

Becoming an Agent of Memory: Using Visual Literacy to Move beyond Tourism in Study Abroad

CARMEN TRAMMELL SKAGGS
Kennesaw State University

MARIKO IZUMI
Columbus State University

Abstract

In this article, we use an interdisciplinary, short-term study abroad program in Berlin, Germany, “Memorializing the Holocaust,” as a case study to demonstrate the use of visual literacy as a medium for transformative learning in a short-term study abroad course curriculum. By focusing on visual literacy, the program helps students navigate beyond their initial touristic relationship to the iconic images and sites in Berlin, allowing them to re-envision and reflect upon their significance. Through digital storytelling and counter-monument projects, students engage in critical reflection about, and elaboration upon, their knowledge of Holocaust remembrance and their experience abroad, allowing them to move from passive observers to empowered participants. As agents of memory, the students learn to map their own intellectual journeys through unfamiliar intellectual and geographic terrain, creating a new material reference for memory.

Keywords: visual literacy, elaboration, transformative learning, digital storytelling, counter-monument

Introduction

A scene familiar to study abroad faculty unfolds even before the airplane leaves the tarmac. With cell phones in hand, students begin capturing the experience with their cameras. From a selfie, to a group photo, to a panorama of the surroundings, these scholars-turned-travelers begin navigating their new experience by taking photographs. Interestingly enough, the photos that 21st century students take aren't primarily for an archival account like a scrapbook. Instead, they are designed for an external, digital audience that often consumes the images immediately and intermittently, resisting the critical reflection that transformative learning requires. While traveling abroad enhances learning for students as viewers of historical images, it amplifies students' touristic attitude/relationship toward capturing those images. Traveling abroad is exciting, and it is natural that students want to take photographs

and document their experiences. Taking photographs and sharing them via social network sites such as Instagram and Facebook offers potential for creating and sustaining their learning experiences beyond the classroom. However, a study abroad course requires careful design in the curriculum so that the travel experience, and the excitement that comes along with it, will not eclipse the learning experience. In addition, faculty must design assignments that intentionally incorporate visual literacy as a tool that allows students to elaborate on the experience in reflection, mapping not only their geographic journey but also their intellectual landscape, too. Using our own short-term study abroad program as a case study, we will demonstrate how incorporating visual literacy into international education can facilitate transformative learning.

Our students belong to the digital generation, and digital photography plays a significant role in their daily lives. According to the survey conducted by Pew Research Center, 83% of U.S. American teens take photographs with their cell phone (Baker, 2012, p. 44), and 91% of the teens post photos of themselves via social networking sites (Pew Research Center, 2012). Yet, as Hattwig et al. (2013) correctly points out, “this participation in visual culture does not in itself prepare them [college students] to engage critically and effectively with images media in an academic environment.” In fact, “taking photographs seems no longer an act of memory ... but is increasingly becoming a tool for an individual’s identity formation and communication” (Van Dijck, 2008). How can we turn students’ tendency and desire to take photographs into a strength, rather than a hindrance, within the study abroad curriculum? If “using photography [is] an instrument for peer bonding and interaction” among the younger generation, how can we utilize this characteristic to benefit them educationally? (Vivienne & Burgess, 2013).

Visual Media Literacy and Transformative Learning

Students arrive at college classrooms as adult learners with a set of assumptions, beliefs, and habits of mind framing the ways in which they experience course materials. In order for learning to be transformational, Jack Mezirow (1997) asserts, we need to engage students in critical reflection, changing their frames of reference. This change requires deep learning, a process through which an adult learner connects new information and experiences with the old and familiar ones. Cognitive psychologist, Kate McGilly (1994), applies the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion¹ to education and explains it as follows:

Learning occurs when information is transferred from WM [working memory] to LTM [long-term memory]. A mechanism called “elaboration” is important in this transfer process. Elaboration is the process of using facts stored in LTM to embellish on new, to-be-learned information; this connects new information to existing

¹ Originally developed by Richard Petty and John Cacioppo in their study of persuasion, the Elaboration Likelihood Model explains two processes (central and peripheral) through which people develop and change their attitude toward an issue or information.

information, making it more memorable (Anderson 1982; Anderson & Reder 1979). Elaboration provides the learner with multiple 'hooks' or routes for accessing information LTM. Elaboration is a key process in building interconnected knowledge networks; information acquired without elaboration tends to be in the form of less memorable, isolated pieces of information. (p. 6)

