

University of Denver

Digital Commons @ DU

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Graduate Studies

11-1-2011

Digital Storytelling and Study Abroad: The Impact of a Narrative-Based, Reflective Practice upon Identity Construction

Nicole Hubbell
University of Denver

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd>



Part of the [Mass Communication Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hubbell, Nicole, "Digital Storytelling and Study Abroad: The Impact of a Narrative-Based, Reflective Practice upon Identity Construction" (2011). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 296.
<https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd/296>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact jennifer.cox@du.edu, dig-commons@du.edu.

Digital Storytelling and Study Abroad: The Impact of a Narrative-Based, Reflective Practice upon Identity Construction

Abstract

Digital storytelling is a multimedia genre that has been steadily gaining recognition since its inception in the early 1990s. Study abroad is also on the rise among U.S. undergraduates. Study abroad returnees often lack opportunities for structured reflection upon their experiences abroad. Digital storytelling is one reflective tool that may be useful for stimulating reflection as part of a narrative process, which connects past events with current life choices and solidifies identity. Five undergraduates and three graduate students attended digital storytelling workshops, created digital stories, and were interviewed. Analysis of these case studies found that while graduate students were more adept at identifying life-changing moments, both groups benefited from narrative closure. The study confirms that digital storytelling is an important resource for study abroad returnees to help them uncover the significance of their experience abroad and can be used as an institutional assessment tool.

Document Type

Thesis

Degree Name

M.A.

Department

Mass Communications

First Advisor

Lynn Schofield Clark, Ph.D.

Second Advisor

Renee Botta

Third Advisor

Christof Demont-Heinrich

Keywords

Digital storytelling, Identity, International education, Narrative, Reentry, Study abroad

Subject Categories

Communication | Mass Communication

Publication Statement

Copyright is held by the author. User is responsible for all copyright compliance.

DIGITAL STORYTELLING AND STUDY ABROAD RETURNEES:
THE IMPACT OF A NARRATIVE-BASED, REFLECTIVE PRACTICE UPON
IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

A Thesis

Presented to
the Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

Nicole Hubbell

November 2011

Advisor: Lynn Schofield Clark, Ph.D.

Author: Nicole Hubbell

Title: DIGITAL STORYTELLING AND STUDY ABROAD RETURNEES: THE
IMPACT OF A NARRATIVE-BASED, REFLECTIVE PRACTICE UPON IDENTITY
CONSTRUCTION

Advisor: Lynn Schofield Clark, Ph.D.

Degree Date: November 2011

ABSTRACT

Digital storytelling is a multimedia genre that has been steadily gaining recognition since its inception in the early 1990s. Study abroad is also on the rise among U.S. undergraduates. Study abroad returnees often lack opportunities for structured reflection upon their experiences abroad. Digital storytelling is one reflective tool that may be useful for stimulating reflection as part of a narrative process, which connects past events with current life choices and solidifies identity. Five undergraduates and three graduate students attended digital storytelling workshops, created digital stories, and were interviewed. Analysis of these case studies found that while graduate students were more adept at identifying life-changing moments, both groups benefited from narrative closure. The study confirms that digital storytelling is an important resource for study abroad returnees to help them uncover the significance of their experience abroad and can be used as an institutional assessment tool.

Table of Contents

Section 1.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	4
Methods.....	18
Section 2.....	25
Case Studies.....	25
Part 1: The Undergraduates.....	26
Part 2: The Graduates.....	40
Section 3.....	51
Analysis, Part 1.....	51
Analysis, Part 2.....	59
Analysis, Part 3.....	64
Conclusion.....	80
References.....	90
Appendices.....	93
Appendix A: Interview Questions.....	93
Appendix B: Pre-workshop Email.....	95

Section 1:

Introduction

Study abroad is increasingly becoming a part of the U.S. undergraduate experience. According to the IIE Open Doors 2010 report, U.S. student participation in study abroad has more than doubled over the past decade. The type of international experience tracked by the Open Doors report is more than simply traveling abroad for tourism; students must earn academic credits as part of their program. Of the students who engage in this type of academic experience abroad, many report reentry difficulties after returning to their home culture (Szkudlarek, 2010). Although it's common for students to feel a sense of displacement when they return home, the depth and variance of such feelings depend on several factors, and are not always severe. For some students, the most persistent problem they face when they return home from a year or semester abroad is how to answer the simple and often casual question: "So, how was it?" Often given only minutes or even seconds to respond, the challenge for many students lies in conveying any real sense of what they experienced. They feel they must provide a one-sentence answer when they have 2,000 photos they wish they could share.

Study abroad offices are aware of the fact that preparing and sending students abroad on educational programs is only part of a successful cross-cultural experience; what happens when students return to campus is equally important (La Brack, 1993). Thrust back into their old routines, study abroad returnees often don't take the time or

emotional space to reflect upon the transformative experiences they had while abroad and how they might reconcile this with their life at home. Consequently, many of these transformative experiences from abroad are never incorporated into students' lives in the US. Reflection is a tool that can address this disconnect. By taking time to reflect upon their experience abroad, students can identify some of the most significant aspects of their time abroad, an important step in processing the experience.

The genre of digital storytelling is uniquely situated to facilitate this process of reflection. Digital storytelling can be defined as “a short, first person video-narrative created by combining recorded voice, still and moving images, and music or other sounds (<http://storycenter.org/index1.html>).” As a multimodal tool, it's appealing to a generation accustomed to media-rich experiences. Students tend to have hundreds of digital photos and videos from their abroad experiences. The process of creating a digital story enables them to assign value to those photos as well as make decisions about which particular ones they will use to represent their experience. The digital storytelling genre is limited to a two- to three-minute finished piece, which carries the advantage of being something the students' friends and families will be likely to watch and therefore is easier to share. The strict parameters involved with keeping a digital story to within three minutes (e.g., no more than 350-word script) helps students to keep their reflection focused, and the tight deadline of the workshop schedule gives them the needed motivation to finish.

Despite the fact that digital storytelling is being experimented with within the field of international education, little research on the topic has yet been done. In this thesis, I will argue that digital storytelling serves as an effective way for study abroad returnees to reflect upon their experiences abroad, and that by doing so they will develop

their identities through the narrative process. This process aides in readjusting to life at home, and is beneficial even for students who are not experiencing any reentry problems in that they identify and articulate the most meaningful parts of their study abroad experience, and in doing so adopt them as part of their identity. Additionally, by crafting a story about their time abroad, students are able to experience a form of closure through narrative resolution, and have the satisfaction of sharing something meaningful about their time abroad. I consider case studies on how several undergraduate and graduate students experienced the digital storytelling process and identify themes that emerged from their stories. Based on an analysis of interviews and the completed digital storytelling products of research participants, I found that study abroad participants were especially interested in framing their experiences in relation to four issues: personal revelation, relationship, place, and language. Not every student spoke to each of these themes, but every story incorporated at least one of them. Both the undergraduate and graduate cases will be introduced in Section 2. The participants were interviewed in-depth, as I will describe in both the case studies and the analysis, in Section 3, which is divided into three parts. Part one compares the undergraduate cases to the graduates, and looks at how differing maturity levels, developmental goals, and social norms influenced the ways in which the two student groups' participation in the digital storytelling process unfolded. Part two looks at a model of digital storytelling as a reflexive process and examines how it works. Part three provides an in-depth look at the logistics of holding workshops, including how the students perceive the process. I conclude by presenting a model of how the digital storytelling process may be integrated into the study abroad returnee experience and who I believe stands to benefit from this process.

In the next section, I introduce three key sets of literature that informed my research question. The research question this thesis sets out to answer is: how does digital storytelling serve as a resource for helping students to integrate their study abroad experience into their ongoing narrative of identity?

Literature Review

In order to understand how digital storytelling and study abroad reentry intersect, I will begin with an overview of the literature in both topics, and will finish with a review of narrative and how it relates to identity construction.

Digital Storytelling

“Digital storytelling” is a broad term that can be defined in many different ways. Bryan Alexander (2011) elaborates on these rapidly-changing definitions—from social media to gaming—in his book *The New Digital Storytelling: Creating Narratives With New Media*. For the purposes of this study, I will be referring to digital storytelling in the sense defined by the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS) on its website: “A short, first person video-narrative created by combining recorded voice, still and moving images, and music or other sounds.”

As co-founder of CDS in Berkeley, California, Joe Lambert has been one of the primary developers of the genre since its beginning in the early 1990’s. Lambert continues to be an influential figure in the field and CDS’ work has spread to other parts of the U.S. as well as other countries (Lambert, 2009). Another early and prominent figure in the history of the genre is Daniel Meadows, who undertook an ambitious digital storytelling project in Wales for the BBC in the early 2000s. Because the CDS and

Meadows models were early and influential, it is helpful to review their histories and distinctive characteristics as a means of understanding how digital storytelling has been developed and applied in different settings today.

Lambert (2009) gives an overview of the history of CDS in his book *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community*. Much of the book is intended as practical guidelines for how to hold a digital storytelling workshop. The CDS model is a 3-day workshop with at least one facilitator and no more than 8 participants. Story Circle is an essential component of the first day, a time in which each participant talks through his or her story or reads a prepared script, and then gets feedback from the others. By laying down certain ground rules in advance (for example, no interrupting, and each comment must begin with something positive), an environment of trust and solidarity is created and individuals often bond, sharing intimate details and revealing deeply private information to people whom may have been strangers only hours before (Lambert, 2009, p. 86). This process is highly effective for drawing upon emotions that create compelling story content. Arguably, the types of stories that are created after time spent in story circle are some that would never be told if the author was writing alone.

The remaining two days of the CDS workshop are spent recording the scripts, learning the basics of Final Cut Express, and creating digital stories. The workshop culminates with a screening, at which everyone gets to see their stories and also see each other's work. Again, because of the story circle and the collaborative nature of the workshops, participants are often invested in each other's stories and eager to see the finished pieces (Lambert, 2009, p. 89).

Respect for the creative process is emphasized throughout the 3-day workshop. The focus is not on a final product that is flashy, slick, and professional looking, but rather on allowing everyone to explore their story through words, pictures, sound, and other creative uses of images or video. Time management is a crucial concern for facilitators, however; the goal is to produce a finished piece by the end of the workshop, and facilitators must develop an awareness of the group's progress and learn to intervene as needed to help everyone achieve that goal (Lambert, 2009, p. 90).

Daniel Meadows attended a CDS workshop in October of 2000 and took the concept to Great Britain (Meadows, 2003, p. 191). He worked extensively with the BBC and created the popular series *Capture Wales*, a project aimed at collecting digital stories from Welsh citizens in order to create a sense of identity and community. Meadows and his team traveled in a van with a portable computer lab and conducted 5-day workshops in various locations in Wales. Because the stories were created with the intention of being broadcast, Meadows' approach with the story circle differed significantly from Lambert's.

Facilitators [also] need to be keen observers of the group dynamic, to see if anyone is becoming uncomfortable or getting upset, for (unlike the American model) it was never an objective of "Capture Wales" to provide therapy. In fact we were always keen to point out that this process is *not* a "safe" one, for the stories told were destined for publication, to be shared with strangers (Hartley & McWilliam, 2009, p. 102).

The fact that the stories would be broadcast is also why Meadows expanded the workshop to 5 days from 3. He found that the additional time was needed in order to bring each story up to the standards of broadcast quality (Hartley & McWilliam, 2009, p. 101).

Meadows' adaptation of the CDS format is interesting in relation to the study abroad project, as place plays such a prominent role in the *Capture Wales* project. While some of CDS' work has to do with place, the BBC project is on a big scale and puts place in the forefront. Individuals from a particular town or area gathered for workshops and engaged in a process that resulted in creative pieces that were broadcast to the world. The title of the project speaks to place, but it's the individual's story that grabs the viewer's attention. As study abroad students leave a familiar place and build homes in a new one, they are sure to encounter issues related to place. Questions raised from this project that are relevant to my study include, What is the relationship between identity and place? How can individuals' stories be defined by a common place while maintaining their uniqueness? How does the viewers' understanding of that place affect their interpretation of the story?

In *Story Circle: Digital Storytelling Around the World*, John Hartley and Kelly McWilliam (2009) present the ways in which digital storytelling is being used in a global context. When defining digital storytelling, the authors note the paradox of how a genre that is largely community-based has become a global phenomenon. They are careful to note, however, that the spread is not even; access to digital resources is most readily available to people in North America, Europe, and Australasia. Workshops that are run in Africa, Asia, and South America, although largely a community-based practice, are often implemented by western groups (Hartley & McWilliam, 2009, p. 7). While at first glance it may appear as though creating digital stories with U.S. study abroad students is only following this same pattern of western privilege, the fact that these students are reflecting upon their identities as global citizens could have long-term, positive

consequences. After an extended period of time spent living in a foreign country, students often have a sense of heightened awareness of what it means to be a U.S. citizen and are sensitized to the notion of a global identity (Dolby, 2007).

In a world where global identities are rapidly changing and nations are becoming increasingly interdependent, reflections upon these contexts and what they mean are extremely valuable for college students. Interestingly, one of the contributions to the *Story Circle* book is about African life as it is lived in Wales, a context that illustrates the cross-cultural flows that are characteristic of life today (Hartley & McWilliam, 2009, p. 131). Media are a major way that people learn about one another, yet often there is a great distance between how people define themselves and how they feel that their identities are reflected through national media (Morley & Robins, 1995). As an emerging genre that is far more personal, yet still has the capability of being heard by a global audience via the Internet (Hartley & McWilliam, 2009, p. 5), digital storytelling holds enormous potential for improving intercultural understanding. That students become literate in the genre of digital storytelling is crucial, not just for their own voices to be heard, but also to enable them to hear the voices of others.

One obstacle to hearing others' voices is identified by Helen Simondson of the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) (Hartley & McWilliam, 2009). Simondson discusses the challenges of pioneering a user-generated content program in a cultural institution (p. 119). The project encountered ideological obstacles, especially due to resistance to the idea that the amateur work of "ordinary people" was somehow representative of a national aesthetic (p. 10). Similarly, I expect that students may resist the notion that a personal story from a peer has any significance beyond his or her

immediate circle of influence. Whereas the traditional medium of television carries the weight of authority, and – at least traditionally – credibility, digital storytelling may require time and exposure before people are ready to accept that individual stories can be important in the communication of similar experiences. Thus, unlike the Wales project, this study abroad project seeks to help students to come to identify not only the differences in their experiences, but the similarities in how they have encountered the pain, challenge, and possibly the transformative impact that happens as one reflects on one's study abroad experience.

Digital storytelling has authenticity in its favor (Lambert, 2009). One of the reasons it's important that the author use his or her own voice to narrate is to convey the personal nature of a first-person narrative. At CDS, storytellers are encouraged to write their scripts as though they were speaking to a friend, or writing a personal letter (Lambert, 2009). However, there is research that indicates authenticity shouldn't always be assumed, because it's not something that can be guaranteed (Kaare & Lundby, 2008, p. 120). Through a study with Norwegian youth, Kaare and Lundby conclude that the context in which the digital story is created is of the utmost importance.

. . . Digital Stories, as a genre, is a strictly defined form of multimodal expression which is up to the individual narrator to fill with content connected to an authentic personal experience. This means that the authenticity inherent in this genre will depend more on how, and under what circumstances, the story is told than on the references to the life story of the narrator, that is the autobiographical evidences (p. 119).

Authenticity is not inherent in the genre; rather, it's through the communal process of creating the digital story that meaning is assigned and authenticity is reached.

