“I am proud that I did it and it’s a piece of me”: Digital Storytelling in the Foreign Language Classroom

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ABSTRACT
This case study examines students’ experiences regarding the infusion of digital storytelling in their high school fourth-year Spanish class. The aim of this case study is to determine if digital storytelling can be an effective tool for language learners to communicate emotion and present information to an audience. Sources of information for this case study include pre- and post-open-ended questionnaires, pre- and post-focus groups, semi-structured subsequent interviews, as well as observation and reflection journals. The findings reveal an epistemological shift that frames students’ perspectives. The data recount a shift in the understanding of the purpose of the digital storytelling task in the sense that the learners’ focus changes from the elements of language and technology to a meaningful project as a whole. The findings also confirm that digital storytelling projects adhere to the presentational mode of communication, follow the writing process, and engage students in a meaningful, real world task in the foreign language classroom.

KEYWORDS
Digital Storytelling, Multiliteracy, Technology-mediated Projects, Presentational Communication

INTRODUCTION
A special night with all the makings of a red-carpet affair—dressy attire, low lights, and anticipation—unfolded in the high school computer lab. Teachers, classmates, administrators, and parents squeezed into the room to watch digital stories created by Spanish students. One by one, each “filmmaker” delivered an introduction in English before sharing a personal digital story narrated in Spanish. The audience responded with tears and laughter to the stories, which ranged from comedic to dramatic to sentimental. Visibly proud and moved, the teacher presented each student with a rose and spoke about each one’s accomplishments during the story-making process.

This vignette describes the scene at a “premiere” of digital stories produced by high school students in a Spanish foreign language class in the Midwest. During a semester-long collaboration, a high school teacher, a university faculty member, a graduate student, and the Spanish high school students incorporated digital stories into the class curriculum. They aimed to embed current technological trends in foreign language teaching practices. The original goal of the case study was to examine the feasibility of creating digital stories, a genre typically used in general education classrooms, in the foreign language classroom. The findings show that it is not only possible, but for many reasons desirable, for language learners to author digital stories in a target language.
LITERATURE REVIEW

U.S. high schools, teachers, and students face many challenges today. In 2006, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) delivered a proposal for education reform to Congress. The document “calls for personalized learning to ensure that students assume ownership for connecting their learning with future goals” (p. 2). One way to achieve personalized instruction of students is through the use of technology in educational settings. High school students themselves are clamoring for increased use of technology in the classroom. A survey from CDW-Government (2012), a company that reviews technology products and services for business, government, and education, found that although teachers are using technology in the classroom, “69% of students would like to incorporate even more technology into their classes as a learning tool” (p. 9).

Directly related to foreign language (FL), Zhao (2003), compiled a review of recent developments in technology and language learning and concluded that modern technology can help enhance the authenticity of communication. In the FL field, it is generally accepted that when language is practiced in meaningful contexts with activities that make connections to learners, students attain competency for real-world communication (Brown 2007; Curtain & Dahlberg, 2009; Hadley, 2001; Sandrock & Webb, 2003; Shrum & Glisan, 2010). Meaningful contexts help teachers follow professional requirements while relevant activities connect to learners’ needs. Consequently, FL teachers constantly seek innovative activities that practice language in purposeful contexts.

Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling projects are categorized as project-based instruction that utilizes interdisciplinary technology by incorporating writing, reading, drama, and technology. Digital stories provide a valuable opportunity for students to engage in authentic tasks that allow for self-construction of meaning (Jonassen, Peck, & Wilson, 1999), a key element for personalizing instruction. This study demonstrates the use of one particular type of technology, digital storytelling, as a viable means for teachers to create a platform for meaningful, real-world communication and for learners to engage purposefully with technology and language.

Digital storytelling is the practice of combining multiple modes of technology, such as photographs, text, music, audio narration, and video clips, to produce a compelling, emotional, and in-depth story. The digitally packaged short films range from three to five minutes long. Story plots include personal narratives capturing a defining moment in a person’s life, accomplishment stories, memoirs honoring a special person, and community concerns. The seven compulsory components of digital stories are listed below (see Figure 1).
Figure 1
Seven Elements of Digital Stories (Lambert 2006, 2007)

1. Point of view
   The central theme of the story
2. Dramatic question
   A query that captivates the audience’s attention
3. Emotional content
   The contemplative issue that comes to life in the story
   The author’s voice used to narrate the story and underscore the emotional content to help the audience understand the content
4. The gift of voice
   The music that supports, embellishes, and adds emotion to the story
5. The power of the soundtrack
   The use of adequate content to tell the story and the exclusion of unnecessary details
6. Economy of language
   The speech rate at which the story is told, not too quickly or too slowly
7. Pacing

The digital storytelling process is creative and cyclical as stories are revised, edited, and revisited several times, with established steps that move the author from concept to completion. The practice entails planning, writing, scripting, obtaining feedback from peers, revising, designing storyboards, digitizing the story elements, and presenting the product to an audience (Lambert, 2006, 2007). The label “digital storytelling” might be deceiving at first blush, but prospective adopters of this type of project must bear in mind that the focus of digital storytelling is the story, rather than the digital aspect. As Banaszewski (2002) writes, “the technology [is] always secondary to the storytelling” (p.1). Digital storytellers spend little time learning and using the software and spend ample time crafting, revising, and narrating the story. Similarly, teachers who infuse these multi-literacy projects spend little time teaching technology because the majority of the time is spent coaching, revising, and providing feedback.

