

'First Person'

**International Digital Storytelling Master Class,
A.C.M.I., Federation Square, Melbourne,
3rd - 5th February, 2006.**

Master Class Report - Daryll Bellingham, Storyteller.

Summary

The masterclass was an excellent followup to the First Person conference. Numbers were limited by the size of the ACMI multimedia lab and the class booked out quickly. The class was well organised. The teaching was flexible and well supported by ACMI staff and volunteers.

It reinforced the principals, ideas and practice of Digital Storytelling within the Berkley (Centre for Digital Storytelling) model. The masterclass exercise - 'produce a 150 word script and digital story during the masterclass' provided a good example of how to go about digital storytelling workshops and projects in a professional and supportive manner.

In doing so, we all basically participated in a digital storytelling creation workshop from introductions and story circle to final showing of our finished products. Along the way Joe Lambert and Helen Simondson took turns in presenting different teaching techniques and in giving different examples of digital stories produced in different locations.

The class provided many examples of different digital storytelling ideas and approaches to use in further development. Most importantly though, it provided different models of how to teach digital storytelling techniques and some different approaches to specific sections of the training from the directors of two different institutes.

Notes

Introductory session - Monday afternoon, 6th February

The master-class group consisted of 16 students from Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Townsville, Beijing, Holland, Wellington, Alice Springs, and New Zealand ; two course leaders and approx 7 ACMI staff and volunteers.

Joe Lambert started with a discussion on the importance of the 'Story Circle' as a beginning exercise.

He then asked everyone to introduce themselves by answering the following questions:

- Who are you?
- Where are you from?
- What do you do?
- One line about your story?

We started around the circle telling or reading the rough drafts of our stories. We had been asked to come with a 150 word script. After listening to a few stories the group broke into two smaller groups to ensure that everyone's story was heard.

Part of the Story Circle process is the careful giving of feedback to each storyteller. Joe suggested things like:

- what worked? what you liked? and
- if you want to give suggestions phrase it something like - 'If it was my story, I might, ...!'

Joe then gave a quick introduction to the history of Digital Storytelling and his involvement since 1993 and a discussion about the '7 Elements of Digital Storytelling'. He then spoke about the ways in which people use digital stories.

A really good idea to encourage with someone beginning a DS is ask

- what am I trying to say?
- who to?
- why now?

The answers to these questions help create scripts, tone, style etc.

All good storytelling is resurrective, falling into chaos and coming out, the emotions of opposites.

- What we see/hear in a digital story is effectively two stories - the explicit story of the script and voiceover and the implicit story of the storyboard.
- Good use of metaphor can enhance the implicit story.

A useful creative exercise is the 10 photos movie. Place 10 photos in a line and use them to tell a story.

Visual narrative carries a lot of weight in human perception.

Developing skills in editing and compression is important. CDS recommends 250 or 375 words as a starting point for the script.

- BBC does a lot of work with performance i.e. not read.
- A shorter script helps relax.

Voice pacing and visual pacing are good skills to experiment with and develop.

Helen Simondson spoke about the ACMI approach to Digital Storytelling.

- We mix elements depending on the community and their needs
- Show a lot of digital stories
- Try to have the most relevant story for the community
 - make sure there's a light story in the mix
 - include a story done by facilitator/s
- often run a briefing session before workshop time
- encourage participants to think in different ways
 - relationship is around dialogue around story
 - think stylistically
- remind participants of copyright issues around music and the need to fill in release forms and ACMI's production music use forms
- will sometimes set home writing exercises before they see the group
- story is the essence not production values
 - i.e. discourage a lolly shop attitude to eg transitions
 - it is always - 'What is right for this story?'
 - 'the story will visualise itself'
- showed David Tytherleigh DS called 'The Little Frenchman'
 - about honouring the life of a neighbour who he believed the community had let down
 - noticed
 - piano music right from the start,
 - pacing
 - choices around dates and time, framework is not chronological
 - AB plot with a shift
 - stories that give tension that can be resolved are more involving
 - know when to shut up so audience has space and time to internalise
- Time management of workshop is critical.
 - ACMI ensures that everyone completes their DS in the workshop by paying close attention to time management and by having appropriate support at an individual level.
 - task completion white board important for staff to keep a check on what's what and encourages participants to maintain energy

(headings – Course no, Draft1, Draft2, Storybd, VO, Capture, Scan, Size, Rough Cut, Trans FX, Music, Titles, Fine, Release, Music Log, Feedback form, Master.)

Session 2 Joe Lambert

- Cookbook is freely reproducible anywhere on the planet.

