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Chapter 9

Making Stories Matter: Using Participatory New Media Storytelling and Evaluation to Serve Marginalized and Regional Communities

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Regional Places, Regional Narratives

Oral historian Linda Shopes (2002: 594), in the oral history interviews she gathered in the regional communities in Pennsylvania, has observed that 'place mattered in an individual's consciousness' and 'a shared sense of identity, a sense of community, includes a set of spatial referents'. While engaged in the task of training regional communities scattered throughout the Australian state of Queensland to gather local narratives – particularly following natural disasters – we found that regional locations produced a series of unique regional narratives. Katherine Cashman and Shane Cronin (2008: 408) observe that a crucial step in recovery after disaster is the community's capacity to incorporate the experience of disaster in both personal and community worldviews by developing explanations, particularly through stories. Storytelling projects in regional areas thus need to allow local communities to narrate their own place stories in a manner that encourages the development of a shared community worldview.

In this chapter, we draw on our experiences facilitating community storytelling workshops in regional Queensland in partnership with the Queensland branch of the Oral History Association of Australia (OHAA Qld) to develop a best practice model for promoting creative approaches to recording oral narratives using digital tools, informed by creative writing practice and embedded evaluation (Klaebe 2012, 2013). These experiences offer an insight into how creative approaches to training can facilitate the sharing and preservation of stories in regional communities.

The rise of community deposited and commissioned digital recordings in museums and libraries in recent years reflects an emphasis on publishing 'good stories' in forms that are accessible and creatively use narrative to 'speak' to diverse audiences. In Queensland, the State Library (SLQ) acquires and manages oral history and digital story collections and is increasingly interested in creative writing and transmedia storytelling initiatives that support Queensland communities – particularly marginalized and regional communities – to better connect to their unique histories. Transmedia storytelling – a process by which narrative is dispersed across multiple online, broadcast and print-based platforms to create a unified entertainment experience (Jenkins 2010: 944) – allows users to engage with oral narratives and community histories through multiple pathways. Such developments in digital tools for sharing stories represent both challenges and new possibilities for regional communities. As this case study demonstrates, universities and not-for-profit organizations

such as OHAA Qld can play an important role in facilitating the recording and sharing of regional narratives across multiple platforms.

OHAA Qld is run by a core group of community historians and academics with an interest in oral narratives and storytelling. The branch formed in 1978 and is based in Brisbane, the capital city of Queensland, Australia. Until recently, it focused on offering training workshops in gathering oral histories only from those communities within the metropolis. In 2011, OHAA Qld, under the initiative of members with academic expertise in creative writing and transmedia storytelling, radically altered the delivery of these workshops, by drawing on creative writing theory and extending their focus from urban to regional communities. Since 2011, we have run a series of oral storytelling workshops throughout regional Queensland, in the geographically disparate cities and towns of Cardwell, Toowoomba, Mackay, Townsville and Warwick.

OHAA Qld has a strong history of delivering oral history workshops for its members and the wider community. These workshops were run for many years by a number of key committee members. However, changes in the core committee group and individual circumstances meant the organization had to change its approach to facilitating workshops. As committee members and researchers at the Queensland University of Technology, we took this opportunity to rethink the workshops, drawing on our backgrounds in creative writing and oral and digital storytelling to better promote, gather and share regional community narratives. We were also aware that in a digital age, the skills required to undertake an oral history project have changed considerably. For community groups, this shift can be new and exciting, but can also invoke feelings of anxiety when there is a gap in the skill set. Regional communities, in particular, may be disadvantaged because of 'significant gaps in telecommunications infrastructure' (Beer et al. 2003: 207). Regional Arts Australia (2013) states that one in three Australians live in regional and remote communities, and that, 'for regional communities, issues of funding, infrastructure, education, remoteness and isolation all impact on their ability to access and participate in the arts and to develop and promote their own artistic endeavours'. Therefore, supporting vibrant regional arts and the cultural practices of creative writers, storytellers, cultural organizations and communities to allow them to develop, present, deliver and distribute high-quality narrative-driven cultural products is an important challenge, as is embedding adequate evaluation processes that will ensure the best use of public funds in the process. We saw our role to re-frame our research focus as useful to community groups and professional or amateur practitioners.

