

Hope Vale Digital Storytelling Project

Using the Camera: Telling Stories our Way

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Abstract

In 2007 the Hope Vale – Pelican project (now in its 6th year) inaugurated a digital storytelling component into the program. The project is a partnership between Hope Vale Elders (championed by Des and Estelle Bowen) and Pelican Expeditions. In 2007 Pelican Expeditions and the Elders invited Samia Goudie, a researcher and digital storytelling consultant, to pilot a digital storytelling project with Natalie Davey, a founding member of Pelican Expeditions. The Hope Vale – Pelican (HVP) project is mainly run out of Connie’s beach, Cape Flattery in Cape York. The success of this pilot resulted in the design and implementation of a larger digital storytelling media camp being embedded as a co-creative practice in the 2008 Hope Vale – Pelican project. This paper seeks to tell the story of this process and explore some of the early findings of both the benefits and problems of using digital storytelling to promote social and emotional wellbeing and caring for country with an Indigenous community within a trans-disciplinary partnership project.

Acknowledgements

We would like to note with respect that this paper contains the names, images and words of Indigenous people. All images and references to names and quotes have been given with permission.

The authors would like to acknowledge and give thanks to the Elders and community of Hope Vale, the *Guugu Yimithirr*² *Bama*³. We would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Connie’s Beach, Cape Flattery (*Yuuru*⁴) for welcoming us to share and learn together on the Country of their ancestors. We hope that the making of the digital stories and this research benefits the community and assists you in your endeavours to maintain your stories and culture for future generations.

Listen my people and children, don’t forget to carry out our speaking or languages and tell them the stories; don’t forget our traditional ways of living and eating, just don’t forget. (Elder Phylomena Naylor 2008, from Mangal Bungal story⁵, Hope Vale – Pelican digital storytelling project, *Milbi*)⁶.

¹ The project reported here forms part of Samia Goudie’s PhD research undertaken at Southern Cross University Lismore. Ethical clearance # ECN-08-090.

² *Yimithirr* mean ‘speakers’ (and *Guugu* is the language) of *Yimithirr*

³ *Bama* means ‘people’ in *Guugu*.

⁴ *Yuuru* is the *Guugu* name for Cape Flattery.

⁵ This story can be viewed at:

www.svpelican.com.au/pages/indigenous/hopevale/2008/clever.html

⁶ *Milbi* is the name of the collection of stories for the Hope Vale – Pelican digital storytelling project. The name means ‘stories’ in *Guugu Yimithirr* (see next note).



Figure 1. Phylomena Naylor in the Milbi (storytelling) tent, recording for DST project (Photo archives Indigenous Knowledge Centre, Hope Vale 2008).



Figure 2. Joseph Jack Palmer filming the seagrass study day on Pelican1 (Photo archives Indigenous Knowledge Centre, Hope Vale 2008).

New Ways Old Ways

The Hope Vale digital storytelling project became part of an annual project run by the Hope Vale community and Pelican Expeditions two years ago. The Hope Vale – Pelican project was formed from a unique partnership between the Hope Vale community (championed by Des and Estelle Bowen- Hope Vale Elders) and Pelican Expeditions. Pelican Expeditions runs a 62 ft catamaran designed for both marine science work and community engagement. The boat has been travelling up to Cape York annually for the past five years to run a series of programs with the Guugu Yimithirr based on returning to Country⁷ and particularly Sea Country.

The authors of this paper are a founding member of Pelican Expeditions and a researcher/digital storytelling consultant who were invited to help pilot a digital storytelling project as part of the overall Hope Vale – Pelican project program. The initial pilot in 2007 ran for 10 days. After the success of the pilot a more intensive program was planned for the 2008 program and was developed in partnership with the State Library of Queensland (SLQ)⁸ and ran for four weeks between September and October 2008. The program is run on a remote⁹ beach camp (Connie's Beach-Yuuru) in Cape York, north of Cooktown. The authors set up a digital storytelling team comprising of another digital storytelling trainer and for the first week of the program, a technical assistant and trainer from the SLQ.¹⁰ The team helped set up a digital media tent and worked co-creatively with the participants in the camp, which allowed the telling and making of stories digitally to be an integral part of the overall 2008 Hope Vale – Pelican project program.

This paper seeks to tell the story of this experience and explore some of the early findings of the benefits and problems arising in relation to using digital storytelling in this remote context.

The project formed part of a creative practice research component within Samia Goudie's PhD. Interviews were undertaken with participants and stakeholders to explore the experiences and values of using of digital storytelling to promote the social and emotional wellbeing and caring for country concepts that were expressed as important for this Indigenous community.

