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Literacy and Social Skill Development: A Technology-Focused Curriculum Design

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LITERACY AND SOCIAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT: A TECHNOLOGY-FOCUSED CURRICULUM DESIGN

by

Karissa Wentzel

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in the Masters of Arts in Teaching.

Hamline University
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter One: Introduction</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technology versus Social Interaction: A Typical Day</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifiable and Non-modifiable Factors of Adolescent Social Development</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Social Skills</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Literature Review</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Social Skills:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Resolution</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening Skills</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Advocacy</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Development</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology as a Hindrance</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology and Specific Populations</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology as a Tool</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology and Literacy Education</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology and the Future</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Achievement Gap and Digital Divide</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Methods</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intended Audience</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale and Relevance of the Curriculum Design</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Design and Methods</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application Outline with Social and Literacy Skill Integration</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Curricular Materials</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outline of Stages</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage One</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Two</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Three</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Four</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5: Conclusion

Limitations 59
Implications 61
Future Goals 62
Suggestions for Future Research 63

Appendix A 65
Appendix B 73
Appendix C 77
Appendix D 79
Appendix E 81

References 84
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Technology propels my day forward, and often without me noticing. I have noticed, however, this same technological dominance in my classroom as each student clings to their one-to-one devices. I strive as an educator in this technology-rich world to create a classroom environment where their devices are not only a literacy tool, but a social tool as well. This is why I chose to focus my capstone project on the answering of this research question: How can technology be used as a tool to advance the social and literacy development for sixth graders?

The curriculum design utilizes the text *Touching Spirit Bear* by Ben Mikaelsen and classroom technology to facilitate literacy and social skill growth.

**Technology versus Social Interaction: A Typical Day**

My alarm shakes me out of my dream state promptly at 5:00 a.m. I reach for my phone to press snooze once before I finally drag myself out of bed. At 5:30 a.m., as my coffee brews and my breakfast sandwich heats up, I check what happened on Instagram and Facebook across my world of friends while I was sleeping. At 6:00 a.m., after departing sentiments are exchanged with my boyfriend, I get into my car and the voice in my speakers never fails to scare me. She calmly states, in her electronic and monotone voice, “Connected.” It is my Bluetooth syncing with my car device. I then plug my auxiliary cord into my phone and listen to my most recently downloaded artist as I travel the 15 minutes to work. Upon arriving to work, students line the floors with their backs resting up against the walls, school-issued iPads in hand as they play
games, send emails, text, etc. The building is quiet, even though I know I saw two dozen middle school bodies on my way in.

The bells signal students to their classes at 7:50 a.m., and as the halls increase in body capacity, the staff continues to remind the students not to walk and use their iPads at the same time - they run into each other when they do this. As my 6th grade students begin to trickle into the classroom, they get their iPads out and scan the QR code on the board that takes them to a warm-up activity connected to our Fact versus Opinion lesson of the day. They work quietly, and the students that finish early know to seamlessly transition into reading independently (most of them read on their iPads) until class begins. It is now 8:15 a.m. and I have spoken only a handful of sentences to another human since I woke- most of which were conducted before leaving the house. However, I have had constant contact with my iPhone since it woke me up. Similarly, my students model their devotion to their devices even as they flutter amongst one another.

Their lack of social interaction concerns me, it concerns their parents, and it concerns my fellow staff members. These concerns are only validated when the last week of school comes around and the iPads are collected for the summer. “Miss, this is weird,” an 11 year-old girl states to me as she walks into class. “I mean we actually have to talk to each other about stuff now? No texting or emailing? I don’t like it. I forget things. But, if you, like, email it to me, or I take a picture of it, I have no reason to forget whatchya told me.” I give her a wink and reply, “Sara, it wasn’t like you remembered to do your homework, or all that I told you, when you did have your iPad either.” She giggles; however, there is truth in Sara’s statement. The chatter in the room is louder, more excited, and never-ending. It was as if the students missed the sound of each other’s voices. It is because of days like this that are what lead me to my capstone
curriculum design. Using the text *Touching Spirit Bear* by Ben Mikaelsen, I chose to develop a curriculum that focuses on how to utilize iPad applications for literacy and social development in a 6th grade classroom. As I began to plan this curriculum and focus on how to systematically tackle it, I first needed to identify the factors that I have power over, and the ones that I do not.

**Modifiable and Non-modifiable Factors of Adolescent Social Development**

The quiet, smooth-running classroom I illustrated sounds peaceful. However, do not let me fool you. These iPad-readers are often caught messaging, playing games, or emailing. Even when I tell them I know all of the tricks (because I have used them), they still are caught making swiping motions, and tilting their iPads so the motion sensors activate in their game. Often I will catch another student staring at their peer’s iPad with wide eyed anticipation. My simple response to this situation is to walk up to said student and hold my hand out for their iPad. I then receive the expected, “But Miss, I was reading!” as they quickly swipe their game screen away to reveal their book that was waiting for cover-up underneath. This all being said, no matter how relieved I was once the iPads were collected for the year, this does not mean that I am oblivious to their sincere benefit.

I believe in the power these electronic devices have for improving academic skills and positively impacting the achievement gap. Yet, I am saddened by the immense decrease in social interaction my students partake in. I cannot control the boundaries of their technological relationships outside of my classroom beyond polite suggestions to parents. Unfortunately for their age of 11 or 12, time management skills, organization, and academic responsibility are
skills that need heavy modeling and practice because they have yet to fully adopt them. I can only control this aspect of their academic management in my classroom.

Within my classroom, I have spent the last two years brainstorming ways to use the iPads as an academic tool - while also having paper backups for the couple of students whose parents refused to sign the waiver for potential theft or damage liability; or the students who did not charge their devices; or for the ones who got them taken away due to inappropriate classroom use (this is the most common reason). The fact that 95% of our students have iPads, and we are heavily encouraged/pushed to utilize them as often as possible in the classroom poses some challenges. Despite that we also have desktop computers in our rooms, the application use does not transfer from desktop to mobile devices. Therefore, the academic tools I am using in the classroom need to benefit all my students, including the 5% without them. This prompts me to often do group work, in hopes they will socialize, problem-solve, and use their provided technological resources together since the literal one-to-one use of iPads is not something I can control.

My next challenge was how to employ the devices in a manner that went beyond turning paper electronic and having them email me the assignment, or turn it into a Dropbox, versus handing it in via paper to an assigned cubby. How do I truly capitalize on the uniqueness and depth of the iPads capabilities in a small group manner? I know that I can control the manipulation of applications that may be designed for a certain purpose, and apply it to group settings, or more social situations. I can control what applications I use and how students are assessed. The activation of their social skills does not always need to be done in the activity portion of a lesson, it may actually come in the assessment. Ultimately, the design of each lesson
and the implementation of the iPads is completely up to my stylistic choices. It is the quest
toward increased social and reading development through iPad use that I now need to critically
embark on. Identifying applications and designing lessons are half of the necessary steps towards
answering my research question. The other important component is identifying the important
social skills that are important for 6th graders to develop.

The Social Skills

This age group is the youngest age I have ever taught. The figurative hand holding and
gradual scaffolding into middle school life was a necessary focus in the classroom. Self-advocacy, healthy and polite interactions, and appropriate school dialogue were phenomenons to
many of my students. Quickly, the word “autonomous” became a classroom-used word. We
frequently discussed the importance of knowing what you do not know and how to achieve the
answers. I talked with the students about how teachers are not mind readers and that I will need
their help in meeting their needs. There was modeling that needed to be done for respectful group
conversations and polite internet interactions when using the iPads. However, there were a few
social skills I noticed them continually struggling with. Regardless of their age, I felt it was my
civic duty as their teacher to help them improve on these. The social skills that I believe are
important to address are: listening skills, conflict resolution, self-advocacy, autonomy, and
identity development.

I noticed early on that interruptions were an issue and I wondered if that is because polite
conversation is a very back-and-forth process when done in person. Electronically, a person can
be typing a reaction to an email or text while the other person still has more to say (electronic
interrupting) without any social repercussions because both streams of dialogue can continue
independently of the other. Or, is this simply a component of their maturity and age? A lack of listening skills can be observed by students interrupting one another, zoning out and being unable to reiterate what was just said, or being distracted on their iPads or books. It takes critical thinking skills to listen to what someone is relaying in a message, to interpret what that means, and then summarize it with applicable meaning. The development of those deeper critical thinking skills begins with listening. The iPads are primarily sight-and touch-oriented; however, it is possible to exercise the student’s listening skills through the use of iPads in small groups.

Also, conflict resolution as a social skill is quite challenging for these students. Passive aggressiveness lives in their emails and texts, and cyber-bullying runs rampant in their peer groups. Therefore, making statements that assert feelings and express needs are difficult for this age group. Avoiding problem-solving in person has never been easier than it is for this generation. Thus, being autonomous about one’s needs in their peer group or classrooms has become arduous because these adolescents have been conditioned to avoid it.

Lastly, adolescents can be insensitive. Being able to interpret social cues is an important skill that will be valuable to their personal and professional lives as they continue past 6th grade. More importantly, interpreting these cues and applying the gained information to a social conflict, is very valuable. However, as mentioned before, the concern I have about iPads is the decreasing amount of personal interaction they cause. This reduces the opportunities for students to engage in social cause and effect. For example, if an adolescent texts another person a message with hurtful words, they cannot readily witness and feel the impact those words have on the receiving person. This reduces their feelings of moral responsibility, and if the receiving person does not respond at all, the instigator has no need for a guilty conscience. Thus, it is likely
to be a repeated behavior. However socially harmful the iPads may appear, they are in my classroom as a tool, and shifting how my students engage in their iPad use may be a way to improve these social skills rather than harm them.

In Review

With what I have witnessed in my classroom in regards to the one-to-one iPads is a concerning blockage of social skill development. I aspire to increase the quality of technology integration into my classroom as well. These two facts are why I chose to focus my capstone project on designing a curriculum that utilizes the text *Touching Spirit Bear* by Ben Mikaelsen and technology to facilitate literacy and social skill growth. The social skills that are addressed are: conflict resolution, listening skills, self-advocacy, autonomy, and identity development.

In Chapter Two, the literature review discusses the following related topics: the benefits and harms of iPad use within the classroom, the important social skills for middle school students, literacy development, as well as the educational rationale for incorporating iPads into the classroom. Chapter Three discusses the specifics of the curriculum design involving *Touching Spirit Bear*. Chapter Four consists of the curricular materials created, as well as information about implementation and assessment. Lastly, Chapter Five discusses the limitations, implications, and the value of the curriculum.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This literature review seeks to reinforce the purpose for a curriculum design involving literacy and social development through the use of technology in a 6th grade classroom. The research in this literature review explores the importance behind the development of five social skills for adolescents: conflict resolution, listening skills, self-advocacy, autonomy, and identity development. It also demonstrates that technology is found to be a hindrance for certain aspects of people’s social skills. Lastly, the research shows that little attention has been paid toward using technology to advance the development of social skills for students of the general population. Rather, attempts towards developing social skills via technology have been restricted to specific populations such as students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or students on the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). By addressing these hindrances and the specified populations where technology is deemed a benefit, I will be better suited for finding the areas of strength that rest within technological use in a general population classroom. The goal is to gain insight from how researchers have used technology to advance the above mentioned social skills for the specified populations, and to not only counteract the found barriers they cause socially, but also to promote the development of the aforementioned skills for the general sixth grade reading classroom. In addition to the social skill advancement, the curriculum focuses on the literacy development needed for 6th graders by implementing the use of iPads and desktop computers.
The Social Skills

Conflict resolution. Fostering positive relationships is vital to the development of adolescents. With the harsh reality that adolescents on average, spend 7 hours and 48 minutes a day interacting with a digital device (Ives, 2012, p.18), it is important to understand how technology is playing a role in their social development. As Mariko Carlisle mentions in her 2011 study *Building Healthy Relationships and Building Developmental Assets in Middle School Students*, coming from a smaller school community with one teacher students saw for the entire day, every day, and transitioning into a school community where they see multiple teachers, with dozens more students, can make relationship building and maintenance for middle school students a challenge. They become more vulnerable as their opportunities to demonstrate their likability are minimized and the rate of peer judgment increases. Bullying, cliques, and opportunities for exclusion run rampant in the less supervised times of the day -- which now occur more frequently than in elementary school (Carlisle, 2011). When these next-to-inevitable social conflicts arise, students must know how to appropriately utilize their conflict resolution skills to effectively navigate the issues. This navigation may occur in person or electronically.

