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Digital Storytelling: A Technological Approach

Reviewed by Katherine E. Perone

Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community. Joe Lambert. Routledge: New York, N.Y., 2013, 206 pages, ISBN: 978-0-415-62703-0.

Lambert's *Digital Storytelling* emphasizes the use of storytelling as a cultural artifact and tool for personal growth and community support. Communicating thoughts and emotions through stories strengthens the ability to engage individuals, groups, organizations, and communities worldwide. Storytelling creates an environment where language is power. Combining technology and storytelling to create digital storytelling results in a new medium to interrelate with others.

Digital Storytelling describes the use of technology to tell one's story. Throughout the book, Lambert challenges the reader to think about the questions "What shapes our stories?" and "How can we tell our stories in today's technological world?" An additional question to consider when reading the book is "What is the value of digital storytelling?" These questions address Lambert's central themes and he answers these questions throughout the book by sharing stories told by "common" individuals. Chapters 1 through 4 provides excellent examples of stories that shape one's life. His examples include stories about obstacles, achievements, people who have made a difference in one's life, and life changes. Many of his chapters conclude with a personal story followed by the author's interaction with the storyteller. This subtle but powerful tool engages the reader in the phenomenological experience of the collaboration involved in the process of creating digital stories. These personal stories describe the "soul of community" and how the story can be used to invoke community activism and education (Sandercock & Attili, 2010). Chapters 5 through 11 describe the tools used to tell stories using modern technology and address the question regarding how to tell a story through the use of technology. These tools include pictures, storyboards, and audio programs. The value of digital storytelling is depicted throughout the book but chapters 14 and 15 detail specific uses of digital storytelling.

Readers from diverse backgrounds will enjoy Lambert's easy to read instructional approach.

Chapter 5 illustrates this approach by explaining the seven elements needed, as determined by the author. These elements include ownership of insights, ownership of emotions, finding the moment, seeing the story, hearing the story, assembling the story, and sharing the story. These elements would not be considered evidence based, but a reflection of the author's lived experience of facilitating digital storytelling workshops over the past two decades. This chapter gives the reader an excellent recipe for digital storytelling, including the emotions evoked, the importance of visual, audio and tactile response, and the methods to tell the story. To illustrate the importance of the audience in sharing the story, Lambert describes how the "permanency story" of foster children can be used in social work training. Lambert's seven elements provide the reader with diverse approaches to digital storytelling, which includes audio, visual, and kinesthetic learning styles. Also included in this chapter is scholarly information about copyright issues when using other authors' material and providing useful information to academicians as well as lay people.

Lambert's mastery of storytelling and the rationale for digital storytelling is evident throughout the book. Although his examples are taken from his workshop participants, the reader gains a sense of how useful digital storytelling is in other arenas such as education, community activism, counseling, and healthcare. Chapter 14 is devoted to the application of digital storytelling in a healthcare setting. In this chapter, he describes a program called Patient Voices, which uses storytelling to advocate change in health care, and he incorporates a question and answer session with the founders of the program. They describe the value of digital storytelling in end of life care. This chapter demonstrates how digital storytelling gives terminal patients control to decide what story they want to share and what visual aids will be used to tell the story. Used in this way, this medium can provide closure for the patient and family.

The use of digital storytelling in higher education is discussed in the last chapter of the book. The chapter is authored by academicians from four state universities representing the East and Midwest. The chapter's authors provide examples of how digital storytelling can be used in the classroom as well as with faculty development. For example, Jacobs describes how digital storytelling strategies used in his course "Digital Storytelling in and with Communities of Color," required students "to think about the ways that the media had represented them and their communities" (p. 177) and to "speak back to those representations, to make their own representations about themselves and their communities" (p. 177). The chapter engages and challenges readers to brainstorm ideas on the use of digital storytelling in program coursework. Current articles written about digital storytelling emphasize the significance of the tool in education (Czarnecki, 2009; Morgan, 2014), and although the chapter was specific to higher education, digital storytelling can be used in all educational settings (Czarnecki, 2009; Morgan, 2014).

Links between theory and practice are a limitation of the book, especially for those who may wish to delve more deeply into the epistemological and methodological frameworks connected to digital storytelling pedagogy and outcomes. Lambert's descriptive terminology postulates narrative theoretical perspectives. These concepts include constructing and reconstructing one's story based on his or her worldview (White & Epston, 1990). Descriptive terms from narrative theory such as co-constructed, reframing, and identity construction to explain the importance of storytelling within the community framework are used within the book. Narrative theory gained prominence in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Bruner, 1987; Polkinghorne, 1988; White & Epston, 1990) and is a framework that encompasses the use of story as a tool of empowerment (White & Epston, 1990). Narrative theory is built on the idea that people's lives and relationships to others are shaped by their life stories. The uniqueness of the person is defined by his or her story and the interpretation of their stories. Issues related to self-concept, interpersonal relationships, and personal growth are explored, deconstructed, and reconstructed to develop a new story (White & Epston, 1990). This storytelling approach mimics

the book's design and linking the theory to his chapters would have strengthened the book's framework.

Another limitation of the book is its ongoing reference to the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS). CDS is a non-profit organization that provides workshops on digital storytelling. Chapter 6 is devoted to the CDS workshop model, and although relevant to the topic, the redundancy to the author's proprietorship may limit the reader in seeing digital storytelling beyond this particular framework (see Alexander, 2011, and Ohler, 2013, for example, for media and education-oriented perspectives on digital storytelling). If the reader can look beyond the strict adherence to the CDS model of digital storytelling, the book provides readers the tools needed to tell a story enmeshed in emotion, logic, and reflection.

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