⁷ 'Country' as understood in Aboriginal English, 'is not only a common noun but also a proper noun. People talk about country in the same way they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, feel sorry for country, and long for country. People say that country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, and is sorry or happy. Country is not a generalised or undifferentiated type of place, such as one might indicate with terms like "spending a day in the country" or "going up the country". Rather, country is a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness, and a will towards life. Because of this richness, country is home, and peace; nourishment for the body, mind and spirit; heart's ease.' (D. Rose, quoted in Mulligan and Martin 1996, p. 237).

⁸ This partnership was part of the SLQ's Indigenous Knowledge 'Keeping cultures strong' program which is part of the roll out of Indigenous Knowledge Centres in Cape York and Torres Strait. See: www.slq.qld.gov.au/about/who/orgchart/ils/ikc

⁹ There is no one singular culture in Indigenous Australia, but multiple cultures and identities. 'Remote' in this sense refers to regions where traditional cultures are located. These areas now respond to the impact of settlement and colonisation however retain in most cases a stronger sense and lived experience of what can be described as 'traditional- orientated culture' (Ginsburg 1994, 365).

¹⁰ Toni-Jayne Northcote: Digital storytelling consultant; James Leech: Project Officer-Keeping Culture Strong, State Library Queensland.



**Figure 3. Hope Vale kids near the camp
(Photo archives Indigenous Knowledge Centre, Hope Vale 2008).**

Background

The Hope Vale Aboriginal community is located in Far North Queensland on the Cape York Peninsula northwest of Cooktown. Hope Vale is home to several clan groups who mostly speak Guugu Yimithirr and English.

The Lutheran Church first established here in the late 1800's as the Cape Bedford Mission at Ellim beach. At the outbreak of World War II, the population was evacuated south to various communities including missions such as Woorabinda and later to Cherbourg and Palm Island (the island was basically used as a prison). The community members who followed Pastor Schwartz (called *Muni*¹¹ by the local people) were sent mostly to internment camps, such as on Palm Island. Muni was of German Lutheran descent and seen as threat to national security as he was feared to have Nazi sympathies. The people of Hope Vale were also perceived as a potential security threat. Tragically this meant the splitting up of families and a time of great loss for the Guugu Yimithirr people. The journey south in itself caused many deaths due to increased exposure to disease, cold and losing connection to Country. Hope Vale was re-established after the Second World War as a Lutheran Mission in 1949. The Aboriginal people from the Hope Vale and Cape Bedford Missions were settled there. The community later shifted about 22 km inland to its present site.¹² In 1984 Queensland established Deed of Grant in Trust (DOGIT) communities for the administration of former reserves. Hope Vale was the first community to receive a DOGIT in 1988 (Pearson 1989).

¹¹ *Muni* means 'black' in Guugu and 'Schwartz' means 'black' in German.

¹² A history of the mission involvement with the Hope Vale community is found in Pohlner 1986; and Haviland and Hart 1999 and general information can be found at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hopevale>



Figure 4. Map of Cape York Peninsula¹³

The Hope Vale – Pelican project is a collaborative effort between the Hope Vale community and Pelican Expeditions that has been taking place each September school holidays since 2004. Inspired in the first instance by a desperate plea for help from a young Hope Vale woman, Coraleen Bowen¹⁴, to support her in addressing a horrific rate of suicide and a prevailing sense of despair in the Hope Vale youth, the project has developed into a positive exchange of skills, healing and knowledge between project partners and the community participants.

The vessel *Pelican 1* arrives at the agreed time near the beginning of the September holidays after month long journey from her base in Melbourne. One aim of the program is to enable the Hope Vale community participants to reconnect with their Sea country (including important islands to the Bama such as Lizard Island (*Jigaru*)¹⁵) and that of their tribal neighbours. It is a time for cultural exchange and knowledge sharing between various age groups and the visitors. The experience offers community members a neutral and unique platform from which to escape the confines, stresses and oppression of overcrowded community life. In one of the Elder's own words, '(f)rom the oldest person to the youngest person - our objective is connecting TOs (Traditional Owners) to

¹³ Cape York Development Association. For more information on location see www.svpelican.com.au/pages/indigenous/hopevale/hopemap.html (accessed 17 September 2009).

¹⁴ Pelican Expeditions Hope Vale 2004 Captains Log. Available at: www.svpelican.com.au/pages/indigenous/hopevale/hopehistory.html (accessed 17 September 2009).

¹⁵ *Jigaru* is the Guugu Yimithirr name for Lizard Island and means stingray.

Country, working with marine parks, tagging turtles, learning about coral bleaching, cooking, respecting Country and Elders.¹⁶

This encompassing project enables participants to undertake various activities around environmental management, sailing and marine industry instruction, digital storytelling and cultural skills such as hunting, dance, cooking, weaving and painting. The key element is that all these activities are held on Country.