Re-designing the Workshops Through Action Research

Using ethnographic action research methods (Hearn et al. 2009), we engaged in three cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. In the first cycle, we considered the strengths and limitations of the previous workshop models, drawing on collated feedback from past participants. Using our experience and research in managing public history projects, we

designed a series of five workshops in Brisbane. The second cycle was triggered by a call from the Cardwell and District Historical Society, asking the researchers to adapt their workshop series to support the community to collect oral stories in the wake of Cyclone Yasi, a weather event that had devastated the small coastal town in North Queensland. Severe tropical Cyclone Yasi made landfall on 3 February 2011, spanning much of the north coast of Queensland between Ingham and Cairns, causing 3.6 billion dollars in damage, making it the costliest recorded cyclone in Australia. Cardwell was particularly damaged in the inundation. In response to Cardwell's request, we developed a methodology for tailoring the workshops to meet communities' needs and goals for their projects – a process Klaebe (2013) describes as embedded evaluation. In the final cycle, we reflected on our experiences in Cardwell to facilitate a series of workshops in regional communities designed to promote the ethical and innovative gathering, preservation and sharing of oral narratives and digital stories.

Between 2006 and 2010, OHAA Qld's approach to running workshops was typically on an 'as needed' basis. The branch would run workshops, which Klaebe facilitated, only when there was sufficient demand, or at the invitation of community groups working on specific projects. The feedback from the workshops demonstrated that, while the majority of participants found the training valuable, some felt overloaded by information. Klaebe found that participants often had disparate levels of experiences, making it challenging to pitch content so that it was appropriately engaging for all. When Van Luyn joined the association in 2009, we discussed this issue at length; we were concerned that participants would return to their communities lacking the confidence to get started. In addition, Klaebe's research into digital storytelling, and her relationship with the SLQ, documented the increasing shift towards digital storytelling and the need for high-quality digital outputs (Klaebe and Burgess 2008). Thus, we re-designed the workshops, with a stronger focus on pedagogy, to cover five fundamental topics that would be facilitated by key committee members in a sequential manner throughout the year, with a new focus on new media outputs.

We designed the workshops with a number of aims in mind. We hoped to stimulate communities by encouraging creative, narrative-based approaches to recording, preserving and sharing oral stories. We promoted the recording of high-quality digital audio files and images, licenced under a Creative Commons copyright agreement (Creative Commons Australia 2013), which allows the outcomes of the oral history project to be used beyond the immediate project and held in local libraries for use by other researchers, storytellers and artists. We reiterated best practice and ethical standards, emphasizing models established by the SLQ (Klaebe et al. 2011). We also encouraged participants to utilize fully the digital resources available to them, including OHAA Qld's own equipment (funded by the Gambling Community Benefit Fund) offered to members on loan. The workshops provided a space for participants to meet others involved in oral history projects and to be inspired by the many and innovative ways that oral histories are being gathered and presented. In regional communities, the opportunity to meet key community members engaged in oral history and storytelling projects – including local librarians and museum curators – was particularly

important, because precious resources, such as audio recording equipment, local histories, archival documents, 'how to' guides and local knowledge could be accessed and shared.

We felt that the workshop series also offered a unique opportunity to embed our own research, which investigated the links between oral and fictive narratives (Van Luyn 2010, 2012a, 2013) and community engagement through new media storytelling (Klaebe and Foth 2007). We intuitively felt that a focus on creative writing would allow a deeper engagement with the narrative qualities of the oral histories; Kip Jones (2006: 70) supports this assertion, stating that 'using arts-based methods to disseminate research will engage new audiences'. When adapting the first series of workshops to support Cardwell following Cyclone Yasi, we came to see evidence of the value of a creative writing approach. Cashman and Cronin (2008: 410) observe that communities recovering from volcanic disasters recover best when they can understand the disaster, both scientifically and through using metaphorical language and telling stories that take into account the emotional impact of disaster. The emphasis on the emotions and subjective experience in fiction thus allowed a new focus in the workshops on metaphor, imagery and emotion.