With the rise in technology, bullying has gone viral and contains less immediate ownership. This means that resolving a conflict is different for our modern middle school students than it has been for adolescents of the past. Instead of face-to-face aggression that requires an immediate reaction, students can now take their time to figure out an appropriate response, they can muster up the behind-the-cloak type of confidence needed to bravely retaliate, or they can ignore the message altogether. Learning how to resolve such conflicts is a necessary developmental skill to work on with students. As stated by Carlisle, “The foundation of building
developmental assets is to help adolescents to build more assets as they age and mature in this period of transition...” (2011, p.11). In other words, the goal of developing an adolescent’s assets, such as conflict resolution, does not end there. Rather, the development of that one asset aids in the development of others, creating a domino effect of social skill acquisition.

Adolescents also must also understand how to spontaneously formulate responses to those they are dialoguing with. If in a conflict situation, this means that they must appropriately respond to a negatively-charged scenario in a manner that is productive. With modern technological advancements, such conflict resolution can take on an in-person and/or an electronic form. Electronically responding to a conflict gives adolescents more time to process what they are thinking before responding. This, in turn, makes in-person resolutions, including phone conversations, feel more vulnerable.

“A phone conversation is so personal because you don’t have time to sit there and think about what you’re going to say...If someone sends you a text message, you have a couple of minutes to think about [it],” says Miguel, one of Sherry Turkle’s case studies from her 2011 book *Alone Together*. As Miguel demonstrates, the strengthening of these skills (with an emphasis on immediacy when face-to-face) is of value to these technologically-dominated adolescents. Thinking before one speaks is a valuable skill, involving self-reflection and cause and effect analysis; however, this particular reasoning behind preferential electronic communication versus real-time communication is not to increase the time to respond effectively. Rather, technology has become a tool for conflict-avoidance. Ultimately, their decision-making skills have changed due to technology. This includes their decisions made in regards to bullying and empathy. With a
large portion of their social interactions going virtual, adolescents now have a different connection to emotionally harming one another:

...when posting something online they do not see the visual reaction of what their behavior is causing (cannot see someone’s face online) and this is takes away their ability to feel empathy because they do not see the immediate effect of their behavior on another human being. (Ives, 2012, p. 31)

Promoting the exercise and awareness of empathy in today’s adolescents requires a degree of intention by adults that has reached a new level. Etiquette on cyber interactions involves the recipient and the initiator, and is now a topic being taught in schools. In the era before cell phones, students learned about “I feel” statements and eye contact. Now, students learn about not writing in all caps and not responding to a cyber bully at all. As our interactions become driven more by our hands and less by our words, the ears consequently get less exercised in the art of listening. If practiced, conflict resolution is one developmental asset that can aid students in the advancement of other social skills such as listening skills.

Listening skills. Listening is a complex skill. Once mastered, it is an invaluable aid to conflict resolution as it allows the listener to really understand what is being communicated to them. As Christopher C. Gearhart and Graham D. Bodie state in their 2011 article “Active-Empathic Listening as a General Social Skill: Evidence from Bivariate and Canonical Correlations,” listening involves a three part process of 1) cognitively interpreting the message being delivered; 2) possessing the interest and desire to respond to the communicator; and 3) the actual nonverbal or verbal response to the original message. In our technological age, listening to others has become more than hearing what they are saying. Likewise, responding is more than a seen nonverbal or verbal message. Wait time, word-size usage and its communication of tone,
punctuation, and emoticons all feed into a message’s delivery. The depth of ambiguity within interpreting communication has significantly increased. Therefore, the development behind listening skills has become even more crucial and differentiated.

An important component of the advancement of such listening skills is advancing one’s Social Sensitivity (SS) and Emotional Sensitivity (ES), or being able to “...respond appropriately to one’s personal, interpersonal, or social environment” by artfully separating and categorizing input (Gearhart & Bodie, 2011, p. 3). School can be classified as a social environment, with many forms of stimulation happening consistently. For a student to complete the aforementioned step #1 of the listening process, they first need to pick the stimulus they want to focus on. Ideally, this stimulus is the peer they are engaging with, or the teacher who is speaking with them. An electronic device in hand can make a person’s choice on what stimuli to focus on more challenging. “When someone holds a phone, it can be hard to know if you have that person’s attention. A parent, partner, or child glances down and is lost to another place, often without realizing they have taken leave,” (Turkle, 2011, p.161). Thus, the individual’s ability to focus on a stimulus must be an intentional choice, as is the choice to extinguish all distractions-- for example, putting said phone in one’s pocket or backpack in order to inform the speaker that they have your undivided attention. Similarly, it has become a social norm to silence one’s device when in public areas where notification pings or ringers would be a distraction- i.e., the classroom or movie theater. However, it has been observed that middle school students have yet to fully adopt this norm. The reasoning could be due to their virtual ignorance, or their ever-developing social skills.
Advancing a middle school student’s listening skills is a tool they can take with them in all social situations, aiding them in the growth of their relationships personally and professionally. Ultimately, “...being an active-empathic listener is most readily associated with skills that enable one to be an efficient and effective conversational partner...” (Gearhart & Brodie, 2011, p.10). It is through effective conversation within the classroom that students can engage in the deep critical thinking that brings their learning experiences to the next level. One of the key components of listening as a skill is empathy. “Empathy reflects a tendency to experience the affective states of others and is therefore, believed to be the affective basis of altruistic forms of prosocial behavior,” (Wentzel, Filisetti, Looney, 2007, p.2). This connects to step #2 in the process of listening. The motivation to respond to a communicator comes from a person’s ability to empathically interpret what is being stated. The key to this step is the motivational piece. The recipient of the message has to be intentionally listening and motivated to achieve true understanding of what is being communicated. With virtual communicators, motivation to understand the sender’s message is still required, and potentially at a higher degree considering in-person cues like body posture, facial expressions, and tone are absent. Ultimately, empathy acts as one of the reasons behind prosocial behaviors like listening (Wentzel et. al, 2007). When a person is ready for step #3 of the listening process, they must be able to communicate to others if they completely comprehended the message- if they need more information or if they could not hear what was being said. Listening for today’s generation, however, is done with more than just the ears. For instance, interpreting a message’s tone involves the eyes now for our virtual communicators, as well as our ears. As their social interactions have taken on multiple forms, their listening skills need to adapt as well.
The ingredients of an adolescent’s social situation has changed for today's youth. “iGen youth today congregate on social media sites for conversations, flirtations, immature humor, and social exchanges instead of hanging out in the local parking lot of the five-and-dime of yesteryear,” (Ives, 2012, p.23). Therefore, these flirtations and humorous exchanges are not being navigated in person as often. Rather, they are taking place electronically. An adolescent’s ability to respond to various forms of social interactions without oral and visual cues will require critical analysis. For some, however, the time and space that technology provides is exactly what they prefer in order to apply such critical analysis. Fitton, Ahmedani, Herald, and Shifflet found in their 2013 study “The Role of Technology on Young Adolescent Development: Implications for Policy, Research, and Practice,” that some boys prefer electronic messaging instead of phone conversations because the computer and texting application allow time to pause and think about what to say, whereas long pauses on the phone can be uncomfortable. “These young men have adapted technology use for effective social coping strategies in interpersonal communication,” (Fitton et al., p.407). The ability to critically analyze a situation’s social needs, and then communicate them, now requires more than one’s listening competence. It requires self-advocacy abilities, another social skill that is at a crucial developmental point for this age bracket.

**Self-Advocacy.** Middle school students are at a transitional place where they are interacting with dozens of more people, including instructors, in each academic day. They are now in classrooms of 35 instead of 15, and for only 50 minutes instead of 6 hours. Their instructors cannot be expected to interpret all of their students’ non-verbal cues perfectly and consistently to adequately meet their needs. Deborah Douglas writes in her 2004 article “Self-
Advocacy: Encouraging Students to Become Partners in Differentiation,” that “Although it is important for teachers to believe in student choice and to create varied learning opportunities, it is just as important for students to understand their specific personal educational needs and to develop the skill to advocate for themselves,” (p. 224). This is the time where an adolescent really needs to develop their self-advocacy skills in order to ensure their academic and social success. Self-advocacy is defined as, “The process of recognizing and meeting the needs specific to one's learning ability without compromising the dignity of oneself or others,” (Douglas, p. 224). In order for an adolescent to be a confident advocate of their own needs they have to be able to acknowledge when they are not understanding something or when they feel they are being mistreated. Then they must be able to communicate their needs. The student has to believe that they can take control of their learning and their needs. Self-advocacy is a component of the broader concept and approach of self-determination. The concept of self-determination is based on the belief that all individuals have the right to direct their lives. It “encompasses a broad set of knowledge, skills, and behaviors that enable an individual to seek goals, make decisions, explore options, solve problems, speak up for himself or herself, understand what supports are needed for success, and evaluate outcomes,” stated Ronen Sebag in his 2010 article “Behavior Management Through Self-Advocacy: A Strategy for Secondary Students with Learning Disabilities,” (p. 22-23). The importance of this skills development in adolescents is immeasurable. The growth in this skill is what will take a student from a passive participant in their education, goals, and future, to the leading role. They become the actor versus the acted upon (Sebag, p.23). A strong self-advocate knows when to approach the teacher and ask for aid, when to raise their hand to ask for clarification, or how to communicate to their parents and teachers what their goals are for
themselves as a student. Their journey towards success involves only their personal strengths and weakness. When given guidance and attention towards the development of these self-advocacy skills, Douglass found that her participants demonstrated a 22% increase from being uncomfortable asking a teacher to help modify something for them, to being okay or very comfortable with asking the teacher for modifications (Douglass, 2011). However, in the constantly connected world, focusing on oneself can be a challenge, and easily avoided if so desired. Plugging into the needs and desires of one’s peers is instantly possible. Therefore, introspection can become a lost gem amongst the modern youth if not intentionally cultivated.

**Autonomy.** Being a strong self-advocate also means that an adolescent must possess the ability to be autonomous, when necessary, from the thoughts and needs of their peers or their parents back at home. Technology can challenge the development of these skills, however, because as Turkle (2011) illustrates in her chapter entitled “Tethered”, adolescents are increasingly pressured by parents to be connected to their devices at all times. Hourly check-ins are a reality for today’s generation. Instead of solely relying on themselves for right-versus-wrong choices about who they hang out with, where they go, and when they return, their decision-making thoughts are regularly influenced by those on the other end of their device—whether it be peers or adults. Despite their constant connections to others via technology, adolescents need to analyze their own needs in order to achieve the success they are aspiring for. “Traditional views of adolescent development take autonomy and strong personal boundaries as reliable signs of a successfully maturing self,” (Turkle, p.172). The increase in these skills means that students will be more likely to get their needs met, to be understood, and to succeed. The devices adolescents are attached to, however, might be a direct link to the development of
autonomy through the lens of ownership: “Ownership of a resource endows children with ownership rights...Leadership, discussed under the banner of social status roles, provides an opportunity for children to learn to experience power and how to mediate their peers as part of a cluster,” stated Lorna Arnott in her 2013 article, “Are we allowed to blink? Young children’s leadership and ownership while mediating interactions around technologies,” (p.110). As adolescents bear the weight of these expensive responsibilities; as they customize the wallpapers of their phones, their favorites on their calling lists, and more, they are learning about what, and who, they value. “It represents the agency that children have in shaping their interactions and behaviours because, as part of the activities, children make decisions about their play and the ‘social connections’ they make,” (Arnott, p. 110). Their decisions to protect their devices involve awareness and decision-making about who to trust, or not. One student explained in John M. Downes and Penny Bishop’s 2012 study entitled, “Educators engage digital natives and learn from their experiences with technology,” that ‘It’s your responsibility. A lot of kids are safe and careful about it. You don’t let other kids use it. It’s your responsibility,” (p.12). Likewise, the ability to think autonomously, and to advocate for one’s self, means that a student is advancing the development of their identity- another important social skill for adolescents.