Digital storytelling is being used in a variety of ways, but most notably it is being implemented in the context of healthcare (<http://www.patientvoices.org.uk/index.htm>), education (Ohler 2007; Frazel, 2010; McDrury, 2003; <http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu/>; <http://www.umbc.edu/oit/newmedia/studio/digitalstories/index.html>), corporate and organizational settings (Brown, 2005), and community groups.

Despite the emphasis in education, there are few instances where digital storytelling is being used in the specific context of study abroad. I found one study that was recently conducted at a study abroad site in Mexico (Rodriguez, 2010). The purpose of the study was to find out if U.S. students could use digital tools as a means of producing a story about this place that was new to them in such a way that caused them to go more deeply into the local culture. Rodriguez was interested to see if, rather than falling back on pre-conceived notions and stereotypes, the students would respond to a creative process that engaged them with local people. Mindful of the dangers of encouraging a touristic gaze, Rodriguez encouraged the students to interview local people to incorporate their voice as well (Rodriguez, 2010, p. 229). The study concludes that digital storytelling can be an effective means of mitigating the potentially isolating medium of technology and instead harnessing it in such a way that contributes to the potential for cross-cultural learning.

I have identified a handful of other U.S. universities and colleges that are using digital storytelling specifically for purposes of reentry, including Austin College, Beloit College, Hobart and William Smith Colleges, and the School for International Training (SIT). Not much research has been done yet that is specifically about how digital

storytelling can work as a reintegration tool to help students process and reflect on their experiences abroad. The lack of research, combined with the continued interest in experimenting with digital storytelling in study abroad programs, forms important justification for the current study.

Study Abroad and Reentry

Gaw (2000) defines reverse culture shock as the “process of readjusting, reacculturating, and reassimilating into one’s own home culture after living in a different culture for a significant period of time (p. 83).” It’s common for people of any age to struggle with reverse culture shock, but research indicates that reverse culture shock can be worse for younger age groups (Uehara, 1986; Szkudlarek, 2010). Therefore, issues involving reentry should be a major concern for college administrators, especially when the number of students studying abroad continues to increase (IIE Open Doors 2010). Many students experience negative symptoms upon their return to the U.S. after a period abroad. These symptoms include depression, alienation, isolation, loneliness, general anxiety, speech anxiety, friendship difficulties, shyness concerns, and feelings of inferiority (Gaw, 2000, p. 101). The severity of these symptoms will vary depending on the individual and the length and type of the experience, but any level of these symptoms is sure to have an adverse affect on the student’s ability to function once back on the home campus. His or her studies, social relationships, and extra-curricular commitments could all be negatively affected.

In a comprehensive review of literature on the topic of reentry, Szkudlarek (2010) finds that as many as 70% of returning individuals experience “significant discomfort” upon their return home (p. 3). While the phenomenon of reverse culture shock has been

acknowledged for many years, not nearly as much research has been conducted on the subject, especially compared to the amount of research that has been conducted on adjusting to a new culture (Szkudlarek, 2010). Traditionally, reverse culture shock has been treated exactly as the name would suggest—as culture shock, but in reverse.

Despite the number of people affected and its predictability, research suggests that the unexpected occurrence of reverse culture shock could be a major contributing factor in its existence (Gaw, 2000; Sussman, 1986; Szkudlarek, 2010). Most people focus on preparing for the time abroad and are anxious to learn as much as possible about the host culture before they go. Reentry, however, is usually assumed to be natural and relatively easy; returning to that which is familiar is not anticipated to be problematic. Changes in the individual of which he or she may not be aware are where the tension lies (Sussman, 1986).

A study conducted on American students showed that the reentry process can be both negative and positive (Uehara, 1986). The researcher interviewed and tested a group of American students who studied abroad, and also interviewed and tested a control group of American students who traveled domestically. The group that went abroad had more difficulty with reentry than the group that traveled domestically, which supported other research and common assumptions about reverse culture shock. A change in values was identified as a major factor in the reason for the greater difficulty for the international group. However, the process of reconciling their new values with their previous lives, in terms of relationships, clothes, and behavior, was largely seen as a positive process (p. 433). While this identification of changes in values may happen naturally as a result of re-immersing in one's previous life and patterns, students could

benefit from intentional programming such as digital storytelling that could help students actively make those identifications.

The change in values that students can experience upon returning home from abroad is one aspect of a larger issue, which is a change in identity. Zaharna (1989) coined the term “self-shock” to describe what happens when a person realizes that the confusion felt is with oneself rather than the Other, as in the case with culture shock. This identity confusion is a result of not being able to communicate well with others, encountering different reactions than one is used to from one’s peers, and the challenge of changing behaviors that are bound up with one’s identity in order to blend with the local culture. As Zaharna succinctly states, “For the sojourner, self-shock is the intrusion of inconsistent, conflicting self-images. At a time when we are searching for meaning ‘out there,’ our own internal axis for creating meaning is thrown off balance (p. 518).” Though she is describing a process that happens while abroad, it can easily be seen how this change in a person’s internal axis can affect them once they are home. The adjustments that a person makes in order to reconcile him or herself with a new environment do not go away immediately upon stepping off the plane. Establishing an identity is a process, and one that can be especially challenging after undergoing the major change of moving back home after living abroad. Once again, this is a place where digital storytelling can act as a positive method to help students consider and reflect on their identities. Through narrative and the creative process, they can experiment with articulating, both to themselves and others, their new perspectives. As noted, the reentry process can be one that is defined by feelings of isolation, particularly as a participant attempts to communicate his or her experience with those who did not share that same

experience. With the process of digital storytelling, study abroad returnees are given an opportunity to foreground their personal view of what they experienced. They can take the time necessary to reflect on key moments from their time abroad, and can thus construct a narrative that is meaningful and satisfying for them. This, as literature on narratives of identity have found, is an important step in the process of changing notions of the self.

Narrative

The practice of telling stories, or creating narratives, has many different uses and there is substantial research to both support and challenge its functions. For the purposes of my research, I am going to focus on narrative as a means of establishing one's identity.

In the comprehensive article "Narrating the Self," Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps (1996) write about the power of narrative to shape life events into a particular perspective on experience. Rather than representing an omniscient, all-knowing perspective on one's life, narrative situates the self in a stream of experiences and articulates a particular version of reality (Ochs & Capps, 1996, p. 21). Against those who may find subjective experience to be less meaningful, Ochs and Capps argue that deeper levels of authenticity can be obtained through narrative. "While narrative does not yield absolute truth, it can transport narrators and audiences to more authentic feelings, beliefs, and actions and ultimately to a more authentic sense of life (p. 23)."

They define and discuss two basic dimensions of narrative: temporality and point of view. When discussing temporality they note how "the telling of past events is intricately linked to tellers' and listeners' concerns about their present and their future lives (p. 25)." This point is relevant to the practice of digital storytelling, particularly in

the context of study abroad reentry, in that the immediate concern for most students is how they reconcile the experience they recently had with their present reality. The stories they tell after one month of being home may differ dramatically from the stories they tell after being home for 6 months, a year, or ten years. The reality of the experience they had while abroad has not changed, but through telling a story about the experience, they are creating a particular reality that addresses their present concerns. Even if they don't have any immediate reentry concerns, the fact that the study abroad program is in the past makes it a good time for them to reflect, and the nature of that reflection will most likely change over time.

The same phenomenon is noted by Kaare and Lundby (2008) in their discussion of autobiographical stories:

A life story will normally be constructed by the narrator according to the circumstances of the life situation at the point where the story is told. Events in the past are reinterpreted to be meaningful in light of the present situation of the narrator, which implies that a person may not tell one and the same story about their life on different occasions and at different times. Thus, a recounted life story is only one of many possible versions . . . (p. 109)

Although the version of an occurrence that a person chooses to tell may be only one of many possible versions, there are most likely significant reasons as to why that particular story is being told.

Bruner (1990) suggests that humans have a predisposition to organize experience into a narrative form, and that the framing of experience in narrative form is fundamental to making sense of experience. Digital storytelling is a way to provide students with the context and format to make sense of their experience abroad through narrative. Davis

and Weinshenker (2011) explain it this way: “As we narrate, we interpret what things mean, evaluate their significance, and infer why they happened.”

The process of evaluation and interpretation is useful, not only for the explaining past events but also for determining future behavior. Davis and Weinshenker (2011) elaborate how this phenomenon occurs in their study on digital storytelling and authoring identity:

How one goes about pursuing one’s ends is mediated by “who one understands oneself to be” in an unfolding chronology of experience. In this way, learning can be transformative as well as incremental: we learn from experience by internalizing symbolic representations drawn from experience, which in turn allows “qualitative transformations of one form of behavior into another” (Vygotsky, 1934/1978, p. 19). Narrative is a means by which we learn from experience by reflecting upon experience, declaring what it means, and distilling it into a symbolic form to be expressed and remembered. The process is essentially reflexive, folding back on itself: experience is distilled into narrative, and the narrative itself becomes a tool which shapes memory and mediates future experience.

Students who have returned from a period of living and studying in another country may or may not be aware of any cultural readjustment issues. Regardless of that fact, narrative can be seen as a way for them to process a significant life experience that is now in the past. Through the process of telling a personal story, students can benefit from the distillation of narrative—focusing on what was important, and solidifying that narrative as part of their life story.

Narrative paradigm theory is a useful framework for analyzing the role of narrative in developing a person’s identity. Developed by Walter Fisher (1985), narrative paradigm theory is a philosophical view of human communication that holds that every type of communication, regardless of whether it is “literary,” can be interpreted through a narrative lens. Fisher identifies narrative rationality as the means by which people

discern whether or not a story is trustworthy. The concept engenders critical self-awareness and conscious choice, as the audience must use the principles of probability and fidelity in order to judge the merits of stories (Fisher, 1985, p. 348). “The primary function of the paradigm is to offer a way of interpreting and assessing human communication that leads to critique, a determination of whether or not a given instance of discourse provides a reliable, trustworthy, and desirable guide to thought and action in the world (Fisher, 1985, p. 351).” For study abroad returnees who are negotiating new and changing identities, the value of crafting a story to describe a particular part of their experience lies not only in telling the story, but also in seeing how it is received by their peers. Positive reception is affirming to the students’ identities because the audience is affirming that the stories have merit; they are consistent and “composed of good reasons (Fisher, 1985, p. 357).”

The current study does not seek to evaluate the authenticity of the narratives students returning from study abroad produce, but rather, sets out to explore how students might experience the process of reviewing their own study abroad experiences in light of their present situations. This study is also interested in which aspects of that process are most helpful to them as they integrate their study abroad experience into a new (or renewed) narrative of identity. Based on the literature, the expectation is that the communal aspect of the story circle will be one of the most significant factors in helping to shape and affirm identity; and that the process of speaking through their narratives and being listened to will result in a final script that is more personal, more focused, and more confident than the rough drafts that students bring to the workshop.

Methods

Qualitative research was chosen as the optimal methodology for this study because it allows for in-depth analysis through interviews with and observations of each participant. Since relatively little research has been done in this area, the rationale was to open up a field of inquiry rather than seek definitive answers. I engaged in participant observation, which Lindlof and Taylor (2002) define as a “strategy of reflexive learning” in which the researcher becomes a participating member of a group, adopting a recognizable role within the group. As a staff person in the Office of International Education, students already recognize me as a facilitator in the reentry process. Thus within this methodological approach, my familiarity with the process and with the students themselves both provide a strong foundation for the study of how digital storytelling might enable students’ productive reintegration into their everyday lives. A qualitative study allowed me to acknowledge and define my position in the study in relation to authority, for authority, if unacknowledged, could produce a dynamic that is counter-productive. The flexible nature of qualitative research helped to counter that dynamic, as I entered into the workshop and approached the interviews not as someone to whom they need to report a “correct” answer, but as a facilitator and co-creator who invited them to express their concerns, questions, and thoughts about their study abroad experience. In this aspect, I drew on the tradition of Participatory Action Research (PAR), and considered the research subjects to be the experts on their own knowledge and respected them as such (Greenwood, Whyte and Harkavy, 1993).

In this study, I built case studies from among the students who attended the study abroad digital storytelling workshops in order to address the general question: how does

digital storytelling serve as a resource for helping students to integrate their study abroad experience into their ongoing narrative of identity?

Like Rodriguez's study, I was interested in how paying attention to how the emotional aspects of digital storytelling production can afford students with deepened opportunities for engaging in reflection about their experience. Whereas Rodriguez was interested in how that engagement might happen in the study abroad setting, my interest was in exploring how digital storytelling can help students with the reentry process, which is a time when they are often struggling to incorporate their experiences into their narratives of identity. Therefore, whereas Rodriguez organized the digital storytelling process within the study abroad experience, my workshops took place after the students had returned home. While looking primarily for issues related to identity, the open-ended nature of case studies allowed me collect information that students wanted to share, giving them space to bring up issues other than those having to do with identity.

Upon completion of these workshops, I interviewed the participants and analyzed their finished stories, looking for patterns that emerged that captured the themes of their stories and revealed what was most important to them. By engaging in the analysis and interviews, I was not looking for data supporting the assumption that digital storytelling would make the reintegration process easier for students. Rather, I was looking for signs that students were reflecting deeply upon their experience and that as a result of sharing a narrative born out of that reflection, they would feel the finished piece was true to their identity and worthwhile to share with others. The underlying assumption is that narrative is one way that people construct their identities, and that identity construction is useful

for managing significant life experiences. Articulating meaning from a significant life experience is an important step towards shaping one's identity.

Workshops, Interviews and Participants

My original intention was to hold workshops for DU undergraduate study abroad returnees. I planned to hold one workshop in the spring, when many students have returned to campus from studying abroad in the fall, and I planned to interview the students twice: once immediately after the workshop and once several months later. I modified my initial plans, though, when graduate students expressed interest in attending the spring workshop. Only one undergraduate attended, so I scheduled a second workshop to be held in the late summer, when four more attended. Although the data collection process took longer, in the end the comparison provided by the graduate students proved to be much richer and gave valuable insight as to realistic expectations for undergraduates. Rather than interviewing the students at two times and comparing those responses, I compared the graduate responses to the undergraduates. In order to protect the students' identities, their names as they appear in this thesis have been changed.

The workshops were modeled after the CDS standard 3-day workshop, though with significant modifications to fit the schedules and time constraints of the students. Rather than running a full three days, the workshops were held over a span of two days: from 2-6pm on a Friday and from 10am-6pm the next day (Saturday). I planned to cap the number of participants at 8, but in the end was not forced to because participation numbers were below the cap.

I acted as the primary facilitator of the workshops. In preparation, I attended a CDS 3-day workshop as well as the 5-day Facilitator Intensive Training workshop; I also volunteered at CDS workshops on several occasions in order to keep learning and developing my skills as a workshop facilitator.

I interviewed the student participants after they had completed the workshops. Some of the interviews were in person and others were done via Skype. I also took notes throughout the process, both on my observations and also on informal conversations I had with the students, about how they perceived the process, at what points they became frustrated, which moments were the most valuable, etc.

Like the Wales project (Meadows, 2003), I observed how students draw upon visual images and music to convey a particular story that illuminates a moment of transition or clarity they believe exemplifies some inner transition, which relates to how they view a certain place. However, each of the participants were reflecting on different locales and experiences, and thus through the story circle they were invited to see similarities that exist across experiences, considering how people who go to differing places similarly experience growth through encounters with the unexpected and uncomfortable.

I also included the finished pieces that students produced in the workshops in my analysis—both the students' perceptions of their work and my own impressions. The stories serve the important function of speaking for themselves, in the sense that they were authored by the students; however, once published, they take on a life of their own. Suddenly, they are open to interpretation from other viewers, a process that can change the way in which the author perceives the story.