Creative writing and oral history are two distinct fields. While Anne Hirsch and Claire Dixon (2008: 190) have argued in the abstract that creative writers can 'operate like magnifying glasses' to understand the narrative structure underpinning life stories, little practical attention has been given to the links between creative writing and oral history. However, as Van Luyn (2012b) argued in her PhD thesis investigating the intersection between fiction writers and oral historians in Australia, both fields are concerned with analysing and framing narratives and documenting the subjectivity of experience. This research in creative writing formed part of the scaffold for the new series of oral history workshops.

Katherine Nelson (2003: 128) identifies the link between life stories and fictional narrative, stating 'Both [fiction and biography] are based on individual life stories and thus depend on real or fictional versions of autobiographical memory'. Memory, the basis of oral stories, shares a similarity with fictive works: its narrative form. Fiction, like memory, uses narrative as a means to organize knowledge. Nelson (2003: 125) argues that *narrative* is the medium of shared memories, collective memories and fictional creations. Paul Rosenblatt (2003: 225) goes so far as to state that 'we hear our interview respondents relating narratives about their lives that seem to be like what we read in novels'. The narrative quality of novels and memories creates the sense that one is similar to the other. Therefore, the notion of drawing on creative writing theory to underpin oral history workshops has traction.

Indeed, when understanding memory, many researchers turn to metaphor – a technique of creative writers – to make sense of the process. James Olney (1998: 20) uses the metaphor of 'weaving' for the operation of memory:

> The weaver's shuttle and loom constantly produce new and different patterns and designs and forms and in operation memory is like weaving [...] if it is processual then it will bring forth ever different memorial configurations and an ever newly shaped self.

Researchers have turned to fiction as a means of understanding this complex process of remembering.

Donald Polkinghorn (1988: 71) argues that 'although literary theorists approach narrative as literary expression, their insights into narrative form can be applied to human sciences in their investigation of human experience and understanding'. Daniel Albright (1994: 19) speculates on whether literary constructions of selfhood might be of use to psychologists in order to understand the remembered self. Ulric Neisser (1994: 2) explains the notion of the 'remembered self' as the self constructed on the occasion of recollection. In oral history interviews, it is the self the interviewee constructs when telling their life story. Albright (1994: 21) observes that literature is suspicious of the remembered self. He uses a number of examples from fiction and poetry to demonstrate how the remembered self is made problematic. Albright (1994) argues that literature explores how the brain is selective when creating memories, and the way memory changes when it is recalled over and over again. He uses T.S. Eliot's 1933 line of verse to understand this quality of memory: 'Memory is but a few meagre arbitrarily chosen sets of snapshots'.

This metaphor reflects current understandings about how interviewees create and draw on memories. After all, oral historians have observed that the brain 'cannot record or retain all of our experiences; the overload would make life unmanageable' (Thomson 2011: 297). Most short-term memories are lost within moments or days after the event (297). Only some are retained and consolidated into long-term memories.

Dorrit Cohn (2000: 117) argues that the difference between fiction and biography is that 'a character can be known to the narrator in fiction in a manner no real person can be known to a real speaker'. Literature 'can provide direct access to other people's minds and hearts' (Gregory 1998: 29). Gregory (29) states that:

> literary experience, unlike life, does provide direct access to others' minds, and in so doing yields essential data, which we use in order to sharpen the accuracy and to increase the depth of our inferential knowledge about the interior lives of real-life persons.

Applying Gregory's assertion to the process of remembering, fiction's access to the interior can offer a representation of the complex process of remembering. Fiction can function as another way, alongside traditional methods, of exploring memory in oral history. Fiction becomes a means to explore these ideas symbolically. Creative writing theory thus played a significant role in the re-shaping of the OHAA Qld oral storytelling workshops – albeit with a pragmatic focus – by encouraging participants to understand the complex process of remembering in an oral history interview, and by promoting new thinking into the ways in which oral narratives can be shared. In regional communities, the opportunity to respond creatively to gathering and sharing oral narratives sparked a number of innovative arts-based approaches to sharing oral narratives in the community, such as digital stories, audio and images. In particular, community members in regional towns affected by disaster found this approach helpful in imagining the possibilities for presenting narratives in museum exhibitions.

