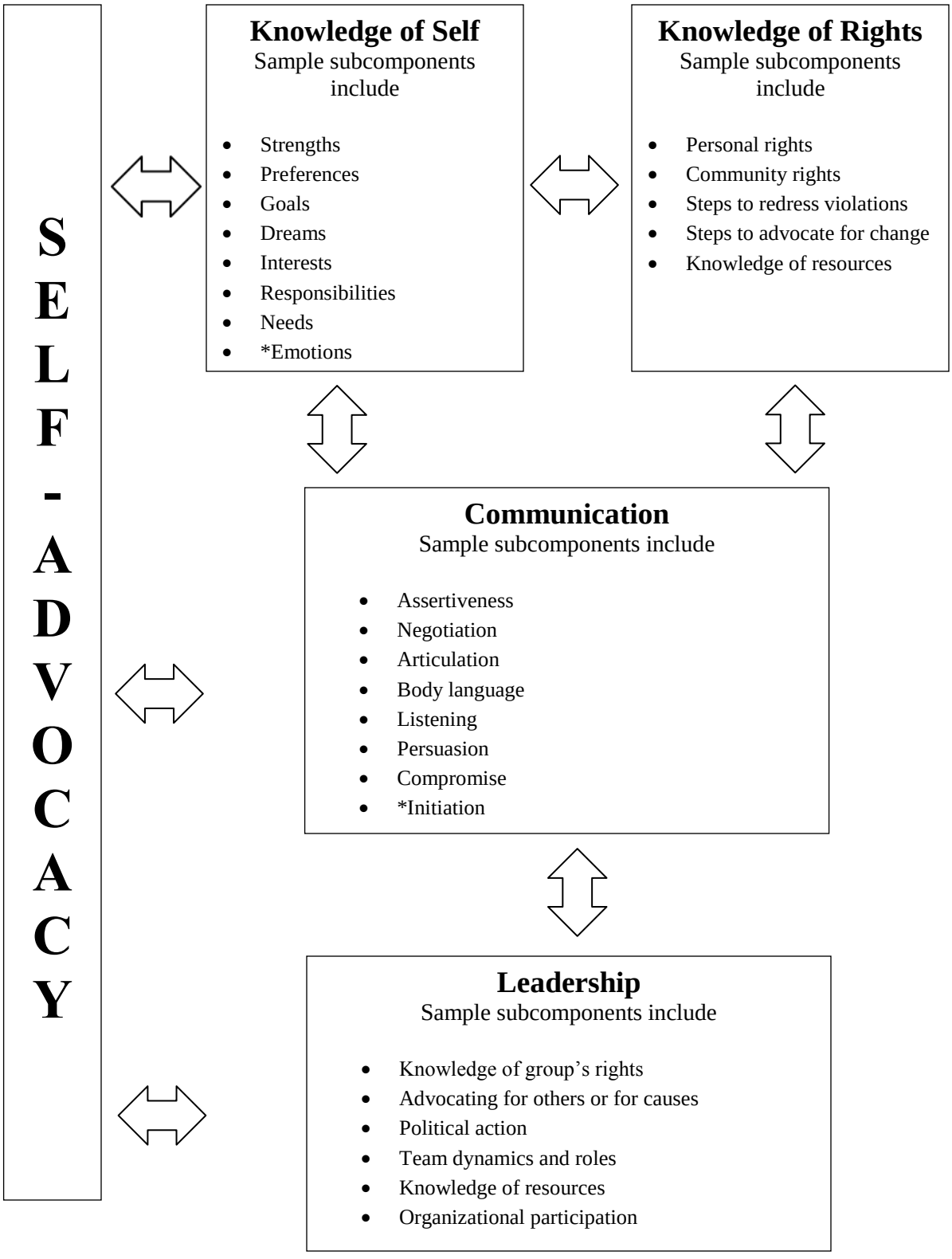


Figure 4: Self-advocacy Framework

YOUTH ENACTING SELF-ADVOCACY

Knowledge of Self

In this Yellow Ribbon workshop, we asked participants to bring themselves into the room and work from an autobiographical space as they shared stories from their lives, which offered opportunities for young people to build knowledge of self. As youth explored their "strengths, preferences, goals, dreams and interests" (Test et al. 49), they had to name their perspectives and deepen their self-knowledge. Through Maya's storytelling and writing process, she explored her ideas about herself, most notably what I name knowledge of her emotional self. After learning about her family dynamic through the focus group discussion, I realized that Maya's sharing of her story of deployment, really any story of deployment, represented a huge risk—and perhaps a risk unprecedented for her or her family. I believe that you have to understand how you feel about something in order to communicate it or move on to other components of self-advocacy. Maya's work throughout the day revolved around her choosing to venture into an emotional space that she purposefully kept hidden in the past and early on in the workshop. Her digital story reflects her journey of coming to terms with some of her emotions related to a specific moment when she missed her dad, and, to some extent, her feelings about deployment in general. Maya's multiple revisions of her story depict her journey to clarify her feelings and the story of this memory. Maya's knowledge of self was complicated by her relationships—her immediate family at home and her deployed father—and her ability to move past these relationships and take time to come to herself and focus on her feelings allowed her to sharpen her self-knowledge.

Throughout Nico's digital storytelling process, he also explored and communicated knowledge of self. He expressed his viewpoint on deployment, suggesting a lack of emotion about it: "I have no emotion for this since he's really not going to do

combat" (Digital Story Transcript). Despite his claim to lack emotions about deployment, he was exercising self-advocacy with regards to deployment—by his refusal to "put on" feelings when he didn't think he had any to share. Even in his refusal to name feelings, Nico still put forward a clear knowledge of self in this moment: that he felt unaffected emotionally by deployment. Naming a lack of emotion is an act of self-advocacy and complicates the notion that we must "reveal" something in order to self-advocate. However, his initial point of view was complicated during our final interview and his comment that, perhaps, no one has ever asked him how he feels about deployment. This revelation within the interview demonstrated another moment of self-advocacy as he shared a new aspect of his perspectives and needs. Nico also accessed the subcomponent of "interests" in an embodied way through the workshop. Through his story, Nico made it clear that his hobbies revolved around designing and playing videogames. The medium of digital storytelling allowed Nico to tap into his interests while telling the story of his passions of designing, creating, and playing videogames. While Nico wasn't as excited by writing his story, his innovation and investment in mediating his narrative into video and photographs told a different story. Nico was able to use the digital technology to share his proficiency with the medium and honor his other media-related hobby, exercising his knowledge of self not only through words, but through the action of crafting a digital story.

In addition to exploring the various aspects of self-knowledge, I would offer that youth in this process identified their place in the process of deployment, as well as named what this process meant to them. The digital stories were tributes to knowledge of self when youth shared the uniquely individual stories that defined their experiences with deployment. In these stories, they expressed their viewpoints, their challenges, their victories, and their emotions surrounding these events.

