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# Digital narrative and the Humanities: An evaluation of the use of digital storytelling in an Australian undergraduate Arts program

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**Abstract:** *In recent times a growing number of university academics, researchers, and administrators have argued for the embrace of multimedia and digital technologies as a necessary strategy for university educators. The promotion of this strategy is justified in two ways: first, to ensure the relevance of subject disciplines; and second, to engage with contemporary students to help meet their learning outcomes. Digital storytelling is one example of how some educators are utilising computing technologies to introduce innovative teaching methods within their discipline areas. In its broadest sense, the term ‘digital storytelling’ relates to the application of multimedia resources within learning environments for the production by students of multimedia narratives. This paper reports on the results of an evaluation of a trial introduction of digital narratives into an advanced undergraduate unit on contemporary Australian culture in one Australian university. The evaluation explored students’ and teachers’ experiences of using digital storytelling. In particular, the evaluation explored participants’ satisfaction and anxieties about the use of digital narratives. It also considered the issues that the use of this methodology raised vis-à-vis the constructive alignment of such activities with the themes, aims, and objectives of the unit, as well as the level of technical training and support required to ensure students’ meaningful employment of such methods. The results of this evaluation will be of interest to those academics considering the use of multimedia technologies in their undergraduate classes.*

**Keywords:** *digital narrative, digital storytelling, multimedia technologies*

## Introduction

This paper presents the results of an evaluation of the introduction of digital narratives into an advanced undergraduate English studies unit on contemporary Australian literature in an Australian university. The evaluation explored students’ and teachers’ experiences of using digital narratives. In particular we were interested in the student and lecturer-perceived usefulness – broadly defined – of digital narratives in the undergraduate classroom: how did the new pedagogy influence student learning and the management/coordination of the unit? Drawing upon student responses to questionnaires, critical reflection essays and focus group discussions, as well as the reflections of the lecturer (the first-named author), the evaluation considered a number of issues including the constructive alignment of digital narrative

pedagogy with the themes, aims, and objectives of the unit, and the level of technical training / support required for the meaningful employment of such methods.

### **What are 'digital narratives'?**

'Digital narratives' – or as they are more commonly known, digital stories – are student-produced multimedia narratives (Barrett, 2006; Benmayor, 2008; Bull & Kajder, 2005; Burgess, 2006; Coventry, 2008b; Kajder, Bull, & Albaugh, 2005; Leon, 2008; Mellon, 1999; Oppermann, 2008; Robin, 2008; Tucker, 2006). Digital narratives can: range in duration from one to ten minutes; incorporate photomontage accompanied by voiceover; or be short video movies. They are generally created using inexpensive photography, video, and audio capture and editing software – such as Windows Media Maker, Photoshop, iMovie, Acrobat, etc – that are readily commercially available and / or commonly packaged with new Windows-based and Apple personal computers.

In this study we use the term 'digital narrative' rather than 'digital storytelling' because in many non-educational contexts 'digital storytelling' has become associated with discourses of personal and therapeutic transformation that may not be appropriate within an educational context. Moreover, many advocates of digital storytelling promote this technique as a *goal* and *outcome*. As the purpose of this study was to evaluate the utility of this pedagogy for *critique*, it was felt that a more 'value-neutral' terminology should be adopted, one that envisions digital narrative as one method available to contemporary – 'transliterate' – scholars.

### **Applications: What are the academic uses and benefits of digital narratives?**

Digital narratives are being employed in a range of educational contexts, including courses on literary studies, creative writing, American Studies, social and cultural history, teacher training, English as a second language (ESL), and gender studies (Ganley & Vila, 2006; Klæbe & Bolland, 2007; Oppermann, 2008, pp. 178-179). They are being used with increasing frequency in North American secondary school classrooms (Dogan & Robin, 2008; Weiss, Benmayor, O'Leary, & Enyon, 2002) and have been introduced into high school curricula in some Australian states (Tucker, 2006). They have also been employed in a variety of social research contexts, including oral and public history projects (Klæbe, Foth, Burgess, & Bilandzic, 2007; Meadows, 2003).