Compensation

Participation in these workshops was entirely voluntary; students were not required to attend, nor were they charged anything. Neither did students receive any monetary compensation for their participation. The benefits to the students included free meals during the workshop, complete ownership over their work, and the option to share their pieces with a broader audience. Some of the venues their work was displayed included the DU OIE website; special screenings held on campus; and presentations at conferences.

The fact that workshop participants were self-selected is not a detriment to my study, as I am not arguing the case that digital storytelling should be required of every study abroad returnee. The attitude and expectations of the participants have a tremendous impact on the process, and it is my belief that the practice can only benefit those who are invested. Simply putting together a multimedia piece on the topic of study abroad will not necessarily stimulate deep reflection or aid in the reentry process.

Interview Guide Questions

The interview process was ideal for my study because, unlike a survey, the qualitative interview is adaptable and allows the interviewee to influence the discussion. Since the information I was seeking was about the student's experience, I wanted each student to have the freedom to take the conversation to those places that he or she felt were the most important. I was primarily looking for issues relating to identity, but careful to leave room for any other information the students wanted to share.

Experiential knowledge is best elicited through narrative accounts (Lindlof & Taylor,

2002), and “qualitative interviews are a storytelling zone par excellence in which people are given complete license to craft their selves in language (p. 173).”

Another reason for choosing the interviewing process is that interviews enable researchers to elicit the language forms used by social actors in natural settings (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Rather than formulating a survey to which students would reply to the researcher’s language, I wanted to allow students to articulate their experience in their own words. By allowing students to use their own words, I was able to gain more knowledge and understanding of how they perceived the study abroad, reentry, and digital storytelling processes.

The questions that I asked students were drafted with the intention of understanding both their view of the process of creating a digital story, as well as their view of how the process changed or affected their thoughts and feelings about their study abroad experience, particularly with regards to their identity. My questions were grounded in the assumption that the reentry process can be difficult and that most people experience a change in values after spending time in another culture (Uehara, 1986; Zeharna, 1989). To test this assumption, I specifically asked the students whether and in what ways they experienced reentry difficulties (see Appendix A for the interview questions). I did not expect or ask students to choose reentry as the topic of their digital stories (although they could have done so, if they had wanted); the purpose of my study was not to evaluate how reflecting on reentry itself can improve adjustment issues, but rather how reflection upon the study abroad experience for the purpose of telling a story can give students the space and time to make sense of their experience, which in turn can have a positive impact on their lives.

In order to determine which part of the workshop was the most effective in helping students to work through these changes in values and identity, and also allow them to tell in their own words what they gained from the experience, I asked questions about each of the major parts of the workshop: the 7 steps lecture, story circle, writing the script, recording the script, choosing images, choosing sound, putting the stories together, and showing them to the rest of the group.

The majority of the questions were nondirective, in order to encourage the students to speak about their experiences in their own words. I concluded each interview by asking if there was anything the student felt was important for me to know, thereby allowing the student to clarify any part of her or answers, or to bring up a topic of discussion that I had not considered (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 204). A complete list of the interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Section 2:

Case Studies

In this section I will introduce the stories of both the undergraduates and the graduates. The five undergraduates who attended the digital storytelling workshops created stories that in some ways were very different from one another's. The workshops were advertised directly to study abroad students, and therefore they all came prepared to tell a story related to their time abroad. Otherwise, though, there was no direction given as to the topics of their stories. All of them had studied in different locations (though two of those were within France); they had studied during different time periods, and had different majors and language abilities.

In analyzing their finished stories and reviewing the interview transcriptions, it soon became clear that four themes emerged from the group: personal revelation, relationship, place, and language. Not every student incorporated each theme (though some used up to three), but in one way or another each story speaks to at least one of these topics. In discussing each case study, I will point out the themes involved in the stories and how they developed.

The stories by the three graduate students who attended the workshops will also be introduced. I will explore how the themes identified in the undergraduates' stories emerged in the stories of the graduate students. Although comparing the two groups was not initially part of the design of the study, due to the fact that graduate students were

interested in attending the workshops and recruitment of undergraduates was more difficult than expected, the methodology was adjusted to include them.

Part 1 – The Undergraduates

Sara

The first case study I am going to consider is Sara, who studied abroad in Lancaster, England for six months. Her digital story is a good example of the “personal revelation” story. At the time of the workshop and interview, Sara had been home for about two months. Deciding what to write about was one of the most difficult parts of the process for Sara; for a long time, she struggled with how to pick one moment or occasion over another. In the end, she decided to focus on a trip she took to Belfast, Northern Ireland. She felt that her photos from that trip were more unique and triggered more memories for her than photos she had from other trips, which she described as more generic (i.e., landscapes or historical monuments). Unlike most workshop participants, Sara chose the music she wanted to use before she wrote her script, and it was also the influence of the music that helped her decide to write about Belfast. She found a song she liked on a royalty-free music website and decided that the Belfast photos matched the mood of the music. The song she used is instrumental (piano, drums, strings) and fairly melancholy, though with a more hopeful tone towards the end.

Sara’s digital story is called “The Simple Things” and begins with a picture of the globe with a red dot in Denver, Colorado that becomes a line that stretches to Lancaster, England, to show her journey. She mentions three of the other places that she traveled to during her semester in England (London, Copenhagen, and Barcelona), then explains

how the Belfast trip was different. Her interest in Belfast was due to research she had done for her major, Political Science; its troubled past intrigued her. She describes entering the city in a taxi with her mom and aunt and how they were greeted by a mural of a masked man holding a gun. Her family turned to her and asked “Why did you want to come here?” Sara uses photos to illustrate her descriptions of what she saw—the graffiti, murals topped with coils of barbed wire, and the peace walls surrounding the city. When she returns to Lancaster, she says she left feeling empty. The screen goes black for several seconds as she reflects on how it’s easy to dwell on the sad and dark things in life. Sara narrates that it wasn’t until she began posting her photos to Facebook that she realized she had good memories from her trip, too. From an inspiring conversation with a tour guide to beautiful landscapes, her experiences in Belfast weren’t all bad. She concludes that it’s important to remember the simple things, ending with a photo of a woman smiling and giving the peace sign.

This insight into the paradox of what humankind is capable of—from war, violence, and tragedy to kindness, beautiful architecture, and close relationships—wasn’t newly discovered during the workshop. Sara took the trip to Belfast in April, about four months prior to the digital storytelling workshop, and it was after she returned and started posting photos to Facebook that she began to process the experience and realize the importance of dwelling on the good rather than the bad. However, the workshop was an opportunity to reinforce this insight and make a strong statement about it. In her words, “I think it was just the way I wanted to say ‘Well, this is what I learned from this place,’ and I don’t think I could really change it in any different way, because it’s how I’ve felt ever since I got back from there.”

Although Sara struggled with mixed emotions after she returned from Belfast to Lancaster, she did not experience any major issues readjusting to life in the U.S. when she returned home at the end of her six months in England. Though she had never left the States prior to her study abroad, she thought the cultural differences were fairly insignificant. When asked what reentry difficulties she faced, she said it was nothing more than small things like remembering to say “elevator” again instead of “lift.”

Sara kept a blog while she was abroad, and since she wrote about her trip to Belfast and talked a lot about it, she doesn't think that her friends and family would be surprised by her digital story and its message. However, she doesn't think she had ever articulated it quite so succinctly. Thanks to the focused nature of the digital storytelling genre, as well as the previous reflection she had already done, Sara was able to produce a piece that sent a strong message about the personal revelation she had while abroad. Her foray into a new place in the world that she experienced, rather than just studied, resulted in a deep conviction that changed her outlook on life.

Kim

The next case study I am going to consider is Kim, who studied abroad in Berlin, Germany for four months. Like Sara, her digital story is also a good example of the “personal revelation” story, but with the added theme of language. As a peer advisor in the Office of International Education (OIE), Kim was deliberately trying to make her story relatable to other undergraduates who were considering study abroad. She wanted to find a way to encourage them that, despite the fears and concerns they might have about going abroad, they could work them out and be more confident in the end on account of those challenges.

Kim begins her story, called “Gneissenaustrasse to Friedrichstrasse,” with immediate action: boarding the plane to Germany and describing her thoughts and emotions. She continues to take the audience step by step through her initial time in Berlin, from meeting her host family, going to bed, and eating breakfast, to her first time making the morning commute. The majority of her story is spent describing the train ride, a description that is well served by both visual and audio elements. A map of Berlin with a red dot showing her path, combined with background noises of chatter and traffic noise help set the scene for the confusion and apprehension she is describing in her narrative. The music she chose for the soundtrack is urban and electronic, which adds energy and a degree of sophistication to her piece.

Her narrative describes in detail her new environment and her first impressions of the bustling city of Berlin. She includes the self-coaching it took to get through that first, long train ride: “Just relax. You can do this. It’s just Germany.” Upon emerging from the final train stop and reaching her school, Kim describes the feeling of accomplishment she felt, as well as the boost of confidence: “I had accomplished something so small to most, but so big for me. Now I could relax and enjoy the time I had ahead of me, knowing to trust my abilities and myself.”

By acknowledging that her accomplishment was a small one, Kim demonstrates self-awareness about her particular situation. She stayed in Germany for four months and took the same train route almost every day. Naturally, it didn’t take long before it was a normal part of her day, and it may have been easy to gloss over the initial bumps and only remember the accomplishments. But during the workshop, when she stopped to reflect upon her time in Berlin, that initial train ride stood out to her as one of the most

difficult things she encountered. Although she had been studying German, it was very different to hear it all around her. Even the title of her piece, which is the name of the two subway stations that marked the beginning and end of her commute to school, indicate the impact that language had upon her experience. Kim's honesty at the confusion she felt in the face of a new environment is perhaps partly due to her role as a Peer Advisor, where she was surrounded by students with questions and concerns about going abroad. As will be shown in the other case studies, students are not typically so ready to admit to such feelings.

Kim feels that her story is an accurate reflection of who she is, speculating that friends and family would agree that she's the type to keep fears and concerns to herself and present a calm and collected front to the world. But they know that there is more going on under the surface, and those are the feelings and emotions that come through in her digital story.

Out of the five undergraduate workshop participants, Kim was the furthest removed from her study abroad. She had been back in the U.S. just over a year at the time of the workshop, and initially had difficulty readjusting to life in the U.S. Her interview was several months later, giving her the longest amount of time to reflect upon the experience. For Kim, the experience of creating a digital story was an important opportunity to take a deep breath and consider, "what did I actually do with my four months?" As she describes it, you go abroad and have all these experiences and really develop as a person, but most of the time you only think about and relay to other people the fun and positive things, and skip over the more difficult or challenging aspects of study abroad. By focusing on the first few hours of her time in Germany, Kim hones in

on the important self-realization of what she was able to handle—despite her fears, despite the language barrier, and despite the newness of it all. She gained a lot of confidence in herself, and her digital story is a concise and artistic articulation of that realization.

Emma

Similar to Kim and Sara, the next case is a student whose story is about personal revelation. However, Emma’s story differs from the first two in that hers is also strongly connected to place, another important theme from the digital stories. Emma’s story is a good example of the impact a place can have on someone, and particularly upon that person’s understanding of herself.

Emma studied abroad in Cape Town, South Africa for five months. At the time of the digital storytelling workshop, she had been back in the U.S. for about five months. Her story, “The time I stopped to wander . . .” is told in the form of a letter. She doesn’t identify the recipient until the very last sentence of her script, when we understand that she is writing directly to Cape Town. A wandering nomad who doesn’t share her emotions easily, her semester in Cape Town marked a change in her life. She recognizes that she became deeply attached to this place and that she hasn’t yet completely moved on (nor does she want to).

Emma begins her digital story by explaining that she had moved six times by the time she was ten, and that she thought her trip to South Africa would be just another step along the way—just another place that she would pass through as a removed spectator. Through beautiful images of beach, surf, friends, wildlife, and bungee jumping, Emma builds the case throughout her story as to why Cape Town is a place she can’t simply

dismiss. It has a hold on her, and for the first time in her life caused her to question whether being a nomad is the best way to live. As she says in her script, “. . . for some reason you would not let me go and still have not let me go.”

The biggest challenge Emma faced in returning to Denver was accepting the fact that life was “same old, same old.” In Cape Town, she had become accustomed to a lifestyle that involved going and seeing and doing and discovering new things almost every weekend. She embarked on these journeys with a group of new friends she made from within her study abroad program and developed a strong sense of camaraderie with them. Knowing that their time in Cape Town was limited, they would push each other to go and do something new, even when it would be easier to sleep in or more comfortable to stay home. Back in Denver, Emma found herself longing for those same adventures. She found herself comparing weekends to her time abroad, always finding Denver to be lacking. After she created a digital story, Emma would occasionally watch it, when she was missing Cape Town, and feel better.

Emma doesn't describe herself as an emotional person. In fact, during the follow-up interview she said that she keeps a wall around herself and doesn't like to talk about her feelings. Though she is proud of her finished piece, she regrets that maybe it's a bit too emotional – “too corny,” in her words. If she could go back and do it again, she would be more cryptic and less straightforward with her feelings about Cape Town and South Africa. Perhaps subconsciously, the music Emma chose for her story counteracts the sentimental mood and serves to give it movement and a slightly edgy feel. Despite her reservations, she posted her story to Facebook and gave permission to the OIE to post it to its YouTube channel.

As someone who doesn't like to talk about her emotions or feelings, Emma's finished piece is remarkable in its heartfelt sentiment. She shared things that she wouldn't normally share, even admitting in her script "I may not say this to many people very often, but Cape Town, I miss you." While she has reservations that she shared too much, she doesn't feel like those emotions weren't genuine—they simply aren't things she would normally share. In that respect, her digital story seems to be an accurate reflection of her identity, but one that may surprise people who know her because she isn't normally so candid about her feelings.

Similar to Sara and Kim, Emma used the digital storytelling workshop as a way to solidify something she learned while she was abroad. The workshop did not cause her to uncover anything new about herself or the experience, but rather to further validate an important truth. When Emma began the workshop, she intended to write about going to a World Cup match between the U.S. and South Africa, a fun and exciting event that was one of her favorite memories. The story that she ultimately told was much more personal and reveals more about her feelings—not just about one event but towards the entire experience.

From some of the photos Emma uses, we understand that she formed important relationships while in South Africa. Many of her photos are of other people or herself with a group of friends. However, Emma's story doesn't focus on those relationships or bring them to the forefront as the most important part of her experience. Instead of writing the letter to one of her friends, or to her group of friends, she chooses to write to Cape Town itself: "You are the one who showed me that there is more to life than wandering, and for that, you have a special place in my heart." For this reason, the theme

of Emma's story is primarily about place, and also about the personal revelation she experienced on account of that place.

Heather

The next case study is also illustrative of the theme of place. Heather studied in Paris for 9 months, and during that time took two separate, weeklong trips to Morocco. Her story is about the second of those trips and includes themes of relationship and language as well, though they play a subordinate role to place.

Heather had been back in the U.S. about two months at the time of the workshop. Though she didn't report any significant readjustment issues, she was interested in taking the workshop because it seemed like an appealing way to capture memories from her time abroad. In deciding on a topic, Heather struggled between writing about the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris, a place she often visited, and the sand dunes of Morocco, a place she visited twice. In the end she decided on Morocco, partly because it made a big impression on her, and partly because she had a story to tell, which was about a three-hour conversation she had in French with a Moroccan man named Omar.

