Digital Storytelling Notes - Process

The best way to create a Digital Story is with a group of people, some who have done it before and some who are brand new but all of whom will be pleased to be doing it with someone else and all of whom will have their own story to share with you. This is part of the ancient traditions of storytelling. Sharing stories and giving supportive feedback helps build community and creativity. We call it the 'Story Circle'. It makes a really good beginning and ending to a project.

So what do you bring along to a Digital Storytelling workshop or project?

1) Bring a rough draft of your story along. It should be about 200 - 300 words and in a form you can easily read out to the Story Circle.

2) You could also bring along some photos or other documents or sound or video files that you might be thinking of including. Don't worry if you don't know what to bring at this stage. Your workshop trainers will help and anyway your story might change.

What happens first of all?

Well we usually get together, introduce ourselves, find out some more about digital storytelling and then begin sharing our story ideas in the Story Circle. Your trainer will make sure that you only get supportive feedback of the type you ask for.

Of course you will hear lots of other story ideas and this will help you think well about your own. This session is usually fairly short and you will then be able to go home, or go off, and do some more work on your story or script.

Session 2
Voice-over
In this session you will record your story or do a voice over. There are lots of ways of doing this depending on the equipment available. You might use a microphone and record directly into some recording software on your computer. You might use a microphone and a mini-disc recorder or even use a digital video camera to record your voice.

Doing the voice-over is quite easy. If you make a mistake that's fine. Just record that little bit again and it can be edited into place later.

Images
In this session you will also be given some help with how to get your photo's and other images into the computer. This will vary depending on the software that is available on the computers. There are easy and quick ways of doing this whether you come with printed

snaps to scan or digital photos in your camera or on a CD. You may also be shown how to use a scanner to add images from documents. The number of images you will need will vary with each story but 30 is often a good approximation.

Storyboard
One technique that may be explained is the storyboard. This is a way of setting out your script so that you can decide what images might go with which parts of your voiceover. This way you can always go and find some more images to fill in some gaps before the next session.

Session 3
Putting it together
In this session you will be introduced to the video or movie editing program on the computers you are working with. You wont have to learn everything about the program, just enough to be able to put the different components of your movie together and have them all happen in time with the voice over.

If this is your first Digital Story it is likely that you will be introduced to one of the simpler programs such as MovieMaker on Windows systems or i-Movie on Apple Macs. A more capable program such as Adobe Premier, Sony Vegas or Final Cut Express may also be available.

Some participants may need more support in this section of the project particularly if you haven't used a computer before or have a particular need. It's possible that your trainers will have organised more staff or volunteers to help out here.

Capturing
Capturing is the term used for getting all of your images, video, music and sound effects together and into the program for editing. This is done slightly differently with each program but usually it involves using an 'Import' command to place all the photos in one folder or 'bin', video clips in another and sound files in a third.

Apple Macs have integrated this process by linking their standard i-Photo program for photos, the i-Music program for music and sound effects with the i-Movie program for the video and editing it all together.

It can help to 'resize' your photos and images to the frame size appropriate to your movie. For example - for a standard 4 x 3 ratio you can resize all of your images to 720 pixels wide to 576 pixels high at 72 dpi. This can help eliminate shimmer in your movie when zooming or panning happens and does keep your file sizes down.

Editing
Is a fairly simple process with a digital story. With most editing programs it is simply a process of dragging files out of the particular folders or bins and dropping them in the right order in the 'timeline'.

First you start with your voice-over. Drag it into the audio track and drop it where you want it to start. Usually you leave some space at the start of your time line for a 'slug' of black leader and your titles.

Then you start dragging and dropping your images and video clips (if any) one by one in their right order and so they roughly line up with your voiceover.

You can play this rough cut at any time and once you are happy with it you can come back and

start adjusting the length of time each image is shown for and the way each image changes to the next. This is also the time to add background music and sound or video effects.

Don't forget these transitions and effects should all help your voice-over tell your story better rather then competing with it for the viewers attention. As a general rule fewer and simpler effects and transitions will work better.

If you need or want music in your movie you might find it appropriate and fun to create your own with a program such as Acid Music Studio on Windows or Garage Band on Apple Macs. This also has the advantage of being your own music composition and therefore copyright free.

Sharing, Publishing and Copyright
Once you are happy with your final movie including your credits at the end you can 'release' it in a variety of forms.

In most Digital Story workshops or projects you will receive a DVD copy of your movie to play on your home computer, DVD player or data projector at a meeting.

You can also export them in a form suitable for uploading to a web site, emailing to friends, playing on a PDA or iPod or even possibly submitting it to be broadcast on TV.

It is important that, if you are using someone else's photos, images, video or music, that you ask permission and, if granted, acknowledge the gift in your credits. This includes files downloaded from the internet unless they are clearly described as for free public use or copyright free.

You may be asked to sign a 'Deed of Gift' agreement which describes if and how the organising body might add it to their collection and use your story for public showing.

The best part of the Digital Story project is seeing everyone's completed movies at the finishing Story Circle and giving feedback. It is quite exciting seeing the changes from uncertain beginnings to completed story ready to release to your world in the way that you chose.

Summary
Digital Storytelling is a very satisfying and often transforming process. Because of changes in home and school computers, digital cameras and software like iMovie or MovieMaker it is now relatively easy to produce our own movies and teach in community workshops.

The Digital Storytelling format with its emphasis on the voice of the storyteller, digital stills and short length can be highly effective emotionally, artistically and financially.

Publishing on DVD or as web movies means that it is accessible to people in classrooms, lounge rooms and offices around Australia and the world.

Creating digital stories as a part of a group builds community and transforms individuals.

Daryll Bellingham, 12th March, 2006 ©