The Hope Vale – Pelican project's main sponsor has been the ANZ bank who was also asked by the organisers to invite some of their employees to take part in the program. In 2008 Pelican Expeditions received additional funding from the ICC (Indigenous Coordinating Centre). The digital storytelling project was funded separately through Arts Queensland with in-kind support from the State Library Queensland. The Hope Vale – Pelican project relies on an enormous amount of in-kind support from Pelican Expeditions and a range of other partners.

The Hope Vale – Pelican project is for the Hope Vale community and critically is directed by the Hope Vale community. The agenda, all activities and timing are driven in accordance with community need and ability. Over the period, development of the project has occurred as trust, commitment and understanding has been established between all the partners. The Hope Vale Life promotion officer Ms Estelle Bowen and her husband Desmond Bowen are the key community drivers. They are supported by a host of family and friends within the community who care deeply about the future for their children. Pelican Expeditions has a dedicated team of crew and project officers led by Captain Garry McKechnie.



**Figure 5. Pelican 1 during the 2006 HVP project
(Photograph by Sandy Scheltema)**

¹⁶ Des Bowen, Hope Vale Elder, 2008, Hope Vale Wiki, available at <http://hopevale.wikispaces.com/Pelican>



Figure 6. Raising the Aboriginal Flag on Pelican 1 (Photo archives Indigenous Knowledge Centre, Hope Vale 2008).

Background to Hope Vale – Pelican Project and Pelican Expeditions

Pelican Expeditions was formed following the making of a successful documentary called *If It Doesn't Kill You*.¹⁷ The documentary involved taking a group of six homeless teenagers into the wilderness of Bass Strait for a number of weeks and recording their lives as part of this journey. It was this program that prompted Coraleen Bowen from Hope Vale to contact the makers. She wanted to know if a similar project could be done with Hope Vale youth. Peter Malcolm¹⁸, on behalf of the newly formed group promised to do so but first they had to complete building the boat, *Pelican 1*, which was designed specifically for marine science work and community engagement. The boat took five years to build and one of its first projects involved sailing north from Melbourne to meet with the Hope Vale community.¹⁹

Pelican Expeditions has been operating for five years after launching their boat *Pelican 1* in early 2004. Their work involves marine research and innovative engagement programs designed to deepen the involvement of the broader community in the marine world. Their programs often involve working closely with Indigenous communities. Pelican Expeditions has used their website as a means of communicating directly both the content of their projects and as an online classroom.

The Hope Vale – Pelican project has generated a great deal of positive interest and the program has received quite a bit of media attention in both film and print. This interest has helped support the sustainability of the program but it also had some unwelcome

¹⁷ This first aired as a five part series on five consecutive Saturday nights on SBS in 1999 and was directed and filmed by the current skipper of Pelican 1 - Garry McKechnie

¹⁸ Peter Malcolm, Expedition Leader for Pelican Expeditions HVP from 2005-2008. Pelican Expeditions lost a founding member and friend in 2009 to cancer. See Obituary- www.svpelican.com.au/pages/peter.html

¹⁹ 'The Vessel', available at: www.svpelican.com.au/pages/vessel.html (accessed 17 September 2009).

impacts. To address these issues, inspiration was set in motion for developing alternative means of documenting the project and telling stories.

During the 2007 camp it became painfully clear that mainstream media was not used to reporting on programs that represent black and white working alongside one another, preferring to represent such projects in the light of 'white man saves black'. This approach was unfortunately revealed in a piece that went to air on the ABC's *7:30 Report* in 2007. In light of such misguided interpretations of the project it became clear to the Pelican team and the authors that the best way to document the program would be to further develop the pilot digital storytelling project into a larger program. Since the inception of the project there has always been a keen interest in supporting the Guugu Yimithirr people tell their own stories in their own way and to capture the unique nature of the time spent on Sea Country at Cape Flattery. Samia Goudie was introduced to the Natalie Davey while she was a Fulbright scholar in the US. It was immediately clear to Natalie that she would be the right person to help introduce digital storytelling to the Pelican – Hope Vale camp.

What is Digital Storytelling? Media and Technology in Indigenous Australia

The term 'digital storytelling' was first devised to describe a practice that was developed by a group of San Francisco social activists in the 1990's. This group of people collaborated with a number of artists, storytellers and media experts to develop workshops that would make stories using multimedia that was accessible for general public use outside of expert media production. Tools and techniques were developed in workshops to create first person narrative stories about people's everyday lives, which were then made into small (usually 2-5 minutes) multimedia stories. These stories could then be easily converted to disk, DVD or placed on web sites and shared through other online networking mediums. The work of these early activists and media makers continues under the guidance of Joe Lambert and team through the Centre for Digital storytelling, (CDS) in San Francisco. Today the CDS is considered one of the leaders in digital storytelling throughout the world (Lambert, 2006; Burgess 2007).

