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Self-Representation and Decolonial Learning in Library Makerspaces: Indigenous Digital Storytelling

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Abstract

This paper explores how Indigenous digital storytelling (DST) can be used as a mode for self-representation and decolonial learning in library makerspaces. DST involves expressing your lived experiences and stories through a dynamic combination of textual and digital literacies. Implementing Indigenous DST programs allows library makerspaces to show the value of technology, digital and visual literacy, Indigenous Storytelling, and Ways of Knowing while letting Indigenous Peoples represent themselves and their lived experiences. Literature shows that creating and implementing Indigenous-centered DST programs helps decolonize makerspace programming. This literature review finds connections between the values of Indigenous Storytelling and DST and explores how Indigenous Peoples have used DST. Examining how libraries have used DST and Indigenous Storytelling so far, this paper addresses how a combination of these two practices can be adopted by library makerspaces.

Keywords: Makerspace, digital storytelling, Indigenous digital storytelling, decolonization, self-representation

Digital storytelling (DST) is the intersection between the traditional act of storytelling and modern digital skills such as recording, photography, filming, and editing. DST is the process of telling stories through video, often self-made and revolving around personal narratives. The final video product, a digital story, uses the storyteller's voice as the "structuring track" and is edited to include photographs, clips, art, music, sound effects, and other digital mediums (Raimist, 2019, p. 1). Library makerspaces are well-equipped with technology and expertise to offer

DST programming. DST presents an opportunity for libraries to merge technology and storytelling with education on Indigenous Storytelling and Ways of Knowing.

As a non-Indigenous person, the author of this paper would like to acknowledge this work took place on Treaty 6 Territory and Métis Region 4. She recognizes the responsibility to respect Indigenous Ways of Knowing throughout her work and is committed to the ongoing learning of this process.

This literature review addresses the following questions:

- Where are the intersections between Indigenous Storytelling and DST?
- What are the key ideas and benefits of both forms?
- How can libraries create and provide DST programming that helps Indigenous Peoples tell their stories?
- How can libraries contribute to DST goals of teaching relationality and self-representation?

Using integrative literature review methods, the connection between values of Indigenous Storytelling and DST are made evident. This paper examine how Indigenous Peoples have used DST and what libraries have done to support DST and Indigenous Storytelling to identify if and how DST practices can be adopted by libraries for use in makerspaces. It is important to acknowledge that “Indigenous Peoples” encompasses various and distinct groups of Peoples. Library programming should reflect and celebrate these distinctions within the local communities that they serve.

This literature review demonstrates that libraries should create and implement Indigenous-centered DST programs to help decolonize their programming. Library makerspaces can reveal the value of technology, digital and visual literacy, Indigenous Storytelling, and Ways of Knowing by providing spaces and resources for Indigenous Peoples to represent themselves and their lived experiences—without the imposition of non-Indigenous programmers teaching patrons about Indigenous topics in a way that potentially ‘others ’Indigenous Peoples. This paper lays the groundwork on how library makerspaces can incorporate Indigenous approaches to DST. Beginning with a discussion on how DST connects to Indigenous ideas of Storytelling and Ways of Knowing, Indigenous DST is shown to be a valuable practice. This paper outlines how DST methods have been used for Indigenous self-representation, agency, and

testimony, and for decolonial learning. This leads into a discussion about how libraries can utilize Indigenous-centered DST in their makerspaces to create valuable, respectful and creative programming. Finally, conclusions and considerations for implementing Indigenous DST programming at libraries are made.

What is Digital Storytelling?

The standard model for DST is created by the *Center for Digital Storytelling*, which hosts three-day workshops where people gather, brainstorm, write their stories, record voiceovers, find music and visuals, edit their videos, and share them with the group (Alexander, 2017). The storyteller's words and voice are the centerpiece of DST. The process involves expressing lived experiences and stories through a dynamic combination of textual and digital literacies. Couldry (2008) explains that DST can be considered a political act. Digital stories are democratizing because they are created "outside the boundaries of mainstream media institutions" (p. 386) and can make an impact on public knowledge about an issue when distributed widely. Today, alternative outlets for media, such as social networking websites, provide increased access and familiarity for people to create, share, and discover stories. Stories shared through this format can "increase[e] understanding across generations, ethnicities and other divides" (p. 387).