From this perspective, designing and delivering a study abroad course is like a weaving of threads that connect the dots of students' isolated and dispersed pieces of knowledge gained through their academic and personal lives prior to joining the course. Visual media literacy (2011) facilitates this elaboration process. By designing assignments that allow students to develop this set of cognitive abilities, we encourage the kind of critical reflection that Mezirow (1997) and Cranton (1994) endorse. With a new frame of reference, students become "both a critical consumer of visual media and a competent contributor to a body of shared knowledge and culture" (ACRL, 2012), interpreting, evaluating, using and creating visual images.

Visual literacy can serve as an effective pedagogical tool to facilitate deep learning of the subject area, particularly among students who live in a media-rich society. Jenkins et al. (2006) describes this environment in which students live as a "culture of participation." Cole et al. (2012) explains that "Increased access to tools and opportunities for interactivity and co-construction also means increased generativity, i.e., more capturing, crafting, telling, retelling, editing, publishing, processing, and meaning making. These are the activities upon which literacy in general, and digital literacy in particular, depends." As mentioned above, participation in media rich culture does not necessarily mean that students have appropriate visual media literacy. Rather, the incorporation of visual media literacy brings along the culture of participation and integrates it into the curriculum. As Cole et al. (2012) put it, "A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another." We invite students to shift "the structure of assumptions through which we understand our experiences" (Mezirow, 1997) by shifting their frame of reference.

Visual literacy allows instructors to re-frame the classroom and the study abroad program as a learning community, where learning is seen as a process of co-constructing knowledge. It "redirects the flow of communication in the classroom so that students can interact, through text and graphics, in constructing a communal knowledge base. They write for each other to extend their common understanding of subject matter. This gives learning, not just writing, a larger shared purpose" (Bruer, 1994). Conceptualizing the dynamics of studying abroad as a learning community brings to the fore the interactive, cooperative, and social nature of learning (Zhu & Baylen, 2005); especially in the higher education context, where students are challenged to think more critically and analytically, "communal interactions allow students to share and distribute the cognitive burdens of thinking" (Bruer, 1994). Being out of their comfort zone and exploring new ways of thinking in a foreign country also adds to the cognitive challenges. As Felt et al. (2012) writes, "Managing cultural [and cognitive] shifts can feel disorienting, and demystifying new practices and products can take time and energy. But educators' embrace of participatory culture can facilitate students' social and emotional growth.

This ability of visual literacy to bring about participatory culture aligns perfectly with the conceptual framework that guides our own short-term study abroad program: “Memorializing the Holocaust.” Focused on the Holocaust memorials, our courses invite students to engage with multiple genres of Holocaust representation, including film, photography, memoir, fiction, poetry, art, and music. The centerpiece of the program is a spring break trip to Berlin, Germany. As a context of learning, study abroad provides both strengths and challenges in learning and teaching about the Holocaust. Importantly, traveling provides a fresh vantage point for students who learn about the Holocaust predominantly through visual representations. As David Bathrick notes, “Visual representations of the Holocaust have proved to be an absolutely integral but also highly contested means by which to understand and remember the Nazi atrocities of World War II” (Bathrick, 2004). The photographic images allow students an opportunity to visualize, and, therefore, verify the atrocities.

However, Bathrick and others warn against the possibility that the viewer may become desensitized to the reality of the Holocaust if the images become iconic. Not surprisingly, many students assume that their familiarity with these iconic images—the piled-high shoes and bodies from liberated concentration camps—means they know what happened in the Holocaust. Through the readings and class discussions, however, students begin to shift their “expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings” (Mezirow, 1997). Indeed, one of the activities we do on the first day of the program reveals the pre-conceived frame of reference students bring to the program. On the first day of the class, we provide students with 20 black and white images related to the Holocaust and ask them to select only 10 of those images to tell the story of the Holocaust. Interestingly, most of the students select the most iconic images to narrate the Holocaust as a historical event. At this early stage of learning, the students use the images to frame only the familiar stories that they have been told, rather than articulating narratives that are deeply grounded in their own learning or reflecting meaning for their own generation.