In the workshops, this theoretical underpinning translated into an emphasis on valuing interviewees' unique reality when designing questions, imaginatively engaging with others' stories through considering their interior life, and encouraging participants to use their local knowledge to write specific and unique questions for interviewees. At the same time, participants were encouraged to reflect on how their knowledge of the history of the place and their own experiences might cloud their questions and responses to interviewees' answers. To ensure this was achieved, we designed the workshops with an opportunity for participants to first interview each other. We gave feedback throughout the interview, pointing out when an interviewer needed to rethink their questions or responses.

Cycle One: The Workshop Series

In the first action research cycle, we designed and facilitated a series of five workshops drawing on our background as creative writers. We were able to adapt these qualities in the next cycle, which supported regional communities to gather narratives post-disaster. The previous workshop series had focused on gathering and preserving oral narratives. We now shifted the focus to exploring oral histories through creative writing and encouraging participants to imagine the many possibilities for sharing and exploring oral narratives, such as creative nonfiction, theatre and fiction. We also encouraged participants to produce rich media packages, including archival quality audio, video, photographs and scanned images and objects, which could form the basis for multiple creative works or exhibitions. With an awareness of the complexity of memory, we supported workshop participants to design questions that promoted first-hand experiential narratives, and to listen for vivid scenes in oral narrative, asking for specific details if these were missing. In the final workshop, participants engaged creatively with practice oral history interviews, exploring memory, representation, theme and image in the oral narrative.

In the first workshop, 'Oral History Basics', we dealt with the pragmatic aspects of oral history, outlining the equipment, time and budget required to bring a project successfully to fruition. Such projects are often more expensive and time consuming than community groups expect. We emphasized the need to break the project into manageable stages, each with tangible outcomes. Based on our understanding of the nature of voluntary organizations, we encouraged volunteers to design projects that could be pursued or set aside as necessary, without causing discouragement by a seeming lack of progress. For example, in the early stages of a project, community groups could conduct preliminary interviews with a small pool of participants, scan relevant documents and images and conduct background research, resulting in a well-researched background study. In the next stage – which could be undertaken by any volunteer with access to the background research – this study could be used to design and conduct interviews recorded at archival quality. In later stages, these interviews could be cut, re-mixed and adapted into digital stories, exhibition pieces and other creative outputs. In this overview workshop, participants were encouraged to consider

their project's aims, and to use these aims to guide their decisions in the remaining series of workshops.

Workshop two was broken into two halves: ethics and copyright, and photography. Participants worked with us to consider and discuss the ethical implications of their project, and to examine model participant information and release forms from the State Library of Queensland and the Queensland University of Technology. Participants were encouraged to ensure that interviewees understood that they owned the copyright of their stories, and to license the interviews under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial Share Alike 3.0 Licence, which allows the interviewee to retain copyright and other users to freely copy, modify and share for non-commercial purposes, provided they attribute the story to the interviewee and maintain the same terms. This allows other creative practitioners and researchers to respond to oral histories, even beyond the initial vision of the project.

The afternoon of workshop two was dedicated to photography for oral history projects. New media expert Bryan Crawford showed participants what photography and video equipment was useful for oral history projects; how to choose a location to take video and photos; what to look for in light, location and background; and how to make the best of the location and light available. This allowed participants to include photographs in the rich media package produced from the interviews they conducted.

The third workshop, 'Recording and Editing', extended participants' capability to construct rich media packages. In this workshop, we showed participants how to record audio at archival quality and edit the audio using the open source sound editing software, *Audacity*. We also encouraged participants to scan interviewees' documents and photographs during the interviewing process, rather than taking away precious photographs or other ephemeral material such as letters.