Knowledge of Rights

Knowledge of rights, another element of the self-advocacy framework, shows up in youths' articulation of "personal rights, community rights, steps to redress violations, steps to advocate for change and knowledge of resources" (Test et al. 49). In reflecting on our workshop, this component of self-advocacy was notably absent from my intentions when I began the workshops, as well as the content that I built for the workshops themselves. However, my community partners and the structure of the Yellow Ribbon events themselves provided youth with increased access to and awareness of their resources.

I believe the knowledge of rights component of self-advocacy does have a place in applied theatre and digital storytelling programs. After working with Maya and Nico, it became clear to me that they might benefit from access and knowledge to peer-group activities with other National Guard youth, and perhaps access to Military Family Life counselors. They both arrived at some vulnerable spaces by the end of the workshop—Maya sharing a story of disappointment and Nico confiding the reason he stays in his room playing videogames. I wish we had a counselor in the room with us participating in the workshop, like we did at our first workshop. It would have been an accessible, unobtrusive way for youth to feel supported by the National Guard community and understand the resources available to them. In order for applied theatre practitioners to access the knowledge of rights component, I believe that they must intentionally research and plan these engagements so that they serve the communities and participants with which they work. While the function of my workshops was not to increase awareness of rights and resources, my partnership with National Guard Child and Youth Programs helped to support me in this aspect, while it may not have been always visible to youth.

Communication

Examining the digital storytelling workshop and stories themselves through the lens of the communication component reveals many useful insights. Subcomponents of communication include "body language, listening, persuasion, articulation and assertiveness" (49). Applied theatre and digital storytelling work require constant, clear communication with youth explaining their ideas, opinions, and needs, as well as asserting themselves in their artistic and storytelling choices. Communication manifests itself in Maya's work in a myriad of ways. First, there was the level of her asserting to me, as a facilitator, when she was uncertain or frustrated by the process. She also worked very hard to articulate her story through multiple revisions and her attention to creating a dynamic visual life for the story. Maya's use of communication also revealed another aspect of communication to me—the ability to initiate communication where there wasn't any, in essence, "breaking the silence." Through her digital story, Maya broke the silence in her family and, perhaps, shared a story that had never been shared before, both with her brother and her mom. In this family, the digital stories became a site of self-advocacy for the siblings to express feelings that they don't appear to express at home. Since they created a digital story together, they literally constructed a space of dialogue for themselves—writing, sharing, performing, and crafting images for their stories and putting them in conversation with one another digitally. In this way, they opened up communication on a family level.

Throughout the workshop, Nico exercised various elements of communication necessary for self-advocacy. At the beginning of the process, Nico had to work harder to articulate his story both when he was writing and when he dictated the details to me. He had to respond to my questions and communicate his memory clearly to me in order for me to write it down. In his choice to create a video instead of using photographs, Nico

demonstrated his ability to work with the facilitators to communicate what he needed. He also worked with the whole group of adult facilitators and youth participants to direct and envision his video. Lastly, Nico negotiated for his needs when he made the decision to not record his narrative. In this moment, he advocated for himself and came up with the solution of Chad performing in his place. In these ways, Nico's communication manifested itself in personal as well as interpersonal ways throughout the workshop.

Throughout the process, the youth used body language and embodiment to aid in the telling of their stories. This embodiment allowed them to further articulate their experiences rather than relying on verbally telling their stories alone. Additionally, in order for them to share their stories with the group, they had to work on articulating the story—finding the essence of the memory and writing it in a way that was clear to an audience of their peers and parents. The articulation that happened was not only verbal and written, but also relied on the creation of their visual images in the form of photographs and short films. In order for each group to create their collaborative digital story, they had to exercise listening skills in order to work together to create images for each story. The process asked them to honor the intent of the storyteller by creating images to support their narrative, as well as edit the story together into a single, cohesive digital file. The editing process itself is a site of listening, negotiation, and compromise as youth bring their ideas to the group, or their partner, and collectively make decisions. Throughout the workshop, communication functioned in multiple ways—the youth communicated to their peers, as well as the facilitators and adults in the room, and through the art product itself. The digital stories also communicated the youths' emotions, perspectives, and unique stories to an audience of their family and community members. The performative nature of applied theatre and digital storytelling allowed us to craft art products to share in a public setting while inviting an audience to engage in

the active listening and receiving of the digital stories, as well as involving the audience in dialogue about what they saw and how they felt after viewing the stories.

Leadership

Finally, the youth engaged in elements of leadership, another element of self-advocacy, through this process as well, however, after reflecting on our work together, I realize that this was another accidental engagement. Within my framework for self-advocacy, leadership is characterized by young people's "knowledge of group's rights, advocating for others or for causes, political action and organizational participation" (Test et al. 49). It was never my intention for the participants to become youth leaders or engage in a social justice act within our short workshop structure. However, over the course of both workshops, I began to wonder how the presence of the military—in the form of staff and officials—influenced viewing and perceived intent of the digital stories. While I encouraged the youth to tell their personal stories, the act of creating collective digital stories and viewing the stories in succession, with an audience, started to create a collective narrative that could be seen as speaking to a larger group's (military youth) needs. I believe this act could be seen as the leadership subcomponent of advocating for others or for causes, as youth voices and perspectives became visible through the viewing of the digital stories. Additionally, this semi-public sharing of youth stories could be seen as political action, as youth reveal perspectives generally invisible within the military system and bring their bodies, voices, and experiences into an adult-centered space. This step of visibility leads to the possibility of shared leadership between youth and adults, which Freire maintains is vital for change to take place: "The revolution is made neither by the leaders for the people, nor by the people for the leaders, but by both acting together in unshakable solidarity" (129). In other words, taking action in communion as

leaders and "the people" is imperative to shift systems of power and initiate change or "revolution" (129). In this study, I began to see how youth-allied adults could begin working in partnership with youth to increase their visibility and voice within the National Guard community, taking steps toward shared leadership.

CONCLUSION

Using the self-advocacy framework to analyze the experience of Maya and Nico within this applied theatre workshop illuminated some exciting questions and insights about youth self-advocacy in the production and sharing of autobiographical digital stories. I believe that, with the intentional application of this self-advocacy framework, digital storytelling can provide a space for youth perspectives to become even more visible, and in ways that youth control, within the military system. Over the course of this research, it became clear to me that applied theatre and digital storytelling practices are uniquely positioned to support the building and deepening of knowledge of self. This is especially true when participants are interrogating their own life experiences and investing in telling their stories. These digital stories reflect not just participants' unique memories, but they provide youth an alternative space to articulate their dreams, interests, needs, and emotions through a richly layered, multi-modal language. Placing youth in charge of the production of their stories allows them to intentionally author their identity and name their world, curating an artwork that allows them to communicate their stories to others.