While in Berlin, students will view many of these iconic images again; however, now they are situated in a different context and rooted in the geographic location of their origins. For example, before students enter the Sachsenhausen concentration camp and pass through the iconic wrought iron gates emblazoned with *Arbeit mach frei*, they will observe the ordinary houses that surround it. Such material context allows students to reconsider the meaning of photographic images of the concentration camps, which often depict only the inside of the camp, tempting the viewers to treat what was going on in isolation from the lives taking place around it. Our digital storytelling and counter-monument assignments invite students to elaborate on the contextualized meanings of these images, the iconic images they have seen in textbooks and other sites prior to traveling abroad, seeing them anew within a different frame. While they previously assumed their position as a post-Holocaust generation precluded them from any obligation of memory, the study abroad assignments provide them the opportunity to re-situate their significance in relationship to their own acts of post-memory.

Our program draws its theoretical underpinning from James Young’s conception of counter-monument. Counter-monuments respond to traditional monuments, rejecting the monument’s representation of stability and permanence.

Instead, counter-monuments return the responsibility of memory to the viewer. By challenging the preconceived notions of the viewer, a counter-monument requires an engaged interaction. Consider, for example, two monuments on the national mall in Washington, D.C.—the World War II monument and the Vietnam War memorial. In contrast to the World War II monument’s traditional columns and imposing dominance, Maya Lin’s counter-monument design, the Vietnam Wall, emerges like a V-shaped scar in the landscape. The simple engraving of the names on black stone invites viewers to approach the wall, rubbing fingers or crayons over the letters. The concept of counter-monument is useful particularly for students who do not have immediate personal and cultural connections to the Holocaust. It encourages them to elaborate on their relationship to the representations of Holocaust memories, providing room for imagining new ways of taking responsibility and of becoming an agent of memory production through visual literacy.

Studying abroad can be overwhelming and disorienting. It is filled with new experiences of learning about the Holocaust from the perspective of counter-monument, being surrounded by a foreign language, walking through an unfamiliar space and exploring a number of Holocaust memorials and museums, etc. The “disorienting dilemma” of traveling abroad, however, gives students richer experiences related to the course subject, as Boase (2008) correctly points out, “[e]xperience does not automatically assume narrative form, but rather we construct stories through the process of reflection on experience. Storytelling is the bread and butter of everyday interpersonal experience, providing a means of communication, interaction, organizing, perception, reflection, thought and ultimately action.” After returning home from Berlin, students construct digital storytelling and counter-monument projects. These visual-based learning projects allow the students to engage in a more public “reflective discourse” (Mezirow, 2000). Our students host a National Day of Remembrance event, inviting members of the campus community and the public at-large to gather and engage in acts of memory about the Holocaust. While the observances across the country often include stories from survivors, our public observance allows our students to engage the community in the memory work of a post-Holocaust generation. These visual based presentations are then shared with the public on the National Day of Remembrance, allowing the students’ narratives to connect their own experiences and memories with an audience beyond our program participants.

Digital stories are “short (3–5 min) autobiographical multimedia narratives in video form, combining personal photographs and/or artworks, narration voiced by the participants themselves, and sometimes music” (Vivienne & Burgess, 2013). We ask our students to use the photographs they have taken during the trip to Berlin, as well as archival images available at the USHMM and other archives and historical societies, to craft a narrative that explores what it means to belong to the post-Holocaust generation by articulating the meaning of learning about the Holocaust memorials. As Avgerinou (2011) puts it, visual literacy is “a cognitive ability but also draws on the affective domain.” Holocaust is an emotion-laden topic. Digital storytelling incorporates students’ emotional responses as an anchor for reflecting on their learning experiences abroad and sorting ideas to communicate their experience to others, acknowledging the key role that students’ thoughts and feelings play in

transformational learning (Baumgartner, 2001). It allows the various learning processes to “center on learners and their experiences” (Boase, 2008), and this is advantageous to make topics such as Holocaust remembrance more personal to the students. When students’ knowledge about the Holocaust is limited, uncritical and unreflective, photography taking can subvert the intended learning objectives. It is likely to facilitate a more touristic relationship to a travel site such as the Memorial for the Murdered Jews, and may risk disrespecting the victims and survivors, however unintentional it might be. Digital storytelling, however, calls upon students to consider the social role of their personal photographs taken during their trip abroad, and engage in the process of elaboration through which students “clarify their ideas and come to better understand what they have learned” by “looking at their own work and their motivation and relationship to it” (Ivala et al.).

