In fall 2011, we began a project that sought to collect people’s thoughts and wishes regarding recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake. Dubbed Bridge! Media 311 (BM311), the project was embraced by the faculty and students of universities in various local areas: Aichi, Fukuoka, Gunma, Hiroshima, Miyagi, and Niigata. The students recorded video footage of reconstruction work not only in the affected areas but also in non-affected ones, and shared them nationwide.

There is a distinct problem with Japanese media environment, which is characterized by strong Tokyo-centrism and poor inter-local communication. For example, most television content is produced in Tokyo and is disseminated around the country via broadcast networks. Thus, people anywhere in Japan have a good understanding of what happens in Tokyo, but do not know much about local events that may be closer to their homes. Residents of north-eastern Japan, where the earthquakes and tsunamis occurred, became afraid that people in other areas of the country would forget the disaster as time passed. In fact, residents rarely had chances and channels to learn about the reconstruction activities of other locals. Therefore, in order to bridge a communication barrier between affected and non-affected areas, we designed the BM 311 project to facilitate university students to record, share, and archive how people coped with the disaster and recovery.

This study examines one facet of the BM 311 project that involved a media workshop held from 12 to 14 February, 2013. We planned that students in unaffected areas visited a stricken area to convey what they saw and heard to their hometowns. Ten student participants from non-affected areas in Hiroshima (four students from the Hiroshima University of Economics) and Niigata (six students from Niigata University) used tabled devices for their tasks. In this paper, we focus on two days when the students visited the devastated city of Ishinomaki in Miyagi and made “Digital Stories” of their experiences.

Students conducted fieldwork in Ishinomaki by taking photos of the disaster site and interviewing people about how they have fared since the tsunami. Afterward, they reflected on their experiences and made short slide movies, adapting their work into the “Digital Storytelling” format. Although digital storytelling generally refers to any computer-edited narrative such as motion pictures or computer games, our method of Digital Storytelling is a particular practice based on a workshop to facilitate video making for

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common people’s narratives. The practice began in the early 1990s in the United States, in California and has spread around the world\(^2\). In the workshops, participants create short video stories for self-expression using photos and their own narration.

In this paper, we propose a design of a media workshop that aims to deepen participants’ understanding of devastated areas and examine ways to express experiences and thoughts by using a tablet device and a form of Digital Storytelling.

2. Workshop Program

As mentioned above, we designed the workshop for university students who live in the non-affected areas of Niigata and Hiroshima. Figure 1 details the design of the workshop. On the first day, participants gathered in a public media center named Sendai Mediatheque, which is located in Sendai, the capital city of disaster-stricken Miyagi prefecture. Visiting students showed videos of reconstruction work that they had shot in their hometowns, and discussed the videos and reconstruction activities together with Sendai residents. The videos were planned to be archived on the Web in the Center for Remembering 3.11 (http://recorder311.smt.jp/recorder311/). As noted earlier, we evaluate activities on the second day and the third day of the workshop (indicated by the dotted circle on figure 1).

On February 13, day 2 of the workshop, students took tablet devices —iPad2, 3 or iPad mini— one by one and participated in fieldwork in Ishinomaki-shi, which suffered heavy damage from tsunamis. Guided by a local resident, the students began walking around the stricken areas near the sea to observe the sights with their own eyes. Then, using tablets, they took photos of whatever caught their attention (Photos A, B, C). First, they walked up to a park on a hill that overlooked large vacant land where houses had been swept away. Moving in closer to the damaged sites, they explored a burned-out school and destroyed buildings, and stopped at a spot that held a floral tribute for victims.

After the tour, the students went to the city center to visit a community FM station, Radio

Figure 1 Design of a 3-day media workshop of the BM311 project in 2013
Ishinomaki, and a newspaper museum, Ishinomaki NEWSee, that exhibited handwritten newspapers published just after the earthquake (Photos D, E). Students listened to the staff’s stories of how they kept reporting through aftershocks and power outages, and the days of suffering that followed March 11. Finally, groups of students visited shopping streets and interviewed local residents. They talked to owners who reopened liquor and butcher shops after the tsunami had closed them (Photo F). They also met new residents who were working to reconstruct the town and launch new businesses.