While it wasn't a focus of my research, nor did it appear in my data, I believe applied theatre can also help participants develop knowledge of their rights. This must be done intentionally and be present in the goals of a given program in order to have suitable resources and supports in place. Intentionally researching and engaging with community

members is vital to understanding the needs of the community. Because applied theatre practitioners often visit and practice in places to which they do not belong, it is imperative to consider how to understand and engage resources that have relevance to the community in which you are working. One way this can happen is by cultivating community partnerships. In this study, my access to supportive, National Guard-specific resources occurred as a result of my community partnership. The Yellow Ribbon events already had these resources and supports in place, and I had access to them because of the way I was working within their system. Introducing participants to knowledge of their rights might also be integrated by a practitioner through their session-planning process. For me, although I considered the importance of youth rights and access to supportive resources during the logistical planning phase of the workshop structure, this framework was not the sole focus or goal of my session planning itself. While I had constant access to these resources if I needed them, my only interaction with a military family life counselor arose out of a youth-motivated necessity in the first workshop, rather than me seeking out their support during the process.

Communication is inherently apparent in the philosophy of applied theatre work as practitioners strive to make sure all voices are heard and foster dialogue within a community setting. The collaborative design of drama work and digital media production in this project created spaces where youth had to exercise negotiation and compromise as they created their digital stories. In addition to verbal communication, the nature of theatre and digital media is also such that communication is expanded to include sign systems and embodiment that may be absent from everyday conversation. This embodiment serves to deepen, expand, and perhaps even complicate our understandings of an artist's intentions. This complication can become a challenge when an audience member is "reading" an artist's work and interpreting something the artist didn't expect.

However, this adds to the richness of dialogue around an artwork and provides audience members the ability to access the work from their own unique entry points, drawing on their life experiences and viewpoints as a lens through which to view the art. While this complication can be fruitful, it causes me to wonder: When engaging youth in creative processes, is there a need to contextualize the artwork in order to protect the artist from misinterpretation?

Lastly, fostering the component of leadership was a challenge in this specific project. It was never my intention to position my participants as leaders or for them to engage in political action. However, through the politics of the space and the stakeholders involved, their storytelling became a political act. And through this process, I realized that sharing one's story is always a political and potentially risky endeavor. Applied theatre is a space where community members can often reverse hegemonic power dynamics within their communities. However, I believe building true leadership and the ability to sustain or maintain power takes time, as well as the support of larger systems beyond an individual's control. In the limited amount of time I had with my participants, asking them to embody leadership was an unfair and, perhaps, unreachable goal to set for them, although we certainly aimed to share power within the structure of our workshop.

This work continues to raise many questions for me: What are the extra considerations we need to make as applied theatre practitioners with the goal of participants achieving self-advocacy? Can the intentional application of a self-advocacy framework guide our work to empower silenced voices?

Chapter 5: Conclusion

We sit, nursing our coffee in the stadium lounge of the University of Texas, stealing moments of reflection between our busy class and work schedules. Laurie, a student and part-time Operation: Military Kids (OMK) staff member was the first person I met when I began volunteering with OMK last April. I assisted her during my very first Yellow Ribbon event, when they had double the amount of youth show up and needed help coordinating the sheer amount of youth. Then, she assisted me during my first digital storytelling workshop in Austin, when I was still refining my workshop plan and my research measures.

It is December and all of my thesis workshops are over. Two weeks before, there was a Yellow Ribbon event in Dallas and Laurie attended alone, armed with the OMK iPads and my original digital storytelling workshop plan. At this event, Laurie facilitated a digital storytelling workshop on her own, combining activities she saw me teach at our first event with some activities of her own. She smiles and laughs as she recounts her experience with the youth. She tells me the most successful thing was:

> [...] getting the kids to talk about, in a creative way, how they were going to be feeling about the situation [of having a parent deployed]. Instead of it being something that's cut and dry and boring. And even the ones that didn't actually record their own sentences, they helped their friends out and they played the role of the dad, the role of the little brother or sister. Getting them to talk about that situation was pretty easy and pretty successful. (Personal Interview 16 Dec. 2013)

Laurie shared how she guided the youth through the workshop by asking them questions about how they were feeling and making sure not to prescribe emotions to them, "I encouraged them to talk and asked 'Well what do you think about this? What is your opinion? Do you have any stories to tell?' And the other kids would encourage them to talk, so they were helping each other out" (Personal Interview 16 Dec. 2013). I see her

get excited as she describes the dynamic in the room, the youth having fun playing ensemble games and learning how to use iMovie on the iPads. She talks about the ways she facilitated, which in many ways mirrored my own—encouraging dialogue and providing opportunities for youth to exercise agency in theatre games. She also shared her challenges with shy youth who weren't ready to engage with the others. There was also a moment, very much like our first workshop with Audra, where a young man wrote his story, but didn't want to record it or make a digital story. In the moment, she created options for youth who didn't want to share.

> There were some kids who didn't want to record their stories because they might have felt uncomfortable or embarrassed and so I gave them the option—they could, but they didn't have to—to maybe just give the paper to their parents if they didn't want to record. And so they ended up helping their friends record. (Personal Interview 16 Dec. 2013)

In this instance, she supported youth agency and engaged them in supporting each other's digital stories. Laurie's experience, specifically her willingness to try out digital storytelling as an applied theatre practice, gets me excited to think about how digital storytelling and applied theatre practice may find a home within Texas: Operation Military Kids programming in the future.

REFLECTIONS ON OUTCOMES

This document explores how National Guard youth engaged in a digital storytelling workshop within an applied theatre framework in order to increase their voice and visibility within the National Guard community. The creative process invited youth to investigate their emotions, ideas, and perspectives around the deployment cycle. This study left me with big ideas around digital storytelling's relationship to creating community with National Guard youth, providing spaces for youth agency in naming and

depicting deployment, and digital stories becoming a site for youth to self-advocate for their needs and feelings.

Through this process, youth engaged in dialogue and storytelling which unveiled their common markings, helping to build relationships between youth and allowing youth to see themselves in each other. While the digital storytelling process offered opportunities for our participants to name, see, and represent common experiences among the group, we also used the digital stories as a space to acknowledge and celebrate difference, rather than assume that all youth shared common perspectives. In this way, we were able to see past the common identity marker of youth being "military" or "National Guard" and interrogate how multi-layered this experience can be for different people. Helen Nicholson states:

> [...] the construction and shaping of local communities, a recurring theme in applied drama is not so much a matter of recovering or rediscovering the lost narratives of a homogenous past, but of making a contribution to redefining their actual and symbolic boundaries in the present and for the future. (84)

As Nicholson suggests, in the process of crafting digital stories that acknowledged and celebrated difference for this community of National Guard youth, we helped deepen and extend, for most of us involved, understandings of what it means to belong to a military family. I believe creating a community that accepted and celebrated difference helped youth empathize with one another and encouraged an environment where they could exercise agency and risk taking in naming.

