

Investigating an Intensive Digital Storytelling Seminar as an Effective Learning
Partnerships Model for Underrepresented Students

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Steven Cisneros

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Rebecca Ropers-Huilman, Ph.D., Adviser

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Chapter 1: Introduction: The Opportunity Gap

United States higher education has the potential to improve the wellbeing of individuals and communities; however, colleges and universities have not produced the same results for all racial and ethnic groups. Specifically, American Indian, Black, and Hispanic students in the United States have historically completed four-year degree programs at significantly lower rates than their peers. According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2007), of all first-time postsecondary students who enrolled full-time in public, bachelor's degree-seeking programs between 1996 and 2002, Asians and Pacific Islanders had the highest four-year graduation rates, followed by Whites, then Hispanics, Blacks, and finally American Indians and Alaskan Natives. This trend has not changed significantly over time.

In the United States, there are major discrepancies in the numbers of four-year degrees earned by race and ethnicity. As of March 2010, 55.8% of Asians between the ages of 25 and 29 held a Bachelor's degree or higher. For Whites, the percentage was 38.6%, for Blacks it was 19.4% and for Hispanics it was 13.5% (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2010, Table 8). From the same data, it is clear that 2010 was not an anomaly. Between March 1989 (the first month and year for which data are available for all four racial and ethnic groups) and March 2010 the average annual percentage of all 25 to 29 year-old persons in the United States who had a Bachelor's degree or higher was 24.2%. During the same time period, the average annual percentage of Asian and White 25 to 29 year-old persons with a Bachelor's degree or higher was 52.4% and 27.4%, respectively. These two groups have consistently earned more degrees than Blacks and Hispanics. The average annual percentage of Black and Hispanic 25 to

29 year-old persons with a Bachelor's degree or higher during the same time period was 13.4% and 10%, respectively. American Indians and Alaskan Natives also earn four-year degrees at below-average rates, and data show that in 2009-10 American Indian and Alaska Native students earned .8% of all Bachelor's degrees conferred in the United States (NCES, 2012). By comparison, as of the 2010 U.S. Census, American Indians and Alaska Natives made up 1.7% of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

These latter three groups consistently fall below the population average in higher education participation, and this trend is also evident in five-year and six-year graduation rates (NCES, 2010, Table 341). More recent data show similar trends for students who first enrolled in 2005 (NCES, 2013, Table 376). A caveat to these data is that while Asian Americans have the highest four-year degree-completion rates, the within-group disparities are stark. These disparities are only visible when data are disaggregated by income, nationality, and immigration status. For example, in the Midwestern United States the number of Asian adults from various cultural groups who held a four-year degree or higher from 2006-2010 ranged from 13% to 84%. This is only apparent when data are broken down by country of ancestry (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2012).

Significance of the Problem

As stated above, effective higher education benefits individuals and society as a whole. Writing about individual benefits, Kuh (1993) described five areas that are generally accepted to be outcomes of college attendance: cognitive complexity, knowledge acquisition and application, humanitarianism, interpersonal and intrapersonal competence, and practical competence. More recently, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005)

have written extensively about the impact of college on students, including the positive impact of earning a baccalaureate degree on post-college earnings. Higher earnings lead to a higher quality of life as well as larger contributions to tax revenues and the nation's Gross Domestic Product, both of which lead to stronger and healthier communities (Barrow & Rouse, 2005; Baum & Payea, 2005; Tinto, 2004). Furthermore, an educated citizenry leads to increased civic engagement and volunteerism, and decreased crime rates, unplanned pregnancies, and unemployment (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Brennan, Durazzi, & Séné, 2013). In order for people from all groups to reap the benefits of higher education, higher education leaders and policy makers need to strive for equitable outcomes across racial and ethnic groups.

If the current trend continues, the human capital in the United States is set to fall drastically within the next two to three decades as a major demographic shift takes place. Within this time frame, the White population in the United States will be merely one of several significant racial groups that comprise the United States. In order to understand the timeline for this demographic shift, one only needs to look at state and national demographic patterns and projections. In 1996 72% of U.S. high school graduates were White and 28% were students of color. By 2006 the percentage of White high school graduates dropped to 66% and the percentage of students of color rose to 34%. NCES projects that the 2016 U.S. high school graduating class will be made up of 59% White students and 41% students of color. In 2021 the percentages are projected to be 57% White students and 43% students of color (NCES, 2011b, Table 13). In the same vein, 2013 was the first year in recorded United States history that the births of children of

color outnumbered the births of White children and “[W]hites in the under-5 group are expected to tip to a minority this year or next” (Yen, 2013, ¶4).

Differences in degree-completion rates by race and ethnicity provide an indication that something is awry, but in order to fully understand the problem it is important to look beyond racial and ethnic categories. Researchers have found that barriers related to income, first-generation status, and campus climate contribute to the discrepancies in four-year degree completion rates, and these factors disproportionately impact American Indian, Black, Hispanic, and some Asian students. Similarly, these populations are more likely to be negatively impacted by two or more of these factors, and it is the combination of these factors that causes the largest challenges to degree completion (Tinto, 2005).

Purpose of the Study

Recent research on the use of digital storytelling with underrepresented populations indicates that the digital storytelling process can be effective at supporting individuals’ self-authorship development. The purpose of this study was to discover the ways in which an intensive five-day digital storytelling process on a university campus supported students’ self-authorship development and prepared them for potential barriers to degree completion. The seminar that is the focus of this research used a digital storytelling process that was similar to the process used in recent studies, with the exception of the duration of the process and the facilitators of the process. The seminar process was significantly shorter, and undergraduates as opposed to professionals facilitated the seminar process.

As I will explain in the next chapter, students who enter college with self-authored ways of knowing may be better equipped to overcome challenges in college by

using successful coping strategies and college resources for success. A digital storytelling process that efficiently uses time and financial resources to prepare underrepresented students for barriers to degree completion has the potential to make a significant impact on the gap in four-year degree completion rates.

Research Questions

The research questions that will guide this study are below:

1. In what ways did attending a five-day, residential digital storytelling Summer Bridge led by undergraduate peer mentors support attendees' self-authorship development?
2. In what ways did attending a five-day, residential digital storytelling Summer Bridge led by undergraduate peer mentors support attendees in overcoming barriers to persistence in their first year?

Definition of Terms

This paper focuses on the experiences of underrepresented students who enroll in public four-year institutions in the United States. Through understanding their experiences, including ways to potentially support underrepresented student persistence, I hope to contribute to resolving the opportunity gap in U.S. higher education. The term *underrepresented* refers to American Indian, Asian, Black, and Hispanic students enrolled at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). It also refers to students who are first-generation and students who are low-income. The degree to which these characteristics overlap varies by the individual, creating a unique set of barriers for each individual student. I broadly define underrepresented students as a way to acknowledge

these unique sets of barriers, particularly for the participants in this study, as explained in chapter three.

I use the term *opportunity gap* deliberately. Some researchers refer to discrepancies in degree completion between underrepresented students and their peers as an *achievement gap* (NCES, 2011a). Other researchers prefer the term *opportunity gap* (Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee, 2014). Both terms refer to education disparities, but supporters of the latter term argue that achievement gap can imply that certain groups of students are unwilling or unable to achieve academically at the same rate as their peers. Those same supporters argue that there is a lack of equal opportunity within the educational system, which leads to gaps in educational attainment. Thus, it is argued, the term opportunity gap recognizes systemic inequities that lead to lower educational attainment by certain groups of students. In my research I will use the term opportunity gap for these same reasons.

The term *four-year degree* is synonymous with the term Bachelor's degree. More specifically, this paper focuses on underrepresented students' barriers to completion of a four-year degree. Additionally, while my institutional focus is four-year public colleges and universities in the United States, for the sake of brevity, terms such as colleges, universities, and higher education, will be used in place of the longer description.

The next explanation of terminology has to do with labels used by writers and researchers to describe racial and ethnic groups. Within any racial and ethnic group there are a number of nuances that define identity, and these nuances are often missed with the use of broad labels. For example, within the *Hispanic* population, the terms Hispanic,

Latino, and Chicano are used. Each term holds different technical and personal meaning, depending on an individual's interpretation, understanding, and opinion of the term.

In this paper, broad racial and ethnic terms will be used so as to capture the overall state of affairs reported by various sources. For example, the term *American Indian* will be used in place of the longer term American Indian and Alaskan Native in later sections. This is not done out of disrespect for these two (distinct) populations, nor is it the intent of this paper to claim that brevity and readability are more important than identity. Rather, in some cases, only data for American Indians are reported, and in other cases data for American Indians and Alaskan Natives are combined. Similarly, the term *African American* or *Black* will be used interchangeably and refer to students who were born in the United States.

The next two terms I will explain are *low-income* and *first-generation*. For the purpose of this paper, the term low-income refers to any undergraduate student who is eligible to receive the federal Pell Grant. Receipt of a federal Pell Grant can be used to estimate a student's household income, as the Pell Grant is a need-based grant. For example, "In the 1999-2000 academic year, 75 percent of all Pell recipients had family income below \$32,000" (Heller, 2004, p. 1).

According to the U.S. Department of Education, a first-generation student is "a student for whom neither parent has earned a four-year college degree" (U.S. Department of Education, 2012b). The logic behind this definition is that parents who have completed a four-year degree have the cultural and financial resources to support a child who wants to do the same. Cultural resources refer to cultural capital within higher education, and are sometimes referred to as "college knowledge". Many parents who

have completed a four-year degree understand the nuances associated with living on campus, studying long hours, taking advantage of college resources and opportunities, and generally what it means to be a full-time college student.

My study focuses on *public institutions*, which are colleges and universities that receive funding from state taxpayers. While there is a four-year degree attainment gap at both public and private non-profit institutions, the focus of this paper is on public four-year schools for the following reasons. The first reason has to do with overall graduation rates. On average, campus-wide graduation rates are higher at private, non-profit colleges and universities (privates) than they are at public colleges and universities (publics). For example, between 1996 and 2004, the average four-year graduation rate of all first-time degree-seeking students at privates was 50.8%. During the same time period, the average four-year graduation rate of all first-time degree-seeking students at publics was 29.4%. Similarly, the degree attainment gap is smaller at privates than it is at publics. For example, between 1996 and 2004 the degree attainment gap between American Indians, Blacks, and Hispanics and their Asian and White counterparts was 11% higher at publics than it was at privates (NCES, 2011a).

The second reason for limiting the focus of this paper to public colleges and universities has to do with the number of students served. Enrollment at public four-year institutions is considerably higher than enrollment at private four-year institutions. For example, in 2009, public higher education institutions enrolled a total of 7,709,197 students whereas privates enrolled 3,730,316 students. By the same token, in 2010 publics awarded 1,049,057 Bachelor's degrees whereas privates awarded 503,164 Bachelor's degrees (NCES, 2011a). Public institutions are larger, on average, than

private institutions therefore impacting a larger number of students, thus greatly influencing the overall number of four-year degree earners by race and ethnicity in the United States.

The third reason for focusing on public colleges and universities is that the majority of these institutions in the United States are *Predominantly White Institutions*, or PWIs. As opposed to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), Asian-Serving Institutions (ASIs), and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), PWIs serve a significantly lower percentage of American Indian, Asian, Black, and Hispanic students with respect to their total undergraduate enrollment. As I will explain later, the racial and ethnic makeup of the student body can greatly impact campus climate and sense of belonging for students who are in the minority, especially on campuses with large student bodies.

The last reason for limiting the focus of my research to public institutions is that large institutions provide larger sets of data for researchers to study. Most of the studies cited in my research use data from publics, presumably for this reason. This is not to say that researchers cannot or should not study underrepresented student experiences at private schools. Such research would undoubtedly provide valuable insight. Rather, this proposal concentrates on the wealth of literature that exists related to public institutions.

My research focuses on the impact of a particular *digital storytelling* process on underrepresented students' preparation for potential barriers to degree completion. Digital storytelling is a relatively new pedagogical tool in which students reflect, write, create, and share a three to five minute personal digital story using digital media

technology. The process includes many steps beyond simply making a video, and the steps of effective digital story production will be outlined in a later section.

Overview

With my research I hope to contribute to the current understanding of effective ways to combat opportunity gaps that limit the success of underrepresented students. Specifically, I set out to discover the ways in which an intensive digital storytelling seminar impacts underrepresented students' self-authorship development as a means to prepare them to overcome barriers to degree completion. The following paragraphs outline the sections of this paper. After this outline I provide the purpose of this study and my research questions.

Current research provides a broad understanding of underrepresented students' barriers to degree completion, and in chapter two of this paper I describe these barriers. I then explain the concept of self-authorship, and explore how underrepresented students experience barriers to degree completion. Specifically, I explain how underrepresented students are more likely to encounter the first phase of self-authorship development (the Crossroads) during college, and they are likely to have a more-complex Crossroads experience than their peers. Therefore, without preparation for Crossroads experiences during college underrepresented students may be more likely to drop out. I then describe the Learning Partnerships Model (LPM), which is used to promote self-authorship development.

In the last section of chapter two I will explain the digital storytelling process, and review recent research that demonstrates its use as a Learning Partnerships Model. I will then explain how digital storytelling is used in an intensive summer program, which

differs from that used in the recent research. Given these differences my intention in this study was to discover if a particular digital storytelling process is an effective and efficient way to support underrepresented students' self-authorship development.

Chapter three presents the methodology that was used in this study. This case study inquiry was primarily based on interviews of students who attended an intensive five-day digital storytelling summer program led by undergraduate students as well as surveys taken by participants at the end of the program. Chapter three also contains a description of the study site and methods for recruiting participants.

In Chapter four I will explain the findings from my study, including the codes that emerged during data analysis. This chapter includes quotes from students to support the findings including support for the answers to my research questions. The findings from this study show that participants were supported in their self-authorship development as a result of their participation in the Summer Bridge. As a result the participants gained confidence in their abilities to overcome barriers to degree completion in their first year of college.

After explaining the findings of this study I will discuss the connections between previous research and this research. I will also discuss the implications and recommendations from this study for higher education professionals to consider. I conclude chapter five with a discussion of the limitations and delimitations of this study and ideas for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The opportunity gap in higher education is not a new issue, and it has been heavily researched. Unfortunately, the issue continues to exist despite many efforts to understand and resolve it. In this chapter I provide an overview of previous work pertaining to the opportunity gap. This overview includes the three broad factors that contribute to the opportunity gap as well as recommendations for resolving the opportunity gap from recent research. I also include an application of self-authorship theory and the coinciding learning partnerships model as the conceptual framework for understanding and resolving the opportunity gap using digital storytelling.

Brief Overview of Recent Research of Barriers to Degree Completion

Over the last several years, researchers have published detailed reports outlining the opportunity gap as well as recommendations to address it. A recent report was published by the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy (CEEP) at Indiana University (Spradlin, Rutkowski, Burroughs, & Lang, 2010). In their review of the literature, the authors conclude that, “although academic preparation and performance do play a major role in retention of underrepresented students, up to 75 percent of all dropout decisions are non-academic in nature” (Spradlin et al., p. vii). This finding supports the use of the term opportunity gap as opposed to achievement gap, as explained earlier. This finding is also important because it emphasizes that underrepresented students have the capacity to persist and graduate from college, but barriers outside of academics prevent them from doing so.

Spradlin et al. (2010) categorize the non-academic factors that impact dropout decisions into three lenses: financial, psychological, and institutional. These lenses are

fairly consistent with findings from the other reports (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Gándara, & Maxwell-Jolly, 1999; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). In this paper I focus on barriers related to income, first-generation status, and campus climate. I believe these three categories accurately capture the findings from the current research on the opportunity gap, including those found in the CEEP report. These categories are explained in the following sections.

Income.

A major barrier to degree completion for underrepresented students is related to income. The fact that income is tied to degree attainment has been made clear by a number of researchers. As Ewell and Wellman (2007) write, “The single biggest predictor of college enrollment and graduation remains socioeconomic status, not academic performance” (p. 3). Not all American Indian, Black, and Hispanic students are low-income, but these populations are more likely on average to be low-income than Asian and White students. According to U.S. Census data, household income is highest for Asians, followed by Whites, then Hispanics, and finally Blacks (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012, Table 690). These differences in household income nearly mirror the differences in four-year degree attainment rates (Mortenson, 2005; Tinto, 2004). Similarly, although not included in the U.S. Census 2012 Statistical Abstract, the household income of Native Americans is correlated to degree-attainment rates (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012).

As mentioned earlier, receipt of a federal Pell Grant can be used to estimate a student’s household income. American Indian, Black, or Hispanic students are 17.9% more likely to be Pell Grant recipients than their Asian and White peers (NCES, 2007).

Low-income status negatively impacts degree attainment, although in fairly indirect ways. Students from low-income households often delay college enrollment after graduating from high school, enroll part-time in order to work or help family members at home, or work full-time while attending college (Tinto, 2004). According to Horn, Premo, and Malizio (1998), these risk factors increase the likelihood of leaving college early. In addition to these three, the authors identify four more risk factors, which include being financially independent, having dependent children, being a single parent, and having a GED. These seven risk factors have been consistent over time, as has the fact that on average, low-income students have significantly more of these risk factors than their peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Low-income students often make decisions to delay enrollment, enroll part-time, and work full-time to earn enough income to pay for education expenses in addition to living expenses. Similarly, being financially independent, having children, and being a single parent can result in an increased need to earn income. While federal and state financial aid programs cover a portion of school-related expenses for low-income students, financial aid is often not adequate to cover the full cost of attendance (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). This results in a greater likelihood of experiencing financial stress, and students who experience financial stress often have few options to resolve such stress outside of working more hours. In examining the effects of financial stress on retention, Joo, Durband, and Grable (2008) report that students who have high levels of financial stress are more likely to drop out of school than students who have low levels of financial stress. This finding makes sense given the logic that working long hours results in fewer

opportunities for engagement with the institution, and engagement is a critical component key to retention (Tinto, 2004).

High financial stress may distract a student from engagement with the campus community because extra hours outside of class that might directed toward engagement with the institution are instead spent working a part-time or full-time job. Engagement includes interacting with faculty, staff and peers, participating in extracurricular activities, and participating in scholarly work such as undergraduate research and writing (Tinto, 1993). Students who enroll part-time, work long hours, or need to take care of family members do not have the same amount of discretionary time needed to take advantage of such engagement opportunities. If a student is not able to engage with the campus community in some meaningful way, the decision to drop out becomes easier because the student may have a lower sense of belonging with the institution (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Institutions that stress or require full-time enrollment effectively encourage low-income students to leave if they cannot engage with the campus in the traditional ways mentioned above.

Low-income students might drop out of college in one of three financially related ways. They either make a cost-conscious decision to leave due to an inability to pay, they are forced to drop out for non-payment, or they underperform in coursework as a result of financial stress and they are academically suspended (Paulsen & St John, 2002). In any scenario, not continuing can be more costly than not having attended at all. This is because a partially completed college degree is not likely to increase income potential, but it can increase student loan debt (U.S. Department of Education, 2012a).

After the standard six-month grace period for student loan repayment, students can find themselves with an increase in monthly expenses without a coinciding increase in monthly income. A student can re-enroll, thus placing the student loan in deferment, but only if there is no debt owed to the school. However, zero debt owed to the school is highly unlikely because debt can easily result from either past-due tuition or financial aid that was returned to the funding agency for an incomplete semester, or both (U.S. Department of Education, 2012a).

In addition to the aforementioned financial debt, a student who is academically suspended must also overcome issues related to academic performance. If a student is academically suspended, the student's Grade Point Average (GPA) will need to be rectified before reenrollment. In order to rectify the academic record, the student often needs to enroll in college-level coursework, and for low-income students this frequently requires the use of financial aid. However, access to financial aid is not available to students who are on academic suspension. Low-income students can easily get caught in the challenging situation of having a tarnished academic record with no way to repair it and loan debt with no way to pay it off. This cycle makes degree completion nearly impossible for low-income students (U.S. Department of Education, 2012a).

As stated earlier, a low-income student's manner of engagement with their institution is likely to be very different than that of a middle or upper income student. Many low-income students may be heavily concerned with earning money while in college. Opportunities like living on campus, participating in school-related extracurricular activities, and going out to eat with friends are not easy options for students with limited income. Along the same lines staying on campus after classes to

study, work on a group project, or meet with professors is difficult for students who work off-campus jobs during nights and weekends. In his study of Pell Grant recipients at a large, public PWI, Opatz (2013) found that some students were unable to socialize with friends from middle- and upper-income households for these reasons, and this inability lead to feelings of missing out.

Low-income students are often less engaged with the institution, based on traditional definitions of engagement. This different relationship is not inherently negative, but it can be perceived as such because it is less common, and in many cases, the campus community does not encourage it. Institutions typically encourage living, working, studying, and socializing on campus because research suggests that students who are engaged with campus are more successful (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001). Students who live and study at home or work long hours off campus often make such choices out of necessity (Opatz, 2013). These choices, however, can create a conflict between the student and their school. The explicit and implicit rules of the institution might indirectly encourage low-income students to leave school to avoid this conflict because the institution does not appear to value saving money, paying rent and bills, and putting food on the table. Since American Indian, Black and Hispanic students are over-represented in the low-income student population, these are the groups of students who are more likely to receive that message.

First-generation status.

In addition to being over-represented among low-income students, American Indian, Asian, Black and Hispanic students are over-represented in the first-generation

student population as well. “Within the White (non-Hispanic) group, students have remained consistently less likely to be first generation [than their American Indian, Black, and Hispanic peers]” (Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Young, 2007). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that “students whose parents held a bachelor’s degree or higher were five times more likely to earn a bachelor’s degree than were similar first-generation students (50% v. 11%)” (p. 590). Researchers offer three primary reasons for this, including pressure from family, sense of belonging, and income. These three are below.

Parents of first-generation students may unknowingly place undue stress on their children because they do not fully understand the experience of attending college. First-generation students may, for example, continue to have family responsibilities such as caring for family members or contributing to the family’s income in addition to the increased academic responsibilities of college. “Parents might expect good grades and success but not at the cost of reducing commitment to family roles or contributions to the family income” (Jehangir, 2010, p. 23). Parents who have not negotiated college life may not fully understand that balancing college-level work with home life is more demanding than balancing high school-level work with home life.

A contributing factor related to pressure from family is the fact that first-generation students are more likely to commute than live on campus. This increases the significance of home and family responsibilities in a student’s day-to-day experience (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). The existence of home and family responsibilities alone is not necessarily detrimental to student success. However, home and family responsibilities that distract from academic responsibilities can hinder

academic success. In the same vein, first-generation students who spend more time at school than at home risk a sense of alienation from their family. First-generation students often feel the need to choose between family and school because it is not clear how to balance their different roles. Students often disengage from the less-familiar entity, which is the academy, in order to avoid detaching from their families. This notion of “feeling stuck between two worlds” is evident in a recent study at the State University (Jehangir, Stebleton, & Deenanath, 2015). In focus groups with first-generation college students, participants reported feeling a number of different pressures that stemmed from first-generation status such as feeling isolated within higher education as well as feeling the need to balance multiple identities at school and at home.

On one hand the norms of the academy stress spending time on campus, studying long hours, and engaging in academic discourse. On the other hand, students’ families might expect them to help out at home and contribute to the family income. Family members might also expect students to earn good grades without fully understanding what is needed in order to be academically successful. Engagement with the school may cause alienation from family, and engagement with family may cause alienation from school. Thus, first-generation students can be at odds with themselves in the attempt to reconcile competing demands of home and school life.

In addition to stressors at home, first-generation students also often face the financial stressors mentioned in the previous section. This is because first-generation students are more likely to be from low-income families than their peers (Chen & Carroll, 2005). The combination of being low-income and first-generation greatly compounds the obstacles to degree completion. Because of the combination of financial stressors and

first-generation stressors, students who are both low-income and first-generation (LIFG) are “at the greatest risk of failure in postsecondary education” (Engle & Tinto, 2008, p. 6). In writing about the stress of LIFG students, Tinto (2004) provides the following example.

In some cases students are important contributors to the economic well being of their families, so their attempts to combine the roles of family provider and students...may undermine their academic commitment and performance. In some cases, these students may feel that they do not belong or are not welcome on a campus environment that is an alien environment for them (p. 6).

It can be difficult for a student who is low-income and first-generation to justify spending time and money at school when those resources could be used to help family. Free time that might otherwise be spent engaged with campus is instead spent working to earn extra income or it is spent assisting family members.

Campus climate.

A final factor that negatively impacts degree completion rates of American Indian, Black, and Hispanic students at PWIs has to do with campus climate. Across the United States, more than 60% of students enrolled in undergraduate education are White. By comparison, 15.3% are Black, 15.2% are Hispanic, 1% are American Indian, and 6.2% are Asian (NCES, 2012, Table 263). Smedley, Myers, and Harrell (1993) found that undergraduate students who are not a part of the majority population on campus are at a greater risk of dropping out than their peers because of factors related to campus climate. The researchers found that being a student of color at a PWI creates an additional burden of stress and is associated with additional “negative outcomes beyond

what can be attributed to the stresses of being a student at a highly competitive academic institution” (p. 445). Specifically, the students of color in the study had a heightened sense of concern over their academic readiness and their legitimacy to be students at a competitive institution because they were not of the majority population. According to the researchers, these students may have felt they were granted admission because of their race or ethnicity, and they may also have felt that other students had the same perception about them.

While this study is more than two decades old, it has laid the groundwork for similar studies that use the Minority Student Stress Scale, which was created by the researchers (Smedley et al., 1993). For example, in their study of 240 ethnic minority students enrolled in a PWI, Cokley, McClain, Enciso, and Martinez (2012) found that “Minority status stress and imposter feelings were both significantly correlated with psychological distress and psychological well-being for all of the ethnic minority groups” (p. 91). Similarly, Wei, Ku, and Liao (2011) found that the “indirect effect of minority stress through the perception of university environment to persistence attitudes was significant” (p.200) for the ethnic minority groups studied (African American, Asian American, and Latino students).

Other researchers who have built on the work of Smedley et al. (1993) include Nora and Cabrera (1996) and Rankin and Reason (2005) who report that students of color who enroll at PWIs report perceiving prejudice and discrimination at higher rates than their White counterparts. Rankin and Reason analyzed the survey results of students (n=7,347) at ten college campuses across the United States. Of the respondents, 72% were White and 28% were students of color. In the analysis, students of color report

experiencing harassment, and they report observing conduct that creates hostile or intimidating working or learning environments significantly more than White students. Additionally, 32.3% of students of color viewed their campus climate as racist compared to 18.3% of White students. More recently, Cokley, Hall-Clark, and Hicks (2011) studied the effect of minority status on mental health and found that “Ethnic minority students were significantly higher in perceived discrimination and significantly lower in mental health” (p. 243). The students of color in this study were found to have lower mental health a result of increased perceived discrimination.

The impact of discrimination on student mental health and student performance is not a new phenomenon. Particular to the experiences of Black students, Steele and Aronson (1995) examined the effects of stereotype threat, which is defined as “being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one’s group” (p. 1). In studies of randomly assigned Black and White Stanford undergraduates, the researchers found that Black students’ performance on cognitive tests were significantly negatively impacted when stereotype threat was activated. To activate stereotype threat the researchers introduced the tests as diagnostic of intellectual ability. “This made the racial stereotype about intellectual ability relevant to Black participants’ performance” (Steel & Aronson, 799). In the non-stereotype-threat condition the test was described as non-diagnostic of ability and therefore the threat was reduced.

In 1999, Shih, Pittinsky, and Ambady conducted similar versions of the study by Steele and colleagues, and found “powerful influence of sociocultural stereotypes on individual performance” (p. 82). The researchers wanted to test the impact of implicitly activating stereotypes associated with above average performance and below average

performance on a quantitative test. Their first study tested the impact of making race and gender salient within Asian female undergraduates in the United States where Asians are perceived as quantitatively gifted and where women are perceived as having inferior quantitative skills compared to men. The results showed that by reminding participants of their race or gender resulted in higher than average scores and lower than average scores, respectively.

To be sure the results of the first study were due to influences from stereotypes, the researchers conducted a second study in Canada where the stereotype that Asians are quantitatively gifted does not prevail to the degree it does in the United States. In Vancouver, the location of the second study, the Asian community is made up of recent immigrants and so the researchers predicted that the test results for Asians and for women would be depressed. The results showed significantly lower scores for participants in both groups (race salient and gender salient) as a result of implicitly activating stereotypes prior to the quantitative test.

Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) built on Steele and Aronson's work to conclude that stereotype threat may contribute to overall poor campus climate and microaggressions targeted at African American students at a PWI. They define microaggressions as, "subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously" (p. 60). An example of microaggression is the following statement: "When I (a White person) talk about those Blacks, I really wasn't talking about *you*" (Solorzano et. al., 2000, p. 61). In ten focus groups of 34 African American students, the researchers used grounded theory to conclude that racial microaggressions at a PWI experienced by African American

students negatively impact students inside the classroom, outside the classroom, and in social settings. In the classroom students reported feeling invisible in the eyes of instructors, and they reported that other students refused to work with them because of their race. Outside the classroom and in social settings students reported being accused of cheating after performing well on an exam, getting stared at in the library, and feeling discouraged by a counselor about enrolling in a pre-med program because of her race. Similar findings are not unique to African American students.