A growing number of researchers have made claims for the benefits of digital narrative making in the classroom. The authors of a special edition of *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* in 2008 asserted, amongst other things, that digital narrative pedagogy offers students tools to investigate 'texts and contexts' in non-traditional ways (Coventry, 2008a, p. 166); that it enhances students' appreciation of theory by making "visible to students how theory emerges from personal experience and how theorising is both intellectual and creative" (Benmayor, 2008, p. 200); and that it facilitates intellectual engagement for students new to academic writing. As Lovell and Baker note, digital narrative provides an example of 'transliteracy' (Lovell & Baker, 2009, p. 52), understood as "the ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms and tools and media" (Thomas et al., 2007, para 1). As such, the use of digital narrative is consistent with a pedagogical commitment to the value of encouraging students to engage with and communicate ideas across a range of media platforms and genres – not just written critical essays. A recent study by Clarke and Adam (2011) supports this assertion. They interviewed six academics on their experiences of using digital narrative in Australian tertiary education settings. All six considered digital narrative

as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, conventional learning and teaching such as critical research essay writing.

As a result of this research the first-named author undertook to implement a digital narrative exercise in a new undergraduate unit on contemporary Australian literary studies. Grant funding was received from the university to support the implementation, part of which involved the lecturer training in digital narrative at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI). Assistance was also received from the faculty flexible education support team who helped develop resources and training workshops. In designing the digital narrative project and the evaluation protocols, we were particularly concerned with: conceptualisation and task definition, constructive alignment, and resources, three themes consonant with the findings from Clarke's and Adam's (2011) study.

### ***Why use digital narratives in an English Studies unit?***

In some respects the answer to this question is both obvious and counter-intuitive. On the one hand it would seem that tertiary studies in 'English,' growing as it has from 'literary studies,' is a natural home for digital narrative. Narrative, after all, is one of the foundational topics of contemporary English Studies. On the other hand, it could be argued that 'digital' narrative is a topic and technique better suited to the disciplines of 'media' or 'cultural' studies, or other cognate fields like film studies. Contemporary English Studies is founded on the examination of *texts*, more often than not defined as 'verbal' texts against 'visual' or 'aural' texts.

In relation to the unit's topic, it was hypothesised that digital narrative would be useful as a way of encouraging student reflection on, and encourage deeper engagement with, Australian literature. 'Representing Contemporary Australia' analyses how Australian society and culture are represented in contemporary prose fiction, poetry, narrative film and drama. The intended learning outcomes of this unit include: the cultivation of knowledge of contemporary debates in Australian film and literary studies; and the development of close reading, critical engagement, research, and academic writing skills. It was anticipated that the digital narrative project would have benefits in relation to most of these outcomes.

There is evidence that digital narrative pedagogy can provide a number of clear benefits in English Studies. First, the literature suggests that as a complement to critical essay writing, digital narrative may prove to be a useful strategy for encouraging students to undertake a *deep* rather than a *surface* approach to learning (Barrett, 2006). Second, the literature suggests that digital narratives are a useful complementary approach for students from non-traditional educational backgrounds, and/or those for whom the critical essay genre is a challenge for linguistic or cultural reasons (Benmayor, 2008; Coventry, 2008b). This claim was of particular relevance given the relatively high number of students from non-traditional educational backgrounds attending our university. Third, the value of applying creative and imaginative techniques to critical examination of topics and texts is by no means novel to English Studies. For instance, creative writing has enjoyed for many years an important place within English Studies. Fourth, there is evidence that digital narrative pedagogy encourages collaborative experiences within the classroom by providing a context for discussion and participation. One of the perennial challenges within English Studies is the reluctance of some students to engage in critical discussion. It was hoped that the process of digital production would facilitate greater in class discussion and reflection.

## **Methodology**

### ***Sample***

Eight students, in their second and third years of undergraduate study at a regional Australian university, participated in this study. There were three male and five female students with an average age of 20.5 years (range: 19-22 years). All students were enrolled as 'internal' students: they attended face-to-face classes. The unit had a substantial cohort of 'distance' students – students who undertake studies via recorded lectures and sessions, and online material. Given the logistics of the project and geographical dispersal of distance students, only students enrolled as 'internal' could undertake the digital narrative project.

### ***Digital narrative implementation***

The digital narrative project was undertaken in the first six weeks of the thirteen-week semester. In the first week of semester students were introduced to the exercise – its rationale and intended outcomes – and provided with information sheets, consent forms, and preparatory material for a software training session scheduled for the following week. At this time students were given the task description (See Appendix A).