The effectiveness of digital storytelling in education has been well documented by scholars and educators (Wang & Zhan, 2010). Elaborating on the work by McDrury & Alterio (2003), Boase (2008) explains the effectiveness of digital storytelling succinctly as follows:

The process of constructing a story requires numerous cognitive strategies to come in to play, such as comparing, selecting, inferring, arranging and revising information. [...] Making and telling the story transforms it from the unspoken perhaps unformed nature which it had while it was latent in the mind, and makes it more real. Storytelling requires the active use of prior knowledge and experience, thus enriching the cognitive resources that are available for future narrative thought and analysis. (p. 4)

This effectiveness applies to the case of Holocaust education as well. For instance, Cole et al.’s (2012) study of users of IWitness, a new online program that engages secondary students in viewing Holocaust survivors’ testimonies, clearly demonstrates how digital storytelling can serve as an effective means to “help students draw connections between the past and present” (Baylen & Butler, 2012) by “fostering social-emotional development and an impact on empathy and behavior” (Cole et al., 2012).

The digital storytelling project shifts students from mere tourists to storytellers with a sense of ethical obligation about their experience of the city of Berlin and their encounters with the Holocaust memorials. By design, the project converts students from consumers of memorial sites to producers of their own memory as members of the post-Holocaust generation. The counter-monument project, adapted from Michael Rothberg’s (2004) original assignment, asks students to design a “counter-monument” in our local city and present its visual design, mapping their learning abroad onto the city of their residence. The project applies Young’s notion of counter-monument to the pedagogical context in higher education by asking students to design a counter-monument on their campus and extends Rothberg’s project by asking students to situate their design in the city where the university is located. This assignment makes students’ learning visible by transposing impressions from abroad onto their living context at home. As Hattwig et al. (2013) puts it, “image production is sometimes seen as a pathway to interpreting and understanding

visual materials” (Hattwig et al., 2013, p. 63). Much like real memorial design competitions, this assignment requires students to share their counter-monument designs with the class through a more traditional form by using visual presentation tools, such as Power Point, Prezi, etc. This format of oral presentation both reflects and gauges students’ understanding of the concept of counter-monument as well as the integral role of visual literacy in understanding the concept. As McGilly (1994) says, “students’ verbalization often reveals more about what they do and do not know than a teacher can determine from answers on tests.” By articulating the connections between their design and Holocaust memory, students will display both their proficiency with visual literacy and their reflective journey of knowledge production.

Furthermore, unlike the digital storytelling component, this assignment gives students freedom for selecting the medium of presentation. As Katsioloudis (2010) rightly points out, being a participant in media-rich culture does not necessarily mean that students know how to select the most effective medium of visual presentation for their purposes. Allowing students to choose the specific technological means to present their visual design of the counter-monument, this assignment integrates into the curriculum an assessment of students’ knowledge about the role of technology itself in the shaping of messages.

We believe that this counter-monument is what Bruer terms “an anchor for learning” about the Holocaust remembrance in our study abroad program. It would “generate interest, allow students to formulate as well as define problems, and see the relevance of the material to their extracurricular lives” (Bruer, 1994). In selecting a site to place the counter-monument in the city, students have to think and reflect concretely about the relationship of the Holocaust remembrance and their own city. They must engage in detailed self-reflection, elaborating the new knowledge about the Holocaust remembrance by referring to what they know about the city, its population, history, and their own relationship to it. By its very nature oral presentation is short-lived; however, the experience of visualizing the city with a memorial monument will remain in their memory. The particular location they have selected, be it a river bank or the center of a downtown music concert hall, these places gain new layers of personal meaning intertwined with the curriculum, providing the “anchor” to continue students’ elaboration of the Holocaust memories just as their lives continue to unfold in the city.

Case Study in Context

Our study abroad program is a 16-week, semester-long curriculum, which includes a week-long travel to Berlin, Germany. Students take up to six credit hours in English and communication courses. As an interdisciplinary program, the subjects of communication and English are integrated together under the theme of Holocaust remembrance, and we co-teach each class throughout the semester. Our curriculum design reflects the visual literacy competency standard for higher education developed by the Association of College and Research Libraries, and Moon’s Map of Learning (1999), which is designed to assess students’ reflections in the process of learning. As Jenkins & Lonsdale (2007) demonstrated, Moon’s mode is more effective in locating

reflection in storytelling—digital or oral—than the one developed by McDrury and Alterio (2003).