Digital storytelling has since grown and now is a worldwide practice that is blossoming in many countries. The practice was undertaken and developed further by projects in many communities such as the BBC Wales in 2001, with Daniel Meadows who also contributed greatly to this field. In Australia digital storytelling has developed through the Australian Centre for Moving Image, the Queensland University of Technology through their Creative Industries faculty and later with library projects such as at the State Library Queensland Indigenous Knowledge 'Keeping Culture Strong' project.

Many academic and grassroots partnerships such as ours have flourished in Indigenous communities where new media and digital storytelling have been developing for many years. The Yolngu people of Arnhem Land in particular have had a long collaboration with university professor Michael Christie²⁰ and have a well-developed profile with new media, music and technology. Other Indigenous communities around Australia have also used this form to communicate important cultural materials.

Work in the Cape has been undertaken using new media and digital forms to document conservation and sea country knowledge, language and history through initiatives of the TKRP (Traditional Knowledge Revival Pathway)-Balkanu (see Standley, Bidwell, George

²⁰ See www.cdu.edu.au/research/profiles/profile_christie.html for Christie's work.

and Steffenson in this issue of *3CMedia*) and The Cape York Institute. Indeed some of the Hope Vale community, who have been involved in digital storytelling training, have previously been involved in training with TKRP. Other work in the area of conservation and the bringing together of 'Old ways and New ways' through the dialogue of science and Traditional Knowledge's is occurring around Australia through organisations such as North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA) and with collaborations with forestry, parks management, fire management projects, fisheries and so forth.

The late 1990s in Australia saw the development of broadband capabilities and the technological advancements that made this practice even more accessible to a larger population and now in 2009 we see a number of communities using this practice here in Australia and across the world.²¹

The use of digital storytelling is developing rapidly and the practice is much more than just a media form based on technological production. According to Burgess (2007, 192), '(t)his form of digital storytelling can be understood not only as a media form, but as a field of cultural practice'.

Aboriginal communities have a well-established history with media, especially the use of community media. Radio and TV have developed as sites to build self-determined representations and demonstrate resistance to mainstream representations and narratives of Australian Indigenous life and culture. A natural development from the success of community radio and visual media quickly became an accessible means to connect and disseminate messages in culturally appropriate and relevant ways in remote and diverse communities. Television and film media developed rapidly, primarily as a method to broadcast health messages and political issues, as well as acting as a type of community billboard for local news and events.

In the 1980's the formation of Aboriginal owned and run media centres developed. As access to cheaper equipment became possible, the ability to distribute content independently emerged. The first such media centres developed in Central Australia and not only challenged licensing and legal requirements for broadcasting, but fast became leaders in remote area broadcasting and was articulated in the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS) Guidelines for remote media broadcasting which was developed in 1987. This type of broadcast was implemented in response to community concerns about the impact of TV on Indigenous communities cultural and traditional life if introduced without consultation and protocols.

The authors consider this concern to be of extreme importance and thus attempted to follow the wishes of the Elders and community in the design of the digital story project at Connie's Beach. Lydia Buchtman explores this issue with the Warlpiri people and asks, '(w)hether Traditional culture/social practices have been damaged or enhanced by new technology' (Buchtman 2000, p. 61). Faye Ginsburg explores these issues further and notes that new technology particularly digital media that is web based, has been embraced ambiguously by Indigenous people (Ginsburg 2007). The debate about cultural production, ownership, traditional culture versus western technology and the notion that democratising media and bridging the so called 'digital divide' is a self determining and

²¹ samiastories.wordpress.com/2008/09/04/hopevalepelican-project-research-proposal/

political action, which replicates ongoing issues that emerge when seeking pathways to bring old ways and new ways together.

These debates are important and allow diverse voices to be heard. Each community needs the ability and agency to decide and control how media and technology should be used and importantly for whom it is produced. During a number of discussions and interviews with Elders during this project, the question was raised about how this new media would impact Indigenous culture. Elders recognized the feeling of being trapped between two worlds and hoped that this new technology would not further remove their younger generations from traditional ways of being and doing but could become a way to re-engage the youth with the Elders and renew and re-vitalize traditional knowledge and culture and make it meaningful in the present.

