Chapter I: INTRODUCTION

1. OVERVIEW

This study sets out to explore how digital storytelling can be suitable as a learning activity for languages in higher education. The purpose of the study is to explore learners’ reflections on potentials for second learning (L2) from digital storytelling affairs. Two research questions as well as two hypotheses have been outlined and will be presented in sections 1.5 and sections 1.6. To allow for a broader possible understanding of the basis of the study, more detailed description of digital storytelling will be presented.

1.1 DIGITAL STORYTELLING (DST)

People have always told stories Normann (2011). It has been part of our tradition and heritage since the time we gathered around the fire to share our stories. Today people still tell stories, but now we have new media tools with which to share them. A digital story can hence be seen as a merger between the old storytelling tradition and the use of new technology.

1.1.1 Definition and Characteristics

The concept of digital storytelling was primarily developed at the Center for Digital Storytelling in California, where Joe Lambert, co-director at the center, was a central person. Within this tradition, a digital story is a short story, only 2-3 minutes long, where the storyteller uses his own voice to tell his own story.

From ancient times till date, storytelling has served as an unofficial popular education tool, utilized to pass on knowledge from one generation to another. Over the past few years, drastic changes have been experienced in the processes used for creating stories, the variety of media used to convey the message, and the target audience. Over the past few years, the concept of the traditional storytelling was adopted and appropriated as a teaching-learning
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medium. The processes of learning experienced drastic alterations in the creation of stories with the use of a varied media to convey messages and to reach the target audience.

Storytelling, in general, is a powerful pedagogical paradigm that can be used to enhance learning outcomes for general, scientific and technical education (Sharda, 2007a). Stories have been told as a way of passing on traditions, heritage, and history to future generations. Even today people continue to narrate stories through new digital media tools. A digital story can be viewed as a merger between traditional storytelling and the use of multimedia technology (Normann, 2011).

Technological advances, such as digital cameras, editing software, and authoring tools, have increased the use of technology in the classroom to help students in constructing their own knowledge and ideas to present and share them more effectively (Standley, 2003).

As confirmed by Armstrong (2003), computers, digital cameras, editing software, and other technologies are becoming more readily accessible in the classrooms, and provide learners and teachers with the tools to create digital stories more easily than ever before. Furthermore, digital storytelling helps students to develop their creativity to solve important problems in innovative ways (Ohler, 2008). It is an effective pedagogical tool that enhances learners’ motivation and provides learners with a learning environment conducive for story construction through collaboration, reflection, and interpersonal communication. Students can use multimedia software tools as well as other technical skills to create digital stories based on given educational issues.

Digital storytelling is used as an embodiment of multimedia production for education purposes. Therefore, this is becoming an integral part of our existence and is on the threshold of integrating the teaching-learning world and phases as well. the innovative technological implementation of storytelling is being facilitated by the ready access to hardware, such as digital cameras and scanners, in conjunction with user-friendly software. Keeping an updated
outlook for classroom teaching-learning processes, many educational institutions have already been exploring the application of digital storytelling for the past few years (Robin, 2008).

The power of storytelling as a pedagogical tool has been recognized since the beginning of humanity, and in more recent times, for e-Learning (Neal, 2001). Digital storytelling has become a modern incarnation of the traditional art of oral storytelling; it allows almost anyone to use off-the-shelf hardware and software to weave personal stories with the help of still / moving images, music, and sound, combined with the author’s creativity and innovation (Neal, 2001).

With the pertinent rise in the implementation of digitalized learning programs and facilities, Donovan, Bransford, & Pellegrino (2000) articulated the probable reasons as to why digital stories have such a positive impact on learners’ motivation, and state. Donavan et. al, in this case, claim that “learners of all ages are more motivated when they can see the usefulness of what they are learning and use that information to do something that has an impact on others” (p.61). In addition, digital storytelling can provide a real way to help students learn how to use technology effectively in their learning, particularly if provided with appropriate digital resources and usable editing tools. In adopting the basic proficiency in their technological usages, learners are encouraged to improve their interaction with the technology at hand not only as a medium of learning but rather as a means of keeping their keen interest in their learning processes. Digital storytelling converges their creativity, talents and technological proficiency in one space which “would further motivate them to create quality stories that could be presented, published and shared with other students in the class” (Sadik, 2008). Consequently, the level of interest is maintained in the study schedule as well as the continuum of self-discovery.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF STUDY