Identity development. In an increasingly more autonomous environment, with new people and new demands, middle school students are truly beginning to engage in their identity development. Sometimes, it is this quest towards self-identification that distracts them from even the best educational experiences: Students’ quests for identity and struggles for peer acceptance sometimes hinder their ability to learn, even in the best of classrooms. As one student honestly explained in Downe and Bishop’s aforementioned study, “There are some days when we’re really
focused and other days when we are not,” (2012, p. 14). It is a reality that some students found daydreaming in class are thinking about how to approach a crush, or how to avoid a bully, rather than the math problem on the board. What they once knew of as the core of what defines them, their family, begins to shift as the number of faces they see multiplies in their new middle school. Peer connections begin to shape their values, and their identity begins to morph in response. Likewise, as their technological interactions increase with a new cell phone, or school-issued iPad, their options for who to become reproduce rapidly. The quantity of new faces and incoming messages they receive are multiplied when technology is involved. “As young adolescents struggle to differentiate and move toward independence and autonomy, they gradually move away from parents and family in favor of intimate peer associations and friendships forming a sense of identity,” (Fitton et. al, 2013, p. 2). The degree to which they connect to aspects of their identity begins to change as they navigate the type of friend, boyfriend, student, brother, daughter, etc. that they are, and what values they want to embrace.

The modern-day adolescent receives less isolated time to reflect on their goals and values, however. Their nonstop plugged-in status virtually streams their identity development to the world via Facebook statuses and the comments from their peers on them. “They need time to discover themselves, time to think...The text-driven world of rapid response does not make self-reflection impossible, but does little to cultivate it,” (Turkle, 2011, p. 172). These technological advances changed the process of identity development for modern adolescents. Turkle metaphorically connects identity development and independence to the Mark Twain symbolism of traveling down the river, away from parental and community influence, towards an autonomous development of self. She says that today’s adolescents face a new phenomenon:
“[Today’s] generations sail down the river together, and adolescents don’t face the same pressure to develop the independence we have associated with moving forward into adulthood,” (Turkle, p.173). This connectedness to their generation comes from the technological capabilities to text home multiple times per day and to check in with peer opinions as each experience takes place. Technology has increased the reality of a “collaborative self,” as Turkle brands it, due to one’s near inability to truly be alone in the development of their identity (2011, p.169). However, is isolation the key to one’s identity development?

Another viewpoint is that technology offers adolescents vast opportunities for exploring their identities. For instance, “Many iGeneration youth have more than one avatar and multiple “identities” or social media accounts...They have many more platforms for experimentation and reinvention of identities,” (Ives, 2012, p.20). The ability to play around with identities, allows adolescents a space for testing out their marketability before committing to one in particular. Albert Bandura, a famous psychologist from the 1970′s who is still studied in today’s college General Psychology classes, theorized about how the social world impacts one’s development.

One of Bandura’s most influential theories is his “social cognitive theory” (SCT), which postulates that portions of an individual's knowledge acquisition can be directly related to observing others within the context of social interactions, experiences, and by outside media influences. He further theorizes that we attain our sense of “self efficacy,” or our belief about our competence and ability to succeed, in social situations (Ives, p.8). It is through these interactions, that adolescents explore their limits, and as a result, their identity. Even before technology played a role in our society, theorists like Bandura understood the power of media in social intelligence. Now, adolescents can observe the behaviors of hundreds - maybe thousands- of different
individuals within a day’s surfing of social media and the Internet. What impacts their ideas of normal, appropriate, admirable, or disgusting involves the sifting through of a multitude of values as demonstrated virtually. “People observe others acting within an environment and these observations are then remembered by an individual and help shape their social behaviors and cognitive processes,” (Ives, p.9). However, amidst the temptation to virtually present oneself as perfect, happy, and popular, there is a battle against self to honestly portray these identities. What happens under the pressure of 200 virtual eyes, when everyone wants to be liked? The way the newer generations develop their identities is different than generations past, yet equally as crucial.

**Technology as a Hindrance**

Technology is in the hands, ears, pockets, and backpacks of students. It is on their desks, their teacher’s desk, on the wall in front of them, and in the speakers of their school’s walls. It is literally all around them. Schools around the country are heavily investing in the technological saturation of student’s lives. As Jing Lei and Young Zhao point out in their 2008 article “One-to-One Computing: What does it bring to schools?,” that “Currently at least 33 states have schools experimenting with one-to-one computing projects and more schools are seriously considering one-to-one programs,” (p.2). It was in Lei and Young’s study that they endeavored to find out exactly how students’ one-to-one devices were being used. The hindrances they reported are ones that concern the development of social skills and academic progress. For instance, 39.3% of teachers perceived the one-to-one devices as a distraction for the students because of the constant temptations of the Internet, email, and games (2008, p. 20). Likewise, Turkle noticed that the
students who were provided one-to-one devices performed at a lower standard than others; a perceived repercussion to their consistent technological distractions (2011, p.163).

Concerns about being present at home were also relevant for 38.7% of the parents. The argument in support of the devices is that they are an educational tool. Turkle counteracts this with a concerning rebuttal by saying, “We are shaped by our tools. And now, the computer, a machine on the border of becoming a mind, was changing and shaping us,” (Turkle, p.x). Thus, we are beginning to rely on the computers for important daily needs like the attention we receive from social interactions. With the device as their main focus, students are spending less time communicating in person, thus less time practicing their important social skills.

Through a lens of intimacy, Rinie van Est wrote his 2014 article entitled “A Survival Plan for the Wild Cyborg.” He discusses how important it is to maintain a healthy relationship with technology, yet how dangerously close this society is to losing that healthy balance between intimate relationships and technological relationships. The more people rely on technology to carry out daily tasks, the more distant people get from intimate and meaningful interactions. Intimate interactions were once shared vocally with close family and friends or written down and addressed to one recipient. Whereas now, intimacies are digitally broadcast for hundreds of “friends” and family to see (van Est, p. 2). Turkle noticed the same phenomenon as she recognized the uproar of online chatting and how “relationships people formed with each other [was now by] using the computer as an intermediary,” (2011, p.xi). This wide broadcast ultimately creates a desensitization of intimacy to the public, thus decreasing the trust people have in what others communicate to the digital world.
Without this trust and exercise of social skills, face-to-face communication may become too vulnerable and intimate of an activity, thus increasing society’s reliability on technology and decreasing society’s connectedness to humanity (Turkle, p. 5). Likewise, communication is happening primarily via text or social media. “…the types of mobile phone use that contributed the most to problematic use were text-messaging and playing games, whereas making calls contributed the least,” stated Mark D. Griffiths in his 2013 article “Adolescent mobile phone addiction: A cause for concern?” (p.76). This means that people are calling each other much less, a continuance of this decrease in intimate interactions. Kaveri Subrahmanyam concluded in his 2002 study titled “The Impact of Interactive Technology on Children’s and Adolescent’s Cognitive and Social Skills,” that this decrease in intimate interactions could have a severe impact on teens. “During the first and second year of access, greater use of the Internet was associated with declines in teens' social involvement (communication within the family, size of social networks, and feelings of loneliness), increases in depression, and decline in social support,” (Subrahmanyam, p. 7). Therefore, at a time when adolescents are crucially developing their identity and concepts of self-worth, researchers express concern about technology’s ability to impair their concept of self-worth.

Utilizing electronic devices for intimate interactions has decreased as the desire to connect vocally has declined, and the desire to interact via electronic script (i.e., texting or email) has increased. Likewise, with more of society constantly glued to their devices in public situations, including the classrooms, it decreases the level of quality in their social interactions. Turkle recounts a student she worked with named Cliff who feels that “…he gets so caught up in the back-and-forth of texting that he ends up wasting his time in what he thinks are superficial
communications ‘just to get back’ [to someone],” (2011, p.265). However, without the in-person connections, students are missing out on social cues that are important for their communicative development. Teenagers themselves admitted to Turkle that they are missing out on social cues such as body posture, tone, and expressions when they solely rely on their devices to interact with others (2011, p. 268). Those intimate interactions that bring joy, vulnerability, or frustration are lacking in their genuine form. The transcribing of such emotions via electronics sacrifices the authenticity of what created the emotion and how it makes the others around them feel. For instance, the reference to a laugh being contagious cannot be captured electronically. “There is a difference, says an eighteen-year old boy, “between someone laughing and someone writing that they are laughing...[my friends] forget that people are still there to give attention to,” (Turkle, p. 268). Alternatively, these missing interactions have conditioned the young population to feel anxiety towards authentic social interaction. Even phone calls elicit stress from adolescents. Brendan, one of Turkle’s students, admits that phone calls should be used to simply set up dates and times and that calling someone for a conversation implies an assumption that they have the time to talk to you. If they do not have the time, and you are perhaps intruding, that could place you in a vulnerable position, Brendan claims (Turkle, p. 270). Therefore, electronic communication leaves social responses and interactions up to an amount of time that has an unspoken agreement on what is appropriate. The communicative misfires and breakages in socially appropriate response times is an entirely separate phenomenon that is beyond the scope of this manuscript.

In Eugenia Ives’ previously mentioned 2012 article “iGeneration: The Social Cognitive Effects of Digital Technology on Teenagers,” he cites Dr. Siegel’s presented paper at a Wisdom
2.0 Conference in California. He mentions Siegel’s concerns about technology in regards to the brain’s development by saying:

   The brain develops by the stimulation given to us. It stimulates the neurons. The genes unravel and structural change happens. This is ‘neuroplasticity’. So, if you have someone who is texting all the time, the concern of 7 hours and 48 minutes a day spent in front of a screen … is that you are using the left brain to type out the linguistic information but the right brain is passive… My concern is that compassion, stress modulation and bodily wisdom to be tuned into your bodily sensory self, will be lessened [by the usage of technology]. (p. 10-11)

   The right hemisphere of the brain is where a person processes the whole, rather than just parts, of a problem or scenario. According to Schiferl (2008), it also is the part where a person learns through insight and intuition. It is the artistic versus analytical side of the brain. Ultimately, a concern and criticism of technology overload for students is rooted in developmental concerns. If abiding by these concerns, it is important for educators to consider options for engaging the students in a manner that requires right brain processing. However, when done with the consideration of these concerns, adolescents report engagement with their creative right-brain side. A seventh grader in Downes and Bishop’s 2012 study, reported:

   For my language arts class we are starting this new unit … we choose one of our favorite books, and we do a book podcast on it using Garage Band, and we say all the information, why we liked it, summaries, and what’s really cool is [my teacher] is having us put those sound jingles in them to make them interesting, and then we’re posting them up (p. 10).
It is possible that there are educators capable of creatively stimulating the whole-brained adolescent, and technology can be a tool for doing this. In fact, technology has been used to target certain areas of development for specific populations already.