Unit 1. Pre-Departure: Weeks 1-6

During the first half of the semester, students are introduced to the study of Holocaust remembrance and the concept of counter-monument. The class meetings are conducted like a seminar, guided by the notion of “reciprocal teaching” as a model (McGilly, 1994). For instance, while one instructor leads the discussion on her expert content area, the other instructor joins other students as an active participant in the learning process. This practice makes the flow of information and communication less hierarchical and more fluid, turning the classroom into a community of learners, where we share our insights, knowledge, questions and discussions.

As a part of our discussions, we use photographs of Holocaust memorials to introduce visual literacy. For instance, we use a photograph of the Holocaust memorial in New York. The first slide shows a close up image of the statue itself, and we ask students what message this particular monument conveys. Then, we show another image of the same statue, captured in long-shot that shows the Statue of Liberty in its background. This time, we direct students’ attention to the concept of frame and discuss how contextual information that is present or absent within the frame shapes the meaning of the image. Discussion of visual literacy, such as this one, will be further elaborated during the trip in Berlin. For instance, when we visit museums and see historical photographs, particularly the iconic ones often seen in textbooks and popular media, we discuss how details in the photographs tell us that they were taken by Nazi officials for the purpose of propaganda.

Prior to departure, we study the memorials we will visit in Berlin and engage students in our “mapping activity.” After dividing students into small groups, we hand them a map of Berlin. Each group receives a name and address of a specific monument, and they are asked to locate it on the map. Then, students outline a travel route to the monument, using public transportation. This exercise not only gives them an opportunity to become familiar with the map of Berlin, but it also helps them visualize these memorials’ location. For example, “Bibliothek,” designed by Micha Ullman, is located in Bebelplatz off the busy Unter den Linden. A memorial to the National Socialists’ 1933 burning of the books, the memorial is located in the heart of Humboldt University and next door to the Staatsoper Unter den Linden. Even before students travel to Berlin, the students may begin thinking about the significance of location in memorial design.

Unit 2. Learning Abroad: Week 7 in Berlin, Germany

On the first day of our stay in Berlin, we travel with the students to the Friedrichstrasse Railway Station to view Frank Meisler’s monument to the Kindertransport, “Trains to Life—Trains to Death,” which juxtaposes the two radically different fates of the children, facing opposite directions. As one walks around the sculpture and takes photographs, it becomes clear that there is no one single frame that captures the historical moment in ways that “represent” or match

closely with the knowledge about the past as we now know it. In the midst of a busy train station, it is very difficult to take a long shot to include the sculpture in its entirety. If one takes a photograph from the side to capture the two opposite directions the children faced, one cannot see the facial expressions and concrete details of either group. Through this experience, these concepts of visual literacy such as frame, perspective, the relationship of figure and ground, begin to gain more concrete and experiential meanings in understanding the selective nature of historical representation in general, and visual image specifically.

After viewing this monument, students receive their first assignment to be completed by the end of the day, allowing them to put the in-class mapping activity to use. Each pair of students has to find their assigned monument, take a photograph, and share it with us at the end of the day. This assignment has been tremendously effective in personalizing their encounter with the Holocaust monuments. The students have to think on their feet, navigating the city to find them. Many students discover that this experience embodies the “disorienting dilemma” that prepares them for the process of transformative learning. Some of them get lost, and some of them do not find the monument, taking a photograph of something entirely different. There is no one “right” way to get to the memorials. By finding and mapping a path to the monument in their own way, the encounter they have with the Holocaust memorial becomes a personal one. Rather than being taken to the monument by instructors, the monument comes to have personal significance in their study abroad experience. At the end of the day, when students show us the monument’s photograph, their impression of the monument is filled with a sense of personal journey. This exercise activates students’ initiative for self-discovery throughout their stay in Berlin. They begin noticing small details in the city, such as Guenther Demnig’s, Stolperstein, little “stumbling stones” that are buried as a part of the pavement and are easy to overlook if one is not paying attention;² and they engage more and more in self-generating discussions about whether a particular site or object can be considered as a counter-monument.