Language plays a prominent role in Heather's story. She begins by panning across a picture of sand dunes and narrates: "Beyond these dunes, there are small towns full of Moroccan men who speak Arabic, Berber, French, Spanish, and English, and veiled women who do not speak at all." She goes on to say how she spoke French with them during her first trip to Morocco, but how the second time she visited it was with a group of Spanish-speaking students. She had only fifth-grade Spanish to fall back upon, and struggled with saying simple things like "*gracias*" instead of "*merci*." One night, she was handed a plate of food and gave an automatic "*merci*" to the man who gave it to

her. He spoke French as well and they were both overjoyed to find someone they could have a conversation with. They talked for three hours about all kinds of things, including various places where they had lived, and ended up taking a walk at night out in the dunes, despite the stinging sand. Heather finishes her story using an interplay of written and spoken words, declaring the sand dunes of Morocco to be her home away from home (Paris) away from home (Denver) away from home (St. Paul).

The feeling of comfort and security that Heather experienced in Morocco was largely due to Omar and the connection that she made with him. However, she says in her script that she knew she would never contact him again (even though they exchanged email addresses). The place was more significant to Heather than the person; Omar's significance seems to primarily lie in the fact that he led her out in the dunes at night, something she never could have done on her own. He serves as a conduit to draw her closer to the place.

Language plays a key role in how she felt at home in Morocco, because if it weren't for the common language she and Omar spoke, she would never have had the long conversation or the long walk out in the dunes, where she certainly would have become lost if on her own.

Heather's story is interesting in how she doesn't express any struggle or discomfort with the French language, even though it is a second language for her. This seems to underscore her declaration that Paris is home for her. Not her first home, but a place nonetheless where she is very comfortable. The level of comfort she has both with Paris and the French language are revealed by contrast to her emotions in Morocco,

especially when she is primarily surrounded by Spanish speakers. The way in which she connected to Morocco was through French.

Like Emma, Heather was proud of her finished piece but felt that it was overly sentimental. She wanted to write a happy piece and felt that the way it turned out, especially with the text on screen against the image of the sand dunes, was too sappy. Unlike Emma, Heather did not choose music that offset the sentimentality. She did not add any music to her story, and while that was partly due to time constraints, she later said that she felt the sand dunes of Morocco were better served by silence than by any music she could think of.

She felt that her finished piece was true to her identity, but that people might be surprised by its seriousness. She would have liked for it to be more lighthearted. Not funny, necessarily, but more lighthearted because that's more how she sees herself. In reflecting on the process, Heather speculated that even if she were more intentional about creating a lighthearted piece, it would be very difficult to do. She doesn't think that the digital storytelling genre is conducive to lighthearted stories.

Although Heather would have liked her story to be more lighthearted, she is satisfied that she communicated the connection she feels to Morocco and is happy with the end result. She agreed to let the OIE post her story to its YouTube channel. The process of making a digital story has made Heather look back on her time abroad as a series of moments rather than a series of trips or experiences. She used to think of her time in Morocco as an entire trip, but now she thinks about it in terms of the moments that she distilled in her digital story. The moments that she chose highlight the impact of place upon her experience, underscored by the roles of relationship and language.

Bekah

The last undergraduate case study we will look at is Bekah, who studied in France for six months on two different programs: one in Villard-de-Lans and the other in Avignon. Her story shares the same themes as Heather's—place, relationship, and language—although with different emphases. Bekah's story is primarily about relationships and how one relationship in particular served to connect her strongly to a small mountain town in France, which is where the theme of place is evident. Language plays an important role in her relationship, though she doesn't focus on it explicitly.

At the time of the workshop, Bekah had been back in the U.S. for about nine months. She did not recall having any serious readjustment issues upon returning home. During her time abroad, she took 2,500 pictures and was eager for a way to narrow them down and tell a story. As with the other participants, Bekah began the workshop with the expectation that she would be summarizing her time in France rather than focusing in one specific moment. When writing her script, Bekah realized that it was two relationships that stood out as the most important and significant part of her experience, and it was the week when those two people met one another that she chose to write about.

Bekah's story, called "My own town in France . . ." begins with a close-up of her and her friend, Maggie, whom she met at the Avignon study abroad program. (Incidentally, Maggie is also a DU student, but they had never met until they studied abroad together.) Bekah narrates how she took Maggie to Villard-de-Lans in the hope that Maggie would fall in love with it, as she had. Though the place was as beautiful as she remembered, Maggie is not as charmed by it as Bekah had been. Bekah describes it as feeling as though something was missing. The "something" turns out to be her

connection with the older French woman, Marie-Laure, who was her supervisor for a month when she worked for her at a bed and breakfast. Bekah introduced them to one another, but Maggie came away with an unfavorable impression. Marie-Laure compared everything about the two girls, from their French accents to the way that they ate. She also insisted that they leave the house and go on a long hike even though it was freezing cold (because they were young and it *just wasn't right* for them to stay inside).

Afterwards, Maggie told Bekah that her French imitated Marie-Laure's, which makes Bekah realize how much she has looked up to the stern woman. Even though she had often felt like she couldn't do anything right in Marie-Laure's eyes, she felt triumphant that she managed to break through the stern façade and grow a deeper relationship with her, one in which Marie-Laure would even confide in her. "She was a comfort of home I didn't know I was missing."

As with the other students, Bekah feels that her finished piece is more sentimental than she normally is, and also more candid. Although her story, like the others, came across as very honest and forthright, I did not have the same impression as the students tended to have of their own pieces that they were too sentimental. I will return to this issue of differing perceptions in the analysis to further explore potential explanations.

Bekah feels that the story is an accurate reflection of her identity, but perhaps a more candid one than she would normally share with people. Typically, when asked to share about her time in France, the things she shares are more general—the kinds of things that are easy to relate to, and not the personal story of relationships she experienced which "really reflect what my trip was like." Bekah describes herself as a shy person and doesn't regret the things that she shared, but is careful about who she will

share them with. Tellingly, Bekah is the only workshop participant who chose not to post her story to the public DU YouTube account.

Bekah chose soft piano music to accompany her piece, a fact that she later regretted because she thought it added to the sentimentality. Also, she would have liked to choose music that meant something to her personally rather than just something that “sounded good.” She brought music she had acquired from France to the workshop, but had technical problems that prevented her from using it. Given more time, she would have searched longer to find music that she felt was more fitting to the experience.

Another aspect of Bekah’s process that is consistent with the others is how reflecting on her time in France caused her to produce something that was a reiteration of what she already knew to be important. She is still in regular communication with both Maggie and Marie-Laure, so the fact that they were a significant part of her time abroad wasn’t new to her. What was new, however, was weaving their stories together in the same narrative. Maggie’s reaction to Marie-Laure gave Bekah a fresh perspective on the woman and their relationship, and caused her to appreciate it even more. It was significant to Bekah that, nine months after the experience, those two people were still uppermost on her mind when she considered the time as a whole.

Initially, Bekah wanted to tell a story that was a good summary of her time in France, but she quickly realized that wasn’t possible. She hesitated to write about Marie-Laure because she didn’t have any photos of her, but in the end the lack of any visual evidence became an important conclusion to her story: “I don’t really regret that you can’t see her. Like a secret monument all of my own, Villard-de-Lans and the friendship

I made there is something uniquely my own. I've taken part of Villard with me and left part of me behind, paving a road back to the town I love, wherever I may roam.”

The significant relationship Bekah had with Marie-Laure was like a conduit that gave her insight into the French village. Bekah uses photos throughout her story that show the stunning mountain scenery that surrounds the village, but her narrative leads us to understand that it's much more than visual interest that made her fall in love with the town. Unlike a tourist, Bekah has a deep connection to Villard-de-Lans, a connection only made possible through her proficiency in the French language. While Bekah doesn't talk about any problems with communication, we know from what Maggie says that Bekah's French mimics Marie-Laure's, a telling indication of the woman's influence. In her script, Bekah uses a few French words that help to convey her familiarity with the place. Even her fluid pronunciation of the names, both of the town and her boss, indicate her comfort with the language and its importance to place.

Part 2 – The Graduates

Grace

The first graduate student we will look at is Grace. Her story is primarily about the personal revelation she experienced after a month in Uganda, and also incorporates the themes of place and relationship. She went to Uganda as part of a non-profit group to improve access to clean water. Through people she met and her observations of life in the village, she came away deeply impressed by their resilience and shared humanity. Grace had also studied abroad as an undergraduate, when she spent a semester in Spain.

In choosing a topic for her story, however, the experience in Uganda stood out to her as more meaningful.

Grace attended the workshop about ten months after she returned from Uganda. She was motivated to attend primarily because she wanted to make something that her non-profit organization could use as a promotional tool, to help people understand what the conditions are like in Uganda and why they are doing the work that they do. After sitting through the story circle and hearing people express their emotions about their own stories, though, Grace changed her mind. She decided that she wanted to do something more personal than she had originally planned—something that could demonstrate her emotions about her experience rather than simply explaining the work of the non-profit.

Grace begins her story, called “Resilience,” with an image of the Ugandan flag and an *a capella* recording of people singing the national anthem. There is no music for the bulk of her story, only silence while she talks about the people she met while she was there. She focuses on a teacher who had experienced unbelievably painful losses and yet is still joyful. He lost 4 of his 7 siblings, had buried a child, and was so poor he had to sleep at the schoolhouse where he taught. After telling her his story, however, he returned to teaching without a hint of pain or emotion. She is also amazed by the children she meets who have hardly anything and yet are happy and smiling and who “dance at the mention of music.” Images of the trees and green land surrounding the Ugandan town are intermixed with pictures of barefoot children in worn clothes with swollen bellies.

Grace transitions from these images to that of a shopping cart, loaded down with grocery items and speeding through a store aisle. The silence is interrupted by the typical

noises commonly heard in a store, such as people talking and a baby crying. The combination is effective in contributing to the feeling of fast-paced, noisy, decision-filled American life that she was trying to convey. Grace describes how, upon her return to the U.S., she watched in amazement as a small child threw a fit because his mom refused to buy him a candy bar. Following a brief pause, her digital story ends with a video clip of Ugandan children singing and dancing.

The sharp contrast between her experience at the grocery store and the children who have almost nothing serves as an effective illustration of the way that her perspective has changed. Something as common as a grocery store looks different to her, and when she sees all of the abundance she is amazed that the child isn't happy, having just seen happy children who have nothing. Thus, Grace's story is primarily about the personal revelation she experienced while in Uganda about what is truly meaningful and gives people happiness. Issues surrounding place—i.e., the stark contrast between the U.S. and Uganda—also inform her revelation, and the school teacher she met clearly has a strong impact on her, as he seems to embody the virtue of resilience that she attributes to the community. The combination of these experiences is what leads her to a valuable insight.

Where Grace takes this personal revelation a step further than the undergraduates is in her clear sense of how her life's direction was changed by the experience. She now serves on the Board of the non-profit and plans to return to Uganda. As she says in her story, "The month I spent in Uganda changed my outlook on life forever."

Grace feels that her digital story is an accurate reflection of her identity. Her close friends would recognize the new humility that characterized her after coming back from Uganda. She is very proud of her finished piece and showed it to several people,

including the other board members of her non-profit. Even though she didn't make the story with the same intention that she started (i.e., as a way to promote the organization), she felt that her finished piece was still effective for that purpose, because it gives people a window into rural Africa that they otherwise might never see. She put it on YouTube and hopes that when people search the web for topics related to Uganda, her video will appear.

Grace was grateful that the digital storytelling process served as a way for her to present a snapshot of her time in Uganda—something that could be easily shared and was beneficial for her to reflect upon. She felt motivated throughout the workshop to learn the software and be more creative than she normally is because the story was so important to her on a personal level, she felt it was worth telling and wanted it to be done well. Although she had more experiences abroad than just Uganda, she wanted to focus on what for her had been a significant time in her life. Through her digital story, Grace identified an important insight and moment of change, and is hoping that by sharing it she can motivate others to feel the same love for Uganda and the same appreciation for life that she feels. As a member of the Board for a non-profit that seeks to improve water conditions in Uganda, Grace has committed herself to a path that supports and affirms this realization.

Julie

Julie's story was also about a relatively brief experience abroad. She spent two weeks in Japan approximately two years prior to the digital storytelling workshop. In Julie's story, we see a strong development of the themes of relationship and language; her story is also reminiscent of Heather's experience in Morocco, in that they were both

deeply impacted by a place despite a fairly brief encounter. Julie came to the workshop with a couple of different story ideas – one more lighthearted than the other. The story circle component of the workshop had a big impact on her, as it helped her to understand how other people reacted to her story ideas. As a result of the feedback she received in story circle, she decided to write about a family who had lost a son and with whom she and some American friends had lunch. She also included a meal she shared with her former Japanese roommate and expressed her regret at not trying harder to communicate with her when they lived together.

Julie’s story begins with several seconds of photos of Japan and music; her voiceover doesn’t begin until almost 30 seconds into the piece. The photos are idyllic—mountains, cherry tree blossoms, and cityscapes. As she begins to tell about the lunch she shared with the Japanese couple, the photos change to pictures of their group and the meal that they ate—dainty sandwiches and parfaits, which she explains were “quite expensive.” The Yamamotos treated Julie and her friends to the meal, in part to show their gratitude. One of the group members had been a friend of their son, who tragically died in a car accident. They wanted to talk to the Americans about their son, and though Julie’s Japanese was very limited, she looked at the pictures and said the Japanese word for “great” over and over. Even though she felt like she couldn’t do much, she could tell that her empathy and efforts at communication meant a great deal to the Yamamotos.

Next, Julie narrates how she had dinner with her former college roommate, who was from Japan. As they ate together, Julie finds herself wondering why she wasn’t more intentional about getting to know her international roommate when they went to school together. Julie’s story ends with a picture of her and two other Americans extending their

arms across a small creek towards a group of three Japanese, who are doing the same. She speaks in Japanese at the end, without using English subtitles. Due to the visual cues and the build up from her story, we understand that she is speaking to her Japanese friends about her desire to communicate with them.

Both through the images and the narrative, Julie's story is a strong statement about a brief but significant time she spent in Japan and her desire to learn the Japanese language and connect more with people from other cultures. She doesn't consider herself to be a creative person, but she enjoyed the workshop and was pleasantly surprised to discover how simple the video editing software was to learn and use. The group aspect of the project was encouraging to her, because she wanted to get feedback from others as she worked.

As with Grace, Julie changed her mind about the story she wanted to tell as a result of the story circle. Instead of writing about an experience that was more lighthearted, she chose to tell about the two important encounters she had with local people. She was happy with her finished piece, although she chose not to share it with many people. She felt that it was an accurate reflection of her identity and served to intensify her desire to keep learning Japanese.

The process of creating a digital story served to reinforce for Julie how significant her experience in Japan was. It was a helpful process for her to articulate why it meant so much to her, even though it was only two weeks, and the impact the trip continued to have on her life.

Shannon

The third and final grad student we will look at is Shannon. Shannon grew up in Brazil, went to the U.S. for her undergraduate degree, where she studied abroad twice, and is now pursuing a graduate degree in International Studies, also in the U.S. She was raised in a bilingual environment and had multiple opportunities to travel outside of her home country as a child. In her digital story, Shannon talks about the stories she heard while growing up about the dirty wars in Chile, Argentina, and Bolivia, her mom's home country. Her family was directly impacted by those events, and she decided to study abroad in Chile on a program that focused on the war in order to get a better understanding of its impact.