The researcher has for many years been interested in innovative approaches to learning, with the strong belief that offering learners the conducive access to new learning, sharing, and acquisition of knowledge through teaching-learning tools. The latter contributes in enabling
the learning processes in our technologically-dominated world. The objective of the study is to examine the benefits of using Digital Storytelling in language classes. It also aims to explore the appropriate classroom activities which assist language teaching and learning. In fact, this study’s main objective would be to explore adult learners’ meta-reflections that would be involved with critical thinking and cognitive skills when digital storytelling is used. Digital storytelling bears productive potential for learning as a learner-centered activity in Higher Education. With the constant mutations taking place around the world, novel learning-teaching tactics are being not solely developed but the focus has shifted to a more student centered spectrum whereby the learners are the central characters of the classroom.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to the National Association of Developmental Educators (2001) “developmental education programs and services commonly address academic preparedness, diagnostic assessment and placement, development of general and discipline-specific learning strategies, and effective barriers to learning. The various programs established to assist developmental learners are 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 is digital storytelling used as a pedagogical tool to assist higher education learners in this quest? In light of the recent research, what are the potentials for learning when digital storytelling is used as a classroom activity? The researcher’s goal is to contribute to the research pertaining to higher education and students as learners with the 21st-century technology of digital storytelling to validate current research literature and lead to new Teaching techniques to ensure learning progress for educators.
1.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

To meet the study’s objectives outlined in the form of the presented research questions and hypotheses, the researcher will carry out a qualitative study. This research project aims to explore the impact of digital storytelling on students’ learning engagement and outcomes. It focuses on exploring the potential of digital storytelling as an innovative teaching and learning approach in Higher Education. And further, the impact of digital storytelling on apprentice learning when students use digital stories is investigated.

One characteristic of qualitative research is that samples are generally quite small (Marshall, 1996). The study was conducted in a group of 20 students who have been selected randomly as subjects on a voluntary basis. The students (Post graduate and Research students) are selected from the Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh, India. The selected students are the subjects of the study because, in higher education, a higher level of vocabulary is required. These students got admitted to the University based on the entrance exam. That is why the researcher did not attempt the research study on students from the lower level. In fact, the researcher is investigating into the advanced level of vocabulary as DST will involve a higher level of vocabulary which is required for higher education. The second reason is the study of the drama, literature in postgraduate courses. All the data collection takes place at the Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh, India.

The digital storytelling project carried out in this group based on Shakespeare’s tragic play, *King Lear* (1608). In fact, this book is being taught at postgraduate level in the classroom and students are to be tested in the same.

The first eight weeks of the course were spent on various activities related to studying the play, Digital Storytelling workshops and both *efferent* and *aesthetic* dimensions were touched upon in order to contextualize the book’s topics. These two terms are based on a definition from Louise Rosenblatt, who points to *efferent questions* as questions where one is
looking for information and factual data. *Aesthetic questions*, on the other hand, are related to what goes on inside the reader or on the feelings and emotions the reading conveys (Rosenblatt 1978 in Claire Kramsch, 1993, p. 124). The latter is hence more about what the reading does with the reader. The researcher finds this information to be essential with respect to the discussions on the importance of contextualization of a digital storytelling project (section 6.3.3).

For the final five weeks of the project, the students were asked to produce a digital story based on the play *King Lear*. They were free to produce their product from the perspective of one of the characters, any concept from the play or theme of the play.

The selected students had the opportunity to engage themselves in innovative learning experiences based on digital storytelling. In order to enhance the reliability and validity of the research, multiple methods of data collection and analysis have been used. Data are collected primarily in adapting the qualitative method. Questionnaires, reflection logs, interviews and finally observation of all data have been used to collect qualitative data.

### 1.4.1 Definitions of Terms

It is necessary to briefly define some of the terms that will be frequently used in the thesis, to avoid ambiguity and hence allow for a common understanding of the terms to take place. *The second language* is in this study limited to the learning of English.