Digital Storytelling and Indigenous Storytelling

Storytelling is deeply important to Indigenous Peoples—it is how Indigenous Peoples pass on traditions and values to their families and communities (Archibald, 2012). Insights and reflections from lived experiences are sources of "fundamental and important Indigenous knowledge" (Archibald, 2012, p. 7). Christensen et al.'s (2018) book on Indigenous Storytelling, *Activating the Heart: Storytelling, Knowledge Sharing, and Relationship,* discusses how storytelling is a significant method of knowledge sharing. Storytelling can be a political act when it is used in new spaces because it "can provide a counter-narrative" to dominant political discourses (p. 170).

DST has technical similarities to Indigenous Storytelling, including multimodality (the mixing of different materials and forms) and the focus on voice. DST has key departures from traditional oral storytelling, including being recorded and preserved in a digital format, a pressure to keep things short for online attention spans, standardization

of online video styles, and lack of control over desired (or undesired) audiences (Couldry, 2008). However, sharing Indigenous stories online is not wholly incongruent to the traditions of oral storytelling. Iske and Moore (2011) explain that Indigenous storytellers have always adapted to engage listeners (e.g. providing extra context for new listeners). It may be viewed as a different way to share stories with a wider community (Mills et al., 2016). Hopkins (2006) describes how oral traditions are thought to be unchanging, but stories do change and are dynamic from community to community—Indigenous DST is an extension of this tradition. DST is one way to continue the tradition of Indigenous Storytelling and teach it to new audiences. Fletcher and Mullet (2016) found that DST workshops are effective for communities who are used to learning through oral storytelling traditions. DST will not be everyone's choice method for storytelling, but as Archibald (2012) explains, for Indigenous Peoples "to understand ourselves and our situation today, we must know where we come from and know what has influenced us" (p. 7). DST is a way to keep these practices alive for future generations and is particularly influential for children who are used to learning with technology and digital media. Teaching DST through an Indigenous lens helps challenge mainstream discourses about Indigenous Peoples and introduces non-dominant forms of knowledge creation and sharing to people (Emberley, 2014).

Indigenous Digital Storytelling

Indigenous Storytelling in the DST format can be referred to as Indigenous DST. This paper does not use an exact definition of Indigenous DST as there is no consensus. Instead, Indigenous DST covers all the ways that DST can be Indigenous-centered, whether it is through content (e.g. Indigenous Peoples telling their stories and sharing their culture) or through technique (e.g. learning about DST alongside the tenets of Indigenous Storytelling and Ways of Knowing). Christensen et al. (2018) call for storytelling that "activates the heart", which means to center "emotion, relationships, reciprocity, recognition, and justice" throughout the process–this applies to tellers, listeners, and educators (p. 178). These are important concepts to remember throughout the process of discussing Indigenous DST and creating new programs around it.

Scholars speak to the positive transformative power of Indigenous DST. For example, Mills et al. (2016) describe the value of multimodal literacy education for Indigenous students as Indigenous learning and knowledge incorporates various modes of information (e.g. dance, song, painting). DST focuses on this type of literacy as it centres and values the different ways people can create meaning, whether it is through music choice, visual literacy, or how they vocally perform their story. Henzi (2018) explains that reclaiming Indigenous spaces with new artistic venues and expression "is to give up the belief of powerlessness, to shed the status of the silenced and oppressed, and to learn how to subvert" (p. 72). Stories about Indigenous topics can be told and understood from new, personal-driven perspectives, which can be powerful and inspiring, instead of victimizing or othering. Storytelling, in its many forms, allows Indigenous Peoples to define their own understandings and feelings about their culture, spaces, and people.