**Technology and Specific Populations**

Individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have been identified as having poor social skills, according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (2000). “… these milestone characteristics are evident in the individual’s failure to develop peer relationships, lack of engagement in play with peers, lack of emotion recognition, [and] difficulties in communicative interactions,” (Ploog, Scharf, Nelson, and Brooks, 2013, p. 301). Due to technological developments, researchers have found ways for working with the ASD population to help promote the development of their deficient social skills. The number of studies involving the ASD population and technological use has increased to about 40 publications per year in 2010, twice the amount it was 5 years prior (Ploog et. al, 2013). This demonstrates how much of a hot topic the ASD population is when paired with Computer Assisted Technology (CAT). The studies also show how CAT is helping with the improvement of social skills for children with ASD. “Children who received CAT improved on three measures: Identification of emotions in facial expressions, in cartoons depicting emotional content, and in stories,” (Ploog et. al, p. 313). They also found that their communication with others increased (Ploog et. al, p. 314). Ultimately, because the ASD has been identified as a population with social impairments, the technological advancements provided a possible avenue for positively impacting their challenges with social skills like facial recognition (Ploog et. al, p. 314).
Another population that has been identified as having social skill deficiencies are those diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). ADHD impacts a student’s academic and social advancement. According to Kevin Fenstermacher, Daniel Olympia, and Susan M. Sheridan in their 2006 study “Effectiveness of a Computer-facilitated Interactive Social Skills Training Program for Boys with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder,” it is “...often associated with comorbid conditions such as oppositional-defiant disorder, learning disabilities, conduct disorder, academic underachievement, and social skills deficits,” (2006, p. 198). As implied in the title of the disorder, those with ADHD suffer from issues focusing their attention and with hyperactivity that impairs their ability to function seamlessly in society:

...children with ADHD frequently exhibit less positive social behaviors, initiate fewer positive peer interactions, experience lower rates of peer reinforcement, and demonstrate fewer cooperative social behaviors. (Sheridan, p. 199)

Since positive social experiences are a challenge for this population of youth, researchers have found ways to simulate these experiences electronically, giving them a safe space to build up these skills. Fenstermacher et al. (2006) studied the impact on social skill development on students with ADHD using “computer-facilitated, interactive social skills training and analogue role-play observations.” What they found was an increase in social problem-solving skills for all students (Fenstermacher et al., p.211). Due to the regimented structure of the simulated environments and the ability for the students to navigate social cause and effect without direct social implications, it aided them in their social problem-solving development (Fenstermacher et al., p. 216). The assistance of technology was crucial to this study’s focus.
Technology as a Tool

As heavily mentioned above, technology has become an excessive distraction for adolescents from social interactions and their learning. However, when harnessed in the classroom in an effective manner, it has also been found to be a productive use of resources. In fact, the philosophy behind teacher education is largely supportive of preparing educators to meet the technological demands of their modern students. Jan Herrington and Jenni Parker state in their 2013 article “Emerging Technologies as Cognitive Tools for Authentic Learning” that, “In teacher education, the imperative to employ emerging technologies is even greater, as the responsibility to prepare future teachers for classrooms of autonomous learners—seeking relevance, connectivity and engagement—is paramount,” (p. 608). Many students come into the classroom with the expectation that they will be engaged, as they should be. Educators are told to find a way of meeting their students where they are and relating to them - technology can be the access point for this.

The educators and district leaders aspiring to provide their students with these technologically rich lessons are often placed with the challenge of awareness. In other words, the vast world of technological possibilities can create a level of incapacitating ignorance. It has been suggested, according to Anika Ball Anthony in her 2012 article “Activity Theory as a Framework for Investigating Direct-Classroom Style Interactions and their Influences on Technology Integration,” “that many principals and district leaders lack the technological knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about program goals, equipment, technological infrastructure, and teachers’ technology professional development,” (p. 337). Simply providing the body of technology to teachers is not enough to aid them in the effective deliverance of its
tools to the students. Rather, professional development opportunities are key to aiding teachers in maintaining an updated attitude and interaction with technological resources for the classroom. In Suzan Duygu Eristi and Adile Askim Kurt’s 2012 study on “Teachers’ Views about Effective Use of Technology in Classrooms,” they found that teachers are not trying to avoid technology in the classroom. “…teachers are willing to use technology in their courses. However, it is an obvious fact that they need constant support regarding technology use in their courses” (p. 39). Therefore, amidst the student cravings for technology, and the teacher’s efforts to meet these desires, there rests a need for professional support and advancement as the educational community aspires to meet all students’ academic needs. “Teachers who are properly trained to use the technology and have adequate technical support are much more likely to integrate technology into everyday lessons within the classroom than teachers who do not have this kind of support,” says Stephanie Diamond Hicks in her article “Technology in Today’s Classroom: Are You a Tech-Savvy Teacher?” (2011, p.189).

Teacher’s efforts to appeal to the students’ needs is not in vain. Digitally-driven adolescents do not respond to “old school” lecture-style lessons anymore. Their eyes need to be actively engaged in their learning. “The prevalence of technology in everyday life has shifted students toward a more visual learning style. Students, in turn, may not respond as well to traditional teaching methods that focus mainly on lecture and textbook reading,” (Hicks, 2011, p. 189). Without that visual stimulation, these students lose interest. Similarly, students in today’s classrooms are wired differently than adolescents of the past. They have actively experienced technology their entire lives. This level of involvement changes how one operates, according to Hicks:
This research indicates that the environmental influence provided by technology has prompted the brain to be more receptive to technology-based delivery methods of information. The latest research in neurobiology indicates that ‘stimulations of various kinds actually changes brain structures and affects the way people think,’ (Prensky 2001). Thus, consistent technology use rewires the brain to respond more efficiently to technology. This information is instrumental in understanding the influence technology has on student learning and achievement (2011, p. 189).

In other words, not only do today’s students crave technological interactions in the classroom because it visually stimulates them, it also appeals to how their brains work. As educators, that is the main goal - to reach a student’s brain, to maintain a high level of engagement, and to teach them how to be intelligent citizens in all capacities. It appears that technology is a crucial method for reaching them.

**Technology and Literacy Education**

As a classroom tool, literature-based technology applications are filled with resources that can aid the student in advancing their reading skills. Without expecting students to download an application that costs money or for the school to fund an application for a class, the iPads come loaded with an application called iBooks that has tools the student can use to supplement and advance their daily reading experiences. For example, the reader in iBooks can highlight important information in a text. This becomes helpful when students are given a prompt to respond to, and they must provide supporting evidence from the text. In addition, the reader can add a note next to pieces of text if they had an important connection, prediction, or question in mind. As the iBooks application description in the App Store also states, the student can create a
PDF of their notes created throughout a text and print them as well. This is an easy way for students to review their thoughts and notes throughout a lengthy text. Also, the application supports vocabulary growth by allowing a reader to highlight a word and then click “define.” This takes the student to the dictionary application, or to the Internet, where they can search out the meaning of the challenging word. These critical thinking skills are important and frequently practiced in reading classrooms. There are additional applications for purchase that offer extensive reading tools to students; however, the students in this study will be solely using iBooks and therefore the application review will be limited to that application. Beyond the specific reading skills important for students to advance, which iPads can aid with, it is also crucial that students are advancing their skills to navigate technological devices.

In the everyday world, as people operate vehicles, pay for groceries, and communicate with others, adults must interact with continuously changing technology. Due to society’s overall shift towards technology dominance, it is important that all students are prepared at a young age for how to interact with technology; and it can begin in the classroom. “An added advantage of digital texts,” says Amy Hutchinson, Beth Beschorner, and Denise Schmidt-Crawford in their 2012 article “Exploring the Use of the iPad for Literacy Learning,” as other scholars have argued, “is that they can support individual readers’ text comprehension and potentially engage struggling readers,” (p. 16). The incorporation of technology into the classroom via literacy instruction is highly supported by the International Reading Association (IRA). “…[The] IRA believes that literacy educators have a responsibility to integrate information and communication technologies (ICTs) into the curriculum, to prepare students for the futures they deserve,” (Hutchinson et al., p.16). There is a civic responsibility placed upon teachers to make
sure that they prepare their students for success in the adult world. An adult's ability to manipulate technological devices has become crucial for their survival. Therefore, some educators are using a model called Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) to incorporate technology into their classroom.

TPACK incorporates the equal overlapping of three components: Technological Knowledge, Pedagogical Knowledge, and Content Knowledge. The TPACK framework, as stated on their webpage, www.TPACK.org, in the section “What is TPACK?” focuses on Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), Technological Content Knowledge (TCK), Technological Pedagogical Knowledge (TPK), and Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge. This design communicates the knowledge that teachers should aspire to incorporate when designing a curriculum that involves technology. The message is that each teacher will bring different levels of each aspect of the model, and their curriculum designs will reflect these differences; however, these are the important components to an influential technology-rich curriculum. TPACK is simply a design implemented by educators to create a balanced technology-rich curriculum. This is not new insight, however; professional development trainings for educators are heavily pushing for teachers to be fluent in technological tools and applications. This means that TPACK is a free resource to any educator that would like to learn from it. In an article by Hutchinson et al., “Exploring the Use of iPad for Literacy Learning,” the researchers used TPACK’s framework to understand the layers involved in teachers being studied (2012). One of these teachers, Mrs. Dill, was able to approach her lesson planning by identifying a content-focused skill that she wanted to teach, a technology-based interactive application (Doodle Buddy) on the iPad she could use to engage the students, and with her pedagogical
knowledge of lesson design and implementation, she created a technology-rich literacy lesson around the reading comprehension strategy of visualization (Hutchinson et al., p. 18). By balancing the three components of TPACK, Mrs. Dill’s lesson on visualization was reported as being successful.

Through interviews with students, we learned that they believed that they had read their text selection more carefully than normal as a result of the ease of revising their images using the Doodle Buddy app. Easy revision led them to reread their text for additional clues, make revisions, and reread the text again to determine whether they had captured the meaning in their image (Hutchinson et al., p. 21).

With balance, Mrs. Dill was able to reach her goal for an engaging and technological lesson.

iPads in the classroom can be used for four main categorical purposes: to tutor, explore, tool, and communicate (Hutchinson et al., p.43). The iPad becomes a tutor when it directly provides the information to the student via an application or webpage. It is used for exploration as students navigate resources online and make their own decisions on validity and preference. “Technologies represent a tool when they are not designed explicitly for school use but can be put to educational purposes,” (Hutchinson et al., p. 43). Lastly, they are used to communicate to peers and teachers during and outside of school hours. What makes these categorical uses possible are the diverse functions the iPad comes with. Apple ships the iPad with the following applications installed: email, a web browser, a photo management tool, a tool to view videos, YouTube, iTunes, a maps program, a notes program, a calendar, the ability to search across applications and some accessibility items (Hutchinson et al., p. 44). Educators can use these
functionalities to execute lessons and engage students. This curricular design, however, is where
the teacher becomes the facilitator. They use technology as a tool, incorporating the important
components that TPACK suggests, and they create an engaging, modern lesson. The goal is to
not to place a device into a student's hand as a replacement for the teacher. Rather, the teacher
handing the device (metaphorically or literally) to a student is also handing them a pathway into
a deeper level of engagement and learning. iPads can replace paper, pens, pencils, and folders.
They can also link a student to their grades via an application, thereby increasing their levels of
accountability and autonomy. It links them to 20 friends via email, iMessage, and GoogleDocs,
versus one peer via the passing of notes in class. Their network of communication multiplies,
giving them additional opportunities to practice important social skills such as conflict
resolution.