Students were also introduced to the unit's online learning website, and a subfolder that they could access that included links to examples of digital narratives – including one created by the lecturer based on his own research work – and information sheets on all aspects of digital narrative making. They were also provided with criterion-referenced assessment (CRA) marking sheets – for the digital narrative and critical reflection essay, respectively and a 'project schedule' that articulated the different stages of the project.

At the commencement of Week 2, students and the lecturer undertook a 'story circle' activity that became a regular feature of each successive class: students were invited to share their ideas with the class and provide updates on the progress of their digital narratives in relation to the project schedule. Students were also introduced to the members of the faculty's flexible education (FE) support team who directed a workshop on how to create digital narratives using iMovie software, held during tutorial time in the faculty computer lab. The FE team and the lecturer attended successive tutorials in the computer lab to check on student progress and answer queries.

Students submitted their digital narratives in mp4 format on a DVD in Week 5 of semester. In Week 6 they submitted their critical reflection essays. Students received grades and feedback on both parts of the project. Students were given the option of resubmitting their digital narrative to address specific elements identified by the lecturer, i.e. the quality of the images, soundtrack, expression of ideas, intellectual content, and so on. In the final week of semester students viewed all the narratives.

### ***Evaluation methodology***

Evaluation focussed on student and lecturer experiences of digital narrative making, specifically the usefulness of this technique. This was explored from three perspectives: students, lecturer and literature, three of the four lenses highlighted by Brookfield (1995) as being essential to critically reflective teaching practice. In order to avoid conflict of interest between the students and the lecturer, two third parties were employed to gather and analyse data from the student perspective, one a research assistant and one (the second named author)

an academic developer with 18 years experience in higher education from the central university professional development unit.

Three sources of data were used in evaluating the usefulness, from a student perspective, of the digital narrative assessment task: mandated student evaluation of teaching and learning (SETL) questionnaires, consisting of both quantitative and qualitative data; individual, personal student reflections in critically reflective essays that complemented the digital narrative; and focus group interviews. These three data sources served varied and complementary evaluative purposes.

### **SETL**

SETL questionnaires provided cross-sectional data: anonymous, summative and holistic student perspectives on their experience of the unit in general, the teaching of the unit, as well as the digital narrative assessment task, specifically. In terms of quantitative data, as well as ten compulsory unit-based questions related to generic curriculum design and delivery and ten compulsory teaching-based compulsory questions related to the lecturer's teaching performance, students answered 21 questions that related specifically to the digital narrative assessment task (see Appendix B). In terms of qualitative data from the SETL questionnaires, students provided free form prose responses in relation to advice or feedback about the unit, the teaching of the unit, or the digital narrative assessment task, specifically.

### **Critical Reflection Essay**

The critical reflection essays, completed in conjunction with the digital narratives, provided an opportunity for students to comment in an extended way on the usefulness of the digital narrative assessment task, within the framework of the entire unit, particularly as it related to the disciplinary content of the unit.

### **Focus Group**

By its very nature a site of co-construction, the focus group provided an opportunity for students to interact and thus challenge and extend each others' perspectives, the ultimate aim being "to be able to draw conclusions about the [the students'] views, ideas or experiences" (Hydén & Bülow, 2003, p. 306). Moreover, as Farnsworth and Boon (2010) point out, focus groups provide a "pragmatic advantage" in terms of their "efficiency" (p. 607): consequently, we were able to glean multiple perspectives within a bounded time frame.

Two focus groups were conducted, the first immediately following the completion of the task (approximately half way through the semester). They were designed to gauge current student feelings and perspectives on the value and relevance of the task to the unit content, their expectations, concerns and perceived benefits as well as the resourcing of the assessment task. The second focus group was held in the final week of semester after feedback had been received on the digital narrative assessment task. It provided two specific opportunities: first, a retrospective space where students could comment on any changes in thinking since the first focus group, and second, a specific space for commenting on lecturer assessment approaches. Attendance at both focus groups was voluntary. Each was audio recorded and transcribed.

Lecturer reflections on the implementation process are also included.

Reference is made to literature throughout the following analysis section to provide evidence of similarity with or difference to the student and lecturer perspectives provided in this study.

## Results

### Data analysis

#### Student Evaluation of Teaching and Learning (SETLs)

Feedback from the SETL questionnaire suggested that all students enjoyed the unit, valued the teaching and developed new skills as a result. Of the eight students who completed the digital narrative assessment task, seven (88%) responded to the SETL questionnaire. Of the total responses to the compulsory *unit-based* questions, 99% selected either 'agree' or 'strongly agree'. Of the total responses to the *teaching-based* questions, 100% selected either 'agree' or 'strongly agree'. Thus, students' overall experience of the unit was consistently positive.