Shannon's story, called "Moving Forward," begins with an image of a window in black-and-white that slowly zooms out. There is soft guitar music in the background, which fades even more quietly as Shannon begins speaking. She talks about a story she heard growing up from her mom, about how she hid under the windows when she heard the gunfire that announced the military coup in Bolivia. The next image is of a man being dragged in the street by police, and Shannon tells about another story she heard growing up, this time about her uncles: one who was kidnapped and one who was almost kidnapped, both in Argentina. Her story ends with a photo she took of her host mom, who managed to survive the war even though she had been left for dead. She is sitting on a couch, smiling, surrounded by her family.

While in Chile, Shannon learned a great deal about the history and the politics of the war, but more importantly, she got to participate with the local community in seeking

justice, through marches and vigils. Her story includes photos of the marches and the monuments built to those who had disappeared.

In Shannon's story we see the themes of place, personal revelation, relationships, and language seamlessly integrated. The place where she studied was important to her because she consciously chose it as a way to further educate herself about its past. Her advanced language skills allowed her to fully participate and communicate with the local community; the level of her immersion was such that language did not even have to be mentioned. Through the relationship with her host mom, Shannon is able to focus her admiration and respect for people who can survive and even smile after surviving unimaginable hardships. This experience of living with these people and being a part of their lives allows her to make peace with her own family's history.

Shannon's interest in attending the workshop was mostly as a way to learn how to document an experience. She likes to journal and scrapbook, so was naturally drawn to the digital storytelling format. As with the other participants, she came to the workshop with a story that was less personal than the one she ended up telling. Her original intention was more to educate people about the Dirty War and Chile's history. This desire to educate about Chile's history, and the fact that she didn't know how much knowledge people would have about the topic, were obstacles to her when it came to writing the script. She wanted to situate her personal story against the backdrop of Chile's history, but the condensed nature of digital storytelling doesn't allow for elaboration on a multitude of historical facts. During story circle, the feedback Shannon received to her script was to focus on the personal stories – her family's background, the time she spent in Chile, and the woman she stayed with while she was there.

Showing her story with others was more difficult than she expected. Shannon said she felt shy about showing it and unsure as to whether people would take away the meaning that she intended. As she explained in the interview:

It was more personal than I thought it would be, really like I was sharing something that I hadn't thought to put into the words quite the same way that I had for the movie itself, and I was a little shy about it and I didn't expect that. I guess that's kind of the reason why that I haven't shared it with my parents yet. I mean I was happy to share it but I hadn't expected to kind of have a little bit of shyness about it and I wondered what they thought . . . because I just wanted to know whether the message I really thought it was sending, that I was trying to communicate, if it really came across. But it was good for me too to kind of watch them watch it, I liked that part. [The feedback] I think for the most part was, 'that was really well done,' and that was gratifying too, to hear that they thought it was good.

While acknowledging that it was good for her to watch people watch it, at the time of the interview she hadn't yet shown it to anyone else.

Her reluctance to share it is not surprising when considering the fact that the most significant part of the whole process for her was having the finished piece, a focused reflection on what was a significant experience for her. She considered the project worthwhile because it was meaningful to her personally – knowing that other people saw her story or approved of it were not as important. In her words, "I mean even if no one else ever sees it, I have it, and I worked on it and I put a lot of thought into it, and it's mine."

Perhaps part of the reason that the finished product was so personally significant to Shannon is because the process of making the digital story caused her to make some connections that she never had before. Her study abroad experience in Chile was four years prior, and since then she has graduated from college and begun a graduate degree in

international studies and human rights. Though she is passionate about human rights, she had never before connected her interest with the stories that she heard growing up about her own family's encounter with a dictatorship. Her uncle that was nearly kidnapped is a big part of her life, and she wonders how different things would have been if he had disappeared—similar to the uncle who escaped to France and with whom consequently she has no relationship. The process of creating a digital story, and especially the impact of story circle and understanding that she has a personal story to tell, made Shannon more aware of *why* she is passionate about human rights and why she has chosen the path that she has.

This type of productive reflection that came about through the digital storytelling process is key to understanding why it can be so helpful for study abroad experiences. Part of the value lies not just in the original reflection/evaluation, but also in the reevaluation.

Summary

From the analysis of the eight students' digital stories, we can see that a set of themes emerges: personal revelation, relationship, place, and language. Not every story incorporates every theme, and in some cases one theme is emphasized more in one person's story than it is in another. Regardless of which theme(s) the students incorporated, we can see how the digital storytelling process served as an impetus for them to uncover these themes; rather than a process of discovery, the reflection required in creating a digital story seems more akin to an exercise in focus. By narrowing down their stories to a few particular moments, students are more easily able to see what was important from their time abroad.

The next section will explore how the digital storytelling process accomplished this task of enabling focus. It will review the ways in which the students experienced the digital storytelling process and how the goals of study abroad offices and universities relate to these processes. First, however, the thesis will elaborate on the significance of these four themes in relation to the maturity levels and social norms that define the differences between the undergraduate and graduate experiences.

Section 3:

Analysis, Part I

The stories that were told by the five undergraduates and three graduates all manifested similar themes: relationship, place, personal revelation, and language. There is overlap in many of these areas, but also areas of distinction. All four themes were not evident in each story, and in some cases one theme was more prominent than another. However, in reviewing each student's story, similar patterns emerged. Language was predictably a stronger element in some stories than in others, especially considering that some students were in English-language countries and others were bilingual. Given the variety of study abroad experiences that were represented by the students, it's not surprising that some students focused more on language and its impact than did others. Although all students told stories about experiences they had in a place other than home, not every student focused on place as a major theme of the story. Emma's story was almost exclusively about place (Cape Town), while Kim told about the events that happened to her in a new place (Berlin) without focusing as much on the place *per se*. While every story that is about an abroad experience will reference elements of the new place, not every story incorporates the place as a major theme. Relationships played a stronger role in some stories than in others; to differing degrees, students told about people they had met and the impact of those interactions. In the cases where students identified personal revelations, they came about as a result of some combination of the

other themes; however, it wasn't always the case that the students who incorporated the other themes also came to a personal revelation.

Although the same themes were evident between the two groups, they emerged differently in the undergraduate stories than they did in the graduates'. The contrast between the two groups is illuminating, both in helping to shape appropriate expectations of the typical undergraduate study abroad experience as well as to see a trajectory in terms of processing and self-awareness.

The ways in which the graduate stories differed can be categorized in two overarching topics that emerged from both groups: Overly Sentimental and Crystallized Meaning. The Overly Sentimental topic is one that becomes apparent by contrast. While the majority of the undergraduates felt that their stories were more sentimental than was characteristic, none of the graduates did. Crystallized Meaning is evident in both groups, but the difference lies in how the grad students were able to map that meaning onto the larger scale of their life paths, whereas the undergraduates were not yet able to do that. Each topic is presented and analyzed more closely in the following sub-sections.

Overly Sentimental

The first finding from the study stems from a common critique the undergraduates had of their finished pieces: they felt they were too sentimental. Even though they did not feel that they were faking any emotions or being overly dramatic, they felt that their finished pieces came out as very sentimental, which is different from how they normally are (or at least how they normally present themselves to others).

The serious nature of the pieces could be a reflection of the genre; one of the students said she'd like to make a second story that was more lighthearted, but didn't

know if it was possible. It certainly seems plausible to say that when a person is asked to identify an especially meaningful or impactful experience, strong emotions will be involved, and a more serious tone is required in order to convey those emotions. The workshop environment also plays an important role in the outcome and overall tone of the stories, as evidenced by the difference between the CDS model and the Daniel Meadows/BBC approach (Hartley & McWilliam, 2009, p. 102). Whereas the *Capture Wales* stories produced by BBC were personal stories intended for a mass audience, and therefore sensitive topics were purposefully avoided, the CDS model encourages deep reflection on issues of personal significance. CDS values the reflective process more highly than a polished outcome. Since my workshops were modeled after CDS, the emphasis on serious reflection is not surprising.

The fact that the undergraduate students considered the expression of serious emotions to be problematic raises the interesting question of why. The graduate students did not report any similar feelings of regret with regards to their stories; nobody said they thought theirs was overly sentimental or more candid than they tend to be. Instead, they reported a sense of gratification at being able to inject some of their personal feelings into the piece. They seemed to view it as an opportunity to bring their own voice to an experience that had a deep impact upon them, rather than stating the experience in more objective terms as is usually required in an academic setting.

Baxter Magolda's findings from a longitudinal study provide a helpful framework for analyzing this finding. She found that college students follow a fairly predictable pattern of growth throughout their time in college:

Absolute knowing, or the assumption that knowledge is certain and known to authorities, was prevalent in the first two years. *Transitional knowing*, or the assumption that knowledge is partially certain and partially uncertain and known through following a learning process, existed for some students in their first year and was the predominant way of knowing in the remaining three years. Fewer students used *independent knowing*, or the assumption that knowledge is uncertain and everyone has their own biases, during college; this became the prevalent way of knowing during the fifth-year interviews (Baxter Magolda, 1992). (Baxter Magolda, 1998)

This pattern of growth continues into adulthood and graduate school. Baxter Magolda identifies “self-authorship” as the necessary ability to develop one’s own perspective in order to “be lifelong learners in the face of constant change and increasing complexity (Baxter Magolda, 1998, p. 41).” Self-authorship is rarely developed by the senior year and often is still in its early stages in graduate school. These patterns were confirmed through a recent study of interdisciplinary majors (Haynes and Leonard, 2010).

In looking at the students who partook in the digital storytelling workshops, the undergraduates’ concern over revealing their emotional selves fits with this development model. If they are in the *absolute* or *transitional knowing* phases, they do not yet regard themselves as capable of knowledge construction, and instead are more comfortable relying on authority to provide knowledge. The graduate students, on the other hand, have a more developed sense of knowledge as contextual and are accustomed to viewing themselves as agents of knowledge construction. The fact that they are willing to bring their emotional selves to bear on their analysis of past events speaks to this more mature level of meaning making.

Furthermore, a coherent sense of identity is also required in order to develop this degree of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2000). Traditional undergraduates are not as likely to have as strong a sense of identity as graduate students, since they do not have the

same amount of life experience and have not fully completed their college studies, which is an important period of identity formation (Liu and Yin, 2010). Since they are still in process, it seems reasonable that the undergraduates wouldn't be as comfortable with self-expression. Kim was the only undergraduate who did not say that she was uncomfortable with the sentimentality of her digital story. She was also the student furthest advanced in her college career—her interview took place soon after she graduated.

The fact that the undergraduates thought their stories were too sentimental is an interesting finding of the study and one that should be taken into consideration for future implementations of digital storytelling. If students feel that their digital stories are more candid or revealing than they are comfortable with, it's imperative that the finished pieces be their property, and that the decision to share the stories with a broader audience is left in their hands. Otherwise, we risk jeopardizing either the integrity of the students, by exposing them to potentially unfriendly and critical eyes, or the integrity of the stories, because if students are forced to publicly share their final piece and are concerned about vulnerability, they simply won't be as candid.

Crystallized Meaning

The second finding from analyzing the case studies is that the students did not discover new meaning or emotions from their study abroad experiences through creating a digital story, but rather crystallized the meaning they had already identified (however vaguely). This is not to place a value on either type of discovery, only to point out that the reflection process is useful for giving students time to dwell on an insight they already had while abroad. Students are appreciative of that opportunity, which they

conveyed both during the workshop and in the interviews. Some felt the most valuable part of the workshop was simply writing the script, because it was the most time they had dedicated to concentrating on their time abroad since they'd been home.

Both groups honed in on specific, meaningful experiences. In telling their stories, however, the graduates were able to speak with conviction about an experience that made a difference in their lives. They were certain about its importance. The undergraduates did not display the same sense of certainty about connecting their experience abroad with their current passions and interests. I will briefly review the undergraduates' stories to consider how the meaning they uncovered through the digital storytelling process could have a more clear connection with events that take place later in their lives, especially keeping in consideration the various student development stages (Baxter Magolda, 1998).

The theme of personal revelation in Sara's digital story was grounded in an experience she had in Northern Ireland. She is now a senior in college and has high ambitions for a political career. The impact made on her by experiencing in person the tragedies of war could very well end up influencing the direction of her career. Perhaps when she is in grad school she will look back on her semester abroad and better connect the significance of that experience with the decisions she makes later in life.

For both Heather and Bekah, the emphasis in their stories is on place and relationships. Language also played a key role. Heather's comfort with the French language and familiarity with Paris are made known through her digital story even though she doesn't focus on them. Instead, she talks about the second of two trips to Morocco and how she came to feel at home there, as well. Similarly, when Bekah introduces her friend Maggie to her former French supervisor, we understand that her

disappointment when they don't connect stems from different experiences and personalities, not a language barrier. We can see how later, once they've had more time to process their experiences, they will draw even deeper meaning and conclusions about how those experiences impacted their lives. In Emma's case, she openly states that Cape Town has changed the way she views her nomadic existence—that there might be more to life than wandering. Only time will tell how and if this realization impacts her life choices, or whether understanding herself in this new way changes her identity.

Kim represents a halfway point between the undergraduate and graduate groups. She completed her digital story a full year after she returned from abroad and had graduated by the time of her interview. As we remember from the case study, Kim identified an internal change, which was the realization that she was competent to handle new and difficult situations; the confidence she gained from that initial experience propelled her through her time in Germany, allowing her to relax and enjoy herself. She has now graduated from college and is pursuing a career related to her major, Digital Media Studies, recently landing a competitive position with Apple. Though she doesn't have a specifically international career, she may later be able to identify the time she spent in Germany and the self-confidence she gained as a key factor to her success. Thus, Kim is in a position where we can see the trajectory from having an international experience, focusing on an area of impact, and mapping it onto a larger scale of life choices and identity formation.

The significance of having time to process an experience abroad could explain part of the reason for the disparity in the depths of the stories produced by the graduates versus the undergraduates. Although the undergraduates' experiences were important,

perhaps they haven't had enough time to situate them within a broader context and then relate how those experiences abroad have impacted their lives. This is not to say that the undergraduates are shallow in how they process their experiences, but rather that time may reveal more depth to the revelations. We will see what this deeper level of processing looks like by returning to the stories created by the graduates.

Grace's story is about the self-revelation she experienced after a month in Uganda, when she came away deeply impressed by the Ugandans' resilience and shared humanity. Where Grace takes this personal revelation a step further than the undergraduates is in her clear sense of how her life's direction was changed by the experience. She now serves on the Board of the non-profit and plans to return to Uganda. As she says in her story, "The month I spent in Uganda changed my outlook on life forever."

Julie, another graduate student, told about two weeks she spent in Japan. Although the trip was brief, she was deeply affected by the people she met—in particular, by a meal she shared with three other American students and a Japanese couple. Like Grace, Julie also recognizes how her time in Japan changed her, even leading her to enroll in a graduate program in International and Intercultural Studies. Her love of Japanese culture is very difficult for her family to understand, but she has made intercultural understanding a priority in her life. She identifies her time in Japan as part of a longer process of coming to appreciate and understand other cultures.