A small but growing body of research evaluates digital storytelling in first language (L1) and second language (L2) classrooms. Banaszewski (2002), Davis (2004), and Kajder (2004) documented the use of digital stories in middle- and high-school English classes with L1 speakers. Others examined digital storytelling in L2 classrooms. Sadik (2008) explored the use of digital stories in various content areas including English as a foreign language (EFL) while Cloud, Lakin, and Leininger (2011) and Vinogradova, Linville, and Bickel (2011) documented the use of digital storytelling with adolescent and adult English language learners (ELLs). These studies found that digital stories can advance cognitive development, self-authoring, and identity construction (Davis, 2004; Sadik, 2008). They can also teach valuable technical skills, engage students, sharpen critical thinking skills, and expand the audience to whom students present (Ohler, 2006; Sadik, 2008). With careful planning and implementation, students put their stories first, later choosing only those technological effects that drive the story (Kajder, 2004). Although the benefits of digital storytelling have been established in a handful of disciplines, it is not regularly featured in general classrooms and is even more rare in foreign-language classrooms. Ohler (2006) cautions that “[i]f digital stories are going to survive in education, they need to be tied to the curriculum and used to strengthen students’ critical thinking, report writing, and media literacy skills” (p. 46). The central notion of this study is that digital stories can also enhance language teaching and learning.

Although digital stories are not currently common practice in the language classroom, they could prove especially beneficial for foreign language learners. Teachers must be creative and resourceful to implement learning tasks that meet the Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century (National Standards, 2006), adhere to one of the communicative modes, and follow current models of language learning such as the writing process. Digital storytelling lends itself to narration of meaningful stories as a medium that
allows L2 learners to better express their opinions and create an emotional context for an audience (Hayes, 2011), adheres to the multiliteracy approach to learning, follows task-based language teaching, is considered project-based learning, and meets the requirements of the process approach to writing.

**Multimedia Literacy**

Pedagogically, the digital storytelling process is a fine example of a “multiliteracy” approach. Because of its simultaneous use of foreign language and technology, digital storytelling in an L2 addresses both the “increasing cultural and linguistic diversity” and the “multiplicity of communications channels” that impact students’ social growth (New London Group, 1996). In other words, students must not only learn to cope with an increasingly globalized society by connecting with other cultures through language, but must also gain competence in representing their own thoughts with new communication technologies. L2 digital storytelling marries these two aims.

A multiliteracy approach also emphasizes communities of learning that exist outside the classroom walls. If designed to include components such as a personal narrative stemming from out-of-class experiences, digital storytelling taps into the learners’ existing communities of learning and promotes autonomy in language learning (Hafner & Miller, 2011; New London Group, 1996, 2000). Digital storytelling is similar in spirit to its written equivalent, the multigenre paper, which frees the writer from traditional structure and allows multiple forms of expression arising from “research, experience, and imagination” (Romano, 2000). Digital storytelling narratives depict personal experiences while the use of technology fuels an imaginative and creative process.

**Technology-mediated, task-based multiliteracy projects**

Digital stories are comprised of meaningful tasks whereby students use the L2 to convey a story to an audience. In the field of language teaching and learning, such production of a meaningful outcome is considered task-based learning. In task-based learning, the endeavor focuses on meaning (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Skehan, 1998) and has a specific purpose or objective (Ellis, 2003; Richards, Platt, & Weber, 1985). When tasks are performed in a classroom setting, the work undertaken by learners and teachers becomes a pedagogical task (Richards, et al., 1985) and when carried out using technology, the task becomes a technology-mediated task (Chapelle, 2001). Chapelle (2001) considers the use of tasks in a technology setting and reminds us, “anyone concerned with second language teaching and learning in the 21st century needs to grasp the nature of the unique technology-mediated tasks learners can engage in for language acquisition” (p. 2). Technology-mediated tasks increase students’ motivation (Olsen, 1980; Ushida, 2005). The digital storytelling project is a distinctive and motivational technology-mediated task.

Moreover, when tasks require a compilation of several components, the aggregated tasks become a project. According to Nunan (2004), “projects can be thought of as ‘maxi-tasks,’ that is a collection of sequenced and integrated tasks that all add up to a final project” (p. 133). The digital storytelling project requires milestones, or micro tasks, along the way that lead to the culminating assignment. For Ribe and Vidal (1993), the large macro-task of the story is comprised of smaller micro-steps. Indeed, this is the case with a digital story where writing paragraphs or sections of the story leads to the final draft that is recorded and used in the culminating product.

