

DIGITAL STORYTELLING: ORDINARY VOICES, EXTRAORDINARY STORIES

A Dissertation  
by  
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## ABSTRACT

### DIGITAL STORYTELLING: ORDINARY VOICES, EXTRAORDINARY STORIES

(December 2011)

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This dissertation explores the perspectives of women enrolled in a developmental English class at a community college which utilized digital storytelling as a pedagogical tool. Building upon the many years of research of best practices in the field of developmental education, this qualitative narrative inquiry is motivated by three research questions: 1) How do the women use digital storytelling technology to create meaning? 2) What does the experience of the female storytellers reveal about women and the learning experience? 3) How do developmental education research-based best practices intersect with digital storytelling? The goals of the study are to contribute to the existing body of literature on developmental education best practices and women's learning as well as merge the two with the 21st century technology of digital storytelling. Within the contemporary literature on digital storytelling, themes of identity formation, multiple literacies, and empowerment through emancipation are pervasive. This study offers insight into and advances the understanding of digital storytelling by including the field of developmental education with an exclusive focus on women's ways of learning.

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There is a saying that every story begins at home. It is true that my story had its humble beginning in the home of Glenn Ray and Judy Boston, my parents. Being an only child of educators, I learned at an early age to value education and to look to each new day as a learning opportunity. My father and mother have remained steadfast in their support with the one goal of seeing me succeed in any endeavor I chose to pursue. For their never-ending love, encouragement, and support, I am eternally grateful. They were and continue to be my first teachers.

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## CHAPTER 1: DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION

In this chapter, I explore the history of the field of developmental education. I seek to conceptualize the research questions, ultimately providing a framework for subsequent chapters. Furthermore, in this chapter, I describe the current landscape of developmental education by addressing basic writing pedagogy, discussing the integration of technology, and inquiring into how women respond to technology.

### Developmental Education: My Personal Connection

Before teaching at the postsecondary level, the majority of my teaching experience was in the field of elementary education. I knew very little about the community college with the exception of having taken some college transfer courses during summer. I had never heard of developmental education until I began my career as an instructor at the community college. Arendale (2002) attributes such a lack of knowledge about developmental education to the fact that many educators themselves did not participate as students in developmental education or access any learning assistance resources. So, like many others new to the field of postsecondary education, I found myself asking, what is developmental education? The National Association of Developmental Educators (NADE) defines developmental education as a

...field of practice and research within higher education with a theoretical foundation in developmental psychology and learning theory. It promotes the cognitive and affective growth of all postsecondary learners, at all levels of the learning

continuum. Developmental education is sensitive and responsive to individual differences and special needs among learners (NADE, 2011).

My first real experience with a developmental course was the fall of 2007. In an effort to assist my seventh grade son with pre-algebra, I enrolled in *Introduction to Algebra* (MAT 070). After 16 years of using math just to balance my checkbook, my abilities had naturally become limited to addition, subtraction, and multiplication. I worked hard to maximize my time in class and perfect my math skills. I found that I had much in common with my classmates who, for various reasons, were also returning to school after some years; this experience both helped me in my advising duties and allowed me to better serve advisees who had been recommended for a developmental course.

In addition to my experience in MAT 070, I also enrolled in a second developmental course [*Composition Strategies* (ENG 090)] during the spring of 2009 to conduct my qualitative pilot study required in my doctoral program. In this course, I worked with others to compose my first three-and-a-half minute digital story. This experience provided the foundation for my pilot study and informed much of my subsequent research design and methodology. My experiences were not ones of memorization, instant recall, or multiple worksheets, but rather classes in which a community of learners was established. During my involvement that spring semester, I observed the rebirth of individuals as they gained self-confidence and pride. They learned the value of self-expression and experienced the freedom of sharing their story. I came to respect and admire the developmental education student as well as the developmental educator.

In an effort to build upon the many years of research in the field developmental education and contribute to the best practices documented in research literature, the purpose

of my qualitative inquiry is to understand the perspectives and experiences of women enrolled at a rural community college in a developmental English (ENG 090) class which utilizes digital storytelling as a pedagogical tool. The goals are multiple and seek to inform educators, administrators, policy makers, and instructional specialists in making decisions about technology implementation and investment, to maximize educational learning experiences of women developmental learners through engagement and empowerment, and to further explore the teacher and student roles within a digital storytelling classroom.

Having taught in the public school system for eight years, I was all too familiar with the behaviorist traditions of education. Each year I witnessed the decline of education into a one-size-fits all model where memorization of content was essential to passing a required standardized test. Even as a novice educator, I questioned student learning and instructional pedagogies under this model. High stakes testing had reduced teaching to a set of mechanical steps. As a teacher, I understood the importance of assessment, but high-stakes testing began to eat away at the core of my teaching philosophy. I became restless and decided to return to graduate school. My professional goal was two-fold. I wanted someday to transition to the community college to continue my father's teaching legacy, but most of all I desired to reconnect with my teaching spirit. I was not familiar with the terminology of constructivist theory until much later, but I knew what it felt like, looked like, and sounded like when I stood in front of a classroom. As a constructivist, I believe how students are taught is equally important as what they are taught.

The cornerstone of constructivist theory is the ability of the learner to construct knowledge by giving meaning to current experiences by building on prior knowledge and past experiences. Essential building blocks of this foundation are learning as an active,

contextual, and collaborative process (Jenkins, 2006). Jerome Bruner (1966) emphasized, “Knowing is a process, not a product” (p. 72). He described a theory of instruction in which the subject matter and teaching methodology are inseparable. Educators actively engage students in the process of learning through designing hands-on activities, accommodating learning style differences, presenting information and skills to students in relevant contexts, and facilitating collaborative learning arrangements. Likewise, the classical theorist Vygotsky envisioned classrooms in which collaborative and cooperative learning would foster joint discovery, resulting in learning environments that build upon the culturally shaped knowledge and value systems students bring to school (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Central to the learning theories espoused by both Bruner and Vygotsky is the emphasis on an active, contextualized, and collaborative process of learning.

I contend that not only are these characteristics important in the constructivist process of learning, but also they are critically important to the field of developmental education. Additionally, an instructional tool like digital storytelling, if used appropriately, is a compelling 21<sup>st</sup> century assignment that results in multiple benefits for the developmental student as active, contextualized, and collaborative learning is emphasized. Thus, mastering basic writing and reading skills becomes more engaging and meaningful as students produce digital narratives to share with their classmates and others.

#### Developmental Education: The Past

What is developmental education? What does it mean to be a developmental education student? These questions began to surface during my first year as a student academic advisor at the community college. One after another, students would walk into my office and, in a robotic motion, hand me their placement test form. I would look at course

recommendations based on their placement test score and then I would, as if a robot myself, register the student for courses such as *Essential Mathematics* (MAT 060) or *Improved College Reading* (RED 090). Being from a public elementary school background, I had little knowledge about the community college system and no experience in it. I had taken a transfer course at a community college one summer, but other than that, I did not have any direct experience with community colleges.

The lack of documentation relating to the history of developmental education is potentially related to the fact that many education historians and researchers did not participate as students in developmental education or access the learning assistance resources; therefore, developmental education was not considered important or worthy of study (Arendale, 2002). Like many of my colleagues, I too overlooked developmental education and did not see it as a valuable part of the college experience simply because I had not been a part of it during my undergraduate years.

The history of developmental education is not, as many might think, an educational practice established in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Arendale, 2002). Developmental education has been around since the founding of America's first college, Harvard, in 1636. Colonists of the first colony established this college to train clergymen. Since the majority scholarly literature at that time was written in Latin, many students found themselves needing remediation. The tutorial assistance these students received in Latin was the precursor to developmental education in American higher education (Boylan & White, 1987).

According to Boylan and White (1987), President Andrew Jackson was responsible for shaping higher education by expanding educational access. Jackson believed education was the key to improving the lot of the common laborer. However, education was not

mandatory at the time and many who were seeking formal education were not prepared academically. Because many colleges were established and maintained with student tuition fees, the only admissions requirement needed was assurance of payment. Many students therefore entered the higher education system ill-prepared to continue. Again, in an effort to respond to students' needs, many colleges implemented tutorial programs for the public. In 1830, the University of Wisconsin was the nation's first institution of higher education to establish a college preparatory department (Boylan & White, 1987).

During the presidency of Abraham Lincoln, a great gain was made in terms of accessibility and affordability of higher education for all Americans. Lightcap (n.d.) documents that on July 2, 1862, President Lincoln signed the Morrill Act, or the Land Grant Act, which was sponsored by Vermont Congressman Justin Morrill. This Act entitled each state to 30,000 acres of public land for each Senator and Representative. The land was then sold and the proceeds became the basis of an endowment fund to support public colleges in each state. These public colleges focused on a curriculum of agriculture and the mechanical arts, both of which were economically important during that time (Lightcap, n.d.). The number of public universities expanded and more American citizens took advantage of educational opportunities made available by congressional legislation.

As documented by Boylan and White (1987), in the latter 19<sup>th</sup> century, educational opportunities grew to include women and African-Americans, who traditionally had been denied access to higher education. Some politicians and educators believed that women were inferior and incapable of academic achievement. Numerous institutions were created with their sole purpose being to serve a female student population. Vassar College and Wellesley College, among others, were established around 1860. As a result of women having been

denied access to higher education for many years, these colleges found themselves augmenting curricula with a curriculum closely aligned with secondary education. Therefore, baccalaureate degrees granted during this time by these institutions were not recognized as equivalent to those granted by other institutions (Boylan & White, 1987).

In addition to women being underprepared for higher education, African-Americans had been denied all educational opportunities due to slavery. After the Civil War ended in 1865, African-Americans became part of the “social, political, and economic systems of the nation” (Boylan & White, 1987, p. 3). In response to their educational needs, many postsecondary schools were established throughout the nation by various organizations. However, it was the Second Morrill Act of 1890 that assisted in establishing land grant colleges for African-Americans and prohibited states from providing separate but *unequal* higher education. In addition, African- American organizations established several colleges directly (Boylan & White, 1987; Jones & Richards-Smith, 1987).

As public and private universities and colleges sought to attract a more diverse student population, there was also an increase in students not academically prepared to enter the higher education system. In an effort to prepare women and African-Americans for higher education, colleges and universities implemented remedial and developmental programs. Historically African-American institutions are now known as pioneers of today’s “developmental education” because of their success in developing a curriculum that serves all students by strengthening basic skills, along with a comprehensive program of tutoring, career counseling, placement testing and courses to improve reading and writing skills (Jones & Richards-Smith, 1987).



Though accessibility to colleges and universities was increasing, some Americans desired practical training for particular professions, trades, and industries. Technical and scientific schools began to appear in the early nineteenth century and were the first to offer extension courses and evening programs that catered to adult learners (Boylan & White, 1987).

Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the junior college movement began in part due to the creation of the College Entrance Examination Board (Boylan, 1988). Even though underprepared students were still being admitted to four-year institutions, tougher admission criteria prevented some from attending and these individuals entered junior colleges. These junior colleges were charged with providing the first two years of college courses as well as accommodating the needs of underprepared students through preparatory and remedial coursework. Because junior colleges were meeting the needs of those not academically prepared, the commitment to preparatory programs at colleges and universities diminished. By the 1940's, a majority of college preparedness programs were being offered by the junior colleges (Boylan, 1988).

After World War II and the passage of the Veterans Adjustment Act of 1944, remedial programs at the university level experienced resurgence (Boylan, 1988). World War II veterans began to take advantage of government-funded programs that gave them the opportunity to attend college without incurring financial burden. Even though the admissions criteria had become more carefully enforced, many admissions directors simply wanted to give ex-military personnel a chance to succeed. Hence, reading programs were re-established, along with study-skills programs, and tutoring services were made available (Boylan, 1988; Casazza, 1999).

During the 1960s, approximately 80 million Baby Boomers headed off to college. Colleges and universities finally had a large pool of applicants. It was much easier to be selective and enforce stricter admissions criteria. Besides, there were enough applicants so that students lost through attrition were quickly replaced by other students. As a result of the selective practices at the four- year level, the community college seed began to take root and grow during this time (Boylan, 1988).

As documented by Boylan (1988), the 1970s marked the era of ‘open admissions’ philosophy. The Higher Education Act of 1965 provided government funds to institutions of higher education that advanced the training and education of traditionally under-represented groups. Higher education began to welcome the nontraditional, underprepared student and, as before, reinstated the practice of providing services for them to increase the likelihood of their success (Boylan, 1988). For nearly 200 years, institutions of higher learning have made informed decisions about accepting underprepared students and have consciously responded to the needs these students (Casazza, 1999). This response, known as Developmental Education, is ever-changing as the student population becomes more diverse. Boylan writes that Developmental Education is simply an “updated response to an ongoing problem” (Boylan, 1988, p. 3).

#### Developmental Education: The Philosophy

Regardless of the name, these support programs were designed to provide additional assistance to a diverse student population with the ultimate goal of encouraging academic success at the postsecondary level. Casazza (1999) argues that names do matter and proposes that words such as “remedial” and “underprepared” carry negative connotations and point to deficiencies that need to be “fixed” within an individual (p. 5). On the other hand, the

developmental education philosophy focuses on the “intellectual, social, and emotional growth and development of all learners” (p. 5). Developmental educators view the learner holistically, with the overall development of the learner as a process rather than a product achieved by higher test scores gained by repetitive practice of basic skills (Casazza, 1999).

The developmental educator recognizes that students enter the doors of postsecondary education at many different levels with an array of talents. Developmental education capitalizes on students’ talents and provides support in other areas so that the students can reach their educational goals. Casazza cautions, “It is a mistake to look at learners who need help through a narrow lens; we are all developmental learners depending on the context in which we find ourselves” (p. 7). For example, several semesters ago I wanted to help my seventh-grade son with pre-algebra. I needed some help with my algebra skills because it had been more than 20 years since I had taken a math course. I entered the course with apprehension, but left it a more confident person prepared to address my son’s needs.

Since the Colonial era, colleges and universities throughout the nation have been accepting students who do not meet their entrance standards. Knowingly accepting these students implies that colleges and universities will respond to students’ needs and develop ways to serve them. The developments and lessons learned from the past have contributed to the present and will continue to define the future of developmental education.

#### Developmental Education: Present Challenges

Given the historical roots and current philosophy of developmental education, it is difficult to argue against the need or benefit of the service. Developmental education does not only reach out to the individual in need of instruction but also enriches the entire institution and revitalizes the community. Critics of developmental education never deny the

importance and relevance of developmental education, but they do emphasize the need for assessment in an effort to promote continual program improvement at the community college level. It is evident in the literature that many of the criticisms of developmental education made in the 1980s are still relevant (Bailey, 2009; Cohen, 1982).

Critics advocating reform refer to completion data of the developmental course sequence to quantify their claims. According to data collected by Bailey (2009), about 44% of students referred to developmental reading and 31% of students referred to developmental math complete their sequence. Completion statistics are still lower for students entering community college who must begin coursework three levels below college-level. These students may take up to three years to complete the developmental sequence. What is the reason students do not persist? What changes are needed to engage and empower developmental learners? How can community colleges better serve developmental learners? Developmental education is the cornerstone of the community college. In his speech at a conference on “Facing the Challenges and Challengers of Developmental Education,” Cohen (1982) states,

The community colleges built programs to attract people from every corner of the community. And the enrollments swelled. Now that everyone who can reasonably be enticed to come to the institution has enrolled, the next issue is going to be that we have to teach them. (p. 8)

Currently the unemployment rate in North Carolina is 10.5% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). For many years, citizens in foothills area of North Carolina found employment in textiles and furniture manufacturing. However, that is no longer the case. It is now not uncommon to find huge textile plants closed and boarded up. The furniture industry

has dwindled, and even fiber-optic manufacturers have undergone mass layoffs (Whoriskey, 2009). Job loss has forced many citizens to return to school to seek training in a new field. Others find it more economically feasible to attend a community college rather than a four-year institution. Thus, many North Carolina community colleges are experiencing record enrollment. As reported by Boykin (2010), the record enrollment coupled with budgetary reversions and decreased funding makes for especially challenging times for the institution of the community college, students, and faculty.

A big challenge facing most developmental education programming is sufficient staffing. Consistent programming is difficult to maintain given the fact that a majority of classes are taught by adjunct instructors. Would it not make sense to adequately staff this area with qualified, full-time personnel since this is the point of entry for many community college students? Administrators must examine the costs versus the benefits. Additional costs may be justified with program improvement, which ultimately will result in higher completion and retention rates. In addition to the benefits sustained by the institution, students would be spared significant financial and psychological costs as well.

Cohen (1982) advocates an integrated developmental education program involving the total faculty. He states,

Every program, every department should have a developmental education component within it. Developmental education should be built into the courses in all departments; either separate courses with the department, or, better, literacy in every course. (p. 11)

Many community college instructors find it difficult to teach students under-prepared in the areas of reading and writing. Instructors want to deliver specialized knowledge of their fields,

but they become frustrated when students cannot handle the course requirements. Cohen (1982) suggests that literacy be taught at all levels and that developmental educators become specialists who teach their colleagues. Isolation in a separate department prohibits this type of collegial knowledge exchange and promotes the idea that the developmental student is “broken” and must be sent to a separate department in order to be “fixed.” Hence, developmental education should be an integral part of every academic department in an effort to eliminate the stigma and promote literacy practices throughout the community college campus.

Bailey (2009) recommends abandoning the dichotomy between developmental and college-ready students by opening college-level courses to more students and incorporating academic support assistance into college-level courses. Bailey argues that students near the cutoff score on placement exams are somewhat mis-advised. Students who score a few points below the cutoff score are asked to spend time and money on services of dubious value, while those who score above it are assigned to college-level courses without special help, even though many of them have weak academic skills. College-level course options are limited to those who must enroll in developmental courses. This is quite discouraging to students and results in the low percentages of students actually completing developmental sequences, especially if the student has two years or more of developmental coursework before he/she ever reaches a college-level class.

## Developmental Education: What is working in Basic Writing

In addition to lessons learned from the past, the future of developmental education is also defined by years of scholarly research into best practices. Within this body of research is an emphasis on engaging and empowering the learner within the context of real world literacy and life experiences in order for sustainable learning to occur (Bernstein, 2007). Moreover, Boylan (2002) points out that the quality of classroom instruction is the single most important factor for developmental student success. The National Study of Developmental Education concluded that no program organizational model or developmental learning component impacts a student's success as much as does the quality of instruction (Boylan, Bonham, Claxton, & Bliss, 1992). Therefore, thoughtful consideration must be given to planning and delivering lessons in order to meet the learning outcomes, as well as to engaging and empowering students through real life experiences.

Freire (1970) coined the term "banking concept" of education. In this form of education, the learner passively listens while the teacher "deposits" knowledge or information. Freire did not advocate this type of education, but rather wrote of a participatory form of education as empowerment to the oppressed within society. Similar to Freire's philosophy, developmental education emphasizes an interactive approach through discussion and collaboration (Casazza, 1998). Such interactivity and discussion is a response to individual students' needs and serves to strengthen a community of diverse learners.