American Indian, Black, and Hispanic students are more likely to perceive campus climate as hostile and unwelcoming, and this includes interactions with students, staff, and faculty (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005, Jones, 2004; Lin, LaCounte, & Eder, 1988, Marx, Ko, & Friedman, 2009). Along the same lines, students of color who attend college at a PWI may encounter hostility at home or within peer groups. As mentioned earlier, first-generation students must often reinvent themselves in order to adapt to college life. This reinvention can lead to ostracism from family members because students often feel the need to pick one identity over the other. A reinvention of one's self can also lead to being labeled a "sell out" by peers at a time when peer pressure is still very powerful. For example, Milner (2002) writes, high achieving Black students are often "looked upon as 'sell outs' and as 'acting White'" (p. 82). This can put students in a position to choose between their education and the people they are close to.

Pizzolato, Nguyen, Johnston, and Wang (2012) write, "Environmental context seems to be a form of context in promoting dissonance, with the degree to which one is a minority in any institutional environment leading to greater likelihood of dissonance (p. 661). What they mean by this statement is that if a student is a minority at an institution,

that minority status can increase their dissonance around the “Who am I?” question. This is because their minority status may make them uncomfortable in their understanding of who they are.

Similarly, Torres and Hernandez (2007) conducted a longitudinal mixed methods study of 29 undergraduates from four different U.S. colleges and universities and found that Latino students identified and responded to racism, stereotypes, and cultural expectations from other White students as well as from other Latino students. This study indicates that in addition to the developmental progression of their peers, Latino students must also manage additional tasks related to their ethnic identity. Examples from the study include recognizing positive and negative societal images of Latinos, including negative stereotypes they encountered in conversations with friends and other students. Participants’ additional tasks included making sense of such negative stereotypes with others as a response to what they encountered. Another example is of a participant who talked about negotiating her former identity as a Latina gang member with her new identity as a college student. This student encountered stereotypes associated with her former identity as well as her new identity, and she faced those stereotypes with her Latina friends and with her new non-Latina classmates.

In conclusion it is clear that campus climate is a significant concern for students of color. Stereotypes can negatively impact students in implicit and explicit ways. Also, oppressive behavior based on race and ethnicity can come from inside or outside of one’s own racial or ethnic group.

A Complex Problem

There is a great discrepancy between the degree completion rates of underrepresented students and their peers in United States higher education, and much of the research on this topic points to three primary factors that contribute to this problem. These factors are income, first-generation status, and campus climate. That there are three primary factors impacting degree completion rates suggest that the discrepancy in degree completion rates is not a simple problem. First, as outlined in the previous sections, there are multiple ways in which each factor might impact a student. Second, there are varying degrees to which each factor might impact a student, and the degree of impact is not necessarily obvious to an observer or to the student. Finally, a student may be impacted by any combination of these three factors.

The overarching hurdle to addressing these factors is the fact that all three of them and their impact on an individual student are not readily apparent or tangible. For example, a student may be a first-generation student, but this characteristic cannot be seen. While first-generation status can be gleaned from an application for admission, this data may not be shared with the faculty and staff who have regular daily contact with the student. Additionally, students may know if their parents completed a college degree or not, but they may not fully understand the impact of first-generation status on their academic career. Family income and experiences with racism may also be hidden due to a student's desire for privacy. As I will explain later, talking about these barriers and how to overcome them is important to degree completion.

Recommendations to Narrow the Gap

As stated above, a number of researchers have recently published thorough research reports outlining the opportunity gap as well as recommendations to narrow the gap. In reviewing these reports, there are a number of similar recommendations. These include the need for more research, increased financial aid, and changes in attitudes about programs created to narrow the gap. The most prevalent of all of the recommendations from the reports is a call for more research. Included in the reports is research to identify the effectiveness of new and existing programs, hold institutions accountable, and to study the effects of various variables on degree completion rates. In addition, a common recommendation within these reports is the need for research on specific groups of underrepresented students.

Of their nine recommendations, Gándara, and Maxwell-Jolly (1999) list five that have to do with research. For example, the authors suggest funding research to discover the individual and societal benefits of increased graduation rates of underrepresented students. They also suggest researching specific issues that impact minority males and the impact of institutional characteristics and retention programs on the success of different racial and ethnic groups. While this report is several years old, it provides evidence that the call for more research about this issue has not changed for several years.

In their report commissioned by the National Symposium on Postsecondary Student Success, Kuh et al. (2006) suggest a number of recommendations for increasing student success, and nearly half of those recommendations pertain to research. For example, the authors suggest examining the student experience inside and outside the classroom and streamlining the reporting of that information to various constituents.

They also recommend studying the experiences of specific underrepresented student groups and the best practices for supporting “low-income, first generation, ethnic minorities, immigrants, men and so forth” (Kuh et al., p. 103).

Spradlin et al. (2010) also heavily emphasize research in order to increase the graduation rates of underrepresented students. Their recommendations include researching the effects of different retention strategies by institutional characteristics, studying the effects of family responsibilities on student retention, improving data collection and sharing methods, and identifying best practices for supporting students at a given institution. This call for school-specific research on the needs of distinct groups of underrepresented students is consistent over time.

For several years researchers have been attempting to identify best practices for closing the opportunity gap, and much of this research has considered mentoring programs, learning communities, bridge programs, and academic advising. Many of these programs are effective at supporting student success, but the opportunity gap still exists, and there continues to be a need to understand the effects of specific factors and practices on specific groups of students. As Spradlin et al. (2010) write, “Each college’s retention and persistence program should be as unique as its students” (p. 34). Various initiatives can each be effective at closing the opportunity gap, but knowing which ones serve which students at a given institution is critical to their success. In other words, students are unique, and solutions cannot be one size fits all. It follows then that determining individual student needs and responding to those unique needs might be the best approach.

As stated earlier, underrepresented students may be impacted by a combination of factors related to income, first-generation status, and campus climate, at varying degrees. Therefore, addressing the needs of individual underrepresented students is likely to be more effective than addressing the needs of groups of underrepresented students. While the former is arguably more effective than the latter, this can be an onerous task for institutions with thousands of undergraduate students, especially when the factors impacting students are not clearly visible. While this task is challenging it is not impossible, and the digital storytelling process may be an effective method for engaging underrepresented populations toward accomplishing this task. The digital storytelling process honors the principles of Baxter Magolda's learning partnerships model, which is used to support students in self-authorship development. These principles will be explained in detail in the next sections of this chapter.

It is important to note that it is not the intent of this study to make a case for placing the burden of solving the opportunity gap on individual students. Haycock, Lynch, and Engle (2010), and Harper (2012) effectively argue for holding institutions accountable for the opportunity gap in higher education, and this study firmly supports that idea. Institutional efforts to address degree completion rates of underrepresented students should not be replaced by individual student efforts. Rather, I believe that with careful planning students can play an integral role as partners in overcoming the opportunity gap.

Conceptual Framework: Self-Authorship

Robert Kegan (1994) originally coined the term self-authorship in his research on human development, yet self-authorship development is frequently associated with the

wide range of work by Marcia Baxter Magolda, beginning with her longitudinal study of the self-authorship development in 18-39 year olds (2001). Baxter Magolda and King (2004) define self-authorship as “the capacity to internally define a coherent belief system and identity that coordinates engagement in mutual relations with the larger world” (p. 304). This definition captures the three primary dimensions of self-authorship, which are cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal.

These three dimensions are interrelated, and the self-authorship development process is cyclical (Magolda, 2008). A person who has achieved self-authorship has the skills to consider multiple perspectives with respect to individuals’ identities and beliefs, and make decisions accordingly. As explained by Pizzolato (2006):

A self-authored student will not blindly follow parental expectations or expect advisors to tell her or him the major that would be best, nor...single-mindedly follow a gut feeling or passion...a self-authored student will be open to and actively consider the advice and input of family members, advisors, and other important authority figures...the self-authored student will consider both external expectations and internally defined goals and values (p. 32).

Self-authorship development occurs in three distinct phases over a span of time, which varies from person to person, as mediated by personal characteristics and environmental context (Magolda, 2008). These three phases are the *Crossroads*, *Becoming the Author of One’s Own Life*, and *Internal Foundations*, all of which will be explained shortly.

Using Baxter Magolda’s terminology, one can safely argue that students who are low-income, first-generation, or students of color at PWIs often have *belief systems* that do not align with the larger culture of higher education. For example, a low-income

student who works to pay for school will have a hard time completing a degree at an institution that expects students to only work a limited number of hours in order to attend school full-time. Similarly, a first-generation student or a student of color may be labeled a “sell out” by friends and family members for engaging with the culture of the academy and for seemingly disengaging with the culture of his or her neighborhood or family.

The lack of connection between the culture of higher education and the belief systems or needs of low-income students, first-generation students, and students of color can make it difficult to engage with the institution, while also creating a perceived need for the student to choose between school and work, between school and family, between school and friends, or some combination of all of these. Supporting self-authorship development can help underrepresented students understand that personal experiences and relationships with family and friends shape individual belief systems, and that those belief systems do not need to be in conflict with the culture of the academy. Self-authorship theory can be useful in understanding how underrepresented students experience barriers to degree completion, as outlined by the phases and timeline of self-authorship development.

Phases of self-authorship.

According to Baxter Magolda (2008) self-authorship development occurs in three distinct phases. Prior to entering the first phase, individuals follow concrete rules that guide their understanding of knowledge, identity, and relationships. Third parties such as parents, teachers, or friends often define these rules. For those who have not yet entered the first phase of self-authorship, the world is viewed in black and white terms with little room for ambiguity.

Baxter Magolda (2008) posits that young adults eventually discover that concrete rules and formulas cannot always be used to reach their goals and objectives, either because no such formula exists or because the previously used formulas do not fit the individual's objectives. In this first *Crossroads* phase, the individual begins to question previously held notions that had once guided his or her understanding of knowledge, identity, and relationships, often leading to feelings of unhappiness with external influences. The Crossroads phase marks the beginning of self-authorship development, and it is in this phase that the individual searches for an internally defined way of knowing, sense of self, and way of interacting with others. Three main questions arise during the Crossroads phase. Individuals grapple with these questions throughout self-authorship development, and each one is directly related to one of the three dimensions of self-authorship. They are as follows: (1) How do I know? (cognitive), (2) Who am I? (intrapersonal), and (3) How am I in relationships with others? (interpersonal). This can be a difficult time for individuals as they strive to define themselves internally while also deciding which external influences they will incorporate into their internal sense of self.

As young adults move through the Crossroads, they enter the second phase, *Becoming the Author of One's Life*, wherein they begin to construct answers to the three aforementioned questions around knowledge, self, and relationships (Magolda, 2008). In the second phase, the individual moves toward understanding the three assumptions of self-authorship, which are (a) knowledge is complex and socially constructed, (b) self is central to knowledge construction, and (c) expertise is shared mutually in knowledge construction (Pizzolato et al., 2012). Upon formation and acknowledgement of these three assumptions the individual enters the final phase, *Internal Foundations*.

In the Internal Foundations phase, individuals make the shift from understanding the three assumptions of self-authorship to integrating them into their daily lives. Baxter Magolda (2008) further explains that this final phase requires building a self-authored system, which contains three distinct elements. The first element, *trusting the internal voice*, refers to the realization that one often cannot control what happens, but one can always control one's reaction to what happens. This realization allows the individual to take ownership of meaning-making with respect to the epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions of self-authorship. The second element, *building an internal foundation* refers to the synthesis of these three dimensions into a personal philosophy that can be used to guide the internal voice. Lastly, *securing internal commitments* refers to refining and improving the self-authored system and living according to the internally created philosophy. Each element is used in a cyclical process to "move the source of one's beliefs, identity, and social relations 'inside' oneself" (Magolda, 2008, p. 279). Building this system is an ongoing process, influenced by the individual's personality and life experiences. As individuals become self-authored they become more adept at answering the three questions that emerged during the Crossroads.

Self-authorship timeline.

As mentioned earlier, the Crossroads is the first phase of self-authorship development and it culminates in an experience or set of experiences referred to as the provocative moment wherein an individual is no longer able to rely on concrete rules or formulas to guide epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal understanding. In Baxter Magolda's (2001) longitudinal study of adults age 18-39, she found that participants worked through the Crossroads phase for most of their 20s, and the Internal

Foundations phase occupied most of their 30s. For the participants in her study, self-authorship development “occurred after college as they also juggled adult commitments” (p. 282).

While the students in Baxter Magolda’s study developed self-authorship after college, it is important to remember that this timeline of self-authorship development is not a standard that can be applied to all student populations. In Baxter Magolda’s study, the students were recruited from Miami University, located in Ohio. Miami University is a Predominantly White Institution, and 97% of the students in the study were White (Magolda & King, 2004). Also, as stated earlier, self-authorship development varies from person to person, as mediated by personal characteristics and environmental context (Magolda, 2008).

For example, Pizzolato (2003) examined the self-authorship development of underrepresented students ($n = 35$), and found that “many of the participants possessed self-authoring ways of knowing prior to college” (p. 802). In her study, Pizzolato found that students who had to negotiate constraints such as first-generation status, low-income status, and issues related to not being a member of the dominant White culture developed self-authoring ways of knowing prior to entering college. These results suggest that self-authorship development can begin as early as high school for some student populations.

Catalysts to the crossroads.

The Crossroads phase of self-authorship development is catalyzed by a period of questioning which stems from an overall feeling of unhappiness with previously relied upon ways of knowing, or from the lack of having a formula for success. In her review of the literature, Pizzolato (2003) found that underrepresented students often encountered

situations in which there was no formula for success as well as situations in which epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions of identity were at odds with previously used dimensions. For example, students who are first-generation cannot always rely on family members for emotional support to get through college, and low-income students must figure out ways to pay for college outside of financial support from family members.

For low-income students, first-generation students, and students of color enrolled at PWIs, early entry into the Crossroads phase of self-authorship is highly possible. Students who fall into one or more of these categories often find that their sense of self, relationships to others, and ways of knowing are at odds with the culture of college. As Jehangir (2010) states, “culture...at Predominantly White Institutions [is] largely based on White, male, and middle-class norms” (p. 33). First year students who do not fit into the PWI culture may find themselves in the Crossroads phase when their cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal belief systems are challenged by their new role as college students. These challenges may catalyze the self-authorship development process as students ask themselves the three Crossroads questions (Who am I?; How do I know?; How am I in relationships with others?) with respect to their new college experiences. This is important to consider when addressing the needs of underrepresented students enrolled at PWIs.

Complex self-authorship development.

The same experiences that create early catalysts to the Crossroads for underrepresented students may also create a more complex self-authorship development process than that of their peers. In their study of 166 students of color at three large

public research universities (two of which were PWIs) Pizzolato et al. (2012) found that students of color entered the Crossroads phase by experiencing dissonance around their identity in two distinct ways. The first experience of dissonance stemmed from feeling “unaccepted or mistreated owing to phenotypical features” (Pizzolato et al., p. 666). In other words, students of color experienced racism from members of their institution based on how they appeared to others. The second experience of dissonance stemmed from “experiences that caused students to clarify what it meant to be a part of their ethnic group” (Pizzolato et al., p. 667) to members of other ethnic groups as well as to members of their own ethnic group.

An example from the study (Pizzolato et al., 2012) is of a young woman who identifies three distinct contexts of self-authorship development she must face as a Black, first-generation, commuter student. The first context is her university’s expectations and standards for her as a young Black woman at a PWI, which can include experiences with racism. The second is her parents’ expectations for her to do well in college without letting go of her Black culture. The third is the expectations from her same-race peers at home who label her a “sell out” for taking honors classes in high school and for going to college. In all three contexts, the student may be asking herself Crossroads questions as previously-held notions about her identity are challenged. While this is only one example, it encompasses some of the multiple overlapping contexts that underrepresented students must negotiate in determining identity through the process of self-authorship.

The authors of this study (Pizzolato et al., 2012) conclude that underrepresented students must often first overcome oppression and racism in higher education as part of phase one of self-authorship development. This is an added dimension that majority

students do not encounter. As explained in the example above, barriers may stem from friends at home, peers at school, family members, and institutional culture. Similar findings of complex self-authorship development are found in research that is specific to Latino college students (Torres & Hernandez, 2007), and researchers have also explored the ways in which underrepresented students cope with this complex process.

In a 2004 study by Pizzolato, underrepresented college students who entered college with self-authored ways of knowing regressed away from those ways of knowing before using one of three coping strategies to deal with marginalization or discrimination. Pizzolato interviewed 27 first-year college students, most of who were students of color (68.6%). Pizzolato used Duval and Silvia's (2002) Dual Systems Model of Self-Serving Attributes to study the challenges underrepresented students have in maintaining their self-authorship. In the study, the researchers found that participants entered college with self-authored ways of knowing, but their self-authorship was diminished when they had experiences with other students, faculty and staff that made them feel less capable than their peers. When this happened, participants reported letting go of the previous goals they had for themselves upon entering college. This was done in order to fit in with the rest of the students. Therefore, the participants in this study regressed away from their self-authored ways of knowing. This led to feelings of unhappiness and methods for coping with that unhappiness.

Some students in the study used avoidance coping ($n = 7$), and blamed the institution or members of the institution for their feelings of discontent without considering their own role in how they faced institutional challenges. This method was not successful in helping students return to self-authored ways of knowing. A small

number of students in the study (n = 6) found success by using self-regulatory coping strategies in which they reflected on problems to overcome barriers to success. The majority of students in the study (n = 14) used supported coping strategies wherein they either received directed support from others or they shared their feelings and thoughts with others in order to think out loud and articulate how they were reacting to oppressive behavior. These students were also successful in overcoming marginalization and discrimination.

Her findings indicate that the way in which underrepresented students cope with challenges in college depends on their entering sense of self. For example, if a student experienced a challenge that was related to a primary part of their entering sense of self, they were more likely to use self-regulatory or supported coping strategies. Pizzolato (2004) uses the example of Chingy, who “felt academically inferior to his peers, but ... attributed his inferiority exclusively to external causes” (p. 434). As a student athlete, Chingy’s primary sense of self was that of a student athlete, and he was therefore dismissive of his academic identity in the face of his feelings of inferiority.

While all of the participants regressed away from self-authorship, those who had entered college with a strong sense of self and a strong focus on their academic goals were able to use coping strategies that returned them to self-authored ways of knowing. This study supports three important assumptions about underrepresented students’ self-authorship development. First, underrepresented students are likely to enter college with self-authored ways of knowing. Second, underrepresented students are likely to attribute the feelings of inadequacy that stem from oppression to permanent personal characteristics. Third, underrepresented students may benefit from affirming their sense

of self, including their academic goals prior to entering college. Pizzolato (2004) also points out that self-regulatory coping, while effective, can be a very lonely process. On the other hand, supported coping strategies such as getting advice from others or having others to talk to shows that, “self-authorship need not be an isolating experience” (p. 437). It seems then that supporting students in solidifying their goals and their self-perception as academic achievers in a group setting may lead to the use of less-isolating supported coping strategies in the face of challenges.

Related to the third assumption above (underrepresented students may benefit from affirming their sense of self, including their academic goals prior to entering college), Stephens, Hamedani, and Destin (2014) studied the effects of educating first-generation students on how their different backgrounds matter to their college success. In their study, 147 participants were randomly assigned to one of two groups. Both groups heard from a panel of college seniors about how they managed to be successful in college. In the experimental condition group, panelists spoke specifically about how their first-generation status impacted which resources they sought out and their experiences in college. In the standard condition group, panelists spoke similarly about ways they had managed to be successful in college, but did not mention their first-generation status.

The results show that participation in the experimental group eliminated the gap between first-generation students and continuing-generation counterparts who seek out college resources. The authors also found “that participants in the difference-education condition experienced less stress and anxiety, better adjustment to college life, and more academic and social engagement than did participants in the standard condition” (Stephens et al., 2014, p. 7). Furthermore, the authors concluded that, “engaging students

about difference can be empowering if students have the opportunity to learn about the significance of their backgrounds in a supportive, constructive, and identity-safe manner” (p. 8). These findings support the notion that having a firm understanding of the impact of one’s (first-generation) characteristics can lead to students’ increased use of college resources that promote student success.

A need for support.

The findings above demonstrate that supporting underrepresented students in solidifying their goals and their self-perception as academic achievers in a group setting may lead to an enduring focus on academic goals and positive coping strategies in the face of challenges at a PWI. Positive coping strategies include strategies that are not isolating and the use of college resources for success. While underrepresented students may benefit from self-authorship development support, PWIs are not necessarily accustomed to offer such support. In her twenty-year longitudinal study, Baxter Magolda, (2001) found that college learning did not prepare the participants for adult lives. This may be because many students do not encounter significant Crossroads experiences during college (Magolda, 2008; Pizzolato, 2005). However, as stated earlier, self-authorship development varies from person to person, as mediated by personal characteristics and environmental context (Magolda, 2008). While it is possible that most students enrolled at a PWI do not require support with self-authorship development, there does exist a need to support the self-authorship development process of underrepresented students, as they are likely to experience challenges in the Crossroads phase.

Low-income students, first-generation students, and students of color enrolled at PWIs can quickly lose their sense of self when their identities, relationships with others,

and ways of knowing are challenged thus creating a demand for self-authorship development support that is specific to the complex needs of underrepresented students (Pizzolato, 2004). Given the rapidly changing demographics of students in the United States and thus the potential for greater numbers of students who may be struggling with self-authorship development, and the high potential for a complex self-authorship development process, it seems important to consider the development of curricular and programmatic options to support students as they work through self-authorship development. There are recent examples of how this has been done using the learning partnerships model.

The Learning Partnerships Model.

The learning partnerships model uses three principles to support students' self-authorship development. The first principle, *validating learners' capacity to know*, is honored by soliciting students' perspectives and ideas in the development of interpersonal, intrapersonal, and epistemological knowledge. Validation helps learners to understand that they have the ability to construct knowledge whenever they are faced with uncertainty. The second principle, *situating learning in learners' experiences*, uses students' existing knowledge and experience to create new knowledge and make decisions. This principle allows the learner to understand the importance of understanding personal context and personal identity in knowledge creation. The last principle, *mutually constructing meaning*, recognizes students as "equal partners in knowledge construction" and assists students in developing more complex understandings by connecting their knowledge with the expertise of others. This principle promotes the exchange of diverse perspectives in the process of knowledge

creation. As a group, these three principles model the blending of autonomy and connections to others (Magolda, 2004). The application of the learning partnerships model can be found in a number of recent studies.

As a curricular example, Bekken and Marie (2007) implemented a two-year course curriculum for undergraduates in an Earth Sustainability course (ES) at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. The course was built on the learning partnerships model with the goal of moving students toward self-authorship development. Fifty new first-year students were recruited for the course during summer orientation, 2004. Twenty-three enrolled from five of seven colleges and 20 could not enroll because of scheduling, but agreed to participate in a control group. At the time of writing the article, 19 students remained in the program. The researchers found that most students entered as “dualistic knowers with a reliance on formulas” (Bekken & Marie, 2007, p. 65), but they began moving toward self-authorship by the end of the third semester. Specific gains included:

Gains in [communication and thinking skills], increased ability to recognize assumptions, increased sensitivity to ethical issues, the connection to and integration of content and skills into personal, campus, and family life, enlarged perspectives, increased listening skills, a tolerance for ambiguity, and a sensitivity to bias (Bekken & Marie, 2007, p. 65).

From these findings, the authors hypothesized “that the rate of this developmental change is more dramatic for students within the Earth Sustainability course than for those in a traditional general education core” (Bekken & Marie, 2007, p. 65), but could not make

the claim for certain as the research study of participants and the control group was still in progress at the time of the writing of the article.

In 2011, Olsen, Bekken, McConnell, and Walter continued the work of the 2007 study at Virginia Tech with 11 continuing students plus “a subsample of 9 students who were matched demographically and academically to the students lost through attrition” (Olsen et al., p. 149). The researchers examined

[W]hether students in a learning partnerships model curriculum (1) demonstrated significantly greater epistemological development at the end of their sophomore year than as entering first-year students and (2) demonstrated significantly greater epistemological development at the end of their sophomore year relative to a comparison group of students in a traditional curriculum measured over the same time period (p. 147).

Epistemological development was measured with Baxter Magolda’s (1992) Measure of Epistemological Reflection (MER), which documents changes in college student thinking in relation to achieving self-authorship.

On five dimensions (role of learner, role of instructor, role of peer, evaluation of learning, and nature of knowledge), there was small difference between participants and the control group until the end of the second year. At the end of the 2-year curriculum, participants outperformed the control group on all five dimensions, at a statistically significant level ($p < .01$). This shows that the participants had significantly advanced toward self-authored ways of thinking compared to the control group. In analyzing the effect of time on within-group results (meaning the development of students from entering college to completing their sophomore year), all five dimensions were

statistically significant ($p < .001$). In other words, the gains toward self-authorship that participants made were likely related to the learning partnerships model curriculum. The researchers also compared the graduation rates of students who enrolled in the Earth Sustainability (ES) course (100%) with the overall undergraduate graduation rate (78%), implying that the learning partnerships ES curriculum led to an increase in retention and graduation. While most of the students in the ES courses were White, findings demonstrate the effectiveness of the learning partnerships model on student self-authorship development.

While the above examples are curricular models Pizzolato (2003, 2004) recommends using the learning partnerships models in non-academic curricula. In such an example, Pizzolato and Ozaki (2007) studied the effects of an academic advising program called STEP (Support to Enhance Performance), that utilizes the learning partnerships model on the self-authorship development of students who were experiencing academic difficulty (< 2.0 term and/or cumulative GPA). The participants in the study were mostly male (78.9%), and they were racially and ethnically diverse (African American or Black = 31.6%, Asian = 5.3%, Latin@ = 10.5%, Other = 10.5%, White = 42.1%).

In the study, 18 students met approximately every 3 weeks with a professional academic advisor to discuss goal setting, time management, study skills, and the like. The advisor also asked questions to understand how students made sense of situations. The sessions were recorded, and the students also participated in two 1-hour semi-structured interviews aimed at discovering participants' sense-making strategies.

Students were asked to talk about challenges they faced in college, their perceptions of why they faced those challenges, and the ways in which they worked through them.

The authors analyzed the data using grounded theory, and found that although students did not explicitly achieve self-authorship as a result of the learning partnerships model advising program; they did clarify personal relationships and begin moving toward self-authorship as a result of the single-semester program. Prior to the program students exhibited formula-following behavior, such as believing “that knowledge was received from authorities...their job was to listen and learn from authorities, and that knowledge was certain – there was a right answer or way to do things” (Pizzolato & Ozaki, 2007, p. 201). After the program, students began to become “aware of the limitations of depending on others for self-definition” (Pizzolato & Ozaki, 2007, p. 202).

The authors sought to identify outcomes that indicate movement toward self-authorship, and as such explain the following two outcomes as precursors to self-authorship development: 1) belief in the controllability of outcomes and 2) belief that the self is important to knowledge construction and decision-making. In terms of the former, students in the study began the semester “with attributions they felt were disadvantageous and unchangeable” (p. 207). For example, students felt at a disadvantage if they were first-generation or low-income, and they seemed to think of this disadvantage as predetermining an inability to be successful. By the end of the semester students began to see that their sense of self was not fixed, but rather “based on emerging understandings of their talents, values, goals, and environmental constraints” (p. 207), and they could seek out resources that would help them overcome potential challenges to their success.

In terms of the latter (belief that the self is important to knowledge construction and decision-making), students moved from viewing knowledge as following formulas toward understanding knowledge to be a combination of formulas, personal goals, values, and beliefs. While it would seem that students had developed self-authored ways of knowing based on this movement, the authors explain that this is indicative of movement toward self-authorship, but not self-authorship development. They conclude that although the students in the study acknowledged the potential importance of self in knowledge construction, their internal definition was not yet fully established thereby tempering their view of knowledge construction. As they state, “Given the importance of internally defined goals, beliefs, and values to self-authorship, the fact that participants seemed still in the process of self-definition implies that self-authorship was not achieved” (p. 209). While STEP did not lead to self-authored ways of knowing, the authors conclude, “the students’ participation in a learning partnerships model of advising moved them into a position for subsequent development of self-authorship” (p. 211). This is an important note as self-authorship development is an iterative process that can take several years.

Based on their research Pizzolato and Ozaki (2007) state that “before students could experience the Crossroads they needed to have an autonomous intrapersonal sense of self in preparation for movement toward the internally defined self that characterizes self-authorship” (p. 210). Students in the study were able to develop an autonomous sense of self by negotiating the different categories they fell into even if those categories were in conflict with each other. For example, what it meant to be a college student and what it meant to be a member of one’s family may have conflicted, but the student was

able to negotiate those two categories into an autonomous sense of self. The authors point out that because the categories were not internally defined; the students were not yet self-authored, but rather moving toward self-authorship. Similar to the work of Pizzolato and Ozaki (2007) this study does not expect to find self-authorship development, but rather support for self-authored ways of knowing.

Pizzolato and Ozaki (2007) conclude that the LPM advising program helped students develop an autonomous sense of self that “moved them into a position for subsequent development of self-authorship” (p. 211). These findings inform the current research topic as to the impact of a digital storytelling process that honors the principles of the learning partnerships model on students’ preparation for overcoming barriers to degree completion. Recent research on the use of digital storytelling with underrepresented populations indicates that the digital storytelling process honors the principles of the learning partnerships model, and therefore can be used to support the self-authorship development process. Before describing those studies, I will explain the digital storytelling process.

Digital storytelling.

The digital storytelling process includes reflecting, writing, creating, and sharing short digital stories about oneself. Digital storytellers combine images, music, video, and text with their own recorded voice to tell a first-person short story about a person, place, or event from the storyteller’s life. Digital stories typically consist of 500 words or less, and usually last no longer than five minutes (Meadows, 2003). The process of producing a digital story promotes personal reflection, collaboration, and critical thinking (Lambert, 2009).