In this study, participants began to name deployment for themselves and for a semi-public audience of family and peers. This naming, through embodied representations, digital photography, storytelling, and dialogue, invited youth to claim their perspectives publicly with their peers, and for some, in a community sharing with parents and National Guard staff and volunteers. This study helped me understand how

using digital stories as a site of naming also invites youth to create multi-faceted meanings, where the digital assets (narration, images, and music) come together to build meaning visually and otherwise. Along the way, I also discovered that our digital assets did not always unite to make meaning in solidarity, as some of the digital stories became a site where the various assets strained against one another to produce conflicting, multi-dimensional meanings. For example, Audra's story, which presented a calm narrative of the importance of cleaning, conflicted with her photographs that were filled with tension and anger. Through their process of naming and representing their ideas and experiences, youth portrayed the messiness and complexity of deployment. This pushed against some of the adult-constructed definitions of deployment I witnessed in youth programming which often felt neat and orderly, and assumed youth all experience deployment in the same ways. When I began this study, I wasn't sure that youth would want to explore the challenging parts of deployment with me, as both a stranger and an outsider of their community. I was challenged as a researcher to support my participants as a youth ally, but also sought to satisfy the goals of my research for each youth to create and share a digital story.

Through this work, I was constantly reminded that, while naming can be a messy, complicated process, it can also be a vulnerable act. The early experience of supporting Audra and other youth opened my eyes to the challenges that accompany the act of telling and sharing one's story—which I hoped would be empowering and celebratory. The youth reminded me that putting our perspectives out into the world, especially if/when we are in a position with little power, is sometimes a risky and political act. As an applied theatre practitioner who wants to embrace a critically engaged, ethical practice, I was invited to revisit many critical questions with this study. The practice and the theory raised a lot of questions for me about who this work serves, as well as how and

why. When we enter a project with specific expectations (for example: a public sharing), how do we safely veer off course and support everyone in the room, while satisfying our original expectations? How do we mediate a desire for shareable outcomes, a digital story sharing, with the fact that youth are telling deeply personal stories?

While this project, and the requisite naming, came with challenges, some of the youth still shared their digital stories in the public sphere of our workshop space, and then again in the more public sharing. In these moments of performing the work, I realized the sharing itself became a site of activism. The youths' stories became more than an artifact of an experience—they became a space of self-advocacy for the young participants. This process went beyond naming and celebrating their experiences as military youth; rather, it became a site of active participation in the National Guard community and within their own families—speaking up for their feelings and needs and making them visible, with the possibility of inspiring action or change. With further attention to this work and its possibilities, youth participation in self-advocacy could call for action and/or initiate dialogue with family members. In this study, the youths' stories also reached beyond their immediate families and into the community consciousness, sparking dialogue among higher-ranking military officials and support staff in our post-show discussions and sharings. Through our semi-public sharing of the digital stories, the youth drew a circle of community beyond just our workshop space into the larger military sphere.

SUSTAINABILITY

Concerns

At the very beginning of my thesis work, after meeting with OMK and learning about the one-day youth programs they offered, I was concerned about how my applied theatre work could fit into their program structure. Their programs revolved around

abbreviated, "one shot" workshops for youth and families. In their current model, they offered limited extended programs. In my past experience, I worked with programs which embraced education scholar Thomas Guskey's ideas about the success of programs and partnerships which are "intentional, ongoing, and systemic" (16). My background in longer-term, or ongoing, projects influenced my perspectives about the potential for quality, effective programming in one-off, short-term workshops. Thus, I came to this project with preconceived notions about quality programming which were rooted in ongoing, long-term engagements with young people. I wanted to work with military youth, but I had questions about how to work within the structures set up by my community partner while still meeting my own core values as an applied theatre practitioner. Throughout this research, I learned I had to complicate my own notions of quality programming, including the value of one-time engagements with youth and building partnerships and programs that do not necessarily need my presence to continue.

Community Involvement

One way I worked to challenge myself in this regard was to build relationships and community with my OMK partners. Early on in this study, I offered a two-hour digital storytelling professional development in order to build buy-in to my study and get to know the volunteer youth workers I would interact with throughout my research study. While I didn't study this professional development session for my thesis, this workshop laid the foundation for my interactions with this community of youth workers and set up a space of mutual learning. The same staff and volunteers assisted me through the two Yellow Ribbon event digital storytelling workshops I led with young people. They were an invaluable resource as they shared their expertise in military culture with me. As assistants in the workshop, they helped youth navigate iMovie using skills we developed

in the professional development workshop. Spending time with the youth workers to teach them about my work was invaluable throughout the research process, as they were able to observe and reflect on the youths' engagement in the workshop through the lens of former participants. It also allowed me to build a sustained engagement with the National Guard and OMK community of volunteers and staff members, which I was unable to do with the youth participants.

My ongoing engagement with Texas: Operation Military Kids and National Guard Child and Youth Programs has shown me that there is a need and desire for programming like digital storytelling and applied theatre, which engages youth in processing their thoughts and feelings in relation to deployment. After the first Yellow Ribbon workshop. one National Guard volunteer shared:

> I think that overall, this project was a great experience for all of those involved in collecting valuable information on how to better work with military youth in a way that provides them to be mentally and physically active. The latent traits that the military youth were learning from all of the activities before the actual digital story creation were also a fantastic method to challenge the kids with new and probably uncomfortable situations, giving them great tools from which they can pull from when they are in a similar situation outside the workshop. (Post-process Questionnaire 2 Nov. 2013)

This volunteer talks about the idea that the research helped "all those involved" to learn other active ways to engage with youth, both mentally and physically. This reflection, paired with Laurie's reflections, causes me to think that the community of youth workers in this space also benefitted from participating in the workshops as another professional development opportunity, and they may have learned new strategies for working with youth that can be used in the future.

As I worked longer in the military community, the youth workers in this setting further integrated my practice and me into their world. I became engaged in the

community in a whole new way once I started teaching workshops at Yellow Ribbon events. My community partner wrote about the workshops in her state-wide newsletters which OMK distributes to other employees and partnering organizations around Texas. Gina invited me to participate in monthly statewide conference calls to speak about my work and share my research findings. Volunteers and National Guard employees shared how they used the theatre ensemble games in other workshops with youth. My community partners have led this work on their own and adapted the materials slightly to include their own expertise in youth programming. In addition, I've stayed in dialogue with them about how to adapt the curriculum and ideas for different populations and demographics. Gina has since moved on to another organization and has been in contact about continuing digital storytelling with her current community of youth. These continued conversations demonstrate an element of sustainability that is key for military programming and reaching families for whom regular meetings and engagements over time doesn't prove realistic or possible.