More specifically in the field of basic writing, practitioners and scholars alike have emphasized the strong interconnection of reading and writing (Baitinger, 2005; Henry, 2007), grammar instruction and error analysis within the context of the student's paper (Neuleib & Brosnahan, 2007; Shaughnessy, 1977), and implementation of activities that build

communities of learners within the classroom through collaborative writing (Elbow, 2007; Raymond, 2007). All of the above research-based instructional strategies for teaching basic writing require active participation from the student. Unwittingly the student becomes involved in evaluating and analyzing his /her thinking and learning processes (Remler, 2007).

Given the researched best practices, it is equally important to consider the affective domain of developmental education to achieve a holistic perspective. Many students lack self-confidence in their writing ability and fear humiliation and embarrassment. The learning environment must meet the physical as well as the psychological needs of the students. Before any researched writing strategy can be utilized, the classroom environment must be established and accepted as non-threatening and non-judgmental (Baitinger, 2005). Teacher and students must enter into a learning partnership based on mutual respect, relationship, and academic rigor.

#### Developmental Education: Implications of Technology

In addition to researched-based practices of teaching basic writing, there exists the complexity of integrating technology into the basic writing classroom. Trends have shifted to include computer labs or classrooms to assist in communication, problem solving, and skill development (Pavia, 2007). Boylan (2002) cautions that technology should not be integrated into the developmental classroom unless it makes a meaningful contribution to student learning. Likewise, Pavia (2007) urges developmental educators to consider student attitudes and access when implementing technology into a basic writing class. Given the diversity of a developmental classroom, educators must not operate under the false assumption that all students have ready access to and are competent in computer fundamentals.



Studies have concluded that technology is best and most commonly used as supplementary assistance to instruction so that it does not minimize the importance of the instructional role of the faculty. In her basic writing classes, Pavia (2007) assigns a technology narrative. This assignment serves as a diagnostic assessment of student writing as well as an assessment of student technology abilities. Unlike Stan and Collins (1998), who advocate hypermedia authorship, Pavia does not implement any more technology than word processing, even though she recognizes that students of the current generation possess the ability to interpret images and sounds. Her rationale is based on an issue of the added complexity images and sounds bring to the basic writing process.

#### Technology: The Feminine Response

With the primary focus of this study on women developmental ENG 090 students and the 21<sup>st</sup> century technology of digital storytelling, it is essential to discuss women's reactions to computer hardware. Studies show that females tend to perceive the computer increasingly as a tool, whereas males tend to see the computer as a machine that needs to be taken apart to find out how it works (Nelson, Wiese and Cooper in Grundy, 1996). Sherry Turkle (1986) eloquently states,

We know that pencils, oil paints and brushes are 'just tools.' And yet, we appreciate that the artist's encounter with his or her tools is close and relational. It may shut people out, temporarily, but the work itself can bring one closer to oneself, and ultimately to others. In the right settings, people develop relationships with computers that feel artistic and personal. And yet, for most people, and certainly for women I studied, this was rare. When they began to approach the computer in their own style,

they got their wrists slapped, and were told that they were not doing things ‘right’. (p. 59)

Moreover, Turkle debunks the idea of “computerphobia” among women. Her ethnographic and clinical studies conclude that women are computer reticent and shy away from computers for fear of becoming deeply involved with an object. Women value relationship with people and the idea of placing an object above people is not appealing. In addition to being computer reticent, her in-depth interviews uncovered women’s fear of risk-taking. One participant stated, “I am still afraid of screwing things up” (p. 48). Risk-taking is a learning strategy in which failure must not be taken personally. Women are not open to jumping in without first trying to understand. This is unlike their male counterparts. Gender differences in learning preferences and styles such as those outlined above are documented in research (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1982) and serve as guides for implementing technology in a way that is more inclusive of women.

#### Developmental Education: A Future Prediction

The current economic climate in the nation, and particularly in North Carolina, has given rise to record enrollments at the community college yet decreased funding at all levels (Boykin, 2010). However, despite limited resources and funding, community colleges and educators around the nation continue to remain hopeful and optimistic. This optimism is evident each day as administrators, policy makers, researchers, and educators continue to assess and evaluate the developmental program. They remain fervent in their commitment to reach and teach all. This commitment is evidenced through implementing comprehensive initiatives statewide to improve and explore new approaches to developmental education (Bailey, 2009). One new approach is the idea of contextualizing developmental education as a way to

engage and empower students by allowing them to explore areas of interest, while simultaneously involving them in skill development. In spite of the challenges facing community colleges, many are forging ahead to discover new approaches to teaching and learning. For example, the implementation of digital storytelling is a new innovative approach to teaching. Digital storytelling contextualizes the student's life experiences with basic literacy skills and current technologies. Every student has a story. What better way to make learning meaningful than by sharing a life story?

I do not contest the importance of longitudinal datasets and detailed analyses of student achievement (e.g., GPA of developmental students, retention rates, completion rates, etc.). Research in developmental education indicates a growing commitment to continual evaluation, albeit limited primarily to quantitative analysis. In a world in which numbers represent truth and administrators espouse data-driven decision making, it seems these datasets will continue to be essential in documenting program validity and ensuring future growth and stability. However, I would argue that measurement and evaluation of programming by simply using numbers paints a very dull, lackluster picture of developmental education. If, on the other hand, the affective domain of developmental education could be quantified, how the painting would gradually come to life with vibrant colors! If developmental educators are charged with meeting the needs of the whole student, should researchers, administrators, and policymakers not assess the whole program instead of only those aspects that can be easily quantified? As many more students enter through our open door, developmental education will no longer remain in the shadows of academia. As we enter the beginning of the second decade of the new century, the dismal economy and unprecedented job loss in our nation and state will perhaps be a catalyst of change for higher

education. Historically, Americans have faced turbulent times and our nation has responded to the needs of its people. I remain optimistic that our nation's response to these turbulent times will be to strengthen developmental programs so that everyone entering through the open door of community college will be engaged in lifelong learning and empowered to become an agent of change in their own lives, and those of their families and communities.

### Problem Statement

According to the National Association of Developmental Educators (2011), “developmental education programs and services commonly address academic preparedness, diagnostic assessment and placement, development of general and discipline-specific learning strategies, and affective barriers to learning.” The various programs established to assist developmental learners is undergirded by the developmental education philosophy that primarily focuses on the “intellectual, social, and emotional growth and development of all learners” (Casazza, 1999, p. 5). Developmental educators view the learner holistically, with the overall development of the learner as a process rather than a product achieved by higher test scores gained by ‘drill and kill’ practice of basic skills (Casazza, 1999). Given the goals of achieving affective growth and learning as a process, how does digital storytelling used as a pedagogical tool assist developmental learners in this quest? In light of the recent research on women's learning styles, how do female developmental students respond to digital storytelling within a developmental education class? My goal is to contribute to the research pertaining to developmental education and women as learners as well as merge the two with the 21<sup>st</sup> century technology of digital storytelling to validate current research literature and lead to new discoveries for educators and administrators alike.

## Research Questions

When students enter the classroom, they bring with them their stories of experience and lessons learned. This history is scaffolding that supports new knowledge and allows it to be assimilated for new meaning. As someone who values relationship, language, experience, and understanding, the methodology of narrative inquiry will guide me in understanding women developmental education students' experiences and perceptions of digital storytelling at a community college. The following research questions will provide the focus of my inquiry:

1. How do women use digital storytelling technology to create meaning?
2. How do women respond to digital storytelling technology, and what do their experiences reveal about women and learning?
3. How do developmental education research-based best practices intersect with digital storytelling?

## Methodology

Because the sharing of experience and story is such an integral part of this study, I conducted a thematic narrative analysis. As the researcher, I spent sixteen weeks in a developmental English classroom (ENG 090) observing student behavior. The class met Monday through Friday for fifty minutes each day for sixteen weeks. I attended each one of these class meetings, interacted with the students, and conducted three focus group interviews with four women students. Throughout this study, I gathered valuable field notes and collected additional data from student reflective journals, researcher subjective memos and journal, a summative survey with a reflective essay, narrative scripts, and digital stories.

I conducted three, one-hour focus group interviews in a reserved location other than the classroom. One interview occurred at the initial stages of the digital storytelling experience. I scheduled the other interview sessions at the midpoint and again at the end of the digital storytelling experience. Each interview was purposely scheduled at particular stages of development to yield a more complete understanding of the digital storytelling experience of these four women.

### Significance of Issue

Given the aforementioned definitions of developmental education and practices, all learning activities should focus on the learner and target both the affective and cognitive domains. In terms of placement assessments for new students, it seems to be one-sided. The majority of US colleges and universities use cognitive assessments to assess academic preparedness and suggest placement (Saxon, Levine-Brown, & Boylan, 2008). Furthermore, many developmental education programs throughout the country subscribe to meaningless practice activities that do little to address the affective domain of education (Cazzaza, 1999). In contrast to the sole emphasis on the cognitive domain, the implementation of digital storytelling encourages developmental students to share their stories and create a sense of community in the classroom that, ideally, will extend itself to a larger context within the institution. Further research into digital storytelling as a pedagogical tool could result in other identified best practices for developmental educators that address the affective area of education. Additionally, the particular focus on women could further validate recent studies and serve to maximize the learning experiences of female developmental students. In general, the focus of my qualitative study will delve into the area of affective education in regards to

women developmental education students all of which tend to be overlooked within the realm of higher education.

### Definition of Terms

Developmental Education- Developmental education is a field of practice and research within higher education with a theoretical foundation in developmental psychology and learning theory. It promotes the cognitive and affective growth of all postsecondary learners, at all levels of the learning continuum. Developmental education is sensitive and responsive to individual differences and special needs among learners. Developmental education programs and services commonly address academic preparedness, diagnostic assessment and placement, development of general and discipline-specific learning strategies, and affective barriers to learning. Developmental education includes, but is not limited to:

- all forms of learning assistance, such as tutoring, mentoring, and supplemental instruction
- personal, academic, and career counseling
- academic advisement
- coursework (NADE, 2011)

Digital Story- a digital story is a 3-5 minute movie that combines a narrated piece of personal writing, chosen photographic and other still images, and selected or performed music to build a story (Gregory & Steelman, 2008).

Developmental Learners- Students, who are determined through a battery of academic assessments, not to be academically prepared to enter college level courses with English, Reading and/or Math prerequisites.

Non-Traditional Student- A student over the age of twenty-four (24) often coupled with one or more non-traditional variables such as background (race and gender), residence (on or off campus), level of employment (full or part time), and enrollment into a non-degree career program (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

### Organization of the Chapters

Chapter One has introduced the broad topic of developmental education beginning with my personal experience, leading into a brief history on developmental education, and concluding with a discussion of present day challenges that face developmental educators. In addition to these topics, the first chapter has also outlined best practices in developmental classrooms with a focus on basic writing, the implementation of technology in developmental classrooms, and women's responses to technology. With the introduction of the aforementioned topics, the stage is set for the subsequent chapters. The first chapter has concluded with a discussion on the predicted future of developmental education and has introduced the reader to the research problem and questions.

Chapter Two consists of a literature review that specifically addresses digital storytelling. Moreover, woven into the literature review is my story of connection to digital storytelling.

Chapter Three addresses the methods that I used to gather data and complete this study. Also, this chapter includes a brief biography of each participant and introduces the institution in which this study took place.

Chapter Four consists of the findings produced by the collected data. More details are provided about each woman's educational history. Following each educational history of each woman, I present the process of developing their own digital story.



Chapter Five synthesizes and analyzes the study findings with the literature from previous chapters. Additionally, it addresses gaps found in the literature, includes limitations of the study, and provides insight into areas of further research.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In chapter two, I recount my first encounter with digital storytelling weaving the personal experience in with a professional review of the literature. Additionally, I explore classical research on the learning theories of Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner, gradually moving from the classical theorists to the contemporary research literature on digital storytelling.

### Introduction: My Connection to Digital Storytelling

Plutarch states, “The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled” (Goodreads, 2011). Digital Storytelling is my fire. It is rather strange that I cannot remember the day or even the year that my interest in digital storytelling was sparked. However, I still, can to this day, recall the sights and sounds that were contained in the first digital story I ever watched. My ears still hear the crickets in the background and my mind recalls vivid pictures of rural Catawba County, North Carolina as a gentle, soothing voice narrates personal experiences and life lessons learned being a child of a fisherman. The story was entitled “A Fisherman’s Child” and it was written and co-produced by two English instructors at Catawba Valley Community College (CVCC). Little did I know, this brief three and one half minute video production involving images, sound, and narrative would be the spark that would ignite a passion that would become the focus of my doctoral dissertation.

The viewing itself was an emotional experience that required deep introspective and reflective practices. However, at the time, I must admit I did not see the profound implication it had for adult learners. Like most of my colleagues, I saw this as a passing technology fad

and simply thought that lack of funds to purchase necessary software and computers would extinguish any hopes of implementing digital storytelling at CVCC.

However, the flames began to spread as digital storytelling was accepted as part of CVCC's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). The three QEP interventions chosen at CVCC were Digital Storytelling, Team Teaching and the development of a Writing Center. Each intervention was implemented in a staggered pattern from 2005-2006 and was continued in successive semesters. Over that course of time, the administration was formally introduced to digital storytelling and the word started to spread across the campus.

However, by involving digital storytelling as a QEP focus, the flames were not fanned; rather, it seemed that digital storytelling was put in an airtight container. As education has moved towards data driven decision-making, educational practices that typically do not fit in the arena of empirical measurement are thought of as having limited educational value. It is true that my institution gathered valuable comparative data on student success rates of English students involved in digital storytelling, in contrast to those students who were not exposed to the technology. This satisfied the accreditation requirement for measurable outcomes, but ignored student growth in the affective domain. Parker Palmer (1998), in his book *The Courage to Teach*, writes, "The intuitive is derided as irrational, true feeling is dismissed as sentimental, the imagination is seen as chaotic and unruly, and storytelling is labeled as personal and pointless" (p. 52). To limit the measurement of academic growth to a set of numbers detracts from the power of using digital storytelling to construct meaning by individuals and groups.

## Classic Literature

Even though the digital component of the storytelling may be a recent development, the study of language and learning within a cultural, social, or experiential context is not a new area of research. For decades learning theorists and psychologists have been writing about the importance of experience and the social setting in the learning process. Some of the earliest studies on this topic were those done by Lev Vygotsky a Russian psychologist. He published his first work (*The Psychology of Art*) in 1925 and coined the term “zone of proximal development,” which is the range of potential each individual has for learning as it is shaped by the social environment in which it takes place. Central to Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory is the importance of context in relation to learning. Context provides the medium in which students discover meaning through social encounters. Alterio and McDrury (2002) write, “ He (Vygotsky) reminds us how easily human capabilities can be underestimated when analyzed in isolation and points out the social and cultural resources we carry as human beings are potential learning tools” (p. 28).

Vygotsky determined that higher thinking is evidenced by internalization of symbolic tools, with language being the most important of these tools (Davis, 2004). Throughout the development of a digital story students embody all of the key components of Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory. Students interact with one another, compose narratives, and identify images. Language and visuals become symbolic tools used to understand a lived experience. Human beings learn from experience. These lived experiences are recalled using internalized symbolic representations (i.e. language, images, stories) that were drawn from the experience and allows for the possibility of “qualitative transformations of one form of behavior or another” (Vygotsky in Davis, 2004, p. 1). Storytelling in a digital format allows for multiple

uses of the symbolic tools that Vygotsky named and provides a performance space in which life transformations may occur.

In addition to the socio-cultural theory of Vygotsky, Jerome S. Bruner, experimental psychologist and cognitive theorist, noted the power of language. In the 1960s, he developed a theory of cognitive growth. His approach looked into environmental and experiential factors. According to Bruner (1990), knowledge may be expressed in three ways: actions, images, and symbols. Bruner stressed the importance of stories in understanding self and bringing cognition, emotion, and action together to make meaning out of experience. He emphasized that narrative does not preserve experiences in an objective manner; rather, narrative allows experiences to be approached subjectively.

Narrative is an essential component of digital storytelling; it invites the past to interact with the present and helps us construct meaning and make sense of experience. In composing the narrative script for a digital story, the past is reinterpreted from the present (Paull, 2002). The composition of a narrative requires introspection and reflection that can ultimately serve to shape our understanding of both who we are and who we want to become. Within the digital format of storytelling, the meaning communicated through the narrative is enhanced with images and music and the combination certainly serves to further validate Bruner's theory of cognitive growth.

#### Research Literature

In addition to contributions by these theorists, there exists a plethora of literature available on the use of narrative and storytelling in educational settings. However, research in digital storytelling is limited due in part to its recent development and the slow pace at which it has entered the educational setting. Most studies are qualitative and the

methodologies include ethnographies, case studies, and comparative analyses. Within the contemporary literature, themes of identity formation, multiple literacies, and empowerment through emancipation keep reappearing, and ultimately these themes can be connected to the classical literature of Vygotsky and Bruner.

### *Identity Formation*

Researchers agree that the use of digital storytelling within a classroom setting assists the students in defining themselves (Hull & Katz, 2006; Merritt, 2006; Tendero, 2006). Hull and Katz (2006) hypothesized that individuals and groups can learn to fashion identities, which ultimately influence the course of their lives as a result of participating in “textual performances” such as digital storytelling. Their research took place at a community technology center in a suburban, culturally diverse area and spanned a three and a half year period. During this time, data were collected on a young adult and an adolescent. Field notes based on conversations and interactions, student writings and story scripts, and interviews with both teachers and students were coded and analyzed. This comparative case study concluded by finding that through the creating of digital stories, learning experiences and outcomes were almost identical regardless of age. The learning and development experienced through digital storytelling cannot be pigeonholed. Both participants in this study came to see themselves as learners and doers. Via digital storytelling and the social opportunities offered at the community technology center, both participants were able to define themselves at that moment in time, as well as see who they wanted to become. They were therefore able to define a life trajectory (Hull & Katz, 2006). The new technology proved to be a useful tool.

Educators need to consider that constructing a story often causes students to recall negative experiences involving writing and speaking. Paull (2002) suggests that educators

should not abandon written and spoken story, but should broadly consider students' other potential resources (i.e., multimedia) for representing self and experience. If implemented these resources could reduce the stress and fears prompted by previous negative and/or traditional writing and speaking tasks involving narrative development and storytelling.

Tendero's case study (2006) examined the use of digital storytelling and its effects on pre-service English teachers. Teachers attending a teaching assistant seminar developed a one hour digital story using video clips that were recordings from the teaching experience. Data were collected from Blackboard class discussions, the teacher journal, students' digital stories, and student interviews. Tendero's analysis of the data presented two emerging themes of consciousness and dialogic practice between the students. The reflective process involved (i.e., discussions, journaling, editing of video) gave the prospective teacher the opportunity to critically examine his/her dialogue with students.