With this story telling, I think it's very important for us, well it goes way back to the Dreamtime, around the campfires elders would tell the story and where different people come from and what clan and our stories, but today it's very confusing for our Bama because we are caught in two worlds. One is our own custom, culture and the other is Western way of living and there are more and more people losing our stories, our culture and most of them know they are traditional....Then I realized this is the way to go today, this is like everybody else says this is the modern world, so we got to keep up with the modern technology and no longer can we work in isolation, we have to bring the two circles in and where it overlaps this is where we should be concentrating and by connecting old ways and the new technology, but keeping in mind, keeping inside the storytelling in the modern day of this higher technology, you know.²²

Imparja, Walpiri Media and CAAMA Media still lead the way in this arena and have produced out of their ranks some of Australia's finest film makers and directors. These organisations also contribute a large amount of the content into the national media initiative Indigenous Community Television, which now operates across Australia. These organizations have long standing programs of training, archiving and research that contribute to the further development of Indigenous Australian media and the cultural ownership and safe keeping of Knowledge by communities.

The remoteness and distance between different Indigenous Australian communities and between urban-based Australia has meant that this medium not only linked up people in remote areas but also has become a viable way to contest mainstream dominant narratives of life for Indigenous Australians. The stories made by Indigenous media centres and filmmakers invite viewers to both participate and observe culture and events from an insider position, returning the gaze of the lens. The stories and method of construction allows for different worldviews. The portrayal and description of Indigenous life as felt, seen and lived by Indigenous people contests dominant narratives. Indigenous media production has no doubt contributed to the maintenance of Indigenous culture but has also affected mainstream imagination and memory, contributing to changing opinions as well as effecting political sentiments in relation to Indigenous issues in general (Buchtman 2000; Michaels 1994; Langton 1993; Molnar & Meadows 2001).

²² Interview with Des Bowen, Elder, Connies Beach, 2008.

It is a natural follow-on that digital storytelling should be readily taken up in Indigenous communities as another accessible means for cultural production. From July 2006 to July 2007, Samia Goudie travelled to the USA to explore the ways new media, especially digital storytelling, were being used in Indigenous communities. She presented a number of workshops and shared experiences with other Indigenous filmmakers and media communicators from North and South America. Everywhere she went individuals and communities were excited and very quickly wanted to be involved and learn how to use this medium (if they had not yet done so). The communities worked with expressed a desire to use the medium to share and connect with other Indigenous communities directly.²³ It was during a workshop at the University of Arizona that one of the workshop organisers, an Australian expatriate and lecturer in Public Health, Jennie Mullins, became aware of Samia Goudie's work in digital storytelling and subsequently passed on contact details to Pelican Expeditions (Ikin & Goudie, 2007).



Figure 7. Hope Vale Elder Des Bowen with young person recording on Pelican (Photo archives Indigenous Knowledge Centre, Hope Vale 2008).

When an Elder talk to our young people, They (young people) will say this is modern (sic), (modern) day not the old way. So hey this modern (sic), (modern) day modem (sic, (modern) technology is the way to go.²⁴

Digital Story Telling at Cape Flattery

The camp at Cape Flattery is remote, mainly due to the fact that you have to cross a magnificent dune system to get to this part of the coast. Much of the equipment and activities for the camp has to be barged in from Cooktown, and all other materials and people have to be brought in by four-wheel drive. The journey to Cape Flattery takes approximately five to six hours from Cooktown, and constitutes some intricate sand dune driving and careful calculation of tide timetables for a beach section of the drive.

²³ See author's website -samiagoudie.blogspot.com/

²⁴ Des Bowen, Hope Vale Elder, 2008, Hope Vale Wiki, available at <http://hopevale.wikispaces.com/Pelican>

All amenities need to be brought in for a month long camp, demanding much careful preplanning and organisation. The site itself is very beautiful but also presents many challenges due its isolation, climate and wildlife.



Figure 8. Ashley's crab
(Photo archives Indigenous Knowledge Centre, Hope Vale 2008).



Figure 9. Cape Flattery
(Photo archives Indigenous Knowledge Centre, Hope Vale 2008).

The climate is tropical, warm and quite humid at that time of year. Wildlife concerns include crocodiles and snakes such as taipans. The last camp saw a large crocodile swimming the length of the beach nearly every afternoon.

The digital storytelling team set up a large media tent supplied by the Department of Communities. The beach environment and nature of how the equipment was being used meant that ingenious solutions had to be devised to protect and ensure that it could all be used again. The State Library of Queensland (SLQ) has been developing the ability to work in remote areas with a portable media kit and through discussions with the authors, assembled the digital storytelling kit to suit the needs of this particular project (SLQ, 2008 p. 27). This remote digital storytelling kit is now part of SLQ resources and can now be used for similar projects in remote locations. The kit comprises a generator to power the system in remote areas, PC laptops, digital cameras, video cameras, scanner, printer, and sound recorders. The SLQ also provided a data projector to show films and share other digital stories with the participants. The data projector was used on the final performance night to show all the digital stories made at the camp.