During their stay in Berlin, students are asked to keep a detailed journal about their photographs. What prompted you to take a photograph of this scene, monument, etc.? What was there around this particular object? Why did you take this photograph from this angle? This journal will become a resource for students as they later reflectively articulate their learning experiences through designing their digital stories and counter-monuments. As participants in the formal program excursions, students visit Sachsenhausen, the Jewish Museum, the House of the Wannsee Conference, the German Resistance Museum, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, the Topography of Terror, the Jewish Memorial at Grosse Hamburger Strasse, and the Gleis 17 Memorial at the Grunewald Train Station.

² Guenther Demnig, a Berlin artist, installs brass bricks in the cobblestone sidewalks of Berlin’s Charlottenburg district. The name and details of death of the Holocaust victim are inscribed on each brick.

Unit 3. Post-trip: Weeks 8-14

Once we return from the journey abroad, students begin working on their digital stories and counter-monuments. They share their drafts in class, apply the visual literacy learned during the pre-departure period in discussions, and revise their presentations, synthesizing their impressions. On National Remembrance Day, students share their digital stories, recite verses from Holocaust poetry, and present counter-monument designs to an audience open to both the campus and the community at-large.

From pre-departure to the post-trip, students' learning about Holocaust remembrance is reinforced through visual literacy in cyclical processes. For example, the concept of figure and ground relationship introduced in the pre-departure unit through the image of the Holocaust memorial in New York is reinforced as we closely examine the iconic historical photograph of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. The same concept gains salience, again, as students struggle to take satisfying photographs at the "Trains to Life—Trains to Death" memorial in Berlin. Because these encounters with Holocaust remembrance are multimodal, ranging from two dimensional visual images to three dimensional sculptures, each occasion not only underscores what they have learned but also serves as the opportunity for further elaboration. To continue with the previous example, the concept of figure-ground relationship takes on a new dimension because now its role shifts from an analytical tool for a static object to a dynamic practice driven by the desire to communicate about the memorial. As students design counter-monuments and craft digital stories in the post-trip unit, the production processes reflectively engage them again in elaboration of the new information and knowledge about the Holocaust remembrance and visual literacy. Who and/or what is the main figure in my design of counter-monument? How does this photograph from the trip frame your experience? Can one use colored triangles, which were used by Nazis to mark prisoners' identities, to create a counter-monument? How can I communicate about silence and absence in my digital story?

As Daniel Suther (2001) writes, "[t]he ability to facilitate learner's elaboration is important because substantial psychological research shows that elaboration leads to positive learning outcomes, including memory for the knowledge unit and understanding of its significance." Throughout the three units outlined above, students in our program go through complex processes of elaboration: applying concepts of visual literacy learned through two-dimensional images to three-dimensional objects; translating visual literacy from an analytical tool of historical images to reflective and ethical guidance for representing objects, people, historical events and themselves, articulating what it means to remember the Holocaust through their own personal journeys. The instructions and exercises necessarily traverse diverse dimensions of teaching and learning about Holocaust remembrance as well as visual literacy. By focusing on the practice of producing visual content, students will also be able to develop visual literacy competency and visibly demonstrate the new knowledge they learned through classroom and personal research.