Shannon's story is especially illustrative of how the process of digital storytelling can result in crystallized meaning from an experience that happened long ago (hers was four years prior) and point to greater significance in life choices. Her story was about her undergraduate study abroad in Chile, a location she chose specifically because she

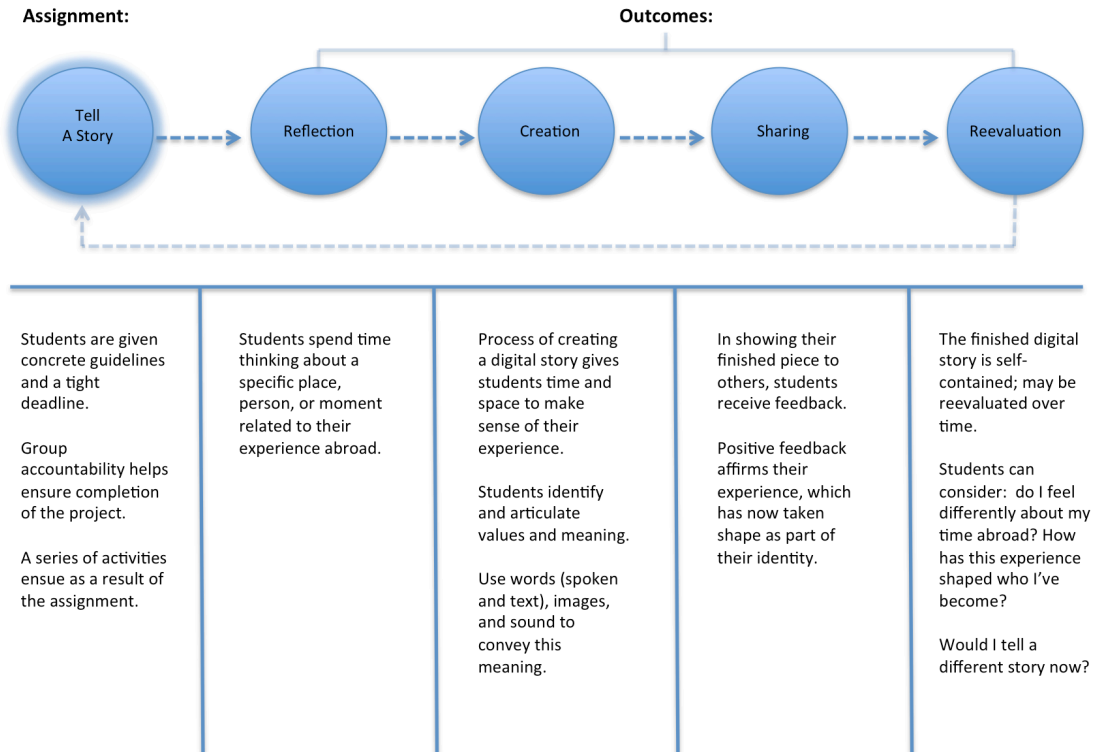
wished to learn more about the Dirty War. Her familiarity with the War began as a child, as she grew up hearing family members tell stories about the War. At the time of the workshop she was enrolled in a graduate program in international studies with a focus on human rights. Reflecting on her time in Chile through the digital storytelling process caused her to make the connection between her motivations for going to Chile, the experiences she had there, and her current life situation. Though she had always known she was passionate about human rights, the process of creating a digital story caused her to identify the roots of that passion.

Analysis – Part 2

Now that the individual case studies have been analyzed and the major themes have been identified, this section turns to consider the digital storytelling process more generally. The following chart provides a visual representation of the digital storytelling process, which will be discussed more in-depth afterwards.

Figure 1

Digital Storytelling: A Reflexive Process



The first part of the process is the assignment students are given to tell a story.

They receive concrete guidelines as to how to do this, including strict parameters (i.e., the story must be personal and must be told in 350 words or less). They are also given a tight deadline in the workshop format; everyone must present a finished piece to the rest of the group by the end of the second day.

This assignment to tell a story and the intimacy of story circle stimulate deep reflection about their study abroad experiences. Rather than skimming over large chunks of time or varieties of experiences with generic statements such as “It was great,” the students are forced to focus on specific places, people, moments, and feelings. By

deliberately choosing one moment over another, one person or place over another, they are making sense of their experience, both articulating and affirming what is most important to them. Kim described the experience this way:

I think when you're looking back on study abroad, a lot of times you just think about the really fun stuff and the really positive things, and then sometimes you don't really realize how much did you actually grow from this experience and learn and really develop yourself as a person. And then doing the digital story, watching it, kind of seeing what other people do as well, I'm thinking like 'wow, that four months, like a lot of stuff happened to me!' But you don't even realize. You know you're going through them at the time but you just kind of scuff it off, you're just kind of like 'oh yeah, whatever.' And then coming back you're just in this huge transitional period. You're seeing all your family and friends and you're starting school right back up, so you don't really have that time to process and really take a breath and be like 'what did I actually do with my four months?' or however long you were there.

Creation is the next part of the process. After having reflected upon their experiences, the students begin putting their stories together, using not only spoken words but also visual images, text on screen, and audio (music or other sound effects). The use of various and overlapping media forms presents a new challenge for students, one of learning to convey meaning through a combination of elements. They must consider how their words will affect an image, and vice versa; how the song they choose will influence the entire mood of the piece; and how the pacing of all these separate pieces conveys meaning, among other variables.

Sharing their work at the end of the workshop is an important part of the process. More than simply an opportunity to let others see their finished piece, students are also getting feedback. As explained by narrative paradigm theory (Fisher, 1985), the affirmation received after telling a story is an important part of identity construction. When people respond to a story in a positive way, that story becomes imbued with a

sense of credibility, which in turn validates the students' themselves and makes the story easier to own as part of their past, and as such, part of who they are.

Now that the finished piece stands on its own, it becomes something that students can re-evaluate later on, which is the final part of the process. Since the stories we tell are informed by our current situations (Ochs & Capps, 1996), as students move on in life they may find that they evaluate their experiences differently. Having identified what was important to them at that point in time allows them to consider if their values have changed and also how their values may impact future decisions. Thus we see the reflexive aspect of storytelling, in that defining a part of one's past involves judgment. Questions arise such as: Do I like the choices I made? Do I have regrets? What would I do differently next time? The answers to these questions affect future actions.

Narrative Resolution

A key element that the digital storytelling workshop provides is a format in which study abroad returnees can come to a satisfying narrative resolution. Unlike many other popular ways of sharing experiences, such as blogs and social networking sites, digital stories have a clearly defined beginning and end. They are grounded in first-person narrative and follow the conventions of storytelling. Although many students post pictures online and even keep blogs while they are abroad, those genres do not result in an encapsulated experience that can be easily digested and responded to. Blogs are by nature open-ended; people can continue to post replies to individual posts as long as the blog remains online. They are also presented in pieces, with archived dates and themes listed in one place and only the most recent posts immediately in view. While such genres are valuable for many reasons, they are not naturally conducive to closure.

By contrast, the processing of creating a digital story is focused on producing a finished piece and therefore comes with valuable constraints. Students are given restrictions as to the amount of time they can spend working on their stories, as well as how long the stories can be. Consequently, students reported a sense of satisfaction that they had narrowed down their time abroad to something specific and achieved clarity along the way. The finished piece is meaningful. During her interview, Grace expressed satisfaction with her digital story, saying “Knowing that I have this little snapshot of this amazing trip that I had in Uganda that changed me really means a lot to me.”

The pressure to finish their stories in time for the deadline and the final showing with the other workshop participants provides much-needed incentive to achieve closure—oftentimes a new feeling in relation to study abroad. This sense of closure is enhanced by the ability to share their creative work and receive feedback. During the workshops, some students had already posted their stories to Facebook before the final screening, which demonstrates their desire for feedback.

Although students may not be creating something that encapsulates every moment and aspect of their study abroad experience through a digital story (and as discussed in the case studies, many times this is the expectation that students bring when they attend a workshop), what they lose in breadth they gain in closure. Many of the students in this study reported a sense of satisfaction at the end of the workshop because they had something definitive that they could share with their friends and families. They all had photos—in some cases, thousands—but had no way of sharing them in a meaningful context. They had all experienced dissatisfaction with the casual way in which people asked about their study abroad experience (e.g., How was it?) and the brief window they

were given to respond. Emma wanted to make a digital story because “I thought it would be a great way to share what my experiences were with others in kind of a compressed way, because one of the things that I learned coming back from abroad was you’re so excited to tell everybody about what you did and your experiences, but you can’t take up people’s time for like an hour or two.”

All of the students expressed interest in creating another digital story in the future. The fact that the genre constrains the storyline to a focused topic means that people have several other topics they could address later. In writing the script, when students struggle with what to cut, it’s helpful to remind them that this is just *one* story; they can tell a different story on another day.

This section has shown how the digital storytelling process works, and how the various stages are conducive to critical reflection, engagement, communication, and reevaluation. Study abroad offices are often looking for ways to engage their students after they return from abroad, and digital storytelling provides an efficient and powerful format for this to happen. The next section addresses some practicalities of implementing digital storytelling in a study abroad office.

Analysis – Part 3

Part of the objective of this study was to provide resources and guidelines to others in the field of international education who may be interested in implementing digital storytelling workshops at their own institutions. This section focuses on the logistics of holding workshops, evaluates the format and student reactions to each part of

the process, includes suggestions for future efforts, and concludes with the ways in which digital storytelling can help fulfill the goals of a study abroad office.

Workshop Model

My workshops were based upon the CDS model, though with significant modifications to the schedule. Rather than holding three-day workshops, like the Standard Workshops at CDS, I held workshops that were roughly half that amount of time—from 2-6pm on a Friday and from 10am-6pm on a Saturday. The rationale for the adjustments was based upon years of working in a college setting and encountering numerous scheduling difficulties. Today’s college student is notoriously busy and clearing a day-and-a-half for something worthwhile, though voluntary, proved challenging enough. Were the workshops to be held for credit or to fulfill some type of requirement, perhaps holding a full 3-day workshop would be more feasible.

The students were given the CDS Cookbook (Lambert, 2010) in advance and assigned the first 30 pages. They were also given information about what to bring, and told to bring a rough draft for their digital story script, no more than 350 words in length (see Appendix B for the complete email). The agenda for the workshops was as follows:

Friday, Month/Day, 2-6pm

2:00 – welcome and introductions

2:15 – the 7 steps of digital storytelling, including examples

3:15 – story circle (this is when you will read your rough draft and get feedback from the group)

5:50 – wrap-up and review

Saturday, Month/Day, 10:00am-6:00pm

10:00 – get feedback on drafts; those who are ready, begin recording voiceovers

10:30 – iMovie ’11 tutorial

1:00 – Lunch (provided)

5:00 – put the finishing touches on your story

5:30 – screening of everyone’s stories (popcorn provided!)

Although some students said they could have used more time, the format has worked in that everyone has successfully completed a 2-3 minute digital story by the end of the workshop. Part of the time that is saved, in contrast to the CDS workshops, is the use of more basic video editing software. Rather than using Final Cut Express (which will soon be obsolete), I have used iMovie '11. Students are relatively technically savvy and are able to quickly grasp the software. In CDS workshops, people of all ages and backgrounds attend, and those with little to no familiarity with computers require extensive coaching. In addition, the Final Cut software is more sophisticated and takes longer for people to learn. Since students have fewer editing capabilities with iMovie, they are not as likely to need as much time to complete their stories.

One valuable lesson I learned from the initial two workshops is to try and regulate the software people use as much as possible. Initially, I allowed students to bring their own laptops and work from the software they already had, whether it was iMovie or Windows Movie Maker. Complications from multiple people using multiple software programs are hard to avoid, and too much time was spent troubleshooting. The Office of International Education now has six MacBooks for student use. If students already own a Mac, they are welcome to use their own (and in some cases, use previous versions of iMovie), but the computers are available and I encourage students to use them.

Motivation

Because the workshops that I held were not for credit or to fulfill specific course requirements, I had to rely on students who self-selected into the workshops and were motivated by other reasons. During follow-up interviews, when asked about their reasons

for choosing to attend, most students said they wanted a way to share their abroad experience with friends and family and saw the digital storytelling workshop as a good way to do that. Nobody who attended was already familiar with the digital storytelling genre. No male students have attended a workshop thus far.

Expectations

Student expectations of the workshop tended to be misguided or low. Students with low expectations were pleasantly surprised by the collaborative nature of the workshop, especially through elements such as story circle. They appreciated the opportunity to meet new people and relate to them on a deeper level, and they also liked the fact that everyone was working on projects at the same time. Even though the stories are individual, there is a community atmosphere in the workshops. Students tend to ask one another for advice and feedback.

Misguided expectations mostly consisted of expecting the finished product to be a complete overview of their time abroad rather than focusing on one or two specific moments. The students who expected more of an overview were not disappointed by the reality; they simply had to adjust their expectations and then were able to embrace and enjoy the exercise of focusing more deeply on one topic. They also appreciated the tutorial in the video editing software, recognizing that they could use their new software skills to create slideshows or other media pieces later on.

Evaluation of finished piece

All of the students who took part in the study were proud of their finished pieces. Even the students who felt that theirs were overly sentimental, as discussed in Part I of the Analysis, were still proud and wanted to show their stories to others.

Evaluation of the workshop components:

The following list of workshop components come directly from the CDS Cookbook (Lambert, 2010).

7 steps lecture

The students were all in agreement that the 7-steps lecture was very helpful, especially for people who are new to digital storytelling. Viewing examples was particularly helpful, as they provided context so students understood what they were aiming for and also gave them ideas about different elements that could be used in their own pieces. Kim specifically mentioned viewing a story in which one photo stayed on-screen for a long time. That helped her see that she could dig deeper than simply going through photos at the same pace the whole time. Emma noted that, although learning the seven steps was helpful, it wasn't necessary to follow them verbatim. Heather didn't consciously think about them as she made her story, although she still agreed they were helpful. Although they had all read the *Cookbook* before attending the workshop, they found that watching examples was the most helpful piece—much more so than simply reading about the steps.

Story circle

As the most personal and dynamic segment of the workshop, people tend to respond well to story circle. The students' responses were positive, for the most part, remarking on how comfortable it felt and how good it was to get to know people on a deeper level than is normally possible. Emma said it had a really big impact on her and led her to think more critically about her story, which resulted in her changing it completely from what she had originally intended. She had reservations about the

feedback, though, because nobody knew each other well and she pointed out that under such circumstances people tend to be nice, and not very willing to give constructive criticism. Bekah felt she would have gotten more out of it if she'd had a script ready to share, but felt it was good for developing ideas. Sara also wished she had a more developed script going into the story circle. She could see where it was helpful but didn't feel like she benefitted much personally, only because she had so many different ideas. It wasn't until later that night that she decided what she wanted to write about. Grace liked how getting to know other people's stories helped her to write her own.

Writing the script

One of the challenges students faced with writing the script was that it was a different style of writing than what they are accustomed to. Following the CDS model, students are encouraged to write with a conversational tone and emphasize immediate action and feelings over analytical statements and objective language. Despite these differences (or perhaps on account of them), the students enjoyed the process of writing a script for their digital stories. Kim pointed out how the limited time turned out to be a good thing, because you are forced to get your ideas out without being too perfectionistic. Julie also agreed that being forced to condense your words helps with the problem of being too "choosy." Almost everyone goes through a few revisions; usually, the first version comes out with very little action or descriptive details and is mostly an explanation about events. After that first level of writing, I work with them one-on-one to pull out the vivid details and sensory information that makes a story more interesting and immediate. That was true for Bekah, who wrote a script Friday night and then was hit with inspiration driving to the workshop on Saturday and completely rewrote it. She

felt she had to get the first version out, which was more forced, before she was able to be more creative and then the ideas flowed. Emma really enjoyed the chance to reflect upon her study abroad experience. Her story was written in the form of a letter, which is a good way to get people in the right frame of mind for the type of writing they should do and often doesn't require as many revisions. They all valued the feedback they received and felt that the story circle helped them to tell stories that were more personal than what they had originally been considering.