Challenges to Sustainability

While the community of youth workers was excited by the practices of applied theatre and digital storytelling, they were not totally without reservations about continuing the work without me. Gina, my community partner at OMK, shared that this process differed from their usual programming because:

> [...] it delves a little deeper than what we normally do. Our stuff tries to be recreational, not that this wasn't. This [the digital storytelling workshop] had the potential to bring up emotions, and that's always frightening working with these kids, because [...] I'm not a trained counselor so that's why it's good to do it at the Yellow Ribbon Events. Because those counselors are there, so if something did evoke something emotionally—they were there. I personally, when I plan

> programs, I try to avoid things like that. It's not that I don't want it. I just don't want to mislead a child. (Personal Interview 17 Dec. 2013)

In Gina's reflection, she brings up the idea of youth programming being recreational, as opposed to these workshops, which dealt with challenging emotions. To me, this statement reveals a need for youth programming which safely and creatively addresses youths' perspectives and emotions, without the healing goals of therapy. I don't believe that applied theatre should avoid emotional engagement, but, as a practitioner, it is important to note the difference between sharing stories and empathizing with each other versus healing goals of working through problems and trying to come up with a solution or resolution about those feelings. I worry that if military youth are only able to access their emotions about these issues with a therapist present, then they are missing out on the opportunity to connect with other youth who may be experiencing similar emotions and events, which further isolates them from a community of peers. Joe Lambert offers that. in his practice with the Center for Digital Storytelling, they do not market their work as creating an environment for a formal "healing process," but:

> [...] it would be inconceivable, incomprehensible, and irresponsible if we do not recognize the emotional and spiritual consequence of this work [...] Today what we know is that when you gather people in a room, and listen, deeply listen, to what they are saying, and also, by example, encourage others to listen, magic happens. The magic is simple. And we do not have many safe places to be heard. Sharing personal and reflective storytelling in a group is a privilege, and for many of us, a sacred trust. (*Capturing Lives* 83-84)

As Lambert offers, "magic happens" in these spaces we create: between storyteller and audience, between youth and adults, between naming the world and changing it. As a practitioner, I am excited to continue striving to create "safe places to be heard" and building connections between people while valuing their unique stories and perspectives. I believe practitioners can ethically engage in this work and protect youth by listening

deeply to youth needs and desires, as well as intentionally collaborating with community partners to ensure youth have access to additional resources (such as counseling), if the need should arise.

New Perspectives on Sustainability

Reflecting back on Guskey's theory of partnerships as "intentional, ongoing, and systemic" (16), I believe I was able to embody these ideas in my research practice, just not the way I originally anticipated. I originally only considered these ideas in the context of the youth—intentional practice, ongoing exposure and face time, and, maybe, systemic support and buy-in for the project itself. Now, I realize that I did access these elements, but it happened with the greater community of adult allied youth workers that make up the volunteers and staff of both Texas Operation: Military Kids and National Guard Child and Youth Programs. Throughout this research process, I felt accepted by them and encouraged to share my work and ideas. They generously accepted and embodied some of my practices into their current work. While I wasn't studying how to impact or shift this aspect of the system, it was intriguing that these adult allies embraced the work so ambitiously. It excites me to think about how this shifts my original ideas of an ongoing practice in that it may not be ongoing contact with the same youth, but the work may continue past my engagement with the community as it reaches more youth through their programming.

FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

In Research

As I moved through this research process, I negotiated many limitations to the work. The amount of face time I had with youth challenged my goals and desires around creating a community built on longer term relationships. Because of the structure of Yellow Ribbon events, we only had one day to meet each other, hone in on the story we wanted to tell, write the story, and craft and edit all of the digital assets into a digital story. This process was very condensed and didn't allow for a lot of time to explore different stories or change our minds about how to communicate the final stories. The youths' experience was also difficult to evaluate because, at the end of a long workshop, youth and families were ready to go home, so extended questionnaires or interview processes were not possible. Additionally, there was a quick turnaround in reflection time, as youth shared their digital stories with an audience, then filled out a post-process questionnaire, and participated in a focus group moments after. In several cases, I found a lack of depth and clarity in youths' written responses, which may have been due in part to the difficulty of reflecting on an experience immediately and after a long day of work.

In future research processes, I am excited to think about how to reflect with youth during and after the process, as well as providing some time away from the workshop for them to gain some perspective on the work. Additionally, I think it is important to conduct focus groups or interviews, in order to follow up and invite youth to expand on and clarify their reflections about the work. The one focus group I conducted helped me glean a richer perspective about how youth experienced the workshop, as they communicated easily verbally, and I could read their facial expressions and hear the emotion in their voices.

Another aspect of this work I would like to intentionally focus on in further research is the importance of the sharing at the end of process. This research focused on process and spent less time thinking about the function of sharing the product of the digital stories within the overall research design. It became clear through this research that publicly sharing the work with families and community members added a new dimension to the work and was imperative to the process of creation. Through the talk-back discussions I had with audiences, I realized adult perspectives were altered in some way by viewing the digital stories. This speaks to my research question of how digital storytelling can increase youth voice and visibility in the National Guard community. Only by including adult perspectives in the research can I deepen my understanding of if and how youth voice and visibility is increased in these spaces. In future research, I would love to examine this further.

Additionally, my data collection and analysis also suggests that moments of community-building primarily occurred, or was observed, during our applied theatre work, such as theatre games, telling stories, creating frozen images together, and unpacking our poster dialogues. These moments point to the relational practices of applied theatre. Currently, my data presents a more limited viewpoint of how the digital media activities specifically supported a practice of building community. This may be the result of several things. First, drama games and exercises are embodied and reliant on people's physical bodies meeting each other in space, negotiating contact and boundaries, and often working together to achieve success. There is constant interaction and engagement from the participants. Secondly, I acknowledge this gap in data points to my greater expertise in applied theatre practices, coupled with my lesser, but growing knowledge in digital storytelling and how the practice of creating digital media can be relational or socially engaged in a group process. After moving through this project, I

better understand the practice of integrating applied theatre practices into the process of creating digital stories. I believe I could deepen this practice by imagining even more collaborative, embodied ways to produce digital assets such as photographs, video, and voice-overs. Moreover, in future research, I will intentionally look at how youth negotiated taking photographs and combining their stories and images into a collective digital story. As a new practitioner to digital storytelling, I realize that much of the social interactions and negotiations around making media are not documented in my field notes or addressed by my questionnaires and interview questions. Going forward, I am interested in how we negotiate a camera in relationship to live bodies. How do we rely on one another to create and engage with digital media? And how do we build understandings about ourselves and others within a mediated creative process? Artist and educator Kelly Wissman envisions how photography can become a social practice concerned with personal, social, and political purposes and offers that this "requires considering learning spaces as profoundly social spaces and nurturing the development of new kinds of relational practices within those spaces" (39-41). As I move forward integrating digital media into my applied theatre work, I want to imagine how photography can embody the relational ethos of applied theatre, which requires us to see each other, to dialogue, to empathize with one another, and to work together to create.