Benmayor (2012) outlines six critical stages of the digital storytelling process, which are consistent with work by Lambert (2009), Meadows (2003), and Reeves (2013). In her course, *Latina Life Stories*, Benmayor begins with a discussion of assigned readings by influential Latin@ authors as a way to stimulate “a process of *concientizacion*, of becoming aware of and situating one’s own struggles in a larger context” (Benmayor, 2012, p. 54). The instructor also invites students to share any personal experiences they have had that relate to the readings. The instructor establishes ground rules about active listening, withholding judgment, and fostering understanding before beginning the discussion. After discussing the readings, the digital storytelling process begins.

To begin the digital storytelling process Benmayor (2012) uses *memory writing*, which is a free writing session on particular topics such as identity, family, community, and gender roles. Following the writing activity students share what they have written and they sometimes also share their general idea for their digital story. This first step allows students to think deeply about a topic and how it relates to their life. The writing process captures ideas and emotions, which will be teased out in the story circle stage that follows.

After students have time to reflect on the discussion and their own experiences and writings, they share a first draft in a story circle. Ground rules for providing effective feedback are reiterated, and students take turns sharing stories and providing each other with essential feedback. The story circle process is perhaps the most critical component of digital storytelling as it provides an opportunity for students to receive feedback from their peers in order to create a clear and effective script. The script is the foundation of

the digital story, and the story circle process works to improve students' writing. In this process students help each other find key components such as the moment of their story, also known as the dramatic arc, and the emotion they wish to convey (Lambert, 2009). The story circle also encourages active listening and therefore promotes understanding and insight into each other's lives.

In the third stage, students record their own voices reading their script. It is important that the storyteller use his or her own voice in their digital story. As Lambert (2009) notes, allowing individuals to find "their voice and make their story heard" is fundamental to healthy living (p. 3). Similarly, Benmayor (2012) writes, "the performance into the microphone becomes the 'real' telling...the moment when they 'hear' their own story out loud" (p. 513).

In the production stage of digital storytelling, students move from writing and revising their script to incorporating images, video and text into their story. These are the components that move a story from a written work to a digital product. In this stage, students also focus on pacing and timing in addition to aesthetic choices that will help convey the meaning and emotion of their story. The production stage requires technological skills, but in a group setting Benmayor (2012) finds that "students form natural teams, help each other, and ... [a]s the technological vulnerability increases, the group support intensifies" (p. 513). The importance of the script and the storyteller's voice as foundational to the digital story is emphasized in the process. Therefore, a completed digital story may still be highly effective with a minimal number of images. Similarly, music and sound effects may be incorporated to supplement the tone, emotion,

and pace of the story. Students often select a song that is meaningful to their story, including a popular song or one they have created.

In the penultimate stage, screening and interpretations, students have the chance to see each other's stories in their entirety, which has a way of sealing the strong sense of community that continuously builds throughout the former stages. Benmayor (2012) writes,

The story and the individual merge and produce deeper insight into that person's social reality, heightening the bond that has been created throughout the semester and creating an unusual degree of cross-cultural understanding and mutual respect among all members of the class (p. 514).

After students in Benmayor's class share their stories with each other, they hold a digital story festival where they can invite friends, family, faculty and staff. This final stage is "a declaration, a presentation of self and one's work, a celebration of authorship" (Benmayor, 2012, p. 514), and students often present copies of their stories to family and friends as gifts. It is important to note that a key tenet of digital storytelling is that the final product belongs to the storyteller (Lambert, 2009), and the storyteller may choose not to share their story with the larger audience. Ultimately, the storyteller decides who will view the completed digital story, as stories are often quite personal.

Digital storytelling examples.

The following examples of digital storytelling with underrepresented populations do not explicitly use the learning partnerships model, but each process closely aligns with the principles of the learning partnerships model. Once again, the learning partnerships

model principles include validating learners' capacity to know, situating learning in learners' experiences, and mutually constructing meaning, all of which are important components in facilitating self-authorship.

As mentioned earlier, Benmayor (2012) begins her Latina Life Stories course with a discussion of articles by influential Latin@ authors as a way to become aware of Latin@ struggles and as a way of becoming aware of one's own struggles within a larger context. Her semester-long course is centered on the concept of *testimonios*, which “involves an urgent voice of resistance to social injustices, an urgency to speak out, a collective interlocutor, and a collaborative process of production and interpretation” (Benmayor, 2012, p. 510). Following this definition, Benmayor's (2012) students create digital *testimonios* wherein they discover the similarities between their individual struggles as college students. For example,

Although the class is typically comprised of a rich mix of students – Latinas, some brave *vatos* (“dudes” in Chicano slang), other students of color, and students of European heritages (women and men), straight and gay, and sometimes of different generations – everyone is able to find points of connection with or divergence from their own experiences (Benmayor, 2012, p. 512).

The digital *testimonios* that are created allow the students to “write back” to different experiences and “write for” themselves, their peers and future generations. In her description of writing back, Benmayor states, “Most Latina autobiographical narratives are positioned in this way, as testimonial responses to historical, cultural, and ideological oppressions” (Benmayor, 2009, p. 2). As opposed to simply writing about their

experiences, the students in Benmayor's (2012) Latina Life Stories class are asked to write back "to social structures, institutions, individuals, and ideologies that shaped that experience" (Benmayor, 2009, p. 3). Students are also asked to consider who they are "writing for", that is, who they feel might benefit from their story. Writing for refers to critically thinking about the students' intended audiences and how that future audience may use the writing in their own personal theory development (Benmayor, 2009).

After the students in Benmayor's (2012) course create their digital stories, they must write a paper in which they apply critical theory to their life experiences. The goal is to move students from narrative theorizing, or retelling a story, to critical theorizing, wherein the story is used to "exemplify existing theories, but also their limitations" (Benmayor, 2009, p. 5). The ultimate goal is for students to develop a theory that explains their own reality.

Similar to testimonies and the processes of writing back and writing for, Espino (2012) draws from Critical Race Theory to explain how counter-stories can be used as a means to battle oppression. Counter-stories allow individuals to counter *master narratives*, which she defines as "'majoritarian' stories based on an inferiority paradigm that people of color are...inferior to Whites" (Espino, 2012, p. 33). Counter-stories resist the deficit model of education, which views underrepresented students as lacking resources or skills to be successful in college (Bensimon, 2005). Similar to the goal of *testimonios*, counter-stories also provide an opportunity for theoretical self-reflection (Espino, 2012).

Espino compiled the narratives of 33 Mexican American PhDs about their educational experiences as a means to counter the master narrative of the pathway to the

doctorate for specific underrepresented students. She explains that narratives have the power to “help researchers, practitioners, and community members construct another reality for future generations” (Esino, 2012, p. 62). This is similar to new theory development explained by Benmayor. While Espino’s work is not digital storytelling, her work is relevant to this project because of her use of narrative to construct a new reality around the pathway to earning a PhD for Mexican Americans. The narratives she uses are not digital, but they are effective in reality construction. While her research did not seek to empower her research subjects, her work touches on the power of narrative to create one’s own reality.

Narrative is at the heart of digital storytelling. In the digital storytelling process, students begin with a script. The script is written, revised, and finalized to form the foundation of the digital story, which is the voiceover (Lambert, 2009). Digital storytelling builds on the power of narrative by engaging “the YouTube generations” because it “offers a democratizing opportunity for [students] to tell their stories in their preferred ‘language’ of multimedia...[T]he voice is the centerpiece of the story, what gives it its authenticity” (Benmayor, 2012, p. 521). Digital stories honor the power of narrative, and provides an opportunity for students to share their stories with a wide audience.

In another example of the power of narrative, Bond Belinky and Weinstock (2000) combined community psychology and feminism to design their Listening Partners program. This program engaged 30 isolated, poor, White rural mothers of young children in regular storytelling sessions. In a series of weekly, three-hour group gatherings that spanned a period of eight-months, the women shared stories of “feeling chronically

unheard and unseen – voiceless, silent, and silenced” (Bond et al., p. 699). While the women in the study did not create video stories, they did create visuals and audio files of their stories, which contributed to the participants becoming empowered as creators of knowledge and community leaders. For example, the authors state, “Publishing was a very empowering experience for the women, encouraging the author to see herself from a broadened perspective, constructing and naming the truth of her experiences in a form that is preserved and attended to by others” (Bond et al., 2000, p. 707). The women in this study worked to create “growth stories” wherein they recorded each other’s stories and reframed them from stories about limitations to stories about resourcefulness and creative coping. According to the authors, the participants who entered the program as silenced or received knowers, meaning they did not consider themselves as able to create knowledge, showed statistically significant gains over the control group, demonstrating that the process of reframing one’s story and experiences is powerful, especially when done with others who have had similar experiences.

In another study, Alexandra (2008) used digital storytelling with undocumented immigrants living in Ireland. In her research, the participants create digital stories to share and understand each other’s experiences of living as an undocumented person in Ireland. This study demonstrates the use of digital storytelling to empower participants to simultaneously understand their experiences in the context of a broader community and their nuanced experiences that are not included in the broader story of the group’s experience.

Alexandra (2008) also uses anthropological concepts of free space and communities of practice to explain how digital storytelling allows marginalized groups to

reflect on their experiences and redesign a new future. Free space refers to a place to learn outside of school where participants can enter on their own terms in order to encourage ownership of the experience. Communities of practice are communities in which all members play an active and equally important role in educating one another. This also gives ownership to participants in a setting such as a digital storytelling workshop. Alexandra studies the impact of weekly digital storytelling workshops held over the course of five months on participants' sense of shared authority to define and frame one's experiences. She analyzes two individuals' story creation process and highlights the ways in which the storytelling process helps the storytellers create stories that capture the individuals' journey without losing sight of how they are situated in the larger group context. In her conclusion she states, "although the stories 'capture an essence' as familiar migrant stories, and therefore become generalizable, due to their intimate, heterogeneous, and individual nature, they simultaneously disrupt that very tendency to generalize migrant stories" (Alexandra, 2008, p. 111). The power to define oneself as an immigrant to Ireland in a group setting affirms her two research subjects' sense of self.

Similarly, Hull and Katz (2006) analyze the impact of digital storytelling on two subjects in the Digital Underground Storytelling for Youth (DUSTY), a multi-year afterschool non-profit program located in West Oakland, CA where participants attended several digital storytelling workshops over several months. The authors draw on research about agency, self-concept, and re-authoring of self to articulate the effectiveness of digital storytelling on identity development. In their study, the authors use an agency framework that combines the work of narrative theorists, the study of discourse, and

notions of performance. Hull and Katz (2006) use their framework to argue, “individuals and groups can learn to fashion identities as competent actors in the world able to influence the direction and course of their lives” (p. 47). They also point out that identity is always formed in relation to others, whether it is in concert with others or in opposition to others. Along these lines, the authors acknowledge that notions of self and self-determination are “tempered by the constraints of specific social, cultural, and historical contexts...especially for ...oppressed, or disadvantaged groups” (Hull & Katz, 2006, p. 47).

In their qualitative analysis of the two DUSTY participants, the researchers found that the subjects were able to position themselves as positive agents of change in their own lives. They described this process as combining the multiple senses of self or multiple identities into a single identity. These multiple senses of identity stem from society at large, social groups, internal motivations, and internal desire. The authors also point out that identity is constantly changing based on personal experiences.

Digital storytelling as a Learning Partnerships Model.

While the studies above use different theories to understand the impact of the digital storytelling process on participants, each of the studies can be understood using self-authorship theory and the learning partnerships model. For example, each study articulates an explicit process of self-reflection with the goal of considering existing theories or beliefs, and ultimately creating a personal identity that recognizes one’s own unique qualities or attributes.

The learning partnerships model is concerned with the process of encouraging self-authored ways of knowing. Self-authorship theory is concerned with considering

existing notions of self, including those notions that stem from relationships with significant others, and reformulating a sense of self in a way that aligns with one's own goals and desires. The aforementioned studies express this process in one way or another, albeit using different terms.

Similarly, at the conclusion of their article, Hull and Katz (2006) explain four critical digital storytelling components that enable participants to create a personal identity. These four critical components can be found in each of the studies above, and they align closely with the principles of the learning partnerships model. The components include 1) access to a supportive community, 2) legitimacy to appropriate and recenter texts on one's own life, 3) competency to effectively and appropriately perform texts of one's own life, and 4) the opinion of final texts as valuable and meaningful to selves and others.

The first component from Hull and Katz, access to a supportive community aligns with the first learning partnerships model principle, validating learners' capacity to know. During the story circle portion of the digital storytelling process, the facilitator uses a number of tactics to create a supportive community among storytellers. These tactics support the individual storytellers' ability and authority to share their personal story. For example, the facilitator establishes ground rules around respect, active listening, and non-judgmental attitudes. The facilitator models appropriate questioning and thanks each storyteller when they are done sharing.

The second component from Hull and Katz, legitimacy to appropriate and recenter texts on one's own life, aligns with situating learning in learners' experiences. Storytellers are highly encouraged to tell their story in the first-person. Similarly,

storytellers are encouraged to bring pictures, documents, and artifacts from their lives that can be used to tell their story. These grant the storyteller authority to tell their story in their own words. Likewise, the storyteller decides how the story will be told, including the tone, emotion, and main idea. This power gives the storyteller the authority to determine how their individual story is told, and which parts of that story are the most relevant to their lives.

The last two components, competency to effectively and appropriately perform texts of one's own life, and the opinion of final texts as valuable and meaningful to self and others align with the learning partnerships model principle, mutually constructing meaning. In the story circle, the facilitator asks questions and encourages other participants to ask questions that help the storyteller pinpoint the meaning or critical moment of their story. This gives the power to the storyteller to tell their story in their own words, but also provides support from a group of active listeners who, in that moment, are intently focused on the storyteller's development of his or her story.

Also, as articulated by Benmayor (2012), the process of using technology to construct the final digital stories encourages collaboration among participants. The use of video editing software also gives participants a sense of accomplishment and provides the final story with a sense of legitimacy as the software is the same or similar to that used by professional video editors. Facilitators receive extensive training on technical equipment used to help storytellers record voiceovers and produce the final digital stories. The facilitators also offer detailed tutorials supplemented with examples about the use of equipment and technology for digital story production.

Conclusion

The opportunity gap with respect to degree completion rates has existed in higher education for several decades. As demographic changes predict a significant increase in underrepresented students in U.S. higher education, resolving this issue is perhaps more important than ever. Above, I outlined self-authorship, including its phases, timeline, and the ways in which self-authorship development is catalyzed with respect to underrepresented students. I also discussed the related learning partnerships model (LPM), and the way in which digital storytelling honors the principles of the LPM. Recent research indicates that supporting underrepresented students' self-authorship development may lead to an enduring focus on academic goals, which leads to positive coping strategies in the face of challenges at a PWI.

Recent research on the use of digital storytelling on underrepresented populations indicates that digital storytelling supports self-authorship development, and individuals who are experiencing or have experienced oppression or challenges to their sense of self can overcome such oppression and challenges, and ultimately move toward a self-authored sense of self. This is because the digital storytelling process honors the principles of the learning partnerships model, including validating learners' capacity to know, situating learning in learners' experiences, and mutually constructing meaning. Through writing, reflecting, and sharing their stories with similar others, the participants develop theories that explain their own reality (Benmayor, 2012), reframe stories from limitations to resourcefulness (Bond, et al, 2000), redesign new futures (Alexandra, 2008), and combine multiple senses of self into a single identity (Hull and Katz, 2004).

All of these outcomes speak to the second phase of self-authorship, Becoming the Author of One's Life.

Many of the studies discussed in this review illustrate how digital storytelling supported participants' self-authorship development. Yet, the digital storytelling processes in these studies lasted several months and were facilitated by professionals. Therefore, these models are not particularly efficient for large numbers of students. Also these processes supported participants in overcoming a current challenge or a challenge they had recently faced. It is unclear as to whether a shorter digital storytelling process facilitated by undergraduates and which did not focus on overcoming challenges would yield similar results. If this more-efficient model of digital storytelling done in advance of students' first year of college can prepare students for potential barriers to degree completion, then it might be a practical method for making positive contributions to resolving the opportunity gap.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to discover the ways in which an intensive five-day digital storytelling process used in the State University SUS Summer Bridge Program supported attendees' self-authored ways of knowing and prepared them to overcome potential barriers to degree completion. In my professional career I began using digital storytelling with underrepresented students in a university program designed to acclimate incoming students to college life during the summer prior to their first year of college. At that time it was clear to me that students were benefiting from the process, but the details of how or why they were benefiting were not obvious. When budget cuts threatened the continuation of the digital storytelling summer program, I was asked to explain the benefits of continuing to offer it to incoming students. At that time I explained that the digital storytelling experience seemed to have a positive impact on attendees' self-authorship development. This study served as a means to discover if that was the case.

Recent research indicates that digital storytelling may be effective at moving individuals through the Crossroads by reshaping the ways in which participants understand challenging experiences. However, the Seminar process differs from the processes used in previous research. The Seminar digital storytelling process lasted only five days compared to previous studies where participants met weekly or monthly over a period of several months. Also, undergraduate peer mentors as opposed to professional staff led the SUS digital storytelling process. Current research does not explicitly state that the digital storytelling process ought to follow a particular set of rules regarding these characteristics. However, many of the empirical studies to date have these characteristics in common.

I used a case study approach to discover the ways in which the SUS Seminar moved undergraduate attendees toward self-authorship development and prepared them for potential barriers to degree completion. In this chapter I will use the term *attendees* to refer to students who participated in the 2014 State University Scholars (SUS) Summer Bridge. I will use the term *participants* to refer to students from the population of attendees who elected to participate in this study. The details of SUS and the Summer Bridge will be explained in this chapter.

The results of this research lay the groundwork for future studies of enduring effects of an efficient digital storytelling process on self-authorship development and underrepresented student persistence. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways did attending a five-day, residential digital storytelling Summer Bridge led by undergraduate peer mentors support attendees' self-authorship development?
2. In what ways did attending a five-day, residential digital storytelling Summer Bridge led by undergraduate peer mentors support attendees' belief in their ability to overcome barriers to persistence in their first year?

Methodological Approach

I used a case study approach to understand the impact of the SUS Summer Bridge digital storytelling process on undergraduate attendees. Yin (2009) uses a two-part definition of the case study research process:

A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the

boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. The case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulation fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection analysis (p. 18).

The aim of this research project was to determine the ways in which a relatively short digital storytelling process led by undergraduate peer mentors prepared undergraduate attendees for potential barriers to degree completion at a PWI. Following the definition provided above, the digital storytelling process is the contemporary phenomenon. The context is the PWI where students are enrolled, and the variables include the student participants' backgrounds, their families and friends, the various components of the digital storytelling process, and other variables that surfaced during the study such as concerns related to making friends, family expectations, and academics.

I used a single case embedded design (Yin, 2009), where the case is the 2014 5-day Seminar, and the student participants were the embedded units of analysis. The event in this study was the process of creating a personal digital story. Student participants include a diverse group of students who completed the SUS Seminar at the State University in June 2014.

According to Merriam (2009), a case study approach allows researchers to get highly detailed information from participants, yet the “case study does not claim any particular methods for data collection or data analysis” (p. 42). I used completed digital

stories, survey data, and interview data to obtain detailed information. The case study method allows researchers to understand how a specific program, in this case the SUS Seminar, impacts individual participants as well as groups of participants (Merriam, 2009). This is appropriate for this study as the digital storytelling process includes distinct individual and group activities, and therefore is likely to produce individual and group outcomes.

In explaining the use of qualitative case study research, Stake (1995) writes, “The function of research is not necessarily to map and conquer the world but to sophisticate the beholding of it” (p. 43). In this study I sought a deep understanding of the ways in the digital storytelling process prepared underrepresented students to face what the literature suggests are barriers to their degree completion. I was looking for support for students’ self-authored ways of knowing, and the interpretation of the data used to determine such support relied on my attention to the details of individual student’s experiences. Such details are what Geertz (1973) called thick description, and what Rubin and Rubin (2005) describe as “depth, detail, and richness...rooted in the interviewees’ first-hand experiences” (p. 13). My analysis of students’ surveys and in-depth interviews sought to elicit such details and provide a full picture of the students’ experiences. While I sought to discover details of students’ experiences, this case study is an *instrumental* case study in that it seeks to do more than understand this particular case (Stake, 1995). The results of this research provide insight specific to the research questions, and can be used to inform ways to support underrepresented students at other institutions. This is consistent with the definition of an instrumental case study, and it is consistent with the goal of advocacy and participatory research.

Conceptual Foundation

My conceptual foundation for approaching this research is the advocacy and participatory worldview. Advocacy/participatory researchers seek to improve the lives of individuals. Of concern to these researchers are important social issues, “such as empowerment, inequality, oppression, domination, suppression, and alienation” (Creswell, 2008, p. 9), and one of these issues is typically the main focus of the research project. Advocacy and participatory researchers typically believe that postpositivist and constructivist research approaches do not meet the needs of marginalized individuals. According to these researchers, the research ought to provide a voice to participants, raise the conscience of participants and others, or improve the lives of the research participants (Creswell, 2008).

In his seminal book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1993) explains his concept of *conscientización*, or an awakening of an awareness of oppression and one’s role as either oppressed or oppressor. Freire argues that in order to be truly free, individuals must rebel against oppression, as oppressed and oppressor are both dehumanizing roles in an oppressive system. One way to fight against such systems is to change the relationship between student and teacher. Freire deplors what he refers to as a “banking concept of education” (p. 53), which considers the teacher to be the narrator of knowledge, and students to be empty vessels who wait to be filled with the narrator’s knowledge. He argues this method negates any knowledge, “they have learned in their relations with the world and with other women and men” (p. 45). Therefore, it dismisses any knowledge or experience the students bring to the classroom.

Freire makes the case for problem-posing education, which changes the relationship between student and teacher, and both work equally to discover knowledge through a “constant unveiling of reality” (p. 62). In this way, both parties’ realities are considered in the creation of knowledge, and thus education becomes the path to freedom from oppression. Parties who may have felt oppressed become empowered to change their situation. As Freire states, “Resignation gives way to the drive for transformation and inquiry, over which men feel themselves to be in control” (p. 66). This notion of changing the relationship between student and teacher informs my research on the impact of digital storytelling on underrepresented students’ self-authorship development.

The work of Freire (1993) informs this study. One goal of this study is to understand if a particular digital storytelling process can support underrepresented student persistence in college. The idea being that legitimizing students’ personal histories and experiences may help them develop self-authored ways of thinking that support them in the face of barriers to degree completion at a PWI. This preliminary research may lead to future studies as to the lasting effects of supporting self-authorship development on underrepresented student persistence, and I hope to use my findings to inform change with respect to the ways in which postsecondary institutions support underrepresented student success.

Study Context

The context for this study is the State University (SU). The SU is a large, public research institution. This state flagship school is located in the state capital, and is considered a PWI. In 2013-2014 75% of the enrolled undergraduates were White and 19% were students of color. The remaining 6% of enrolled undergraduates were either

international students or their race or ethnicity was unknown (State University). At the State University there is an achievement gap within the undergraduate student population. The four-year graduation rate of White students at the University in 2011 was 66.4%. However, the four-year graduation rate of students of color was 52.8%, and this was not an anomaly. From 2002 to 2011 there has been a consistent gap in four-year graduation rates between these two populations, with an average difference of 17.3 percentage points that consistently favors White students (Radcliffe, 2016).

The State University Scholars Program.

As stated earlier, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the ways in which attending a five-day, residential digital storytelling seminar led by undergraduate peer mentors supported students' self-authored ways of knowing and prepared them to effectively navigate potential barriers to degree completion. At the State University, digital storytelling is used in a new program designed to increase retention and graduation rates of underrepresented students. In fall, 2013 the State University implemented the State University Scholars (SUS) Program, which aims to provide opportunities for participants to critically consider their academic, career, and personal goals throughout their undergraduate experience. The idea behind this process is to prepare students to answer the questions around sense of self, relationships with others, and ways of knowing that arise during self-authorship development. This preparation is based on the current research findings that underrepresented students enrolled in PWIs are likely to wrestle with Crossroads questions during their undergraduate experience (Pizzolato, 2003, 2004).

SUS students participate in a fall conference where they can learn about campus resources, opportunities and programs to help them meet their individual goals. Additionally, each student is assigned an undergraduate peer mentor to speak with about questions or issues they have in their first two years of college. Other SUS components include an online goal articulation assignment, and a small scholarship in their first and last years of undergraduate study. Prior to the start of their first year, SUS students are also invited to attend the optional State University Scholars Summer Bridge.

Summer Bridge.

The SUS Summer Bridge is a five-day, residential program for incoming SUS students to create a digital story about a significant part of their lives. The goals of the Seminar include building community, gaining familiarity with people and places on campus, making friends before the start of school, and gaining confidence in being a SU student. The broad goal of the Seminar is to encourage attendees to identify the important pieces of their lives so that they may begin to understand how their academic, career, and personal goals are influenced by their life experiences. The Seminar honors the principles of the Learning Partnerships Model (Magolda & King, 2004) with the hope that attendees learn that their role as a college student need not conflict with the other roles they play in their lives. This goal is based on previously cited research on underrepresented students' self-authorship development that points to the fact that underrepresented students often feel that their belief systems do not align with those of their college.

In the Seminar, students are asked to consider a significant person, place, or event from their life as the focus of their digital story. The prompt is intentionally broad to give

students the opportunity to select something that is genuinely meaningful to them and to encourage them to consider how their prior experiences shape their current and future experiences. This centers the students' college experience on their lives and lets them know their experiences and personal histories are significant.

Likewise, the SUS Summer Bridge digital storytelling process contains the four critical digital storytelling components outlined by Hull and Katz (2004). This includes emotional and technological support for students as well as a formal conclusion of the five-day Seminar. All attendees screen their stories in small groups of about 20 students, and the Seminar culminates in a two-hour screening of selected digital stories, which are selected by each group through secret ballot. The final screening is held in a large auditorium, and the audience includes all Seminar staff and students, as well as various faculty and staff from campus. After this final screening, the students and staff go to the student union for pizza, bowling, and billiards as a way to conclude the Seminar. Students take photos and bid one another farewell until the start of the fall semester.

Differences between SUS digital storytelling and recent studies.

The SUS digital storytelling process is similar to that used in recent studies, which follows the model created by the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS) in the 1990s (Lambert, 2009). CDS was borne out of grassroots advocacy work and the organization has a long and consistent history of partnering with various community groups to empower disadvantaged and underrepresented individuals (Lambert, 2009). It is therefore not surprising that the recent studies on the use of digital storytelling indicate similar outcomes, such as moving individuals through the Crossroads phase of self-authorship development. While the SUS Summer Bridge serves many underrepresented

students, SUS staff do not make the students' disadvantaged status the focus point of the program. Rather, the staff acknowledge and recognize attendees as students who have demonstrated perseverance, tenacity, and determination to be successful in the face of adversity. As such, SUS students are encouraged to celebrate their achievements.

Another difference in programs has to do with duration. While the CDS digital storytelling model is typically 3-5 days long, the recent empirical studies of digital storytelling have much longer durations. For example, the study with the shortest duration included a process that lasted one semester, and the study with the longest duration lasted eight months. While the time frame was long, the process was spread out over several months and participants met on a weekly or monthly basis. By contrast, the SUS Seminar lasted only 5 days, and the Seminar was residential. Therefore the process lasted for more total hours and all of the hours were back to back. This design resulted in a more intense experience as it allowed students to get to know each other inside and outside the classroom. They relied on each other for feedback on their stories and they continued to process their identity over mealtime and other activities.

Also, the studies to date explain a process that was facilitated by professional staff, many with advanced degrees. In the SUS Seminar, the facilitators were undergraduate peer mentors who received extensive training prior to leading groups of students through the digital storytelling process. Peer mentors were 1 to 3 years older than the Seminar attendees and they were mostly from underrepresented backgrounds.

Details and outcomes of the Summer Bridge.

The SUS digital storytelling process began with peer mentor preparation several weeks prior to students arriving. In mid-March 2014 SUS staff interviewed and hired

undergraduate students as peer mentors. The peer mentor training program on how to lead the Summer Bridge digital storytelling process began in late May. The training process included a 3-day digital storytelling workshop for peer mentors to create their own digital story, training on digital storytelling workshop facilitation best practices, practice leading a digital storytelling workshop, and training on general topics such as classroom and residential hall management, emergency protocols, and university policies. These components are outlined below.

At the first May meeting the 15 peer mentors met each other for the first time, and SUS professional staff presented the mission and goals of the SUS program and the Summer Bridge, including the digital storytelling component. This first meeting served as the first day of the 3-day digital storytelling workshop for peer mentors. The first day included reflection activities, writing about reflections, and a story circle. Peer mentors were asked to work on their first draft and return in June with an updated version. June 2nd and 3rd served as days 2 and 3 of the 3-day workshop. These days included a second story circle and time to work on written scripts on day 2. After lunch on the same day the peer mentors recorded their voiceovers, and they were instructed on how to edit them using sound editing software. Other tutorials included file management and video editing instructions. The remainder of day 2 was dedicated to production time where peer mentors used their new skills to begin editing their stories. Day three of the peer mentor workshop included more production time in the morning, and final edits and screening of final stories after lunch.

Days 4 and 5 of the peer mentor training process included instructions on best practices for leading a 3-day digital storytelling workshop, including presentation

techniques, reflection activities, and story circle ground rules. Best practices also included how to effectively deliver technology tutorials, and appropriate ways to provide feedback on scripts and rough edits of digital stories. After these discussions, the peer mentors practiced the various components individually, in pairs, and as a large group. Following each practice session, professional staff and other peer mentors provided feedback on what was effective and what could be improved.