Presentational writing as a process

Whether the task is an in- or out-of-class activity, the digital story should always align with the writing process approach, following these steps: planning, drafting, obtaining feedback, reviewing, and publishing (Flower & Hayes, 1981). Since the publication of this seminal piece in the L1 field advocating for consideration of the diverse set of processes involved in writing, the process approach has been alive and thriving in the L2 profession. The process writing approach was a response to teacher-centered and product-oriented approaches that were once at the heart of teaching writing (Matsuda, 2003; Silva, 1990). The process approach to writing advocates a student-centered view of teaching that values the procedures taken to complete a task as well as the product itself (Kern & Schultz, 1992; Leki, Cumming, & Silva, 2008; Matsuda, 2003; Scott, 1996). Writing in the new paradigm involves “the process of helping students discover their own voice, of recognizing that students have something important to say, of allowing students to choose their own topics, of providing teacher and peer feedback, of encouraging revision, and of using student writing as the primary text of the course” (Matsuda, 2003, p. 1). The goal in process writing is to shepherd learners through the steps that lead to a polished product that communicates a meaningful message to an audience.

Similarly, task-based language teaching is based on the premise that meaning and message creation are at the heart of the project (Skehan, 1998). When faced with personal meaning-focused tasks, teachers provide feedback on the various grammatical forms that learners use to communicate their message to the audience (Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001). Since each digital story is unique, feedback is personalized for each learner and teachers provide targeted feedback on meaning and form. As Ellis (2006) puts it, “in the meaning-focused lessons [feedback] is likely to be directed at whatever errors learners happen to make” (p. 94).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this case study was, broadly speaking, grounded in ethnographic and phenomenological assumptions of research, as presented by Stake (1995). According to Merriam (2002), a case study is “an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit, such as an individual, group, institution, or community” (p. 8). The unit for this case study, 12 students in a Spanish as a foreign language class, comprised a bounded and integrated community (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 2002). By focusing on a single group, this study aimed to uncover the interaction and significant factors (Merriam, 1998) characteristic of the digital storytelling process in the foreign language classroom.

My default role was observer as participant (Gold, 1958). At times, I quietly watched and listened to students’ interactions while at other times I played a more active role and interviewed students. Consequently, the study takes a phenomenological or experiential approach to describing, understanding, and interpreting the experience of students creating digital stories in Spanish. This study “focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience” (Patton, 2002, p. 107). Using ethnographic methods and a phenomenological perspective in a case study in which digital stories were created in a high school Spanish class is well suited for addressing the research problems raised here.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this case study was to examine the feasibility of including digital stories in the language classroom by examining students’ experiences and perspectives throughout the project. The following three questions guided the study:

1. What are students’ initial skills, concerns, and understanding regarding the production of digital stories?
2. What are students’ concerns when engaged in the digital storytelling tasks?
3. What are the overall student perceptions of the digital storytelling experience?

Participants

A total of 12 students (six females and six males) participated in this case study. Ten participants were native English speakers and two were heritage Spanish speakers. One of the heritage speakers arrived in this country at an early age and commenced his studies in English in first grade, while the other arrived two years prior to the study. The first can be considered an English dominant learner (Valdés, 2001) with vocabulary and pronunciation skills in Spanish, while the second was a Spanish dominant bilingual (Valdés, 2001) developing her English academic language. The 10 native English participants had completed three years of Spanish study and their proficiency level can be categorized between Novice-High and Intermediate-Low, “L2 learners after 2 years of high school language study” or “L2 learners after 4 years of high school language sequence” respectively (Swender, 2003). Given that nine of the participants were seniors in high school and this was their last year before graduating at the end of the semester, a prompt (provided in The Project section below) for the digital story was crafted to engage students by eliciting reflection on their prior high school experience.

Data Sources

During the twelve-week period in the classroom, I collected data in five forms: a) pre-project open-ended questionnaires, b) subsequent pre-project focus group discussions, c) post-project open-ended questionnaires, d) subsequent post-project focus group sessions, as well as e) observation and reflection journals that the graduate student and I kept (see appendices A, B, C, and D). I administered questionnaires and the graduate student and I led the focus groups. Questions for the focus group discussions were based on information gleaned from the open-ended questionnaires.

Additional sources of data include feedback from ongoing teacher conferences and photographs from the process and premiere. In most cases, I digitally recorded interviews for later transcription. When a quiet space for recording was not available, the graduate student transcribed responses on a laptop. I also gathered data through informal conversations with students and the teacher, and recorded these data in my daily observation journals.

Data Analysis

My approach to data collection and analysis facilitated the emergence of important themes and topics. I used existing digital storytelling literature to design the pre-project questionnaires. I reviewed the pre-project questionnaire responses to formulate probes for the focus group and semi-structured interviews to evoke richer responses and clarification (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). I then created individual interview questions based on the data obtained in both the questionnaires and focus groups in order to elicit in-depth understanding of participants’ knowledge and perceptions throughout the process. As Merriam (1998) recommends, “[t]he right way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection” (p. 162).