Recording the script

The process of recording the script into a microphone and using an audio recording program to capture the sound tends to be new for most people. The range in how the students responded varied, with some feeling like it wasn't very difficult and others naming it as one of the most challenging parts of the process. For some, recording the entire script in one go worked best, while for others, recording paragraph-by-paragraph was more effective. One thing everyone could agree on is that they do not like the sound of their recorded voice.

At the first two workshops I held, I sat with the students while they recorded and coached them through the process. I recommend doing that whenever possible because you can help to catch things that might distract from the story, like background noises or pacing issues (going too fast or too slow). However, at the last two workshops I let students record on their own so that I could be available for help in other areas.

For equipment, our office purchased a Blue Snowball USB microphone and students recorded using either Garage Band or Audacity.

Choosing images

The paradox of choosing images is that, on the one hand, study abroad students tend to have hundreds if not thousands of photos from their time abroad. On the other hand, though, they may not have pictures to illustrate exactly what they want to show. Kim ran into this obstacle when she realized she didn't have a picture of the inside of a Berlin train station. In the end, she decided that those are the opportunities to be more creative and do something unique. In her case, she electronically scanned the map of Berlin she had kept with her all throughout the semester and used it to illustrate her journey. Similarly, Sara used a globe to illustrate the difference between places, and that was her favorite visual element of her piece.

Bekah, who began with 2,500 photos, was surprised by how it easy it was to narrow them down, after she had recorded her script. She found the process of selecting an image to match what she was saying to be very natural. The question of how a photo is used is one that we discuss during the 7 steps lecture, but can be hard to immediately grasp. The concept that we discuss is the difference between implicit and explicit imagery. Implicit imagery adds layers of meaning and complements the narration, whereas explicit imagery usually restates whatever is being verbally described. It's natural for people to choose explicit imagery first, but part of the facilitator's job is to encourage students to consider both types of images.

Choosing sound

Although the students didn't have any familiarity with digital storytelling before taking the workshop, they seemed to have an appreciation for the importance of choosing music. They were aware of the affect that music can have in setting the mood for a piece.

Heather knew from the beginning she didn't want music, only ambient sounds, if anything. The setting for her story—the sand dunes of Morocco—lent itself to a quieter atmosphere. Bekah regretted that she didn't spend more time choosing music. She felt that the piano track she found was too sentimental and not very meaningful to her personally. She had brought some music from France with her to the workshop but encountered technical problems and therefore wasn't able to use it. Sara was the only student to choose the topic of her story based upon music. She had a hard time finding a topic, and it wasn't until she found music she liked and then looked at her photos while listening to the music that it all came together. In her words, the music led her to the photos.

As part of the 7 steps lecture, we talk about copyright issues and I point students to some websites where they can download royalty-free music. Although not everyone ends up using those resources, most of the time they do. Especially when they understand how using music that is extremely popular can detract from their stories, because people will bring their own associations that may change the overall meaning.

Putting the story together

Assembling the story comprises the bulk of the workshop. After writing and recording their scripts and learning some basics of iMovie, students spend several hours adding images, sound, title slides, and credits.

Timing the images to the voice over is a critical part of making a digital story. Images have more meaning when they appear at a designated moment, rather than randomly. Unfortunately, iMovie isn't as conducive to precise timing as Final Cut, which is a linear software that allows the user to build on top of the narration track.

However, adjustments can be made to the length of photos to essentially get the same outcome using iMovie. Students expressed surprised at how simple it was to learn the software, after just a short time experimenting with it. However, they were also surprised at how long it takes to put everything together. Again, they appreciate the deadline as a good motivator and a way to ensure that they finish. They recognize that, given the chance to keep working on it, they would probably never finish and would never be satisfied. As previously noted, the forced conclusion is valuable.

Showing the story to the group

The conclusion of each workshop is a screening of everyone's finished pieces. When asked how they felt about this final step of the workshop, the students were evenly divided: half were excited about showing theirs, while the other half was nervous. The confident ones seemed to feel that they didn't have anything to worry about because the group already knew what their project was; everyone was doing the same type of work, and therefore it was a sympathetic crowd. The students who were nervous felt that there was a big leap between talking through their script ideas and showing a final piece. They also expressed concern about whether or not the meaning of their stories would be received in the manner they intended. However, the shy students were relieved once it was over and glad to receive positive feedback from the group. All the students enjoyed seeing the others' finished pieces.

The most significant component

When asked to identify which part of the workshop was the most significant, the students were divided: four chose story circle, three chose writing the script, and one said having the finished product was the most significant part. For the majority, who

identified story circle as the most significant aspect of the workshop, their reasons were similar. All four students highly valued the feedback that they received during the story circle and appreciated the outside perspective that allowed them to see their own stories in a new light. Kim also emphasized the deeper level of knowing other people that takes place during story circle and appreciated the way that it served to break down barriers.

For the three who chose writing the script as the most significant part, their reasons varied. Sara felt it was the most difficult part because she had such a hard time deciding what to write about, and therefore it was the most significant. Emma was most appreciative of the way the script writing gave her the opportunity to sit and reflect about her time abroad. Heather was struck by how difficult it was to write a script, knowing that the goal is to make it sound like an easy conversation—not forced at all, but natural.

Shannon was the student who named having the finished product as the most significant part of the process. She felt that having something that identified the main message she took away from her time in Chile was deeply meaningful, even if only for herself.

Scheduling

After holding five workshops in the Friday afternoon/Saturday format, and interviewing students about their impressions, there is one area that stands out as the most problematic, and that is scheduling. The students who attended my workshops said that they were initially scared away by the time commitment (though they also said they loved the feeling of accomplishment when it was over). Ideally, there will be some type of external motivation to offer such as credit or fulfillment of a course requirement that will help make the workshops a priority in students' eyes. However, another option that I am

pursuing is to try and make the workshops more accessible by breaking them down into smaller pieces and offering sections throughout the academic year. Students will be able to sign up for story circle on one day and the 7 steps lecture, then come back later in the week during open lab hours to work on their stories. The biggest losses I expect from this type of structure are the deadline pressure and the lack of group cohesion. I'm hoping to maintain deadline pressure by putting limits on how long students can work on their stories, and also by scheduling regular screenings so they have something to work towards. As far as group cohesion goes, I'm hoping that there is enough of a community feel on campus that they already have some of that benefit when they come in.

This section has explored how students responded to the digital storytelling experience. The next section considers how this process relates to the goals of study abroad from the perspectives of professionals and educators in study abroad programs as well as higher education in general.

Digital Storytelling and Institutional Goals

Study abroad professionals continually seek opportunities to encourage students to reflect meaningfully on their study abroad experiences before, during, and after their programs. Unfortunately, many study abroad programs lack the mechanisms of a post-study abroad course or requirement that encourages such reflection. This thesis, however, has demonstrated that such reentry opportunities for reflection can be very important in the overall learning process. They provide students with important opportunities to articulate their narratives of identity in relation to their study abroad experiences, and therefore give students a sense of satisfaction and closure as they recognize that they did, in fact, learn, grow, and change through their time abroad.

At the University of Denver, one of the four goals of the Office of International Education is for students to “. . . gain a deeper understanding of their own identities through intercultural communication, language study and practice (“The Future of Study Abroad at the University of Denver,” 2011).” Without a structured and guided opportunity to reflect upon their time abroad, students are less likely to gain this deeper understanding of their identities. As shown through the case studies in this thesis, considerations of place, relationship, language, and personal revelation are all relevant to identity construction. What’s more, to have these stories documented and accessible to others in a digital format means that the impact of these experiences can be spread much more widely, extending beyond the duration of an individual student’s time in college. Students who are considering going abroad can benefit from viewing stories with depth that offer insight into what a study abroad experience can be. Students who watch a digital story that is a true reflection of a deep and meaningful experience will have a new understanding of what can happen during study abroad and may adjust their expectations accordingly. Their expectations for their own experience could be raised, which would in turn improve their experiences and the stories they create upon return, thus perpetuating the cycle.

There are several ways in which the goals of the OIE tie into the broader goals of DU; in particular, study abroad goals are closely tied to the Undergraduate Student Learning Outcomes

(http://www.du.edu/assessment/documents/DU_UG_Student_Learning_Outcomes.pdf).

The complete list of outcomes includes *Epistemology and Inquiry*, *Communication*, *Intellectual Engagement and Reflection*, *Engagement with Human Diversity*, *Community*

Engagement, and Disciplinary Knowledge and Practice. Three of these outcomes are particularly served through study abroad, and are defined below:

Communication: Students develop considered judgments and craft compelling expressions of their thoughts in written, spoken, visual, technologically-mediated, and other forms of interaction.

Intellectual Engagement and Reflection: Students demonstrate a commitment to self-sustained learning and cultivate habits, including self-discipline, self-reflection, and creativity which make such learning possible.

Engagement with Human Diversity: Students critically reflect on their own social and cultural identities and make connections and constructively engage with people from groups that are characterized by social and cultural dimensions other than their own.

Whether a student is learning a foreign language, taking content classes in a second language, or studying in English, his or her communication skills are challenged and developed through time spent abroad. Students are negotiating new academic systems and living arrangements within different cultural norms. Tasks that would be relatively easy at home, such as purchasing a cell phone or talking to a professor about a course assignment, require more concentration and effort. Likewise, their capacity for engagement and reflection are challenged in new ways by being immersed in new environments. Students oftentimes experience new levels of independence from being abroad as they learn how to take care of problems and issues that perhaps would have been solved by family or friends if they were home. Typically, the level of engagement with human diversity is much higher for students at DU who study abroad than it is for them on campus. The amount of time students spend outside of the classroom and involved with the local community varies greatly, but even those who choose not to

volunteer or take part in internships are exposed to a wide variety of people and places that they could never experience if they stayed home.

Digital storytelling provides a way for study abroad returnees to reflect on these experiences and further cement them as learning moments, thus advancing the goals of study abroad. Through the digital storytelling process, students can be more deeply connected with what they experienced. The learning outcome of *Communication* is even further developed through the process, as students must determine how to convey something meaningful to people who did not share the same experience; in a sense, they become translators of their own experiences. Reflection is the crux of digital storytelling, and allows students to remember and make connections between experiences abroad and their current emotions, relationships, and decisions. And lastly, the opportunity for students to critically reflect on their own social and cultural identities is paramount to the process. The stories that are told about relationships and language demonstrate this outcome.

There are other benefits that accrue through such focused interventions with study abroad returnees, both for the study abroad office and for other constituents concerned with student growth. Study abroad professionals benefit from hearing stories from their students. They are more aware of the challenges and opportunities students face, and hear a meaningful expression of those experiences. All too often the only reports heard while students are abroad are negative ones, when there is an emergency or disciplinary situation. Very little is heard from students when they return, as they quickly become caught up again in campus life. Being reminded of the good and meaningful experiences that take place while students are abroad is invaluable to morale in a study abroad office.

The larger campus community benefits from the digital stories as well. By viewing experiences that take place while abroad, the professors, staff, and students who remain on campus have a better sense of what the abroad students are experiencing. Rather than snapshots of famous monuments or beautiful sunsets (although digital stories may incorporate those things), digital stories are a more personal and meaningful way to convey an experience. Parents of students can also benefit by being exposed to more realistic experiences than what they might be visualizing for their son or daughter.

Undoubtedly, admissions and advancement offices will see an opportunity in digital storytelling as well. While there is nothing inherently wrong with using digital stories for such purposes, it's important that students are never pressured to tell a particular type of story because it better suits those purposes. The core of digital storytelling is for a person to tell his or her own story rather than having someone else tell their version of that story. Once that starts to happen, the university is better off using its videographers and photographers to do the usual type of journalism that promotes the university.

Conclusion

This study focused on the case studies of students who spent time abroad and attended a digital storytelling workshop after they returned home; the five undergraduate students had studied abroad for a quarter or longer, while the lengths of the graduate programs ranged from two weeks to six months. I identified four themes that emerged from the stories that the students told: personal revelation, relationship, place, and language. First, we looked at Sara, who studied in Lancaster, England and told a story about personal revelation. In her case, it was a trip to Northern Ireland and the paradox of good and evil she found there that prompted the insight that it's important to remember the simple things in life. She realized that if you look for the good, you will find it. The second case study was Kim, who studied abroad in Berlin. Her story exemplified the theme of personal revelation, as she discovered she could trust her abilities and herself after navigating a long city commute during her first day in Berlin. Language played a key role in the confidence she felt, as she grew more comfortable with the German language. Emma's case study followed, providing a good example of how personal revelation can develop through a strong connection to place. Her story was a letter to Cape Town, expressing gratitude for the important lesson it taught her – that there is more to life than wandering. Next we looked at Heather, who also told a story about place, a theme that was underscored by relationship and language. Her trip to Morocco was significant in that she managed to feel at home in a place entirely different from what

she was used to. Not only because she grew up in St. Paul and went to college in Denver, but also because she was studying abroad in Paris. However, thanks to relationships made possible through language, she was able to feel at home in both places. The last undergraduate case we looked at was Bekah, who studied in France in two different locations and told a story primarily about relationships that was also strongly tied to place and made possible through her French language abilities. Bekah feels very connected to Villard-de-Lans, even calling her piece “My own town in France,” but the connection is there not just because it is beautiful (or else her friend Maggie would have felt the same way), but because of her relationship with Maurie-Laure.

After reviewing the undergraduates, we looked at what can happen with graduate students. The same themes that emerged from the undergraduate stories were also identified in the three graduate stories. The primary difference is that the graduate students were able to map the significance of their story—whether due to personal revelation, place, relationship, or language—onto the broader trajectory of their lives. Grace chose to tell about the personal revelation that she experienced after spending a month in Uganda, rather than talking about the “good work of the non-profit,” which was her original intention. By doing so, she recognized the significance of that experience—why she decided to serve on the Board, and why she intends to return to Uganda. Julie chose to tell about relationships she formed in Japan and her struggle with the language. Underlying her story is the strong desire to connect with the people she met on a deeper level, a desire strong enough to motivate her to enroll in a graduate program in International and Intercultural Communications.

Shannon's story was the last that we looked at, as hers represents a culmination of the themes that were identified in the other stories, as well as the progression of identity construction that takes place through narrative. Her story was about her undergraduate study abroad in Chile, where she went to learn more about the Dirty War. Through the experience, she connected not only with her family's history, but also with her desire to pursue a career in human rights and international studies. Though she was already in the degree program at the time she made the digital story, she had never before made the connection between the personal reasons she had for choosing that path. Thanks to the narrative process that is inherent to digital storytelling, she honed in on those motivations and came away with a better understanding of herself.

These case studies illustrated how narrative can serve as a means of identity construction. As explained by Davis and Weinshenker (2011), giving an account of something that has happened to oneself—in effect, telling a personal story—causes the individual to interpret and evaluate the significance of those events. These evaluations play an important role in the individual's understanding of his- or herself, shaping both memory as well as future actions. The undergraduates' stories served the purpose of identifying and evaluating significant meaning from their time abroad, which they may later identify to be moments of change as they reevaluate their stories.

Not only was the telling of the stories important, but also the act of sharing them with their peers. Some students were confident and others were hesitant about sharing their stories, but either way the feedback they received was valuable. Through narrative paradigm theory (Fisher, 1985), we saw how the act of telling these stories and receiving positive feedback is affirming to one's identity. When our stories pass the test of

narrative rationality—that is, the when they are understood as being trustworthy and composed of good reasons—the understanding we have of ourselves is affirmed and reinforced.