The next part of the peer mentor training process was a 3-day digital storytelling workshop for University faculty and staff led by the 12 peer mentors as a group. The peer mentors divided the different pieces they had practiced and delivered them to 15 participants from June 9-11. The participants completed a survey at the end of the peer mentor-led workshop providing one last set of feedback on digital story workshop facilitation for the peer mentors before the start of the SUS Summer Bridge.

The last piece of training for the peer mentors included three days of training on classroom and residential hall management, emergency protocols, and university policies. For example, peer mentors learned classroom techniques for teaching digital storytelling lessons, they created a schedule to monitor activity in the residence hall, and they met with university professionals from the housing department to discuss rules and policies related to residential life on campus. Peer mentors also planned the logistics for how they would lead their students each day, and they practiced different potential scenarios they might encounter during the summer. These last three days concluded the peer mentor summer training program. The peer mentors had two days off before returning for the start of the SUS Summer Bridge, beginning with a Saturday afternoon check-in and move-in process.

On Saturday, June 21, 2014 the peer mentors moved in to their residence hall rooms and the SUS staff held a morning meeting to go over the plans for the day and answer any last questions. By this time the peer mentors had rated their confidence in their ability to lead students through the SUS Summer Bridge, and they had rated their level of readiness to begin the program on a survey with Likert scaled items. According to the survey, the peer mentors were confident and ready. The staff had lunch as a group in the residence hall dining facility and then set up a check-in process in the residence hall meeting room. As student participants arrived they received their keys, access cards, room information, and a SUS welcome packet. Peer mentors helped the attendees move in and then led the group to a large lecture hall for the Summer Bridge kickoff. At the kickoff the SUS director welcomed the attendees and they were given an overview of the Summer Bridge including goals and expectations.

After the welcome, the peer mentors met with their assigned students in small groups at various locations around campus. Each peer mentor had 8-10 students in their group, and the first meeting consisted of icebreakers, defining expectations, and answering attendees' questions. After the first meeting, participants had free time and time for dinner. The last meeting for the day marked the start of the digital storytelling process for participants. Peer mentors paired up and led their group of combined students through an introduction to digital storytelling with examples and questions. The pairs worked together during the day for the remainder of the Summer Bridge to produce their digital stories.

The format of the digital storytelling production process mirrored that of the 3-day process used in the peer mentor training program outlined above. Peer mentors

began with a reflection activity followed by time to write. Then they led a story circle to discuss what participants had written. After the story circle, participants were allowed time to edit their first draft based on the feedback in the story circle. The next two days were dedicated to technology tutorials and production time. At the end of the fourth day the peer mentors screened the digital stories in the groups they had led throughout the seminar thus far. Each group then selected three to four stories to show at the final screening for all Summer Bridge participants and faculty and staff.

Day five of the Summer Bridge ended with a large-group closing activity followed by the final screening in the same room where the kickoff meeting was held. Light refreshments were served and the audience viewed the selected stories for approximately two hours. After the screening, all audience members were invited to the student union for bowling, billiards, music, pizza, and soda. By 5pm on Wednesday, June 25 all of the SUS Summer Bridge participants had checked out of their residence hall rooms, marking the end of the Seminar.

On the last day of the 2014 Summer Bridge, 90% (n = 75) of participants completed an online survey used to evaluate the SUS Seminar. When asked if they would recommend the SUS Summer Bridge to a friend, 100% of the respondents indicated a positive response thus indicating high satisfaction with the Seminar (Cisneros, 2014). While this is a positive outcome, a more important question to answer relates to the impact on students' preparation for barriers to degree completion. If the Seminar can prepare students for challenges they may face in college in a resource-efficient manner then the SUS Seminar may prove to be an effective model to inform the development of similar programs at other institutions.

Role of the Researcher

In a previous section I outlined my use of the advocacy and participatory worldview as my conceptual foundation. My academic and work experiences have certainly influenced my worldview, and I will explain these experiences so as to be clear about my role within my research. My assumptions and experiences are described below.

My assumptions include a strong belief that a postsecondary education is possible for most, if not all, citizens of the United States and U.S. colleges and universities should have the capacity and ability to serve all who desire to attend. I do not intend to imply that a college education is easily accessible to all. Quite the contrary, I acknowledge that the path to college is not equitable.

I therefore also believe that a primary role of public institutions is to educate future students about their options to attend college, with a particular emphasis on students who have less access to such information. This education includes the cost of attendance, academic preparation, the application process, and basic information about how postsecondary systems function. Information also includes the different types of institutions that exist in the United States. I believe that if an individual wants to attend college, they ought to have accurate information to do so.

In my professional work I have supported students' preparation for college, and I have worked with students once they were admitted. I have many years of experience working with low-income students, first generation students, and students of color and I have supported many as they worked to overcome barriers to degree completion. For example, as a financial aid advisor I have educated students on federal and state aid programs, including organizing and leading information sessions for students and their

families. As an academic advisor for underrepresented students I have met with many students to talk about personal issues, many of which stem from barriers common to underrepresented students.

I acknowledge these life experiences as informing my research, and I consider them as part of my education. I feel that I have a firm grasp on the struggles of underrepresented students based on my professional experiences including what I have learned from my students. I also have firsthand experience with such obstacles as a first-generation student of color. For this reason I feel equipped to relate to and fairly represent the participants in this study.

I also have extensive training and experience with digital storytelling. This includes participation in two distinct workshops on digital storytelling at the Center for Digital Storytelling, one of which was designed to teach participants best practices of digital story workshop facilitation. I have led multiple digital storytelling workshops on campus and have presented at conferences, community information sessions, and at several meetings of the Digital Storytelling Community of Practice, of which I am a co-founder. These experiences have deeply informed my development of the SUS Seminar.

I must also make clear that as the director of the State University Scholars Program, which includes the Summer Bridge, I have a vested interest in the outcome of this study. To combat potential bias, I was intentionally very clear to participants during the interview process that their honest and candid opinions were more important than telling me what they might have thought I wanted to hear. Furthermore, I was clear that I was not looking particularly for positive opinions about the Seminar. Rather, my goal was to look for themes about the ways in which the Seminar supported students' self-

authorship development and prepared them for potential barriers to degree completion. My questions were rather open-ended to facilitate participants' honest reflections about their experiences. I also used triangulation methods to support the validity of my findings. These will be described shortly.

Institutional Review Board Approval

For this study I followed the State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies and procedures for expedited review. My IRB application included the aims of my proposed research, my recruitment plan, data collection procedures, and details of informed consent. My application was approved, including my consent form and recruitment materials.

After conducting three pilot interviews with my initial set of questions, I changed the order of my questions as well as some of the wording. My initial interview protocol had some questions that seemed to cause confusion due to word choice and length. I submitted a Change in Protocol form to IRB and received approval for the updated interview protocol. Copies of the IRB forms are included in Appendix A.

Participants

In this study I analyzed data from the underrepresented students who attended the 2014 SUS Seminar from June 21-25, 2014 and who volunteered for this study. All 83 of the 2014 attendees were recent high school graduates at their time of the 2014 Seminar. The makeup of the group included 58 women, 25 men, 1 American Indian, 29 Asian, 19 Black, 10 Hispanic, and 22 White students. Two students did not specify their race or ethnicity. Of the attendees, 52 were first-generation students and 49 were Pell Grant

recipients. The SUS Seminar is an optional program, and all 2014 attendees opted in to the Seminar.

Participant selection.

Creswell (2008) writes, “The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites (or documents or visual material) that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question” (p. 178). Following this logic, I invited attendees from the 2014 Summer Bridge who completed the Seminar survey, and who are considered underrepresented (low income, first-generation, or student of color) to participate in this study. The number of underrepresented students in my pool of potential participants was 65. I determined this by calculating the number of Seminar attendees who completed the Seminar survey and who fell into at least one underrepresented category. I purposefully recruited students who fell into all three categories, students who fell into 2 categories, and students who fell into only 1 category. The number of students that fell into 3, 2, and 1 category is 31, 16, and 18, respectively (11 students did not fall into any category). My research therefore was limited by my pool of potential participants as well as the number of students from that pool who volunteered for this study. I estimated that approximately 25% of my pool would volunteer for my study. I therefore anticipated interviewing approximately 15 students.

Upon receipt of IRB approval a campus colleague sent a recruitment e-mail (Appendix D) to the pool of 65 potential participants. At that time 64 of the 65 potential participants were enrolled at the University. One student was on a leave of absence.

Interested students sent me an e-mail indicating their interest in participating in my study per the recruitment e-mail that was sent to them. Upon receipt of their e-mail

expressing interest in participating in my study I sent each student a link to an electronic scheduling system where they could select a day and time to come in for a 1-hour interview. Once they selected a time their name and that particular time disappeared from the scheduling system so as to ensure privacy. All of the students who scheduled a time to come in for an interview showed up for the interview portion of the study.

After the first e-mail was sent, eight students agreed to participate in my study. Upon reviewing the gender makeup of the eight participants I sought to recruit more than the one male student who volunteered for my study, and my campus colleague sent the recruitment e-mail a second time to the male students from my pool. This second e-mail yielded four more participants, including two male students. My participants therefore consisted of ten female students and two male students.

In terms of race and ethnicity, nine of the participants are students of color, two participants are White students, and one student did not identify with a particular race or ethnicity. The breakdown of the students of color was as follows: American Indian = 1, Asian = 6, Black = 1, Hispanic = 1. The breakdown of first-generation and low-income status was as follows: first-generation = 10, low-income = 10. Some students fall into multiple categories, as follows: first-generation only = 2, first-generation, low-income, and student of color = 7, low-income and student of color = 9. These demographic data are presented in tables 1-3. No students fell into the category of first-generation and low-income unless they were also students of color. Half of the students in this study were Asian, and this was consistent with the population of attendees in that most of the attendees were Asian. Furthermore, the percentage of students of color in this study was representative of the percentage of students of color in the population.

Gender	
Female	10
Male	2

Table 1: Gender breakdown of participants

Race/Ethnicity	
Students of Color	9
White Students	2
Not Specified	1
American Indian	1
Asian	6
Black	1
Hispanic	1
White	2
Not Specified	1

Table 2: Race/Ethnicity breakdown of participants

Underrepresented Student Categories	
First-Generation	10
Low-Income	10
Students of Color	9
First-Generation Only	2
First-Generation + Low-Income	0
First-Generation + Low-Income + Student of Color	7
Low-Income + Student of Color	9

Table 3: Underrepresented student category breakdown of participants

Name	Race/Ethnicity	First-Gen.	Low-Income	Underrepresented characteristics	First-year Housing
Linda	White	Y	n	1	on-campus
Mary	Asian	n	Y	2	off
Gloria	Asian	Y	Y	3	off
Diane	White	Y	n	1	on-campus
Beatriz	Hispanic	n	Y	2	on-campus
Nora	NS	Y	Y	2	on-campus
Kelly	Asian	Y	Y	3	on-campus
Keith	American Indian	Y	Y	3	on-campus
Leton	Black	Y	Y	3	off
Ben	Asian	Y	Y	3	off
Olga	Asian	Y	Y	3	off
Evelyn	Asian	Y	Y	3	off

Table 4: All participants

Protecting participants.

During recruitment and data collection I took specific action to ensure that the participants were aware of their rights and felt comfortable participating throughout the study by following the State University’s Institutional Review Board human subjects standards. For example, the recruitment e-mail was sent by a third party to avoid potential for coercion, and that e-mail contained a copy of the Participant Consent Form (Appendix A). Also, at the beginning of each interview I reviewed the Participant

Consent Form with each participant and asked questions to ensure they understood their rights. I assured all participants that they did not have to answer any question if they did not want to, and that they could withdraw at any time without negative consequences. This last point is particularly important, as I did not want participants to worry about their status in the State University Scholars Program if they elected to discontinue with the study. Each participant signed a consent form agreeing to participate in my study, including my analysis of their survey data, the interview, and the use of demographic information (Appendix A). I provided each participant with an electronic and hard copy of the Participant Consent Form.

All interview responses and study data are confidential. Identifying information has been removed from this paper, and pseudonyms have been used in place of real names. I have also altered any unique information that might identify a particular student. My data are organized and stored on a private, encrypted server that is backed up each night. Each participant is an embedded unit of analysis, and therefore has a file folder on my drive with all data inside. For example, each participant's folder contains their survey results, interview audio, and interview transcript. Upon completion of this study I will shred all hard data and I will delete all electronic data used in this study per my IRB agreement.

Data Collection

For this study I collected data from two unique sources. These sources include the surveys completed by study participants during the 2014 Seminar, and interviews of 2014 Seminar attendees who elected to participate in this study. The survey data was collected on the last day of the Seminar, and the interview data were collected during

one-hour interviews in a private meeting room. I recorded each interview with a microphone and recording software. As part of the interview process I watched participants' digital story with them at the start of the interview.

The Summer Bridge survey was administered to all Seminar attendees on the last day of the 2014 Seminar. The response rate for this survey was 90%, with most of the students completing the survey at the last group meeting. The intent of the survey was to determine student satisfaction with the Seminar and provide them with an opportunity to voice concerns, make comments, or provide other general feedback. The survey was completed online using a Google form, and the form collected unique identifiers for each student, which allowed me to match the survey data with students' interviews. The survey contained a total of 24 items in three categories. The first category contained six items about the Summer Bridge as a whole, the second category contained 14 items about the digital storytelling process, and the last category contained four general items. These general items include questions about what students learned about themselves and others. Most of the items in the survey were open-ended with the exception of nine Likert Scale items about the digital storytelling process. I selected 6 items from the survey to analyze as part of this study. I selected these 6 items because they pertain to my research questions. The other items from the survey were designed as evaluation items and do not fit the scope of this research. The 6 items are as follows:

1. What, if anything, did you learn about yourself as a result of the SUS Summer Bridge?
2. What, if anything, did you learn about others?
3. In your mind, what does it mean to be a college student?

4. What did you learn from interacting with your fellow SUS Scholars about what it means to be a college student?
5. As you look toward starting school in the fall, what are 2 to 3 things that you learned during the Summer Bridge that will be useful to you?
6. Do you have any comments, remarks, or questions that were not addressed in the previous questions?

Students who elected to participate in the interview portion of my study were interviewed for one hour about their experiences in the Seminar. The interview protocol (Appendix C) consists of main questions and follow-up or probing questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). My interview questions are informed by questions used by Pizzolato (2004) and Pizzolato and Ozaki (2007). My questions are also informed by Magolda and King (2007) who recommend allowing the participant to identify significant moments of importance, and then asking probing questions to “explore the epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal assumptions behind their reflections” (p. 499). Similarly, I asked participants follow up questions about the significant item they discussed in their digital story, and I asked them about insight they may have gained about themselves or others in advance of their first year of college. I also asked them about important experiences and challenges they had during their first year of college. My probing questions were used to understand how students perceived their Summer Bridge experiences to have impacted their first year experiences.

This semi-structured process allowed for consistency in questions between interviewees as well as room for clarification specific to individuals (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The first interview question served as a memory exercise to help participants

recall as much as they could about the Seminar. After students told me about what they remembered I was able to ask questions about specific memories to begin the conversation. Following this discussion I asked students if we could view the digital story they created during the Seminar. All but 2 participants agreed to watch their story, and one of those 2 had originally requested that I destroy our copy of her story.

Viewing the stories of the other participants prompted further discussion about the participants' frame of mind and significant memories from the digital story production process of the Seminar. At the end of the interview I asked participants for any other information they wanted to share or if there was anything I should have asked them. Participants were also invited to send me an e-mail if they thought of anything after the interview was done. Next steps for them included coming in to review the interview transcript once it was done to verify the record or make changes or clarifications, and receiving a \$25 payment for participation.

The two data sources complement each other in terms of advantages and limitations (Creswell, 2008). The survey data was collected during the last day of the Seminar, and the data are in the words of the participants. For this source, the limitations include the potential for inaccurate interpretation. To combat this limitation I read the participants' survey responses prior to their interview so that I could ask clarifying questions, if needed. This is one of the benefits of interviews. Interviews also allow for immediate follow up to participants' answers, and they provide insight into participants' Seminar experience that was not directly observed or recalled by the researcher. Interviews also have their limitations, including hazy recollection, interviewee bias, and a risk of interviewees who are not articulate or perceptive.

The two data sources also complemented each other in terms of what they provided. The first two questions in the survey asked students what they learned about themselves and what they learned about others. These questions were also asked during the interview, thus providing rich data about how the participants perceived their learning at two different points in time. These questions were asked after asking students to go through a memory exercise to help them remember their Summer Bridge experience.

The third and fourth survey questions provided data about how students were feeling with respect to entering their first year of college. As I will explain in chapter four, students expressed confidence about entering college for the first time, and survey questions three and four captured those sentiments at the end of the Summer Bridge, prior to the start of their first fall semester. Interview question two also captured data about participants' concerns about college at the end of the Summer Bridge, providing a second source of data for that particular moment in time.

The fifth survey question captured those sentiments as well. It also captured overall sentiments about the Summer Bridge along with question number six. The last two survey questions were similar to interview questions six, seven and nine, once again providing data validity. The interview questions also provided data about participants' self-authorship development and support for overcoming barriers in the first year of college. These questions and the corresponding research question are in Appendix C.

Prior to each interview I also watched the participants' digital story they created during the 2014 Seminar. Initially, the digital stories were going to serve as one of my data sources; however, I determined that the digital stories would not likely be particularly helpful in answering my research questions. Instead, I used the stories to

remind myself of the participants' backgrounds. I also used the stories during the interviews to remind the participants about what they chose to write about during the Seminar.

Data Analysis

Merriam (2009) outlines a qualitative data coding process that includes making preliminary notations and comments on potentially relevant pieces of data, grouping codes together, and ultimately forming categories. The researcher refines the categories and moves from an inductive process of analysis to a deductive process of testing the tentative categories against the data. The categories are used to explain the findings of the research, and examples from the data are used to illustrate the findings.

For my analysis I used a combination of emerging codes and predetermined codes based on the recent research on underrepresented students' self-authorship development outlined in my conceptual framework. Rubin and Rubin (2011) state, "predetermined codes are perfectly legitimate" (p. 209), and in my case they make sense given the recent research on underrepresented self-authorship development. For example, Pizzolato and Ozaki (2007) discovered two precursors to self-authorship development as outcomes of participating in a learning partnerships model of advising. These precursors include 1) belief that the self is important to knowledge construction and decision-making and 2) belief in the controllability of outcomes. Students who understood their sense of self as influenced by various parts of their lives, and who viewed knowledge as a combination of formulas, personal goals, values, and beliefs were considered to be moving toward self-authored ways of knowing. The researchers also found that students' dissonance stemmed primarily from interpersonal dissonance, and the learning partnerships model

resulted in cognitive interdependence, defined as “recognizing that they could successfully negotiate conflicting expectations in ways that were satisfying for them but also considered others” (p. 206).

Based on these findings, my codes include “sense of self”, “understanding of knowledge”, and “cognitive interdependence”. Also, since I was interested in knowing the ways in which attending the Seminar supported attendees in the face of barriers to persistence, my fourth code is “belief in ability to overcome barriers”. This last code is also based on the work of Pizzolato and Ozaki (2007), whose research subjects felt they could seek out resources for success by the end of the semester. In my data analysis I looked for data that fit my codes and I noted potential emerging codes. As I analyzed the data, I combined codes that went together in an iterative process with each new set of data.

Stake (1995) writes, “There is no point at which data analysis begins” (p. 71). Similarly, Creswell (2008) states, “ongoing process involving continual reflection” (p. 184), and Merriam (2009) advises that data are much less daunting if they are reviewed during collection. In my research I deliberately analyzed data as they were collected. I began by reading participants’ survey results first for general impressions, then again to find pieces of data that fit my codes. I also made a list of follow-up and clarifying questions to ask the participants during the interview.

After the analysis of this first data source, I conducted my interviews with the participants. As mentioned earlier, I started each interview with a memory exercise followed by watching the participants’ digital stories with them to remind them of their experience in the Seminar. This was important because at the time of this study the

participants' Seminar experience had been several months earlier. My intention was to prompt participants to remember more details about their Seminar experience.

After each interview I reviewed and clarified my notes immediately. Rubin and Rubin (2011) suggest setting time aside specifically for this purpose so as not to forget the important parts of the interview. Similarly, I transcribed the recordings as soon as possible so that I could review the transcriptions soon after the interviews. Following Creswell's (2008) recommendations, I read all of the transcriptions once to get a general sense of them. Next, I reviewed the transcripts in detail to find data that fit my codes and to find emerging codes.

Throughout the analysis of each participant's data I utilized the constant comparative method of data analysis. Merriam (2009) states, "the constant comparative method of data analysis is inductive and comparative and so has been widely used throughout qualitative research without building a grounded theory" (p. 175). I coded new data while comparing the new data to previous data. Once I coded all of the data, I compared each new participant with previous participants to look for general conclusions. Merriam (2009) writes, "qualitative data analysis is primarily inductive and comparative" (p. 175), and following this logic, I sought to move from specific information from my data to general themes or categories about the participants' Summer Bridge experiences. Creswell (2008) suggests 5-7 final categories of findings, and my findings fit within this recommendation. I will discuss my final categories, including specific illustrations and multiple perspectives that exemplify the categories from the SUS Summer Bridge in the following chapter.

Triangulation and Validity

Merriam (2009) lists three forms of triangulation that are common to qualitative research. I used multiple sources, multiple methods, and multiple investigators in this study. Stake (1995) refers to these as data source triangulation and investigator triangulation, and asserts that they lead to validity in a qualitative study.

In order to accurately portray the characteristics of the participants, I gathered demographic data from the University's Office of Institutional Research. These data included race, gender, first-generation status, and low-income status. This information is derived from students' admissions applications and federal financial aid applications, and the University consistently relies upon it as accurate data. I verified the consistency of this data with what the students reported during my study. In one case the participant was not categorized as a low-income student, but in speaking with her I discovered that this was not accurate due to a lump sum of income from one parent's recent retirement. The accuracy of this information is important to understanding how students who identify as low-income, first-generation, students of color, or some combination thereof report their experience in the SUS Seminar.

I also compared data from students' surveys with interview data as a form of data source triangulation (Stake, 1995). For example, the survey and interview protocol contained questions about what participants learned about themselves, what they learned about others, how participants defined themselves as college students, and the ways in which participating in the Summer Bridge prepared them for their first year of college. Before each interview, I read the participant's survey responses and I asked follow up questions during the interview if there was any confusion. I then compared participants'

survey responses with their interview question responses for the questions that were the same. These include questions about what the participants learned about themselves, what the participants learned about others, and what participants found to be beneficial to their first semester of college.

Lastly, I used investigator triangulation by asking a colleague to code an interview from this study. My colleague is a current university employee who earned her PhD. in Educational Policy and Administration in 2009. Her dissertation research included qualitative interview data, and she is confident in her coding abilities. After coding the interview we compared codes. My colleague and I agreed on 77% of the codes. We partially agreed on 13% of the codes, meaning we coded a passage with the same code but we each added a second code for the passage, and the second code was different between us. We disagreed on 10% of the codes. After discussing the discrepancies with respect to the second code and with respect to the disagreement, we agreed on 97% of the codes.

Finally, I conducted member checking with all data. This was accomplished by asking participants to clarify any questions I had about their survey responses, as mentioned above. As for the interview data, I also conducted member checking of the interview data by asking each participant to review the transcript of our interview and asking them to make any necessary corrections and clarify any points they deemed necessary. Upon final sign-off of the transcript, participants received a \$25 cash payment inside of a thank you card.

Limitation and Delimitations

There were several limitations and delimitations in this study. The delimitations include the study setting, the population of participants, and the generalizability of the findings. This study took place at a large public research institution. Within higher education there are several different types of institutions and the findings from this study may not be the same as findings that might result at a different type of institution. For example, two-year institutions enroll a significantly higher percentage of underrepresented students than do four-year institutions, and the impact of a similar program at a two-year school may be quite different.

A second delimitation of this study has to do with the student population that was studied. The students who attend the Summer Bridge opt in to the program. Such students might be at a different place than their peers in terms of student development, they might be more eager to engage in the digital storytelling process, or there might be characteristics that otherwise distinguish them from students who did not opt in to attending the Summer Bridge Program. The voluntary nature of the program may impact the outcomes of students who attend the Summer Bridge and therefore cannot automatically be applied to all underrepresented undergraduates.

One limitation of this study has to do with generalizability. This was a qualitative case study with a small sample size. Due to these characteristics the findings cannot be applied to a broader population of students. At the same time, the goal of this study was to have a deep understanding of students' Summer Bridge experience, as it related to self-authorship development and barriers to degree completion. While the results cannot be generalized to other populations or institutions, they can inform future studies at other

institutions. The results of this study allow for a deep understanding of students' experiences. These results can be used to improve the program in this study and the model that was used.

Another limitation has to do with the demographics of the participants. In this study, the majority of participants were women and the participants mostly identified as Asian. While there is no indication that findings are specific to gender, race, or ethnicity it may be beneficial to include the perspective of more students, including all races and ethnicities to determine if differences exist. The participants in this study primarily spoke about their experiences as students from underrepresented backgrounds, and each individual student had a different experience than the next with respect to their backgrounds. It seems that a greater variety of combinations of backgrounds might, at a minimum, contribute to the notion that individual students require individualized support.

Conclusion

The opportunity gap with respect to degree completion rates is a recurring issue in the United States. Recent recommendations include learning more about specific groups of students at given institutions. Digital storytelling can provide student-specific data while engaging individual students in their preparation for barriers to degree completion. Recent studies of the use of digital storytelling with underrepresented populations indicate that digital storytelling honors the principles of the learning partnerships model, and therefore can be used to move underrepresented students toward self-authored ways of knowing. In doing so, underrepresented students may be better prepared to overcome barriers to degree completion. The findings from this study indicate that the digital

storytelling process used in the Summer Bridge supported students' self-authored ways of knowing and it supported them in overcoming barriers to persistence in their first year.

Chapter 4: Findings

In this chapter I will present my findings using predetermined and emerging codes. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I set out to discover the impact of digital storytelling on participants' self-authorship development. This intention was based on my previous professional experience and findings from studies on the impact of the Learning Partnerships Model on participants' self-authorship development.

As I analyzed the data using the predetermined codes, I discovered emerging codes. Together, the predetermined codes and emerging codes helped me understand that the process of the digital storytelling experience during the Summer Bridge program was integral to sparking an awareness of the Crossroads Phase of self-authorship development for the participants in this study. This awareness is what Baxter Magolda refers to as the provocative moment (2004).

After providing an introduction to the students in this study, I present the findings in chronological order, beginning with the emerging code *Challenges*, which explains the concerns participants had as they entered the Summer Bridge. Then I describe the emerging code *Environment*, which explains how the major elements of the Summer Bridge program honored the principles of the Learning Partnerships Model and influenced students' experiences. Next, I use the predetermined codes to explain the ways in which participants were aware of their individual provocative moments, and the ways in which that awareness gave them confidence with respect to unique challenges they faced as they entered and during their first year of college. The intention is to focus on the process of the digital storytelling experience rather than the product(s) of that

process, and the themes, both predetermined and emergent, will focus on the process that students experienced in the five-day seminar.

In this study I found that process of the five-day digital storytelling Summer Bridge led by undergraduate peer mentors sparked participants' awareness of their Crossroads experience, and promoted participants' belief in their ability to overcome barriers related to that experience. The Summer Bridge impacted students in a way that was unique to each participant, but the pattern of the impact was similar for all participants. Participants entered the Summer Bridge with concerns about college, and many of these concerns were consistent with previous research on the barriers faced by underrepresented undergraduate students. The digital storytelling Summer Bridge catalyzed an awareness of and about participants' Crossroads experience, and it gave them confidence to address the concerns they had prior to entering the Summer Bridge. Participants therefore felt confident about entering their first year of college, and spoke about overcoming challenges in their first year using lessons learned from the Summer Bridge.

Introduction of the Students

This section includes a brief introduction of the participants in this study, including demographic information for each student as well as a brief overview of their completed digital story. I've also included a statement that summarizes what each participant perceived to be the most valuable part of his or her Summer Bridge experience.

Linda.

Linda is a White female student from a small town approximately 30 miles from campus. She is a first-generation student, and her story is titled, “Trust Your Struggle”. Linda’s story is about the death of her father while she was in high school. In her story she discusses coping with the loss of her father and overcoming the associated challenges. The most-valuable part of the Summer Bridge for Linda was having the chance to tell her story to others and let others know who she was beyond her identity around the death of her father.

Mary.

Mary is an Asian female student from Social City, approximately 10 miles from campus. She is a low-income student, and her story is titled, “The Little Things”. Her story is about her time volunteering with Big Brothers Big Sisters. Mary’s story is about realizing the impact she made on the girl she mentored as well as realizing the impact the girl made on Mary. The most-valuable parts of the Summer Bridge for Mary included having the chance to make friends, exploring campus, and exploring her passion and future career.

Gloria.

Gloria is an Asian female student from a suburb near campus, approximately 30 miles from campus. She is a first-generation student, and she is a low-income student. Her story is titled, “My Best Friend”. Gloria’s story is about her best friend from high school. Specifically, Gloria reflects that her life before meeting her best friend was lonely; even though she had convinced herself she did not need friends. During the story production process Gloria realized how fortunate she was to have made a best friend

during that time of her life. The most-valuable part of the Summer Bridge for Gloria was making new friends and feeling free to be herself.

Diane.