The analysis entailed sorting, coding, dividing, reassembling, and reducing data into manageable forms that allowed interpretation. As patterns emerged, I identified themes and categories and grouped analogous statements. Additionally, I documented salient points and themes, noticing not only what was happening, but also the value and implications of these actions on subsequent data collection (Duff, 2008). The final product was a theme-based
table with color-coded statements placed under each theme. I analyzed the data thematically and used the multiple sources of data to interpret the results.

The Project
All Spanish language teachers in the local school district were invited to participate in the study via email. Due to the nature of this qualitative study and the time required to work with the curriculum, teachers, students, and technology, only one teacher along with one of her classes was selected to participate. The teacher selected was the first teacher to volunteer to embed the digital storytelling project in her course. The graduate student and I worked closely with the teacher to integrate the project into the curriculum. The main role of the graduate student was to provide technological assistance, especially when students were in the lab compiling the digital story components.

I also adhered to Lambert’s (2006) digital storytelling process that entails presenting samples, brainstorming, scripting, giving and receiving feedback, revising scripts, designing storyboards, recording audio, and digitizing the story elements. The first of these steps involved viewing readily available online samples created for the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS, n.d.) and the Scott County Digital Storytelling Center (SCDSC, n.d.), all of which are in English, as well as one sample in Spanish that I created for the purpose of this study. It was also important to show digital stories that were made in community settings, as well as in school settings, in order to demonstrate how digital stories can encompass personal narratives, memorial stories, and accomplishment stories, and how they can be completed by students of varying ages.

Because it was the last year of high school for many of the students in the course participating in the research project, the teacher and I designed a prompt that would capture this particular moment in the students’ lives:

You are on the verge of graduating high school. Now is an ideal time to share a story from your high school experience. Think of a story that you want to share with your peers as well as with an audience. You will package this story and present it to an audience on the last day of the project.

This prompt was followed by a class brainstorm session for potential topics. Next, following Lambert’s (2009) recommendation, students wrote a 250-375-word first draft of their story in Spanish as a homework assignment (personal communication, February 23, 2009). Students in the course had previously written compositions but all were less than 250 words. At first, the teacher and I were unsure how the students would react to limiting a story to 250-375 words, or in this second language setting, to producing a composition with a minimum of 250. Surprisingly, the students perceived this composition limit in an original and unexpected manner—as an attainable goal. One student remarked: “I can write a 250-word story in Spanish!” (observation notes data) during the presentation of digital storytelling samples and the instructions for the project. Following the homework assignment, the students turned in the first draft of their story to the teacher, who read them and provided feedback in the margins. As other studies in the field recommend (Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Ellis, et al., 2001), the feedback provided by the teacher in this project centered on the grammatical forms the learners needed to communicate their message to the audience.

A few days later, the students were divided into groups of six, creating two groups for the story circle activity. During this story circle activity, the students in each group took turns reading their stories aloud and receiving oral feedback from their peers, teacher, and sometimes from myself. We set specific parameters for feedback and interactions during this time of sharing. Students were told that they would have four minutes to discuss their
story and that the time was entirely theirs. This allotted time could be used to discuss their stories with their peers, to reflect, and/or to think aloud. Group members were instructed to provide feedback by using the expression, si fuera mi cuento, yo... (if this were my story, I...). The students eagerly used this expression because it provided a comfortable environment for offering comments and suggestions to one another’s stories without detracting from the author’s intention. The teacher and researcher respected and gave priority to student participation and saved their own comments until the end of the four minutes. Then, as homework, students revised their scripts using peer and teacher feedback and turned these in as a second draft. Based on teacher feedback and on student interest to continue working on their drafts, several students completed a third and/or fourth draft (see Appendix E for a sample of first and final drafts). Four in-class days with multiple homework assignments were dedicated to the writing process of the narrative.

Once ample time was spent finalizing the stories, the project moved for five days into the computer lab where students created storyboards. Storyboarding entails separating one’s story into natural and/or purposeful breaks, embellishing the story with pictures, and sequencing the pictures accordingly. Storyboarding procedures require students to continue reading, and sometimes editing, their story. We spent one day in the lab searching for pictures and creating the storyboards. Some students brought in personal hard copies of pictures to scan. Some searched for personal pictures on social networking sites, while others searched for representative images on the web. Half a day in the lab was used for a mini tutorial on the iMovie software, in which they learned how to add text titles and transitional slides, as well as to import photos and audio. The remaining three and a half days were used to record the narration and compile the digital story. Three private audio recording stations were set up so that students could take turns recording their scripts while others worked with their images in the iMovie software. Most students read their story aloud, listened to the audio recording, decided to make minor edits, and repeated this process until they were satisfied with the outcome of the story. Subsequently, students digitized all the story elements—audio recording, text, pictures, and music—and finalized their project.