Testimony and Witnessing

Testimonies are supplemental narratives to traumatic events. While not a requirement of DST, testimonial digital stories have powerful effects on creators and viewers. Indigenous digital stories can give truth to historical or traumatic events by digitally documenting one's account of them. Emberly (2014) describes how testimonies allow Indigenous Peoples to recollect an event and actively "refuse to be reduced to a silent murmur" (p. 2). Indigenous Peoples use storytelling practices for productive change. In Iseke's (2011) example of testimony, Cree/Métis Elder Alma Desjarlais ' videos were forms of recovery and healing from colonial history. Testimonial stories aim to unsettle the dominant narrative by hearing the truth from Indigenous perspectives. These acts are transformative and difficult. Indigenous Storytellers may choose to honour their histories through carrying on these storytelling traditions from this personal experience.

The power in DST lies not only in its creation, but the way people can view it. Christensen et al. (2018) describe the dual importance of storytelling for the creator and viewer. The viewing of a story turns into a "mode of reciprocity, through the expression of one's gratitude, experiences, and love" (p. 176). The sharing of stories in a public sphere, such as online websites, allows for multiple understandings to be created.

When implementing DST in libraries, it is important to consider how the viewing of a digital story will impact the creator and audience, especially when they deal with difficult and painful subjects. For some libraries, the goal is not just the creation of stories but to share them. If a library uses their platform to this aim, they are encouraging their viewers to “allow the understanding of someone else’s life to interrupt [their] own life” (Iseke, 2011, p. 312). With videos, viewers are directly called to witness these histories and recognize the truth of them. When more people view these stories, the historical narratives that erase Indigenous voices and perspectives are disrupted.

Digital Storytelling as Self-Representation

A common thread on Indigenous DST is the value of Indigenous Peoples representing their own stories in ways they choose, as to not be subjected as the ‘other. ’With Indigenous DST, Indigenous Peoples have agency and control in their representation of self, instead of being “other people’s culturally romanticized or stereotyped” image (Mills et al., 2016, p. 13). DST initiatives provide platforms for stories that are not part of the dominant colonial media landscape. They also offer opportunities for learning where meaning is self-constructed and not misrepresenting Indigenous Peoples through inappropriate materials and assignments (Bissel & Korteweg, 2016). Winter and Boudreau (2018) explain that Indigenous Peoples who use new mediums to “represent traditional knowledge, are demonstrating how Indigenous peoples have been navigating local and globalized contexts to connect with communities all over the world to advance their rights” (p. 44). Indigenous DST may be recent, but it is an extension of what Indigenous Peoples have always done and fought for. This creates an appropriate opportunity for libraries to support this work by offering help with space, resources, technology expertise, and literacy knowledge.

Self-representation and agency are important aspects of DST as the process is largely individual-driven, from narrative writing to editing. In fact, some argue that digital stories should solely be authored, filmed, and edited by the storyteller. Raimist (2019) states that each storyteller is “the agent of crafting her own digital story” (p. 4). The goal is for the storyteller’s voice to be heard in every aspect of the final product through their choice of images, music, and sounds. With DST’s multimodality, individuals can tell their versions and understandings of stories, communicated not just through words but

sounds, images, pacing, etc. Each choice can become political and creates a space for Indigenous Peoples to be agents of change through choosing how to share their perspectives and experiences (Iske & Moore, 2011).

There are various examples of successful Indigenous DST projects. For example, Eglinton et al. (2017) examine how DST functioned as a tool of identity for Alaska Indigenous youth to have their thoughts and concerns taken seriously. The suicide prevention organization *Project Life* produced over 566 digital stories in the project's first four years. In these videos, Indigenous youth represented themselves ~~not only~~ in their written narratives and reproduced their identities and culture in their visuals by using imagination and creativity, including photos of cultural artefacts and creating aesthetics that connected to their communities and world. Mills et al. (2016) found that through sharing digital story videos, Indigenous youth saw how their "collective memories of a common culture provided affirmation of [their] place in the present" (p. 13). Fletcher and Mullet's (2016) study found that Indigenous DST for youth helped build community, cultural continuity, and positive health outcomes (p. 183). In their project, Indigenous youth created digital stories about colonization and food habits. Participants stated that the DST process gave them a voice and sense of belonging. These projects show how DST is an effective method of Indigenous learning of traditional and contemporary skills through honouring individual agency over what to feel throughout the process and how to express themselves.