Diane is a White female student from a small town approximately 40 miles from campus. She is a first-generation college student, and her story is titled “Leadership”. Diane’s story is about working hard in high school to prepare for college. Her hard work includes being a captain of her soccer team, joining National Honor Society, and completing admission and financial aid applications for college. These were particularly meaningful experiences for Diane because she did not have a lot of support from her parents as a high school student. Diane frequently had to take care of herself because her parents had significant health concerns. The most-valuable part of the Summer Bridge for Diane was realizing how important it was for her to stay positive in the face of adversity. She became highly aware of her need to stay positive as a result of the Summer Bridge.

Beatriz.

Beatriz is a Latina student from a large city approximately 85 miles from campus. She is a low-income college student, and her story is titled, “My Story Begins Today”. Beatriz’s story is about her desire to get to know others on a personal level and to befriend those with similar stories. In her story, Beatriz discusses the experiences that have made her who she is. Through sharing these experiences she hopes to give others an accurate picture of who she is as a means to become closer to them. The most-valuable part of the Summer Bridge for Beatriz was getting to know other students and establishing a sense of community with them.

Nora.

Nora is a female student who does not identify with a race or ethnicity. She is a first-generation and low-income student from Metropolis. Her story is titled, “The Storyteller” and it is about her process of wrestling with the ideas of knowledge and identity, including how they influence each other. While Nora acknowledges that her story does not touch on a particularly personal event from her life, she stated that she learned to accept and be proud of her personal background. The most-valuable part of the Summer Bridge for Nora was getting to know others on a deep level and letting others get to know her on a deep level as well.

Kelly.

Kelly is an Asian female student from a small city approximately 70 miles from campus. She is a low-income and first-generation college student, and her story is titled, “Hi, My Name is Kelly”. Kelly’s story is about moving to a new high school where she experienced racism and isolation. She eventually made friends through music, and had a positive end to her high school career. She learned that she was able to make friends by being herself and staying positive. The most-valuable part of the Summer Bridge for Kelly was learning about others from in-depth conversations with them and from their perspective portrayed in the digital story production process.

Keith.

Keith is an American Indian male student from Metropolis. He is a first-generation and low-income student, and his story is titled, “Pioneering”. Keith’s story is about growing up as the oldest child in a household with parents who used and sold drugs. In his story he writes about some of his childhood challenges, including moving

in and out of foster care. Through his story production process he learned a lot about himself, including why he is a shy adult. The most-valuable part of the Summer Bridge for Keith was being able to reflect deeply on his childhood and understand himself more deeply. Keith also talked about how the Summer Bridge helped him explain his story to others so that they might know him better.

Leton.

Leton is an African female student from a suburb of Metropolis. She is a first-generation and low-income student, and her story is titled, “A Good Listener”. Leton’s story is about the importance of listening. In her story she writes about her role in her family with respect to her 8 younger siblings, and the importance of listening as opposed to giving them advice. Through her story production process she learned that often people need to have the opportunity to talk about their lives as it can be a source of relief for them. She also learned that listening to others is a gift, and it is a gift she possesses. The most-valuable part of the Summer Bridge for Leton was having the opportunity to build community with other students in the program. Leton also talked about how the Summer Bridge helped her realize she could get involved with other students throughout college, and that involvement would help her; not distract her as she had originally thought.

Olga.

Olga is an Asian female student from Metropolis. She is a first-generation and low-income student, and her story is titled, “Colors”. Olga’s story is about growing up with a disability. In her story she writes about the emotions she experienced growing up due to her disability, including feeling left out and feeling ostracized. Through her story

production process she learned that her new peers were very open and accepting of her and her disability. She also reflected on the support she had received growing up from her family, and how important that support had been to her. The most-valuable part of the Summer Bridge for Olga was connecting with other students and feeling accepted by them. Leton also talked about how the Summer Bridge helped her feel motivated to continue making connections with students during her first year of college.

Ben.

Ben is an Asian male student from Social City. He is a first-generation and low-income student, and his story is titled, “Pebble”. Ben’s story is about having wanted to influence the people of the world in some way, and realizing that others had influenced him throughout his childhood. In his story he writes about the various people and programs that helped him achieve his goals, and how he is thankful for having had those experiences and opportunities. Through his story production process he learned the importance of asking for and accepting help from others. The most-valuable part of the Summer Bridge for Ben was making friends and realizing he had benefited from a lot of opportunities throughout high school. This motivated Ben to continue to use opportunities to achieve his goals alone, and it motivated him to be a resource for other students.

Evelyn.

Evelyn is an immigrant female student from the Middle East. She moved to a suburb of Metropolis when she was 15 years old. She is a first-generation and low-income student, and her story is titled, “Moving In”. Evelyn’s story is about her move to the United States. In her story she writes about being excited about going to school, but not being

able to play with the other kids because of the language barrier. It was a difficult experience but she was determined to take advantage of the opportunity her parents had created. Through her story production process she learned that her family had made many sacrifices for her to be able to receive an education in the United States, and she was grateful for the experience, given the alternative had they stayed in her home country. The most-valuable part of the Summer Bridge for Evelyn was making friends, as this was a concern for her as she entered college. Evelyn also talked about how the Summer Bridge helped her understand that her peers were open and accepting once she got to know them, and she was happy to have made friends in the summer who eased her transition in the fall semester.

Emerging Codes

During my data analysis ten codes emerged. The first emerging code is *challenges*, and the corresponding sub-codes are *friends*, *family*, and *academics*. The second emerging code is *environment*, and the corresponding sub-codes are *peer mentors*, and *storytelling*. These first emerging codes explain the ways in which participants experienced the process of the Summer Bridge Program. I will follow the explanation of these codes with an explanation of the predetermined codes *sense of self*, *understanding of knowledge*, and *cognitive interdependence*, which explain the insight participants gained about their unique challenges and concerns. The last predetermined code, *belief in ability to overcome barriers*, is used to explain what participants did with this insight, and the last three emerging codes, *social preferences*, *academic beliefs*, and *resources* provide detail about the last predetermined code.

The code, *challenges* is an important code as it explains the challenges and concerns participants faced as they entered the Summer Bridge Program, and as they prepared to enter the University in the fall. During the Summer Bridge Program, participants were able to address some of these challenges. Therefore, in order to understand how they were able to address those challenges, it is important to understand what the challenges were.

Challenges.

In the interviews, participants identified challenges they faced prior to entering the Summer Bridge, and these challenges help explain the participants' state of mind as they entered the Seminar and as they prepared to enter their first year of college. The challenges that were identified by the participants primarily revolved around making friends, challenges with respect to family members, and challenges related to academics. The challenges participants faced prior to entering the University are discussed below, and the challenges participants faced during their first year of college will be discussed toward the end of this chapter, in the *confidence* section.

While many new college students worry about making friends, picking majors and performing academically, the participants in this study students spoke about their concerns as they related to being a low-income or a first-generation student. Their concerns about making friends, satisfying family members, and performing academically had the potential to catalyze the Crossroads phase of self-authorship development. This phase is marked by a period of uncertainty wherein students question who they are, how they know and their relationships with others. While participants did not explicitly state they were asking themselves these questions, the concerns they discussed demonstrate

potential catalysts to the Crossroads phase of self-authorship development. The challenges that participants faced caused them to think about who they were as college students, as peers with other new students, and who they were with respect to their parents and siblings. The challenges also caused participants to think about their relationships with their family members and the ways in which their decisions about college would impact those relationships. The challenges

Friends.

A common concern students had at the start of the Summer Bridge was their ability to make friends. It is not uncommon for new college students to worry about making new friends at the start of their first year, but for participants in this study from low-income and first-generation backgrounds their concerns were connected to their family income. Participants' concerns were also connected to their parents' misconceptions of socializing on campus.

For example, Gloria was concerned about making friends, specifically because her parents had made the decision that Gloria would commute in order to afford tuition:

I think the scariest part for me was the fact that I wouldn't be able to make friends because I don't live in the dorms. So the commuter life is what scared me the most because everyone's like, Oh first year dorm experience you make your best friends for life." And so that's what my biggest worry was because I wouldn't be able to connect with them.

For Gloria, her ability to make friends was connected to spending time with other new students in the residence hall. Her family's inability to pay for the expense of on-campus living, in addition to tuition and fees impacted her perceived ability to make new friends

in her first year and this was Gloria's primary concern. Evelyn had similar concerns because she was planning to commute as well. "I knew it was going to be hard to make friends because I wasn't going to live here". Evelyn knew she would be less connected from others to form friendships because her plan was to commute in the fall. Both of these students talked about needing to live on campus, in part to save money.

Ben also talked about his fear of not being able to make friends, but in a way that was explicitly tied to his family's income:

I was really insecure because of my family income. I looked down on myself because others had more money than I did, and I always had to work. Like on school breaks other people would go on trips to Hawaii, and I've never even left Minnesota. I always had to work during breaks to make money.

During high school Ben had felt insecure about himself because of his family's income, and he didn't want to feel that way again in college. He continued, "I didn't want to look weak in front of others, and I was worried about people not liking me". This insecurity left Ben feeling unsure about opening up about himself to his new Summer Bridge peers. He stated, "I didn't share as much about myself when we were telling our stories because I didn't know if people would accept me or not". Later during the summer he would realize his peers were accepting, but on the second day of the Seminar he was still uncertain about others accepting him, given his low-income background.

Beatriz also talked about her worries about making friends when she arrived to college, as related to her income. Like Ben, her fears were based on her high school experience:

The struggle for me was wanting to buy things or wear things or whatever that looked like I was able to spend that money, but I wasn't really that person... and that's where I lost a lot of my friends is the point where I was like, "Guys I need to separate myself and just find me a little." And then I ended up losing all my friends. So it was definitely something I worried about when I first got here, because I was trying to get away from all that.

Beatriz spoke about feeling pressured to have the latest clothing trends in high school, and not enjoying that pressure because she did not feel authentic. She also remarked that at one point she stole clothing because she could not afford the latest trends, but she felt she needed to have them in order to fit in with her peers. Beatriz was concerned upon entering the Summer Bridge that she would feel a similar pressure at college.

While some participants worried about their ability to make friends because of low-income status, other participants worried about making friends because their parents had told them making friends would not be good for them. Participants talked about pressure from parents to avoid making friends and socializing on campus.

Olga spoke about how her parents and older siblings told her not to make friends on campus and not to get involved. They told her people would not be open to her and they told her that social activities would only distract her from the rigorous academic expectations. "My parents told me college is scary and people aren't welcoming. They warned me to be cautious about school activities because they wouldn't help me. They didn't want me to make friends because they said they wouldn't be open to me, and they would only distract me". Olga's parents did not attend college and their perceptions of college were somewhat misinformed. Their advice was to avoid getting involved with

other students on campus, which is counter to best practices for increasing student engagement.

Evelyn's family had a very similar outlook as Olga's. In her interview she stated: My parents said that spending time on campus is a waste of time. They wanted me to come home each night, but I didn't listen to them. They got mad at me and I had to listen to them lecture me after [I came home]...It was worth it.

Evelyn spoke about her family's misunderstanding of college in the United States as influencing her parents' wishes that she come home each night during the Summer Bridge. Her parents are recent immigrants who do not speak English, and they could not see the benefit of her sleeping in the residence hall each night for the Summer Bridge Program. Because of the language barrier they had to rely on Evelyn to tell them about the Summer Bridge, including the residential component. Evelyn ultimately decided she wanted to have the residential experience, and she was willing to be punished for her decision. This was not an easy decision to make as a new student, and it added to her concerns upon entering.

Kelly's father did not tell her to avoid making friends, but he had been very concerned about her safety prior to her attending the Summer Bridge. He warned her about the other students, and she recalled her dad telling her, "Make sure you zipper everything, don't go on the sidewalk...be careful...take care of yourself". Later, she would realize "Everyone's so nice I don't think this person will steal from me." It didn't take long for these students to dispel the myths and concerns they had heard from family members, but the myths and concerns nonetheless caused some stress as they entered college.

Challenges with making friends have the potential to catalyze Crossroads questions. Participants considered their identities as related to their income and social status. They also considered their relationships with their parents and siblings with respect to their own wants. Family members who advised them against being social on campus put some participants in a situation wherein they had to determine how they would choose between their family's wants and their own wants.

Family.

Participants spoke about other concerns with respect to their family members that seem to have been exacerbated by their first-generation or low-income status. These concerns came through in feeling alone, feeling pressure to be a role model for younger siblings, and feeling pressure with respect to academics. For example, Diane spoke about feeling alone with respect to her college admission process. For Diane the process of applying to schools and applying for financial aid was something she did without help from her parents. Coming to the University felt like a stressful process for her because of the lack of family support:

Because at the time I was applying and it pretty much was all on my own. And it was super stressful and I just would get way too worked up about it. And I just felt like no one was helping me. And I would try and call my oldest brother, and you know he just didn't really have time for me. I just always felt so secluded and I just didn't know who could help me. My parents weren't involved. So when I tried to ask them for help they didn't know what to do.

The application process was stressful for Diane to get to college and it did not seem like her parents would be much help to her once she started. Diane spoke about going away

to college as “a break out of that house”, and while she may have been looking forward to getting away from her family; she nonetheless was experiencing stress from feeling alone at the beginning of her college experience.

Leton spoke about feeling alone too, but in a different way. She worried about getting lost at college because it seemed like such a large institution, and one of her greatest concerns about coming to the University was the size of the school. She stated, “I was just really unsure about coming here because it’s so big. I didn’t want to get lost in the crowd with all the other students.” When I asked her why she chose the University, she said she had wanted to attend a smaller private college in the area, but ultimately decided on the University because of the lower cost of tuition. Leton was seeking a sense of community in college, and this seemed hard to attain at the University because of the size. Her family’s income impacted her decision of where to attend college and her second choice school left her feeling uncertain as an incoming student.

Leton also felt pressure as a first generation student with younger siblings, and she spoke about the pressure of having seven siblings that looked up to her:

I was nervous because I am the first person in my family to go to college and I was unsure of my major and I felt like I needed to figure it out. Especially because I have seven siblings and I’m the oldest, so I’m their role model and I didn’t want to slip up.

As the first person in her family to go to college, Leton felt the need to figure out what she wanted to do, and she felt the need to be successful for her younger siblings.

Similarly, Keith spoke about the pressure he felt to set a good example for his younger siblings. “I wanted to be a role model for them, and I wanted to be better at it

but I was really focused on myself”. While he wanted to be a positive role model, he also knew he had to focus on his needs for getting into and through college. As a first-generation college student, Keith entered the University with a very limited understanding of what to expect. “I didn’t know what to expect in my first year. This school just seemed like a really big place, and my biggest worry was getting lost and being alone”. Keith had never been to campus prior to the Summer Bridge and not knowing what to expect caused him to feel stressed and to feel the need to focus on himself. This left him feeling guilty about whether or not he was fulfilling his duties as an older brother.

Nora also felt guilt about leaving her younger brother behind when she went off to college: “I feel guilty for being at college...I left my brother. He had to move out of my house and he lives with my grandparents”. Nora’s mother did not have a steady income that would allow her brother to be cared for at home. She knew the transition to her grandparents’ home would be difficult for him and it concerned her. It would not be until later, after speaking with other students, that Nora would feel better about being at college and leaving her brother behind. Nonetheless, she entered the Summer Bridge with this concern on her mind.

Leton felt pressure to be successful for her younger siblings and Keith and Nora felt torn between their own success and being able to support and guide their younger siblings. All three students are first-generation college students and all three are low-income students. For each of these students, the family members may not have understood the pressures they were inadvertently placing on them as they were preparing

to enter their first year of college, which is understandable given that they had not attended college themselves.

The challenges related to participants' families are related to all three dimensions of self-authorship development. Participants may have questioned who they were as college students and how their new role affected their relationships with family members. Participants also seemed to have struggled with knowing how to get into college and how to feel connected once they were on campus. The challenges of not knowing about college were isolating due to the lack of support from or pressure from family members.

Academics.

Students spoke about concerns upon entering college with respect to academics. This included time management, choosing a major, and not knowing if they would be able to handle the work. As a first-generation college student, Leton did not know what to expect from her college classes. Her perception of college was “everyone was going to be really studious and really smart”. She expressed, “I thought I would just have time to go to class and work and that’s it. I thought I would have no time to do anything because I would have to be in the library all the time”. This sentiment was amplified by pressure from her family to pursue a medical degree.

As mentioned earlier, Leton felt pressure from her family to be highly successful because she was the first person in her family to go to college. In addition, there is a family history of a medical condition in her family. Because of this condition, her family members felt that if she were to become a doctor she could help her family:

My parents really wanted me to go to med school because [a medical condition] runs in our family, and telling them I didn’t want to do that was hard. It was

really hard, but I had to explain to them it would be like dragging myself out of bed every day.

As she entered college she was concerned about finding time to study, and she had the additional burden of feeling the need to major in something she was not certain she was interested in. Complicating this burden was her family's expectation that she would be able to help her family members with a particular medical condition. This is not to say it would be impossible. Rather, this expectation demonstrates the lack of her parents' understanding of the interest, ability, and time needed to realize this goal.

Nora also felt pressured to pick a particular major, but the pressure she experienced was more direct. Nora's mom earned a low income and her grandparents paid her tuition at a private high school. In return, her grandparents had specific expectations: "they paid for my schooling in high school. Since they paid that good grades were expected of me, high involvement, a lot of things were expected". As she entered college, she felt pressured to major in science, "I had pressure from my grandparents to go into sciences. And I'm like sure I guess I like science". While Nora entered college as a science major, it did not feel like it had been her choice, and this left her feeling pressured about her major as she entered college. She would later realize science was not for her.

Another participant, Kelly also felt pressure to pursue a particular field. She talked about her last-minute decision to major in design even though a lot of other people told her she would be better off in a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) field. "I thought I was going to go more into math and science...before I picked graphic design, and people were like that's where the money is, you're not White and

you're a woman, you're going to get a job". Kelly felt pressure to enter a field she was not passionate about because of her race and gender, but she ultimately decided on a design major. As she was entering college she still felt some uncertainty about her decision, and it was not until after the Summer Bridge that she felt reaffirmed in that decision.

The examples above demonstrate the concerns participants had as they were preparing to enter their first year of college. While most, if not all, entering college students have multiple concerns at the onset of their undergraduate career; the examples from this study demonstrate the multiple dimensions of concerns that are typical for underrepresented students. For example, typical concerns of undergraduate students about fitting in and making friends are complicated by income and the impact of income on one's ability to feel connected to and accepted by others. Similarly, typical concerns of undergraduate students about major selection and academic performance are complicated by feelings of isolation during the process of getting into and through college with respect to the admission and financial aid processes. Additionally, implicit and explicit expectations from family members can also complicate the process for underrepresented students upon entering college and thinking about a major and future career. The complexity of these challenges has the potential to spark the Crossroads phase of self-authorship development.

The example of Leton's entrance to college demonstrates the overlapping challenges associated with her first-generation and low-income status. She selected the University because it had the lowest tuition, but the size of the institution caused her to feel anxious about finding community on campus. Exacerbating her anxiety was her

parents' desire that she pursue a field she knew to be very difficult. She also felt pressure to be a successful role model for her younger siblings. The combination of the pressures she felt as an incoming student caused Leton to imagine having time to study and not having time to socialize.

The students in this study entered college with concerns related to making friends, family expectations, and academics. These concerns had the potential to catalyze the Crossroads phase of self-authorship development as participants questioned how they would fit in, find their way around, select a major, and satisfy their family members. As I will explain in the next sections, an environment that promoted deep dialogue with similar others allowed participants to reflect on and talk through their concerns. The Bridge experience supported participants' self-authorship development by helping them answer questions they may have had in the Crossroads phase, and it gave them confidence as they entered college in the fall and during their first year of college.

Environment.

The code *environment* explains the environment of the Summer Bridge Program, including the peer mentors and the storytelling process. The environment honored the principles of the Learning Partnerships Model led to support for participants' Crossroads experience. This led to support for participants' belief in their abilities to overcome barriers to persistence in their first year.

The environment of the Summer Bridge was one of the first things participants recalled when asked about what they remembered from their experience. Participants talked about feeling welcomed right away, and how that put them at ease with some of their initial concerns about coming to the Summer Bridge and about coming to the

University. They also mentioned feeling that their peer mentors were genuinely interested in their stories. Lastly, participants mentioned how quickly they made friends with other participants. Within the Bridge Program community, participants felt welcomed by the peer mentors and their new peers. This helped them to feel comfortable with themselves as college students and within their new environment so that they could engage in deep dialogue with peer mentors and peers.

On the first day of the Summer Bridge professional staff and peer mentors greeted students at the residence hall by first name. Peer mentors checked the students in and helped them move their belongings to their rooms. Participants recalled that process vividly in the interviews. For example, Gloria said:

I remember the first day walking into [dorm name]. I've never been there before so it was all very new to me. And there were a bunch of people who said, "Oh hi Gloria, how are you doing?" And so it was really fun to see that they knew my name and I thought oh my gosh I don't know them, but they know me. I thought that was really fun and it kind of made college a little bit easier. Especially since I've actually never been to the U, I never toured it before I went there. And so being able to see people who wanted to get to know me and had this mentorship was really fun.

In her comment Gloria recalls how it felt to have people know her name. She recalls that the peer mentors who greeted her knew her name and wanted to get to know her more.

Many of the participants talked about being nervous prior to coming to the Summer Bridge and feeling relieved when they were greeted by name. Mary said the move-in process made her feel like the Summer Bridge was going to be a fun program:

Well I remember the first day I had my suitcase ... my backpack ... and that was right outside [dorm name]. And I remember walking up the steps to [dorm name] and like these people were like, “Hey Mary!” and I was like, “Whoa how do they know my name?” It was really cool because I felt like it was going to be a fun program...it seemed like everyone was really cool... they were excited to be there and that made me excited.

Olga also talked about feeling very nervous as she entered the program, and she also talked about how quickly she became comfortable because of the welcoming environment, “I was really nervous at first because I thought there not going to be friendly people here, but everyone was so friendly it opened me up...I forgot to be nervous and I unconsciously became comfortable”. As mentioned earlier, Olga’s family had warned her that students would not be accepting of her, and all of the concerns she had brought with her left almost immediately.

In addition to feeling welcome on the first day of the program, participants spoke about feeling welcome in terms of being able to be themselves throughout the program. Participants spoke about this in terms of an overall environment of being accepting of one another. For example, in her survey Gloria said, “it was a very friendly environment where I could be myself and I know that I would be accepted by everyone.” In her statement, she mentioned having the ability to be herself, and this was consistent with what other participants experienced.

In her survey, Nora stated, “I learned that people like me the way I am. I could be myself this summer and that made me feel good”. Linda mentioned that she felt “being yourself” was required in order to have fun at the Summer Bridge in her statement: “You

had to be yourself. You wouldn't have fun if you didn't." Similarly, Diane spoke about acceptance as a refreshing change from where she grew up, "pretty much anything is acceptable. There's just not a lot of judgment. And it was so refreshing to come into an environment like that because that's not one that I received in my hometown." Diane's comment was that it felt refreshing, especially compared to her hometown. Diane grew up in a small town and had been looking for a college experience in a large city. This may have influenced her perception at the time, but given the fact that she made this statement towards the end of her first year of college indicates that she was still feeling the same way about her first few days at the Summer Bridge.

Participants talked about wanting diversity in their college experience, and feeling happy upon finding it at the Summer Bridge. Linda, for example, talked about feeling good about the diversity she saw when she arrived to the Seminar:

I didn't expect there to be so much diversity, and that was really nice to see because I was thinking that everyone was going to be the same and wear the same things in my high school. I thought there'd be a lot of stuck up people with Abercrombie and whatever, but there weren't.

Linda's statement, including the naming of a specific clothing brand, hints at the notion that clothing can identify individual's socioeconomic status leading to feelings of exclusion. She had been nervous about making friends before she came to the Summer Bridge, and seems to have felt relieved upon seeing the diversity of the group.

Mary also talked about the benefits of diversity to her in the Summer Bridge. "The community had all this richness of diversity and color and it wasn't just because of me as a person of color. But it was ... just a lot more to it than my city". Mary indicated

that she enjoyed the diversity of the Seminar group as she describes the community as full of richness and color, which was different than what she had experienced in her home city.

Beatriz reported feeling safe because of her ability to make friends with other students of color at the at the Summer Bridge Program:

It was nice to experience the Summer Bridge. It felt like a safe place because I could find people that I related to in so many different ways just because they were different. Just because they you know they were people of color or they were not people of color who were interacting with people of color and it wasn't a stand-offish or awkward experience.

This made Beatriz confident in her ability to make meaningful relationships with other students:

Definitely the most valuable part was being around all of each other. It just made me feel like I could really get out there and create real meaningful relationships. Because it was happening. Because that was what was happening during the seminar. So it just made me realize how easy that is to do and how much I love doing that.

From the beginning of the Summer Bridge participants felt welcome and comfortable to be themselves in their new environment. They seemed to enjoy the environment of the Summer Bridge because it was a friendly, open and diverse place. The peer mentor played an important role in establishing and maintaining the positive environment of the program.

Peer mentors.

While I did not pose questions about peer mentors during the interview process, it was clear they played a significant role in the Summer Bridge. The peer mentors facilitated the storytelling process, among other things, during the program, and participants remarked that the peer mentors' interest in students was genuine. The peer mentors were interested in getting to know them as people, and they were genuinely interested in their stories.

Mary expressed feeling this way:

I would definitely say that the Summer Bridge leaders . . . I felt they were a lot more into us. I felt like they were more friendly. It was almost as though they were like I want to know you, I want to know about you and I've made the effort to know about you vs. [other programs] where I'm just another checklist to them, I'm just another name that they need to make sure that I'm with them or else they're going to get in trouble you know. And so I feel like the Summer Bridge was a lot more personal.

Nora also talked about the peer mentors' genuine interest in helping students:

The mentors are crucial because you can message them on Facebook or text them really quick like, "Hey where can I go to get help with editing my story?" And they would tell you right away because that's why they're there, that's their role and they enjoy doing it and they know that it's important. So that helped out tremendously having that community.

Beatriz talked about how the peer mentors were good at getting to know people on a personal level and this inspired her to apply to be a peer mentor. "Seeing the mentors

working with students definitely sparked me. I asked you about how I could do that (become a peer mentor), so that definitely got me rolling”. Her statement, *got me rolling* refers to feeling inspired to become a peer mentor. When asked what specifically made her want to become a peer mentor, she had this to say:

Just that they were so honest with us. Like they felt —they didn’t feel superior to us, they felt like a buddy and that was cool. And I knew that I was good at doing that with other people. You know really getting to know people just on a very personal level. They were so good at doing that, and it was like, “You know what? I think I’d be good at that.” You know so that was kind of where I felt that. Beatriz’s comment illustrates the perception that the peer mentors were genuinely interested in her and she enjoyed that so much that she wanted to serve future students in the same capacity.

The peer mentors played a critical role in establishing a positive environment at the beginning of the Summer Bridge Program. The peer mentors created a welcoming and fun atmosphere on move-in day, which helped relieve initial concerns participants had about making friends. The peer mentors continued to support a positive and accepting environment throughout the program with their leadership in the story production process. It was the storytelling process that provided participants with insight on their self-authorship development.

Storytelling.

Creating a digital story is the primary tangible outcome of the Summer Bridge. Accordingly, there were many opportunities for storytelling built into the five-day program to support this outcome. These opportunities included structured, unstructured,

and organic reflections and conversations. It included group, one-on-one, and individual dialogue.

For example, story circles, conducted on the second day, are a critical and formal step in the digital story production process, and they follow a specific protocol. Prior to the story circles, peer mentors set ground rules such as using nonjudgmental language, providing constructive criticism, practicing active listening, and respecting others' privacy and perspectives. The peer mentors modeled and reinforced these ground rules during the story circle process.

During the story circle, each student had an opportunity to share their story with the rest of the group. Each group included 10-12 students, and one by one, students shared their stories followed by a request for specific or general feedback from the rest of the group, as decided by the storyteller. Group members asked questions to help the storyteller clarify details of his her story and offered feedback on specific parts of the story.

In interviews and surveys participants mentioned becoming close with the other attendees, and they reported that this happened faster than what they would have anticipated because of the story circles. Mary described this clearly as she talked about the process of getting to know the other students as *plunging in*. For her, making friends was a faster process than she had anticipated, but it allowed her to make strong connections with other students who would continue to be her friends well after the Summer Bridge ended:

Our group sat in a circle and I was just listening to all the other students' stories.

We were still kind of new to each other; it kind of was like a plunge into knowing

each other. It was like telling our secrets to these people we don't know. But then that was actually really good because I met some closer friends on campus because of the Summer Bridge. Usually it takes me a really long time before I start really getting out there. And going out with people who I would call my friends. But it was so fast-paced, but it was good because it was fast-paced, in my opinion.

Beatriz also commented on how quickly her group opened up to each other and how opening up was a positive experience. Similar to Mary, she talked about being 'thrown into' getting to know a new group of people:

It helped me because it threw me into a group of people I didn't know, who were going to be around me for five days and doing the same thing. And you know during that whole process it forced us to open up but in a good way; in a great way. It was just a bonding experience. It really was because we had to really talk about ourselves. We had to verbalize how we were feeling about our stories and what it meant for us and what we wanted it to mean for other people. So that was very cool.

Ben also talked about how quickly he formed connections with the other students. "I don't know how it happened but it usually takes years for people to open up to you, but it happened really quickly and it still felt natural". Ben also stated that he originally thought the Summer Bridge was required, and then realized later it was optional. He did not regret this mistake: "It was like come for the money, but stay for the community". Ben's statement refers to the State University Scholars program scholarship. He thought

he needed to attend the summer seminar to receive the scholarship, but was happy to stay for the community once he realized he was not required to be there.