Witherell and Noddings (1991) wrote that caring relationships are established through dialogue; and such dialogue does not exclude touch, smiles, affectionate sounds, and silences. The digital storytelling process provided an opportunity for pre-service teachers to form a visual response to their actions with and responses to children in their classroom and served also to inform professional practice. As the teachers analyzed and edited the video footage of their teaching experiences, they were able to recognize a "teaching consciousness" and envision the type of teacher they wanted to become (Tendero, 2006).

Digital storytelling also creates a space for multiple identities that may be contradictory. Ultimately, the revision necessary in the writing and editing processes help to negotiate a sense of self (Hull & Katz, 2006; Merritt, 2006; Tendero, 2006). Merritt (2006) analyzed a collection of digital stories from a freshman college writing class and concluded

that, “Students who are invited to tell digital stories are being presented with a rich means of making meaning, and mediating different, even conflictive identities” (p. 35). Researchers agree that the process of revision and editing- both in the written format as well as digital- provides a new dimension for shaping consciousness and self-awareness. It is within this negotiation that one envisions himself/herself as a learner and a doer, both of which can influence present circumstances and future possibilities (Hull & Katz, 2006; Merritt, 2006; Tendero, 2006).

### *Multiple Literacies*

Literacy in the 21st century has expanded beyond print-based texts and now encompasses multiple literacies. New digital tools make possible new ways of constructing and communicating meaning. According to Kajder (2007), these digital tools no longer confine the definition of literacy to the realm of print, but open definition to include online technologies, communication technologies (e.g., email, instant messaging) and software tools that allow for visualizing thinking and representations of it in multiple ways.

Maier and Fisher (2007) studied the implications of digital storytelling in a middle school health education class within a marginalized community. This approach to teaching healthy decision-making skills was a creative response to learning and thinking that allowed students to move away from rote memorization. Ultimately, in the areas of reading and writing, these under-performers (who typically found themselves lost within written texts and writing prompts) found “...their voice, creativity, and productivity and, in addition, they were able to visually summarize their experiences and resolution” (Maier & Fisher, 2007, p. 176).



Kadger (2004) implemented digital storytelling in her English 11 class with the academic goal of extending literacy skills by allowing students to become not merely readers and writers, but also directors, artists, programmers, screenwriters, and designers. The two-week project resulted in below level reading students becoming more engaged, motivated, and eager to share in a “collaborative interpretive community” (Kadger, p. 67).

Merritt (2006) concluded that digital storytelling is a means of understanding multiple literacies. As she analyzed digital stories of college freshmen, she noted that the “...written scripts of stories, digitized images, music and video transitions and effects interact in ways that can be held up to the lens of narrative theory to gain greater understanding of the process of meaning-making the storyteller engages in” (p. 22). In many instances, images took precedence over text and became the voices in the written text. Hull and Katz (2006) concluded,

... we must find ways to make possible personally and socially meaningful uses of literacy, even and especially in the current climate, uses that allow young and older authors alike to engage in agentive literate practices such as the recontextualization of symbolic resources. (p. 72)

Literacy should be relevant, filled with inquiry, and utilize the most powerful cultural tools available for communicating. However, in today’s educational climate where testing, accountability, and rote memorization are highly valued, it is very common to see literacy experiences reduced to “drill and kill” programs, especially in low-performing schools and classrooms (Kadger, 2007). Hull and Katz (2006) caution that the exclusion of multimodal practices, such as digital storytelling, “will only widen the literacy and achievement divide” (p. 72).

## *Empowerment*

Researchers agree using digital storytelling is a powerful tool that creates meaning by transcending cultures and empowering students to see their life and the world differently (Hull & Katz, 2006; Maier & Fisher, 2007; Merritt, 2006; Tendero 2006). Empowerment occurs by enhancing individual's "ownership and control" over his/her life (Burk, 1997). Additionally, student empowerment is characterized by respecting others valuable contributions and recognizing that each person has a unique voice that echoes personal experiences (Burk, 1997).

Hull and Katz (2006) discussed the sense of empowerment experienced by the adult and adolescent participant, in their comparative study. Both groups illustrated ownership and control over their own lives by repositioning themselves as "agents and authors" (Hull & Katz, 2006, p. 69). As participants authored each of their digital stories and incorporated words, images, music, and voice, they became capable of looking at their lives and relationships with a critical eye. Thus, the possibility for initiating change existed; participants were empowered to envision their future.

Tendero (2006) noted that through the use of digital storytelling, pre-service English teachers were able to critically examine their teaching methods and interactions with their students during the field experience. Students decided what video footage would be used in their digital stories and, hence, were empowered to "shape their narratives" about classrooms, themselves as teachers and, ultimately, shape the kind of teacher they wanted to become.

Robinson (1994) suggested that empowerment is marked by respect for each individual in the group based not on a position of authority or individual skill, but on

acknowledging that each person has a valuable contribution to make. Researchers agree that the social interaction involved in creating digital stories recognizes each author has a significant and valuable contribution to make through his/her story (Hull & Katz, 2006; Merritt, 2006; Tendero, 2006). The performance component in digital storytelling development is critical to empowering both author and audience. Listeners play a significant role in affirming the individual and his/her story as well as engaging in discourse that may expand the story. Again, respect is not demanded based on position, but is given as a humanizing factor in recognizing that each individual is important.

Empowerment is especially noted throughout the research on digital storytelling in marginalized, disenfranchised, and culturally diverse groups of students. The Hull and Katz (2006) study took place in a poverty-stricken community that had been designated a “federal empowerment zone” (p. 48). Maier and Fisher (2007) studied the building of decision-making skills in middle school students in marginalized communities. In their study, digital storytelling was done to address a literacy barrier.

Merritt (2006) analyzed several digital stories taken from an ethnically diverse, group of first-generation college students. Students incorporated a historical narrative based on their immigration experiences. A common thread running through the research articles reviewed is that developing digital stories was a powerful tool that liberated the students by allowing them to critically examine the past and present, and giving them a vision for the future.

### Conclusion

Researchers agree that digital storytelling is a meaningful learning experience because it assists the learner in defining a sense of self, provides opportunities to master multiple literacies, and serves to empower and liberate students (Hull & Katz, 2006; Maier &

Fisher, 2007; Merritt, 2006; Tendero, 2006). However, the existing literature lacks the empirical evidence that, to some, would strengthen and validate digital storytelling's value in educational settings and curricula. Hull and Katz (2006) wrote in closing,

Our hope is that educators, in schools as well as outside them, in these challenging times of standards-based constraints, scripted curricula, and a zeal to test, rank, and calibrate, can manage to hold onto the humane dimensions of teaching, to remember why most of us became teachers in the first place- because we believe in our students and their "possible lives." (p. 72)

Digital storytelling provides an opportunity in which content, student, and teacher can become connected in an energized learning experience. The teacher is now a facilitator and the student becomes an inquirer wanting to know more.

Digital storytelling provides countless opportunities for the student to interact with the content and teacher. Further research needs to be conducted into the discourse that occurs between the teacher and student during the development of digital stories. Tendero (2006) scheduled conference times with the pre-service teachers while they developed their digital stories and encouraged them to critically examine the teaching footage. At the same time he wrestled with the question of how to interject his more experienced view into their self-reflections. There must be a delicate balance if true student meaning is to be realized.

Mair and Fisher (2007) noted the amount of time involved in creating digital stories in an already "over-packed curriculum" (p. 176). In the current climate, where numerical measurement is pervasive, implementing digital storytelling within school curricula must be efficient and fluid. Research into the amount of time involved in the production process

could be a decisive factor for those educational systems wishing to invest in digital storytelling equipment and software.

By introducing digital storytelling into the classroom, teacher and student are able to connect with each other. We learn from each other through a collaborative learning experience, and even turn inward to learn from ourselves. We become partners in education. It is quite possible that we may impact a larger order as we share and interact with others. Margaret Wheatly (2002) writes, "...simple conversations that originate deep in our caring give birth to powerful actions that change lives and restore hope to the future" (p. 23). While it is true that digital stories are not technologically simple, they are, in essence, conversations. These conversations/stories have a lasting impact on students as they discover who they are and want to become. As they learn that academic achievement is not measured only through conventional practices, they become empowered to create change and freedom for themselves.

The research literature reviewed focused on digital storytelling and its applications within an educational setting. However, there exists a gap in the literature with the implementation of this technological application in the field of developmental education. Moreover, my study narrows the field of developmental education to exclusively focus on women and learning. In this study, I seek to address this gap by exploring digital storytelling and the female digital storyteller within the context of a developmental English classroom at a community college.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I provide an in-depth look into qualitative study with a particular emphasis on narrative inquiry and thematic analysis. I include a detailed description of how I conducted my research and illustrate the ways in which data was gathered and analyzed. In addition, I discuss the issues of ethics and trustworthiness as related to this study.

### Qualitative Inquiry

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry is to describe, analyze, and interpret the perspectives and experiences of women enrolled in a community college, developmental English (ENG 090) class that utilizes digital storytelling as a pedagogical tool. As an inquiry into social phenomena, interactions, and discourses, qualitative research is about people, with the central goal of understanding their perspectives and contextualizing issues in a particular socio-cultural-political setting (Glesne, 2006). Given my purpose and social constructivist epistemological stance, qualitative design is most useful given my study's research problem and purpose.

A qualitative approach to research assumes that reality is socially constructed and is situated within an authentic context (Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 1998). It is within this authentic context that the researcher finds himself/herself seeking to explore a phenomenon in an effort to understand how those involved ascribe meaning to that which is being explored. I, as the researcher, situated myself within the context of a developmental English class that utilized digital storytelling software as a learning tool. As the researcher, I came to associate myself with the field of developmental

education as well as became an integrated part of the class. Throughout the semester, I not only observed the class, but also I closely explored the development of digital stories as composed by three women enrolled. Qualitative researchers, with years of experience, caution novice researchers not to let the research problem determine the methodology whether quantitative or qualitative, but recommend shaping the research questions to reflect the researcher's preference of viewing and understanding the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 1998). Therefore, I carefully crafted research questions which addressed the research problem, but simultaneously allowed me to conduct my study using a methodology which was compatible to my personal commitment to designing an interactive research process, to understanding a phenomenon rather than predicting it, to telling a story rich in details, to cultivating relationships, and to exploring interconnectivity. Because of my personal values, I was naturally drawn to qualitative study.

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) characterize qualitative research as an interactive process. The research project is shaped by the researcher's personal history and background as well as by the people in the study setting. Qualitative researchers enter the natural field in an effort to become familiar with a particular phenomenon or behavior (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 1998). By becoming an engaged member within an authentic context, the researcher is able to collect data through multiple methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Creswell, 2009). For example, I immersed myself within a classroom with developmental English students. I attended class just like they did. The class was scheduled to meet Monday through Friday for 50 minutes each day for a total of 16 weeks. My data collection was multi-faceted with a signification portion collected through observation and focus group interviews. These focus group interview sessions were highly interactive.

Another characteristic of qualitative research is the desire to understand phenomena rather than predict them. The basis of my research was to understand the development of a digital story from the perspective of three women enrolled in a developmental English class at a community college. I had no intention of predicting the outcome or the process of their experience; rather, I desired to explore the developmental stages and meaning-making processes from their perspectives. Rather than test proposed theories, I wanted to generate my own theories based on my field notes, small focus group interviews, student journals, the researcher's reflexive journal, summative surveys, and, ultimately, each woman's digital story (Bryman, 2004). According to Bryman (2004), many qualitative researchers express a commitment to viewing a phenomenon or event through the eyes of the people in which they are studying. In my case, this statement could not be truer. I wanted to engage in face-to-face interaction with the women I studied and see into their world as they navigated the role of being a woman in a developmental English class that utilized digital storytelling software. I was curious how the women would use the technology to create meaning while simultaneously improving their writing skills.

Equally important to the characteristics of qualitative research is rich detailed description. Geertz (1973) was the first to apply and define this concept of thick description. Since this date, qualitative study experts have continued to define this particular concept as a constant when writing about the characteristics of qualitative investigations (Bryman, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 2009). The researcher's task is to provide a detailed description of the context in which the study takes place so that the reader is provided enough details to determine if the study results may be transferrable. In addition to detailed and descriptive accounts, qualitative researchers may also include artifacts such as



direct quotations from documents or interviews, excerpts of videotape or, in my particular study, authentic digital stories created by participants, and so on (Merriam, 2009).

Throughout my study, there is storied, rich description to establish the context in which this study took place as well as a context for the women's behavior in response to past educational experiences. Words, quotes, and stories (both oral and digital) are abundant in the research, and each plays a significant role in establishing the social world and exploring the perspectives of digital storytelling development of three women developmental English students.

Qualitative research encourages and demands close contact with the study participants (Bryman, 2004). Additionally, characteristic of qualitative research is the use of interviews to collect detailed data with the objective of understanding participant behavior in a particular context (Seidman, 1998). In the present study, these detailed data were provided in terms of stories as each woman reconstructed her educational past as well as reflected upon the experience of developing her own media driven narrative. By asking open-ended questions, which began to navigate the research landscape, the women and I were drawn into relationship with one another. Throughout the sixteen-week semester, the relationship I cultivated with the women was nurtured and carefully monitored.

Most importantly, qualitative inquiry seeks to explore a phenomenon in depth while simultaneously making connections and noting tensions. According to Seidman (1998), there are two types of connections that develop as a result of in depth interviewing of participants. The researcher may discover connections among the experiences of each participant. Furthermore, through the method of detailed accounting of participant's stories, the audience may make their own personal connections. Thus, the researcher, the participants, and

audience share interconnected experiences. As described by Seidman (1998), this interconnectivity promotes a degree of “understanding and humility” (p. 45).

### Research Questions

The following research questions provided the focus of my inquiry:

1. How do women use digital storytelling technology to create meaning?
2. How do the women respond to digital storytelling technology, and what do their experiences reveal about women and learning?
3. How do developmental education research-based best practices intersect with digital storytelling?

### Research Design

Crotty (1998) challenges researchers to answer two questions when designing a study: “What methodologies and method will they employ, and how will they justify these choices?” (p. 2) According to Glesne (2006), many modes of qualitative research exist (e.g., ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, symbolic interactionism), and I chose to construct a narrative inquiry/analysis. Narratives have become a popular source of data in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). My purpose was to understand, analyze, and interpret the developmental education women’s perspectives and experiences of digital storytelling in one educational setting (an ENG 090 classroom) at a community college. Moreover, my additional objective was to explore the interconnectivity and draw my reading audience to an understanding in an effort to mobilize educators, administrators, technology specialists into action, thus moving developmental education forward by adding yet another best research-based practice to the field. Students composed and developed their own written narrative and assembled it within a digital storytelling format by adding images, voice recording, and

music. It seemed natural to have the classroom experiences of the women involved in the study to continue in a story format.

How does one define the research methodology of narrative inquiry? Although many narrative researchers may define the methodology using different terminology, the large majority embrace the assumption that *the story* is one, if not the fundamental, component that accounts for human experience (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Throughout history, human beings have told stories to understand and make sense of an event, encounter, or exchange. Furthermore, the telling of stories adds perspective and connects life experiences. Narration of past experiences is a dynamic process because the past interacts with the present. As a memory is narrated, within a particular point in time and context, the narrator is engaged in restorying. The process of restorying is the reconciliation of the narrator's past with his/her identity of self in the present. As duly recorded throughout my research, as well as in the women's digital stories (Appendix F), their past experiences shaped their present day perception of themselves and helped them visualize their future more clearly. The intentional storying and restorying of one's life are essential for personal and social growth, as well as a salient feature of education (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989; Reisman, 2008).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) acknowledge that to define narrative inquiry is limiting; therefore, they prefer to question: "What do narrative inquirers do?" (p. 49). Narrative inquirers wish to understand a phenomenon that is contextualized in time and place rather than formulate a logical, scientific explanation. As the narrative inquirer, I extended an invitation to the women to "tell me about..." (Kamp, 2004, p. 105). In narrative inquiry the story that is produced is the basic unit of analysis. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kamp, 2004; Reisman, 1993, 2008). I analyzed and interpreted the women's narratives for their

meanings in an effort to understand past educational histories and the process of digital storytelling development for each woman.

Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) coin the term “turns” to indicate movement from one way of thinking to another. As the researcher “turns” his/her thinking to narrative inquiry, s/he must consider what Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) have outlined as pivotal turning points in thinking; their four turning points that move the researcher towards a narrative inquiry mindset are characterized by the following:

- A recognition that the researcher and the researched in a particular study are in relationship with each other. Through collaborative work indicative of narrative inquiry both parties will learn and change in the encounter;
- An embrace of literary conventions such as metaphor, image, and character to address the human experience and express emotion, feelings, and reactions often lost in translation;
- A move from generalizability to valuing a particular experience, in a particular setting, involving particular people; and
- A desire to understand rather than control and predict the human world (p. 29).

As I continue my educational journey, I am gradually “turning” in the direction of narrative inquiry. Although the four “turning” points outlined above may be indicative of qualitative research in general, narrative inquiry reporting is writing organized within a story format which describes a sequence of events usually with a beginning, middle, and end. Unique to narrative inquiry is the narrative data that is collected. Open-ended interview questions allowed the women in my study to share their stories of past educational and life experiences as well as share about their present and future. As an educator, a student’s story

has always been important to me. When students enter the classroom, they bring with them their stories of experience and lessons learned. This is scaffolding that supports new knowledge and allows it to be assimilated for new meaning. I value relationship, language, experience, and understanding; thus, the methodology of narrative inquiry aligned with those personal and professional values. Most importantly, narrative inquiry gave me, the opportunity to give a voice to the women's stories. These particular voices are voices that have been unheard in educational research.

Narrative inquiry is not a methodology without limitations or criticisms. As an approach to qualitative research, narrative inquiry has been criticized for not fitting into a fixed criterion for assessing reliability, validity, and ethics. Ironically, it is what makes narrative inquiry unique that also makes it vulnerable to criticism. It is the concept of coauthoring story that narrative inquiry attracts criticism of seasoned social researchers. According to Bryman (2004), there exists a tendency for narrative inquirers to treat stories uncritically. In this study with narrative research, it has been a continuous effort to monitor myself making sure I represent the women's narratives accurately while carefully analyzing all the data collected and exploring interconnectivity of their narrative with my own. It was a tenuous process of placing the women's narrative within a larger narrative; however, the women's digital stories, individually produced, serve to further validate the larger story told.

#### Design Rationale

In reference to the four turning points outlined by Pinnegar and Daynes (2007), a narrative analysis aligns itself with the research topic and the research questions. As the researcher, I became a participant observer in the particular context of a developmental English (ENG 090) classroom. The ultimate goal of narrative inquiry/analysis is to actively

seek out the voice of the participant focusing on a particular experience within a particular context. Narrative inquiry does not seek to generalize knowledge, but rather seeks to understand and explore the particular. The particulars of this study were the women and their experiences with digital storytelling within the context of a community college developmental English classroom. Furthermore, focus group interviews with open-ended questions created a point of entry into their educational and personal experiences in the present, past, and future. Throughout the research process, I established a close bond with the women. Narrative inquiry is the vehicle that transported me as the researcher into the world of the women.

#### Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I assumed the role of observer as participant. I participated with the students within a structured classroom and observed the process of their digital story development. Additionally, I conducted three small focus group interviews with selected students. The observer as participant researcher role allowed me to establish a relationship with students as I interacted with them on a daily basis. Moreover, this interaction identified me as an insider, but I did not participate in daily activities that constituted class activities (Merriam, 1998). That is, I observed the class each day, but I did not complete homework, participate in class discussions, or peer revisions of scripts. My objective was to be an insider into daily activities so that I could richly describe the developmental English classroom that utilized digital storytelling as a pedagogical tool to an outsider. Glesne (2006) advocates maintaining a level of self-consciousness in order to get in the habit of constantly monitoring researcher behavior and its consequences. Daily contact with the students prompted me to constantly maintain a level of self-consciousness of my behavior. Because my research took

place at my home institution where I am employed as a faculty member in a different department, I constantly had to monitor my behavior as a classroom insider as well as maintain a faculty identity.

### Ethical Issues

There are many ethical concerns to be addressed in narrative inquiry, especially considering the dual role of the researcher. The researcher is involved in two relationships at the same time and both have distinct responsibilities. There is the responsibility to the participants as well as to the scholarly community (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007). Josselson (2007) advocates maintaining an “ethical attitude” (p. 538). This ethical attitude is not a list of guidelines for the researcher to follow, but instead must be internally navigated with two main purposes in mind: to honor and protect the participant(s) and maintain standards for responsible scholarship. For instance, in reporting my research findings, I had to internally navigate my responsibility to the women involved in the study as well as remain accountable to my audience. I struggled with the decision of whether or not to correct the women’s grammatical errors found within interview responses. As the researcher, I agree with Siedman’s (1998) recommendation to “reduce the threat of exploiting participants” (p. 53). Therefore, I made the decision to correct glaring grammatical errors made in an oral response to interview questions. Given that the women were enrolled in a developmental English class, I did not desire to bring more injury to an already fragile level of self-confidence. Moreover, my research project was not dependent on a linguistic analysis of the women’s narrative. My decision was based on protecting the women but did not jeopardize the integrity of my study nor did it interfere with addressing my established research questions.

Glesne (2006) emphasizes the importance of a lay summary before data collection occurs. As the researcher, my lay summary informed participants about my study and prepared them to take part in the data collection (Appendix A). Participants were assured that if they wished to withdraw their participation at any time there would be no penalty for doing so. Also, participants were made aware that right or wrong answers to research did not exist. Research transparency was an initial step to establishing rapport with the participants as well as critical in addressing equality (Seidman, 1998).

In addition to the lay summary, all students in the ENG 090 classroom were presented with an informed consent form. The informed consent revealed the purpose as well as outlined the research process and protocols. Again, students were made aware that participation in the study was completely voluntary and that a decision not to participate would not affect their progress or grade in the class. Even though some researchers may argue that research transparency may skew results, Seidman (1998) recommends providing as much information as possible about each aspect of the proposed study. An informed consent guards against misunderstandings and is “ethically and methodologically” necessary (Seidman, 1998, p. 51).

In addition to the lay summary, I completed the Institutional Review Board instructional modules in January 2010. Moreover, the required forms to begin data collection were approved by the Appalachian State University Institutional Review Board on February 15, 2010. The approval to collect data expired on February 15, 2011.

Digital storytelling belongs to a new realm of visual narrative. Not only am I telling the stories of experience and perceptions of the women developmental learners involved in the ENG 090 class, but also each woman tells her own story through using the 21st century



technology of digital storytelling—which juxtaposes images, voice recordings of narratives, and music. Josselson (2007) states, “The principle of assurance of confidentiality and privacy to participants is central to the very possibility of doing narrative research” (p.541). I was not able to promise anonymity to my participant’s because the visual element of my study could identify them. Bach (2007) faced this issue in her visual narratives. She cautions visual narrative inquirers to employ “sensitivity” (p. 296) and constantly question the intentions of the visuals in relation to the study. From the beginning, I was aware that I may have to abandon a participant’s digital story if I felt in any way that by making her story public it would be harmful or bring injury to her dignity. In addition to monitoring my goals and intentions, I sought formal permission to use the women’s digital stories through the signing of a release form (Appendix B). I realized that composing a narrative of any medium could involve a high level of self-disclosure. For the three women who participated in my study, two of the three stories involved a moderate to high level of self-disclosure, but all three women felt strongly about sharing their story in an effort to reach others in similar life situations. Additionally, all three, even though they were given the opportunity to request a pseudonym in the informed consent, declined and requested that I reveal their identity. Their individual digital stories gave them a voice to speak to a larger audience. Again, I, as the researcher, remained mindful of the intent of my study and maintained respect for the participant(s) by honoring their requests. These were fundamental priorities of my study of which I did not compromise.

## Data Collection

### *Interviews/Focus Groups*

Data were drawn from the following sources: all students enrolled in a particular ENG 090 class, a small in-focus group of four women students representing the diverse

student population typically found in a developmental education classroom, bi-monthly student journal entries, my subjectivity memos, the women's digital stories, and my field notes. Only three women were featured in the research findings because one woman did not submit a journal to me. I desired to provide a rich, detailed description of each woman's educational past as well as describe the process of producing their media driven narrative; therefore, the lack of data created a gap. I could not fully address my purpose given the lack of data on this woman. Hence, I decided to move forward with the narratives of the remaining three women; however, some of the data that were gathered from this woman was too valuable to discount. The data that I was able to retrieve is used throughout the study findings and representation.

### *Observations*

Glesne (2006) outlines three dominating data-gathering techniques involved in qualitative inquiry: participant observations, interviewing, and document collection. Glesne emphasizes the need for the qualitative researcher to collect data from a combination of these techniques rather than employing a single method. Collection of data from several sources, which is one aspect of triangulation, enhances the trustworthiness and credibility of the study and also provides richer data by allowing for a more extensive and in-depth exploration of observations (Bryman, 2004; Maxwell, 2005). Having various sources of collected data (i.e., observations, focus group interviews, and journals), I was able to cross reference the data to further explore observations. For example, early on in the semester, I observed various struggles that the women experienced in the classroom when asked to complete a task using the computer. With the exception of one woman, simple computer-related tasks such as manipulating a mouse proved to be challenging. The interviews and the journal entries further elaborated on the women's technological deficiencies, but also the data expanded to

include their fears and exposed a low level of self-confidence in using technology. Even the one woman, who appeared to be more familiar with the computer, expressed a lack of self-confidence when using to complete a task. My understanding was further broadened by the triangulation of data sources.

Crotty (1998) advises researchers to explain in detail the type of interviews that they plan to conduct, the interviewing techniques they will use, and the setting in which the interviews will be conducted. A pilot study conducted in spring 2009 informed my decision to proceed with focus group interviewing. During my pilot study, I interviewed three women ENG 090 students individually on three separate occasions. I designed the interviews to be structured; and, in retrospect I discovered this structured atmosphere elicited very brief responses. The women were especially reluctant to speak when I was recording the interview. Johnson-Bailey (2007) experienced a similar hesitancy from her interview participants when she conducted a study on the feminist perspectives of African-American women. Johnson-Bailey is an African-American woman, but the fact that she is also a recognized scholar within academia made her interview participants feel uncomfortable. She writes, “Because I was using narrative analysis and a feminist theoretical framework that was sensitive to power differences, the interviews with the hesitant women were eventually accomplished by interviewing them as a group” (Johnson-Bailey, 2007, p. 126). Like Johnson-Bailey, I wanted to balance the concept of researcher over researched and give the participants a collective power. Therefore, I conducted focus group interviews with women ENG 090 students involved in digital storytelling. Focus group participants were considered to be homogenous as a result of gender and their classification as a developmental English student. I met with the focus group for a minimum of three, one-hour sessions. One session

was scheduled at the beginning of the narrative composition, another was scheduled during the development stages of the digital story, and the last session was conducted at the completion and presentation of the final product. Seidman (1998) advocates employing a three-interview series to explore the context of the experience and therefore create meaning. I used the three-interview series for two reasons. First, I wanted to understand the context of their past lives which led them to the community college and the developmental English classroom. Secondly, I wanted to use historical experiences (both personal and educational) as our starting point and have the women elaborate on present-day developmental English experiences that involved digital storytelling in order to make connections among past, present, and future. And finally, I created the third interview session as an opportunity for the women to reflect on the experience after they had produced their individual digital stories.

As the researcher, I spent 16 weeks in an ENG 090 classroom observing student behavior. I attended class Monday through Friday for 50 minutes each day. On the first day of classes, I entered the classroom with my black binder in my arms and pencil in hand. I took the next to the last seat on the last row. There were a total of four rows. My row faced the wall and directly in front of me was a black, PC desktop computer. The middle rows faced one another with computers back to back. The remaining row faced the wall that housed the entrance. The instructor's computer was stationed at the front of the classroom at the head of the two middle rows. It was from this location that the instructor introduced me and I greeted the class. The students met me for the first time; likewise I met them on that first day of class as they took turns giving brief introductions that included their name and future plans. From that day forward, the daily contact that I had with them provided me with the opportunity to acquire the status of "trusted person" (Glesne, 2006, p. 49). My primary

duty was an observer; however, I did interact with the study's participants. Even though I did not engage in answering homework questions or participate in classroom discussions, I did move throughout the room assisting students in navigating the digital storytelling software and I assisted in problem solving. Also, I worked individually with each student as s/he recorded his or her digital story script. Glesne (2006) cautions, "The more you function as a member of the everyday world of the researched, the more you risk losing the eye of the uninvolved outsider; yet, the more you participate, the greater your opportunity to learn" (p. 50). Whether working with the group of students or working individually one on one, I uncovered rich details. These details, in the form of field notes recorded in my black binder, brought me to a more complete understanding of the developmental education student and the process of developing a digital story. I was very conscious of the fact that, even though I was received as an insider, I was still an outsider looking in for a deeper understanding.

### *Documents*

In addition to my fieldwork, I analyzed other documents collected during the semester. These documents included student reflective journals, researcher subjective memos and journals, the digital stories, a final reflective essay and summative survey, and field notes. In the reflective journals, students responded to a journal prompt that I developed prior the beginning of the semester (Appendix C). In addition to the student journals, I maintained a personal journal in which I kept weekly subjective memos. I reflected on each week and monitored events and emotions. The reflective essay and summative survey (Appendix D) served as a student self-assessment of growth in the area of technology and personal achievement. I closely examined the responses provided by the women who participated in the focus group interviews in an effort to triangulate my observations recorded in my field notes with the women's written journals and self-assessments. I carefully analyzed each of

the aforementioned documents and triangulated the data exploring the interconnectivity of student and researcher experiences.

### Participants

For the qualitative researcher the times, settings, and individuals selected to answer the research question are the most important considerations in qualitative selection decisions (Maxwell, 2005). The question of where to conduct my study was easy because my home institution of Catawba Valley Community College (CVCC) was the only community college in the state to utilize digital storytelling. Upon beginning my observations I was open-minded regarding whom I would select as interview participants. However, after spending days in the field, it became apparent that I was drawn to the stories the women were sharing. My study involved a homogeneous sampling of women in an ENG 090 class that used digital storytelling. Because the demographics of the class were very diverse, I made a conscious decision to include women from diverse backgrounds to lend credibility to the study and to illustrate the diverse student population often characteristic of a developmental education class.

Participants were all the students enrolled in a particular ENG 090 section that utilized digital storytelling as a pedagogical tool. The three female participants of the focus group were purposely selected in an effort to represent the diversity within a developmental education classroom at a community college. The three focus group participants were Lucinda, Vanessa, and Melissa. All three women gave me permission to use their given names in my research. According to the definition provided in Chapter One, Melissa is a traditional community college student while Lucinda and Vanessa are non-traditional students. Lucinda is a middle aged, Caucasian woman who continues to work a second shift

job in addition to being a part-time student. She is married and has one daughter and one son. Her son is challenged with health complications. He is her inspiration to become a nurse specializing in pediatric care. Vanessa is an African-American woman in her late fifties who aspires to own a daycare business. She possesses a natural love for children. Vanessa comes from a large family and often found herself caring for children other than her own. For this reason, she desires to obtain her Associates degree in Early Childhood Education. Melissa is originally from Costa Rica. She speaks Spanish fluently and is in her early twenties. She immigrated to the United States with her mother at the age seven. Currently, she works a part-time job at the local while attending community college. She is presently undecided about her career path.

#### Interview Protocol

On the first day of my fieldwork, all students in the class received a lay summary (Appendix A) explaining the study and addressed confidentiality along with their right to withdraw. In addition to the lay summary, the women selected to participate in the focus group interviews were presented with a digital storytelling student release form (Appendix B). Three focus group interviews were conducted using the interview questions (Appendix E) on campus at a reserved location other than the classroom. One interview occurred during the early stages of their digital storytelling development, one at midpoint, and finally the last occurred at the final stage of completion and performance. Each interview session lasted one hour. I decided to schedule three interviews in order to establish a contextual educational background of the women. The second interview focused on the various stages of developing a digital story with the final interview being a reflection of their most recent experience of producing and performing their digital story.

## Data Analysis

The data I collected were analyzed within the sociological tradition of thematic analysis. This thematic analysis required me to categorize, synthesize, search for patterns, and interpret the data I collected. Early data analysis included memo writings and classroom observations. At this early state, my subjective memos and observations were the only forms of data that I had collected. The digital stories, student journals, and summative surveys were not available until the end of the sixteen-week semester. While data were being collected, I began what Glesne (2006) termed “rudimentary coding schemes.” Initially my codes were numerical labels that referenced one or more of the three research questions in my study. Being oriented to a more methodical, old-fashioned pen and paper technique of organizing data, I made copies of the three women’s journals, my field notes, interview transcriptions, and the three women’s summative survey. I labeled legal sized yellow tablet headings with each research question and began to literally cut and paste relevant and meaningful data to research questions. I repeated this process for each interview participant. I am a visual learner, so the physical cutting and pasting, even though outdated, helped me to visually organize my data. The reading and critical thinking required served to reinforce connections discovered throughout the data analysis.

Reissman (2008) outlines four types of narrative analysis: (1) thematic analysis, (2) structural analysis, (3) dialogic/performance analysis, and (4) visual analysis. In thematic analysis, the content of what is said by the participants and written or recorded in other documentation is the focus. In addition to the importance of content analysis, thematic narrative analysis seeks to keep a story sequenced and whole rather than conducting a linguistic analysis of various language and grammar components. Thematic narrative



analysis develops a theoretical argument based on the story of “what” is told by the participants. To employ a thematic narrative analysis, I presented case stories of each woman by separating and ordering relevant story components into chronological biographical accounts. Each woman reconstructing her past self as a student brought a sense of order to the present day self. Categories began to divide and subdivide as I identified the five major steps these women went through in order to develop their own digital story. The five major steps that I identified were: (1) choosing the narrative topic, (2) composing the narrative, (3) recording the narrative, (4) choosing images and background music, and (5) assembling the movie. I continued to look for similarities as well as differences in each woman’s experiences with digital story development. Each woman’s account is woven into each identified step in an effort to describe in detail her individual experience. The more advanced coding, or what Glesne (2006) calls “entering the code mines,” required putting the pieces of the puzzle together. I organized “data clumps” to create an organizational framework. The framework is organized to present each woman as an individual with an individual story to tell.

### Validity

Ensuring the trustworthiness of a narrative inquiry is particularly important in an applied field like education where “practitioners intervene in people’s lives” (Merriam, 2002, p. 18). Creswell (2009) defines qualitative validity as checking for accuracy of findings by employing multiple validity strategies such as:

- Triangulation of data sources
- Member checks
- Rich, thick description

- Reflectivity of the researcher
- Presentation of negative or discrepant information
- Prolonged time in the field
- Peer debriefing
- External auditor (pp. 191-192).

I implemented all of these validity strategies with the exception of an external auditor. Above all, I desire to report an accurate narrative account of these women's experiences both past and present. I may have composed the final research report, but ultimately, it was co-authored. The stories within do not belong to me.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest criteria such as credibility, confirmability, and transferability for this method of research. Credibility suggests that the qualitative researcher possesses a confidence in the "truth" of his/her study findings. In turn, the confirmability addresses the extent to which the study represents the stories of those who were involved, and not the researcher bias or opinion. Finally, the assumption behind transferability is that, even though qualitative studies are typically conducted using smaller sample sizes, the findings will have applicability in other contexts.

Validity criteria for narrative inquiry research are still in development (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe criteria of valid narrative research as having authenticity, adequacy, and plausibility. These align with Guba and Lincoln's (1985) aforementioned validity criteria of qualitative research. By establishing validity criteria, narrative inquiry research became more recognizable as an accepted methodology within the qualitative research field (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000)

Some narrative researchers consider a resonance criterion in maintaining validity. In employing the resonance criterion, the research is validated on the feedback provided by the target audience or readers. If readers see or hear themselves in the writer's narratives, it demonstrates the importance of resonance. For the readers or intended audience, resonance with the research is an opportunity to think about a particular experience in a new way (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007).

In an effort to enhance what Lincoln and Guba refer to as credibility and Clandinin and Connelly refer to as plausibility, I employed a triangulation strategy. Maxwell (2005) defines triangulation as collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods. Through a triangulated approach, I checked what I learned from the interviews against what I observed in the field and read in various documents (i.e., focus group transcriptions, student journals, reflective essays/surveys, and my personal journal). For example, Lucinda's recording her physical voice was a difficult step for her to complete. She shed lots of tears and at one point we simply had to stop the recording process. I noted this difficulty in my field notes and speculated about her denial of the seriousness of her son's disability. She later confirmed in her written journal that putting thoughts into words was emotionally painful as she recalled the difficulty of past situations and accepted the reality of future challenges her son would have as a result of his medical condition.

Moreover, I ensured credibility by using respondent validation in which the participants had the opportunity to comment on my interpretation of the data gleaned from the focus group interviews. Before each subsequent interview session, I provided each woman with a copy of my transcriptions of the prior interview. They were presented with the

actual interview data that is used throughout this study. Maxwell (2005) contends that respondent validation is “the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstandings of what you observed” (p.111).

Given the intense relational aspect of narrative inquiry, I established rapport with the research participants by seeking to establish trust and reduce anxiety (Glesne, 2006). I was cognizant of my behavior and attuned to the relationship aspect in order to create an atmosphere that invited participants to share their story. As a researcher at my home institution, I was careful to balance my role as a faculty member, while simultaneously creating a comfortable, open environment of discussion. Furthermore, I monitored my own biases and subjectivity through a weekly reflexive journal. Glesne (2006) encourages novice qualitative researchers not to suppress feelings, but rather inquire into their perspectives and emotions to develop new questions through reflection on previously formed assumptions. On occasion, I recorded in my reflexivity memos my surprise to hear a woman student comment that she had never heard her own physical voice before. With this incident noted, I began to question the significance of the physical voice. Hence, monitored subjectivity can be a valuable resource for the qualitative researcher as it is the basis of the story one is about to tell (Glesne, 2006, p. 133). Narrative inquirers are particularly challenged as they “live on an edge” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 147). I found myself in a balancing act as I inserted my researcher voice in my study that is designed to tell the story of others, while simultaneously addressing a larger audience.