**Technology and the Future**

Speaking from a global perspective, technology is connecting and dividing our world.
People can speak, see, and interact with others tens of thousands of miles away. Businesses have
global partners and competitors, a topic of competition is education. The question for each
school in each community across the world is: How can we prepare these students to better serve
the future of the community? This involves a heavy technological component because the
direction the world is traveling in is not one further away from its presence, rather it is more
entwined and reliant on it. This means that students in today’s classrooms must interact with
technology and be prepared to carry out technological tasks in a manner that will benefit this
country in the future. That may be a loaded statement, however there is truth to the pressure that
resides within it, for both teachers and students. In their study “Transforming Practice in Design
and Technology: evidence from a classroom-based research study of students’ responses to an intervention on inclusive design,” Nicholl, Flutter, Hosking, and Clarkson state:

Technological advances have led to concomitant changes in national and global economics, with shifts in patterns of markets, employment and migration. The instrumentalist response to this dilemma is that education is first and foremost a means for securing economic prosperity and hence curricular reform in many countries has tended to focus on providing an appropriately skilled workforce, although it is widely acknowledged that knowing precisely which skills will be required in the future is increasingly uncertain (2013, p.87).

Nicholl et al., went into two secondary schools in England and initiated their “Designing Our Tomorrows Project.” The purpose of this project was to aid educators in engaging students in a Design and Technology (D&T) curriculum that would be effective in the accumulation of content-focused and technology skills (Nicholl et al., 2013). The researchers emphasized that the project involved student and teacher collaboration. the teacher took on the role as the facilitator to resolve any issues that arose. The response from students was that they found it challenging and rewarding (Nicholl et al., p.94). The key here is giving students the ability to make decisions about the task at hand and how it will come together. Making choices, and good ones at that, does not come naturally to all people. In fact, some would argue that it is a skill acquired through critical thinking, creativity, and the evaluation of options, consequences, and benefits. “Allowing students a more active role in the learning process gives students a stronger sense of ‘ownership’, which serves as an important stimulus for directing students’ attention and motivation,” (Nicholl et al., p. 96). In other words, by giving students a driver’s seat position in their learning, they
practice autonomy skills, while also being more motivated and engaged in their tasks. By using technology as the tool and reading as the content it is possible to for students to engage in that creative and autonomous expression. With iPads as a huge trend in schools, there are continuous opportunities for how to use them in the classroom. However, one thing is for certain: as said by Orin T. Murray and Nicole R. Olcese in their article “Teaching and Learning with iPads, Ready or Not?” “…while the core of education—reading, writing, reasoning and computing mathematically—has not changed, how, where and why these core principles are engaged in is vastly different today than it was even a few decades ago,” (2011, p. 48). The design and implementation of technology still rests in the creative minds of the educators leading students towards proficiency.

As the above researchers demonstrate, the iPad is a popular and beneficial tool for guiding students towards content-focused and technology-based success. With the digital world playing an increasingly prevalent role in the lives of adolescents, it is relevant and critical to involve it in the classroom. Within a classroom where technology has its own crucial seat, so too does the development of essential social skills for middle school students. By engaging all important factors, it is possible to intentionally challenge middle school students’ minds and their social development, while utilizing the modern devices in their hands.

The Achievement Gap and Digital Divide

There is a phenomenon in education known as the “Achievement Gap.” No matter how hard educators try to close this gap in achievement, there are a range of complex factors that feed it’s existence. As defined politely by the National Assessment for Education Progress (NAEP) website, “Achievement gaps occur when one group of students outperforms another group and
the difference in average scores for the two groups is statistically significant (that is, larger than the margin of error).” The two achievement gaps of focus, according to NAEP, is the gap between Hispanic students and White students, as well as the gap between Black students and White students. Ultimately, what is happening is that the White students are statistically outperforming the Hispanic and Black students, and despite the differentiation emphasis in classrooms, or the multicultural awareness and trainings provided to staff, this gap persists. The school this curriculum is designed for consists of 75.42% Hispanics, making the achievement gap a high concern. Also, 78% of the school receive Free and Reduced Lunch Plans (FRLP), meaning they are within the poverty margin. This means, that a good majority of the Hispanic students within this school are impoverished.

With low income comes fewer opportunities for materialistic goods. The most trending, and most expensive, materialistic goods for this generation’s students are of the technological kind. However, these students of low-income families are less likely to have computers, wireless Internet, handheld devices, laptops, etc., in their homes. This becomes an issue when the schools are attempting to prepare this generation for the future; however, the future requires people who can uphold a vast amount of professional responsibilities; and these responsibilities are all heavily intertwined with technological skills. This technological division between students of different Socioeconomic Status (SES) is called the Digital Divide. The digital divide, as defined by Ritzhaupt, Liu, Dawson and Barron in their article “Differences in Student Information and Communication Technology Literacy Based on Socio-Economic Status, Ethnicity, and Gender: Evidence of a Digital Divide in Florida Schools,” is “generally divergent on a number of troubling demographics, such as socioeconomic status (SES), ethnicity, and gender.” (2013, p.
students are now not only entering the classroom with different home environments, different cultural experiences, and different reading levels, but they are also entering with different technological capabilities.

What happens is something like this: Student A is a low-income Hispanic student who comes to school with a very small amount of technology-life experience. They did not have a computer at home, but sometimes they would walk to the library and use theirs; or sometimes they would play on a friend’s Smartphone. Student B is White and middle-class. They grew up with a computer in their common room and has played on it for years. They also have a tablet for games during car rides and reading. Mom and Dad have smartphones, and sometimes they are allowed to play on them. Student B comes into English class knowing quickly how to manipulate their Word document on the computer, how to save files, fix their errors, and check their spelling. Student A may have similar writing capabilities as Student B, however Student A is behind on the technological skills and has to spend half of class trying to navigate the tool they are using versus writing the actual paper. Imagine the quality of a paper Student A creates when frustrated by the tool they are using, and when feeling rushed. This is one scenario out of many. However, it is reality for many students of low SES. Therefore, in an attempt to reduce this divide, schools have been using their Title I funds to provide technological resources to their students. (Title I funds are allocated by the federal government to support schools with a large majority of low SES students.) The school this curriculum is designed for does this; each student is issued an iPad for their school year. They take this iPad home, they use it in class, and they use it socially. In other words, they use it everywhere.

Summary
In summation, this literature review demonstrates the importance of conflict resolution, listening skills, autonomy, self-advocacy, and identity development. Likewise, the research shows that technology has an unwavering presence in society, and that impacts the student’s social interactions inside and outside of the classrooms. Literacy development and technology have the ability to be combined in a manner that also engages the student’s aforementioned social skills; thus, the following chapter will outline how that combination can take form in a curriculum design for a 6th grade reading classroom.
CHAPTER THREE

Methods

The literature review demonstrated that adolescents are in a crucial developmental stage for their social skills. One-to-one technology has also been found to hinder social interactions between adolescents in the classroom, which conflicts with this necessary development. In addition, all present research found on technology being used as a social skills tool has been focused around children with special needs. The aim of this research is to broaden that population. Also, since the need for social development is not going to change, and since the role technology plays continues to increase in the modern child’s life, this research aims to discover a way to utilize iPads as a tool to advance the social skills of a 6th grader. Therefore, this curriculum design addresses the research question: How can technology be used as a tool to advance the social and literacy development for sixth graders? The five social skills of focus are: conflict resolution, listening, self-advocacy, autonomy, and identity development.

Intended Audience

The student group that this curriculum is designed for are sixth graders in a English/Language Arts or Reading classroom. The lessons are designed for 50 minute class periods, with one chapter taking two days of classroom reading, discussion, and activity work. the students will be in small groups of four or five students. Each student will need access to their iPad, the GoogleDocs application, Edmodo application, and the Internet. For students without iPads, these applications are also available via the Internet on the desktop computers. The unit is broken into
four stages. Per the specific activities, as described further in Chapter Four, some activities will involve partner work, whereas others will be independent, in their small groups, or as a whole class. This unit was designed to take place in the second semester of the school year. Due to this placement, the students will come to class with a set of skills already in place to complete the desired activities. The prior knowledge these students will need are: How to infer meaning, the elements of plot, character traits, how to use context clues, as well as a repertoire of reading strategies.

Rationale and Relevance of the Curriculum Design

As the research in the literature review emphasizes, the social development of adolescents is at a crucial stage of maturation. With the increase in controversial situations that middle schoolers must face, navigating appropriate conflict resolution becomes more urgent (Carlisle, 2011). Similarly, an adolescent’s ability to skillfully listen and respond to another person becomes an important component of solving such conflicts. Skillful listening also aids a person in being a desirable conversational partner (Gearhart & Brodie, 2011). Once an adolescent knows how to skillfully listen, they then need to know how to adequately articulate what they understand or do not understand and what they want to respond with that can contribute to the conversation at hand. This connects to the development of self-advocacy. As the literature review states, adolescents in the classroom need to be able to identify and communicate their learning needs as well as their needs in their evolving social circles (Douglass, 2004). Likewise, as these adolescents gain a grasp of how to advocate for themselves, they can also achieve a better understanding of how to do a personal inventory of their wants, needs, values, and motives. As they continue to practice this self inventory and explore these
areas of their identity, they will also begin to evaluate the types of roles they play and how they want to play them. However, with fewer opportunities for true autonomy, due to the omnipresence of technology, adolescents of today are in less of a hurry toward independence and the identification of their personal values as distinct from their other communities (Turkle, 2011). Considering the interconnectedness of these five social development skills and the way technology heavily weaves itself into these adolescent’s lives, it is opportunistic to take an already prevalent aspect of their lives and utilize the device that can positively impact their social skills, rather than hinder it.

Curriculum Design and Methods

The curriculum is crafted using the “Understanding by Design Framework” by Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins (2012). The goal of this framework is for teachers to plan backwards by thinking about the summative and formative assessments first (McTighe & Wiggins, p. 1). While doing this, the alignment of the activities and assessments to academic standards is significant as it creates intention and focus for each lesson. The framework is about long term achievement goals and the transference of knowledge and skills (McTighe & Wiggins, p. 3). The choice to use this framework for this curriculum was intentional as it facilitates the creation of lesson plans and units that foster long lasting academic growth.

The curricular plan is to engage the students in a series of literacy-based activities utilizing their iPads (or other available technology) while emphasizing social interactions. The social skills of focus are the aforementioned five: conflict resolution, listening skills, autonomy, self-advocacy, and identity development. The technology applications that will be used are
GoogleDocs, Kahoot, Edmodo, and My Talking Avatar. The students be working independently, in partner pairs, small groups, and as an entire class.

For the independent work, the classroom will utilize the website on Edmodo.com. The students also have an application on their iPads that makes the website more user-friendly for mobile devices. However, for students who do not have iPads and must use the desktop computers, the website provides all the same functions. For each activity, a discussion question that pertains to the reading that week will be posted. One question will be persuasive in nature, requiring the students to defend their stance on an issue. By the end of the week, every student will need to respond to two of their classmate’s original posts, either politely agreeing or disagreeing with their statement. This exercise will channel the students’ conflict resolution skills and how they navigate sharing opinions with their peers and backing them up in a constructive manner. Also, the students will be required to use their Academic Language skills that have been emphasized in other lessons. Such language skills require the students to practice appropriate academic expression of their knowledge and opinions, while simultaneously acknowledging their peer’s comments. See Appendix C for the assignment document outlining the expectations and assessment rubric.

For partner work, students will participate in creating an avatar based off of a character from *Touching Spirit Bear* utilizing the application “My Talking Avatar.” There are guidelines provided to the students as to what specific information they need to include in their avatar creation- see Appendix D for assignment and assessment details. The students will be given two class periods to plan out and create their profiles. On the third day, they will present their avatars to the class. In order to submit their avatars, they will turn them into an assignment folder on
Edmodo by uploading the animated video of their Avatar. For this project, they will be evaluating identity of a character, which will involve the incorporation of their own identities through design. This project will require each partner to practice their listening skills as they must cooperatively find middle ground for their shared ideas in order to create one solid project. Likewise, it will require them to work on their self-advocacy skills as they will need to appropriately communicate what they want, need, and may not understand. Lastly, since this project requires the personal evaluation and communication of what is important for each student to express through the project, the students will gain an understanding of their personal values, communication styles, and skills; thus developing their identity.

