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Research Proposal

Inquiry into International Student Identity through A/r/tography

I.   Statement of Problem

1.   Background of the Study

Globalization has had an impact on universities, discipline content, and the teaching and learning process (Jonrd, 2010). This globalized environment impacts many schools, including K-20 education, which attract huge international students studying in the U.S. United States is one of the most popular destinations for international students every year (Zong, J. & Batalove, J. 2016). In fact, international students in the U.S. are a minority on college campuses. According to the Open Doors: MIZZOU fast facts 2016 which is a report from the International Center, 2,990 students from 110 countries attended the University of Missouri in the academic year of 2015 -2016. The comparison between 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 is remarkable, the number of international students at Mizzou has declined considerably. The decline is 198 less (international students) compared to the academic year of 2015/2016, with Chinese students making up the majority of this number. It is important for the University of Missouri System to determine the cause of this decrease and how to recruit and to find a way to improve its reputation among foreign countries. In my opinion, in seeking the answers, it would be worthy to consider the environment, the campus itself, and the society of Columbia. Certainly, the big step which I think is the most important part is to establish a better relationship with international students, and to understand how they identity themselves, how they feel towards life here, and what they value most about their place in Columbia culture. In addition, study how they integrate across cultural boundaries. It is vital to give them opportunities for introspection, to explore themselves, and to voice and defend their personal identities and value systems.

2.   Purpose of the Study

This project is to explore MU international student's identity through a/r/tography, a methodology which does not create the invention while it does help people gain new

understanding based on existing knowledge (Irwin, 2013). In terms of this methodology, the purpose of this project is to provide a safe space for MU international students to explore their own identities by creating videos (documentary) with their stories, and to gain a new understanding towards themselves during the process of exploration. In fact, the process of making video is paralleled with the reality that they've encountered. Their stories that they have created are not just a means of expressing themselves, but also a way of recognizing and thinking about the real world. As Aufderheide (2007) states, "A documentary film tells a story about real life, with claims to truthfulness. (p. 2)" This second purpose of this project is to manifest MU international students' emotion, attitude, and value in a dynamic way. Participants (MU international students) "bring their unschooled and often unsanctioned literacy practices into academic settings creates a culture in which unseen and unheard stories can be told (Jocius 2016)." Finally, their voices would be heard by MU students, faculty, staff, even Columbia residents. Hopefully, this project would become a bridge across among different cultures. We embrace diversity and diversity makes our culture prosperous.

II.   **Research question and Sub-questions:**

The central research question is: How do Mizzou international students self-identify themselves in terms of nationality, culture, ethnicity and career in Columbia, Missouri?

The following sub questions will further direct and guide the study:

1.   How do international students' perceptions transform from the beginning enrolling school to now?

2.   How do they cross the cultural boundaries and ethnic borders?

3.   What do they value most about their place in Columbia culture?

4.   How does documentary filmmaking empower the international student voice and sense of place within the MU community?

III.   **Related Research**

1. Theoretical Framework

Visual art researchers described the Internet with metaphors as a technology research tool

(Dunn, 1996), community-building method (Krug, 1997), and interaction forum (Heise & Grandgenett, 1996). Stankiewicz (2004) reports technological usage for art learning, visual language functions, and especially visual literacy for social control and characterizes art-making as a way of providing social conformity rather than promoting social criticism. Krug (2004) claims that problems involved technological literacy, fluency with skills and knowledge, and integration that supports and enhances effective learning in and through the visual arts.