The program for the beach camp and sailing involved a broad and lively range of activities in which participants could involve themselves within the areas that are of the most interest to them. The activities took place on both the beach and the boat. The beach activities were led by creative practitioners and included Traditional dance (William Brady), Hip Hop (Speak Out) and Contemporary dance (Tamara Pearson), percussion and singing (Speak Out), Men's culture tent, spear fishing and hunting, the Australian Football League Cape York 'Health for Life Program', Culture and Learning forums with Elders and teachers from Hope Vale, weaving (with the Cultural Centre Elders) and learning computer skills.



Figure 10. Dancing with William Brady and Tamara Pearson (Photo archives Indigenous Knowledge Centre, Hope Vale 2008).

2008 saw a larger beach program than in previous years of the project. Over the years a wish list grew as the Elders formed ideas about the possibilities of the project. Due to an increase in funding we were able to incorporate many new activities into the 2008 camp.

In relation to the digital storytelling component there were movie nights held around chosen themes to support interest in activities or around specific issues brought to the attention of the digital storytelling team by participants (particularly around health issues).

The activities on the boat included marine research involving the documenting of sea grass varieties²⁵, learning the importance of maintaining sustainable environments for the dugong, turtle populations and turtle tagging²⁶, sea skills such as sailing and coxswains training, day sails and memorial trips (such as the Muni day celebrations²⁷) and a longer kayaking trip supported by the Department of Communities.²⁸



Figure 11. Aboard Pelican 1 (Photo archives Indigenous Knowledge Centre, Hope Vale 2008).

The digital storytelling component of the program was embedded within all the activities of the camp. The benefit of having a broad array of activities meant that everyone could find at least one or two activities that they were drawn to and perhaps had an interest in documenting. A digital storytelling trainer was present for each activity and participants

²⁵ The seagrass mapping was done in partnership with the Cape York Peninsula Marine Advisory Committee (CYMAG). See www.cymag.com.au/icreate/default.asp

²⁶ From the Captains log, Pelican website 2008 '29/9/08: 'The last three days of the camp also feature the turtle tagging project run by Queensland Parks and Wildlife scientist Ian Bell. Ian is well known at Hope Vale. He first started working with them in 1996 but has been a vital part of this project since 2005 and has also involved trainees from Hope Vale in other work with turtles up and down the coast. He describes himself as a turtle researcher turned conservationist. In his words "the results are in"... turtles are under serious threat in northern Australia from a variety of causes. Habitat loss, commercial harvesting in other countries, chemical runoff, climate change, feral pigs eating their eggs, boat strike, commercial fishing by-catch and indigenous hunting, (in particular the practice of targeting pregnant females for the pot as the extra fat they carry at that time makes them very delicious). Ian works directly with community to catch, measure, and tag and release turtles and to monitor turtle numbers. We share his view that involving local community in these monitoring and education programs is the best way to negotiate positive outcomes and ensure that subsequent generations of indigenous people will continue to harvest turtles. The young men love to work with Ian, which involves leaping out of speeding boats and wrestling turtles to the surface with their bare hands. In Des Bowen's words, "the 'Hope Vale Turtle and Dugong Management Plan' has been sitting on the shelf gathering dust for too long. It is time that we involved the whole community as well as scientists and government agencies in updating Hope Vale's policy, strategy and implementation for turtle and dugong conservation and management."

²⁷ See www.svpelican.com.au/pages/indigenous/hopevale/2008/muni.html

²⁸ See www.svpelican.com.au/pages/indigenous/hopevale/2008/warriors.html

would be offered the use of equipment and trained if they showed an interest in recording and possibly making a story. Being actively involved throughout the whole camp meant that digital storytelling could develop organically as an embedded practice alongside of the activities. This process allowed the youth and community to develop their skills and stories at their own rate and gave them a variety of avenues to explore the telling of their own stories and reflecting on their experiences during the camp.



Figure 12. Mason interviewing Alita (Photo archives Indigenous Knowledge Centre, Hope Vale 2008).

I think by grabbing a camera or video and interviewing the Elders it's bringing the Elders and youngsters together. We are building bridges here and working on respect, reviving the old ways but using modern day ways of getting the message out.²⁹

Research – Methodology

Samia Goudie conducted this research as part of her PhD with Southern Cross University Lismore NSW and supported by the CRCAH (Co-operative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health), with permission and according to National Ethics protocols and under the guidance and with permissions of the community, Elders, Pelican and stakeholders.

The findings from the interviews will be used for the benefit of the community and stakeholders to support work in future projects and to help us refine and improve the project in the future.