Peer mentors also held less-structured one-on-one scheduled meetings with participants on the second night of the Seminar. There was no agenda for these meetings other than to check in with each student. Participants talked about finding value in these meetings because of their peer mentors' interest in the participants and the participants' stories. As an example, Keith talked about the importance of his peer mentor's interest in his story. This was encouraging for Keith because his story was perceived as important, and it was encouraging because his connection with his peer mentor resulted from a genuine interest in him:

My peer mentor was helpful. She was nice and she wanted to get to know me.

We had a close connection, and it was nice because she's only one year ahead of me, and we had a similar story...she was really interested in my story. It was helpful to learn my peer mentor's story because we had a stronger connection and I got more out of meeting with her. I could see how strong she was and I could relate to that.

Keith's peer mentor was a role model because she had similar experiences and was successful in college. He mentions being able to relate to her because of similar experiences. Not only did Keith feel supported in the moment, but he also felt supported as a college student who had faced life challenges.

Linda also felt encouraged by her peer mentor to develop her story. She articulated this in her statement:

My peer mentor kept trying to push me to do more and put more pictures in with my dad or with my mom. She wanted to help a lot so people would get the idea of my story, and that my story isn't just a sad thing.

Linda worked hard to avoid feeling pitied by her peers during her story production process. In her statement it is clear that her peer mentor understood that this was Linda's goal, and was willing and able to help her accomplish her goals for her story.

Beatriz talked about getting at the deeper meaning of her story through conversations with her peer mentor:

I remember talking to my peer mentor about my story and kind of opening up to her about what was really at the root of what I was trying to portray in my story. And that was pretty cool because it was just a moment for her and [me] to step away from everything else to just talk.

Keith, Linda, and Beatriz spoke about the benefits of the one-on-one meetings with their peer mentors. These meetings helped them develop their stories and they promoted a positive relationship with their peer mentor.

Keith, for example, spoke about feeling supported as a college student. Keith's quote above illustrates a sense of being able to relate to his peer mentor, and he talked about how his peer mentor encouraged him to make new friends during the Summer Bridge. He commented:

[My peer mentor] pushed me in just how I am as a person. Just getting me to open up to other people. I think that was a pretty big help in just developing as a person you know, and it was good to get to know people, to do different activities with them.

Storytelling also occurred in informal ways during the Summer Bridge Program. Some participants reported finding value in the time to reflect on all of the new experiences of the day or of the Summer Bridge to that point. For example, Nora said, “Staying up late in rooms, going on walks, going to yogurt lab was always helpful to decompress the day with others”. Similarly Gloria said, “I enjoyed being able to detox and have deep conversations”. With so many new experiences, the free time with each other provided time to consider all of the new people, places, thoughts, and events from the day.

In the examples above, participants spoke about working with their peer mentor to get at the deeper meaning of their story, and in Keith’s case, being pushed to develop as a person. Participants also talked about their peer mentors as role models as they modeled genuine interest in the participants and their stories. The peer mentors encouraged attendees to listen to one another’s stories without judgment and to get to know one another on a deep level. Peer mentors also served as role models for participants who had faced challenges, and became successful college students and leaders in the Summer Bridge Program. Participants not only felt a strong connection with their peer mentors, but they also felt connected to other students in the Summer Bridge Program because of the peer mentors’ leadership.

This promoted fast connections in the story circles, and it seemed to have promoted conversations among attendees outside of formal storytelling. The welcoming and accepting environment promoted and maintained by the peer mentors through storytelling led to insight into sense of self, understanding knowledge, and cognitive interdependence.

Predetermined Codes

The predetermined codes I used came from recent research on movement toward self-authorship among underrepresented students. Those codes are *sense of self*, *understanding of knowledge*, *cognitive interdependence*, and *belief in ability to overcome barriers*. These are defined below.

Sense of self – Understanding that the self is influenced by various parts of one’s life.

Understanding of knowledge – Understanding that knowledge is created from a combination of formulas, personal goals, values, and beliefs.

Cognitive interdependence - Recognizing that one can successfully negotiate conflicting expectations in ways that are satisfying to one’s self but also considers others.

Belief in ability to overcome barriers – Believing in the controllability of outcomes and believing in one’s ability to seek out resources for success.

In terms of self-authorship theory, the first two codes align with the intrapersonal and epistemological dimensions, respectively. The intrapersonal dimension is concerned with the question, *Who am I?*, and the epistemological dimension is concerned with the question, *How do I know?*. The third code aligns with the interpersonal dimension of self-authorship theory. The interpersonal dimension of self-authorship development is concerned with the question, *How am I in relationships with others?*. These three codes overlap with each other as do the dimensions of self-authorship in that self-authored ways of knowing consider intrapersonal, interpersonal, and epistemological dimensions, and the ways in which those dimensions complement each other. My first research question is aimed at understanding the ways in which the Summer Bridge supported students’ self-authored ways of knowing, and these first three predetermined codes provide a way to

understand in what ways the students in this study were considering their self-authored ways of knowing. It is important to note that these concepts are not used to demonstrate self-authored ways of knowing, but rather, they are used to identify ways of thinking about one's self-authorship (Pizzolato & Ozaki, 2007).

The final predetermined code I used is based on research of a learning partnerships model advising program that led underrepresented student participants to feel they could seek out resources to barriers as a result of that advising program (Pizzolato & Ozaki, 2007). The final code, *confidence in ability to overcome barriers*, aligns with my second research question, which is aimed at understanding the ways in which the Summer Bridge supported students' belief in their abilities to overcome barriers to persistence in their first year of college.

Sense of self.

Sense of self is defined as understanding that the self is influenced by various parts of one's life. Through the digital storytelling process, participants gained insight on their sense of self with respect to their entering concerns about making friends and fitting in with their peers. They also mentioned accepting previous life events and being able to move forward from such acceptance.

One of the most salient examples sense of self was Keith's explanation of how he understood the impact of his childhood on his current life. In Keith's example he drew a connection from his lonely childhood to his quiet nature with his siblings and with his friends. As a child Keith was left alone a lot by his parents. From this he learned how to survive in loneliness. From his childhood experiences he also became wary of approaching others because he did not want to be bothersome:

When I lived with my mom she never really liked to be bothered by anyone. So if I wanted to ask for something like if I wanted to go to the store or something, like not even asking for money or anything, just for permission to go, then you know she'd kind of snap at me a little bit. And you know I just kind of learned I don't like that, I'm just going to not ask her, I'm just going to go. I'm not going to ask for a ride somewhere. I'm not going to ask because it seems like it really bothers her.

Keith understood his reservation to make friends with other students for fear of bothering them as well even though he knew he wanted to make friends with other students:

Being alone is, it's almost against human nature. You know because people are very communal. You know people make friends, people talk. I guess being alone just is anti-human. And you know just having someone just to talk to and to relate with can be – I don't know almost refreshing.

Through reflecting on his childhood in the digital story production process, Keith was able to understand his hesitation to make friends even though he desired friendship. He gained an increased sense of self and an understanding of knowledge as it related to his life.

Gloria also talked about sense of self with respect to making friends. She came to the realization that she enjoyed having friends, and she would later act on her desire to have friends by making friends at the University. In Gloria's story she spoke about how she had convinced herself she didn't want friends as a way to cope with her loneliness in high school. In her digital story she talked about realizing how much she had actually

missed having friends and in her interview she talked about how much she enjoyed making new friends during the Summer Bridge:

The times where we were sharing our stories and brainstorming ideas showed me that hey people aren't so bad. And that I really enjoyed being able to have deep conversations with others and that really helped me realize that I thrive on relationships. And I love being with people and it's weird to think that I've been missing out on that for such a long period of time, when in reality that's what I genuinely wanted.

Like Keith, Gloria realized she wanted to make friends. She was able to move away from trying to convince herself she did not need friends to be happy, and she was able to take steps to make new friends:

It helped me realize what I really wanted and sort of gave me ways to figure out how I should get to that. Whether it was to make an effort to being the first one to start a conversation or just personally being able to step out of that comfort zone to sort of start a new beginning here.

Gloria also gained an understanding of how she had previously approached problems:

I learned that things aren't always as complicated as I make it seem. I thought it was this huge, complex problem where I would never be able to defeat it because there's so many different strings attached to it. And it's just a huge issue that I can't remove out of my life. But when you boil it down to the basics it's all in my head. And so that's what I learned through the seminar by writing my story – that problems are much larger if you focus on them, but if you take a step back it's not as bad.

Gloria was able to apply her lesson to making new friends in the fall. She specifically talked about being nervous to join a student group until she reminded herself that she had nothing to worry about, and eventually managed the courage to join the group and make new friends. Her new insight on how she viewed problems allowed her to take a step back and make progress towards making new friends.

Gloria talked about gaining a new sense of self with respect to her cultural and ethnic identity, which made her feel special in the eyes of her peers. This seemed to be important to Gloria as she previously had not considered herself to be particularly special. As a student with parents from two different ethnic backgrounds, she had not reflected on how her two ethnic backgrounds influenced her until the Summer Bridge. It was through conversations with her peers that she realized this made her unique, and that realization made her appreciate herself more. In her words, “I felt really special, I’m like oh my gosh. Like people think I’m cool because I’m half and half”. When pressed about why it made her feel special, she had this to say:

It made me realize that, see I always thought I was plain. But in reality there’s so much more culture. Like being able to eat both different foods, celebrate both traditions is something that doesn’t always happen in families. So it made me value that a lot more. And made me more interested in learning how to cook both foods and to incorporate both cultures into my future family and what I want to do when I grow up. Of course that’s into the future, but it just made me reflect on who I was.

Gloria's reflections demonstrate her perception of the impact of her identity on other parts of her life as well as a newfound appreciation for the ways in which her background make her unique and contributed to her sense of self.

Evelyn spoke about her sense of self with respect to how she viewed meeting new people in the Summer Bridge Program, compared to the past. Evelyn previously had stayed reserved in new situations. Her story was about coming to the United States as a child and being eager to make new friends. Her inability to speak English prevented this and she said, "I stopped making friends, and I wasn't a social person. I didn't want to be the outcast because I didn't know English". Evelyn did not want to be seen as different as a child, and her reservations about making new friends carried over to her last years of high school: "In high school I stayed away when I didn't know someone because I was shy, but the people here were really nice and I learned I should be more open to meeting them and not be an outcast".

From her digital story, Evelyn reflected on how she had felt like an outcast as a new immigrant. She also learned that people were friendly, and she learned to be open to making new friends. A noteworthy observation is her use of the word *outcast*. As a child she felt like an outcast because she could not speak English, and she avoided social situations because it made her feel like an outcast. In her later use of the word it indicates she had the power to decide if she was going to be an outcast or not. This indicates a change in her sense of self as being able to make friends and make the decision to not be an outcast.

Beatriz had a similar experience, and she talked about ways in which reflecting on her story allowed her to overcome concerns she had about making friends when entering

the summer Seminar. Beatriz talked about owning up to her past mistakes because they were a significant part of her identity:

And I think it was this ‘ah-ha’ moment in being like it’s ok to be 100 percent me and understand that some people aren’t going to like it as much, some people will and those are the people I want to keep around...I just realized that it’s ok to be honest about where I’ve come from and what I’ve been through and all of that because it doesn’t—I’m not me without any of that.

While participants expressed understanding how their past experiences influenced their sense of self, they also expressed understanding that their past experiences did not entirely define their sense of self. For example, Linda expressed moving on from part of her past. She understood her story as one part of her identity, but not the entirety of her identity:

I think the digital story helped me identify who I am in a way. It helped me identify that this digital story does not define my entire like...Like everything that happened, it’s not who I am. It’s a part of me...but it’s not who I physically, mentally, emotionally am. I mean obviously it’s still part of me, but it just doesn’t define what I do and what I’m about. And it’s really...just the past...it shaped me definitely, but I don’t think that I am the same person I was even a year ago.

Linda found it helpful to share her story because it allowed her peers to see that part of her identity in addition to who they were getting to know during the Summer Bridge: “It felt good. Like and especially sharing it with everyone it felt good to know that people knew, but they didn’t have to just see me as that”. Linda said that sharing her story made

her feel good because it allowed others to see one part of who she was, which allowed her to move on.

Nora also talked about past experiences as one part of one's past, but not indicative of her whole self. She talked about being honest about past mistakes, and she commented that mistakes could be understood as who you are at a particular moment in time. She also talked about the power each individual possesses to make changes about who they are:

Sometimes your story includes a lot of mistakes. But...it's just how you are in that moment in time and...sometimes it's good, sometimes it's bad... and the cool thing is you have the power to change it. Like you will always have that as long as you continue to live. So you will have the power to change what you need to if you want to...I think one crucial thing is own up to your story. Like embrace it. I used to be very, very anxious or not accepting I guess—or didn't want to reveal to people (my story). I felt awful about it. When in reality it wasn't even in my control. I should be like yeah hey this happened but I'm here, that's my story, I can't change it.

Like Nora, Diane also expressed her ability to change the story of who she is. Diane's gains in sense of self were related to her family and her journey to get to college. Diane had been solely responsible for applying to college. She had not received help from her parents, yet she chose to talk about the positive things from her life in her digital story. She reflected on that decision in her digital story production process:

And I remember in my digital story I wanted it to be positive, because I feel like there was a lot of negative things in my life. And like especially what I was going

through at that time I just was so sick of being negative. I really wanted to be positive...and I think that's really the type of person I am and want to be.

Diane's comment demonstrates an awareness of her sense of self. She was consciously deciding to have and maintain a positive perspective of her experiences, and of her life.

Diane commented that she was proud of herself for coming so far in terms of her ability to stay positive in the face of adversity, and her word choice seemed to indicate that she was motivated by this ability to continue to be a positive person. She realized that her desire to stay positive in the face of adversity was a personality trait she was proud of and wanted to foster, moving forward: "It was kind of like hey I went through all this stuff, but look what I chose to focus on, look I can be positive and I can be happy and I'm going to be". Diane spoke about taking her positive attitude into the fall and having an overall positive first year in college.

Participants gained insight into their sense of self through creating their stories about past friendships and life experiences. Participants talked about understanding themselves as influenced by various parts of their life. Similarly, they expressed an understanding that any individual part of their life was not definitive of their entire self. The insights gained around sense of self allowed participants to move forward with respect to previous Crossroads challenges.

Understanding of knowledge.

Understanding knowledge is defined as understanding that knowledge is created from a combination of formulas, personal goals, values, and beliefs. Participants mentioned gaining insight about knowledge through listening to the experiences of others and talking through the deeper meaning of their stories. Many participants learned to be

less judgmental as a result of listening to others' stories. Many realized that they often had been wrong about prejudices they made about others once they heard others' unique stories.

For example, Kelly found that she became more accepting of others from hearing others' stories, "I just liked to communicate and hear their side of the story. And sit down and just listen I guess. Just listening to other people. And then I guess I just grew more as a person by doing that". When asked to say more about how she grew as a person, she had this to say, "Just hearing other people's stories I guess, being more accepting maybe. And just learning by not even having to go through that experience. Just listening was like understanding how they have gone through it." Kelly's comment indicates she learned that she could understand another's point of view on a life experience through listening.

Similarly, when asked what she learned about others, Leton said this:

Others' digital stories were really touching, and when people open up, you see them as stronger. It gives you a different perspective and you learn to give others a chance to talk and don't assume. You don't know what they went through and everyone's special and brings something to the world.

Leton talked about the importance of learning to withhold judgment before getting to know others because the story of their experiences can provide a new perspective on their contributions to the world. Like Kelly, she learned that she could understand another more deeply through listening to their story.

Ben used the phrase, "You can't judge a book by its cover" to describe what he had learned: "I learned you can't judge a book by its cover; you just can't. You don't

know where people have been”. Beatriz used the same phrase before elaborating on what she learned about others as a result of attending the Summer Bridge Program. Beatriz wrote about learning to be less judgmental in her survey: “I learned that I am judgmental, and I no longer want to be that way. I learned to be more open when I meet new people”. When I asked her to say more she said:

It sounds really cliché, but the whole you can’t judge a book by its cover was so applicable in what we were doing. Because there—ok. There were so many people that I met and talked to and related to and got to know that I think if I hadn’t really sat down with them and just started a conversation about their story or where, you know what I mean, I wouldn’t have known enough about them to really get to know—to want to get to know them. You know? Because, because yeah. I find myself previously judging people by what they look like you know. I’ve realized that that, that it holds you back in so many different ways because you’re, you miss out on so many amazing relationships that bloom from things that you never would have expected. And this digital story process really did that for us. And so it was just really eye-opening that you can’t, you just can’t judge a book by its cover with anyone.

Beatriz learned to be less judgmental because after getting to know her peers from their stories, she realized she could relate to them. She also realized she would have missed out on that ability to relate had she not taken the time to get to know them. She describes this realization as “eye-opening”.

Evelyn spoke about a specific example when she described a student that she had originally thought was very strange until she saw his digital story, “It made a lot of sense of why he was like that, and I realized I need to learn more about people”.

As a result of listening to others’ stories, participants were able to understand others’ views of the world, their experiences, and the ways in which others’ goals, values, and beliefs impacted who they were. Participants also expressed that actively listening to others led to understanding their experiences. For example, when discussing the story circle process, Diane mentioned how it felt good to listen to each other. She spoke about the importance of being present while someone was talking and why it is so important to connecting with others:

It takes a lot to put yourself in somebody else’s shoes and really be empathetic and listen to what they’re going through. Not just hear it but be present; to actually listen. And not think about what you’re going to say next. Just sit there and take it in. It’s like, “Thank you for listening, thank you for actually caring – oh? You’re going through something similar? Wow now we can really relate with one another.”

In Diane’s comment she mentions the importance of active listening because it leads to understanding their experiences and an ability to relate to another person. This is indicative of an understanding of knowledge as created from experiences.

Similar to Diane, Nora expressed that she learned to listen so others felt heard. In her survey, she wrote, “I learned the importance of listening. Because sometimes that’s what people need. Just taking the time to listen is like so relieving for people. Like it

really helps a lot and makes a big difference in their world”. Similarly, in her interview she stated she learned the importance of acknowledging others from the Summer Bridge:

That’s what I’ve learned, is acknowledging people because it hurts to not be acknowledged. And I don’t want anyone to feel that. And I want them to know that I see you, I’m going to listen to you, I hear what you’re saying, and I’m going to actually contribute too because let’s have a conversation, let’s talk it over.

When asked how she knew it hurt to not be acknowledged, Nora said this:

It hurts because I’ve been not acknowledged before, and in talking with the other students I think a lot of us have. You know you’re not acknowledged or you feel like you’re not valued because nobody’s appreciating the work you’re doing or really understanding how much you’re putting behind it. I just think it’s important to talk, to talk and really engage with people and hear them out. Just make sure they know that you’re listening and you’re really there.

When I asked her why that was important, she said, “It’s important because it’s how you’re going to get through everything. It’s how you’re going to get through your first year. It’s how you’re going to potentially just get through life you know.” Nora’s understanding of the importance of listening gets at a deep understanding of knowledge. That is to say, by having someone to talk through experiences with an individual will feel validated in their understanding of the world, and may be able to come to conclusions about challenges. As Nora put it, “it’s how you’re going to get through your first year...through life”. Nora understood the importance of listening to others as a form of supporting others in making sense of and overcoming challenges.

Leton spoke about learning the importance of listening in this way as well. Listening was the topic of her digital story, and when I asked her why it was important to listen, she said:

Sometimes people just need listening. They just need you to sit there because it helps to talk about feelings because sometimes everything looks fine on the outside, but it's nice to let people know what's really going on. But you need to listen; actually listen. You know there's a difference between listening and hearing and if someone's not listening it can make you shut down.

Leton learned through her digital story production process that she enjoys listening to others, and she expressed that her ability and interest in listening to others was a gift.

Leton was able to understand the importance of listening so the speaker can make sense of their feelings.

Participants spoke about the benefits of talking to others during the Summer Bridge Program. Because such conversations helped them find the deeper meaning of their stories. Beatriz spoke about this when she described meeting with her peer mentor:

I talked with my peer mentor about the deeper meaning of my story, and I think my point of clarity really started really with that conversation with [my peer mentor]. Because I really wanted to sit down and be like, "This is how I'm feeling...this is where this is coming from right now and can you help me bring it together a little bit better?" So that was definitely a point of clarity for me.

Beatriz talks about clarity in terms of figuring out the deeper meaning of her story.

Beatriz also talked about the sense of relief she felt upon telling her story to her peer mentor:

There was a lot that went on and it would just—it just built up to the point where I felt like I needed to just unload. And so it was a really great moment for me in realizing that it's ok to ask for help and that everyone needs a listening ear and that's ok. So talking with [my peer mentor] was really nice because I got to tell her about why I felt like I needed to tell my story.

Other participants spoke about similar feelings that resulted from talking with others. For example, Diane referred to showing her digital story as therapeutic. After reflecting on the hardships she had been through in her childhood, Diane talked about how she was able to feel better about her past from making a story about it.

Finally like it's something real. It's like an actual video with my words. It's something that people can watch. It's not just what's going on through my head anymore. It's on paper now...It's almost a therapeutic method...And I guess this video is kind of like that.

Similarly, Linda talked about how writing her story took it from an experience that played in her mind to something that felt more real. In that process she describes feeling a weight lift from her chest:

I guess seeing it on paper is just so different than seeing it in my mind where I'm like wow that actually happened and that's real. You know I guess it felt like a piece of me was being presented to everyone which was nice...Because just seeing it, hearing me say it and writing it, it helped a lot. It kind of felt like I got something off my chest and I kind of let something go that I've been holding on to for a long time.

In terms of understanding knowledge, Diane's sentiment that her story became "something real", and Linda's sentiment that part of her "was being presented to everyone" suggest that their experiences, which had previously only played in their minds, were being presented as knowledge for others to understand. From the participants' perspective it felt like a relief. From a theoretical perspective, this was because their experiences were transforming from a thought to knowledge and understanding.

Participants expressed insights about knowledge primarily through listening and talking to others about their experiences. For many, the process of hearing others' stories allowed them to understand the faults of judging others based on appearances alone. Instead, they learned to seek the truth about others through hearing their perspective. Similarly, participants spoke about the benefits of talking through their own experiences as a means to create meaning for themselves and as a means to help others understand their point of view.

Cognitive interdependence.

Cognitive interdependence is defined as recognizing that one can successfully negotiate conflicting expectations in ways that are satisfying to one's self but also considers others. Participants in this study demonstrated cognitive interdependence in different ways. Examples include interactions with parents about staying on campus, and interactions with family members about major selection. Other examples include interactions with peers with respect to spending money, and with respect to peers' prejudices. Participants spoke about how the digital storytelling process helped them consider the expectations of others and how understanding others' perspectives led to an

ability to consider others' expectations in addition to their own. This led to the maintenance of relationships with important others as opposed to disagreements with them.

In the example of Gloria, her understanding of her mother's point of view came from the digital storytelling process even though Gloria's digital story was not about her mother:

My mom gets worried a lot, and during the seminar I was either going to make a digital story about my mom or my friend...I was able to think about her story and her experiences and understand what makes her worry. It made me realize hey she's not just being stubborn, she genuinely cares about me. So the [Summer Bridge Program] gave me a little bit of time to reflect on that.

Gloria reflected on her mother and her mother's concerns during her digital story production process. From this reflection she was able to see her mother's perspective, thereby changing her own (Gloria's) understanding of why her mother worried about Gloria, and how that worry came through in seemingly stubborn behavior.

Gloria was able to use her understanding to inform her discussion with her parents about living at home during college.

Gloria talked about negotiating her role as a daughter with her desire to stay out late with college friends in her first year. She considered her mom's point of view that she had learned about during the summer and demonstrated cognitive interdependence as she compromised on an agreement that worked for everyone. She spoke about feeling frustrated, then considering her mother's point of view, and finally negotiating what she wanted:

The only challenge I have with staying at home is the fact that I'm still under the authority of my parents. Of course I have a very good relationship with them. I can understand why they don't want me to come home late and why I shouldn't go to certain places because it'll be bad for me. I'm very understanding of that and I respect their decision, but it's just that sometimes when I'm like hey I want to stay out until maybe 11:00, I can't necessarily do that just because I know my mom gets worried a lot especially with it being college and there's a lot of news about different crimes that happen on campus. Especially since I would be alone walking, stuff like that. Which is very understandable. But it's still kind of a hassle that I don't have that same freedom that other students have.

When I asked her how she addressed this concern with her parents, she said:

My parents are—my dad is very cool with it. He's like, "Just let me know where you are." But my mom is very protective and I can understand, she's a mother, there's no way she's going to stop worrying about me. But being able to like talk to her every once in a while, telling her who I'll be with, that I won't be alone, that I will still make good choices and stay true to who I am is something that sort of helps her a little bit.

Gloria's reflection on her mother's life helped her understand her mother's perspective and reason for being so protective. This understanding helped Gloria understand what her mother wanted and how to negotiate that with what Gloria wanted for herself.

Other participants said they overcame challenges with respect to their families by using insight gained during the Summer Bridge. Nora talked at length about reflecting on her time in the Summer Bridge in order to negotiate her role as a college student with her

role as a granddaughter. Nora realized she could make the decision to major in writing even though her grandmother wanted her to major in science. Eventually she was able to begin a conversation with her grandmother about her decision:

I think that a lot of my realization came from talking with other SUS students because we all knew, we're like oh my god we're starting college in the fall. And it's like this is us. I remember being so pumped to come here. Like, I'm going to do this; I'm going to run my life because I had pressure from my family to go into sciences. But I realized once I'm here I'm paying for this, I'm working for this, I'm living here, I get to decide what I do here, I need to decide if I get up and go to class or sleep...this is me. And since I have no help, no whatever, I can do what I need to do. And that was a huge realization for me...And I told my grandma that I was really interested in writing. And for some reason she actually heard me.

Nora also indicated feeling able to make her own decisions in her survey. In response to the question, 'What does it mean to be a college student?' she wrote, "It means to be innovative in your own life. It means to make your own decisions for yourself and not let other people tell you what to do or that you aren't good enough". From the interactions with her peers during the Summer Bridge, Nora felt confident about her ability to make her own decisions. In her statements she articulated her feeling of ownership in her college experiences, and she overcame the pressure she had felt to major in science as an incoming student. In her first year Nora changed majors and transferred from the College of Biology and Science to the College of Letters and Arts to pursue a major in writing. She did this while also maintaining her relationship with her grandma.

In a similar example, Leton's family had wanted her to pursue a career in medicine. She spoke about feeling pressure to not slip up as the first person in her family to go to college, as the oldest of many siblings, and as an immigrant. She knew she was setting an example for her younger brothers and sisters, and she knew she was a potential future solution for her family members with a medical condition. Like Nora, Leton reflected on what she wanted from her college experience, and in her first year, Leton told her parents she did not want to go to medical school. [Telling them] was really hard, but I had to explain to them it would be like dragging myself out of bed every day because it's not what I wanted to do". Leton knew she did not want to be a doctor, and even though it was a difficult conversation to have with her parents, she was confident in her ability to explain to them what she wanted and why.

Leton demonstrated cognitive interdependence with her conversation because she considered her parents' wants and her own. She chose a major that would lead to a career in healthcare, and she was happy with her decision. Leton also joined a student group and became involved with organizing events for other students. This was a stark contrast from Leton's initial perceptions of what her life would be like as a college student. Upon entering she thought, "I would just have time to go to class and work and that's it. I thought I would have no time to do anything because I would have to be in the library all the time". By the end of her first year she said, "Now people ask me where I find the time to do so much".

Leton credited her time in the Summer Bridge Program for helping her understand the benefit of getting involved on campus and learning: "I got a chance to reflect on my own life and share that with other people...I learned to be open-minded and try new

things”. It was through such reflection and trying new things that Leton learned she enjoyed connecting with others, which was something she had originally sought out in her college experience. Leton found a sense of community at her second choice school, and this seems to have encouraged her to continue to build community into her college life.

Olga and Evelyn had very similar experiences and they both spoke about finding motivation to stay in college by reflecting on their stories from the Summer Bridge. Both students spoke about feeling challenged by their lives as commuter students and overcoming those challenges by remembering their summer experience. Specifically, they remembered gaining insight to consider their families’ expectations. For example, Olga said, “Everyone else gets to go out and I have to go home and it’s hard, but then I remember my story and how my family was there for me, and I was lucky to have them to go home to”. Evelyn had a similar comment:

I feel tired. It’s hard because I go to school and work and study and it’s really hard and I want to give up, but I remember my family sacrificed for me so we would not have to struggle and work all the time because if we were in my old country that is what my mom saw for us.

Both of these students found motivation to continue through difficult times by thinking about their families’ expectations. They both talked about reflecting on what they had learned about their families’ expectations from making digital story. In particular, their new perspective on how their families had supported them in the past was motivating to them.

It does not seem that Olga and Evelyn were considering their own expectations as much as they were considering their families' expectations. Therefore their comments do not demonstrate cognitive interdependence. Rather, their comments indicate the ways in which reflecting on their digital stories gave them a different perspective on challenges in their lives. Perhaps advocating for what they wanted was yet to come, but at the time of their interviews, they both seemed to be somewhat dissatisfied with commuting to college.

While some of the participants above demonstrated cognitive interdependence with their families, others demonstrated cognitive interdependence with their peers. Conflicting expectations with peers resulted from differences with respect to money and with respect to prejudices.