On day 3 of the workshop, students gathered in Sendai again to create Digital Stories based on their fieldwork experiences the previous day. We designed activities to facilitate students’ reflections and recordings of their memories. At first, the students sorted photos they took in Ishinomaki as either “confirmation” or “findings” (Photo G). “Confirmation” photos included scenes that they anticipated seeing before they actually visited the damaged areas (e.g., mountains of rubble). For students, such images were familiar through media: television reports, newspaper coverage, and online information. The “findings” category
included unanticipated scenes such as a placement of flowers in tribute and new food stands. Tablet devices were used to sort. As “confirmation” photos, most students captured scenes of collapsed buildings or “nothing left” (Photos H, I). As “findings” photos, students often captured images of details such as a sign showing the height of the tsunami or people participating in reconstruction work (Photos J, K). By creating “confirmation” and “findings” folders, students were able to reflect on what they saw, found, and thought during their visit to Ishinomaki.

After each individual created a personal reflection, the students presented their work in groups of three or four, and reported on why they took certain photos and labeled scenes as “confirmation” or “findings” (Photo L). During these presentations, audience members took notes about feelings and thoughts such as empathy or surprise, and the questions that arose (Photo M). Group members also commented on presenters’ selections and discussed the scenes and their experiences of the previous day. During this group reflection, students widened their point of view and deepened their understanding of the current situation in Ishinomaki.
After the reflective activities concluded, the students used their tablets to create one-minute Digital Stories of their thoughts based on their experiences. The 10 participants were asked to make the stories reflect memories of the disaster and convey the current conditions of the stricken area to their hometowns. The students created three sequences of two or three photos each. After completing sequence worksheets, each student used a video editor “Reel Director” to insert their photos and record narration in their own voices (Photo N). The files were then edited into complete narrated slide movies. At the end of the workshop, Digital Stories were shared among all participants and comments were offered (Photo O).

3. Digital Stories Generated by the Students

The students made 10 digital stories consisting of 6 to 15 photos; each story was about one minute long. All of the students were shocked to see how much damage the earthquake and tsunami had done to the landscape. Several students commented that their knowledge of the disaster area had been wrong or incomplete, and all of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Digital Stories by Students of Hiroshima University of Economics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
<td><strong>Story</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Thoughts about What I Saw and Heard in An Affected Area</td>
<td>Felt a deep empathy for the words “we just do what we can,” spoken by a person who managed a food stand and was devoted to reconstruction of the shopping area. The student began considering what he himself could do to help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Places I Wish to Recover</td>
<td>After lamenting the overwhelming destruction, the student comments on unchanged parts of the area (e.g., sculptures of anime heroes, people’s will to live, the beautiful scenery), and whispers about how he could contribute toward restoring Ishinomaki to what it was before the earthquake.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forward</td>
<td>Introduces persons who reopened shops and launched a new café, and shows an appreciation for people’s endeavors to move forward, one step at a time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going Forward, Ishinomaki</td>
<td>Fixes on still visible damage, but is moved by people’s strong will under such terrible conditions, as well as the strength to move forward.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the Digital Stories seemed to be motivated by gaps between what was imagined and what was actually seen. The stories all attempted to show, as far as possible, the reality of Ishinomaki based on what had been seen and heard. Moreover, the students expressed shock at the devastation they had seen and showed compassion and respect for the people of Ishinomaki.

### 4. Results of the Workshop

To examine the results of the workshop, we employed three modes of analysis. First, we analyzed the actual Digital Stories produced by the participants; second, we analyzed comments written by students after the workshop had ended; and third, we evaluated the students while they participated in the field-work activities, reflective exercise, and Digital Story production.