The culminating step of the process was the movie premiere. The object was for students to experience an authentic audience as well as to revel in the joys that accompany the satisfaction of finishing a labor-intensive product. The original arrangement was to present the digital stories in the classroom to an audience of peers. But because of the high quality of the finished pieces, the teacher decided to organize a much larger event that would showcase the students’ remarkable work to a larger audience. The teacher reserved the computer lab, purchased red roses to give as gifts to each student, and sent out an invitation to parents, colleagues, administrators, and community members. The teacher’s decision to include a broader audience helped in expanding on “the traditional composition or speech created for an audience of ‘the teacher’” (Phillips, 2008, p. 99). Phillips (2008) recommends that we broaden the audience for our students and this assignment helped us achieve this goal. Once everyone was gathered in the larger computer lab, the teacher introduced each student one by one, asked each student to introduce his/her story to the audience, shared with the audience an aspect of the process or product that made her proud of the student, gave the student a rose, and asked the lab coordinator to play each video. Few members of the audience spoke Spanish, but because the stories were comprised of pictures, music, and text, all were able to get a sense of what the students were portraying. The importance of the Spanish-speaking audience will be discussed in the findings section of this paper.

**FINDINGS**

Classroom integration of digital storytelling was observed to provide a picture of students’ concerns and overall perceptions of the project. Students’ understandings of the process
were observed prior to, during, and upon completion of the project. Student comments specifically addressed the topics of background knowledge and comfort, steps taken to complete the project, the impact of audience, and the value of meaningful contexts. Themes emerged during the project and analysis of the data and have been categorized accordingly as pre, mid, and post project perceptions.

**Initial Concerns and Understanding of the Project**

The pre-project questionnaire and subsequent focus group data helped establish students’ background knowledge, understanding, and concerns with the digital storytelling project. When asked about images that came to mind and concerns they might have had with the impending tasks, the majority of the students were concerned with details of both language and technology.

At this pre-project stage, many responses were narrowly focused on the details of language. Participants centered their comments and anxieties on the grammatical elements of the story. For example, Amy expressed that she felt “somewhat comfortable,” that she is “not a pro at speaking Spanish and that she tend[s] to be off structurally when [she] speak[s].” George admitted to us that he wanted “assistance in grammar aspects, technical aspects, and pronunciation before [he] complete[s] the final product.”

The nuances of language (e.g., structure, grammar) were at the forefront of most students’ concerns at these beginning stages of the project. This is not surprising given students’ views on grammar correction. Although research on grammar correction as a whole is incomplete and inconsistent, what we do know is that students have stated a strong desire to receive feedback (Ferris, 2004). This seems to be the case for George who craves guidance with all the elements in language.

Similarly, with regard to technology, students first focused on the hardware and software aspects used to create a digital story. Among the comments, the most prevalent images that came to mind for students included “iMovie,” “montages,” “photos,” “music,” and “cameras.” Todd put it this way: a digital story “includes pictures, video clips, someone narrating a story on a screen . . . use pictures or video to stress what you’re talking about to draw in the audience.” Given that we would create the digital story using Macintosh computers, George discussed his anxiety with this platform: “Apples are confusing. There's only one button on the mouse. PCs are ok.”

Although the micro aspects of the task, including technology and facets of language, were the main initial concerns and understanding of the project for the majority of the students in the class, some students captured the essence of the digital storytelling task: focusing on the story. Rachel went beyond the ancillary technological aspects and talked about a meaningful story: “you put picture and music to tell a story about something that has left an imprint on your life.” Kelly echoed the importance of the story, saying, “I know that digital storytelling is when a story is portrayed through images and words about a specific event or subject in a person’s life.”

It is interesting that the majority of students’ comments regarding their basic understanding of the task focused mainly on the minutiae of the project at this pre-project stage. Our understanding of a task before we commence doing the work can affect the process we are going to embark upon.

**Process concerns**

Using the data obtained during the post-project questionnaire and focus group data, I teased out evidence relating to students’ notions regarding the revision and editing process of the digital story. This section will focus on the six middle components of Lambert’s (2006)
digital storytelling process (as described above). For the purpose of focusing on process findings in this section, I will discuss presentation to an audience (Lambert, 2006) and the publication (Flower & Hayes, 1981) in the following section.

It appears that the teacher’s feedback prompted multiple revisions until the story was “right” and raised awareness of errors by allowing students to “see” the issues with the document. Mary described how they felt about the drafting process as well as the assistance obtained from the teacher in this way: “The hardest part was first writing my story in Spanish but the teacher helped edit it so I could revise it until it was right.” Sarah also commented on the value of drafts and teacher feedback:

Editing [the digital story] with my teacher cleared up some grammar confusions I had . . . I liked being able to do drafts and seeing what I am doing wrong. On a test you can’t make improvements and I don’t usually get to do that with my Spanish.

The draft process likewise encouraged students to seek out specific vocabulary. George used the dictionary to look up such words as “spickets” and “slums” as well as adjectives that included “dusty,” while Kathy used the vocabulary she knew and incorporated new words:

You got to put it all together. I was able to use vocabulary and grammar I had built up over the years. I also learned some new vocabulary specific to my interests.

