

Review:

Joe Lambert. *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community*, 4th edition (Routledge, 2012)

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This is the story about an icon.

I asked him one question, “How do I become a good journalist?”

He answered, “Tell me a story.”

His voice echoes in my head as I return to story as a way to make sense of more than just the ebbs and flows of the world around me,

but to make sense of the changes that occur within me.

When I was undergraduate student, I had the chance to intern at the prestigious news magazine, *60 Minutes*. The story above comes from a meeting I had with the late Mike Wallace. In *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating*

Community, Joe Lambert asks all of us to take “our deeply felt attraction to media” (5) which has worked to silence our own voices, and through digital storytelling, “become storytellers again” (5). Lambert asks his audience to consider the ways stories circulate and how “ordinary stories become extraordinary journeys” (10), that lead to a sense of increased social agency and connection among individuals and communities. The 4th edition builds on previous versions to include examples and guides, responses to changes in media, and foregrounds the vision needed to build a digital storytelling movement. Additionally, it provides a theoretical and methodological framework along with guidelines that help storytellers understand the fundamentals and purpose of dynamic digital storytelling.

Building on work already compiled by those who call for an increased inclusion of multimodal methods and participatory media to engage students (Selfe, DeVoss, Eidman-Aadahl & Hicks, Halbritter, Wysocki), Lambert’s book speaks to the ways digital storytelling practices have far-reaching benefits for a myriad of individuals, organizations, and communities both inside and outside of the classroom. The text is not meant to be read as a textbook, but rather as a collection of thoughts that have grown out of Lambert’s 20 years of experience as the director of the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS). Mostly, the text focuses on the gathering of personal stories into “short little nuggets of media called Digital Stories” (1) through a methodology Lambert calls Digital Storytelling. However, as the text shows, the applications of those “nuggets of media” have far-reaching applications in the lives of individuals, organizations, and communities. For instance, at the end of Chapter One, readers learn of a story created by a workshop participant chronicling her relationship with a friend who had AIDS. The story, which is incredibly moving, ended up serving as a memorial for the friend who died during the duration of the workshop. In an aside, Lambert explains how this particular story highlights the ways in which this story helps teach us all “a valuable lesson about dignity” (24).

The book is appropriately organized into three sections that build to provide readers with an in-depth understanding of not only how digital stories might be useful for social activism and educational work, but also how they can help individuals make sense of their

own experiences and ways of understanding the world: chapters 1-4 establish context for the work done at the CDS, chapter 5-9 provide information on how to create and foster the creation of digital stories, and chapters 10-15 discuss how digital storytelling work has been applied in various contexts. Each section is unique in style as the text is littered with anecdotes, personal stories, and interviews to help provide readers with incredible insight into the ways the creation of digital stories represent “lived experience” (117) which can help both creators of digital stories and audiences understand, connect, take action, and heal.

The first four chapters discuss the work of story and provide readers with an historical account of the CDS, and how it emerged as a non-profit organization intent on creating a space where people could create and share personal digital stories. Story, as Lambert points out, “has many jobs” (14) that function often as ways for storytellers to learn about and make sense of themselves and the world around them. Digital stories provide space for multiple modalities to be utilized to even further encourage the formation of social agency and identity. As Lambert puts it, stories cannot simplify the messiness of life, but they can help us “feel whole about the impermanence. We can bear to be ourselves”(14). Moreover, Lambert points to the types of personal stories we tell and categorizes them as such: stories about someone important, stories about events in life, stories about a place in life, stories about what we do, and other personal stories such as recovery stories (19-22), in an effort to begin thinking of the ways we might create digital stories. At the end of several chapters throughout the text Lambert provides examples (with links) of personal digital stories with reflections from facilitators on the process of creation, offering incredible raw insight into the digital storytelling process. These asides help us all begin to imagine the ways in which we might learn from the successes and failures of others who have worked to incorporate digital storytelling into pedagogies and practices.

Chapters 5-9 function primarily as a “how-to” guide to assist readers in beginning to foster digital storytelling practices within organizations and communities. Chapter 5 provides thorough explanations of what the CDS has identified as Seven Steps of Digital Storytelling (owning your own insights, owning your emotions, finding the moment,

seeing your story, hearing your story, assembling your story, and sharing your story) to help guide digital storytellers through the process of creation from inception to delivery. In Chapter 6, readers are provided with information on how to facilitate the creation of digital stories in a workshop environment by implementing practices such as the story circle, which assists in helping participants have a “transformational experience” (70). The chapter provides insight into the process from experienced CDS facilitators who have worked among a variety of groups and individuals to compose these stories. The detailed and specific advice regarding workshop timelines and activities is useful to those who want to engage in digital storytelling practices in classrooms or communities. Chapters 7, 8, and 9 provide even more suggestions, strategies, and practices to help facilitate various stages of the process from invention (storyboarding) to execution (digital design).

Following in Chapters 10–15 are explications of ethical and political engagement associated with the process of creating and sharing digital stories, the applications of such work, and interviews with professionals utilizing these processes in a variety of fields to different ends. These chapters provide a sense of caution and encouragement to those who seek to engage in such work as they unearth some of the difficulties the work entails, and the sensitivities inherent in execution of digital storytelling workshops. The insight provided through interviews of those who have adapted the CDS model for their own purposes within in specific communities is invaluable as it helps readers understand the ways in which such practices (which are often so deeply personal) require adaption and close attention to individual concerns in order to be facilitated with thought and care. For instance, Chapter 13 consists of an interview with Yvonne Pratt, who is currently utilizing a digital storytelling approach to help one indigenous community make sense of the trauma they have faced as a result of colonization.

The contribution of the work of Lambert that now spans two decades and those who have come to follow and build on the practices and processes developed by those at the CDS is wide-reaching and incredibly significant especially in our current age of media ubiquity. Digital stories provide an outlet for educators, activists, academics,

students, and citizens to begin to bridge the divides that separate us and recognize the elements that bind us together as human beings. This is the work of the CDS, and those that promote their mantra -- listen deeply, tell stories (190).

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