Kelly talked about feeling frustrated with a friend that had more money than her and his spending decisions:

We went to Scream Town one time and the ticket was like 50 dollars. And like I almost had a heart attack paying for this ticket. And like he, if that's something he wants, he's going to get it and pay like full price because that's what he wants. And like here's me like discounts all the way, it just made me realize like all the money I spend it's the money like I worked for, because I hate the idea of like spending my parents' money.

When I asked her to say more about the idea of spending her parents' money, she said:

It made me feel—I guess in a weird way I kind of felt lucky that I do have this mindset of like discounts and like thinking about how much I'm saving money. And like really caring about how like the effects of like spending my parents

money. I feel like a little bit more mature thinking that way than him, and like it's a really big deal for me. If I don't have to spend my parent's money I absolutely won't. Like my mom—that's why like I get so mad when my mom tries to give me like 20 dollars because I was like I don't need it, like I'm solid like I've learned how to like budget and manage and be all fine.

While Kelly was initially frustrated with this situation, she chose to think about her appreciation for her hard work and her appreciation for her parents' money. Instead of allowing herself to feel negatively about her financial situation, she saw the positive outcomes of her struggle to pay for her ticket.

In this example, Kelly demonstrates an ability to manage her relationship with her friend. Instead of being upset or jealous, she demonstrates an ability to see his perspective as indicated by her comment, “if that's something he wants, he's going to get it.” She also chooses to think about her situation in a positive way, thus allowing her to maintain the relationship.

Diane expressed a similar situation with students she knew who did not have to pay for college like her:

It's frustrating because a lot of kids aren't paying for their college. So that really... like pulls a wire in me. Especially when I'm trying to understand that everyone has their own problems kind of a thing. It's sort of like, “Oh my gosh! Like why are you wasting your money buying everyone pizza right now?” [They said], “Like well my parents gave me their credit card.” And it's like nooo, like you don't get it... they don't need to worry about it kind of a thing. But it's hard for me to sit back and look at that. So seeing how other people were spending

their money made me more aware of how to spend my money and how to keep a balance and a budget and you know like how am I going to make money this summer? And just kind of be very futuristic about what I need to do in order to pay off my college.

Diane was initially frustrated by other students' lack of concern about money. However, instead of continuing to be frustrated, she thought about how she could be a wise spender and plan for the future. Like Kelly, she acknowledged, at least to herself, that other students did not have the same concerns about money. She then moved forward with her own plan to be careful about how she spent and saved.

Both Diane and Kelly felt frustrated about how their peers spent money, and they were able to resolve the conflict in their mind about differences in access to disposable income. This is not to say it was easy for them to manage with less money than their friends and peers, but it does indicate a way of moving through the challenge. Their comments indicate their ability to successfully negotiate conflicting expectations around spending money so that they could be satisfied with their own situation and consider others' situations at the same time.

In another example of cognitive interdependence, Mary talked about understanding that the perspective of others is informed by their experiences or lack thereof, and she learned to combat uninformed perspectives by sharing her story with others. She talked about her ability to educate her peers by sharing her point of view during class:

When I have discussions with a lot of my classmates who are predominantly White it's hard for them to understand just because they haven't been in that

situation. And I want to try to make them understand, but sometimes it can just be so hard when it's, it's not their fault. It's just because it's just how they were, how they grew up you know. And which I understand so I'm, it's not like oh well you guys are just really ignorant White people. You know it's not like that. It's a lot more to that. And I guess I really want to try to bring that understanding... I feel like the number one thing that the Summer Bridge did teach me was to share your story.

Mary realized that others were not able to consider her point of view as a result of their past experiences. Instead of being frustrated with her classmates' lack of understanding, she made the conscious decision to share her point of view. Her decision to educate her peers indicates her abilities to take an active role in managing the difference between her peers' expectations and her own expectations of her classroom experience.

Participants mentioned the ways in which their Summer Bridge experiences allowed them to consider others' points of view and others' expectations of varying situations, and using the skill to consider others in a positive way. Specifically, participants were able to move forward in the face of conflict around academics, money, and prejudice. Through an awareness of the situation, participants were able to take an active role in creating a situation or an understanding of a situation that allowed them to feel satisfied and able to maintain relationships with others.

The Summer Bridge Program supported participants' self-authorship by providing them with the opportunity to reflect on their individual challenges and concerns. Participants were able to address entering concerns related to making friends and fitting in. They were also able to address entering concerns related to family expectations,

including decisions about what to select for a major. Participants mentioned addressing challenges related to being a first-generation student being a low-income student, and being a student of color. Attending the Summer Bridge Program also supported participants' belief in their abilities to overcome barriers to degree completion, some of which have been mentioned above. In the next section, I will discuss additional data that answer my second research question in greater detail.

Belief in ability to overcome barriers.

Belief in abilities to overcome barriers emerged in a number of ways among study participants. As mentioned in the sections above, many participants entered the Summer Bridge with concerns related to friends, family, and academics. The environment of the Summer Bridge led to feeling accepted and making strong connections. Through storytelling, participants gained perspective on their lives, which allowed them to understand themselves better or move forward with respect to making friends or accepting past mistakes. Participants also gained perspective on the lives of others, which gave them skills to speak to their parents or classmates about concerns and challenges during their first year of college.

In this section I will explain some of the ways in which participants reported feeling confident in their abilities to overcome barriers to degree completion as they prepared to enter their first year of college or during their first year of college. The majority of participants reported feeling confident about entering college in the fall, and much of that confidence came from feeling socially and academically prepared. It also came from feeling confident with the physical campus, and feeling able to utilize campus resources.

Social beliefs.

Participants learned about their social preferences from their Summer Bridge experience. Linda, for example, reported that she learned she had a preference for quality over quantity in her social life. When speaking about one of the group socializing activities, Linda talked about her preference for the deeper interactions with her peers:

[It was important to me] when they took their time with it and they didn't rush.

Because you got to put effort into it and time to get something quality out of it. I mean if someone's going to go out of their way to make my day feel better or something or if someone does something little...it just makes me feel like oh they care you know. So that's a big part of it for me is the little things.

Other students also talked about learning about their socializing preferences. Kelly talked about understanding herself as an introvert and an extrovert:

[I learned] going around people all the time all day I was like oh my god this is so much fun, I love the people. Then at night me and my roommate got completely exhausted. Not from the activities but being around people so much. So literally my roommate and we watched a movie together on my laptop on the floor while everyone else went out and explored the city. We're like like uh-uh, we can't, we're done.

She also compared her friendships during the Summer Bridge with her friendships in her first year of college and what she was learning about her preferences from that comparison:

So I'm learning more about myself, like extrovert and introvert. Like how I like to have that small group of people that I'm most comfortable with all the time, but

I also like to meet other new people and get that sense of like oh what's your story? And then going back to my friend group where I'm most comfortable.

Because during the seminar I was more didn't really have like that one friend I stuck to the entire time except my like roommate, and now I have that.

Kelly's lessons learned during the Summer Bridge Program carried into lessons learned in her first year. Like Kelly, Gloria talked about staying in at night instead of going out with friends, albeit for a different reason. She learned how to feel comfortable prioritizing her academic goals over social goals. Gloria learned that she could say no to her friends without the risk of losing those friends, and she spoke about her experience of saying no during the Summer Bridge as preparation to saying no to her friends in her first year of college:

I've been able to learn from the Summer Bridge you have to think about yourself and what you think is best. Still staying true to who you are and your goals for academics. Like if it's staying out late – hey I've got to study for an exam that's on Monday, can't go out on Friday. So being able to do what is right for myself is something that I learned from the Summer Bridge... because (during the Summer Bridge) people were a lot more understanding than I thought they might have been. So if I rejected them they'd be like, "Oh ok, maybe next time." So it's not like they'd abandon me like oh ok well whatever enjoy your life. It was a very friendly environment where I could be myself and I know that I would be accepted by them regardless of my decision.

Leton also said she learned about her social self through the digital storytelling process: "Looking through my photos for my digital story I realized I'm always the same

with my friends and family. I'm always the one that listens to others' problems" Leton's comment is about her realization about the consistency of her role within groups of friends and family as well as an appreciation for herself in that role.

Other participants spoke about learning about their social preferences with respect to their racial or ethnic identity. Beatriz spoke about her identity as a student of color at a Predominantly White Institution. The Summer Bridge experience gave her a sense of what it felt like to be involved in student groups with many students of color, and from this experience she knew she would feel welcome in similar groups. Therefore she actively sought out groups of students of color in the fall so she could feel connected to campus. This was her solution to feeling left out of Greek life, which she perceived to be a place for affluent White students to network with each other and a place where she was not welcome:

I guess I feel a little disconnected from the culture of frats and sororities. That culture tends to be a very predominantly White culture. I don't feel like I really have a place in that even if I wanted to... like first semester with girls who were rushing. It was kind of this pressure of like it was a question I got all the time, "Are you rushing?" And it was like when I said no, it was not only like, "Oh ok." but it was like, "Oh I figured." So that was kind of hard...because I feel like that culture definitely has a huge tie to how much money you have because you do have to pay for it. And...it's an amazing experience and...it will help them with networking and all that, but like there are other ways to network. That was really cool about the summer like there were so many students of color at the SUS program that I felt a sigh of relief so I've gone to, recently, a lot of people of color

events...it's such a cool experience because I realize how much on campus I'm not in a room with that many people of color.

In this example, Beatriz gained confidence in her identity as a student of color at a PWI, and felt confident in her ability to overcome feeling left out because of how she looked and dressed.

Kelly also talked about connecting with other students of color and feeling a sense of camaraderie with them based on shared struggles:

We had more life experience like *struggling* or having that judgment or like knowing constantly that you're not White. Like that kind of more relatable experience than a White person. Because they'll never not know what it's like not to be White.

Kelly continued to talk about her connections with other students of color as motivating when put in perspective of having made it to college:

And it's just like yeah, hey, I got you, like we've been through that, but look it, we're here now, it's all good, we're at the U. Like these other (White) people...that have the money and stuff like that. Like we're all here. We're at the same place... we made it. Like we got into college. I'm here now.

In her statements, she indicates that she was able to relate to other students of color about the challenges of not being part of the majority. She also makes a reference to having less money than other students at the University. From this camaraderie with other students of color, she believed in her ability to overcome barriers in her first year. She describes her initial anxieties and how nerves were calmed after spending time at the Summer Bridge:

Going to the seminar kind of prepared me like what type of people were going to be at the U kind of thing. And so I was surprised, not surprised, I was really content how I got along with people...I was surprised how long I worked well with my roommate even. Because I was like this is a complete stranger, we're going to be sleeping in the same room. But at the end we're like oh my god I hope I have a roommate just like you.

By the end of the Summer Bridge, Kelly concluded that she felt confident with the people and her security at the University:

And so I was like yeah I can do college, look at me I was here for five days, I got along with everyone. So it was like yeah maybe I am going to the right school.

Because I felt comfortable with everyone after the five days.

Kelly's sentiments paint a clear picture of the evolution from concern to confidence. In the end, her summer experience left her feeling confident about her decision to attend the State University.

For these participants, realizing their social preferences was important to preparing them for their first year of college. They mention feeling confident in the types of social relationships they wanted, how to balance socializing with academics, and who they most comfortable socializing with and why. In addition to learning about their social preferences, participants talked about feeling socially prepared for their first year of college because they had made friends during the Summer Bridge Program. Many made connections with others through realizing they had similar concerns.

For example, as a commuter student Evelyn had entered college knowing it would be hard to connect with other students. At the end of the Summer Bridge, she felt

confident about her friends from the program. In her survey she wrote, “I learned that I am actually not alone. There are many people out there who want to have a lot of friends...I learned that they are all friendly and scared to make friends just like me.”

She also talked about her friends from the summer that carried into the fall: “When I got to my classes in the fall there were a lot of people there from the Summer Bridge and we would hang out, study, or go eat after exams. It was really nice because it was like having a built in group of friends”. She continued, “This was nice because it was one less thing to worry about, especially since I wasn’t living on campus”. Evelyn knew it would have been more difficult to make friends in the fall had she not met them during the Summer Bridge, and this allowed her to focus on other things in her life, and feel confident about her social life while in college.

Olga also had been nervous about making friends as she entered the program because she was concerned about being accepted by others. Olga talked about her first night at the Summer Bridge as having been rather emotional. “I cried the first night of the Summer Bridge. Not because I was sad. My roommates and I were all laughing and joking and having a good time. I was just so happy that I was making friends”. Olga’s statement is powerful as it summarizes her sense of relief about her new experience in light of her and her family’s concerns about making friends in college.

Participants also discussed feeling confident to speak up in social settings as a result of their Summer Bridge experiences. For example, Diane reflected on her word choice and how it had been influenced by her surroundings in high school, and later in college. In high school Diane and her friends used racist language casually, but after coming to the University for the Summer Bridge she became more aware of her word

choices and made a conscious decision to change her language. While her time spent on campus for the Summer Bridge did not cause her to change her language, it did make her aware of the language she was using, and provided the foundation for how she would interact with others with respect to language in the fall:

I would attribute my first awareness to the Summer Bridge. And then moving to the cities and being immersed in diversity fully for every day since September is when I really learned. Just being around diversity every day. But I'd say it first began when I went to the Summer Bridge.

Diane went on to explain how she understood her friends' use of similar language and took it upon herself to educate them about their word choices:

And then you know some of my friends who are a few years younger than me if they come visit me or even if I just talk to them it's like, "Dude you can't talk that way." And it's just kind of like, "You know it's not affecting anyone right now, but just so you know you really have to change the way you talk." And me and my friend... she lives in the cities too, she's from high school, and if we go home together we just kind of tell that to our friends...it's still just so much more strict in the cities. Maybe not strict but more respectful.

When I asked Diane if it made her feel like an outsider when she went to her home town, she said:

No if anything I feel like more confident. Like it is kind of a confidence boost. Like look I live in the cities, and I go to the SU and you know this is how we do it there. Because I'm proud of this school and I'm proud of like being able to come here.

Diane's comments demonstrate her confidence in her ability to inform others about language use. Diane spoke about feeling confident in their ability to speak up to her peers about her experiences, and she credited the Summer Bridge for giving her insight about why it is important to speak up. This example indicates that Diane felt secure in her opinions so much that she was willing to share her opinions with their peers, even if it may have been unpopular. This is very different from the insecurities some participants talked about upon entering the Summer Bridge.

Ben, for example spoke about his insecurities during the Summer Bridge and his hesitation to share his story, "When it was almost my turn to share, my heart was racing. I was so nervous because I wasn't sure if I wanted to tell everyone about me". Ben ultimately decided to hold back during the story circle at the Summer Bridge, "I left some things out because I was really insecure, but then later I realized everyone was really accepting and I wished I shared more".

While Ben was not comfortable sharing his personal insecurities at the Summer Bridge, he still felt accepted by his peers in the program. This acceptance let Ben know that students at the University were open and accepting. By the end of the Summer Bridge, Ben had felt that he could trust his peers with his story, and in his survey he wrote, "I can trust other students and finally open up about my problems...and they will accept me". He also wrote, "I learned that everyone has problems and should not face them alone, that is why I am glad to be part of SUS. I am not alone!". In the fall semester, during one of his classes, Ben had an opportunity to share his story with his peers. "In my class we kinda did the same thing as in the Summer Bridge, and I opened up a lot more because I knew it would be ok from the summer". Having had the Summer

Bridge experience, Ben felt comfortable sharing his insecurities with his classmates in the fall.

Ben felt confident speaking up in class, and he also learned the importance of sharing his opinion as one of the only students of color in his classes in the fall:

Most of my classes are White and it challenges me, but in a positive way because it makes me want to use my voice more and talk more. I'm good at speaking out and I take the opportunity to because I like the diversity of voice. The summer seminar was really diverse and it made me want to talk more, like why should the people talking always be White people? It's good to have diversity of voice.

Ben mentioned that the diversity in the Summer Bridge made him want to speak up in classes during his first year. His account of entering the Summer Bridge feeling insecure about his story to feeling compelled to use his voice as a student of color in his mostly-White classes demonstrates a large shift in his confidence to speak up among his peers.

Academic beliefs.

Participants expressed becoming aware of their academic selves in advance of their first fall semester as a result of their participation in the Summer Bridge. While the Summer Bridge did not include an official University course, participants felt like they gained a sense of how they would accomplish college work with respect to the pace, required skills, and quality. Some participants gained new insight about their academic preferences and readiness, while others felt reaffirmed in the plans they had previously made or things they had already known about themselves.

Weaving through the discussion about the pace of college work and academic skills is the importance of producing quality work. For example, Diane spoke about the

pace of the Summer Bridge and how she learned that she liked to be prepared in order to have time to edit her work. Diane commented, “(the digital story process) gave me a taste of how long my days are going to be,” indicating that college-level work was going to require a significant amount of time. She continued, “I guess I learned that I’m a type-A kind of person when it comes to school. I wanted to be prepared”.

Similarly, Linda talked about wanting to produce quality work:

I think [the Summer Bridge] helped me realize that I can get this done if I put my time into it and my efforts. Because if I don’t put any effort in it’s not going to be quality. So I guess if I didn’t put any effort into the story and just kind of put it together and didn’t really care; it would have come out bad. So I guess it helped me learn that putting the quality and the time into it makes it come out so much better. And you have to put the effort into it for it to come out nice and shiny.

While these students talked about their confidence in their new insight about academic preferences, others talked about feeling academically ready after the Summer Bridge program.

Participants worried about the pace of college upon entering the Summer Bridge as well as their readiness to complete the work. Olga, for example, overcame her concerns about readiness through meeting other attendees with similar academic backgrounds, which made her feel better about her initial academic concerns. In her survey she listed “Confidence” as one of the two things she learned from the Summer Bridge. When asked to elaborate, she said:

I was rejected at first from the SU and so my application was sent to the TRIO program so I felt like, not as smart, and then I met other TRIO students at the

Summer Bridge, and we were like we're smart because we made it; you know – we got accepted and got the scholarship, and listening to their stories about how they worked hard in school, but their ACT score wasn't as good...it made me feel good because we knew the ACT score isn't IQ. I knew we were all good students and I felt a lot better about it.

Olga had felt insecure about not getting admitted to the University right away, but she later realized that other students like her were strong students who did not perform well on the ACT standardized entrance exam. She was able to connect with her new peers, and those connections relieved the concerns she had about her academic abilities and increased her confidence in her ability to be a strong student at the University.

Others felt academically ready as a result of being able to complete the Summer Bridge digital story production task. While the Summer Bridge task was not for credit, it gave participants a sense of college-level work and expectations. Having managed it successfully, they felt prepared to enter classes in the fall. Linda talked about the pace of the Summer Bridge as intimidating in the beginning, and realizing she could work at a fast pace by the end:

[I learned about] trying to finish things in a timely manner. Because we had to finish the story in two days or something. I was like how am I going to finish this in 24 hours? I can't, it's physically impossible. But I mean working through it and getting it done was really nice and that really helped, it was a nice warning of what I would have to do the coming year.

Other participants felt confident in their academics, but felt reaffirmed from their experiences in the Summer Bridge. Keith talked about how his summer experience reminded him that he was capable of working hard to complete assignments:

It reminded of how quickly I can get things done. I was probably one of the first ones to get my story done. I just kind of powered straight through it whereas some people were working until the very last day.

Another example of reaffirmation includes Gloria's statement about feeling an implicit reassurance that her life as a college student was going to be ok:

It was just a really nice experience to get that gradual increase to college saying hey it's not going to be that bad and learning from the mentors was fun, crazy sometimes a little hectic. But I don't know it was just a really nice lesson from—that wasn't directly stated but just overall saying you're going to get through this, it's not as scary as you think it is. And being able to go off of that and feel like hey if they can do it maybe I can do it too.

Gloria mentioned feeling ready to go to college because of the Summer Bridge experience. She also indicates that seeing peer mentors succeeding in leadership roles inspired her to feel able to do well in college in the fall.

Other participants felt confident about their major as a result of experiences during the Summer Bridge. For example, Kelly enjoyed the artistic work of the Summer Bridge, and she felt especially happy that her story was one of the stories chosen to screen on the last day of the Seminar:

It made me feel really good because I'm majoring in graphic design and that was really graphic heavy pictures, timing with the text and whatnot. So hearing it was

a success, was like hey maybe I'm going in the right direction if I can do this little movie with graphics and with text, why not? So I thought that really helped and inspired me to continue along with this major.

Kelly talked about feeling content with her decision to pursue a major in design even though it felt like a last-minute decision, and she knew she could possibly make more money in a technical field:

Graphic design was my last minute decision on what to major.

So in high school I took a whole bunch of those personality tests that would match with your career or major. And apparently I had too many things or disliked too many things every time...So then I went online and apparently graphic design fit my personality...So then I applied for graphic design here and got accepted and so far I'm doing really well in my classes and I've been liking it.

Kelly continued to feel happy with her decision to major in graphic design in her first year when she met other design students with similar personalities: "But like us, the design students, we're more chill...us design students are like just go with it, let's be creative...So it was like yeah these are my more type of people." In the preceding quotes, Kelly discusses her decision to pick a major that she enjoyed over a major that might guarantee her a job after college. She talks about being happy with this decision when she met other students who similarly enjoyed being more relaxed and more creative.

Mary also talked about feeling good about her decision on what to major in, and she credited her experience in the Summer Bridge with allowing her to explore her identity and helping her decide to major in Youth Studies:

Doing the digital story really made me realize who I am as a person. And why it is important, why this story is important. It's kind of showing your identity, who you are as a person. And you know we don't really get that in high school... And it was kind of that moment that I realized well college is also about it is about academics, but it is about finding yourself. And just kind of exploring who you are as a person and your interests, your dislikes, what you're passionate about, and what inspires you and what's going to inspire you to continue your passion. And I was actually really having to think about that that I kind of realized that I really have a passion for helping students, helping kids a lot more. And so I've been playing with majors in my head. I mean what am I going to do with my life? Like what is my passion? What inspires me? And my story really inspires me you know. That little girl. She really inspired me. And so going along with that I kind of figured my major would be somewhere in helping youth area. And so I talked to my academic advisor. And I actually kind of decided that I am going to major in youth studies now.

Mary expressed that having a major felt good because it aligned with her passion. She also expressed that she felt relieved to have an academic goal to motivate her each day:

And so I guess I just I feel relieved that I have a goal and that I have a plan. I feel a lot more confident coming to school each day knowing like why I'm coming to school, what is my goal. And so each day I feel like I'm accomplishing something a little more.

Some participants in the Summer Bridge gained insight about their academic preferences and readiness and some felt reaffirmed in their academic lives as a result of attending the

Summer Bridge. Through completing the work, talking to others and reflecting on their lives, participants felt confident in their academic abilities in advance of their first year of college. Participants also mentioned feeling more confident about campus resources as a result of their summer experience.

Resources.

A concrete example of feeling confident with University resources is participants' comfort level with the physical campus. Being on campus was a confidence booster, and participants spoke about the confidence that came from spending time on campus before the start of the school year. For example, Gloria said, "After going to the seminar I was a lot more comfortable with the campus and like hey it's not as big as I thought it'd be. And being able to use the busses was fun too". Beatriz had similar thoughts about the benefits of being on campus early:

Well let's start with the basics. I wouldn't have known the campus as much as I did first coming in, which was super nice because I felt like I had a little of a one-up in knowing where things were and getting to know the campus.

Keith spoke at length about what he remembered from being on campus during the summer before the fall semester began, including having the opportunity to learn from the peer mentors:

Just being able to see the campus I guess. See how big it is you know, have people who have already come here for a year just kind of, you can ask them questions and you can have a little tour. Like when I first saw [building name] I mean it was [Note: Laughs] it was shocking almost. Because the building is huge and the rooms are giant and lecture halls are, they're massive. And during the

summer session you know there weren't a whole lot of students on campus compared to now. If you just walk outside I mean there's students all over. And just seeing the campus I guess helps you realize maybe the magnitude of college. Keith was amazed at the size of the rooms, buildings, and the entire campus. He also wrote about this in his survey: "Staying in a dorm and navigating the campus was helpful because before coming here I was really worried about getting lost because the U is so huge!" His summer experience prepared him for the size, and Keith talked about the benefit of experiencing the campus before fall and before all of the other students arrived.

Participants also talked about the benefits of living on campus during the Summer Bridge because it eased their concerns about feeling disconnected from campus as commuters in the fall. For example, Mary had this to say:

I think also dorming during the Seminar, I kind of realized that dorming wasn't necessarily for me. When I first chose to be a commuter I was kind of iffy because I was like I feel so bad because I'm going to be losing out on this experience. But just because of money I chose to stay at home. But then although it was really fun doing the dorming experience during those five days, me and [my roommate] were both were yeah this isn't really for us. I just, I felt more confined on campus versus if I was living at home. And so that was helpful because you know as a commuter you probably won't ever dorm on campus, but that was just a good little experience.

Mary originally felt disappointed about missing out on the dorm experience, but by the end of the Seminar she felt better about her first year living situation. The Summer Bridge

allowed her to have the dorm experience and compare on-campus living with living at home. This allowed her to see the positive aspects of living at home in the fall.

Similarly, Gloria had originally been concerned about making friends in the fall as a commuter student, but after the Summer Bridge dorm experience she felt satisfied to have had the opportunity to see what it was like. Her conclusion was that she felt more comfortable at her home:

I think the scariest part for me was the fact that I wouldn't be able to make friends because I don't live in the dorms. So the commuter life is what scared me the most because everyone's like, "Oh first year dorm experience you make your best friends for life." And so that's what my biggest worry was because I wouldn't be able to connect with them...I remember living in the dorms and it was, it was all right. [Dorm name] is a really nice dorm, but I'm very happy I stayed at home because I get to eat home food and I'm very content with that. And being able to have my own living space was something that I kind of valued a little bit. So I was really happy about that. The seminar was really fun for like a little vacay so it kind of gave me that little dorm experience, but it made me realize hey I'm not really missing out on much except for the fact that I don't have like 20 different people on my floor.

Gloria's sentiments are similar to Mary's in that she originally worried about commuting, but in the end she was able to focus on the positive aspects of living at home. Both Mary and Gloria had a chance to explore dorm life as a result of the Seminar. This allowed them to not feel as if they had missed out on that experience.

Participants stated that they learned to use others as resources to be successful. Participants spoke about feeling confident to ask staff and other students for help. For example, Linda commented that she learned how to ask for help through the digital storytelling process:

It was really easy to just ask people, “Hey I don’t understand how to put this here and this there.” So it was really easy. I guess I learned that it’s easy to talk to people if you need help from them or if you don’t understand. Your peers are really helpful. And in high school and in middle school I didn’t ask for help very often. So I guess it was nice to just actually ask because it really helped and benefited me.

Linda also wrote about asking for help in her survey: “There's always SUS students and staff there to help you and to try and not get too stressed over school”. As a student entering college for the first time in the fall, Linda felt comfortable about asking her new peers and peer mentors for help.

Ben also talked about learning to ask for help. After reflecting on his past experiences as part of the digital storytelling process, he came to the conclusion that he had received a lot of help along the way, “I always used to see myself as like a independent person, but I realized a lot of people pushed me a lot”. When I asked him who pushed him he talked about his academic advisor, staff in the Multicultural Student Center, and his peer mentor. When I asked him what he meant by seeing himself as independent he said:

I thought I had to like do it all on my own, and then I realized there's a lot of help, like resources. It's like the hand is waiting there for you to grab it, and you just have to reach it.

Ben realized he did not have to meet his goals alone, and he was grateful for the support he received on campus.

Ben appreciated the power of getting help from others enough to motivate him to start a student group for other students like him. He reflected on how he had been lonely in his first semester, and he considered the potentially lonely experiences of other students of color and international students at the University. From this reflecting he created his own student group, which turned out to be rather successful. "We started with just a few members, and now we have over 150 members". This example demonstrates Ben's reflection on how he was feeling as he entered college, and a change in attitude about seeking out support that was strong enough to motivate him to create a support system for other students like him at the University. Ben reported feeling proud about connecting students who may have been shy like him at one time. "Four of our members are living together next year, and 2 are dating." Ben had started college feeling insecure, through a process of learning to open up and learning to ask for help; he became a resource for other insecure students.

Evelyn also entered college feeling ashamed for asking for help. Like Ben, she realized through the digital storytelling process that asking for help was "a better way to do things because there is power in teamwork". When I asked her what she meant by that she said, "I usually try to do things alone and try to be independent, but I learned that it's better to get others' help because they give you ideas and make it better, and you have

more fun doing it”. Whereas Evelyn spoke about asking for help in general terms, Keith talked about a very specific example of asking for help. He needed a book during his fall class and felt confident about asking a fellow student from the summer:

I struggled really hard with my first calc class with the homework part because I couldn't get the book. I didn't have the money to buy the book. And that was really hard. So I had to eventually borrow a book and you know take pictures of all the pages. It would have been much easier if I could just buy it... There was a girl who I'd seen on my floor in the summer who was in my discussion class so I just borrowed her book.

Keith found it acceptable and possibly easier to ask someone he had met earlier to borrow a book for class, and this ultimately helped him to be successful in his calculus class.

Summary

The majority of students in the State University Scholars Program are first-generation college students, students of color, students from low-income households, or some combination of these three. Many participants demonstrated confidence to overcome barriers to persistence in varying ways. At a basic level the exploration of campus and dorm life led to confidence in areas where participants had previously been concerned. Participants felt comfortable finding their way at a large campus and they felt comfortable with the experience of living in a residence hall. At a deeper level, participants spoke about learning about their preferences and abilities in their social and academic lives. Some participants spoke about the benefits of such exploration as a low-risk endeavor because the Summer Bridge was a five-day program, and it served as a test run in advance of their first year of college. Others spoke about the Summer Bridge

experience as reaffirming of what they had previously known about themselves.