For the small group interactions, I will employ the use of the application GoogleDocs in two different ways. First, every other chapter, the students will participate in a literature circle discussion. Every chapter the students will use a spinner to dictate which role they will play for that chapter. The available roles are Story Mapper, Question Generator, Summarizer, and Vocabulary Finder. All roles involve literacy skills that will have been a part of the classroom curriculum from the beginning of the year. Now, they will be asked to apply these skills to this specific text. The Literature Circle Document will be available to their small groups that are created in GoogleDocs by me. Only their group can make edits to the document, and will add their individual components to that document in live-time during the class period. The students will be reminded to share each of their findings for their individual roles before moving forward. The design of the assignment is to individually focus on a literacy skill (which is consistently, and randomly changing), yet to also share with their peers what they have learned and discovered. This involves problem-solving skills, autonomy, and listening skills.
GoogleDocs will also be used to independently share items with the teacher. Every 2-4 chapters in *Touching Spirit Bear* activities have been designed to highlight a variety of literacy skills. The students are to work independently on these literacy skills, via the uploaded documents on GoogleDocs, and to share them with me upon completion (See Appendix A for examples of these documents). Before moving forward as a class, we discuss their findings as noted in their GoogleDocs. This class discussion, in combination with their uploaded work, operates as an informal assessment tool. It illustrates what skills the students need more practice on, and what skills have been mastered. A specific component of these activities is vocabulary building. Upon the completion of a section of chapters, and the review of the vocabulary as a class, the students will take a vocabulary assessment using their iPads and the website kahoot.it. Through the website create.kahoot.it, a series of assessments have been created that determine the student’s comprehension of the vocabulary previously practiced (See Appendix B for screen shot examples). This application will employ their autonomy, as it is timed. This forces them to make their own decisions versus getting caught up in the decisions of their peers. However, it is class-involvement which allows for fun and social interactions between questions. The crucial component is that it is still an independently-assessed application. The students get excited and competitive when playing this assessment game. If they do not stay focused and intent on expressing what they know, rather than racing their peers and the clock, they may sacrifice their score. All components and cautionary advice are discussed elaborately at the beginning of these assessments.
Application Outline with Social and Literacy Skill Integration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application Name</th>
<th>Assignment Type</th>
<th>Social Skills Addressed</th>
<th>Literacy Skills Addressed</th>
<th>Projected Use of Application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GoogleDocs</td>
<td>Small Group and Independent Work</td>
<td>Conflict Resolution; Self-Advocacy; Listening Skills</td>
<td>Vocabulary Development; Reading Comprehension; Fluency</td>
<td>Daily/ Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Talking Avatar</td>
<td>Partner Work</td>
<td>Conflict Resolution; Self-Advocacy; Listening Skills; Identity Development</td>
<td>Reading Comprehension</td>
<td>Fourth week of the curriculum design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edmodo Posts</td>
<td>Independent Work</td>
<td>Conflict Resolution, Autonomy</td>
<td>Reading Comprehension</td>
<td>Twice- every other week during the 2nd month of the curriculum design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kahoot</td>
<td>Independent Work</td>
<td>Listening Skills</td>
<td>Vocabulary Development</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

In summation, this chapter provided the rationale and relevance of the curriculum design. It also discussed the general population the curriculum design was created for, as well as the curriculum plan and the specific activities involved. The following chapter will provide the Understanding by Design Framework of the four stages for the unit.
CHAPTER FOUR

Curricular Materials

Outline of the Unit Stages

The curriculum is organized into four stages. The first stage involves the chapter activities through the use of GoogleDocs (Appendix A). For vocabulary assessments, the Kahoot.it created quizzes will be used (Appendix B). The second stage includes all that is in stage one with the addition of the Literature Circles Preparation Form via GoogleDocs (see Laura Candler’s website for document access). The third stage includes the chapter documents and Kahoot assessments from stage one, however adds the Edmodo Assignment (Appendix C). Finally, stage four comprises of the chapter documents, the Kahoot quizzes, as well as a character development activity utilizing the iPad application My Talking Avatar (Appendix D & E).

Stage One Details

The GoogleDoc chapter activities are the individual assignments that have the students focusing on vocabulary development, literary devices, inference skills, and character development throughout the chapters of Touching Spirit Bear. The students will complete these activities individually first, through GoogleDocs which are shared only with me, and then as a class their responses will be discussed in further depth. This gives the students an opportunity to first formulate their autonomous thoughts, then to share and explore them deeper with their
peers. The first few chapters will be focusing on plot structure, character diagramming, and background building. See Appendix A for examples of these documents.

The students will be performing their vocabulary comprehension through the use of the interactive assessment tool on Kahoot.it. The vocabulary assessments involve the use of the iPad or desktop computer to select a shape and/or color that best matches with the synonym, antonym, or image that is referencing a vocabulary word. Screenshots of this assessment tool can be found in Appendix B.
Understanding by Design Framework for Stage One

Stage Two Details

The same chapter activities and Kahoot assessments mentioned in Stage One will be used in this stage as well; however, the addition of the literature circle document is made. The literature circle document will be used to engage the students in the advancement of their literacy.
skills in vocabulary development, inference skills, summarizing skills, mental mapping, and the organization of events. Also, the use of this document through GoogleDocs makes its formation live as the students can simultaneously add to it in their groups at the same time via their own iPads (or a desktop computer if necessary). The document was created by Laura Candler, who has been a classroom teacher for 28 years, a teacher educator for 12 years, and has written 10 books about teaching practices. She has a website of free resources available to the public across multiple content areas. The document used from her website for this curriculum is called Literature Circles Preparation Form and can be found at http://www.lauracandler.com/strategies/litcirclemodels.php.
Understanding by Design Framework for Stage Two

Stage Three Details

The same chapter activities and Kahoot assessments mentioned in Stage One will be used in this stage as well; however, the addition of the Edmodo posts will be added. The Edmodo
posts are designed to engage the students in the formation of autonomous opinionated thoughts in response to persuasive and argumentative prompts. After they post their original posts, they will respond to at least two of their other group member’s posts, thus engaging them in their conflict resolution and academic language skills. See Appendix C for the assignment details.

**Understanding by Design Framework for Stage Three**
Stage Four Details

Following the pattern of the previous three stages, the chapter activities and Kahoot assessments will carry on in this stage as well. The addition to this stage is the avatar character analysis. This partner-based project is intended to expand on the student’s understanding of character development and turn it into a three-dimensional design of their literary character. It will require students to work collaborative with their partners, thus activating their conflict resolution, self-advocacy, and listening skills. Appendix D shows the assignment sheet the students are given, including the rubric that clearly states what they will be assessed on. It notes that they receive a grade for completing their preliminary character-development worksheet that they are given earlier in the text to help them build their character-development skills. That worksheet, created for the purpose of this curriculum, is found in Appendix E.
Understanding by Design Framework for Stage Four

**STAGE 4 – DESIRED RESULTS**

**Unit Title:** The Touching Spirit Bear

**Established Goals:**

**Understandings:**
- Students will understand that:
  - Plot changes due to character development.
  - Making meaning of unknown words increases reading comprehension.
  - Inferences and drawing conclusions requires textual evidence as support.

**Essential Questions:**
- How does a character develop throughout a text in reaction to plot events?
- How does one use academic language to appropriately express ideas and opinions?

**Students will know:**
- How to infer
- Plot elements
- Character traits
- How to use context clues
- Reading strategies
- Use the GoogleDocs application
- How to operate the My Talking Avatar application

**Students will be able to:**
- Infer meaning from the text at a deeper level.
- Identify parts of the story’s plot.
- Analyze the development of the characters.
- Reflect on the meaning of the plot and character changes, and author’s intention.
- Communicate ideas and opinions using academic language.
- Work collaboratively within small groups to gain a deeper understanding of the text.
- State an opinion and back it up with textual evidence.
- Respond to a peer’s opinion using academic language and respect.
- Advocate for personal knowledge and choices while cooperatively and collaboratively working with a partner.

**STAGE 4 – ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE**

**Performance Tasks:**
1. Chapter Activities accessed through GoogleDocs - See Appendix A
2. Literature Circle documents - as seen on Laura Candler’s website (see reference list).
3. Avatar Project - see Appendix D and E

**Other Evidence:**
- Kahoot Vocabulary Quizzes - See Appendix B

**STAGE 4 – LEARNING PLAN**

**Summary of Learning Activities:**
- Students will independently reflect and respond to the vocabulary and discussion questions located in the chapter activity in GoogleDocs. After completing each chapter’s vocabulary and questions, they will share their responses with me via GoogleDocs, and ultimately discuss their findings with group members. After that chapter section is complete, and vocabulary is reviewed as a class, the students will partake in the Kahoot vocabulary assessment.
- Students will work in their small groups to fulfill individual, and rotated, roles for that chapter of text. Upon completing their individual role, students will share their findings with their small group using academic language guidelines to guide their dialogue.
- Students will work collaboratively with partners to create a speaking and moving animated avatar. This avatar will demonstrate components of a character’s personality, experiences had, and development made throughout the plot.

**Summary**

In summation, this chapter provided the details and Understanding by Design Framework for the four stages of this curriculum design. In the following chapter, the curriculum is reflected
upon regarding its limitations, implications, future goals, and suggestions for future research are provided.
CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

This curriculum design addresses the research question: *How can technology be used as a tool to advance the social and literacy development for sixth graders?* What started out as a concern turned into a constructive curriculum. As the 2014 school year wound down, and iPads were getting taken away from students, the stark contrast in their social engagement with and without the iPads was alarming. At such a crucial developmental stage for adolescents, the last thing I wanted was to sacrifice the advancement of their social skills in light of the advancement of their technological skills. Therefore, what became of this concern was the merging of both social and technology skills in a literacy curriculum. I used our Spring novel *Touching Spirit Bear* by Ben Mikaelsen, and a series of technology applications to create four stages of activities that intertwine together, and worked in conjunction to further advance all skills important for these socially changing adolescents, in a technologically-driven era, while learning in a 6th grade reading classroom.

This curriculum channels the problematic desire to isolate oneself with their devices and turns it into a social activity. My goal in the creation of this curriculum was to use technology as a tool to increase academic and constructive social interaction by, for example, intentionally creating conflict - but only after practicing skills for how to handle it in the unique space of a discussion board. Instead of the relationship between social and technological interactions resting with text messages and emails, I wanted to create opportunities for personal reflection, conflict resolution, opinionated discussions, and creative expression instead.
The social skills that were emphasized in this curriculum design are: conflict resolution, listening skills, self-advocacy, autonomy, and identity development. As the students navigate their newly multiplied faces in middle school and how to interact with each one, they have two mediums, and different rules for each, on how to do so- electronically or face-to-face. The safer route would be via technology. However this choice can lead to empathy-free behaviors, preventing the advancement of their conflict resolution skills. When a person posts something online they miss out on the visual reaction of the other person involved. This takes away their need to feel empathy because they do not see the immediate effect of their behavior on that person, thus detaching them from the responsibility of their online choices (Ives, 2012, p. 31). The cause and effect of their social choices are less immediate; therefore, without guidance and education around technological conversations, and without facilitating productive and healthy conversations on the Internet, these students may continue to develop bad conflict resolution habits. This is why my curriculum was designed to facilitate academic conversations utilizing chat-based activities in our electronic classroom using the application Edmodo. Students will receive guidance and practice around the use of academic language, and then engage in persuasive and argumentative conversations online. The goal is to elicit their conflict resolution skills, using the medium that can hinder their empathic tendencies, while simultaneously giving them to tools to appropriately navigate their speech and autonomous opinions. In connection, autonomy was another social skill that I emphasized in this curriculum design.