In addition to establishing rapport and monitoring subjectivity, I spent an entire semester in the field. Maxwell (2005) denotes intensive, long-term involvement as increasing a study's trustworthiness. I became participant-observer in an ENG 090 digital storytelling class at my home institution for the duration of one 16 week semester. I attended class for 50 minutes Monday through Friday. Being participant-observer is a means by which I established rapport and attempted to eliminate the tension of power differences between the researcher and the researched. Interview focus group sessions were held on campus, but in locations other than the actual classroom or my office. I was careful not to choose meeting locations that would emphasize power differences.

Finally, I employed many methods for collecting rich data (i.e., journal entries, student digital stories, focus group interview transcripts, etc.) from which I provide essential details to invite the audience into the research context. The audience becomes familiar with the people, place, and time so that these women's experiences in the developmental classroom that utilized digital storytelling teaching tool would resonate with other students, teachers, administrators, and technology specialists. Rich data lends itself to rich description. This, in turn, increases the study's transferability to other educational and research contexts. (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 2006; Maxwell, 2005).

## CHAPTER FOUR: DATA REPRESENTATION

In this chapter, I introduce each woman who participated in the small focus group interviews. I provide a detailed account of each woman's past educational experiences. Additionally, I identify five stages of digital story development and provide a rich detailed description of each woman's experiences with each of the stages of development.

During the spring semester of 2010, I became a participant observer in an ENG 090 (Composition Strategies) community college class. Like the feminist researcher, Shulamit Reinharz, I did not completely identify with this particular terminology because it did not accurately describe my research experience. Even though I was an "observer as participant" from a technical standpoint, I experienced much more. My experience seemed to relate closely to what Reinharz and her research team described as a "temporary affiliation." These two words capture the "human mutuality" within the research relationship (Reinharz in Belenky, et al., 1986, p. 225). I spent the semester truly being with and interacting with developmental education students using digital storytelling technology. Furthermore, I developed special relationships with the four women who graciously participated in my focus group interviews. The human mutuality existed in our mutual respect, interest, and care for one another's story. The sharing of stories was dynamic and the many insights these women provided will not only prove to enhance the field of developmental education, but also has strengthened me both professionally and personally, helping me to renew my teaching spirit and passion for something I have always known I was meant to do.

This ENG 090 class was different from the normal developmental course offerings because it utilized digital storytelling technology. The class met for 16 weeks five days a week for 50 minutes each day. Having already spent a semester in a Digital Storytelling ENG 090 classroom completing my pilot study, I knew just what was in store for these students. As the spring 2010 semester unfolded, I watched in amazement as students viewed digital stories for the first time and constructed mini-movies gaining essential practice for the development of the “big” story. Students commented in their class journals about their first viewing, noting their favorite digital stories. Throughout the initial recordings in the student journals, it was not uncommon for me to read responses like,

I am using this digital story as my motivation to do more with my life. Many of the stories and experiences that the people in the digital stories have been through touched me. To hear what many people have been through at times when I just wanted to give up really pushed me to work harder.

One particular student wrote in his journal,

I went out and bought Adobe Premiere Elements 8.0, which is one version above what we are using in class. I’ve tried to work on my project at home, but the environment of the classroom is really what gets me in the mood to advance my digital story.

Another student commented, “Each story was as different as the students who had written them.” One of the small focus group participants, Lucinda, found comfort in the stories and stated, “Doing the digital story has made me realize that there are others just like me. We are just starting over, and that they are in this [returning to college] for the same reason.”

Students learned to celebrate their uniqueness and identify similarities with one another while

working collaboratively in a classroom environment. Digital stories, whether fictional or personal accounts resonate with students by actively engaging and empowering them while simultaneously strengthening writing, reading, technology, and higher order thinking skills. Both cognitive and affective domains are utilized. Both domains are equally important to the developmental student and educator, and must be addressed through instruction to focus on the “intellectual, social, and emotional growth and development of all learners” (Casazza, 1999, p .5). Higbee, Arendale, and Lundell (2005) write that, “It is critical that developmental educators attend to the lived experiences of their students and focus on affective and cultural aspects of learning, not just on the cognitive domain” (p. 7). The purpose of this study, therefore, was to analyze the current research on developmental education and digital storytelling synthesizing the research with the experiences of women enrolled in a developmental English (ENG 090) class that utilized digital storytelling as a pedagogical tool at a community college.

To fulfill the study’s purpose, I employed a qualitative research design and methodology and explored the perspectives and experiences of four women enrolled in a section of ENG 090 that incorporated digital storytelling into the developmental classroom. I selected the four women though purposeful sampling in an effort to represent the diversity present developmental classroom. Three of the four women, who were older than 24 years of age, were considered to be non-traditional students and were returning to school due to various life circumstances, while the other had taken a year break between her high school graduation and admission to the community college. Having designed a basic narrative inquiry study, I sought to understand the meaning these women assigned to the process of developing their own media-driven narrative using the technology of digital storytelling.



Moreover, I sought to enhance the trustworthiness of the study by triangulating the data collection through focus group interviews, daily classroom observations, student journals, a reflective essay and student summative survey, weekly researcher subjectivity memos, and I obtained member checks of the transcribed interviews. According to Hatch (2002), “When interviews are used in conjunction with observation, they provide ways to explore more deeply the participants’ perspectives on actions observed by researchers” (p.91). Together, the focus group interviews, daily classroom observation, student journals, summative surveys, and student digital stories produced a more thorough understanding of a woman’s experience of developing a digital story within a developmental English classroom.

This chapter comprises the following sections: a description of the study setting of Catawba Valley Community College; each participant’s educational background story (with the exception of one participant as explained in Chapter Three); study findings presented within a chronological story/narrative format based on each woman’s experience with digital storytelling; and a summary. By the given nature of narrative inquiry and analysis, the findings along with the individual digital stories present a story within the larger story context of the women’s lives prior to their entrance into the community college. The four women were given the opportunity in the research consent form to request a fictitious name, but all four declined. All of the women requested that I use their real name. Thus, I decided to reveal the study setting as well because digital storytelling is one of several unique instructional strategies that Catawba Valley Community College utilizes within the Department of Developmental English and Reading.

## Study Setting

Catawba Valley Community College (CVCC) is situated in the Piedmont within what is known as the Foothills of western North Carolina. It is located in Hickory in Catawba County. CVCC is an “innovative, comprehensive community college” (CVCC 2010-2011 Course Catalog, p. 9). The history of this educational institution dates back to 1958 when it was formally established by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Construction began in 1959 and the open door opened in August 1960 with an initial enrollment of 77 students (CVCC 2010-2011 Course Catalog).

The main campus today is physically noted by the white, rectangular marquis with deep, red lettering and the oak trees that line the main drive and entrance. Additionally, the campus has expanded to include the CVCC Alexander Center, Cosmetology Center at CVCC Newton Center, and the Workforce Development Center at the East Campus. The college offers technical, vocational, and certificate programs to prepare individuals for employment as well as a two year College Transfer program to provide opportunities for students to transfer two years of academic credit to senior colleges and universities (CVCC College Catalog, 2010).

### Meaning Making: The Past meets the Present

During the script-writing phase of digital storytelling, students are encouraged to seek out a metaphor for his/her story. Having read Virginia Clark's (2001) discussion paper entitled, *Reactions of Nontraditional Women Students in an Introductory Class: Quilting Conversations*, and being of a southern heritage, I was inspired to continue the use of this metaphor in relation to the 21st century technology of digital storytelling. With the desire to understand (rather than predict) the digital storytelling experience for women who are non-traditional developmental education students, my narrative inquiry allowed me, as the

researcher, to journey with these women through the development stages of their own personal multi-media narrative. Moreover, their final product is worthy of a narrative analysis as it relates to adult education and feminist pedagogy.

As America was being established, early women settlers were lending a hand by in various ways. To sustain a family through the winter months Pioneer women "...kept the family beds piled high with colorful quilts as they struggled to survive the winters in the wilderness of North America" (Miller, 1977, p. 186). Not only did the bed covers serve a practical purpose, but also they were one of the first art forms in America. This art form was historically associated and practiced by women (Allen, 2009). Often times quilting was a collaborative effort. Women would gather at quilting bees around the quilting frame to stitch and share stories. A sense of cooperation and community made it more enjoyable to undertake the detailed work (Bial, 1996). Unable to vote or hold public office and often challenged with inadequate writing abilities, women used their quilting skills to express their political views, thoughts, and ideas (Allen, 2009). For example, one pattern made by women during the Civil War was called Radical Rose; it featured a black center in each rose, an expression of sympathy for the slaves (Miller, 1977). Quilting became for these pioneer women of early America a necessity in all senses of practicality, and also fulfilled the need for their voice to be heard and their thoughts and life experiences to be documented in a visual, imaginative craft.

Stafford (1991) writes, "Memory is made as a quilt is made. From the whole cloth of time, frayed scraps of sensation are pulled apart and pieced together in a pattern that has a name" (p. 15). For the women in this present study, memories have been pieced together not by frayed, spare pieces of cloth, but rather have been sewn together image by image on a 21st

century quilting frame called a computer. Together these women worked together to produce an individual digital story within their ENG 090 classroom at the community college. They exchanged ideas, laughed, became frustrated, cried, and established mutual friendships with one another. Much like the exchange of patterns and faded fabric scraps among the pioneer women of early America, these women participated in an exchange of sorts, which ultimately rendered a creation of their individual digital story. As with quilting, "...each quilt is an individual creation. It says something about the maker's life" (Miller, 1977, p. 186). The same is true of a digital story.

During the Spring 2010 semester, I explored the experiences of four women enrolled in a developmental English class that used digital storytelling as an instructional tool. I journeyed along with these women and their classmates as they created a digital story adding yet another colorful quilting square to their educational and personal quilt of life. Their experiences are documented in the following data sources:

- Weekly journal entries;
- Three, one-hour interview sessions with the four women prior to, during, and after the digital storytelling experience;
- Classroom observation field notes;
- Researcher journal;
- Reflective essay and summative survey;
- Student narrative script;
- Student digital story.

Just as a quilter must sort through the many colorful fabric swatches, I had to sort through the data to create a meaningful pattern that would speak to a large audience of educators,

administrators, curriculum specialists, and instructional technology specialists. I introduce each woman with an “educational snapshot.” Moreover, I carefully organized and classified data under each research question, and I maintained the narrative by listing five stages of digital storytelling development that were reoccurring. These stages are not meant to be all-inclusive; rather, they illuminate the experiences of the four women who participated in my study. The stages are sequenced and include: 1) choosing a topic, 2) composing a written script of no more than 375 words, 3) recording of the script, 4) collecting and editing of 30-50 pictures, and 5) assembling the movie by sequencing pictures and adding the recorded narrative and music. Even though I was not present at the performance stage, it is a very important and worthy of mention as it empowers individuals to speak to a larger audience.

I present the study findings in a chronological order according to the five main stages of digital storytelling identified above. The stories of each of the women are presented beginning with their personal as well as educational history. This background illuminates the characteristics of the developmental learner, perhaps identifies multiple reasons for placement, and speaks to the importance of developmental education in higher education. From here the each narrative evolves to include a collaborative story as together they progress through the five identified major stages of digital story development. Finally, the development of their digital story ends with a discussion related to the importance of performance in front of a larger audience.

#### Data Representation

##### *Becoming part of the Community of Learners*

On a cold day in February 2010, I nervously attended my first ENG 090 class. I was the newcomer. The class had already met several times, so I was not really sure how the students would react to my presence. I took a seat in the back corner of the classroom. The

classroom boasted 24 fairly new computers that were aligned in four rows, where the middle two rows converged in the center of the classroom. Pictures taken by photography students were strategically placed above each computer as if to emit a calming effect. I was the outsider wishing to accompany ENG 090 students on their digital storytelling journey. Amazingly, I did not remain an outsider for any length of time. I attended class daily with the students, and over the course of a semester, I learned from them. In a community of learners the power of exchange, collaboration, and sharing of stories involved in digital storytelling creates a space of personal transformation and empowerment for both author and audience.

### Lucinda's Quilt

#### *Interpreting the Pattern*

Lucinda sat across the classroom from me. I remember the first day I attended class. My attention was drawn to her as she eagerly raised her hand to answer a question. She appeared to be confident in her ability and was not afraid to ask questions; nor did she cower when she was corrected. Occasionally, she would be the last to leave the class so she could thank the instructor for correcting her grammar. She was relaxed in her jeans, t-shirt, and tennis shoes but sat erect in the rolling chair, which she had turned to face in the direction of the instructor. Her posture communicated a seriousness and purpose. Other than the obvious characteristic of being a white woman, I did not know much about Lucinda, but identified her early on as a focus-group interview candidate. The scheduled time for focus group interviews created a space for the participants and me, the researcher, to connect on a more personal level.

Lucinda is a part-time community college student and works a full-time job on second shift. Not only is she a student, but also she is a wife celebrating 20 years of marriage and the proud mother of two children. As evidenced in her digital story and interview

comments, her commitment to family is very strong. Her family is supportive of her educational endeavors to become a nurse. Lucinda states, “I had my daughter at age nineteen. I put my life on hold. You have to when you have kids; your life goes on hold.” Lacking the encouragement and financial support of her parents to continue her education beyond high school graduation coupled with her pregnancy at a young age, Lucinda decided not to continue with her education.

Lucinda’s education continued to be put on hold. Several years after the birth of her daughter, her son was born. He was not more than a few weeks old when she and her husband were told he had a serious heart condition that could possibly be fatal. He underwent open heart surgery at only a few weeks of age and suffered multiple complications. Since his first open heart surgery, he has made significant strides. Lucinda stated,

He is ten years old now, but it was after the second surgery that it hit me what I want to do. I want to work with children in the hospital or with cancer patients. He has been my little inspiration.

Through what some might perceive as a hardship, Lucinda has managed to reframe a particular life circumstance and map out a life trajectory. Lucinda reframes her experience in her digital story and further validates the literature reviewed by echoing many of the salient themes of identity development, multiple literacies, and empowerment (Hull & Katz, 2006; Kajder, 2007; Merritt, 2006; Robinson, 1994).

After working in textiles and a hospital for many years, Lucinda is returning to school part-time and continues to work at a hospital part-time. Her daughter is attending college, her son’s health has stabilized, and he is enrolled in school. Digital storytelling provided a space for Lucinda to reflect on her son’s medical situation and how she and her family have coped

and grown from this experience. She was empowered to stitch her faded photographs and narrative into a combined pattern to create a message for others facing hardships. She has visually prioritized her life and designed a clear message for others to hear based on her life experiences. In her digital story, Lucinda “gives voice” to experiences previously unarticulated (Hayes, 2002).

### *Patterns Stitched by Others*

During the first group interview experience, I discovered the women had similar past educational experiences. I asked each woman to provide a verbal, descriptive snapshot of her education experiences at these various stages: elementary, middle, and high school. Lucinda recounted positive educational experiences at the elementary and middle grades. She spoke of a favorite math teacher in elementary school and related a humorous story of a middle school teacher who would pass along his wife’s romance novels to his students. She stated,

...he [the teacher] noticed I did not like to read. He brought one of his wife’s (pause) I don’t know if he should have done it, but (pause) romance novels to school and he got me hooked on reading. I love to read now. I can read a book in no time.

Lucinda acknowledged that the distribution of romance novels was a questionable practice, but admits this is truly what got her engaged in the reading experience.

High school ushered in other issues and concerns that seemed to unconsciously define Lucinda’s identity both in and out of class. She described peer isolation:

...like she [agreeing with Teresa, focus group participant] said in high school if you did not have money or if you were not a jock or a cheerleader you were considered ugly and poor. I mean I have been called...I won’t say it [giggling]... a poor witch...just change the witch word. All because I did not wear Jordache. I didn’t play sports and stuff.



In addition to peer isolation, Lucinda's classroom experiences were limited and provided little challenge. This is evident when she states during the interview session,

Lucinda: My English teacher in high school... that was the bad thing... I had her for all four years. She did not push it. Like the test...she would literally tell you the answers to the test.

Teresa: I had a teacher like that one time.

Donna: So it wasn't a challenge for you.

Lucinda: Yeah, she did not challenge you to put forth any effort. Yeah, but that was it.

Having the same English teacher for all four years throughout high school coupled with low academic expectations on the part of the classroom teacher further defined Lucinda at that particular time. However, today she is using these experiences to teach her daughter so she can be conscious of her decisions so that she will be academically prepared.

Lucinda: My mom and dad did not push me to take these hard classes. They said graduate, graduate. Do whatever you need to do to graduate. I encouraged my daughter to take these classes. I told her if you want to make a better life for yourself this is what you need to do.

Vanessa: Like when we were in high school, they did not push us that way. They pushed the smart ones to take classes like Algebra I and the SAT. If you were not in this group, you were left out.

For Lucinda, high school seemed to be the defining moment. At a critical time in her development, her identity was unconsciously stitched together by the controlling authoritative forces. She was not allowed to piece together her own unique quilt square to

add to the larger whole; but rather, authority figures selected a pattern for her. Lucinda, like many of the young women in Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule's (1986) study, experienced an absence of voice and was dependent on external authority for direction.

### *Quilting Lucinda's Way*

Once Lucinda decided to enter the community college some twenty years after raising her children, she was required to take the COMPASS placement exam. According to Lucinda, the test results placed her out of all prerequisite reading courses (RED 090), but she did not place out of developmental English and Math courses. When I asked if she believed ENG 090 to be a correct placement, she responded,

They told me I had to take this English class. I said this is what I need. In writing I am not worth a diddly. I could sit here and tell you a story, but to write it down perfectly is a challenge for me.

Lucinda recognized that ENG 090 was a needed course. She did not question or argue with the placement. She was aware that, due to past experiences, her English skills were inadequate and she needed improvement. In her journal, Lucinda echoed her high school English experience and compared it to her developmental English experience at the community college. In reference to this experience she wrote,

If I knew back then what I know now, I believe I would have pushed to be put in another class. I am now being challenged to do my best, to show my best in what I can do. I needed this challenge so that I can understand and do the work. The instructor challenges me every time I turn around. I like that. She seems to see in me something that I have not found yet.

Upon entering the ENG 090 class, Lucinda learned that the development of a digital story was a required component of the class. Her initial thought in response to this news was, "...I am doomed." She continued to explain her thoughts in relation to her computer skills:

Before this class, the only thing I could do was to look up something on the internet, but that was about it. Things like copy and paste or save a file I did not know how to do it. I did not know anything about Microsoft Word.

Even though Lucinda has a computer at home, she cannot access the internet because internet services are not available in her area. Aside from the initial panic, Lucinda along with her other classmates began to relax after viewing digital stories developed by other developmental English students from previous semesters and after creating "mini" stories based on a class novel that was being read by all developmental students.