Two over-arching topics were identified from the case studies: *Overly Sentimental and Crystallized Meaning*. The undergraduates tended to feel that their digital stories were too sentimental, whereas the graduates did not. Student development theory, particularly as described by Baxter Magolda (1998) helps to explain this finding. Undergraduate students are not as developed in their ability to construct knowledge on their own, which involves a strong sense of identity; this tends to develop in adulthood, and is more common among graduate students (Baxter Magolda, 2000). Similarly, while both groups of students used digital storytelling as a way of honing in on meaning they had already identified, the graduate students were able to articulate the significance of that meaning in relation to their life choices.

In the second part of the Analysis, we looked at a visual representation of the digital storytelling process and how, beginning with the simple assignment to “tell a story,” students are then motivated to reflect, create, share, and reevaluate a life experience. Through this process, they identify what was most significant to them about their time abroad, undertake layers of processing to communicate this meaning in a multi-modal format, and receive affirming feedback from their peers. Once the story is finished, they have a concrete articulation of their experience that they can continue to evaluate in the future, making it both a part of their identity as well as a guide and reference for future actions. As a result of this process, students achieve narrative resolution, which is the satisfaction of having a creative expression of their time abroad that has a definitive

beginning and end and is easy to share. Their friends and family are more likely to watch a digital story because it's a condensed genre, and therefore also more likely to respond and provide feedback to the students, which also contributes to the feeling of closure.

In the third part of the Analysis section, I reviewed the logistics of holding digital storytelling workshops, including details about how the students in my study perceived the different steps of the process. I concluded with suggestions for future workshops, as well as an explanation of who all stands to benefit from their implementation in a study abroad office.

Contrary to expectations, cultural readjustment problems did not play a significant role for the majority of the undergraduates. Of the five undergraduate students, only two (Kim and Emma) reported any serious issues. For Kim, readjusting to life back in the U.S. was more difficult than adjusting to life in Germany. She had become accustomed to the German language and missed it when she returned; she also missed the more exciting lifestyle she had abroad where travel and new discoveries were a part of life. Emma found herself missing a place for the first time in her life, and she struggled with being back in familiar, less exciting, surroundings. The other students, however, did not report any major issues with coming home. Although nobody went so far as to say they had *no* issues with readjustment, the examples given were small things such as vocabulary adjustment and difference in daily routine (e.g., different type of breakfast).

The reasons for the lack of readjustment issues are not clear. One consideration is that the level of readjustment issues a student faces will be informed by the length and location of the program, as well as by the individual's personality and past experiences. The student who is fully immersed in the developing world will in all probability have a

more difficult time readjusting to life in the States than the student who goes to Western Europe. The student who has already undergone multiple cultural immersion experiences will be more adept at negotiating change. The students in this study represent a small sample and therefore are not representative of broader trends. The majority studied in Western Europe, which, being culturally more similar to the U.S., may explain in part the lack of reentry issues. The two graduates who studied in Africa and Japan were there for a short period of time, which is another reason to expect minimal issues. The graduate student who was in Chile for a semester was already “studying abroad” as an undergraduate in the U.S.; her international background makes her different than the typical U.S. undergraduate.

Although this sample may not be representative, these findings point to the need for further research in the area of cultural readjustment after study abroad. Especially considering the recent and rapid onset of communications advances in technology, there are many factors that make the typical study abroad experience very different today from what it was just a few years ago. The ubiquity of internet and real-time connections with home are sure to have an impact on the experience a student has while he or she is abroad, and in turn upon his or her experience with reentry. New research could serve to confirm whether cultural readjustment is a persisting problem or one that is diminishing due to changing communication norms.

While students may not be experiencing dramatic issues that significantly disrupt their lives, as described in the literature (Gaw, 2000; Sussman, 1986; Szkudlarket, 2009; Zaharna, 1989), there seems to be tension in the simple fact that they have no conclusive way to process their experiences abroad. The sense of satisfaction students experienced

upon completing a digital story—what was termed “narrative resolution” in this study—points to the benefit of some type of conclusive act. Digital storytelling provides a means for them to bring closure, even if only in a small area, which brings not only a sense of satisfaction, but also the added benefit of enabling students to share something significant about their experience.

Implications For Study Abroad

By comparing the undergraduates’ stories with the graduates’, some interesting conclusions emerge. In some respects, the level of processing that takes place for the undergraduates during a digital storytelling workshop could be seen as disappointing. They did not identify life-changing moments, as the graduate students were able to do. However, seeing the trajectory of where the stories can lead and understanding the development stages students commonly experience changes one’s perspective. The process that they engage in by creating a narrative account about their experience abroad is not one that stops once the story is finished. The creation of the story stands in the middle of the process, followed up by sharing and receiving feedback about their account, as well as continuing to reevaluate their stories over time (see *Figure 1*). This solidification of something deemed to be significant serves as an important way for students to construct their identities and better understand their past, which in turn informs their understanding of their futures. The process of digital storytelling contributes to solidifying one’s narrative of identity.

Understanding the undergraduate stories in this light is helpful in better understanding some of the assumptions that are easy to make about students by those who work in the field of international education. People who choose to make careers in

study abroad tend to do so because of the significant impact that their own study abroad experience had upon them. In many ways, the average study abroad advisor did not have the average study abroad experience. In working together, it is natural for advisors to reinforce to one another the normalcy of their experiences and then project those expectations upon the students. By doing so, we can lose sight of what a typical experience is meant to be. The stories that students tell through the digital storytelling workshops provide a valuable way to better understand their experiences. The more students who participate in workshops means a larger pool of stories that, taken as a whole, can serve to validate the typical undergraduate study abroad experience.

This suggests the need for future research into how study abroad offices might use digital storytelling as a way to check our own expectations against students' actual experiences. Digital storytelling is a way to provide the space and environment for students to tell in their own words what study abroad meant to them. The emphasis shifts from *telling* to *listening*, and further research could show how such a shift may impact our expectations.

This study demonstrates that the digital storytelling process can be an important one in helping students to articulate a moment and an experience that, over time, may prove key in their life decision-making. Participating in digital storytelling gives students an important boost in the process of reflecting on that life-changing moment, and can perhaps help them move forward from that experience toward other experiences that will similarly shape their abilities to contribute to a global society.

This research builds on the earlier Rodriguez (2010) study because it investigates how cross-cultural learning can be enhanced after returning from abroad (as opposed to

while the student is still abroad). Rodriguez' study concluded that digital storytelling can be an effective means of mitigating the potentially isolating medium of technology by harnessing it in such a way that contributes to the potential for cross-cultural learning. This study has shown that digital storytelling can also be an effective means of identifying and solidifying cross-cultural learning moments after the student has already completed his or her term abroad.

The appeal of digital storytelling to a generation that is accustomed to media-rich experiences has been noted in this study. Many of the students were quick to post their stories online to social networking sites such as Facebook, but not every student wanted to do so. An area for future research would be to explore how students make this decision and whether or not the desire to share their stories online is a measure of anything. For example, many of the undergraduates felt that their digital stories were too sentimental. While it's important to note that they didn't feel that their stories were not authentic, the boundaries between what they are comfortable and not comfortable with sharing can be blurry. The stories are created in an environment that is deliberately constructed to be safe and affirming; however, the appropriateness of whether the product of such an environment is suitable to post on Facebook could be difficult for students to judge. Additional research could help to determine what level of emotional engagement through digital storytelling is optimum for traditional college undergraduates.

The negotiation of relationships in a mostly electronic environment, after students return home, is a related area of potential research. Digital stories provide a way for students to identify relationships that were meaningful to them while abroad, and it would

be interesting to explore how or if those relationships are maintained and what their long-term significance is to the lives of study abroad returnees.

Digital storytelling acts as a mediator between the student, the study abroad staff, and the university. It connects the student to their abroad experience and helps them to distill and reflect upon meaningful moments; it connects the study abroad staff to what the students are learning and allows them to see whether and to what extent study abroad is fulfilling the goals of the office; and it serves as a tangible way to connect the goals of the study abroad office with the learning outcomes of the university (at the University of Denver, those outcomes include *Communication, Intellectual Engagement and Reflection*, and *Engagement with Human Diversity*.) A system in which digital storytelling is available to a large number of students, with incentives to encourage participation and support from upper administration, could have many positive ramifications. At the very least, this study has shown that the attempt to implement such a system is well worth the investment.

References

- Alexander, B. (2011). *The new digital storytelling: Creating narratives with new media*. Oxford: Praeger.
- Baxter Magolda, M.B. (1998). Developing self-authorship in graduate school. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 101, 41–54.
- Baxter Magolda, M.B. (2000). Teaching to promote holistic learning and development. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 82, 88-98.
- Brown, J.S. (Ed.). (2005). *Storytelling in organizations: Why storytelling is transforming 21st century organizations and management*. Boston: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Davis, A. and Weinshenker, D. (2011). *Digital storytelling and authoring identity*. Unpublished manuscript, Department of Education & Human Development, University of Colorado Denver, United States.
- Dolby, N. (2007). Reflections on nation: American undergraduates and education abroad. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11(2), 141-156. doi: 10.1177/1028315306291944
- Fisher, W. R. (1985). The narrative paradigm: An elaboration. *Communication Monographs*, 52, 347-367.
- Frazel, Midge. (2010). *Digital Storytelling Guide for Educators*. Washington, D.C.: International Society for Technology in Education.
- Greenwood, D.J., Whyte, W.F. and Harkavy, I. (1993). Participatory action research as a process and as a goal. *Human Relations*, 46(2), 175–92.

- Gaw, K. (2000). Reverse culture shock in students returning from overseas. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 24, 83-104.
- Hartley, J., & McWilliam, K. (Eds.). (2009). *Story circle: digital storytelling around the world*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Haynes, C. & Leonard, J.B. (2010). From surprise parties to mapmaking: undergraduate journeys toward interdisciplinary understanding. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 81(5), 645-666.
- IIE Open Doors Report (2010). Retrieved from <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data>.
- La Brack, B. (1993). The missing linkage: The process of integrating orientation and reentry. In R. M. Paige (Ed.), *Education for the intercultural experience* (pp. 241-279). Maine: Intercultural Press.
- Lambert, J. (2009). *Digital storytelling: capturing lives, creating community*. Berkeley, CA: Digital Diner Press.
- Lambert, J. (2010). *Digital Storytelling Cookbook*. Retrieved from <http://www.storycenter.org/cookbook.html>.
- Liu, J. & Yin, A. (2010). Assessing personal growth. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 111-123. doi: 10.1002/ir.334
- Lundby, K. (Ed.). (2008). *Digital storytelling, mediatized stories: self-representations in new media*. New York: Peter Lang.
- McDrury, J., & Alterio, M. (2003). *Learning through storytelling in higher education: using reflection and experience to improve learning*. London: Kogan Page.

- Meadows, D. (2003). Digital storytelling: research-based practice in new media. *Visual Communication, 2*(2), 189-193. doi:10.1177/1470357203002002004
- Morley, D. & Robins, K. (1995). *Spaces of identity: global media, electronic landscapes and cultural boundaries*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Ochs, E., & Capps, L. (1996). Narrating the self. *American Review of Anthropology, 25*, 19-43.
- Ohler, J. B. (2007). *Digital storytelling in the classroom: new media pathways to literacy, learning, and creativity*. New York: Corwin Press.
- Rodriguez, K. (2010). Digital storytelling in study abroad: toward a counter-catalogic experience. *Seminar.net: International Journal of Media, Technology & Lifelong Learning, 6*(2), 219-233.
- Sussman, N. (1986). Re-entry research and training: methods and implications. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 10*, 235-234.
- Szkudlarek, B. (2010). Reentry—A review of the literature. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 34*, 1-21. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2009.06.006
- The future of study abroad at the University of Denver*. (2011). Unpublished manuscript.
- Uehara, A. (1986). The nature of American student reentry adjustment and perceptions of the sojourn experience. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 10*, 415-438
- Zaharna, R. S. (1989). Self-shock: The double-binding challenge of identity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 13*, 501-525.

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. How long did you study abroad?
2. Where and when did you study?
3. How long have you been back in the U.S.?
4. Have you encountered any difficulties readjusting to life in the U.S.? If so, please describe what those are.
5. Why did you decide to attend the digital storytelling workshop?
6. Describe your expectations about the workshop. How did the experience compare to your expectations?
7. How did you decide what to write about?
8. How did your story develop or change over the course of the workshop?
9. Did you have a specific audience in mind when you started the workshop? If so – or if not – did that change over the course of making the story? How?
10. Have you already shared your story, or do you plan on sharing your story with anyone? If so, who?
11. How do you feel about your finished piece?
12. Would you change anything about the story if you could? What would you change?
13. I'm going to list the different parts of the workshop. Please say what you liked, disliked, or found meaningful about each part:
 - a. 7-steps lecture
 - b. story circle
 - c. writing the script
 - d. recording the script
 - e. choosing images
 - f. choosing sound
 - g. putting your story together
 - h. showing your story to the group
14. Which part of the process stands out to you as the most significant?

15. What did it feel like to listen to yourself over and over through the headphones, choosing and timing your photos and music, and putting your story together?
16. Do you feel that the digital story you made in the workshop is an accurate reflection of your identity? In other words, would people close to you be surprised by your story, or feel that it confirms what they already know about you?
17. Do you feel any differently about your study abroad experience after having created a digital story? If so, please describe what is different.
18. Do you think you would create another digital story in the future? Why or why not?
19. Is there anything you would like to add, either to clarify something we have already discussed or to address a new topic?

Appendix B: Pre-workshop Email

Subject: Important info about the digital storytelling workshop

Dear Storytellers,

I'm looking forward to our upcoming workshop! Before the day is upon us, I wanted to send you some details about what to expect as well as some things to prepare in advance. Attached is the Digital Storytelling Cookbook, which is written and produced by the Center for Digital Storytelling in Berkeley, CA. This will be our guide for the weekend, so please take the time to read the **first three sections** before the 19th (pages 1-30).

Set aside a little time to think about the story that you'd like to tell. You don't need to have this absolutely fixed in stone, but having an idea of the topic you'd like to pursue will help you hit the ground running.

Please bring the following things with you to the workshop:

- a rough draft of your story – these are short pieces that we are making (2-3 minutes), so keep your draft to 350 words MAX!
- up to 20 digital photos (you can also bring images to scan)
- some of your favorite music
- headphones
- a laptop, if you have a Mac

On the first day, we will focus on learning the steps to making a digital story and then share our story rough drafts/ideas with the group. The goal for Day 1 is to walk away with a good grip on the story you want to tell and an idea of how you're going to tell it. Ideally, you'll have some time Friday night to re-work your first draft.

The second day will mostly be spent as an actual workshop, putting together your stories. Our office has MacBooks loaded with iMovie '11 that you are welcome to use. I will start Day 2 with a brief tutorial on using iMovie, in case you're not familiar with it.

Some of you will want to spend some time in the morning on Day 2 re-working your drafts, while others will be ready to record your voiceover and start putting everything together. The goal is for everyone to complete their stories by 5pm so that we can have a screening at the end of the day.

There will be light snacks provided on Friday and lunch on Saturday. Below is a more detailed itinerary.

Let me know if you have any questions! I look forward to hearing your stories and working together on a finished piece you can be proud of.

Regards,
Nicole

Friday, August 19th, 2-6pm

2:00 – welcome and introductions

2:15 – the 7 steps of digital storytelling, including examples

3:15 – story circle (this is when you will read your rough draft and get feedback from the group)

5:50 – wrap-up and review

Saturday, August 20th, 10:00am-6:00pm

10:00 – get feedback on drafts; those who are ready, begin recording voiceovers

10:30 – iMovie '11 tutorial

1:00 – Lunch (provided)

5:00 – put the finishing touches on your story

5:30 – screening of everyone's stories (popcorn provided!)