The methodology is modelled on the organic process of developing the project from the inside out, with both participants and researcher as co-creators. The guiding principle of this methodology is embodied in the centrality of relationship and deep listening, flexibility, ownership and returning of materials. The project thus incorporates principles of qualitative and participatory action research (PAR) located within an Indigenous research perspective (Crotty 1998; Denzin & Lincoln 2000; Fontana & Frey 2002; Gubrium & Holstien 2003; Martin-Booran, 2001; Smith 2002).

²⁹ Interview with Elder Des Bowen, Connies Beach, 2008.

The research design involved a qualitative methodological framework consistent with Indigenous research principles (Smith 2002) that use semi-structured interviews and 'yarning up' conversations to explore the experiences and reflections of the participants involved in the process.

The aim of the research component of the project is to explore the impact on Indigenous people's sense of wellness, and through the use of digital storytelling as an embedded practice within the camp, capture the actual experiences of participants. The project focused on the link between perceptions of Indigenous wellness and how identity and sense of place 'Caring for Country' is experienced through the telling and creation of digital stories told in the first person on Country.

Outcomes

During the 2008 digital storytelling camp eighteen stories were completed and screened on the last night of the camp during a lively closing celebration. The response by the community was extremely positive. The participants themselves felt very proud and people who saw the stories for the first time also expressed their surprise and pride at all the work that participants had undertaken. Many of the people attending commented that it gave them a new way to reflect on what they had been doing and allowed them to see some of the other activities in the camp that they had not been involved with.

Community camp participants who had not directly been involved in making stories commented that they would definitely be involved next year in the project and that they could see how important the digital storytelling project could be for developing agency and voice within the community.

This activity led to a communal reflection in the camp debrief about the importance of researching the history and communal stories of the Guugu Yimithirr. One of the stories made, called *The Guugu Yimithirr Sea Warriors*, created excitement for pursuing further research and creating a history of navigation and sea country journeys by the Guugu Yimithirr to Lizard Island and the surrounding islands. It ignited interest in how travel between islands was undertaken and how the original canoes were constructed. The screening of *The Guugu Yimithirr Sea Warriors*, subsequent reflections about the journey and the meaning of undertaking the journey expressed through making a digital story demonstrated the power of communal storytelling.

This practice is common to many Indigenous Oral history traditions where the importance of communal stories is always inclusive of diverse versions of the one story, ensuring all parts of the story are represented in the retelling for the community memory and that through stories we hear who we are (Silko 1986).

There was also interest from the Cultural Centre in using digital storytelling to document the lives of Elders and artists and for stories in language (Guugu) to be created. The Hope Vale School, which had already been using digital storytelling to some extent, also expressed their support for the project. By bringing learning and literacy from outside of the classroom and integrating it into the students' lives and it strengthened the importance and relevance of western-based education for youth and their families. In general, the interest in researching history and culture and using new media and digital storytelling to record the stories generated a great deal of new interest in learning across new and old ways. The project elicited responses and questions about the impact of new technologies on traditional practices and explored ways in which these modes of

technology can be used to renew cultural practices by showing the importance of traditional practices for the Bama through documenting and archiving them. The involvement of the community in this practice of making the stories creates an avenue to broaden participation across all cultural practices in the community, both as observer and creator. The Elders expressed the view that this medium has potential to be used in a wide variety of ways within the community that will support and maintain traditional practice whilst bridging the digital and generational divides.

The media tent at Cape Flattery became a communal space to meet, charge phones and equipment and run workshops. Regional artists from Speak Out worked closely with the team and assisted with sound recording, mixing and composition on some of the stories. Overall approximately 150 people participated in the camp. Of these, 51 (one third) visited the storytelling tent and took part in training and using the equipment. The Hope Vale – Pelican digital storytelling project made eighteen complete stories and collected 9,000 individual images along with 35 soundtracks and recordings, and approximately twelve separate video sections ranging from two minutes to one hour in length. These media were all archived with the Indigenous Knowledge Centre in Hope Vale. As part of her PhD research, the researcher undertook 32 interviews during the camp to explore the experiences of participants.

The eighteen stories were presented back to the community in Hope Vale at the Indigenous Knowledge Centre by the authors and at an assembly at the local school. A special edition DVD was made for the participants and the stories posted to YouTube, Hope Vale Wiki, Pelican website and the researcher's website.

Conclusion

This project and research reaches beyond just benefiting the direct community it was designed for and may have relevance for other Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Some of the early results indicate that digital storytelling as a tool contributes and provides much needed evidence to support the use of trans-disciplinary approaches in programs such as those which are arts, science and sport based. Digital storytelling, as an embedded practice and an evaluation tool, can be used to demonstrate that these programs do contribute greatly to the improvement of social and emotional wellbeing, and for the health of Indigenous communities.