### Melissa's Quilt

#### *Interpreting Patterns*

Unlike Lucinda who was eager to ask questions, Melissa was timid. She only spoke when called on by the instructor. Despite her bold physical exterior, she was shy and seemed to be very cautious with her responses. She admits, "...In my English class, I am afraid to ask questions." As I continued my observations, I discovered that Melissa was from Costa Rica and that English was her second language. After the first week of class, I made an attempt to break the ice and get to know Melissa better; I greeted her in Spanish with "Hola. ¿Cómo estás?" Her face began to glow and a radiant smile began to appear. Her visible expressions communicated relief and comfort. At this moment, a shared language connected us. Spanish is her native language, and it is my second language. When I approached her with the consent form to become a part of the small focus group, she was excited and cheerfully agreed to participate.

Melissa was born in Costa Rica and attended kindergarten through second grade there. At the age of seven she immigrated with her mother to the United States. Now, she is in her early twenties and is a full-time student. Melissa is a very outgoing and creative woman. She strives to maintain her individuality and does not feel instantly compelled to conform to the standard. When she moved to the United States as a young second grader, she was the only Hispanic student in her elementary public school. Her perception as a young child was that all the other children had white skin, blue eyes and blonde hair. She felt different as though she was only girl in the school with dark eyes and dark hair. She was unique. She still maintains this uniqueness today.

In addition to being a full-time student, Melissa works part-time and shares in family responsibilities. On one occasion she was late to the focus group interview session because she had to take her grandmother to work. She lives with her mother, stepfather, and half-brother. Melissa spoke of her mother often and gives her credit for providing constant guidance and encouragement. Her mother never settled for average grades and in Melissa's words: "my mom doesn't like 80s; she likes from the 90s and up." During my time in ENG 090, I rarely observed Melissa without a smile on her face. She always had a very pleasant disposition.

Melissa described the private school in Costa Rica as "hard core." She noted that academic rigor was greater in Costa Rica and the rules were more rigid, especially in reference to the dress code. The dress code tended to suppress individuality and infringed on Melissa's creativity. She stated, "...my uniform had to look perfect. My shoes had to look shiny and perfect black all around. One little scratch or your shirt was not ironed they would

take points off your grade.” When Melissa moved to the United States, she encountered a very different situation in her new public school.

### *Merging Two Contrasting Patterns*

A point worth reiterating is that during the small focus group sessions these women discovered several commonalities in their educational journeys both past and present. The interview sessions provided an opportunity for the women to hear their own voice and have it reflected back in the voices of the other women. All four women carefully listened to one another, responded in a caring way, and mutually supported one another (Hayes, 2002) The women were actively engaged in “rapport talk” where the “...emphasis is on understanding and valuing other’s perspectives through careful listening and responsive questioning” (Hayes, 2002, p. 100).

Melissa entered second grade and immediately felt different. Unlike Lucinda, Melissa experienced isolation in her elementary years. The language and cultural barrier separated Melissa from her teacher, classmates, and community members. Even though she had studied English in her school in Costa Rica, she still experienced frustration with communication skills. Moreover, she “...was not only a new kid, but the only Hispanic kid in the whole entire school.” For the first time, Melissa felt different. She revealed, “All the girls were like blonde, blue eyes, and I am here with dark hair and dark eyes.” She imagined her classmates asking, “What is she and where is she from?”

Adjustment was difficult, but Melissa had caring and understanding elementary school teachers who pushed her to do her best. Similar to Lucinda, Melissa recalled positive experiences working with the teachers and interacting with her peers in grade school. She concluded her discussion about this stage in her life saying, “The elementary years were the best years.”

During the middle grades years, the novelty and newness of being the only foreign student in class faded. She began to feel like what she referred to as an “outcast.” In her words, she “...learned that being different was a good and bad thing because people are mean.” Lucinda, Teresa, and Vanessa all nodded in agreement at Melissa’s statement. They, too, had experienced isolation and tolerated ridicule from their peers. As noted by Belenky, et al. (1986), the same theme resounded in their interviews; for women, who listened to others and possessed an absence of voice, “words were perceived as weapons.” (p.24). For these women, words were meant to tear down and demean rather than to unite and connect. Rebellion soon followed as Melissa continued to feel isolated by those she described as the “Barbies.” She continued on her quest to discover how her unique pattern would fit into the other patterns which surrounded her.

In high school, she became friends with band members, and she became involved with the drama program. She described herself as friendly to everybody, but she had an attitude armed with cutting remarks for those who poked fun. For survival reasons, she began to behave mean-spiritedly with an “in your face” attitude. This attitude began to dissipate as she became involved in her Theatre Arts class. She credits her involvement with theatre for making her more open and accepting of others.

When I questioned her about high school experiences in English, Melissa recalled an emphasis on reading required novels and memorizing vocabulary words. She remembered writing a research paper in high school and stated, “That was the only big writing thing we did in high school.” Her recollections of academic experiences were somewhat limited; however, socially her experiences were very vivid. During her junior and senior year of high

school, Melissa began to experiment with drugs. Her attendance record and grades suffered. She stated,

And so, by the end of my senior year, I was gone. I was completely different person. Even my friends tell me now that I look different than I did before. They tell me how I looked those two years of my life, and I don't even remember how I looked. Lookin' in the mirror was something I don't remember do'in.

Unable to connect with many of her peers and teachers, Melissa made bad decisions. By experimenting with drugs, Melissa was able to find acceptance and a sense of connectedness following the wrong crowd. Again, Melissa like Lucinda did not have an inner voice. She obeyed others in an effort just to have a sense of belonging or of fitting in (Belenkey, et. al, 1986).

Realizing that her life's choices had her trapped in a downward spiral of self-destruction, Melissa reached out to her mother for help. Two days later, Melissa was on an airplane bound for her home country. There she reunited with family and even met her father for the first time. In the year that she remained in Costa Rica, she attended therapy sessions, shared time with her biological father and family, and took beauty courses. Melissa continued,

When I got home, mom was like, 'It's CVCC now.' I said, 'Okay let's do CVCC now.' I feel like now I am ready. I left all that stuff and now I am on the path again. I think now...yeah, I am happy with my choice.

#### *Designing her Unique Quilting Pattern*

In terms of Melissa's age, she does fit the definition of a traditional student. However, she did not directly enter the community college after graduation from high school. She returned to the community college at the age of 20. Given the fact that English is Melissa's

second language, coupled with spending the past year in Costa Rica, Melissa was not surprised to learn that her COMPASS placement test score placed her in a developmental English course (ENG 090). Melissa wrote in her journal, “English class you are my nightmare! I have never liked English. English to me is one subject that first, I am not good at, second, I don’t get it, and finally, I usually get the worst teachers.”

Because this is Melissa’s first experience with higher education in the States, she noted some differences. She mentioned that there are several of her classmates “...who are like closer to [her] mom’s age.” Moreover, she commented on her fear of asking questions in her ENG 090 class. However, as the semester progressed, I noticed a change in Melissa’s reservation to ask questions. She became more comfortable because the use of the technology compensated for her inadequacy in the English language grammar. She was able to assist the more mature students with the technology and in turn they reciprocated by assisting her with the English language grammar concepts. She wrote in her journal, “My English teacher now in college has taught me a lot of grammar more than my teachers in high school ever did.” Melissa’s comment supports the theme of multiple literacies, which is salient among the research reviewed. Several skills both cognitive and affective are addressed by the one assignment of developing a digital story. Digital storytelling is a new way of addressing writing skill deficiencies (Kadger, 2004). Hence, Melissa was more engaged, motivated, and eager to share with her peers. This experience was in stark contrast to her English classroom experiences in middle school and high school.



## Vanessa's Quilt

### *Stitches Through Time*

Vanessa is an African-American woman around 50 years old. In relation to where I sat in the classroom, Vanessa was seated across the classroom on the second row right in front of the instructor. She listened carefully and appeared to take notes diligently. I was drawn to Vanessa's smile and eagerness to learn; it is though she was hanging on to every word the instructor said and processed the information slowly and carefully.

Unlike Lucinda, Vanessa appeared to be reluctant to ask questions and only contributed when she was called upon to do so. In an effort to emphasize the diversity found in a developmental classroom, I sought out Vanessa to join in the small focus group interview sessions. She was delighted to be a part of the group and often referred to it as the "digital storytelling support group." After hearing her story, it occurred to me that being a part of this group brought a sense of belonging that Vanessa had not experienced in her past educational journeys.

Vanessa is married and lives in a small rural town. She is the mother of three children and the grandmother of nine. She has been attending the community college for two years and is seeking an Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education. Her future goal is to open a childcare learning center. Vanessa describes herself as a "person who can give up easily" but notes that the challenge of doing a digital story helped her to discover she could complete a task without giving up.

### *A Pattern within a Pattern*

Vanessa's past educational experiences echoed the same patterns of negative peer influences as did those of Lucinda and Melissa. Vanessa remembered her parents encouraging her to attend what she referred to as a "higher school" after completing her high

school education. However, she recalled how she “never felt smart” because her peers often teased her or “picked on her.” Vanessa began to believe her peers and lost what self-confidence and self-esteem she did possess. As documented in literature, words became weapons (Belenky et al., 1986). The words spoken by authority figures as well as peers began to tear away little by little Vanessa’s self-worth and confidence. She reflected, “Now being older you think that would all change, but you carry that through life.” She revealed that over the years she has tried to build her self-esteem, but finds it difficult. Additionally, she confessed that she was also enamored with her high school sweetheart and that she was “into the boys” at the time. Even though her parents encouraged her to continue her education after high school, she gave into the taunting voices of others and began doubting her abilities.

After graduation in 1977, she began making gloves at a local textile factory. Realizing that factory work was not for her, she soon enrolled in the community college to prepare for an office job. Vanessa worked during the day and attended the community college during the evening hours. Often times Vanessa would catch herself falling asleep in class. At first she thought she was simply tired from working all day, but found out she was pregnant. That was her first and last semester.

Eighteen years passed as she raised her family. Her dream to pursue an education never was forgotten; it was residing in the shadows of her family responsibilities to her own children. In 1995, she again enrolled in the community college. For the second time, she met with failure and quit school.

In 2002, Vanessa’s granddaughter began preschool. The director of the preschool asked Vanessa if she had ever thought about returning to school to get her credentials in

childcare. This question reawakened Vanessa's long dream of continuing her education. From a young age, she had always cared for other people's children. Vanessa, like Lucinda and Melissa, found acceptance. However, she found acceptance among young children who accepted her without question. She came from a large family and oftentimes found herself caring for children other than her own. She recalled, "I liked other people's kids and I liked keepin' 'em before I even had my own children." After all, she was from a family who traditionally specialized in caring for others. Her own mother had retired from her job just to care for her aging grandmother (a fact that becomes evident in her digital story about her "Mama James").

### *Putting the Patterns Together*

Vanessa eventually found work in a preschool facility. The director of the preschool encouraged her to return to school and gave her release time from her job to attend the community college. She discovered that daytime classes appealed to her more than the evening classes. She had tried evening classes twice before to no avail.

Economic downturns resulted in the closing of the preschool facility where Vanessa was working. Vanessa is now enrolled full-time at the community college and is pursuing an associate's degree in Early Childhood Education. She works well with her classmates and encourages the recent high school graduates to continue with their education because, as she puts it, "the older you get the harder it is."

Vanessa agrees with her placement in developmental English. She acknowledges that her writing skills need to be sharpened and that her grammar needs improvement. At the end of the semester Vanessa wrote in her journal, "But I need more help on writing a thesis paper, knowing where there is a run on, fragment and comma splices."

The challenging part for Vanessa has been the use of technology. Even though it is printed in the class bulletin, Vanessa did not realize that the developmental English class she registered for used digital storytelling technology. She noted in her journal significant improvement in her technology skills. The repetitive nature of the digital storytelling process allowed Vanessa the opportunity to solidify core technology skills, which will assist her in other areas of study. However, instead of celebrating this significant improvement with technology skills, she commented, “My skills have improved, but not enough. I need to practice on it a whole lot more to become perfect.” She remains very critical of her achievements. It is apparent that the scars of past educational experiences and never feeling “good enough” run deep.

#### The Process Unfolds: A Stitch in Time

The stages of digital storytelling are many, but I have identified five important stages for the purpose of documenting the research findings. The stages are sequenced and include: 1) choosing a meaningful topic, 2) composing a written script of no more than 375 words (restriction established by the instructor), 3) recording the script, 4) collecting and editing 30-50 pictures, and 5) assembling the movie by sequencing pictures and adding the recorded narrative and music. These stages kept resonating throughout the collection of my data as important time markers for students in terms of their digital story and its completion. After all, the students had to meet a deadline for submission of their digital story because it was an ENG 090 class requirement. Even though I was not present for the performance component as the students shared their stories with one another, it is worthy of discussion as it empowers the developmental student to speak to a larger audience.

*Choosing a meaningful topic: A Woman's Authentic Pattern*

Before sitting down around the quilting frame, pioneer women had to decide on a particular quilting pattern or perhaps design their own pattern as well as gather necessary materials to begin the quilting process. The same is true of digital storytelling. As mentioned before students viewed other digital stories and created “mini” stories in an effort to prepare them for the making of their own personal digitized story. The instructor purposely designed such activities to excite and build student confidence. Lucinda wrote about this experience in her journal,

The stories that I have watched were stories of family and friends. These stories are the ones I like best. Stories about family and friends have the most meaning to me, because you can put a lot of meaning into the story.

Likewise, Vanessa enjoyed watching digital stories that were “touching” and wrote about several that brought tears to her eyes.

Additionally, all women listed possible digital story topics in their journal. All listed topics for all women focused on others (children, grandparents, father, and mother) along with life struggles in their own personal journey. All women struggled with deciding on their story focus because all felt like the each person or life circumstance was equally important for shaping the person they have become. For example, Lucinda desired to create a digital story honoring both her daughter and son giving an equal tribute. Given the narrative limitation of 375 words, Lucinda decided to narrow her focus to her son, John. She wrote,

I chose my topic about my son. It was hard to choose between this one and the one about both my children. I had a lot of ideas to choose from, but I had to pick one. It was hard to choose just one. I chose to do a story on my son, so I can tell everyone about the long and rough road he had to travel to get where he is now. Another reason

I want to tell the story about my son is so people can see that life is worth fighting for and that if you think you have it bad, there is always someone out there that has it worse.

Lucinda felt guilty for choosing one child over the other. She spoke to her daughter and explained her decision. It was important for Lucinda to verbally express to her daughter the rationale for a sole focus and get her daughter's approval.

Melissa was not intimidated by the computer or the programs needed to assemble her digital story; she remarked in her journal, "The only thing I was still nervous about was not the programs or even looking for my pictures, but what I was going to do my digital story on." By the close of the script writing stage, Melissa had taken five possible topics and carefully crafted a script that included all five items on her list. Deciding on a topic was Melissa's most challenging part of the story development. Vanessa did not seem to struggle with topic selection because she was able to eliminate two of the three for lack of personal pictures.

Each woman wrote her script with purpose and with an intended audience in mind. Lucinda and Melissa's purpose was to send a message to a wider audience whereas Vanessa's target audience was her family. As noted in Belenky et al. (1986), the understanding of care and empowerment of others is central to a woman who is approaching or is in the life phase of adulthood. Just as the women in pioneer days sent messages by visually documenting emotions in their quilting patterns, all three women created and produced individual digital stories that purposely transmitted an inspirational and encouraging message in an effort to illicit a response from the heart and mind of those they seek to raise up. Likewise in an effort to raise up the voice of others, these women digital

storytellers have become to value and listen to their own voices and minds as well (Belenky et al., 1986).

### *Writing the Script: Piecing Words to Create Meaning*

Lucinda and Vanessa admitted that writing the script was the most difficult part of the entire process. Lucinda wrote in her journal, “Writing the story can be a mind buster. You try to put everything you want into the story and you end up with more than you need.”

Lucinda’s script packet consisted of five drafts, Melissa’s script packet consisted of three drafts, and Vanessa’s script packet contained five drafts. Once a draft was finished, it was submitted to the instructor for feedback. The instructor provided necessary feedback on content as well as grammar. Condensing lengthy written stories to a minimum word count was especially challenging as evidenced by the many drafts. Each draft became shorter as an excess of words was trimmed. Vanessa noted in her journal, “The most challenging part of creating my digital story was writing my story.”

In addition to revising the writing to fit within the word allowance, all three women had to address grammar and punctuation issues. It was not uncommon for the women to find comments either word processed or hand-written by the instructor pointing out errors involving comma splices, run-on sentences, and/or subject verb agreement. Lucinda wrote in her journal, “...you have to proofread the story you have written. This is when you check for errors. The errors that you look for are spelling, punctuation, and sentence format.”

Moreover, peer editing of the script was an essential component of script development.

Students verbally read their scripts to a small group of classmates to gain insights into how to improve their writing. Students are actively engaged in evaluating and analyzing errors within the context of their own writing as well as evaluating the writing of others in a collaborative fashion during peer assessments (Elbow, 2007; Shaughnessy, 1977). As

Lucinda read her script to her peers, she became emotional and began to cry. At one point during the small group reading, she paused to ask if it would be possible if someone else in her group could read her script. Not only did I, as the researcher, notice Lucinda's reaction, but also the instructor commented in her script review,

I heard you read your script aloud the other day, and I know that your emotions (quite understandably) run high. That emotional context needs to be explored in your story as you see fit.

In addition to peer editing, the instructor scheduled individual conferences with students. Together the student and the instructor read the narrative script and discussed the feedback from the multiple drafts. Each woman incorporated this individual conference feedback into her final draft that resulted in a polished narrative within the specified word count. The instructor/student interaction required of digital storytelling provides effective feedback that is required of developmental educators. Boylan (2002) contends that timely feedback "provides recognition that the instructor has seriously reviewed student work" (p. 84). Furthermore, it validates that the instructor truly cares about the student as well as the learning process. Just as pioneer women carefully and purposely pieced together hand-selected, colored cloth carefully to create meaning within a chosen quilting pattern, the women digital storytellers did the same with the written word. Each word was carefully and purposely chosen.

#### *Recording the Narrative: An Authentic Layer of the Feminine Voice*

Quilting involves the art of layering the top, batting, and backing together. Digital storytelling also incorporates an aspect of layering. One layer is the voice recording of the narrative script. Again, all three women requested multiple recordings of their script.

Realizing the importance of voice recording in producing a quality digital story, the women



wanted to ensure voice clarity, speed, and intonation were correct. Even though each woman had the same intended purpose for the recording, the recording phase was one of self-discovery for her.

As mentioned before, Lucinda had difficulty with sharing her story during the peer-editing phase without getting emotional. When I called her name to record, Lucinda grabbed her script packet and proceeded towards me, but before leaving the room, she reached for several tissues housed on top of a tall, black filing cabinet. She was gathering the needed provisions for recording her voice. The first day we tried four times to record her voice. As the tissue became more crumpled and filled with tears, we finally decided to try again the following day. The recording experience brought Lucinda face-to-face with painful past experiences and the point of acknowledging the challenging future that lies ahead of her son. It was during the recording phase that Lucinda became vulnerable for a few minutes and dropped the superwoman persona. It was powerful to witness the shedding of her tough exterior to reveal a woman, at that moment in time, confronting the reality of raising a special needs child. By hearing her authentic, physical voice, Lucinda was faced with the truth she had been denying. The next day the recording went better, and after two tries, she saved the voice recording to her flash drive and was ready to import.