The responses to the 21 digital narrative-specific questions (see Appendix B) were somewhat more varied and provided interesting insight into those specific aspects of the unit students experienced more positively or neutrally (no students recorded a 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' response). Given the variability of responses and the small sample size we are hesitant to claim generalisability. It should be pointed out that the majority of students (84%, N=6) selected either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' as their response to the 21 questions related to their digital narrative experience. The most consistently positive responses (86% of the total) were received in relation to the following statements:

- sufficient technical support was provided to assist me to complete my digital narrative;
- the expectations for the Critical Reflection Essay were clearly reflected in the marking criteria sheet for this part of the project;
- my grade for the Critical Reflection Essay reflects the time and energy that I devoted to this part of the digital narrative project;
- the process of creating the digital narrative was enjoyable;
- the process of creating the digital narrative was challenging;
- creating a digital narrative is a useful complement to written essay assignments; and
- I appreciated the chance to revise my Digital Narrative

The seven points above illustrate a discerning perspective: that is, students commented on a range of aspects of the learning and teaching experience, from technical support to assessment to aesthetics.

Qualitative SETL data was minimal. Only three students responded in free form prose. Those free form comments that were provided were positive and supportive in nature and related primarily to the level of interest and engagement generated by the digital narrative task. Some suggestions were made in relation to resourcing.

- "*enjoyable to attempt a different task*";
- "*all-consuming, but fun*";
- "*thoroughly enjoyed, good texts and generated an interest in a subject I thought would have been dry*";
- "*it is clear that [the lecturer] has a passion for this area*"; and
- "*having the [computer lab] support people around later in the process would have been good*".

### **Critical reflection essays and focus group research data**

The richest sources of data for the evaluation of the students' perception of the usefulness of the digital narrative assessment task as a learning and teaching technique were the critically reflective essays and the focus group discussions. Of the eight students who completed the digital narrative, five (63%) specifically made reference to the assessment task in their essays. Six (75%) students participated in the first focus group and seven (88%) participated in the second. Insights from both sources will be reported here collectively.

Students consistently and convincingly identified the usefulness of the digital narrative assessment task. Their responses fell into two distinct categories: usefulness defined in terms of skill development and usefulness defined in terms of enhanced understanding of unit content.

Skill development, although challenging in many instances, was recognised by all students as one of the most direct and beneficial outcomes of the digital narrative experience. Although initially collectively "*daunted*," "*excited*," "*worried*," "*concerned*" and "*terrified*" by the prospect of undertaking such an innovative assessment task, most students accepted the challenge, recognising that growth would occur as a result. This perspective is mirrored in the SETL feedback where students positively identified the "challenging" as well as the "enjoyable" aspects of creating the digital narrative. These students clearly understood, albeit tacitly, the exponential growth in learning that occurs when, as adults, they are faced with disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 1991). They recognised, also, that their skill development relied heavily on the support provided by the computer lab support staff.

- "*searching for appropriate images and recording my script led me to more closely analyse my writing*";
- "*I was pushed out of my comfort zone, but without the stress and frustration that sometimes comes with learning something new*"; and
- "*I enjoyed learning about how to use a Mac and iMovie and construct something new, not only learning unit content, but a new way of presenting information.*"

Enhanced understanding of unit content, as a result of completing the digital narrative, emerged strongly in students' essays and the focus groups. This was the outcome that revealed the most profound insights from students. Many commented on the fact that the digital narrative allowed them to explore and interface with contemporary Australian literature content from a more personal perspective rather than the traditional third person objective stance that is often required with essay writing. While some found this challenging, they recognised that they were interacting with the material in a way that deeply touched their identities. The students' responses in this regard appear to be consistent with the general research on digital narratives (see, for example, Benmayer, 2008). Student responses included:

- "*thinking about how you identify with Australian literature and culture was also a personal growth thing*";
- "*the digital story aspect provided a deeper understanding and respect for the unit*";
- "*developing a concise script, sharing my ideas, selecting images, and recording the script contributed to my understanding of Australian literature and what it means to me...it assisted in the development of my idea in relation to connections between the work of [Australian literary artists]*"; and