Reflection

In his essay “When the Last Survivor is Gone,” Michael Berenbaum writes: “the Holocaust will become about the past and recede into the past . . . We are not witnesses; we have lived in the presence of witnesses. Future generations will not even be able to say that” (cited in Lindquist, 2010). In such a context, how can we help contemporary students imagine themselves as agents of memory, as those who self-reflexively take on the responsibility for keeping alive the memories of the Holocaust? As Michael Rothberg (2004) notes, our challenge is “encouraging awareness of one’s simultaneous implication in and distance from the events under consideration.” Most of our students have little personal connection or access to the lived stories of struggling for survival in the face of atrocities, but we believe our program was able to provide a unique learning environment to help students become “intentional learners,” – “for whom learning is a goal rather than an incidental outcome of cognitive activity” (McGilly, 1994). Because the courses included in this short-term study abroad program were from two disciplines focused on rhetoric and argument—English and communication, we were keenly aware of the importance of equipping students with the skills described by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) as essential elements of a 21st century education: the ability to “create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts.” After successfully completing our program requirements, the students also demonstrated proficiency in skills that are the hallmarks of self-directed critical reflection: “defining the need, finding and assessing, interpreting and analyzing, evaluating, using, creating, and understanding ethical and legal issues” (Hattwig et al. 2013). For instance, a senior biology student began his digital story with an image of an animal in the Berlin Zoo. As an aspiring biologist, his story intertwined the Nazi discourse of eugenics and biological experimentations with his reflection on the role and power of biology in our contemporary life. Through the transformative process of critical reflection, he navigated through his own relationship to the past and the present, understanding his own responsibility for using knowledge in an ethical and responsible manner. Similarly, an academically high achieving history student reflected on the role of intellectuals in the unfolding of German history, demonstrating her critical awareness about the ethical potential, both positive and negative, of leadership. Significantly, our learning community dispelled her previously held notion that education, culture, and art could protect society from misguided and destructive potential of unbridled power. A music major designed a counter-monument that invited participants to reflect on all the unwritten music lost to the world when countless composers and performers perished in the Holocaust.

After moving through the “disorienting dilemma” of the study abroad experience and engaging in critical reflection about the course readings and assignments, our students produced the projects described above as tangible evidence of a future course of action informed by a new understanding of their relationship to a world-altering historical event. Significantly, we also engaged students in thinking about the broader, ongoing work of memory in America today. For example, after learning about Germany’s long, arduous process of wrestling with and acknowledging

its role in the atrocities of the Holocaust, students started thinking about and questioning why the United States does not have a memorial to slavery. In these conversations, the difficult work of transformative learning—coming to terms with one’s own preconceived notions and assumptions—confronted our students. Similarly, we explored the work of memory involved in memorializing the unfathomable loss experienced by the United States in 2001 on September 11th. As witnesses to this atrocity, the students started to recognize the distinctions between the memory work of survivors and the memory work of the post-atrocity generations.

By incorporating visual literacy in our study abroad program, we offer students the opportunity and the platform to articulate their experience of navigating unfamiliar terrain—both intellectual and geographic. They learn to go beyond a touristic reading of a map of a city or a text; they create their own. Through the digital storytelling project and the counter-monument assignment, the students map their own intellectual journey, incorporating the questions, ambivalences, confusions, and transformations that occur along the way. During this process, the “disorienting dilemma” enables them to revisit the familiar narratives and reflect critically on their previous knowledge. In place of these iconic images, students use their own images and experiences to reshape their frame of reference as more responsible thinkers. They become agents of memory empowered to tell the story.

References

- Avgerinou, M. D., & Rune, P. (2011). Toward a cohesive theory of visual literacy. *Journal of Visual Literacy*, 30(2), 1-19.
- Baker, F. (2012). Media literacy in K-12 classroom. Washington D.C., International Society for Technology Education.
- Bathrick, D. (2004). Teaching visual culture and the Holocaust. In M. Hirsch & I. Kacandes (Eds.), *Teaching the representation of the Holocaust* (pp. 466-476). New York, NY: MLA.
- Baumgartner, L. M. (2001). An update on transformational learning. In S. B. Merriam (Ed.), *New directions for adult and continuing education: No. 89. The new update on adult learning theory* (pp. 15-24). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Berenbaum, M. (2004). When the last survivor is gone. *Jewish Daily Forward*. Retrieved from <http://forward.com/articles/104857/when-the-last-survivor-is-gone/>.
- Boase, C. (2008). Digital storytelling for reflection and engagement: A study of the uses and potential of digital storytelling. Center for Active Learning and Department of Education, University of Gloucestershire. Available via Digital Storytelling and Learning: A Project at Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences. Retrieved from http://gjamissen.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/boase_assessment.pdf.

