Chapter III

Digital Storytelling: Culture, Media and Community

Kevin W. Tharp, Central Queensland University, Australia
Liz Hills, Central Queensland University, Australia

ABSTRACT

This chapter considers the significance of digital storytelling as a force for community cultural development in global and regional contexts and as a means of transforming regions. The primary focus is on practice, which will prove useful to both the community informatics practitioner and ethnographic or participative action researchers. This is achieved by contrasting the traditional ‘top down’ approach to media and cultural production with the rise of community-based digital storytelling. The authors argue that community-based digital storytelling must take seriously the realities of the digital divide, and must consider the social, political, economic and cultural contexts of communities and their specific ‘relationship’ to digital technologies to ensure that communities have both access to, and the literacy and skills to engage with, the digital medium. The authors consider
specific examples that illustrate this approach and conclude by reiterating that access to digital technologies should be combined with community-based training programs, community based-goals and initiatives, and a commitment to principles of regional and global social justice.

INTRODUCTION

The attendees at the Information Technology in Regional Areas (ITiRA) 2002 conference, held in Rockhampton, Australia, (http://itira.cqu.edu.au) witnessed a powerful and emotive keynote presentation by Maori descendent Robyn Kamira. The presentation was about her family’s struggle to reclaim her grandfather’s memoirs about early Maori culture from the New Zealand government. While Kamira’s address spoke of the big ‘political’ issues the audience expected to hear in an ‘official’ academic keynote presentation, her address was also an extremely personal ‘story’: an emotionally compelling, human-centered and multidimensional example of the personal as well as the political. In her presentation, Robyn was both ‘academic’ and ‘digital storyteller’. In telling the story of her family’s and community’s battle over self-determination, self-articulation of indigenous issues and the difficulties of protecting indigenous cultural practice in the digital age, Kamira used the digital medium to great effect: rhythmically editing together text with images of her homeland, the sounds of waves crashing on a beach and the uplifting chorus of indigenous singers (Kamira, 2002). The telling of this story had a strong effect on the audience and the authors professionally and personally.

Kamira’s performance as a subject story (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) sought an emotive response from the audience, and invited the audience into the researcher-as-storyteller’s subjective view of what it meant to be her. In this performance, the audience saw the embodiment of the new mythology that Denzin (1997) considers as a way forward in the crisis of representation among interpretive researchers. This involves “starting with a story about themselves, explaining their personal connection to the project, and by using personal knowledge to help them in the research process” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In considering the dual role of the researcher as subject, there are calls to broaden the way that qualitative researchers gather information and insert themselves into the presentation of their findings through narrative and storytelling techniques (Bailey & Tilley, 2002; Fairbairn & Carson, 2002; Tierney, 2002; Vickers, 2002).

Rather than simply reinforcing her address, Kamira’s multimedia performance offered a glimpse into her cultural and personal contexts, grounding her firmly within the context of the research. It also provided a dimension that extended the audience’s emotional connection to the story and provided what Kamira called a balance between reason and emotion. Rather than simply being
Related Content

Housing Citizenship Through the Federation of Urban Poor in South Africa: A Human Capability Development Perspective
www.irma-international.org/chapter/housing-citizenship-through-the-federation-of-urban-poor-in-south-africa/204741/

Integrating ICT into Sustainable Local Policies
Antonio Caperna (2012). Regional Development: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 1116-1140).
www.irma-international.org/chapter/integrating-ict-into-sustainable-local/66168/

The South Australian Common Knowledge Community
www.irma-international.org/chapter/south-australian-common-knowledge-community/11458/

What Lessons Can We Learn for “Good e-Government” From a User-Centred Evaluation of the Websites of European Capitals?: Research-Based and Genetic Learning in the Study of Administration and Law
[www.irma-international.org/article/disability-issues-and-planning-education/116613/]