Sarah points out that she learned vocabulary indicative to her story:

I learned a lot of vocabulary because it was personal to me. I was constantly thinking, how do I say this in Spanish? Once I got it done, I was glad I learned all the vocabulary I learned.

After completing their compositions, students moved into one of the two private audio recording stations to record their story scripts. During this step, students read their story aloud and the script was digitally recorded on a computer. The technology availed students the opportunity to listen to the audio recording and if they were not pleased with the product, to rerecord the script. All of the students took advantage of this option, some rerecorded the audio two times, but the majority rerecorded the audio multiple times. Although rerecording required more time investment, it appears the experience was positive: Amy said, “I have never recorded myself. It helped a lot deleting because I had to do it like twenty times . . . I liked it because I got to hear myself and I got to experience how I talk in Spanish.” Another student, Sarah, reported that “recording it took me a lot of tries to get the entire story reading through without a lot of breaks or mispronunciations. There are still a few, but it’s not enough to make it worth rerecording.”

When the teacher and I had a conference to review the students’ experience, she discussed her impression of the recording sessions. Kyle told us, “It helped that I could delete because I edited it a lot. I wanted to catch my mistakes.” The teacher noted that, “‘Delete’ is a technology term that the students use but it is all about self-awareness.” This was especially the case for Kyle, who “wanted to catch all [his] mistakes.” The self-awareness benefits extended to one of the heritage learners in the class. After listening to her first recording, Lisa decided to rerecord her speech and adjust her expression to the audience of teacher, peers, and guests that would be present at the premiere.

Lisa: To hear my voice, it felt like leaving a message on an answering machine, it was like leaving a story in an answering machine. When I speak
Spanish, sometimes I speak so fast that people don’t know what I am trying to say. When I speak I also skip the “s” and the “n,” but for the digital story I had to add them and speak slower.

**Overall Perceptions**

The digital storytelling premiere was the students’ favorite activity. Students dressed up for the occasion and were eager to share their culminating product with the audience of peers, teachers, administrators, and parents.

When discussing the project from a holistic perspective, Kyle told us that he benefited throughout the process: “Starting with square one, writing it all out, getting it together, hearing it, critiquing it, it brought everything together.” Kyle was not the only one that enjoyed putting all the aspects of language together. Cathy said that “it was finally nice to put it all together, every tense, hearing yourself, combining everything. . . . Before, you are just kinda practicing in parts and never revisit, but here you could put it all together.” A couple of students, (e.g., Cathy and Sam below), went beyond putting the story together and discussed how this task was a meaningful real-world task.

Cathy: You got to put it all together. I think it is easier to do that because these are all meaningful things to us so we got more into it and we were able to get into using our Spanish while doing that. We spent more time focusing on the correct way to put it into words and it was a good way to practice because that’s how you are going to use it in real life.

Sam: We are actually taking our Spanish and putting it into context, into real-life situations. You see a practical use. It was interesting to use it for something that I would use in an English class. It makes you more conscious about your grammar and your pronunciation. I thought it was good practice. It was good to see yourself using your language in another context other than the classroom.

When the post-project questionnaire and focus group data were analyzed, I also unearthed a theme of audience awareness. This awareness was reflected in their opinions of the project upon completion. Kelly remarked, “They were all different, each video I really wanted to listen to what everyone was saying. It was nice to hear everything of their story and hear their choices on the stories they chose to tell.” Many in the audience did not speak Spanish; however, a few did, including one parent. Rachel paid close attention to this parent and sought confirmation of understanding via her response: “Seeing her reaction helped because I knew I was doing things right because I saw her expression.” Once all the stories had been shown, students had an opportunity to interact with the audience and many audience members approached the students to inquire about their stories. Rachel said she “liked having time to mingle and they came up to me and I knew they got the idea.”

Although working on various components of the digital story for 12 weeks can lead to monotony, students relished the opportunity to author and present a complete story. It appears that the digital storytelling format provided a safe space to tell “a whole story.” Rachel described her experience in this way: “I didn’t know how to get emotions across in Spanish. I don’t know how to say a sad sentence in Spanish because I’m so concerned with the right grammar but with the digital story, I could tell a story.” The pictures, music, and transitions in a digital story assist students in telling their story by addressing limitations students may have in the language.
At the end of the project, students displayed a satisfaction inherent only to narrating a complete story with a beginning, middle, and end. For example, Todd told us "I am proud that I did it and it is a piece of me." Rachel summed up the experience this way:

You get to see your progress and you get to hear yourself tell a whole story in Spanish. It sounds kind of cool that you can complete a whole story. You get to see your peers’ progress. You see the reactions of the audience and the reactions, and you know you are getting your point across.

Not all experiences regarding the project were positive. Kyle felt that “the best way to practice is to talk to someone who is at your own level” while Julio did not seem to benefit from the technological component of the digital storytelling process. He said, “I think the beginning with the writing of the stories helped the most, but then the rest didn’t help as much.” Student opinions may be based largely on notions of language and technology study. Some students may believe that you can only learn from peers at your own level while others may not see the benefits of multiple drafts with technology.