Sixth graders are fresh to the management of materials, schedules, and responsibilities. Amongst the chaos of trying to organize their exterior life as a new middle schooler, sharing their opinions amongst a new body of peers every 50 minutes can be a daunting task. Likewise, taking
the time to internally check with themselves on what they feel and think, only to brave the crowd
to share it, can be an ultimate challenge. Add in technology to their mix of stimuli, and the
advancement of their autonomy can be at a high risk, if the technological tools are not harnessed
for the positive. At any point, a student can double-tap their home button on their iPads, swipe to
their iMessage application and send a quick “What do you think?” to their peer across the room-
without the slightest idea from an instructor. Their autonomous opinion becomes instantly
impacted. Knowing the importance of their autonomy, I chose to create opportunities within my
curriculum where they would need to first harness their own thoughts, opinions, and knowledge,
before debriefing with their peers. “Traditional views of adolescent development take autonomy
and strong personal boundaries as reliable signs of a successfully maturing self,” (Turkle, 2011,
p.172). This development can be seen in the aforementioned Edmodo discussion posts. Likewise,
they will share the weekly chapter documents with only me on GoogleDocs. These documents,
as shown in the previous chapter, that has them reflecting on the text we are reading and the
character and plot development taking place. Once we are finished individually with these
documents, then we will discuss the questions as a class. This offers the students the opportunity
to be autonomous, while also learning from their peers.

The student’s autonomy skills connect with their self-advocacy skills within the
curriculum. First, the students need to separate their opinions from their peers, truly reflect on
what they understand and do not understand, and then express themselves. This self-evaluative
procedure is foreign for many students. Acknowledging that they do not know/have something,
and then advocating for its gain is an important social skill. “It encompasses a broad set of
knowledge, skills, and behaviors that enable an individual to seek goals, make decisions, explore
options, solve problems, speak up for himself or herself, understand what supports are needed for success, and evaluate outcomes (Sebag, p.22-23). This is why the Edmodo posts and the Avatar partner projects are important in this curriculum— they provide intentional opportunities for the students to advocate for themselves. They first must establish an autonomous idea, then they advocate for it in a technological venue, as well as in a classroom seat. This way, the students are getting the practice they need to safely express themselves in the two mediums they will float between regularly.

With an emphasis on technology, it is easy to visualize heads bent downward towards a device, mouths quiet. My concern for the advancement of their listening skills was prevalent when designing this curriculum. “When someone holds a phone, it can be hard to know if you have that person’s attention. A parent, partner, or child glances down and is lost to another place, often without realizing they have taken leave,” (Turkle, p.161). In connection to conflict resolution, students need to be able to appropriately listen to their peers’ autonomous expressions, then to process what they have heard, in order to ultimately communicate an effective response. Therefore, I included an activity that involves partnership, and another involving group work. The partnership activity utilizing the My Talking Avatar application, requires students to advocate for their ideas and insight to their partner, and conversely, to listen attentively to what their partner is saying in order to create a cohesive project. Likewise, their literature circle weekly activities requires the students to share, and discuss, their individual roles during every few chapters. Then, they must cohesively add each of their role completions to a GoogleDoc that is shared with me. As I monitor their group discussions, I am able to probe them
on a group-by-group basis with more thought-provoking questions, enhancing the depth of their discussions as needed.

As the students navigate the development of the above social skills, it is my intention and design, that they will ultimately gain a greater sense of their identity. “As young adolescents struggle to differentiate and move toward independence and autonomy, they gradually move away from parents and family in favor of intimate peer associations and friendships forming a sense of identity,” (Fitton et. al, p. 2). By processing these autonomous thoughts, testing out conflict resolution skills, listening to their peers effectively, and then advocating for themselves, my hope is that they will become more aware and confident of their own thoughts and feelings, and how to express them effectively. At an age, and in an era, where everything around them and within them is changing rapidly, creating an educational space where they can process those changes has been a big part of my passion for teaching.

Limitations

Although my curriculum design has been extensively thought over, and planned out, there are potential limitations. First, the level of technological communication that will be going from me to the students, and back again, has the ability to be logistically complicated. Middle school students forget login passwords, their devices, and due dates on a regular basis. Chasing down students with reminders has become a daily part of my job- partly because they are still heavily developing those organization skills necessary when suddenly being an autonomous learner. Between Edmodo and GoogleDocs, I will have small groups created in both applications, with students submitting assignments within both. Likewise, they will also be submitting individual assignments in each application as well. Often times, they do not submit them on the
same date. Therefore, I will need to be regularly checking the applications, and all forms of
submissions, to appropriately assess their work. When such chaos is bound to happen, some
students may fall between the cracks, and some assignments may get missed. Developing a
pattern for logging completed work will be crucial.

Another logistical limitation that I predict to be a complication is the availability of
Internet and devices outside of the classroom. Not all of my students have access to wifi off
campus. Therefore, if time becomes an issue - as it frequently does - these students will be
incapable of working on their technology-rich assignments at home. I always ensure that I am at
school and available before the first period every day. I stay after school one day a week (usually
Thursdays) and by appointment otherwise. However, the number of students that show up for
these available times is usually low. The Internet concern is not a concern solely off campus. It
has a reputation of being unreliable on campus as well. One class period may have fully working
Internet, whereas the next will not. Or, the Internet may decide to cut out part way into the
period, derailing our activity. The only sincere reliability I have when it comes to Internet access
is that it will be unreliable. Therefore, I always try to have paper copies of documents we might
be using, or back-up plans for an activity in case my plan derails. Likewise, a student’s access to
their device varies. Some students have strict rules for their at-home use of their device. Others
are set free to do as they please, and for most this means playing games. For another group of
students, when they get home their devices are confiscated. This might happen because of at-
school behavior or grades, or because a parent, or sibling, wants to use the device for themselves.

When thinking about applications to use for this curriculum, a limitation was cost. A
budget for literacy applications does not exist at the school I will be implementing this, and I
could not ask my students to pay money for applications or programs. This limited my options, and sent me looking at applications that were Internet-based, like GoogleDocs and Edmodo. Likewise, the My Talking Avatar application used in this curriculum is only the free download version. There is an upgrade available for a cost, however I do not have the personal funds to purchase the application for 70-plus students. Justifying the cost of one application for one activity is difficult, and likely unsuccessful, to parents as well.

Lastly, the most common limitation with this curriculum connects to adolescent behavioral patterns. Since the curriculum relies on the students to bring their one-to-one iPads to class every day, the daily obstacles are often: their iPad isn’t charged; they lost their iPad; they damaged their iPad; they damaged their charger and it is dead; they are grounded from the device; or the iPad was stolen. The classroom desktops are available at all times, however there are only three or four to use. They are there for students who do not have a device; and on a day where the majority of students bring their devices in working, charged, conditions, that is all that is needed. However, with these limitations in mind, with my own personal iPad as a backup, and with flexibility and a healthy sense of humor, I believe that these limitations are not crippling to the success of this curriculum design.

Implications

At the school level, I hope to create an awareness of the tools available to literacy instructors, as well as other content areas. Some teachers are hesitant to test out new methods of instruction; however, if they can see academic and social successes come from it, they are more likely to invest in it. Throughout our team meetings, I will be able to share with my coworkers what I am accomplishing and walk them through the creation of their own GoogleDocs, Edmodo
posts, and more. If possible with administration approval, I could spread my gained insight to the staff during inservice opportunities as well.

At the classroom level, with 78% of the student population receiving free and reduced meals, my students are at a disadvantage for their level of technologically-rich interactions. Part of our Title I funding is intentionally designed for the students to have iPads, as a rectification of this disadvantage. The idea is that if students of lower SES have fewer interactions with technology, then they will be less prepared for the technologically-advancing world that awaits them in adulthood. Even though all of our students have iPads, it is the teacher’s job to assist them in using them for the advancement of their skills, emphasizing available tools, and connecting them to their resources via the devices. I intend for my curriculum design to do just this.

Future Goals

Upon the complete execution of the curriculum, I intend to engage my students in a discussion about the pros and cons of the components involved. I will ask them about what they enjoyed and what they did not; what they feel they learned the most from, and what they did not. I also plan to reflect after the execution of each activity to ensure that I am actively assessing the productivity, the issues that may arise, and making plans for what to modify for next time. As an effective educator, it is crucial to reflect, modify, and try again. With the input of my students, as I do at the end of every school year, I hope to consistently advance this curriculum. Likewise, I have begun taking courses as a Digital Instructor for professional development through my district. My hope is to continue these courses and to apply the insight gained about applications
available for literacy instruction, as well as how to engage students via technology, in my classroom and in my curriculum designs in the future.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Due to the cost and resource limitations, I was unable to focus my curriculum around iPads solely. Adventuring further into iPad-specific applications that advance literacy skills and/or social skills would be a suggested avenue for future research.

Social skills are focused on and exercised through the use of this curriculum design; however, further research could be done on how to measure the growth of social skills through the use of technology. For instance, the question of how one-to-one iPads impacts face-to-face conversations is a question this project is unable to answer. The Social Skills Rating System created by Pearson Clinical provides a foundation for assessing social skills.

Similarly, an area this manuscript was unable to tackle, yet would benefit from future research, is the communicative misfires and breakages in socially appropriate response times as connected to technological interactions.

**In Conclusion**

As my day comes to a close, I check my email to tie up loose ends from work, I surf Instagram pictures to see what my friends have been up to today, and I set my alarm on my phone for the next day. I always check it twice because if my phone does not wake me up promptly at 4:45 a.m., I will miss my first class. This close relationship I have to technology spans my entire day’s length. However, as I reflect upon that reality, I also acknowledge the level of social interaction I have still had - through a device and from face-to-face interactions. I have emailed, text messaged, Faceooked, shared meals and discussions with people, and taught
students today. Ultimately, I have no desire to change my relationship with technology; I like how it is right now. I am confident that my students feel similarly about their relationship with technology as well. Therefore, I find peace in the design of this curriculum and its ability to harness that technological relationship and use it to advance literacy and social skills.
APPENDIX A

*Touching Spirit Bear* Chapter Examples
Chapter 6-7 Touching Spirit Bear

Directions: Use your context clues to fill in the Definition Prediction box for the following words:
Discuss and Respond to the following questions:

Chapter 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word – Part of Speech</th>
<th>Original Sentence from Text</th>
<th>Definition Prediction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taunted—verb</td>
<td>“”Or you’ll what?” Cole taunted. “Beat me?”” Chapter 6, page 47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>muted—adjective</td>
<td>“A muted murmur rippled around the circle.” Chapter 6, page 49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stammered—verb</td>
<td>“”Uh, well…birthdays have never been a very big thing around our house,” he stammered.” Chapter 6, page 52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scrounged—verb</td>
<td>“He dug carefully with a stuck until he found hot coals, then scrounged dry twigs from under the tree branches.” Chapter 6, page 53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manipulated—verb</td>
<td>“Peter’s lawyer had asked for the feather. “All your life you’ve lied, manipulated people, and tried to avoid consequences,” she said.” Chapter 6, page 55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuffs—noun</td>
<td>“Chuffs of air from their blowholes broke the still air.” Chapter 7, page 58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>roiled—verb</td>
<td>“For hours his mind roiled with turbulent thoughts before he fell into a restless, tortured sleep.” Chapter 7, page 60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>makeshift—adjective</td>
<td>“Cole picked up the makeshift spear in one hand, the knife blade in the other.” Chapter 7, page 63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rivulets—noun</td>
<td>“Raindrops beaded on its white bushy hair and dripped off in miniature rivulets.” Chapter 7, page 64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
i. At this circle justice meeting we learn a lot about some of the characters. What did we learn about mother and father’s relationship? About Garvey and his attitude towards Cole? How is Peter feeling? Use textual evidence as support.

ii. “Banishment isn’t a sentence. It’s simply a time for Cole to *walk his talk.*” What does Garvey mean by this?