All cultures are equal; diversity is an asset; cultures evolve and cannot be confined to boundaries; cultural processes are as important as products; and cultural forms of expression are effective means for social transformation. (Adams and Goldbard 2001:14)

According to MU Campus Climate Research Study in September 2017, 73% of Undergraduate, Graduate, and Professional Student/Post-Doctoral Scholar respondents felt valued by University of Missouri-Columbia faculty while 71% felt valued by campus staff. 77% of Undergraduate, Graduate, and Professional Student/Post-Doctoral Scholar respondents felt valued by faculty in the classroom. 70% of Undergraduate, Graduate, and Professional Student/Post-Doctoral Scholar respondents had faculty whom they perceived as role models. 19% of respondents indicated that they personally had experience exclusionary intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct. 26% noticed that the conduct was based on their gender/gender identity, 23% felt that it was based on their ethnicity, 21% felt that it was based on their position status, and 20% felt that it was based on their racial identity. By ethnicity, significant differences were noted in the percentages of Afficant/Black/African American (39%), Asian/Asian American (21%), Hispanic/Latin/Chican (25%), Multiracial Respondents (27%), Other Respondents of Color (24%) and White respondents (16%) who believed that they had experienced this conduct.

According to the Open Doors: MIZZOU fast facts 2016 which is a report from the International Center at University of Missouri - Columbia, 1800 international students attended at the University of Missouri – Columbia in the academic year of 2008/2009, 1831 international

students in 2009/2010, 1948 in 2010/2011, 2198 in 2011/2012, 2490 in 2012/2013, 2576 in 2013/2014, 2879 in 2014/2015, 2990 in 2015/2016. In the academic year of 2016/2017, there were 2792 international students from 110 foreign countries attending at MU. From this statistical data, we can see that the amount of international students was increasing during 2008 – 2015, while in 2016, the amount decreased a little bit.

2. Literature Review

Fail, Thompson, and Walker (2004) collaboratively use the data from eleven former international school students. This study explores these former international students' thoughts and feelings, covering emotional and relational issues such as sense of belonging, identity and the nature of relationships formed. The authors claim that these students are positive and enthusiastic about the advantages of their background and the ability it has given them to feel at home in different places and also to relate to other people like themselves. Moreover, they are no longer in a process of setting up a sense of identity or belonging but are reflecting on something that has been established during the course of their lives.

Michael Haugh (2008) claims that a number of recent studies investigating the construction of international student identities have supposedly adhered to postmodernist-inspired notion of identity. Therefore, these studies appear to be premised on the assumption that what international students say can be equated with their identities, without critical attention being paid to the way in which identities emerge as a conjoint construct through interaction. He believes that identities are invariably jointly constructed by participants through discourse, even in interviews and focus groups where the researcher is ostensibly taking a neutral stance.

Rita Irwin (2004) demonstrates a/r/tography as a metaphor for informing artist-researcher-teacher identity, including self-realization, self-development and the relationship between self and the outside world, and extends to the reflection on education and teaching as well as personal life through artistic and aesthetic approaches to self-consciousness in education and social phenomena. A/r/tography is a form of "living inquiry". Art is not just a means of

expressing itself, it is also a way of recognizing and thinking about the real world. Additionally, as a/r/tographers, they occupy "in-between" space. "Those living in the borderlands of a/r/t recognize the vitality of living in an in-between space."

Irwin, Bickel, Triggs, Springgay, and some researchers (2009), use data from eight intergenerational immigrant families in The City of Richmond, British Columbia, Canada to examine their experiences and narratives through a community-engaged process that employed a/r/tography as a methodology. The study shows that culture and memory can be transformed and maintained. Site, home and location can be more than one place, and more likely somewhere in between. This research is precursive and unprecedented which supports my research topic – International Student Identity. It helps me understand a/r/tography and the practicalities of how to conduct a/r/tographical research.

Räsänen (2012) has shed some light on the factors affecting cultural identity, as well as multicultural identity. She believes that cultural identity is based on verbal, artistic, and other stories created in a certain time and place. Rituals, clothing, and images mediate traditions that connect an individual to a group. Additionally, she asserts that representation is a useful concept for understanding the relationship between the individual and culture. Representation refers to all verbal and spoken language, visual presentations, and combinations of words and images, which means something that represents a thing, a person, an object, or a phenomenon.