In Practice

My community partner, Gina, also suggested that the digital stories themselves are a site of reintegration for military families. During our final interview, I asked her, "Based on your work with me this fall, is there anything you want to take with you or keep doing?" She spoke about the possibility of sharing the digital story as an act of reintegration:

> [I want to continue] Giving them [military youth] a space to continue to express themselves through digital stories, and to share with their families. That's big too, that helps reunite the family. And we saw that—the arms go around the child as they are watching it. The lean over and give them a hug and a kiss. [Parents saying] "I'm proud of you." A lot of our [OMK] focus is reintegration and getting the families back together and I think that helps unify the family when you do things like that. It helps the "gone" parent see the things that were missed and it allows the kids to feel special and express themselves. (Closing Interview 17 Dec. 2013)

In Gina's reflection, she doesn't just note the importance of sharing the digital stories. She explains the physical and emotional reactions of the parents, and how she perceived the action of viewing the stories to "[help] reunite the family." In future work and studies, I will continue to think about how the practice of digital storytelling can become a site for families to begin the reintegration process and help fill in the holes that deployment has left. For digital storytelling to help address this need, I believe it should become intergenerational, where families come together to create digital stories around a shared theme or topic. Helen Nicholson offers that, "In intergenerational storytelling, narratives previously located in specific spaces and times come to belong to both generations, and it becomes unclear which generation is the subject or object of the work" (106). In other words, when multiple generations come together and tell stories, the stories find a home with both generations and become shared. So, the dialogic nature of applied theatre practice can begin conversations between family members, rebuilding connections through dialogue and through the relational practices of applied theatre. Families can come together and own all of the perspectives of deployment without privileging one or the other and move forward towards reintegration together.

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

As Laurie and I finish our coffee, preparing to scurry off to our respective work, I ask her one last question: "After working with me this fall, is there anything you want to take with you and continue doing?" She shares:

> Not pressuring them [the kids] to feel any way. I think it's kind of silly that people say "you should feel sad because your parents deployed" and sometimes they're just fine. So I think they should have an opportunity to express whatever they're feeling and not try to force feelings on them. (Closing Interview 16 Dec. 2013)

Laurie's closing thoughts on our time together leave me with so much hope for the way we engage with military youth in the future. I now believe that digital storytelling as an applied theatre practice supports and cultivates community among National Guard youth. Through this research process, I saw how it created spaces for youth agency to own their perspectives and experiences and name them for themselves and their world—in both personal and public acts of self-advocacy. I still have big questions about the ethical considerations to ensure that this work errs on the side of art-making and not therapy. I also wonder about the impact of community youth workers replicating this work without fully understanding the pedagogical background of applied theatre.

As I continue my professional journey, I've set my compass to lead me in discovering, and perhaps creating, nurturing community-driven spaces where all youth can name their experiences and perspectives and be heard. If I hit a detour along the way, I feel ready to step off the path and embrace the unknown, armed with questions that drive me to seek out the answers—or perhaps, more questions.

Appendix A: Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Workshop Session Plan

Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Workshop
Austin, TX

8:00-8:45 Introduction and Getting to Know You

Introduction (5 minutes)
Hi everyone! We're so happy to have you with us today. (Introduce Spring and Meg) You are in this group because your parents said it was okay for you to participate in a workshop that is part of a research project. This research is exploring how to use theatre and digital storytelling to share stories between military youth (kids). Does anyone know what a digital story is? A digital story is a short film that uses images, narration and music to tell a story. Today we're going to create digital stories about your own life experiences. Even though your parents said it was okay for you to participate in the research, we want to make sure that you want to as well. We are going to pass around this form.

Oral Reading of Assent Form (8 minutes)
Let's take a few minutes to read it aloud together. You can pass if you don't feel like reading.

Does anyone have any questions? Everyone take a moment and decide if this workshop and research sounds like something you would like to participate in. If not, it's totally okay! If you want to participate, go ahead and sign your form.

Defining Re-integration (5-8 minutes)

You're all here for the same reason, because you are experiencing re-integration or the end of deployment. What is re-integration? What happens during it? Write these responses up on a large piece of paper

Thumb grab (5-8 minutes)—how could this game be a metaphor for re-integration or post deployment?

The truth about me (8-10 minutes)
Clear a space in the room and ask all youth to gather their chairs in a circle or to stand on space designated by a piece of tape. "One of our goals today is to take risks.

So I'm going to start this game by sharing something about me." facilitator stands in the middle and says, "The truth about me is . . ." and completes the sentence with a true statement about something they like or don't like, or a simple fact about them. When the statement is made, everyone that shares that characteristic must change places and find a new place in the circle. At the same time the person in the middle is also trying to get a spot. Whoever does not get a spot goes to the center and the game begins again. Side coach as needed with ideas: clothing, shoes, hair color, favorite food, sports team, movies, etc.

8:45-9:30 Ensemble Building

Stop/Go, Name/Jump, Knees/Arms

Invite youth to begin walking around the room. When the facilitator says "stop" youth should stop moving. When facilitator says "go," they can resume moving. When facilitator says "name" everyone says their name at the same time while continuing to move. When the facilitator says "knees" everyone taps their knees with their hands and continues moving. Lastly, if the facilitator says "arms" everyone lifts their arms in the air and returns them to their sides. Introduce each instruction slowly. Once youth have learned all of the instructions begin slowly reversing instructions "If I say stop you are going to go (and vice-versa)." Give them some time to master this, then reverse the next instruction "If I say name you are going to jump (and vice-versa)." After they've mastered this, reverse the last one "If I say knees you are going to lift your arms in the air (and vice-versa)." Once they have mastered this, invite youth to become the facilitators and the facilitator can participate.

People to People

Invite youth to begin walking around the room. When the facilitator says "People to people," youth must find a partner and stand back to back. The facilitator gives an instruction such as "elbow to elbow" and each pair will touch elbows. The facilitator might then say "elbow to knee" and each student must find a way to touch their partner's knee with their elbow. The facilitator gives two or three instructions to the pairs, then invites them to begin walking around the room again. When the facilitator says, "People to people" again youth find another partner and the facilitator gives the partners two or three new instructions. Repeat this process a few times offering youth challenges to problem-solve with their partners.

Body part options: hand to hand, shoulder to shoulder, hip to hip, knees, elbows, etc. After they get comfortable with the game, ask youth for ideas. Challenge them by getting into bigger groups of 3-5.

9:30-9:40 BREAK

9:40-11:45 Storytelling

Transition: Welcome back, everyone! Now we are to the point in our time together where we are going to start creating some assets to use for our digital stories. ***Assets can mean photos, videos, sound or narration.*** *We are going to work together to create these assets, then after lunch you will be working with your group to edit them together into your digital story. We are going to be sharing personal stories, so if at any time you feel uncomfortable, or just don't want to share, that's always an option—just take care of yourself in this space.*

Continuum (10 minutes) 9:40-9:50

- I like to tell stories
- I like to perform
- I consider myself an artist
- I've grown up using a computer
- This was my first experience with deployment
- While they were gone, I communicated with my parent through technology
- There was a special moment in my life that my parent missed (Discuss, share out)
- Life has changed since deployment (Share with partner, or group, see if there is an agreement in the group)

Transition: So, we are going to continue thinking about these ideas by doing an activity called poster dialogue.