- *“production time for the finalized narrative was five weeks, and during this time my ideas and approaches toward the set questions were both challenged and transformed...the development of ideas gave me a new direction to critique”.*

Students’ perceived usefulness of the digital narrative as a learning and teaching technique was inherently related to the assessment process employed by the lecturer. Reference was made to the *“thoroughness, clarity and conciseness”* of the feedback and the helpfulness, particularly in terms of *“reducing ambiguity,”* of the criteria marking sheets. As one student commented, *“We knew what we were working towards.”* Another said, *“I looked at it and I was like, ‘Oh this is what I am actually meant to do.’”* Although students clearly valued the feedback they received, for example, *“The good thing about [the lecturer] is that he actually writes a thorough page on what you’ve done,”* over half the students commented that they would have liked more detailed feedback from the lecturer in relation to what they had done well, rather than focussing on ways to improve. This stands in some contrast to students’ characteristic desire for advice on how to improve that has been consistently acknowledged in higher education learning and teaching literature (see, for example, Boud, 2000; Lizzio & Wilson, 2008; Nicol, 2010; Sadler, 2010). This disparity could perhaps be explained by the students in this study working in an innovative assessment area without previous experience and therefore seeking explicit affirmation of their new skill development. All students appreciated the opportunity, although not all accepted, to resubmit the digital narratives for an improved grade, exemplified by the following comments:

- *“it’s really good that we’ve had an opportunity...to go back and change things”;*  
*and*
- *“it could be that couple of percent that could get you over the line at the end of the year.”*

Overall, the quantitative and qualitative data collected suggest that this group of students reacted positively to the digital narrative project and suggest a range of benefits that indicate the usefulness of this form of pedagogy.

#### **Lecturer’s (first-named author’s) reflections**

Implementing digital narrative was both exciting and challenging. It was also very time consuming – reflections that are consistent with the experiences of students.

Like many of the students, I had no previous experience working with multimedia in an educational context; we were all, in essence, novices. As an early career academic, I am fairly conservative when it comes to implementing new techniques. Indeed, I would consider myself a “late-adopter” of new technologies and techniques. Without the financial support provided by the university to undertake training and facilitate the students’ training, it is unlikely that I would have introduced the digital narrative innovation. Support, then, has been fundamental to the success of this learning experience.

Early observation of students revealed a number of surprises. First was learning of their anxiety in undertaking something novel. The students were familiar with using computers, word processors, and digital phones, etc., but they were by no means ‘digital natives’ (Prensky, 2001). While all of them felt confident in their skills using the Internet to retrieve information, most indicated that they had never used video production software like iMovie and that they “usually use new technologies when most people [they] know do”, rather than describing themselves as early adopters of technology. The concept of creating a short audiovisual presentation as a work of critical reflection was novel to all the students. While it

was obvious that the students felt nervous and anxious about undertaking this assessment task, they were nevertheless all willing to participate in the project – a number especially appreciating the opportunity to exercise their creativity. They also appreciated the guidelines they were given as well as the way the digital narrative exercise aligned with the other learning tasks and objectives within the unit. Nevertheless, it was clear that students took some time to “get into” the activity. The progress of the project had been planned in stages, but some students found it difficult to keep up with the schedule. The students progressed at their own pace until it came time to submit their work and a number of the students were forced to rush in order to meet the deadline. While anecdotal evidence would suggest this pattern is not an unusual one with tertiary students, it does indicate areas for future consideration as a way of ameliorating some of the challenges.

There were a number of challenges in the implementation of the digital narrative project. It was both time-consuming and resource intensive, consonant with findings from earlier studies. One of the biggest issues related to the doubling of my workload in the first half of the semester, with separate lecture recordings needing to be made for distance students not participating in the digital narrative project. Assessment was another significant issue. I was aware of the literature on this topic and the debate about aesthetic expectations. Should we expect students to create presentations that are of “broadcast quality”, or should we assess their work using an alternative aesthetic regime, one that takes into account the conditions under which the media was produced? I drew upon a CRA sheet from *Digital Storytelling: Tips and Resources* (Matthews-DeNatale, 2008) and adapted it with the permission of the original designer. Also, I gave students the opportunity to resubmit their work once they had made adjustments to certain aspects of the work that I identified in my initial assessment. Two students took up this offer.