Attending the Summer Bridge Program supported participants' belief in their abilities to overcome barriers to degree completion as they prepared to enter college and in their first year of college.

Conclusion

In this study I set out to determine the ways in which attending in the Summer Bridge digital storytelling program supported participants' self-authored ways of knowing and the ways in which attending the Summer Bridge digital storytelling program supported participants' confidence in their abilities to overcome barriers to degree completion in their first year of college. In the data analysis I looked for evidence that supported four predetermined codes, and in the process additional codes emerged that helped understand the experience of participants in the Summer Bridge Program.

Summer Bridge participants entered the program with concerns that are typical for any new college student, but that were complicated by their underrepresented status. The Summer Bridge environment and experience was welcoming and accepting, leading to strong interpersonal connections and an overall strong sense of community. From the sense of community, participants felt comfortable engaging in deep dialogue with one another, which led to gains in perspective into their own lives, the lives of others, and gains in understanding how experience can influence others' point of view. Some also learned how to manage conflicting expectations and many felt confident about overcoming barriers as they started college and as they moved through their first year of college.

The Summer Bridge program honored the principles of the Learning Partnerships Model, thus providing a space for participants to engage with the Crossroads phase of self-authorship development. While each participant had a similar Summer Bridge experience they were able to make gains that were specific to them and their unique Crossroads experience. In addition to feeling comfortable with participating in the Summer Bridge soon after arriving, the Summer Bridge experience also eased participants' concerns as they prepared to enter their first year of college. Some participants also talked about using skills they had gained during the Summer Bridge in their first year of college.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the ways in which the State University Scholars digital storytelling Summer Bridge Program supported attendees' self-authored ways of knowing, and prepared them to overcome barriers they might experience in their first year of college. Findings suggest that participants entered the program with concerns related to friends, family, and academics. Through storytelling with peer mentors and fellow attendees, participants gained insight into their unique Crossroads experience. Participants also felt confident in their abilities to overcome barriers related to friends, family, and academics as they prepared to enter their first year of college and during their first year of college. In this chapter, I discuss the connections between this study and previous research. I follow that discussion with sections on implications of this study, and a final conclusion.

Connections to Previous Research

The first question I set out to answer in this study was: In what ways did attending a five-day, residential digital storytelling Summer Bridge Program led by undergraduate peer mentors support attendees' self-authorship development? In this study it was clear that participants entered college with varying concerns related to their underrepresented status, and such concerns had the potential to spark the Crossroads phase of self-authorship development. Participants questioned their sense of self, understanding of knowledge, and relationships with others as new college students with respect to their entering challenges.

Crossroads.

In this study participants mentioned challenges they faced as they were entering the Summer Bridge Program, including concerns they had prior to the start of their first year of college. Their concerns were primarily regarding friends, family, and academics. These concerns are consistent with previous research on underrepresented students in higher education. Recognizing that underrepresented students have the potential for additional challenges in higher education, Pizzolato, Nguyen, Johnston, and Wang (2012) found that students from underrepresented backgrounds faced additional challenges on the path toward self-authorship. The participants in this study presented challenges associated with identity, ways of knowing, and interpersonal relationships that were complicated by income, first-generation status, and their race or ethnicity.

For example, low-income students must often commute to campus due to the inability to afford living on campus (Opatz, 2013; Tinto, 2008). Students in this study decided to commute in order to afford college, and they expressed concerns about how their commuter status would impact their ability to make friends. Similarly, first-generation students are often required to live at home to assist with family or because their parents do not support on-campus living (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Tinto, 2004). Participants in this study reported similar opinions from family members with respect to living at home and avoiding significant social engagement with the University. First-generation students may also experience a lack of family support, leading to feeling lonely and isolated. Participants in this study spoke about an isolating application process and parents' lack of understanding of the challenges associated with being a college student.

Participants in this study may have been entering the Crossroads phase of self-authorship upon entering the Summer Bridge Program. They reported questioning whether or not their peers would accept them, and they also reported questioning their relationships with their family members with respect to their major or their life as a college student. Participants also reported feeling unsure about what college life would be like, including the campus, peers, and teachers. These entering questions and lessons relate directly to the three principles of self-authorship, which begin with the questions, ‘Who am I?’, ‘How am I in relationships with others?’, and ‘How do I know?’. The digital storytelling process used in the Summer Bridge Program supported participants’ self-authored ways of knowing in similar ways as digital storytelling programs described in previous studies.

Support for Crossroads.

The impact of the Summer Bridge digital storytelling program on self-authorship development is similar to previous research on digital storytelling programs. For example, Benmayor (2012) and Alexandra (2008) discuss the importance of participants understanding shared struggles while also learning to identify the ways in which individual stories are unique. In the Summer Bridge Program students similarly mentioned connecting with other attendees through shared struggles, but also gaining insight into their individual lives. This supported participants’ sense of self as they understood the influence of their past experiences on who they were.

In terms of understanding knowledge, Bond, Belinky, and Weinstock (2000) found that their participants perceived publishing their stories as “constructing and naming truth of [their] experiences” (p. 707). In the Summer Bridge program

participants spoke about the importance of listening and being heard as a way to promote understanding and learning for the storyteller and the listener. Participants spoke about the shift from seeing a story in their mind to presenting their story to others thereby making it “real”.

Lastly, in terms of interpersonal relationships, Espino (2012) mentions “writing back” in an effort to counter master narratives, which define people of color as inferior to Whites, and Bond, Belinky, and Weinstock (2000) discuss their work as “growth stories”, which promote a reframing of one’s perception of their life from limited to resourceful. Summer Bridge Program participants spoke about gaining similar insights in terms of cognitive interdependence. Participants learned to consider others’ perspectives and their own perspectives to manage conflicting expectations between them and their family, friends, and peers.

The digital storytelling process at the Summer Bridge Program supported attendees in the Crossroads phase of self-authorship development. With support from peer mentors, participants gained insight into their sense of self, understanding of knowledge, and their relationships with others. Participants also gained confidence in advance of their first year of college as a result of attending the Summer Bridge Program.

Overcoming barriers.

The second question I set out to answer was: In what ways did attending a five-day, residential digital storytelling Summer Bridge led by undergraduate peer mentors support attendees’ belief in their ability to overcome barriers to persistence in their first year? This is an important question to answer in light of recent research on underrepresented student success.

Understanding unique student barriers.

Recent research by Spradlin, Rutkowski, Burroughs, and Lang (2010) highlights the importance of an institution-specific approach to closing the opportunity gap. Similarly, the work of Bensimon (2005) highlights the importance of working to uncover increasingly specific data to understand the ways in which institutions can make changes to support specific groups of underrepresented students. In line with these suggestions, the digital storytelling process used in the Summer Bridge program allows for the identification of barriers to degree completion at the individual student level.

In this study, participants were instructed to create a digital story about an important person, place, or event from their lives. The topic of each student's digital story was determined by the student to encourage him or her to identify something they felt inclined to explore and discuss. As a result, participants gained insight into a specific part of their lives, including friends, family, and academics.

Barriers to degree completion for underrepresented students include those related to income, first-generation status, and being a student of color, and the ways in which barriers impact students can vary from student to student. This is true for students who have similar underrepresented characteristics and it is especially true for students who have different underrepresented characteristics. The result of gaining insight into one's unique challenges leads to feeling able to overcome those challenges.

In their research on an after school digital storytelling program for youth in California, Hull and Katz (2006) found that "individuals and groups can learn to fashion identities as competent actors in the world and be able to influence the direction and course of their lives" (p. 47). In the Summer Bridge Program, participants gained insight

into their sense of self, their understanding of knowledge, and their relationships with others. As a result, participants were able to address various concerns they had with respect to friendships, family members, and academics. This is similar to the findings of Hull and Katz (2006) in that participants were able to influence the course of their college lives.

Participants spoke about their preferences for how to spend their free time, the type of people they wanted to spend their time with, and the relationships they wanted to have with their families and their peers. They talked about gaining confidence about their academic goals and readiness as a result of their Summer Bridge experience. Participants felt confident with the physical campus, and they felt confident asking for help as a result of their time spent in the Summer Bridge.

The Summer Bridge digital storytelling process followed a similar protocol as the processes used in previous research, and accordingly, participants made similar gains. These similarities as well as the unique circumstances of the Summer Bridge program have implications for theory and practice.

Implications

Findings from this study have implications for higher education professionals, including administrators, faculty, and staff members. In particular, those considering a digital storytelling program or other programs designed to increase the retention and graduation rates of underrepresented students may be interested in the outcomes of this study. This study was designed to understand the ways in which a digital storytelling Summer Bridge Program supported students' self-authorship and supported them in

overcoming barriers to degree completion in their first year of college. Implications from this study include implications for theory and implications for practice.

Implications for theory.

In this study I examined previous research on the impact of similar storytelling programs on study participants. The digital storytelling process used in the Summer Bridge Program was similar to the processes described in previous studies, which similarly promoted self-authored ways of knowing. Namely, previous studies pointed at the creation of a personal identity (Hull & Katz, 2006), the establishment of sense of self (Alexandra, 2008), viewing oneself as a creator of knowledge and a community leader (Bond Belinky & Weinstock, 2000), and the creation of a theory that explains one's own reality (Benmayor, 2009). The previous studies did not name self-authorship development as a theoretical framework, but the previous studies used models that aligned with a Learning Partnerships Model, which is used to promote self-authorship development.

It is important to note that the program I studied had multiple components. In addition to the digital storytelling process, participants lived together, played games together, and socialized with one another in various environments. While it was clear that digital storytelling was a catalyst to engagement with questions that often arise during self-authorship development, I acknowledge that this engagement was likely enriched by the other elements of the program. The extracurricular activities of the Summer Bridge were extracurricular to the formal digital storytelling process, and it was the process that provided the time and space to think critically about one's Crossroads experiences. The implications for theory include ensuring that a similar program honors

the principles of the Learning Partnerships Model. The Summer Bridge Digital storytelling process aligns with the Learning Partnerships Model as described below.

Validating learners' capacity to know.

The first principle of the Learning Partnerships Model is validating learners' capacity to know. This refers to letting the student know that his or her experiences are important to making sense of the world and giving them permission to use their own experiences to create knowledge in the face of uncertainty. In the Summer Bridge program this was accomplished by beginning with an environment that promoted a sense of community. In the work of Hull and Katz (2006), access to a supportive community is one of four critical components that enable participants to create a personal identity, and this first component aligns with the first principle of the Learning Partnerships Model.

In the Summer Bridge Program, a sense of community was established by creating a welcoming and accepting environment. Peer mentors greeted students by name on the first day and they established and modeled ground rules for storytelling in their small groups. Peer mentors were students close in age to the participants and they had similar backgrounds with respect to underrepresented student characteristics.

Along the same lines, attendees at the Summer Bridge were similar in many ways with respect to low-income and first-generation status and in terms of racial and ethnic diversity. Participants in this study mentioned the importance of feeling welcome and accepted by the staff and other students. They also mentioned connecting with peer mentors and other attendees with respect to being a student of color, a low-income student and a first-generation student. Together, these characteristics of the Summer

Bridge Program created a supportive community where students felt validated in their capacity to know.

Situating learning in learners' experience.

The second principle of the Learning Partnerships Model, situating learning in the learner's experience, aligns with Hull and Katz's (2006) second component, which is legitimacy to appropriate and recenter texts. These ideas refer to allowing the student to consider life lessons within the context of their experiences and to describe those experiences in their own words, thereby defining the recollection and telling of them. This allows the student to focus on what those experiences mean to him or her.

In the Summer Bridge program the process of situating learning in learners' experiences began with the selection of story topics. Participants were asked to think of an important person, place, or event from their lives to write about for their story. Beyond the prompt, the topic and focus of each student's story was up to their discretion. In terms of how the story was told; the requirement was that the stories be told in the first-person voice and using the storyteller's own physical voice. These requirements ensure that the storyteller's point of view and understanding of their story is the focus of their story and is not influenced by others to a significant degree. Participants mentioned understanding themselves and their goals, attitudes, and beliefs as a result of reflecting on their own, talking with others about their story, and receiving feedback on their story in the story circle process.

Understanding also came from probing and encouragement from peer mentors in the story circle and in the one-on-one meetings with peer mentors. Participants talked about getting at the heart of their story and gaining insight into their lives and the ways in

which they thought about past, present, and future events. Participants also spoke about the process of storytelling as therapeutic and the importance of hearing and seeing their story come together for others to witness.

Mutually constructing meaning.

Mutually constructing meaning aligns with Hull and Katz's two last critical components of digital storytelling, which are competency to effectively and appropriately perform texts of one's own life, and the opinion of final texts as valuable and meaningful to selves and others. At a basic level, participants spoke about feeling confident about learning new technological skills and feeling able to put their stories together using sound and video software.

At a deeper level, participants talked about feeling confident to share their story during the Summer Bridge Program and after the Summer Bridge as a result of their digital storytelling experience. Participants mentioned feeling encouraged by other students and peer mentors to come up with the meaning or focus of their story and put it together in a way that honored their understanding of their story. The digital storytelling process encourages facilitators to play the role of learning partners because they genuinely must ask students to identify the deeper meaning of their story. The facilitator cannot be an expert in another person's life, and this naturally allows for the mutual construction of knowledge.

Participants expressed the importance of the screening in small groups and as a large group on the last day of the Summer Bridge Program. The screenings honor all of the final texts as valuable by providing each storyteller with an opportunity to introduce their final product to the other attendees in the program.

The Summer Bridge Program honored the principles of the Learning Partnerships Model, much like similar digital storytelling programs in previous studies have done. For this reason the Summer Bridge program supported participant's self-authorship development and their confidence to overcome barriers to degree completion. For individuals interested in the use of digital storytelling to promote underrepresented student retention and graduation, it seems important to use the Learning Partnerships Model and consider the ways in which a digital storytelling program supports self-authorship development.

Implications for practice.

Implications for practice from this study include implications for the population of attendees, staff, and the program itinerary. Most participants spoke about enjoying the diversity of the Summer Bridge group. Similarly, most spoke about being able to relate to the other students at the Seminar and the sense of community came in part from having similar backgrounds. Participants bonded with one another in many ways, including relating to one another about what it means to be a low-income student, what it means to be a first-generation student, and what it means to be a student of color. In the Summer Bridge Program, participants bonded over their like characteristics, and it seems that participants in a successful digital storytelling program ought to have some similarities with one another. This implication is consistent with previous research findings where participants were able to identify their unique challenges as well as challenges they faced as a member of a broader community (Alexandra, 2008).

It also seems important that attending the program be optional. While not discussed in the findings, the attendees of this program opted into the five-day

experience, thereby contributing to a community of students who were open to meeting others, learning about themselves, and overall being engaged in the process. A compulsory program would certainly distract from the sense of community, which was critical to the program. Furthermore, with a short duration of five days, the time needed to develop attendees' openness to the digital storytelling program simply does not exist.

With respect to the staff that facilitated the Summer Bridge digital storytelling process, undergraduate peer mentors were unique to this study and they seemed to have performed as well as the facilitators in previous studies. In previous studies, professional staff with advanced degrees facilitated the digital storytelling process. In this study, undergraduate students served as facilitators.

The peer mentors, after having received appropriate training, seem to have been an asset to the Summer Bridge digital storytelling program. Peer mentors were from similar backgrounds as the participants, and this allowed peer mentors and participants to connect over similar past experiences. Such similarities also allowed participants to view peer mentors as role models, offering insight to the participants about potential future opportunities and optimism about their abilities to be successful at the University. Participants viewed peer mentors as confidants, role models, and resources. Knowing they would have support from a peer mentor in their first year of college increased many participants' confidence as they prepared to start the fall semester.

Peer mentors also provided strong leadership in the other components of the Summer Bridge Program, including evening activities and informal discussions about their lives as college students. It seems that the similarities between the peer mentors and

the participants were important as the peer mentors were able to connect with participants on various levels and about various experiences.

An important consideration with respect to facilitators is the training program for staff. Peer mentors received eight days of training to prepare for a five-day program. Training included understanding and practicing the digital story facilitation process, including technical and story circle leadership skills. Peer mentors learned tactics for modeling active and non-judgmental listening, providing appropriate feedback, and creating an overall welcoming and inviting environment. This included memorizing students' names prior to their arrival, explaining ground rules for attendees, and serving as a resource for the duration of the program.

Peer mentor training should include a discussion about the importance of creating and maintaining a welcoming and relaxed atmosphere for students. Students can come to campus with worries and concerns about the summer program or their first year of college. Many participants in this study spoke about feeling good about their decision to come to the summer program and their decision to come to the University soon after meeting the Summer Bridge staff. They felt safe to be themselves, and they felt comfortable telling their stories to each other. It seems that a critical component of a successful digital storytelling program led by undergraduate peer mentors is an intensive training program that instills confidence in the peer mentors prior to the and during the digital storytelling program.

In terms of the itinerary, this study included an intensive five-day residential digital storytelling program. This was different compared to previous studies, which followed a schedule that spanned several weeks or months and did not have a residential

component. There does not seem to be any negative outcomes of an intensive five-day residential storytelling process as opposed to the timeline found in previous studies. In fact, the intensive and residential nature of the program seems to have encouraged dialogue among participants and with peer mentors.

The residential nature of the Summer Bridge Program provided multiple opportunities for dialogue among attendees and peer mentors. Unlike the previous studies, conversations continued during nearly all waking hours. Participants worked together in the classroom for eight hours per day, dined together for all meals, spent free time together on campus, and shared dorm rooms with one another.

Participants spoke about the speed at which they bonded with one another, and at the same time commented that the bonds felt natural and overall positive. Participants mentioned the benefits of making friends in advance of the start of the school year, which gave them confidence, made them feel safe, and relieved the stress of trying to make friends in their first year of college.

Participants also talked about the benefits of being on campus during the summer. Benefits included getting a chance to explore dorm life, getting accustomed to the size of campus and its buildings, and having the opportunity to explore the physical layout of campus prior to the start of school and prior to the rest of the students coming back from break. Compared to the other digital storytelling research, the Summer Bridge digital storytelling program may have occurred over a shorter period of time, but in the end equaled the same, if not more total hours. The intense nature of the residential summer Bridge digital storytelling experience seems to have benefited the participants.

An intensive five-day residential digital storytelling summer seminar led by undergraduate peer mentors is an effective and efficient model of digital storytelling. The intensive timeline as well as the residential nature offer uninterrupted dialogue among participants and mentors, and contribute to a strong sense of community. Students learn about themselves and each other, and undergraduate peer mentors are excellent facilitators of the digital storytelling process, provided they receive adequate training. In this model, participants have the opportunity to explore residence hall life, campus, and a new community. This has the potential to alleviate preconceived concerns about campus and making friends.

In addition to these implications for practice, which are related to a digital storytelling summer program, there are implications from this study that might carry over to other areas within higher education. For example, within undergraduate classrooms, programming, and student groups the instructors, staff, and group leaders could use the Learning Partnerships Model to guide the development of curriculum and learning objectives. This The findings from this study suggest that honoring the principles of the Learning Partnerships Model in these other environments might be an effective way to encourage students to engage deeply with the learning objectives and goals in classrooms, student activities, and student groups.

With respect to these other areas, it is important to keep in mind that this study presents evidence that the process of engaging with the Crossroads phase of self-authorship development is more important than the product. For example, while the final digital stories created in the Summer Bridge were important, the overall quality of the

stories themselves were not of greatest importance. Rather, the process of creating the digital stories was the impactful, and therefore the most-important part of the program.

Similarly, while achieving self-authorship is a worthwhile outcome of higher education, it is difficult for any singular program or curriculum to make self-authorship the objective. Self-authorship is something that is achieved over a long period of time, and it is the process of moving through that process in a positive way that ought to be the goal of individual programs and curricula. This study offers an example of effective engagement with the Learning Partnerships Model as a way to create a positive Crossroads experience.

As for the Bridge Program itself, findings from this study suggests that it may be beneficial to share students' entering concerns with others. For example, it could be very helpful for families of entering students to know what the typical concerns of students are so that they can support their children during their academic career. Findings could be shared with offices that work with parents in an effort to share this information in the most effective way. Similarly, findings might be shared with instructors, staff members, and other new students in a way to promote understanding and alleviate underrepresented students' concerns.

After attending the Summer Bridge Program, the students in this study seemed more confident about their first year of college. This was a result of having had the opportunity to reflect on a particular challenge and understand their role within that challenge more deeply. In the future, it may be good practice to engage Summer Bridge attendees in a follow-up conversation about their summer experience, and about their first year of college. Doing so might provide a way for students to address any questions or

concerns they have at that time. Follow-up conversations could be individual or in groups, with the latter providing an opportunity for students to reconnect with one another.

Implications for future research.

In the future it would be helpful to study students after their second, third, and fourth years of college to determine what, if any lasting impacts result from the Summer Bridge. Additionally, a future study would examine the role of the peer mentors in greater detail. From this study it is clear that the peer mentors played a significant role in students' experience. A future study would include more explicit questions about students' peer mentors and the role they played in the Summer Bridge Program. This future study might also include interviewing peer mentors to understand their perspective of the program.

Conclusion

This study included interviewing 12 participants from the 2014 State University Scholars digital storytelling Summer Bridge Program. I was interested in understanding the ways in which attending the Summer Bridge Program supported underrepresented students' self-authorship and their ability to overcome barriers to degree completion in their first year. Using a case study approach, I was able to understand the experiences of the 2014 Summer Bridge participants.

Many participants spoke about gaining new insight on their life or an event from their life. This new insight supported participants' sense of self, understanding of knowledge, cognitive interdependence, and their belief in their ability to overcome barriers. Through support for self-authorship development, participants were able to

address concerns that may have catalyzed the Crossroads phase, including concerns about friends, family, and academics. Participants spoke about sense of self with respect to making friends; they learned about knowledge construction by realizing the benefits of talking through concerns with other attendees; and their insight into others' points of view gave them skills to negotiate conflicts with friends and family members. While not for credit, the task of the Summer Bridge Program gave participants confidence with respect to their academic selves, and they spoke about confidence in knowing their way around the physical space of campus, and asking for help.

This study contributes to the current literature on underrepresented student success in three distinct ways. First, it highlights the fact that different barriers impact underrepresented students in unique ways and to varying degrees. This emphasizes the importance of creating an individualized approach for student success. The second contribution this study makes is it provides support for digital storytelling as an effective method to implement the Learning Partnerships Model and to support students' self-authorship. Previous studies indicate that digital storytelling supports self-authorship development, and this study explicitly names support for self-authorship development as an outcome of a specific digital storytelling experience. The third contribution this study makes to the current literature is evidence that undergraduate students can effectively and efficiently facilitate the digital storytelling process for a large number of students. Previous studies identified professionals with advanced degrees as digital story facilitators, but the peer mentors in this study effectively led participants through the Summer Bridge digital storytelling process. These contributions are timely given the

relatively recent resurgence of interest in underrepresented undergraduate student success.

Historically, United States higher education has not retained and graduated underrepresented students at the same rates as their peers. There has been a consistent history of researchers and practitioners attempting to change this at the institutional level and at the national level. Population trends indicate the number of underrepresented students continues to grow in the United States, including the number of underrepresented students preparing to enter college. These trends create an increased demand for improved approaches to serving underrepresented students, and individual institutions will benefit from implementing an efficient approach to serving their unique students. With such an approach perhaps United States higher education institutions can collectively close the national degree attainment gap.

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Appendix A

Participant Consent Form

Digital Storytelling as Crossroads Preparation

You are invited to be in a research study exploring how the State University Scholars (SUS) Summer Bridge prepared attendees for potential barriers to degree completion. You were selected as a possible participant because you participated in the SUS Summer Bridge. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Steve Cisneros, Director of State University Scholars in the Office of Undergraduate Education; PhD student in Higher Education, College of Education and Human Development.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to understand the ways in which the SUS Summer Bridge digital storytelling process prepared undergraduate attendees for potential barriers to degree completion. The results of this study will help faculty and staff gain a better understanding of how digital storytelling benefits students.

Procedures:

If you agree to this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a one-hour interview with me sometime between winter break, 2014 and the first month of spring semester, 2015. With your permission, the interview conversation will be digitally recorded (audio only).
2. Allow me to use the following for this study:
 - a. Your completed digital story from the SUS Summer Bridge, 2014.
 - b. Your survey responses from the SUS Summer Bridge, submitted on June 25, 2014.

If there are specific pieces from the above list that you do not want to be used, you are free to contact Steve Cisneros at any time during the study. The use of the materials above for this study will not impact your role, participation, or standing with the State University Scholars program.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The study has the following risks:

The topic of this study may be personal and you may choose to respond to questions in ways that lead to self-disclosure. Participants may choose to not answer any question

posed to them during the interview. Because of the option to opt out, participation in this study provides minimum risk. Also, your responses and identity will remain strictly confidential. Participation in this study will not impact your role, participation, or standing with the State University Scholars program. You may withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

The benefits of participation are:

There are no direct benefits to study participants. Study participants may benefit indirectly as they discuss and reflect upon their digital story and their first year at the University in ways that prompt personal understanding and/or growth.

Compensation:

You will receive payment in the form of \$25 cash after you have verified the transcript from the 1-hour interview. There is no compensation beyond the two gift cards.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report published from this research, no information will be used that might make it possible to identify you as a participant. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. Study data will be encrypted according to current University policy for protection of confidentiality.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the State University or the State University Scholars program. It will also not affect your role, participation, or standing with the State University Scholars program. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researchers conducting this study are: Steve Cisneros. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to

contact him at 612-626-7388 or cisne004@umn.edu.

Advisor's Name/Phone: Rebecca Ropers-Huilman, 612-624-1006

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Metropolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B

Selected Survey Questions

1. What, if anything did you learn about yourself as a result of the SUS Summer Bridge?
2. What, if anything did you learn about others?
3. In your mind, what does it mean to be a college student?
4. What did you learn from interacting with your fellow SUS Scholars about what it means to be a college student?
5. As you look toward starting school in the fall, what are 2 to 3 things that you learned during the Summer Bridge that will be useful to you?
6. Do you have any comments, remarks, or questions that were not addressed in the previous questions?

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Research Questions:

R1: In what ways did attending a five-day, residential digital storytelling Summer Bridge led by undergraduate peer mentors support attendees' self-authorship development?

R2: In what ways did attending a five-day, residential digital storytelling Summer Bridge led by undergraduate peer mentors support attendees in overcoming barriers to persistence in their first year?

1. [Memory exercise] Tell me what you remember from the Summer Bridge.
2. Before the Summer Bridge how would you have answered the question, "Who is a college student?" Where did that definition come from? After the Summer Bridge, how would you define yourself as a college student? Why do you define yourself in this way? (R1, R2)
3. Tell me about the people you met during the Summer Bridge. What did you learn from them? About yourself? About others? About anything else? (R1, R2)
4. Tell me about your digital story. What did you learn from the digital storytelling process during the seminar? How did you learn this? (R1, R2)
5. Since the Summer Bridge have you watched your digital story? Have you shared it with others? If so, who? What was the purpose of showing them? What was their reaction? (R2)
6. In what ways did attending the Summer Bridge prepare you for your first year of college? (R1, R2)

7. In what ways do you think your 1st year would have been different had you not attended the Summer Bridge? (R1, R2)
8. Think about your first year of college, could you describe a specific academic challenge you've face here? Why do you think you experienced this challenge? What went through your head when you found yourself in this situation? (R1, R2)
9. Think about your first year of college, could you describe a specific non-academic challenge you've face here? Why do you think you experienced this challenge? What went through your head when you found yourself in this situation? (R1, R2)
10. Research shows that some students in college face challenges pertaining to money, being the first in their family to go to college, or being a member of a racial or ethnic minority. Can you speak to any such challenges? If so, tell me about your experiences with them. (R1, R2)
11. Is there anything I didn't ask you about your Summer Bridge experience that I should have?

Appendix D

Recruitment E-mail

Dear [student name],

I hope you are enjoying success in your second year at the State University!

The purpose of this email is to invite you to participate in the research study described below. After reading the following information, please contact Steve Cisneros via e-mail (cisne004@umn.edu) if you are interested.

In addition to being the Director of the State University Scholars (SUS) program, Steve Cisneros is also a PhD student at the State University. For his dissertation he is conducting research that explores the impact of the SUS Summer Bridge on students. He is interested in what, if any ways the seminar helps students develop and manage challenges in their first year of study. Based on what he finds from you and other participants, he hopes to share this study with other educators so that they can work to enhance the summer program and inform the development of similar programs at other schools.

As a student who attended the 2014 SUS Summer Bridge and who completed the evaluation on the last day, he invites you to participate in this study.

If you are willing to participate, your commitment will consist of two parts. The first part is permission for Mr. Cisneros to analyze your responses from the evaluation you completed on the last day of the seminar (June 25, 2014). The second part is a 1-hour interview with Mr. Cisneros about your summer experience and your first-year of college. This interview will occur prior to May 1, 2015, and it will be audio-recorded. You will receive a total of \$25 for participating in this study.

Be assured that your participation or decision to participate in this study will not affect your standing or participation in the State University Scholars program. If you agree to participate, only Mr. Cisneros will know your involvement in this study. He will make every attempt to ensure that no one else can attribute anything you say to you.

If you are willing to participate in this study, **please email Steve Cisneros directly stating your interest**. Attached is a consent form with more information. If you have questions about this study, feel free to contact him at cisne004@umn.edu or [612-626-7388](tel:612-626-7388).

Thank you for considering this request!