DISCUSSION

The current study explored the process of creating digital stories from the perspective of fourth-year high school foreign language students. Overall, the findings reveal not only that students can create digital stories, but that they can exceed the expectations of the teacher and the researcher. Students were able, willing, and proud to share personal stories in a foreign language. All students in the class successfully completed a digital story in the target language and presented the finished product to an audience during the premiere. The digital story topics ranged from the death of a young niece, to the importance of drama club on a student’s high school experience, to the impact of stereotypes of skateboarders on self-identity.

At the beginning, it is apparent that students believed they would spend the majority of their time on the technology (importing pictures, finding music, and learning the software) rather than on the writing of the narrative. This finding corresponds to what Banaszewski (2002) found when he implemented digital storytelling in a generalist middle school English class–technology tends to be at the forefront for students at the beginning stages of a digital storytelling project, but some students understand early on that they will be authors of a story.

Once students became engaged in the process, in general, they found the drafting and editing process to be satisfactory. Since digital storytelling requires writing, drafting, editing, revising, and presentation to an audience, students inherently follow Lambert’s (2006) digital storytelling and Flower and Hayes’ (1981) writing process. Another current goal in the profession is to address the three modes of communication. Digital storytelling effortlessly adheres to the presentational mode of communication in which students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience in a one-to-many mode as well as in a planned fashion (National Standards, 2006). An added benefit was observed during the digital storytelling process. As the teacher pointed out, it was during the recording step that students became aware of their language. The learner data and teacher confirmation corroborate conclusions from other researchers who report that multiple speech draft recordings enhance learners’ awareness of their own speaking skills (Castañeda & Rodríguez-González, 2011).

At the end of the project, when students presented their finished product, they recognized that the process entailed putting all the pieces of the target language together and presenting these to an audience. The students came to realize the audience was broadened to include not only their teacher, but also their peers and the invited guests recommended
by Phillips (2008). Students made an emotional connection to the task at hand. Overall, the students were personally invested in creating a personal digital story that includes out-of-class experiences (Hafner & Miller, 2011; New London Group 1996, 2000). Students practiced language in a purposeful context that will help them attain competency for real-world communication (Brown, 2007; Curtain & Dahlberg, 2009; Hadley, 2001; Sandrock & Webb, 2003; Shrum & Glisan, 2010).

In conclusion, while observation of the implementation of this project in one course is limited in depth and scope, students’ perceptions offer valuable insights into understanding the digital storytelling process. This study’s findings assert that digital storytelling can serve as a viable means to achieve meaningful goals in the foreign language classroom. Not only did students complete the story, they practiced language in an expressive manner and engaged in real-world communication. Moreover, through this medium, the teacher integrated the writing process into the curriculum. A digital story sets the stage for a meaningful, real-world task that can be presented to an audience. Through this research project, the data demonstrate an epistemological shift whereby students are initially concerned with technology and grammar, yet move beyond this focus and are able to create a compelling, emotional, and in-depth story in the foreign language.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX A
Pre-Project Open-Ended Questionnaire Guiding Questions

What images come to mind when we say digital storytelling?

- Have you ever seen a digital story online? If yes, can you describe it?
- What is your current knowledge of digital storytelling?
- What kinds of technology do you currently use?
- How comfortable are you with using these various technologies?
- How comfortable are you telling a story in the language you are studying?
- How comfortable are you telling a story about yourself in the language you are studying?

APPENDIX B
Pre-Project Focus Group Questions

- Images/Ideas that come to mind with DST
  - While you touched upon the various elements that make up a digital story (images, music, narration) only a few immediately thought about a story about themselves...why is that?
  - In terms of ideas, did anyone begin thinking about themselves or a story they would tell?
  - Many of you said pictures, but what kinds of pictures did you imagine? Your own? Ones you go out and find yourself? Ones you take?
- Have you seen one online? If so, describe it...
  - Some of you mentioned that the stories were “deep”, what do you mean by deep?
  - Some of you mentioned that you had already made one...what class or project was it for? What was the main goal of your story, or was it something you decided to do on your own? Did you post it online?
  - Either before or after you viewed digital stories in class, did you go out on your own and look any up? If so, what were your thoughts?
- Current knowledge of DST
  - When you say a “compelling” story, what does that mean to you?
  - Many of you could address the main ideas and mechanics of making a digital story, but do any of you have any more thoughts about your digital story that you feel would add to your current knowledge?
- Technology that you currently use
  - All of you said that you currently use computers, but which kind do you generally use, Mac or PC?
- Comfort level with using various technologies
  - There was a mix of comfort levels, including those who don’t feel as comfortable or only use them for a specific task, so do you feel any anxiety or worries about beginning this project?
- Comfort level with telling a story in a second language (Spanish)
  - Most of you said you feel moderately comfortable to confident in telling a story in your target language. If you have any concerns at all, what are they? Grammatical issues? Public speaking?
o Or what about your target language or studying so far makes you comfortable?
  • Comfort level with telling a story about yourself in a second language (Spanish)
    o Nearly all of you felt comfortable telling a story about yourself, but if you have any
      trepidation, what would it be? Just the personal nature of the story, if the fact that you
      may or may not be able to express yourself fluently in the language you are studying?
  • Music
    o People want instrumental pieces, and ideas of playing a song themselves and
      recording themselves while playing to add to story