Although this was the first time digital narrative had been used in the unit, a number of benefits were noticed: first, the exercise provided a clear and practical scaffold for student work in the first half of semester; second, it provided a context for students to engage collaboratively; third, it encouraged students to work on a set assignment across a number of weeks; and fourth, it provided a clear and explicit context for students to engage with issues relating to the unit’s core content. This allowed students to engage with lecture material as part of their assignment, and provided for a “continuous learning experience” in line with the pedagogical aims of the project.

I believe that the exercise provided a number of potential benefits for learning purposes. Perhaps the key benefit that I perceived was the way the exercise forced students to ‘reveal’ their positions in relation to critical issues in a manner that provided a clear context for student-teacher engagement. For example, one student produced a sophisticated digital narrative that addressed the question of the relationship between Australian novelists’ use of characterisation. His short narrative provided a clear argument in relation to the way Australian literary culture favors certain stereotypes of character and situation. His narrative pointed to some of the ‘biases’ that one observes in Australian fiction. At the same time the student’s use of ‘male’ authors, as well as the images he chose of these authors, revealed his own biases towards Australian literary fiction and its values that called for further reflection and critique. The digital narrative provided both an outcome of this students’ critical reflections as well as a context for further work. This student’s work clearly showed his ability to appreciate and apply the ideas that he had gained in the first part of the unit. It also demonstrated how the creation of a short script, and the demands that places on a writer, influenced the critical reflection essay. And it also revealed in verbal and well as visual modes

aspects of the student's intellectual engagement with the task that called for further development and refinement.

## **Discussion**

Students were generous in making suggestions about potential ways to improve their predominantly positive experiences of completing the digital narrative, reflecting a perception of themselves as co-constructors of this innovative learning experience. Most suggestions were logistical and related to issues such as: encouraging future students to complete the script earlier, particularly prior to using the faculty's computer lab; alerting future students to the time-consuming (albeit ultimately valuable) nature of the task; providing greater clarification on the way the digital narrative assessment task coordinates with the rest of the unit, especially the lectures; and making access to the faculty computer lab and the technical assistants available later in the semester, not just at the beginning. Students encouraged the lecturer to maintain the 'story circles' as they found them valuable in providing guidance, particularly in relation to the *openness* of the question. Exemplars were also cited as being potentially useful in this regard. The student suggestions, then, were essentially refinements to what they considered a valuable learning experience.

One critical observation from this study, consistent with current Australian higher education demographics and policy (see Bradley et al., 2008), is that the majority of students are on campus only when required to attend class. This had direct implications for their readiness and capacity to alter their campus engagement routine. This will need to be highlighted to future students as an important time management consideration. Taking into account the changes suggested by students, the lecturer will also introduce a further stage to the project: after submitting the digital narrative to the lecturer, students will 'present' the narrative to the class for discussion. Following this, they will have the opportunity to amend the narrative and then resubmit with the critical reflection essay in order to better facilitate the deep learning potential of digital narratives mentioned above.

In the next offering of the unit, distance students will be able to undertake the digital narrative project provided they can attend the technology workshop, or demonstrate to the lecturer that they have the requisite skills. Overall, given the amount of technical and resource support that was provided this year, and the resources and skills that were developed, it is hoped that in future it won't be necessary to provide so much support. Research shows that we cannot assume that all young tertiary students are 'digital natives'. Lovell and Baker (2009) cite a number of studies that challenge Prensky's view on student attitudes towards and aptitudes with new media and computer technologies more generally and argue for a more nuanced understanding of this phenomenon (see Palfrey & Gasser, 2008; Toledo, 2007). Moreover, it is clear from the experiences with this cohort of students that ongoing technical support will be necessary.

## **Caveats**

While the responses by students and lecturer support the idea that the digital narrative project had clear benefits for student learning, there are a number of factors that limit the generalisability of the study's conclusion. These include the small sample size, as well as the potential conflict between the first named author's role as teacher, researcher and 'trainee' digital narrative maker. The authors have attempted to address these issues by using multiple

perspectives and approaches to the evaluation, and by relating the findings to current literature of digital narratives/storytelling and higher education learning.