Digital Storytelling for Decolonial Learning

DST is a significant learning method for non-Indigenous educators and students. By incorporating arts-based inquiry, constructivist learning, and digital literacy, DST is a powerful tool for teaching non-Indigenous people about Indigenous Ways of Knowing. DST is a transformative learning experience that is immersive and complex and allows students to explore their ideas while challenging their existing beliefs, biases, and positionalities. According to Czarnecki (2009), DST teaches interactive communication, interpersonal skills, personal and social responsibility, technology, literacy, visual literacy, and creativity. Studies show that non-Indigenous students are enlightened after completing Indigenous DST assignments. Castleden et al.'s (2018) study demonstrated that DST was an effective means to educate non-Indigenous students about Indigenous

topics. Their study consisted of Environmental Management students having “direct interaction with and learn[ing] from Indigenous peoples in Indigenous spaces” (p. 488). Students felt this was an engaging learning experience “with practical experience in the field, and not just an understanding that can be acquired from textbooks” (p. 492). Their DST projects contributed to relationship building as the students left traditional learning environments and interviewed Indigenous Peoples to form their own understandings and personal connections with Indigenous topics. Castleden et al. show how teaching Indigenous topics through textbooks or lectures is insufficient, instead, “direct engagement with Indigenous peoples” (p. 488) is required for understanding Indigenous perspectives. DST is an effective way to directly engage with Indigenous Peoples.

For Non-Indigenous Educators

Bissell and Korteweg (2016) explain that Indigenous DST is an opportunity for educators to learn about their Indigenous students without speaking for or on behalf of them. This presents a chance for libraries to offer Indigenous programming that does not ‘other ’Indigenous Peoples. Teaching DST through an Indigenous lens offers a unique learning experience for everyone. Hildebrandt et al.’s (2016) study documents a primarily non-Indigenous third grade class creating digital stories to learn about Indigenous Peoples. Accompanied with a guest storytelling from Nehiyaw storyteller, Joseph Naytowhow, this Indigenous DST assignment provided a complex medium for students to learn about traditional Indigenous Storytelling and practice it to express their new knowledge. Similarly, Sunderland et al. (2020) found that social work students were transformed by a DST project. Students noted how the process caused discomfort when “realizing the lack of visibility and valuing” of Indigenous Peoples and cultures for the first time, but they recognized this as valuable to understanding and building better relationships (p. 495). Each iteration of an Indigenous DST project or program is an opportunity for educators and librarians to reflect on how Indigenous education can be improved by the hands-on, personal experience of creating and listening to digital stories.

Libraries and Digital Storytelling Capacity

Storytelling is a traditional aspect of library programming and despite its lengthy process, DST is a worthwhile endeavor. Taking storytelling seriously “builds necessary

ties between community and academia to engender a space for broader, non-oppressive education models" (Christensen et al., 2018, p. xi). Multimodal forms of learning are important for developing 21st Century skills and show library users that there are different forms of knowledge creation, such as Indigenous Ways of Knowing. Libraries can help patrons develop the digital literacy skills to use multimedia in their videos, e.g., scanning photos,-filming original footage, downloading copyright-free images from online, or other makerspace-based experimentation. Further, Bissell and Korteweg's (2016) study found that digital technology is responsive and flexible enough for representing one's self through DST. Incorporating technology into library storytelling is a great option for programming that aims to engage emotions and personal, introspective learning.

For educators who feel they do not have the knowledge and experience to teach Indigenous Ways of Knowing or Storytelling, DST education helps them "reframe their relationship with Indigenous peoples and cultures in a more relational manner by emphasizing a shared narrative of humanity and braided history" (Bissell & Korteweg, 2016, pp. 4-5), as opposed to teaching Indigenous Peoples about their own culture. Indigenous DST programs also help balance existing library programming. As Christensen et al. (2018) state "Indigenous stories cannot simply serve as objects or symbols…they must serve as a form for new relationships and for ethical and just recognition" (p. 178). In this view, it is not enough to create programming around reading Indigenous texts. Programing should actively involve and embody Indigenous concepts. Indigenous DST programming helps frame new library goals, such as to teach Indigenous Storytelling in creatively engaging and challenging ways or to show how technology can intersect with traditional forms of Indigenous knowledge.