The researcher will use various terms to refer to the students who take part in this study. As a point of departure, the term *respondent* is henceforward used to refer to the data sample from the questionnaires and from the reflection logs and interviewees. When this researcher quotes from the respondents, he will use Respondent + a number (from 1 to 20). Finally, when the researcher henceforward uses the term *students*, this implies a generalization and embraces all learners in general, not only the ones who took part in this study.
1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research presents an experimental and an exploratory study intended to address the below stated and the rationale for the project is to explore the pedagogical asset of digital storytelling. The overall purpose of the study is to learn about and describe learners’ reflections around their own learning potentials when they use digital storytelling as an approach to second language learning. The main research questions are:

1) What are the potentials for learning when digital storytelling is used as a second language learning activity? Here the kind of learning would be self-learning, as perceived by the students and expressed through their reflections
2) Can DST offer a diverse interactive learning experience and improve the involvement of students in the process of learning?

1.6 STATEMENT OF HYPOTHESES

The first hypothesis is limited to second language activity in terms of developing critical thinking and acquisition of a higher level of vocabulary. The hypothesis is related to the first research question. This hypothesis can be outlined as:

- When DST is used as a second language learning activity, it increases the ability for critical thinking and enhances the use of higher level vocabulary.

The second hypothesis, which is slightly broader, brings in interpretations, various kinds of reflections, stories and etc. The hypothesis is related to the second research question. This hypothesis can be stated as the following:

- DST works through reflection, creating different interpretations and offering diverse, various interactive learning experiences.

The study is aimed at looking at how students reflect on potentials for learning when digital storytelling is used as a second language learning activity.
1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

This work benefits students in three ways: It gives them an opportunity to express their own ideas, interests, and dislikes; also, it forces students to use more complex sets of structures and a presumably advanced range of vocabulary, and develop their critical thinking abilities (it forces students to think critically about the story and express what it means using their own words and visual representations. They must use critical thinking such as deduction and interpretation). Furthermore, Digital Storytelling develops students' ability to express an opinion, argue their case, initiate and sum-up ideas and illustrate opinion with an example.

1.8 LIMITATION

The researchers’ focus is not on digital storytelling as a phenomenon in itself, it is on the learning aspect of using digital storytelling as an approach to second language learning, as perceived by the learners (section 4.3). This means that no student products will be presented in this study. Even though that could have been an interesting approach, the study is limited to looking at how students reflect on potentials for learning when digital storytelling is used as a second language learning activity.

Whether they achieved good results in the relevant project or not is therefore not in focus. With respect to teaching and learning strategies, the researcher does not, in accordance with Hattie (2009, p. 245), believe in one particular method, activity or tool that will make an overall difference with respect to academic achievement. The researcher, however, believes that students should be presented with a variety of approaches to use in their learning. They additionally need to reflect, both alone, with peers and with the researcher, on the usefulness of these various approaches, with respect to meeting the objectives set for each learning activity. This study can also be seen as a formalization of such meta-reflections among a student of higher education learners.
1.9 OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

Chapter Two
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter two presents review the current literature and research in the field of digital storytelling. The literature review is carried out in order to analyze the topic and understand the viewpoints of existing researchers in the field.

Chapter Three
THEORETICAL FRAMING

This chapter contains constructivist approach to learning, traditional socio-cultural theory and the activity system, technology, pedagogy and content knowledge and would continue with theory related to motivation and learning differences. Finally, the chapter deals with theoretical framework related to second language learning.

Chapter Four
METHODOLOGY

Chapter four reveals a complete picture of research methods and design tools required for this research. This chapter explains the details pertaining to the design and implementation of a methodology to investigate relevant research questions. Also, it presents the instruments utilized in this research, particulars of participant groups, data collection, and the analysis approach.

Chapter Five
RESULT AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The result and analysis of the data will be in this chapter. This chapter will explain the result of the data with regard to the purpose of the study to provide a direct answer to the
research questions. The chapter reports the quantitative data and analysis of the data collected to address the research question of the study.

Chapter Six

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses the findings of quantitative data. It deals with the discussion of the findings of the quantitative data gathered to address the two research questions. Based on the findings, the final chapter will present the conclusion and recommendation of the study in higher education. In the end, it suggests a direction for further research in relation to use of DST in language learning higher education.

ENDNOTES

1 L2: second language (UNESCO: “a language acquired by a person in addition to his mother tongue” (Cook, 2008, p. 12)
2 http://www.storycenter.org/
3 William Shakespeare: “King Lear” (1608)