Wang, Cash, & Powers (2000) use photovoice as a research method to explore people who are living at shelter. As authors state, "photovoice is an innovative participatory action research method based on health promotion principles and the theoretical literature on education for critical consciousness, feminist theory, and a community-based approach to documentary photography. (p. 81)" Authors believe that the photovoice concept and method enable people to create and discuss photographs as a means of catalyzing personal and community change. Tacchi (2009) collects data from 15 pre-existing local media in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and

Indonesia to explore how digital storytelling empower and affect the local context, and how both social and technological networks empower poor people to communicate their "voices" within and beyond marginalized communities. Tacchi explains that the definition of voice is broad, which means it can be about opportunity and agency to promote self-expression and advocacy, about access and the skills to use technologies and platforms for the distribution of a range of different voices. This study was divided into three phases. The first phase was training of trainers, where they trained members of the Finding a Voice sites through a series of workshops. The second phase was the local development of participatory content creation activities in each site. The third phase is concerned with strategies for distribution, which depends on the message and target audience. The author claims that digital storytelling can contribute to development agendas, and also can form an interesting component in participatory development in contexts.

3. Key Terms

A/r/tography: A/r/tography is an arts-based research methodology, and the name itself examplifies these features by setting art and graphy, and the identities of artist, researcher, and teacher (a/r/t), in contiguous relations (Irwin, R. L., Beer, R., Springgay, S., Grauer, K., Xiong, G., & Bickel, B, 2006). The A/r/tography includes self-realization, self-development and the relationship between the self and the outside world, and extends to the reflection on education and teaching as well as personal life through artistic and aesthetic approaches to self-consciousness in education and social phenomena. This methodology does not place emphasis on the identity of the researcher, nor on the artist or the educator, while it focuses on when he/she is the researcher, or the artist, or the educator, including the transition between or among them. Moreover, these roles of "A/R/T" are not separate, they are united. Artist-researcher-teachers are inhabitants of these borderlands as they re-create, re-search, and re-learn ways of understanding, appreciating, and representing the world (Finley and Knowles 1995). A/r/tography places more emphasis on the close relationship between theory and practice, cognition and art than in previous educational research. Art is not just a means of expressing itself, it is also a way of recognizing and thinking about the world in reality.

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"A/r/tography is a living practice of art, research and teaching: a living message; a life-writing, life-creating experience (Irwin et al. 2001)". It poses the questions - what does life look like? What are your feelings towards life?   How can you capture the aspect of life? How can you achieve the goal of a/r/tography? Most importantly, a/r/tography as a research methodology does not create the invention while it does gain the new understanding based on the existing knowledge. As Irwin describes, researchers establish the condition for becoming a/r/tography. She claims that "the condition of possibility or the inventive potential creates the conditions for becoming (Irwin, 2013)". In her view, the lines of intensity, movement, and events that entangle across time and place unfolds a cartography of a/r/tography.

Nonimmigrant: As U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services states, nonimmigrant is "an alien who seeks temporary entry to the United States for a specific purpose"- whether for tourism, business, temporary work, or study, including temporary workers, students, exchange visitors, temporary visitors for business or for tourism.

International Student: the definition of "international student" varies in each country in accordance to their own national education system. "An international student is defined as an individual who is enrolled for credit at an accredited higher education institution in the U.S. on a temporary visa, and who is not an immigrant (permanent resident with an I-51 or Green Card), or an undocumented immigrant, or a refugee." (UNESCO)

Identity: The Communication Theory of Identity identifies four aspects of identity: personal, relational, enacted, and communal layers. The personal layer of identity is an individual's self-concepts, which reflects the traditional conceptualization of identity. The relational layer takes a number of forms, perhaps the foremost among which is an individual's perception of how others view of him/her. The enacted layer is an individual's self as expressed in communication. The communal layer of identity is the collectivity or group's conceptualization of identities. The communal layer exists on a group or collective level instead of the individual and dyadic units of identity that are reflected in the other layers (Hecht, 1993). This study would focus on

individual identity, the communal layer of identity would not be included in the study.