Digital Literacy

The technology involved in DST is not as intimidating as it seems. Hildebrandt et al.'s (2016) study shows that children as young as eight years old can use technology like iPads to create videos with their own voice and images. One of Fletcher and Mullet's (2016) DST project's aims was to "de-mystify the university" (p. 185). In the same vein, DST programming can serve to 'de-mystify 'libraries and create a welcoming space where patrons can play with equipment. DST learning creates an "environment

for sense-making and knowledge construction through the development of multimedia-enriched narratives" (Hildebrandt et al., 2016, p. 20). Helping people understand and critique the daily images they see is an invaluable skill that naturally fits into makerspace learning goals.

Like all forms of storytelling, DST teaches crucial literacy skills, including how to be a good listener. Eglinton et al. (2017) describe the multiplicity of voices being heard through DST as "a democratic space that connected youth and their communities…where youth voices and concerns could be taken seriously in those conversations impacting their lives" (p. 17). In the *Center for Digital Storytelling* model, participants usually share their videos to all other participants at the end of the program. In DST programming, patrons should be encouraged to listen and engage with stories. Alongside creating stories, participants should learn to listen with compassion and take others 'personal narratives seriously. This helps libraries meet the goals of incorporating and privileging Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Storytelling more fully.

Makerspace Philosophies

When including Indigenous DST in library makerspaces, it is important to consider how the makerspace philosophy connects to the ideas of Storytelling and Ways of Knowing. Wardrip et al. (2017) provide a suggested framework for how to best support learning in makerspaces that encapsulates the makerspace philosophy. This framework recommends that libraries think about how their makerspace aligns with the larger goals of the library, such as 21st century skills, building resilience, and providing "positive, social and creative atmosphere[s]" (p. 13). Wardrip et al. state that "people matter most" (p. 6). In makerspaces, patrons should feel empowered to lead their own learning experiences.

Adding Indigenous DST to makerspace programming is one approach meeting makerspace goals such as building collaboration, fostering creative expression or knowledge sharing. As makerspaces are self-driven learning spaces, DST helps people build upon their strengths and learn new ones through collaboration. Understanding Indigenous practices such as storytelling makes patrons better *makers.* By having a richer understanding of the history of storytelling and how it impacts different people, making can become a meaningful activity. Winter and Boudreau (2018) reflect on how

makerspaces can help bridge the digital divide while also teaching Indigenous topics. Digital media is not new to Indigenous Peoples, but access to the technology is not equal and libraries are equipped with the physical resources needed for DST. Harnessing and sharing digital media resources helps Indigenous Peoples "sustain their Indigenous Worldviews" for future generations (Iske & Moore, 2011, p. 22). The makerspace philosophy can provide a gateway to incorporating Indigenous DST practices in libraries.

Indigenous Approaches to Makerspace Learning

It is possible to connect makerspace philosophies to Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Storytelling. Indigenous topics should be implemented in makerspaces more often as they can open "possibilities for Indigenous forms of learning and being that cultivate and enact Indigenous presences" (Barajas-Lopez & Bang, 2018, p. 7). Barajas-Lopez and Bang's study about a storytelling-based clay work makerspace program shows that giving patrons hands-on experiences teaches them about the multiplicity of how stories can be told (oral, through materials, relationally, etc.). While STEM programs are often framed neutrally and with western conceptions of success (e.g. messages about how STEM skills are necessary for the future workforce), making media is not apolitical nor neutral, and should not be framed as such (Tzou et al., 2019). Acknowledging that media creation is political and valuing these political perspectives as forms of knowledge, make the makerspace more accepting of different forms of knowledge creation and knowing. Tzou et al. (2019) provide~~s~~ a framework for a makerspace storytelling programming with decolonizing aims. They created the program, *TechTales,* to approach storytelling through STEM-Art design projects (mixed media dioramas). Tzou et al propose that STEM programs focused on storytelling and making helps "remediate historically powered paradigms between Indigenous and Western knowledge systems" (p. 307). Their participants created projects that taught lessons about nature and the Land and provide accurate representation of Indigenous knowledge. During this process, participants navigated between Indigenous knowledge, "Western science and engineering knowledge systems, and family-based knowledge systems" (p. 320). This example shows the value of makerspaces when they teach people to use technology for diverse, meaningful, and respectful purposes. People do

not have to keep their personal, familial, or spiritual beliefs out of their technology practices. Similarly, Vossoughi et al. (2016) argue that it is important to move beyond the “narrow focus on STEM by foregrounding the multidisciplinary development of ideas as interwoven with the development of social relations” (p. 226). Focusing on the values inherent in Indigenous DST, including centering the social, political, and personal in the making experience helps expand the definition of what makerspaces are for.