## Conclusion

The present study reinforces existing views about the applicability and utility of digital narratives in higher education contexts. It is also the first study of its kind to examine the utility of digital narratives as learning and teaching tools in the discipline of Australian literature. While there are clear limitations on the generalisability of the results the responses by the students and lecturer provide encouragement to continue using this methodology. The feedback from students consistently suggests that the digital narrative project facilitated a deep learning experience for them. The reflections of the lecturer suggest refinements that could be made to further improve students' learning experiences. In particular, the student responses support the idea that the digital narrative facilitated an appreciation of how critical engagement with texts can be related to personal experience (Benmayor, 2008). As mentioned, the use of 'creative' methods to facilitate critical intellectual engagement is by no means novel and the results of the study suggest the value of digital narratives towards supporting and attaining this goal.

This study also demonstrates the importance of effective training and support for academics who seek to implement innovative teaching practices. While the type of software required to create digital narratives has become widely available, the utilisation of such technology in the university classroom brings with it a host of issues. Technical support for students and teachers is vital if such technology is to be used effectively. Furthermore adequate preparation of resources, protocols and plans is also necessary. Amongst other things this study reinforces the utility and necessity of institutional-supported teaching development initiatives to drive innovation.

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## Appendix A

### Task description:

*What does 'Australian literature' mean to you? How does the experience of reading novels and poems, and viewing film reflect and/or influence your sense of who are and where you come from?*

To answer this question you will create a short 'digital story' using iMovie software. A digital story is a 3-5 minute audiovisual presentation. It will include still and/or moving images, as well as a soundtrack and/or voice over narration. You may already be familiar with such presentations through YouTube. You are free to be as creative as possible.

In addition to producing a Digital Narrative, you are required to produce a Critical Reflection Essay. Your Critical Reflection Essay will address a number of specific questions. These include:

1. Why did you choose to approach the questions set for the Digital Narrative Task in the way that you did?
2. How did the process of producing the Digital Narrative over five weeks influence the development of your ideas in relation to the set questions?
3. How does your Digital Narrative relate to the ideas that have been examined in the unit so far and to the primary and/or secondary texts that you have encountered?

## Appendix B

### Digital Narrative Project

(In this section 'Digital Narrative' refers to the short audiovisual movie that you created; 'Critical Reflection Essay' refers the reflective essay that you wrote in conjunction with the Digital Narrative; and 'Digital Narrative Project' refers to the whole project, i.e. Digital Narrative and Critical Reflection Essay)

1. Sufficient information was provided to me about the **Digital Narrative Project** at the start of semester.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>

2. The aims of the **Digital Narrative** were clear.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>

3. The aims of the **Critical Reflection Essay** were clear.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>

4. Sufficient training was provided to me in the use of the software for the purpose of creating the **Digital Narrative**.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>

5. Sufficient technical support was provided to assist me to complete my **Digital Narrative**.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>

6. Sufficient time was provided in class to facilitate the production of the **Digital Narrative**.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>

7. The expectations for the **Digital Narrative** were clearly reflected in the marking criteria sheet for this part of the project.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>

8. The expectations for the **Critical Reflection Essay** were clearly reflected in the marking criteria sheet for this part of the project.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>

9. The **Critical Reflection Essay** provided a good way of exploring in a deeper way the ideas and themes of my **Digital Narrative**.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>

10. My grade for the **Digital Narrative** reflects the time and energy that I devoted to this part of the **Digital Narrative Project**.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>

11. My grade for the **Critical Reflection Essay** reflects the time and energy that I devoted to this part of the **Digital Narrative Project**.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>

12. Appropriate feedback was provided on my completed **Digital Narrative Project**.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>

13. Producing the **Digital Narrative** helped me gain a deeper understanding of the assignment topic.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>

14. Producing the **Digital Narrative** gave me a deeper understanding of Australian literature.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>

15. The process of creating the **Digital Narrative** was enjoyable.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>

16. The process of creating the **Digital Narrative** was challenging.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>

17. Creating a **Digital Narrative** is a useful complement to written essay assignments.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>

18. I am pleased with my **Digital Narrative**.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>

19. I appreciated the chance to revise my **Digital Narrative**.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>

20. **Digital Narrative Projects** have a place in other Faculty of Arts units.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>

21. **Digital Narrative Projects** have a place in other University units.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>

Satisfaction with the Digital Narrative Project as a whole:

Thinking about the Digital Narrative Project as a whole—and considering all of the elements mentioned above—how satisfied are you with your experience undertaking the Digital Narrative Project?

<i>Very Unsatisfied</i>	<i>Unsatisfied</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Very Satisfied</i>