Documentary: The documentary is a movie about real life, but not real life. They are portraits of real life, using real life as their raw material constructed by artists and technicians who make myriad decisions about what story to tell to whom and for what purpose. Filmmakers expect that a documentary will be a fair and honest representation of somebody's experience of reality. (Aufderheide, P. 2007) Additionally, documentaries that address a politics of identity also address the question of alliances and affinities among various subcultures, groups, and movement. Certainly, they emphasis on social issues and on personal portraiture as well. Social issue documentary might go with the expository mode and an earlier moment in documentary, whereas personal portraiture might seem to go with observational or participatory mode (Nichols, 2017, p. 243). Based on the purpose of this study, each participant would make a personal portraiture documentary film.

IV.   Data Sources

I would conduct this research (supported by MU International Center which is a department helping international students and scholars) among international students at the University of Missouri – Columbia which is located in the city of Columbia, Missouri. According to my research questions, each participant would be an individual who is enrolled for credit at the University of Missouri – Columbia on a temporary visa. However, it does not specifically require participants' age, gender, but most of participants would be college students aged from 18-28. They may have previous art instruction during their high school education, and this research would begin during the spring semester where the study occurs so that as many as possible international students can participate in this research. After the research proposal is approved by MU International Center, they would help me send out the email to all MU international students to seek for participants.

V.   Methods and Data Analysis:

1. Intended Sampling Procedures

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A.   Pre-interview with participants one by one and the meetings are recorded by digital camera, the questions would be relevant to whether they believe or not that technology (social media) empower their personal voices and in what ways technology affect them.

B.   Lead participants start exploring the big idea – identity, and give them prompts, such as, sketch self-portrait, make some visual samples related to their personal experiences, or photograph people and place that they feel either express a part of their identity or affect it. Art activities and art making should be designed thoroughly, and I must design a unit plan draft before conducting this research. This process would be filmed and observed by me.

C.   Some participants who have some special stories would be filmed by me for a couple of months.

D.   Gather participants to watch each participant's documentary film and share their thoughts with the group;

E.   Post-interview with participants one by one and the meetings are recorded by digital camera.

F.   Based on these raw video clips I've made and documentary films that participants have created, they could be made into a documentary. Finally, audience would see participants' documentaries in their own perspectives, and my documentary in my perspective.

2.   Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Data Collection: In this study, I would collect data through the processes of interview, observation, and creation of artworks (including documentary films and raw video clips). Meanwhile, the data would be recorded through digital camera.

Analysis Procedures:

A.   Transcribe the interviews, and sort them into different categories;

B.   Sort the observation notes into the created categories;

C.   The visual artwork analysis is based upon the personal narratives, participant's descriptions of their experiences of living as an Asian American in Columbia, Missouri.

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VI.   Bias

Actually, I am biased towards research questions, due to some reasons in the Following. First, my close friend who is international student as well was discriminated by her professor. It was really frustrating. However, I am loved and embraced by art education graduate program. The comparison between her and me is a gap. Actually, I feel grateful towards MIZZOU, at least, I've got a lot support from some leaders and of course my advisor and professors. Therefore, I am inclined to agree with some positive attitude towards MIZZOU.

VII.   Timeline:

1.   By Oct 31st 2017: complete the research proposal and get approved from research advisor;

2.   By Nov 30th 2017: look for participants and funding source, affirm the final participants and funding;

3.   By Dec 31st 2017: Create and design art lesson plans – documentary for participants, and get approved from research advisor;

4.   Jan 19th – Mar 31st 2018: data collection (actual conduct of the research, meet, teach the participants regularly once a week in 50 minutes);

5.   By Apr 30th 2018: data analysis; full of documentary is completed; write artist statement and research reflection;

6.   May 1st – May 31st 2018: international student identity documentary exhibition;

VIII.   Discussion/Possible Findings

This study had the potential to gain some new insights into how international students at the University of Missouri – Columbia identify themselves according to culture, ethnicity, etc. The final documentary would be a bridge across over among Mizzou faculty, staff and students, and it would help them get to know international students. However, this study would be limited by the time and the length of meeting times.

IX.   References:

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