The value of community is emphasized in makerspaces and Indigenous DST. Iseke and Moore (2011) point to the importance of keeping DST within the community. In one of their projects, students interviewed Indigenous community members to create videos about forests in their region of Nova Scotia. They found that the DST process “reflected the shared experience of the community members and centered the community as the site of power” (p. 26). Makerspaces provide a space for a community to come together and make things together and Indigenous DST provides a way for people to share their stories with their community.

Considerations

Creating a digital story is often an emotion, personal, and transformative experience, which makes people vulnerable throughout the process. Castleden et al. (2018) reminds us that “creating safe and supportive spaces is integral to transformative learning” (p. 494). Strong bonds can be created through shared experiences of DST projects and these relationships should be nurtured. Castleden et al. (2018) points to how their DST workshop helped students form new interpersonal relationships with each other and with the Indigenous Peoples they visited for their stories. Makerspaces implementing Indigenous DST programs must make the space safe for all users. Trust is key when individuals choose to give an organization, such as a library, the opportunity to help create and share their story. Videos are meant to be watched, but letting others view your story can be scary. If a librarian is building webpages to share these works, choosing what format to use or what goes online and for how long can be daunting (Iske & Moore, 2011). Couldry (2008) states how fear of being watched by a limitless audience may limit the stories people choose to share. It is important for educators to create safe spaces and have clear understandings on where these stories may end up.

Issues related to privacy and Indigenous data sovereignty arise in relation to what stories can or cannot be shared online. Libraries should consult with local Indigenous community members before implementing Indigenous programming. Walter and Suina (2019) state how Indigenous Peoples have “collective rights to data” about themselves (p. 236). Libraries need to ensure that people always have the choice to share as some personal stories may handle sensitive content. Furthermore, Winter and Boudreau (2018) point out how makerspaces ’Western conceptions of copyright do not fit models of Indigenous Knowledges. Instead of teaching Western perspectives about copyright, libraries should “focus on facilitating Indigenous control over project designs to foster technological self-determination and sovereignty” (p. 46). Every community is different—libraries must be aware of what local Indigenous communities want from DST and follow protocols.

Conclusion

Using literature review methods, this paper discovered that Indigenous Storytelling and DST share many qualities, including multimodality and focus on the human voice. Indigenous DST can be viewed as an extension to the tradition of Indigenous Storytelling. Research revealed that Indigenous DST has positive transformative powers for storytellers and viewers. This paper found that makerspaces are the most valuable when they can teach people the boundless potential that technology has, including going beyond Western ideas of success, ownership, and STEM. Library technology can be used for educating a community together or for one’s own understanding and exploration of self.

This paper demonstrates why Indigenous DST is an important project for libraries to implement. DST brings in important concepts such as self-representation and multimodal skills. It benefits all library patrons, while displaying the value of library makerspaces for expressing oneself and accessing resources, technology, and expertise. When makerspaces are used as collaborative spaces, Indigenous DST can function as a platform for relationship building and knowledge sharing. Indigenous DST is an intersection of many important concepts and values, including the value of lived experiences, the political capacity built through telling your truth, media theory, and digital literacy. There is still research to be done on what Indigenous DST in

makerspaces looks like in practice and what additional problems may arise. More practical concerns related to implementing Indigenous DST, such as staffing, funding, and timelines can also be addressed in future work on this topic. This literature review demonstrates how Indigenous DST is an ideal method to teach Indigenous Storytelling and Ways of Knowing while conveying the values of relations, understanding, and emotions.

Conflict of Interest Statement

None declared.

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