The ease and accessibility of using digital storytelling encourages new voices to become community archivists and storytellers. It encourages youth – with the support of Elders – to take vital leadership roles in developing future initiatives and becoming trainers themselves, thus ensuring sustainability outside of expert media centres and a non-reliance on high end user access or equipment. For this reason PCs were used, due to fact that the digital storytelling software is readily available and free to download on PCs. Computer use is nearly all PC based in Hope Vale and other communities so PCs are also best for compatibility and sustainability.

The flexible approach explored in this project allowed participants to create stories which help shape and broaden concepts of the current practice of digital storytelling outside of accepted methods of western storyboard design and allow for a more participatory and natural unfolding of skills and methods to develop. Klæbe & Burgess (2008) speak of the value of digital storytelling for developing participatory practice and note that despite most digital stories being undertaken in institutional contexts, there is 'no one thing that is digital storytelling; in practice it is shaped and reconfigured to fit the goals and

ideologies of each of these contexts – from public service broadcasting to community activism and education'.³⁰ They also note the similarity of this practice to the traditions of oral history in Indigenous communities.

The trainers within this project avoided overtly intervening with the processes of participants by taking a non-prescriptive approach to the construction of their stories. The result is an attempt to allow authentic voice in the first person to emerge. The trainer's role is that of support in co-creating the stories and following the direction of the participants. This process resulted in a number of themes to develop beyond the more accepted digital storytelling style of an autobiographical narrative. Of the eighteen completed stories these could be described as including: literacy stories, where the focus of the story was on language and technological skills and: other styles, which could be described as educational, documentary and archival.

Reflective retelling of events undertaken in the camp formed the bulk of stories. Many of the stories, whilst having one distinct participant who carried through the project to completion, had many other people involved in various stages. Some of the stories were communal and in this way mirrored more traditional understandings of Indigenous oral and communal storytelling. Indigenous Australian culture is participatory in culture and not performative traditionally. Thus embedding digital storytelling as an active component of cultural activity within community naturally becomes participatory.

The ability to continue this work in the community through the Hope Vale School, Indigenous Knowledge Centre and Cultural Centre keeps the program sustainable and relevant to the community. The Hope Vale School is using digital storytelling within their classes and the Cultural Centre has expressed a desire to do more hands on work with the elders in gathering oral stories.

The expansion of the concept to other communities to form sister – brother communications through digital storytelling and the creation of curriculum using digital storytelling to link Western science and Traditional knowledge together is work that Pelican Expeditions is now undertaking in Victoria with Koori kids and Elders.³¹ The stories will also be available for these communities to share each other and hopefully create vibrant links between these diverse communities.

The Sea Country work³² shown in the digital stories also supports the growing body of work that indicates the inclusion of 'Caring for Country' as a relevant and important health determinant for indigenous people. Burgess et. al. (2008, p.2) suggest, '(t)here is a clear and urgent need for effective Indigenous health interventions. Indigenous Australians assert that their relationship to ancestral land and sea is a prerequisite for health. This relationship is poorly understood, unmeasured and receives tacit recognition'.

Early findings in the research indicate that digital storytelling and new media supports and enhances existing programs within the Hope Vale – Pelican project and contributes

³⁰ Burgess & Klæbe, 2008

³¹ In late 2008 Pelican Expeditions was awarded a Community Coastcare grant for the project: Two Bays - Caring for Sea Country.

³² www.svpelican.com.au/pages/indigenous/hopevale/2008/conservation.html

to building capacity and developing social and emotional, cultural and spiritual wellbeing for the Guugu Yimithirr people.

This finding is also evidenced through many similar projects across Australia and internationally. The Elders within this project have expressed a hope that, in the future through using the medium of digital storytelling within the Hope Vale community, their stories, cultural history and efforts can become a valuable asset for future generations and help maintain language and Cultural Knowledge.

How the Guugu Yimithirr Bama and Traditional Owners take hold of this technology and medium in the future for the benefit of their community is a development that will continue as this work and skill sharing between old ways and new ways develops. One of the young people, when asked what she felt about the Hope Vale –Pelican Project, stated, 'I like going to the camp and listening to my Elders. Maybe this year I can make a film about it. I know this helps keep the Culture alive and strong.'

And finally, a statement by Des Bowen:

I think by grabbing a camera or video and interviewing the elders it's bringing the Elders and youngsters together. We are building bridges here and working on respect, reviving the old ways but using modern day ways of getting the message out.³³



Figure 13. Kayak journey
(Photo archives Indigenous Knowledge Centre, Hope Vale 2008).

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³³ Interview with Elder Des Bowen, Connies Beach, 2008.

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