Chapter 7

i. “No one was watching. He could easily back away from this bear and not a single human being on the planet would ever know.” What does this thought show about Cole and some of the actions he has done?

ii. Attacking the Spirit Bear is metaphorical for Cole attacking other aspects of his life. What else may Cole be trying to attack?
**Name:**

**Chapter 8-10 Touching Spirit Bear**

**Directions:** Use your context clues to fill in the Definition Prediction box for the following words:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word – Part of Speech</th>
<th>Original Sentence from Text</th>
<th>Definition Prediction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **gluttonous—adjective**  
**Gluttony—noun**  
**Glutton-noun** | “The gluttonous seagulls had brazenly eaten chunks torn from his chest and were now onto something else—a herring or a clam.” Chapter 8, page 68 | |
| **bile—noun** | “A sour bile taste stung his throat.” Chapter 8, page 72 | |
| **haphazard—noun** | “Watching the bird made Cole curse every second of his miserable and haphazard life.” Chapter 9, page 74 | |
| **torrents—noun**  
**Torrential—adjective** | “Rain fell in torrents, and thunder rumbled across the sky like empty barrels rolling towards the horizon.” Chapter 9, page 76 | |
| **doggedly—adverb**  
**Dogged-adjective** | “He felt himself slipping into darkness and blinked hard, doggedly clinging to life, willing himself to not let go.” Chapter 10, page 80 | |
| **frail—adjective** | “The sparrows were so frail, helpless, and innocent.” Chapter 10, page 82 | |
| **wallowing—verb**  
**Wallow-verb** | “All of his life he had squandered his choices, wallowing in revenge and self-pity, keeping himself down.” Chapter 10, page 84 | |
| **skittish—noun** | “Cole lay motionless as the skittish mouse ventured across his forearm and sniffed at his wrist, then inched onto his upturned palm.” Chapter 10, page 87 | |
Discuss and Respond to the following questions:

Chapter 8

i. What might be the author’s purpose behind being so detailed and descriptive about Cole’s experience after the attack?

ii. Cole acknowledges that the blood of his, and the blood he shed from Peter looks the same. Why is this an important realization?

Chapter 9

i. On page 77, Cole describes a prickling sensation that covers his body after a “searing light flashed” and a “deafening explosion” happened. What is the author inferring to? How do you know?

ii. Cole asking if the baby sparrows are okay is a big moment! Why?

Chapter 10

i. Cole envies the baby sparrows. Why? Use textual evidence to support your answer.

ii. On page 82, Cole recognizes: “The power to choose was real power, not the fake power of making others afraid.” Why is this important for him to recognize?
Name:

**Chapter 13-15 *Touching Spirit Bear***

**Directions:** Antonyms are words that mean the opposite of each other. Use your context clues to make a prediction in the box for the following word’s *Antonym*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word – Part of Speech</th>
<th>Original Sentence from Text</th>
<th>Antonym Prediction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>intently—adverb</td>
<td>“Edwin remained standing along the wall, watching intently as Garvey placed a big pillow under Cole’s head and ladled spoonfuls of chicken broth between his cracked lips.” <em>Chapter 13, page 104</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>raspy—adjective</td>
<td>“I had a dream,” he said, his voice raspy.” <em>Chapter 13, page 106</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tousled—adjective</td>
<td>“He ran a hand through his tousled hair.” <em>Chapter 13, page 108</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reluctantly—adverb</td>
<td>“Finally, the guard nodded reluctantly and allowed Cole to walk freely during the transfer.” <em>Chapter 14, page 115</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trauma—noun</td>
<td>“You’re lucky to be alive, and your body will continue to react to the trauma for a long time.” <em>Chapter 14, page 117</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relinquish—verb</td>
<td>“Because of what happened, they will probably relinquish authority over our case and send it back to the court system.” <em>Chapter 14, page 119</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monotonous—adjective</td>
<td>“During the next week, Cole settled into the monotonous routine of the detention center.” <em>Chapter 14, page 120</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resignation—noun</td>
<td>“The Keeper spoke with resignation.” <em>Chapter 15, page 130</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resign—verb</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discuss and Respond to the following questions:

Chapter 13

i. “He’ll be okay if he finds a reason to live,” Edwin says (p. 105). What does Edwin mean by this?

ii. We learned some new, and important, information about Garvey this chapter. What was it, and how does it help us understand why Garvey believes in Cole?

iii. Sequencing is putting the events of a story in order. Unscramble the below events of the chapter and put them in their correct order by listing the letters in correct sequence.
   i. Then Cole wakes up from a nightmare in the middle of the night.
   ii. First, the only nurse on the island, Rosey, takes Cole in to take care of him.
   iii. Finally, no one believed Cole about seeing the Spirit Bear. He threw the fur into the water anyways.
   iv. Then, Cole acknowledges the metaphor Garvey made earlier: “If I like the cake, the ingredients are okay, too.”

Chapter 14

i. Garvey points to Cole’s head and says, “The therapist told you about your physical healing…but healing up there is much harder.” What does he mean by this?

ii. Cole and his mother have a positive moment together. What does his mom confess to? What is she doing to be a better mom, and person?

Chapter 15

i. Using the Venn diagram below, compare and contrast Cole’s behavior in the first Circle Justice meeting to the one in this chapter.
ii. What was Edwin saying by doing the demonstration with Cole? Was how Cole handled it a shock to you, or not, and why?

iii. Cole is going back to the island. What do you predict will happen?

**All of the following chapters follow a similar design as the above chapters.**
APPENDIX B

Kahoot Vocabulary Assessment Screenshots
What word has the definition: to suffocate?

- **Stifle**
- **Bouts**

What word has the definition: to move around restlessly and stealthily?

- **Prowl**
- **Bouts**
What word has the antonym hopeful?

17

Kahoot!

0 Answers

- desperate
- quizzically
- bouts
- fleeting

What word is depicted by the following image?

18

0 Answers

- fleeting
- bouts
- quizzically
- desperate
What word is depicted by the following image?

Choose one:
- mauled
- prowl
- quizzically
- bouts

Which word has the antonym: breathing.

Choose one:
- stifle
- quizzically
- mauled
- bouts
APPENDIX C

Edmodo Discussion Posts Student Handout
Edmodo Posts

i. You will need to respond to each post I create within your small groups on Edmodo. There will be one post on Wednesday, another Friday, and the last one on the following Monday. (5pts)

Requirements for your post:

i. It must be written in proper grammar and punctuation (1pt)
ii. It must be a minimum of 3 sentences (1pt)
iii. It must include textual evidence to back up your response (3pts)

i. After posting your initial response, no later than 2 days after your initial post, you must respond to the comments of ALL your group members, using Academic Language, and no less than 2 sentences. (5pts)

Academic Language Suggestions:

I agree with what you are saying because...
I respectfully disagree with you because...
I liked when you said __________, but I also think...
I learned __________ from your post because…
APPENDIX D

Avatar Character Analysis Student Handout
Avatar Character Analysis - (20 points)

Directions: Using the character analysis worksheets (you completed a few weeks ago) as a guide, you will create an Avatar in the iPad application called BuddyPoke: My Talking Avatar for a character from your classroom text. (If you and your partner originally chose different characters, you will need to decide on one to do together) You will complete this project with a partner at your table. You will need to work cooperatively to create one unified piece of work. See below for the required components, as well as the rubric.

Required Components

i. Create a physical appearance to the Avatar that matches their characteristics in the text. Use your imagination to fill in the gaps.

ii. Create a personality for them using information from the text. You can give them:
   i. Physical postures based on emotions they frequently have in the text
   ii. Facial expressions based on emotions they frequently have in the text

iii. Give them something to say! First, write a miniature biography for your character, then voice record it. It should include:
   i. Their name
   ii. Their role in the book/how they are connected to the (other) main characters
   iii. Their attitudes/beliefs/understanding of the Banishment/Circle Justice
   iv. An experience they’ve had in the text from their perspective. For example (as Peter): “It was my first time seeing Cole since he attacked me. I was terrified. I was angry. I hated him for what he had done to me. My life, and my body, will never be the same…all because I told the truth about what I saw.”

Grading Rubric:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Appearance</th>
<th>Excellent work:</th>
<th>Needs work:</th>
<th>Almost there!</th>
<th>Good work!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 point- The character does not connect to any textual evidence of how they may look. Lacks creativity.</td>
<td>2 points- The character semi-connects to textual evidence of how they may look. Mild creativity.</td>
<td>3 points- The character connects to some textual evidence of how they look and/or has mild creativity</td>
<td>4 points- The character connects exactly to textual evidence of how they may look</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Personality</th>
<th>Excellent work:</th>
<th>Needs work:</th>
<th>Almost there!</th>
<th>Good work!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 point- The character’s personality is not shown and/or does not closely match evidence from the text.</td>
<td>2 points- The character’s personality is semi-shown and/or semi-matches evidence from the text.</td>
<td>3 points- The character’s personality is shown and moderately matches evidence from the text.</td>
<td>4 points- The character’s personality is shown in detail and closely matches evidence from the text.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voice Recording of Character</th>
<th>Excellent work:</th>
<th>Needs work:</th>
<th>Almost there!</th>
<th>Good work!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 point- It does not include all the necessary components.</td>
<td>2 points- It includes some, but not all of the necessary components.</td>
<td>3 points- It is missing one necessary component.</td>
<td>4 points- All necessary components are present!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partner’s Contribution</th>
<th>Excellent work:</th>
<th>Needs work:</th>
<th>Almost there!</th>
<th>Good work!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 point- My partner did not contribute to the project at all.</td>
<td>2 points- My partner contributed slightly to the project.</td>
<td>3 points- My partner contributed, however I still took on more work than them.</td>
<td>4 points- We put equal amounts of work and effort into the project.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Analysis Worksheet</th>
<th>Excellent work:</th>
<th>Needs work:</th>
<th>Almost there!</th>
<th>Good work!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 point- It is missing</td>
<td>2 points- It is only partially completed</td>
<td>3 points- One component of the worksheet is missing.</td>
<td>4 points- The worksheet is completed!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E

Character Analysis Student Planning Worksheet
Name:
Period

Building a Character Profile

*Touching Spirit Bear*

**Step 1:** Pick a character from the text that you would like to analyze deeper. Write their name below:

**Step 2:** Describe what that character looks like. Use the book as a reference tool. Think of the answers to the following questions: *What color is their hair? Are they tall/short/average height? Are they well groomed, dirty, etc? Do they wear expensive clothes, a uniform, etc? Do you imagine them smiling a lot, frowning, yelling, thinking, etc?*

**Step 3:** Draw a sketch of the character below.

**Step 4:** What type of personality traits does this character possess? Think of the following questions: *Are they kind or mean? Are they intelligent or naive? Are they curious? Are they adventurous or safe?* etc.
Step 5: Now, reference your list of the 10 IB attributes. What attributes do they possess already? For each attribute, refer back to the text for evidence that supports this. Write your evidence below. For example: Cole is adventurous. I know this because __________ (Identify at least three attributes and why)

Step 6: Using your inference skills to make predictions about upcoming events in the text, what IB attributes do you predict this character to gain? For example: I predict Cole to gain the IB attribute of knowledgeable. I think this because right now he is __________ but, I predict that __________ will have, allowing him to develop that asset. (Identify at least two attributes and why)
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and communication technology literacy based on socio-economic status, ethnicity, and