#### 4.1 Awareness of Students

Throughout the course of the workshop, did participants deepen their understanding of the devastated areas? To answer this question, we must focus on a number of different factors. First, students became aware of the real situation in the disaster area, which differed from what was imagined prior to the start of the workshop. All of the participants were shocked by the state of the city, and each found the town more damaged than they had imagined. Their perceptions had come from mediated reports from television stations and newspapers. Immediately after the disaster, mass media continuously reported on the scope of the damage and the victims with sensational pictures. However, because such coverage gradually diminished over time and shifted to focus on topics of recovery, the students naturally believed the recovery was making steady progress and the affected towns would be restored to their pre-disaster state. The students learned that the facts did not conform to this narrative. Second, as encountered in many of the Digital Stories, students had great compassion for the residents. Visiting a shopping mall and talking to residents, the students realized the strength of people’s will to reconstruct the city and understood that help was still needed and wanted to support the residents’ efforts. Finally,
the students came to consider what they could do to help the reconstruction process. They were conscious of the disaster area and recover efforts, and were motivated to move forward with their own activities. There was a sense of responsibility to share what they saw, heard and experienced after they returned to their hometowns. In fact, students from the Hiroshima University of Economics eagerly reported their visit to Ishinomaki, and played their Digital Stories in a community FM radio program based in Asaminami-ku of Hiroshima-shi.

4.2 Effectiveness of Tablets and Digital Storytelling

During the workshop, we aimed to explore ways to convey participants’ experiences and thoughts, using a tablet device and a form of Digital Storytelling. The tablet devices were effective for this activity for a number of reasons. First, the tablets were all-in-one. That is, the students were able to take photos, record narrations, edit slideshows, and share their work without needing additional peripheral equipment. Moreover, the tablets had high mobility for fieldwork outside and allowed them to complete their tasks in a short period of time. Second, the tablets were easy to operate. Most students had a personal smart-phone and were accustomed to similar interfaces in everyday life, which allowed them to operate the tablets with minimal instruction. Indeed, we feel the tablet devices expanded individual capability. The tablets facilitated self-reflection, by digitalizing what the students saw, heard and experienced, and allowed for self-made creation and self-expression. This is one possibility with regard to using tablets, which facilitate the liberation of an individual’s media expression with more elaborated programs.

The Digital Storytelling allowed the participants to hone and express their deep thoughts. Participants were able to sharpen their feelings on a short timeline (i.e., by re-constructing their experiences during the process of finding a theme for their story, choosing photos, and verbalizing their feelings). As they created the narrative, students were clearly aware of their own feelings and consciousness. Another point in their favor was that, the Digital Stories were comparatively easy to make – each “film” comprised photos, text captions and narration. Very little technical instruction was necessary. If they were creating traditional movie clips, using video cameras and editing software, it would be necessary to provide explanations that would have consumed a fair amount of the allotted time. Moreover, perhaps the most important aspect of the Digital Storytelling is that they could pack and crystallize feelings and thoughts “in the moment.” Later, these moments could easily be shared with others. The movie files of the Digital Stories repeat participants’ perceptions and thoughts so that they are not forgotten, and this can be shown to many people at any time in any place. Indeed, the narrations that accompanied the Digital Stories evoke their emotions at that time.

5. Further Consideration

During a two-day workshop, students were exposed on-the-ground reality and understood the vast suffering caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake. They started thinking about what actually happened in the wake of the disaster, and most students felt compelled to do something themselves to aid reconstruction. To move forward, we consider several challenges of using a
tablet device and Digital Story production.

In this workshop, there was a tendency toward individual work and less interaction with in the groups. There may be a need for new applications or program designs adjustments that promote group work. There was also a tendency for students to tell similar stories. Commonly, students focused on the suffering experiences in the damaged area and the will of the residents to recover in the face of severe conditions. It is likely that the workshop design inspired similar conditions. That is, we asked participants to sort their photos as either “confirmation” or “findings” and encouraged sequences for a story based on this binary. This design was meant to facilitate awareness, but it also may have generated similar awareness and approach to the stories. New workshops can be designed to help engender other storylines, and we should keep trying to explore ways to elevate people’s media expressions and openness to different perspectives.

Acknowledgement

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Notes

2) For details of the world movement of digital storytelling, see Hartley and McWilliam (2009) and Tsuchiya (2013).
3) We use the sequence worksheet designed by a dialogic Digital Storytelling project “Media Conte” (http://mediaconte.net/).

References