Unlike Lucinda's psychological self-discovery, Vanessa and Melissa discovered how the recording phase could assist them in mastering individual learning needs. Vanessa had difficulty with subject-verb agreement. Additionally, she would often add an additional "s" to words that were already in plural form. For example, in her script, Vanessa used the word "childrens" and "grandchildrens." Even though she corrected the spelling and usage in her polished script of which she was reading, the mistake resurfaced in her voice. The incorrect

usage was deeply embedded into Vanessa's daily pattern of speech. After each recording was made, I played it back to Vanessa. Each time she listened, she would point out grammar errors that she had made and make note. She explained in the interview session, "Sometimes you are thinking you are saying it right, but once you hear it you know you are not."

The recording phase became a pronunciation activity for Melissa. Because English was Melissa's second language, pronunciation issues challenged her. For example, her script begins with a quote, which included the word "resignation." This proved to be a difficult word for Melissa to pronounce. After hearing her first recording, she was unhappy with the way she pronounced the word. We practiced saying the word and broke the word into three syllables and transposed them over the word. After several recordings, she was finally happy with her pronunciation. Ironically enough, this had also occurred in the recording of the mini-story quote. Melissa had difficulty pronouncing the word "beach." After hearing her voice, she thought it sounded like a bad word. She worked on the clarity and intonation to make sure her classmates would understand. Thus, the recording phase presented a learning opportunity in which each woman literally listened to her own physical voice and was actively engaged in active learning as she analyzed the oral recording for English errors and mispronunciations. Active learning, as originally conceived by Friere (1970) and defined by Boylan (2002), does not require students to learn passively through hours of lectures, but rather advocates involving students in their own learning. As Boylan (2002) continues to point out, developmental students have traditionally been exposed to typical lectures, drill and practice, and discussion in high school. These approaches have not worked for these students, so why continue with the same unsuccessful teaching techniques? Unlike the traditional approaches that have proven unsuccessful, the authentic voice recording stage of

digital storytelling is a “hands-on” activity that enabled Lucinda, Melissa, and Vanessa to personally make connections with the course content as well as connections with reality.

*Collecting and Editing Pictures: A Creative Layer of the Feminine Voice*

My mother tells me stories of how my great-grandmother collected fabric scraps from the area furniture factories and use them to make warm, heavy quilts for the winter. One of her quilts adorns the back of the brown leather couch in my family room. As I cover up with this quilt, I am reminded of how she carefully cut the selected fabric scraps into shapes and sizes to make them fit perfectly. Much of the same careful consideration is given to the photos selected to illustrate a digital story. All three women either revealed in our interview sessions or wrote in their journals that the most enjoyable part of putting together their digital story was selecting, sizing, and cropping their pictures. Lucinda stated, “Looking for pictures is the fun part; you can pick different pictures to go along with the story.” Being the creative person Melissa described herself to be, the phase of selecting and sizing photos appealed to her creative side. She described carefully searching creative commons sites to locate the right picture to communicate the abstract ideas of love. She wrote in her journal, “...when I was looking for some pictures on love, it was very difficult since there are so many types of love. After looking and looking on many pages I finally found the perfect one.” She complimented herself on her skills of visual/image literacy and was able to recognize immediately an image that was a good fit for her story. Lucinda wrote in her journal, “Sometimes you would be listening to your story and find out you need a different picture for that part.” The three women understood the importance of visual literacy.

Moreover, Vanessa commented on the technology skills needed for organizing the pictures in the correct electronic file folders. Pictures in an electronic format (JPG) had to be organized in an unedited file folder. Once the pictures were sized and cropped, they were

saved in a new electronic format (PSD) and organized in an edited pictures file folder for use in the digital story. This required critical thinking and organizational skills. Both Lucinda and Vanessa entered the developmental English class with limited computer knowledge, but the repetition required in sizing and cropping photos as well as organizing photos in the correct electronic file folder aided in learning the process. Developmental students need more than simply drill and practice in basic skills. They need to be able to apply and transfer knowledge learned to other college classes in order to be successful (Boylan, 2002). As students like Lucinda and Vanessa, who had little experience with computers, learned required technology skills, they also enhanced their ability to think critically.

In addition to carefully selecting the correct photograph to communicate particular ideas or thoughts, the women had to provide attribution to all creative common images used in the digital story. Each woman became aware of copyright laws that legally prevented her from capturing any image from the web. Lucinda wrote, “You have to make sure that these pictures can be used for your digital story, they may be copyright protected.” Each student was required to provide a credits page at the end of their story giving attribution for photographs as well as music. Unlike my great-grandmother who used furniture fabric scraps carefully cut, Lucinda, Vanessa, and Melissa used many family pictures as well as collected creative commons pictures carefully sized and copped to create yet another layer of their digital story. Simultaneously the women experienced the addition of a meaningful layer to their experience as developmental English students because they were involved in active learning strategies, utilized the power of critical thinking, worked collaboratively, and ultimately used technology as a learning tool to document their personal transformations. (Boylan, 2002; Brothen, 1998).

### *21st Century Style Quilting: Hand-Stitching the Layers Together*

Once the top of the quilt is piece worked together and the batting and backing are in place, the quilt is stretched over a quilting frame for hand-stitching. Each stitch is meticulously and strategically made to attach the three layers into one piece. Much of the same is true for assembling the digital story, but the process does not involve a needle or thread. Rather, the layers are the written script, voice recording, edited pictures, and selected music. Pictures are sequenced to the voice recorded script and royalty-free music is chosen to enhance the story's meaning.

Melissa, the most experienced with the computer and former drama and cinema club member, wrote about how much fun she had putting her story together. She wrote, "I love how I could play around with my voice and pictures as well. I could really be creative." Lucinda remarked about the difference in this ENG 090 class and her past experiences in high school English. She stated,

I thought I would be doing a lot of bookwork on verbs, nouns, adverbs, pronouns, and sentence structure. I am not saying that we did not do any of this, but that our instructor just took another way of teaching us these things. I believe this way has helped me understand things a lot better.

Lucinda's statement is evidence that student perceptions of teaching and learning focus on bookwork and worksheets. Digital storytelling is a 21<sup>st</sup> century response to teaching traditional English skills and concepts in a new engaging and exciting way. More importantly, the computer is used for constructing meaning and transforming students rather than simply being an "add-on" component to facilitate drill and practice of basic skills. Brothen (1998) concludes, "The best way for technology to have a transformational role in developmental education is for it to be effective in transforming students" (p. 4).

Likewise, many teachers, administrators, and policy makers in education today emphasize the concept of quantity over quality of work. Students churn out pages and pages of meaningless work often in a sloppy, incomplete manner. Because assignments prove to hold little meaning for the student, few learn to take pride in the completed product. However, digital storytelling empowers students to produce a quality story. Like her classmates, Lucinda remarked, “I just wish the class were a little bit longer.” How often do students request more time in class? Vanessa wrote,

I like this class because we are writing and we are recording our story, and in the other classes they are just writing. They do not know how much fun it is to be in a digital storytelling class. When I miss a day in class I feel like I have missed a lot for not being there.

As all three women assembled the layers of their story, they were actively engaged in a meaningful learning experience. Their stories would be performed for a wider audience and quality became a priority. Similar to the process pioneer women went through when carefully selected scrap cloth to connect in a pattern of constructed meaning, the women literally sorted pieces of themselves and searched for their authentic voice to create a meaningful masterpiece of self-expression. As eloquently stated by Belenky et. al. (1986):

These women want to embrace all the pieces of the self in some ultimate sense of the whole-daughter, friend, mother, lover, nurturer, thinker, artist, advocate. In women, there is an impetus to try to deal with life, internal and external, in all its complexity. And they want to develop a voice of their own to communicate to others their understanding of life’s complexity. (p. 137)

Much like the quilt is a visual symbol of tedious, intentional work; their digital stories visually documented a semester of assigned yet meaningful work.

#### A Discussion: A Meaningful Final Creation

Many years ago pioneer women labored to create a purposeful yet meaningful, imaginative quilts. The quilts would keep their loved ones warm during the harsh, cold winter months and often communicated well-designed messages to others. Because many of the women's basic rights and freedoms were denied, they created quilting patterns as a form of self-expression of their thoughts and ideas. All three women in this study expressed a desire to share their digital story with others. As required by the class, all stories were performed in front of their classmates during a portion of the final exam time. However, the women who participated in this study intended to continue to share their stories with a larger audience- their families, addicts, and mothers of sick children. This is one reason they agreed to participate in my research. They wanted to have an opportunity to impact others and provide hope to overcome personal obstacles.

## CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS, IMPLICATIONS, FURTHER RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, I analyze the findings documented in the previous chapter. Throughout this chapter, the study findings are integrated with contemporary research in basic writing instruction, technology implementation in developmental education, and women and learning. Additionally, I discuss the implications of this study and provide suggestions for further research.

### Introduction

Each year a substantial number of students graduate high school throughout the country underprepared for college. These students require remediation in reading, writing, and/or mathematics. In 2008, 64% of NC high school graduates who enrolled at the community college took at least one remedial course (GTCC Summit on College Readiness, 2010). Additionally, the troubled economy is responsible for community college enrollment spikes. As the job markets fluctuate and unemployment rises, thousands of adults are returning to formal education looking for training in new industries or careers. Thus, these students need to review key skills in reading and writing to ensure success in college-level courses (Strauss, 2009). One of the primary reasons that community colleges withdraw is lack of academic preparedness (GTCC Summit on College Readiness, 2010). Without a doubt, the basic literacy skills that students acquire in the nation's community college developmental education programs lay strong foundation for which to build future academic and professional success. As Maddox writes, "The major responsibility for educating most under-prepared students takes place at the community college level" (2002).



According to Daniel Pink (2005), today's society has moved from the Informational Age to the Conceptual Age. He emphasizes that students must know more than how to read, write, and calculate. Along with the left-brain intellect, successful people will also have to cultivate right-brain qualities of inventiveness, empathy, and meaning. Upon studying the desired holistic approach to developmental education and surveying the research literature on digital storytelling, I discovered a considerable gap in the current knowledge base about the role of digital storytelling in developmental education programs. Furthermore, literature on how women developmental education students respond to digital storytelling was not available. To address this gap, I designed a narrative inquiry qualitative study with the purpose of gaining insight into the feminine perspective of using digital storytelling as a pedagogical tool within the developmental English classroom. Located in the western region of North Carolina, Catawba Valley Community College in Hickory, NC served as the study site. This study set out to address the following research questions:

- How do the women use digital storytelling technology to create meaning?
- How do the women respond to digital storytelling technology and what do their experiences reveal about women and learning?
- How do developmental education research-based best practices intersect with digital storytelling?

While coding and analyzing the data, I noticed a story within a story develop. The story of process evolved among the larger contextual story of their educational and life experiences. Their educational and life experiences provided insights into reasons a developmental English class was the appropriate placement for these three women. Furthermore, the process of producing and creating a digital story seemed to develop as its own story and approached

learning basic literacy skills from an innovative, engaging angle. Thus, the story presented in the study generated answers to the foregoing questions.

This chapter focuses on an analysis of the study findings, conclusions, implications, as well as recommendations for practice and future research.

### Analysis of the Study Findings

#### *How do the women use digital storytelling technology to create meaning?*

Despite the worry and anxiety the women expressed over choosing a topic for their digital story, all three women unknowingly revealed their topic during our first interview session. Evidently, our relaxed, but directed conversation created a safe, secure haven where each woman could express herself. Hayes (2002) observes that women respond positively to learning situations that “encourage and support varied forms of talk and interaction” (p. 91). These women not only discovered their topic, but, as the process of digital storytelling unfolded, also they discovered their voice. The women created meaning using digital storytelling technology by developing what Hayes (2002) identifies as voice as talk, voice as identity, and voice as power. As we sat around the table and enjoyed a cup of coffee and doughnut joined in conversation, each woman began to express herself and learn about herself in relation to one another. Step by step as the digital storytelling process unfolded each woman began to see herself as the heroine of her own story and claimed an individual power through the expression and validation of her story. The women did not choose to see themselves as victims of their personal circumstances; rather, they chose to see themselves as a unique person all the more special because of her life experiences.

Not only did these three women find an inner voice, but also they used their own special physical voice to supply the narrative for their digital story. The level of self-disclosure was intense and these women came to own the part of themselves they were

telling. Unlike oral storytelling where the story is changed or embellished at each telling, these women told their story carefully with lots of emotion. Although ownership of story is evident in autobiographical writing, this dynamic is more pronounced as digital storytellers read or tell their story using their physical voice.

In the literature surveyed, Hull and Katz (2006) described how digital storytellers at a community technology center were able to define a life trajectory based on person they were at that moment in time as well as the person they wanted to become. This is equally true for women developmental English students with whom I worked. Lucinda was not only the mother of her son John, but also was a woman who aspires to become a nurse and work with terminally ill children. Likewise, Melissa did not see herself as a victim of drugs, but rather a person who can and will continue to overcome the odds. Vanessa lovingly related a story of her Mama James and how she cared her large family. Like her Mama James, Vanessa aspires to care for others and someday open a childcare facility.

In alignment with the current research on digital storytelling (Hull & Katz, 2006; Maier & Fisher, 2007; Merritt, 2006; Tendero 2006), these women also experienced a sense of empowerment. They were empowered to envision a future in which they were in control. They looked closely at where they had been and where they were going. Additionally, these women were empowered to share their story with a larger audience. Melissa wrote in her journal, “The more I thought about it the more I realized that I wanted to do a story that was going to impact people and was going to make people think.” She continued,

I think it was important to me to tell this story for many reasons. One, I wanted to show people that you can overcome a drug problem. Second, I felt like me sharing this story would open people’s eyes and make them see that if they are doing drugs

there are ways out. Finally, I felt like I had to close that chapter of my life for good. . . . without a doubt the first person I want to share my story with is my mom. I want her to see that this horrible chapter is in the past and that now a new chapter is starting.

Vanessa, who internalized the teasing of classmates and eventually began to believe their taunts of not being good enough, expressed her desire to show her digital story at the next family reunion. She wrote in her journal, "...it will make me feel proud of myself if everyone will like my digital story." She wrote about making copies of her DVD as gifts for her family members. Lucinda was empowered to share her son's journey with others for various reasons. She wrote in her journal,

I chose to do a story on my son, so I can tell everyone about the long and rough road he had to travel to get where he is now. Another reason I want to tell the story about my son is so people can see that life is worth fighting for and that if you think you have it bad, there is always someone out there that has it worse.

All three women had a message for a much larger intended audience. By finding their voices, these women not only created meaning throughout the digital storytelling process, but also were empowered to share it with others. Furthermore, the primary reason that the women requested that I reveal their name in the study was that they wanted to be identified by their story. Their story their individual voices. The digital storytelling experience provided an opportunity that gave these women a voice, ultimately empowering them to influence others with their story.

Moreover, the three women used the layers of their narrative script, voice recording and music, and pictures (both personal and generic web pictures) to create meaning. Similar

to the quilting metaphor used throughout the Chapter Four, each layer added a new dimension of meaning that enhanced the final product. Likewise, each layer of created during the digital storytelling process added an enhanced dimension of meaning to their moving story. In Bruner's (1990) words, each creative choice made is an act of meaning.

The women worked with family members to collect pictures and found the collaborative nature of the project an added benefit. In addition to working with family members, the women were involved collaboratively with their classmates. Lucinda pointed out in the interview session that by assisting her classmates in problem solving "...it helps me understand it better." Researchers have documented through various studies that women learn in relationship with themselves and others (Belenkey et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1976). Gilligan (1982) discovered through her research that a woman viewed her world composed of relationships and Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) made the term "knowing in connection" popular as a result of their studies about women and learning. Digital storytelling is an instructional strategy that by its very nature engages the student in creating meaning. However, the digital storytelling process was extremely powerful for these women as they worked and interacted with others including the instructor and myself, as an observer as participant in this research study. Relationships that were formed as a result of this study and digital storytelling experience continued beyond the 16 week semester. All three women stop by my office occasionally to see me and chat. All students in this particular ENG 090 class became members of our own learning community. Each student as well as the instructor became connected with one another on a much more personal level.

*How do the women respond to digital storytelling technology and what do their experiences reveal about women and learning?*

As documented in the research, the women were more afraid of choosing a topic than they were over the use of the computer. Even though all three women expressed a lack of or uneasiness with their computer skills, they were not computer-phobic. Each step was explained step by step by the English course instructor and each woman progressed successfully through each step to arrive at her final production. Computer anxiety ran high at times, especially during the assembly phase, but the women were always comforted with the “undo” option in the software. Both Lucinda and Vanessa were hesitant to play around with the software features because they did not want to “mess-up” the storyline they had already sequenced. However, Melissa wrote in her journal about the excitement she felt during the assembly process of putting all the layers together. She wrote, “I love how I could play around with my voice and the pictures as well. I could really be creative.” In concurrence with Turkle’s (1986) research, these women viewed the computer as a tool to producing their media-driven narrative. Digital storytelling allowed these women to approach the computer on their own terms by using it to create rather than conform to standards. By the end of the semester, anxiety was no longer peaked at the mention of computers, but rather all three women that participated in the study wanted to continue learning about computers and their educational applications. Furthermore, each woman commented in their summative survey that their computer skills had improved significantly. As evidence by journal writings, field notes, and interview transcriptions, each woman was faced with technology challenges, but in the end all three expressed a sense of accomplishment.

*How do developmental education research-based best practices intersect with digital storytelling?*

Another important finding throughout this study is how digital storytelling aligns with researched best practices of developmental education. McGrath & Spear (1987) called for a distinct identity for developmental education, an identity that goes beyond mechanical drills and seeks to incorporate language at the center of the curricula. They argued that developmental education should "...develop pedagogical practices powerful enough to prepare the nontraditional students adequately for the literacy requirements of academic and professional careers" (McGrath and Spear, 1987, p. 19). The field of developmental education has certainly made more than commendable progress at developing a distinct identity centered on many researched pedagogical innovations. Ironically, these pedagogical practices are migrating or are being adopted into mainstream higher education. Developmental educators are making their mark and accomplishing their goal of educating the whole student both affectively and cognitively.

Digital storytelling actively engages the developmental learner in writing a meaningful narrative. It involves both reading and writing while at the same time emphasizes the power of collaboration and process writing. Additionally, other forms of literacy - aural literacy, visual literacy, and digital literacy - are emphasized within the development of a digital story. Digital storytelling used as a pedagogical tool within a developmental education classroom has multiple benefits for the student and instructor alike. The student is transformed into a movie producer and is enticed to enter a classroom where English fundamentals are still taught, but addressed in a creative, innovative way. Likewise, the instructor becomes a facilitator rather than a lecturer and joins in the creative process with

the students while simultaneously guiding them through the writing process and providing feedback.