Poster Dialogue (10-15 minutes) 9:50-10:05

Write words, phrases, draw an image—anything that helps you communicate what the deployment process was like for you. If you agree with something that another person has written, put a check mark next to it. We are going to play music while you do this, but please do this activity in silence. Make sure to visit each poster at least once.

Posters:
Before they left
While they were gone
Now that they're back

Reflect: Put the posters next to each other and popcorn the ideas out. What do we have in common? What do we see that is different?

Tableaux (10-12 minutes) 10:05-10:17

- Use these poster dialogues to create large group images to tell the story of each stage of deployment.
- Use people to people to get them into groups of three.
- In your group, create one image that tells the story of re-integration.
- Bring around the iPads, take the picture.
- Challenge: now create an image that tells the story of re-integration without using your faces. Think about how close or far away something is and perspective. Think about how to use your body in different ways.

Transition: So now we are going to really focus in on this last poster dialogue: Now that they're back. (If this is not working, or falls flat—switch to a different one in the moment) Everyone get a notecard and a pen and find your own place in the room.

5 Word stories (10 minutes) 10:17-10:30

Write a story about a moment that defines/exemplifies reintegration/post-deployment. The challenge is that you can only use 5 words to tell this story.

Share examples:
A moment that exemplifies high school—"Nobody asked me to homecoming."
"Won my first poetry prize."

Share out stories. Now take a moment and think about how you can flesh this story out. Think about—what is the beginning, middle and end? Turn your card over and write down the BME.

Story Circle (25-30 minutes) 10:30-11:00

- Form two concentric circles, match up with a partner.

- You have 1 minute to share your story with your partner. Think about telling the **beginning, middle and end**. Keep talking until I say stop. Partner: What questions do you have? What were you curious to know more about? Each partner shares.
- Next round: this time, focus on **adding more details** to this experience. What did you hear, see, smell, taste, feel? Make your partner feel like they were there. Partner: Questions and curiosities.
- Final round: this time, focus on the **first line of your story and the last line of your story**. Make it really clear how it begins and ends—how do you capture an audience's attention? How do you let them know the story is over? Partner: Questions and curiosities.
- Find your own private "writing desk" in the space. Write this story down on paper, thinking of all the things you just discovered and your partner's feedback.

Sharing and BME Tableaux Creation (15-20 minutes) 11:00-11:25
Get back into your small groups and share your stories. Create BME frozen image that tells that story. Take pictures of each image.

Write Transition One Liners
On a separate piece of paper, finish the sentence "Reintegration is..." These lines will go between your story and the other stories in your small group.

11:45-1:00 LUNCH

1:00-2:30 Building Digital Stories (Spring, volunteers and staff assist)

Transition: Welcome back everyone. Now it's time to start putting all of the assets you've created together into one digital story.

Scripting (15 minutes) 1:00-1:15
So you are each going to get a large piece of paper. On this paper, arrange all of your pieces in an order that makes sense to your group. Think about what story should go first, middle and last? You don't have to use all of your transition one-liners, but a structure might look like this (share butcher paper with structure). Decide which ones you want to use and where they fit.

Editing Stories (75 minutes) 1:15-2:30

- Walk them through editing—teach each part
- Look at your story and see if there are any places you need more images
- Create those pictures and drop them all into iMovie
- Once they are completed, download all stories onto Meg's computer. Or iPad.
- In case of technology glitches, sharing will take place as a gallery walk, where we have different groups at each station, or we rotate all together.

2:30-3:00/3:15 Screening Prep—share stories with each other

3:00/3:15-3:45/4:00 Screening Digital Stories

3:30-4:00 Clean up

Appendix B: Yellow Ribbon Deployment Workshop Session Plan

Yellow Ribbon Deployment Workshop
San Antonio, TX

8:00-8:30 Goals and Expectations with National Guard Youth Programs Staff

8:30-9:45 Introduction and Getting to Know You

Introduction (5 minutes) 8:35-8:40
Hi everyone! We're so happy to have you with us today. (Introduce facilitators: Meg & Chad) You are in this group because your parents said it was okay for you to participate in a workshop that is part of a research project. This research explores how to use theatre and digital storytelling to share stories between military youth (kids). Does anyone know what a digital story is? A digital story is a short film that uses images, narration and music to tell a story. Today we're going to create digital stories about your own life experiences and how you have been affected by deployment. At the end of the day, we are going to share these digital stories with your families.

Name Intro (10 minutes) 8:40-8:50
"I am the one who always".... Ex. My name is Meg and I am the one who always wants to eat chocolate.

Thumb Grab (5-8 minutes) 8:50-8:55
What did you do in this game? Why do you think an actor would need to play this game?

People to People (15 minutes) 8:55-9:10
Invite youth to begin walking around the room. When the facilitator says "People to people," youth must find a partner and stand back to back. The facilitator gives an instruction such as "elbow to elbow" and each pair will touch elbows. The facilitator might then say "elbow to knee" and each student must find a way to touch their partner's knee with their elbow. The facilitator gives two or three instructions to the pairs, then invites them to begin walking around the room again. When the facilitator says, "People to people" again youth find another partner and the facilitator gives the partners two or three new instructions. Repeat this process a few times offering youth challenges to problem-solve with their partners.

Body part options: hand to hand, shoulder to shoulder, hip to hip, knees, elbows, etc. After they get comfortable with the game, ask youth for ideas. Challenge them by getting into bigger groups of 3-5.

Then, use people to people to get them into partners and invite them to share stories based on the following prompts:

Partner stories:

- Tell your partner one thing that they couldn't tell just by looking at you.
- Tell your partner how long your parent/family member has been gone.
- Share: a moment that my parent/family member missed was…
- Share: something that is different while my family member is away is…
- In one sentence, tell your partner your least favorite thing about deployment.
- In one word, tell your partner the emotion that you felt most during deployment.
- Tell your partner what you are looking forward to the most when your parent gets home.

Poster Dialogue (15 minutes) 9:10-9:25

Write words, phrases, draw an image—anything that helps you communicate what the deployment process was like for you. If you agree with something that another person has written, put a check mark next to it. We are going to play music while you do this, but please do this activity in silence. Make sure to visit each poster at least once.

Posters:

- Before they left
- While they were gone
- Now that they're back

Reflect: Put the posters next to each other and popcorn the ideas out. What do we have in common? What do we see that is different? What emotions do these things bring up?—Attach emotions to actions.