Story Circle Suggestions

Joe

- the creative and group building energy of the circle is well worth it
- > 12 is hard
- time management is important so work out how long you have available and the time available for each participant and announce this
- suggestions for facilitation
 - 'Please allow storyteller to finish before giving any feedback or questions.'
 - 'Storyteller do you have any questions for us about your story?'
 - 'Group, in giving feedback, give constructive feedback first eg what worked, or what I really liked was ...'
 - 'Group, in giving suggestions don't say - 'You should.' Try - 'If it were my story I would do ...'
 - Be aware of how much each participant can take.
 - 'Storyteller, do you have enough feedback?'

Helen

- similar
- 'I like saying - ' What I really see is ...' or 'I see this ...' i.e. add some visual feedback
- and 'I could hear ...'

Joe

- if the story is not closed or resolved then reflective prose or poetry is often the answer.

Script Development suggestions

- 4x6 card exercise
 - fill a card with a story
 - prompts
 - Decisive moment
 - Mentor
 - Just didn't work
 - First stories
- 5 objects
 - pick 5 objects in a room or location or memory and use them or what comes up when you think about them to write a story
- Who am I?
- ***'You have to walk by the dragon and look it in the eye.'***

Facilitation

- Facilitation is basically - 'protect the storyteller' - the group will look after itself.
- Triage - not over working, where necessary suggest a break.

Session 3 Monday

Joe Lambert - Photoshop tutorial session

We've taught Photoshop because

- personal photos often have flaws and can be easily fixed in Psp
- knowing Psp is often a bottom level literacy to enter into this field
- Psp excites people and is a gift or a good return

Helen

- helps provide an understanding of the digital world
- setting absolute canvas size by using Psp eliminates jitter in pans when image is imported into Premier
- Premier handles Psp files
- Process of cropping and framing encourages people to experiment and think about their DS in a visual way

Joe

- think about which resources are limited in workshop situation and encourage people to work accordingly
- eg, scan multiple images quickly and then go back to lappie & Psp to process those images
- chose a problematical image and demonstrate working on
 - o focus eg sharpen filter
 - o exposure
 - o levels (bring outside tents to foothills of mtns is often optimal)
 - o unsharp mask (zoom into feature and sharpen)
 - o tint (show variations)
 - o cropping to Pal aspect ratio 720x576 @ 150 pix/cm
 - o polygonal lasso tool (save selection as alpha channel)
 - o clone stamp for retouching eg removing UFOs or remove a character and then fade in
 - o layers eg add lasso tool selection as new layer and change opacity
- takes approx 1hr 15 or 25 mins and provides a break from storycircle

Helen Psp tutorial content

- make sure we don't do too much in tutorial
- have prepared 'super-doggey' tutorial (Freddy and Dolly) that encourages participants to take it lightly

- show stories that use cropping in an interesting way
- depends on time available
- might not do Psp tutorial if people don't want to work on computers

Helen general tutorial subjects

- time/image approx 9 -10secs which leads to at least 20 images
- ACMI encourages lots of images i.e. leads to lots of choice
- participants can make use of stock library
- usually some time on the OS10 operating system eg
 - o mousing
 - o saving
 - o windows and finder
- need data projector for demo tutorial and DS display work

Adobe Premier tutorial

- 'cake cooking' metaphor
 - o cupboard or bins where we keep our ingredients
 - o timeline where we mix our ingredients
 - o monitor where we see the cake rising
 - o first of all have to go shopping with digital camera, scanner, vid cam to import to bin
- editing against the timeline so do VO (voiceover) first
 - o generally break VO into smaller sections
 - o if try to do one clean take from beginning to end participant is more likely to stumble
 - o small bits let you know where you are visually while editing
 - o demonstrate convention for moving audio (alt. A&B channels)
 - o demonstrate video editing
 - o image pan on long image (a la Wales school house) good fun carrot for kids
 - o moving alpha channel selection along Motion settings path
 - o titles
 - transparency in vid2 or increasing as alpha key fades in
 - add a slug of black video before and a fadin to first image

Essential

- keep stories safe
- guard against redundant back ups
- make it safe to use software
- storycircle is a 'magic process'
- best way to promote Digital Storytelling is to run workshops

Outcomes General

- all participants in Master Class finished their DSs and showed them to group at end
- some participants experimented with specific limitations eg only using free or open source software
- all participants received a copy of their completed DS on ACMI packaged DVD and a copy of source files if requested
- an email networking list was circulated
- all participants received copies of Photoshop and Premier Tutorials and CDS Cookbook

Outcomes Personal

- completed 'Making a Life' a memorial and honouring Digital Story about my father
- experimented with different video editing techniques
- learnt some new Photoshop techniques and tutorial techniques
- reinforced Adobe Premier tutorial techniques
- learnt some new workshop facilitation techniques such as
 - o long pan and alpha layer movement pan as carrot ideas for kids
- reinforced appreciation of some workshop techniques such as
 - o time management board
 - o importance of story circle
 - o protect the storyteller
 - o triage
- made new DS contacts in Queensland, Australia and overseas
- reinforced my conviction that development of Digital Storytelling art process and education in Queensland is timely and important

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