In terms of technology, the computer was simply a tool used to achieve a learning objective. According to Boylan (2002) use of the computer in a developmental classroom should bring a meaningful contribution to student learning. The computer, along with the software, enables students to assemble the final product into a sequenced, more powerful story. The computer was an added dimension that bound the creative layers together giving the stories an enhanced meaning. All the technology skills required for producing a digital story are applicable to the students' academic future as well as their professional career.

Findings from this study do indicate that women respond positively to digital storytelling. Gaps in the literature indicate that little attention has been given to digital storytelling technology used in an English developmental education classroom. Furthermore, the literature surveyed did not limit the focus to a particular gender as does this study. As developmental educators continue to seek an identity of pedagogical innovation in the new era, then creative, engaging, and meaningful assignments will be needed to prepare students in the new age as described by Pink (2005). Developing a digital story is one such assignment. It provides a forum for women to connect with others and share a story, which ultimately leads them to connect with who they were, who they are, and who they want to become. Digital storytelling used as a pedagogical tool fosters connectivity for women. They connect with the institution, the subject matter, the instructor, fellow students, and technology. More importantly, they connect with the intellectual community and transform their conceptions of education and trade in their defeatist attitudes and self-doubts for



positive optimism. This research reveals that the digital storytelling experience was an opportunity for the women to come to know themselves as learners.

### Conceptual Framework Revisited

The main premise of this study was to describe, analyze, and interpret the perspectives and experiences of women enrolled in a community college developmental English class that utilizes digital storytelling as a pedagogical tool. Given my purpose and social constructivist epistemological stance, I employed the method of narrative inquiry and asked the women to tell me about their past educational and life experiences in an effort to understand their past which led them to the developmental English classroom, to explore their present endeavor of mastering foundational English concepts while simultaneously creating a media driven narrative, and to describe how they view their future in relation to these experiences. According to Behar-Horenstein and Morgan (1995), “Story represents an enormous database from which to develop new understandings about the relationships among phenomena in educational contexts” (p. 1).

This study was informed by many areas of scholarly research, including the history and philosophy of developmental education and research-based best practices in the field of developmental education with an emphasis on writing instruction and technology usage. Additionally, research conducted by Gilligan (1982), Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986), Miller (1976), and Hayes and Flannery (2002) provided a conceptual framework for exploring best instructional practices to maximize learning experiences for women. Moreover, the work by Sherry Turkle (1986) added an additional dimension of understanding as she explored gender related responses to implementation of technology. All of the aforementioned scholarly research provided a framework for my exploration of the women’s perceptions and experiences with digital storytelling as it was used in their

developmental English class at Catawba Valley Community College. My study findings connect the converging fields of research together and unify the study of developmental education and digital storytelling from the perspectives of a small group of women. According to Reinharz (1992), feminist research has multiple perspectives of an existing method. However, one component remains true of feminist research. Feminist research maintains that the lives of women are important and research should contribute to the welfare of and knowledge about women. Ultimately, this study addresses a larger audience of developmental educators, administrators, instructional technology specialists, and all interested in maximizing learning experiences for women.

#### Implications for the Future

Several implications for the future of developmental education emerged from this study. Given the rapid pace of evolving change in the global economy and job marketplace, higher education must likewise respond by making continuous adjustments to meet these demands and prepare students for the 21st century workplace. According to Boylan (1999), more than 12 million undergraduates participate in developmental education during any given year. Boylan (1999) defines successful developmental programs as student oriented with a holistic approach to education. Successful programs also value the life experiences that students bring with them building upon these to develop the student both personally and academically. Even though the field of developmental education has made significant pedagogical advancements well documented in scholarly research, practitioners in the field must continue to educate and train all individuals through engaging and active professional development opportunities. Ultimately, these trained professionals will make informed curricula decisions with the primary goal of integrating developmental education theory with

practice to ensure student success. Such decisions may include the implementation of digital storytelling as an instructional tool within a developmental education classroom.

Brothen (1998) suggests that technology can indeed have a transformational role in developmental education. However, he continues to emphasize that for this to happen then the technology must be effective in transforming students. As a result of digital storytelling as an instructional tool in a developmental English classroom at Catawba Valley Community College, these three women grew and developed by taking control of their learning. They continued to persist despite academic and technological challenges and were ultimately successful in writing a narrative script and producing a digital story. Developmental education is truly establishing a high standard by aligning philosophy and learning theories with innovative, engaging instructional practices. An identity, as called for by McGrath and Spear (1987), has been established for developmental education. It is an identity with documented, transformational student success.

Catawba Valley Community College exemplifies institutional commitment for supporting the developmental educational program by implementing innovative instructional approaches to ensure student success. These practices have begun to spill over into the curriculum classes. Currently, digital storytelling has been implemented in college transfer English classes as well as foreign language classes. As noted in the CVCC strategic plan, academic excellence is the primary institutional goal and the college is committed to providing engaging, meaningful instruction. If innovative teaching strategies (i.e., digital storytelling) become both instructional and institutional goals, then students enrolled in developmental courses will learn more than foundational literacy skills; they will learn to analyze, synthesize, and think critically. A goal such as this does not conflict with the

philosophy of developmental education but rather complements its mission of fostering students' cognitive, affective, and social potential.

Realizing the need for ongoing professional development, Catawba Valley Community College has continued to support its commitment to digital storytelling not only by investing monetary capital, but also by continuing to invest in the training of faculty who desire to implement this teaching tool into their classroom. Faculty from continuing education, developmental education, as well as college transfer has taken a digital storytelling workshop sponsored by the college. For an institution to become an effective “teaching college,” it must have administrators who are knowledgeable about teaching and supportive of various efforts at improvement (Grubb, 1999). Hence, both administrative support and ongoing professional development are instrumental in improving the quality of instruction and implementing innovative pedagogies.

As community colleges and all institutions of higher education seek to improve their instructional programs to maximize learning for women, as well as for all students, administrators, education specialists, instructional technology specialists, and educators should support and encourage the use of instructional pedagogies that engage the student in reading, writing, and mathematical thinking from a variety of perspectives. Students should be actively engaged in relatively realistic learning activities rather than merely participating in drills. Grubb (1999) cautions, that while there may be a place for drill in every program, educators should not use drill exercises exclusively.

Futhermore, institutions of higher learning can maximize the learning experiences of women by:

- Utilizing pedagogies, such as digital storytelling, that foster individual voice (the telling of her story), transformation, and collaboration.
- Limiting the use of lecture and encouraging instructional faculty to employ other approaches such as personalized instruction, verbal praise, cooperative learning, storytelling, figurative language, open-ended writing, learning communities, field trips, and service learning. Again, digital storytelling is such an instructional tool that combines several of these approaches into the culminating project.
- Implementing technology that is used as a tool to accomplish a meaningful task rather than supplementing the text with electronic exercises.
- Developing activities/projects that will be shared with a larger audience.
- Hiring teaching professionals who maintain the philosophy of teaching as a “guide on the side” rather than the “sage on the stage” (Grubb, 1999).

One statement that bears reiteration is that learning objectives or content standards for any course can always be made more challenging, stimulating, and meaningful when approached from a constructivist epistemological stance using specific learning tools. Grubb (1999) describes that,

... in the absence of explicit forms of instructor preparation (including informal preparation like mentoring), instructors will probably follow approaches that are most familiar from their own education, which is likely to be conventional behaviorist teaching. (p.5)

The new generation of students demands much more. Developmental educators must seek to teach content standards as before, but educators are challenged to think

creatively to use 21st century learning tools to teach in a new way. As educators in an ever-changing society, we are called upon to think and teach in a new way.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

Conducted at Catawba Valley Community College, this narrative inquiry study, while intended to address a gap in the existing literature, by no means presents an exhaustive exploration of the digital storytelling, developmental education, and women and learning. Thus, I offer several recommendations for future scholarship. Although I explored a small group of women's perceptions of and reactions to developing a digital story in a developmental English classroom, I did not delve into the instructor perspective, prompting the need for additional studies. The developmental education instructor has a unique role within the developmental classroom that utilizes digital storytelling as a pedagogical tool. Moreover, a comparative study between perceptions and experiences of men and women would result in a valuable future study.

Future researchers might explore the digital storytelling workshops that seek to train other instructors or professional staff, like that in Catawba Valley Community College. Furthermore, an intriguing inquiry concerns the design, development, and implementation of digital storytelling at a community college. Such research could be helpful to guide and facilitate other community colleges in the implementation of this technology into the curriculum.

Digital storytelling is a compelling assignment that simultaneously addresses content standards while engaging students with 21st century technology. As the economy continues to fluctuate, more and more students are passing through the open door of the community college. The field of developmental education is on a precipice. The time is ripe for developmental educators to showcase their pedagogical and programmatic innovations and

articulate a distinct identity (McGrath & Spear, 1987). By implementing pedagogies such as digital storytelling into the developmental education classroom women and ultimately society are transformed.

### Summary and Conclusions

Guided by the primary purpose of exploring the field of developmental education, digital storytelling, and women and learning, I conducted a thematic narrative inquiry at Catawba Valley Community College in Hickory, North Carolina. Moreover, I synthesized the contemporary research with the experiences of women enrolled in a developmental English (ENG 090) class that utilized digital storytelling as a pedagogical tool. In Chapter Four, I described the study site, offered detailed background descriptions of the women, and presented study findings. Through interviews, observations, and document analyses, I sought to understand the perspectives of three women developmental students as they produced and individual digital story. By triangulating the data sources and obtaining member checks of the interviews from the participants, I established the study's trustworthiness.

During the data coding and analysis, I identified five important stages of digital storytelling development. The stages include: 1) choosing a meaningful topic, 2) composing a written script of no more than 375 words (restriction established by the instructor), 3) recording the script, 4) collecting and editing 30-50 pictures, and 5) assembling the moving by sequencing pictures and added the recorded narrative and music. These stages resurfaced time and again as each woman worked towards the completion of her digital story. As I provided a rich detailed account of the each woman's experience as she progressed through the development process, I was mindful of the following guiding research questions:

- How do women use digital storytelling technology to create meaning?

- How do women respond to digital storytelling technology, and what do their experiences reveal about women and learning?
- How do developmental education research-based best practices intersect with digital storytelling?

At the beginning of the process, all three women struggled with selecting a topic for their digital story. As the process began to unfold, the women created meaning step-by-step as each one engaged in dialogue with one another, learned about herself in relation to one another, discovered an inner voice, and ultimately developed an outward voice as a means of self-expression. As evidenced by the women's digital stories (Appendix F), each woman became the heroine of her own story.

In response to the second research question, digital storytelling allowed the women to approach the computer on their own terms. The computer was a tool that provided creative avenues of self-expression. Although each woman was faced with technological challenges, her lack of computer skills did not impede the production of her media-driven narrative. Each woman expressed a sense of accomplishment with the final product and was empowered with self-confidence.

Regarding the third research question about how developmental research-based best practices intersect with digital storytelling, I documented supporting evidence that reveals how digital storytelling addresses basic writing and reading skills in a new engaging way. Writing the narrative script involved reading and writing while simultaneously incorporating collaboration among peers and emphasizing the importance of process writing. Through the implementation of digital storytelling, basic writing fundamentals are taught in a creative, innovative manner.



Given the many advances in the field of developmental education, developmental educators remained challenged to seek ways to use 21st century technology to teach age-old content standards. In this study, I have explored one such technology that has multiple benefits for women developmental English students. Digital storytelling actively engages all students in a meaningful, realistic learning activity and fosters personal transformation and connectivity for women.

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## Appendix A: Lay Summary

Dear ENG 090 Students,

You are invited to participate in a research study that seeks to understand women developmental English students and their perceptions of digital storytelling. This research is being done as part of my program as a doctoral student at Appalachian State University.

I am asking you to participate because I believe that your experiences and feedback are essential to improving developmental education practices as well as learning for women students. The possible benefits to you doing this study are that you will have an opportunity to share your thoughts about digital storytelling, hear about other's experiences with the technology, and you may even make some new friends. In addition, your participation in this study may help me and others better understand how to improve our teaching. There is, however a risk, that sharing our stories could be uncomfortable or emotional depending on the chosen topic.

For the most part, I will be attending class and making notes. However, I will be conducting small group interviews three times a semester: one at planning stages of developing your digital story, one at mid-point of the development, and finally the last interview will occur at the completion and performance stage of your digital story. Each interview session will last up to one hour. If you are chosen to participate in the small group interviews I would like your permission to tape-record the interview session as well as take notes. I will be the only person to listen to the tape or view the notes taken. I will protect your identity by allowing you to choose a name that will be used throughout my study. Also, I

would like to use your digital story as part of my research. At the end of this consent, I will ask you to also sign a release form giving me permission to do so.

The most important thing for you to remember while you are participating in this study with me is that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions I ask you. All I am looking for is your opinion or ideas. Should I ask you to tell me more, or explain your answer, it is because I want to be really sure I understand what you are telling me. Always remember that in this situation you are the expert, or teacher, and you are explaining to me about your experiences with digital storytelling.

You should also know that you can decide to not participate in this study, or stop doing it at any time after you have started- this is your decision. If you decide to stop doing this study, your decision will not affect any future relationship you have with me, Catawba Valley Community College or Appalachian State University.

Sincerely,

Donna Boston Ross, ASU Doctoral Candidate

Appendix B: Digital Storytelling Student Release Form

Digital Storytelling Release Form

I hereby consent to the use of my digital story to Donna Boston Ross for use in her doctoral research studies at Appalachian State University. I understand that if my story is selected for her dissertation it will be published and made available for others to see. In addition, my digital story could be used at professional conferences and/or professional presentations.

I hereby indemnify you and your licensees respecting any claim or action against you, your licensees or the executives and personnel, arising from my actions or statements.

Signed this \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name -- Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City/State/Zip Code

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number

Witness:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name -- Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

### Appendix C: Journal Entry Prompts

- What does it mean to you to be a developmental English student?
- Has your experiences in this developmental English class differed from what you had imagined? What were some of your expectations? So far, does this class meet, exceed, or fail to meet your expectations?
- After viewing a few digital stories created by other ENG 090 students, how do you feel about creating your own digital story? Why do you feel this way?
- Do you enjoy watching other digital stories created by other students? Why or why not?
- How did you choose your story? Why was it important to share this story?
- In comparison to other classes you have taken whether in high school or college, do you think the role of the teacher/instructor is different in any way? If so, how is the teacher's role different in ENG 090 that uses digital storytelling technology? If possible, provide examples.
- Now that you have worked with the digital storytelling technology, would you say your technology skills have improved? If so, in what ways?
- Many times on a large project, students make unexpected discoveries about themselves? Did you learn anything about yourself in the digital storytelling process? Explain.
- Would you say this digital storytelling enhanced your college experience? If so, how? If not, how did it fail to meet your needs as a college student?



- Other than your digital story, which classmate's story did you enjoy watching the most during the performance stage of the digital stories? Why?
- Will you use the skills you have learned in making this digital story in other college courses and in your workplace? If so, what ways?

## Appendix D: Reflective Essay with Summative Survey

### **Reflect On Your Learning**

Write ½ to a full page describing your learning experience in the digital storytelling project. Staple your response to the survey sheet. Be sure to explain your challenges as well as your achievements in digital storytelling. Answering the pre-writing questions below will help you plan your reflective essay.

1. Looking back at your digital story work, what makes you feel most proud?
2. What was the most challenging part of creating a digital story?
3. What was the most enjoyable part of creating a digital story?
4. If you could talk to the students who will create digital stories next semester, what advice would you give?
5. Will you use your expertise in digital storytelling for other projects in college or in your career?
6. How and why did you select the subject for your digital story?
7. What is the most important thing you learned from creating a digital story?
8. Discuss your confidence level as a learner prepared to confront new challenges and difficult assignments.
9. Discuss your ability to use technology now with your ability at the beginning of the semester.
10. Tell anything else related to this experience that you would like to share.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class Hour: \_\_\_\_ Story Title: \_\_\_\_\_

**On the following scale, rate your learning (your dendrite growth) from participating in the digital storytelling project. Circle the number that best matches your skill development in each area.**

Little Improvement	Some Improvement	Much Improvement	Significant Improvement	Very Competent I can help others do this.
1	3	5	7	10

**Written communication skills** (Using narrative point, exact wording, conciseness, clarity of ideas, and logical organization)

1	3	5	7	10
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**Creative Expression** (Using originality including metaphor and simile to enrich communication)

1	3	5	7	10
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**Oral communication skills** (Recording your own voice; speaking with clarity)

1	3	5	7	10
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**Critical Thinking Skills** (Staying organized, figuring out problems and planning ahead)

1	3	5	7	10
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**Technology Skills** (Following directions and feeling confidence with Adobe software)

1	3	5	7	10
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**Collaboration Skills** (Demonstrating ability to solve problems with others)

1	3	5	7	10
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**Learner Confidence** (Demonstrating a positive attitude for tackling new projects)

1	3	5	7	10
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## Appendix E: Interview Questions

- If I were to give you a camera and asked you to take snap shots of your learning experiences in elementary, middle, high school, and even higher education, what would I see? Who would I see?
- How did you feel when you received your placement test results and discovered you would be enrolled in a developmental English class?
- What is your definition of a developmental student?
- What kinds of learning activities are most beneficial to you as a student?
- How would you categorize yourself as a computer user? A beginner? An experienced user? An expert user? Tell me why.
- Digital storytelling requires many tasks including Writing the script, locating the pictures, sizing pictures, recording the script, and building the movie. When you reflect on the hard work that went into building your digital story, which part of the process was most difficult? Which part was the most enjoyable? Why?
- How was your reaction when you learned that creating a digital story was a requirement for this class? How do you feel about it now?
- How did you choose your topic for your digital story?
- What made you want to tell the story you told in your digital story project?
- When you reflect on the process of creating a digital story, of what are you most proud?

- Individuals learn in many different ways. How did creating a digital story meet or fail to meet your personal learning style?
- What role do you think digital storytelling plays in your ENG 090 classroom?

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Donna Boston Ross was born in Hickory, North Carolina, on February 7, 1969. She graduated from Appalachian State University Boone, North Carolina, magna cum laude with a B.S. in Elementary Education and Spanish Education in 1991. Additionally, she received an M.A. in Spanish Education and an Ed.S. in Higher Education Administration in 1995 and 2004 respectively from Appalachian State University. As a doctoral candidate, she was awarded a travel grant from the Appalachian State University Office of Student Research that partially funded her travel expenses to co-conduct a pre-conference workshop on the multiple benefits of digital storytelling at the 2011 National Association of Developmental Educators conference held in Washington, D.C. She received her Ed. D. in Educational Leadership from Appalachian State University.

Dr. Ross currently serves as the Department Chair of Humanities and is the 2011 Excellence in Teaching award recipient at Catawba Valley Community College in Hickory, North Carolina. She resides in Claremont, North Carolina with her husband Bryan and their three children Matthew, Luke, and Jessica.