- Bruer, J. T. (1996). Classroom problems, school culture and cognitive research. In K. McGilly (Ed.), *Classroom lessons: Integrating cognitive theory and classroom practice* (pp. 273-290). Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Cole, G., Street, K., & Felt, L. J. (2012). Storytelling in the digital age: Engaging learners for cognitive and affective gains. *The International Journal of Technology, Knowledge and Society*, 8, 113-119.
- Cranton, P. (1994, November/December). Self-directed and transformative instructional development. *Journal of Higher Education*, 65(6), 726-744.
- Felt, L. J., Vartabedian, V., Literat, I., & Mehta, R. (2012). Explore locally, excel digitally: A participatory learning after-school program for enriching citizenship on- and offline. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 4(3), 213-228.
- Hattwig, D., Bussert, K., Medaille, A., & Burgess, J. (2013). Visual literacy standard in higher education: New opportunities for libraries student learning. *Portal: Libraries and Academy*, 13, 61-89.
- Ivala, E., Gachago, D., Condy, J., & Ivala, E. (2014). Digital storytelling and reflection in higher education: A case of pre-service student teachers and their lecturers at a University of Technology. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 2(1), 217-227. Retrieved from <http://www.redfame.com/journal/index.php/jets/article/viewFile/286/24>.
- Jenkins, M., & Lonsdale, J. (2007). Evaluating the effectiveness of digital storytelling for student reflection. In Proceedings ascilite Singapore, 440-444.
- Jenkins, H., Purushotma, R., Weigel, M., Clinton, K., & Robison, A. J. (2006). *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Katsioloudis, P. (2010). Identification of quality visual-based learning material for technology education. *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education*, 47(1). Retrieved from <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JITE/v47n1/>.
- Lindquist, D. H. (2010). Setting a context for Holocaust education in the United States: Past trends and future challenges. *International Journal of Social Education*, 24, 221-243.
- McDrury, J., & Alterio, M. G. (2003). *Learning through storytelling in higher education: Using reflection and experience to improve learning*. New York, NY: Kogan Page.

- McGilly, K. (1994). Cognitive science and educational practices: An introduction. In K. McGilly (Ed.), *Classroom lessons: Integrating cognitive theory and classroom practice* (pp. 3-21). Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative learning: Theory to practice. In P. Cranton (Ed.), *New directions for adult and continuing education* (pp. 5-12). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Moon, J. A. (1999). *Reflection in learning and professional development: Theory and practice*. London: Kogan Page, New York.
- National Council of Teachers of English (2013). NCTE Framework for 21st Century Curriculum and Assessment.
<http://www.ncte.org/governance/21stcenturyframework>.
- Rothberg, M. (2004). Pedagogy and the politics of memory: 'The Counter-Monument Project.' In M. Hirsch & I. Kacandes (Eds.), *Teaching the representation of the Holocaust* (pp. 466-476). New York: MLA.
- Shoah Foundation. (n.d.) University of Southern California. Retrieved from <http://sfi.usc.edu/news/2013/10/viral-video-demonstrates-need-mandatory-holocaust-education>.
- Smith, A. (2011). Americans and their cell phones. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2011/08/15/americans-and-their-cell-phones/>.
- Stone, M. J., & Petrick, J. F. (2013). The educational benefits of travel experiences: A literature review. *Journal of Travel Research*, 52, 731-744.
- Suther, D. A. (2001). Towards a systematic study of representational learning discourse. *Journal of Universal Computer Science*, 7(3). Retrieved from http://www.jucs.org/jucs_7_3/towards_a_systematic_study.
- Teens fact sheet (2012). Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheets/teens-fact-sheet/>.
- Van Dijck, J. (2008). Digital photography: Communication, identity, memory. *Visual Communication*, 7, 57-76.
- Visual literacy competency standards for higher education. (2011). Association of College and Research Libraries,
<http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/visualliteracy>.
- Vivienne, S., & Burges, J. (2013). The remediation of the personal photograph and the politics of self-representation in digital storytelling. *Journal of Material Culture*, 18, 279-298.

Wang, S., & Zhan, H. (2010). Enhancing teaching and learning through digital storytelling.

International Journal of Information and Communication Technology, 6(2), 76-87.

Zhu, E., & Baylen, D. M. (2005). From learning community to community learning: Pedagogy,

technology, interactivity. *Educational Media International*, 42(3), 251-26.

Author's Note: Carmen Trammell Skaggs is Associate Dean for academic support and an Associate Professor of English at Kennesaw State University. Mariko Izumi is Director of the Office of Quality Enhancement Plan and an Associate Professor of Communication at Columbus State University.

Citation: Skaggs, C., & Izumi, M. (2018). Becoming an agent of memory: Using visual literacy to move beyond tourism in study abroad. *Journal of Transformative Learning*, (5)1, 71-85.