Deployment Storyline Activity (20 minutes) 9:25-9:45

- Everyone gets a piece of plain white paper on a clipboard
- On your paper, draw a horizontal line across it. This is your deployment storyline.
- Draw a circle on the far left of the line. This is the moment you found out your parent or family member was being deployed. Write an emotion you felt.
- Draw a circle on the far right of the line. This is the moment your parent came home or is coming home. Write something that has changed or that you expect to change. Or, write something you are excited to do with them once they get home.
- Now, on your deployment storyline, place a moment where something funny happened while your parent was gone.
- Place a moment where you had more responsibility.
- Place a moment where you missed your family member the most.
- Place a big event that your family member missed.
- Look at all of these moments. You are going to choose one to focus on and use to create your digital story. We'll spend the rest of our time together working on telling this story.

9:45-10:00 BREAK

10:00-11:30 Creative Visual Storytelling

Story Selection (15 minutes) 10:00-10:15

- Choose one of the stories.
- Share the story with your neighbor.
- Write the beginning line of your story at the very top of your page. Next, write the very ending line at the bottom. Now, think about what the most important moment in your story is—write that in the middle. Now, fill in the gaps between each moment.
- If you finish, then fill in the spaces between with details about your story.

Storyboard Story (10 minutes) 10:15-10:25

Choose 3-5 things that you want to visually bring to life.
You are the director of your story! What are the images that you need to tell your story?

Transition: Now that we have the text of your story, we are going to start creating the visual life of this story. How are you going to show the emotion or the actions of this story? We are going to explore 3 different ways you can bring this story to life.

Digital Storytelling Tracks

Narration_____
Music_____
Images_____

[Scribe these visual storytelling methods on butcher paper as you go! Take all of the pictures on one iPad to use later!]

Abstract and Literal Photography (20 minutes) 10:25-10:45

Now we're going to start thinking about how to create the visual track of our digital stories. First, we are going to play with different ways to use photography to tell a story. We are going to use the emotion 'HAPPY' as an example (or ask them for a strong emotion). If we were going to create an image using our whole bodies that is 'HAPPY' what would that look like? Everyone freeze in 3-2-1! Take a few photographs on the iPad and share them with the group. What do we think about these? Do they show 'HAPPY'?

Get them into partners and give each pair an iPad. What if I challenged you to visually show 'HAPPY' using just your hands? Everyone create a frozen picture of 'HAPPY' with just your hands. Take a few images of 'HAPPY' hands, switching with your partner so you each have a chance to be the photographer and the subject of the photo.

Now, you are going to find objects in the room which visually show 'HAPPY.' You have two minutes to take a picture of objects which show the emotion of 'HAPPY.' Take a few images of 'HAPPY.'

Bring the photos back to the group and discuss: What do you see in this photo? What about this photo says 'HAPPY' to you?

iMovie Tutorial (20 minutes) 10:55-11:30

- Project iMovie on the screen while showing how to use the iMovie program.
- Show everyone how to drop their images and movies into iMovie (and turn off the sound of the clip.)
- Show them how to title their project and save it.

11:30-12:00 BREAK

12:00-1:00 LUNCH

1:00-1:15 Group Time with National Guard

Ensemble Game—Everyone's it Tag
In this version of tag everyone is it. If you get tagged, you have to squat down. Pay attention to who tagged you because if they get tagged you are back in the game. Play until everyone is energized!

Editing 1:20-2:15

Narration
- Decide how you want to tell your story!
- Are you the one narrating, or would you like someone else to? Do you want to work as a group to tell it together?
- Introduce possible vocal performance techniques: echo, unison, repeat, break it up.
- Rehearse a few times, then go somewhere quiet to record.

iMovie Tutorial Moment
- Show them how to stretch images before they record.
- Show them how to record.
- Then, show them how to adjust their pictures and videos to the recording.

BREAK 2:15-2:30 2:30-3:00 Digital Storytelling Finish Up—Youth Screening and Post-process Questionnaires

3:00-3:30 Digital Storytelling Sharing with Parents
3:30-3:45 Post-process Youth Focus Group

Appendix C: Youth Pre-Survey

Pre-process Questionnaire-Youth

Pseudonym _____

Age _____

What branch of military is your family affiliated with? _____

Who in your family is employed by the military? _____

How many deployments have you experienced? (circle) 1 2 3 4 5+

How long was the deployment(s)? _____

While my family member was deployed, I communicated with them by:
(circle all that apply)

Email Motomail Texting Skype Phone Facebook Twitter Letters

Other: _____

Please answer the following statements by circling the number which best describes how you feel.

I belong to the military community.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

There are other young people in military families in my community (school, church, neighborhood, etc.).

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I feel connected to other military youth.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Other people understand what I go through as a member of a military family.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I discuss(ed) my feelings about deployment with my family members.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Why or why not?

I discuss(ed) my feelings about deployment with other military youth.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Why or why not?

I discuss(ed) my feelings about deployment with non-military people.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Why or why not?

Appendix D: Youth Post-Questionnaire

What was your favorite thing you did today? Tell the story of what you did.

How did it feel to share your story with others?

Circle the answer that best describes your experience.

Did you hear any stories similar to your own? Yes No

How did you feel hearing these stories?

Did you realize anything new from sharing your story (ex. Feelings, Ideas, Conclusions)? Yes No

If yes, please explain how.

After participating in this workshop, has your relationship with the other youth in the room changed? Yes No

If yes, please explain how.

Appendix E: Adult Post-Questionnaire

Post-process Questionnaire-Volunteers and Staff

Pseudonym _____

1. At what moments do you think the youth were the most engaged?

2. At what moments do you think the youth were the least engaged?

3. Was there a moment that stood out to you most? Please tell me the story.

4. What did you notice about how the youth shared stories with each other?

5. When did you feel that the group was most connected?

6. When did you feel that the group was least connected?

7. What most surprised you about the youth's work today?

8. Is there anything else you would like to share that you heard/saw/experienced throughout the workshop?

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Vita

Meg Greene holds a BA from The Ohio State University with dual degrees in journalism and theatre performance. She will receive her MFA from the University of Texas at Austin in Theatre from the Drama and Theatre for Youth and Communities program. After graduating from Ohio State, she moved to Washington, DC and worked as an actor and a teaching artist. As an actor, she performed in plays ranging from theater for social change to classical theater and theatre for young audiences. With over eight years of experience as a teaching artist, she has taught various topics in theatre and creative writing to youth and in professional development workshops for educators. As an applied theatre artist, she has taught and created work in schools, community settings, juvenile detention centers, and with 4-H through Operation: Military Kids. Most recently she has taught for the Zach Theatre, Drama for Schools, Imagination Stage, Arena Stage, Adventure Theatre, and Young Playwrights' Theater. Meg's passion is to create theatre with and for young audiences that provokes, excites, and enchants while sparking dialogue. Her work is fueled by the desire to tell diverse stories and challenge the traditional representations we see on our Theatre for Young Audience's stages. She believes that everyone has a story to tell, and she wants to nurture a space for these stories to breathe, to yell, to whisper, to laugh, and, most of all, to be heard.

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This thesis was typed by the author.