APPENDIX C
Post-Project Open-Ended Questionnaire Guiding Questions
• What was difficult for you in creating your digital story in terms of technology?
• What was difficult for you in creating your digital story in terms of language?
• What technology strengths were you able to use in creating your digital story?
• What language strengths were you able to use in creating your digital story?
• What challenges or problems did you have while working on your digital story in terms in
  technology?
• What challenges or problems did you have while working on your digital story in terms in
  language?
• What are you proud of with your digital story?

APPENDIX D
Post-Project Focus Group Questions
• General benefits
  o What do you believe were the benefits of using digital stories in the Spanish classroom
    in general?
  o What were the benefits of using a digital story to practice YOUR Spanish?
  o How did you feel about recording your voice in Spanish? Did it help that you could
    delete it if you made a mistake? How? Tell me more about recording yourself.
  o How did you match the audio to the picture?
  o Did the digital story help you communicate in Spanish? How? Tell me more.
• Connection to the standards
  o Did the format of the digital story help you present to an audience? How? Tell me more.
  o Did the digital story help you with other disciplines such as English, technology, etc.? How? Tell me more.
  o How did you use the digital story and the process of making it help you to enhance
    your Spanish?
  o What were the drawbacks of using digital stories in the Spanish classroom?
  o Do you believe the digital story made learning a language enjoyable and enriching? How? Tell me more.
• Performance based assessment
  o Do you believe the digital story helped you use Spanish for real and meaningful communication with others? How? Tell me more.
  o How did you feel when you knew you had to complete a digital story task? Did this help you or hinder you in some way?
  o A real-world task is something you could do in the real world if you lived in a Spanish speaking country, for example. Do you think the digital story helped you practice a real-world task?

APPENDIX E
First and final draft of Rachel’s digital story

Digital story script: First draft

En el primero de abril de dos mil y ocho, una bebé bella nació. Este bebé es mi sobrina, Brianna Dawn. Yo recordo waking up temprano de la mañana con mis padres y mi hermana embarazada. Nosotros manejamos al hospital, cuando el rocío de la mañana todavía fue en el grama. Yo esperé en la sala de espera. Yo esperé mirar la nueva añadidura a mi familia. Por fin, el médico nos dice que la bebé nació. Una sonrisa extendió a través de mi cara. Estaba muy emocionada para conocer mi sobrina.

Yo caminé por el vestíbulo con mis padres; yo pase por el cuarto de los niños. Yo vi mi sobrina por el primero momento en el cuarto de hospital de mi hermana. Mi hermana sonrió a mi. Sus brazos tuve la bebe pequeña. Tiempo pasó y por fin, yo pede hold mi nueva sobrina, Brianna. Yo no he visto una bebé mas bella. Sus ojos tan azules como el mar. Yo mire su mano pequeño coger mi dedo. Yo asombré. Yo recordo pensar, “Yo cuidara toda su vida.”

Pero la vida de mi sobrina fue no largo. Después tres meses cortos, ella se murió por síndrome de la muerta subita.

Digital story script: Final draft

Mi ángel pequeña

En el primero de abril de dos mil y ocho, una bebé bella nació. Este bebé es mi sobrina, Brianna Dawn. Yo recuerdo despertarme temprano de la mañana con mis padres y mi hermana embarazada. Nosotros manejamos al hospital, cuando el rocío de la mañana todavía fue en el grama. Yo esperé en la sala de espera. Yo esperé mirar la nueva añadidura a mi familia. Por fin, el médico nos dijo que la bebé nació. Una sonrisa extendió a través de mi cara. Estaba muy emocionada para conocer mi sobrina.

Yo caminé por el vestíbulo con mis padres; yo pase por el cuarto de los niños. Yo vi mi sobrina por el primero momento en el cuarto de hospital de mi hermana. Mi hermana sonrió a mi. Sus brazos tuvieron la bebe pequeña. Tiempo pasó y por fin, yo pude tenerla en mis brazos, Yo no he visto una bebé más bella. Sus ojos tan azules como el mar. Yo miré su mano pequeña coger mi dedo. Yo asombré. Yo recuerdo pensar, “Yo la cuidaré toda su vida.”

Pero la vida de mi sobrina fue no larga. Después tres meses cortos, ella se murió por síndrome de la muerta subita. Fui al mismo hospital donde mi sobrina nació pero este vez estaba allí para comfortar a mi hermana y no celebrar. Fue una sorpresa que no quise. Tuve muchos sueños para mi sobrina que ahora fueron perdidos. Estuve sin preparación ara el dolor y tristeza. Un año ha pasado pero no hay un día que no piense de mi sobrina hermosa. Falto su presencia y nunca olvidaré. Ella estará siempre en mi corazón.
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