We discovered the value of scanning documents and other precious objects during a preliminary interview with Sister Angela Mary as part of the *Queensland Business Leaders Hall of Fame* project in 2009. Sister Angela Mary had few personal possessions but had kept the baggage tags from her migration from Ireland to Australia as a young nun. These baggage tags became a key component of her digital story (Queensland Business Leaders Hall of Fame 2009).

To gain experience in the workshop, participants engaged in two activities. The first was a practical exercise in recording whereby participants worked in pairs to conduct a three-minute interview. In the second activity, participants edited their interview on *Audacity*. In the afternoon session, we described how to produce transcripts and interview summaries. Then, using the style guide provided and their three-minute interview, participants produced a transcript using the open source software, *Express Scribe*.

In the fourth workshop, titled 'Interviewing', we described some of the complexities of remembering and explored some of the theory around fiction, metaphor and memory. We drew on Campbell's commonly used fictive trope, the hero's journey (Bloom and Hobby 2009), to encourage participants to design interview questions that captured an interviewee's

character arc, documenting how they changed as a result of obstacles encountered. Van Luyn considered her own experiences fictionalizing oral histories as part of her practice-led research to encourage participants to shift questions from the abstract to the specific to elicit narratives grounded in rich and vivid scenes. In the afternoon, participants worked in pairs to interview each other, using strategies discussed in the earlier sessions. We walked around the teaching space, offering suggestions.

In the final workshop, 'What to do with your materials', Van Luyn discussed some of the ways in which participants could present oral history materials, including via academic articles, digital stories, curated exhibitions, blogs, websites, creative nonfiction, theatre and fiction to inform public art, and provided an example of each. In the afternoon session, participants briefly interviewed a partner. Again drawing on the research that links fiction and oral history, we encouraged participants to explore the interview using techniques of fiction; participants could choose to re-represent the interview either as a short story (fiction) or as a factual account that used some of the techniques of fiction, such as scene-setting, dialogue, imagery and theme (a form referred to as creative nonfiction). At the end of the afternoon, participants read their drafts and received feedback from us. This workshop was designed to offer a taste of each of these forms, encouraging participants to imagine the possibilities of being able to share, modify and explore the rich media packages they had been trained to produce.

Reflection

In the initial stages of the workshop planning, we circulated a very brief outline of what each workshop would cover. Owing to the generality of the statement, one participant attended workshop one expecting a discussion on 'the art of storytelling, its usage, history and current forms', while we had a more practical, project-related emphasis. This led to a decision to manage expectations by providing detailed outlines of the workshops on the OHAA Qld website and asking participants at the beginning of each workshop to state their reason for attending and the outcome they expect from the workshops, to ensure all participants have a shared understanding of the content.

Although the workshops were advertised to the public via the OHAA Qld website, flyers in libraries, mailing lists and the SLQ, some participants did not find out about the workshops until halfway through the series, leading to problems with having to revisit content. In particular, Van Luyn found that because the ethics workshop only had four participants, many ethics-related questions were raised in later workshops. This led her to provide her slides on ethics to all subsequent workshop participants. Potential participants may not have realized the value of, or been interested in, an ethics workshop, even though such considerations are fundamental to all oral history projects. That they then sought out this information in other workshops they attended points to their awareness of just how critical and engaging this topic can be.

Feedback

The workshops were generally attended by five to eight participants including professionals working in a military museum and recording oral histories for training purposes, community historians producing traditional research outcomes such as academic articles and Higher Research degree students from universities. Three participants attended all five workshops. Two were professionals at a military museum and the third was a researcher embarking on her PhD project. Due to our academic backgrounds and the participant's dedication and enthusiasm, we were able to provide support to the research student over the five months of the workshop series, which produced a development in her research project. The participant stated:

> I found the workshops were well structured and presented to provide an overview of an extremely complex topic. Having attended the whole series I thought there was a natural progression.

She also stated that she 'found the [workshop content on] planning an interview and ideas on how to modify my strategy have made a huge difference'. The benefit of having the series of five workshops was to capture that complexity – an understanding needed for work in an academic context. However, participants who 'picked and chose' the workshops missed this sense of progression and were left with only part of the picture.

The gap between the aims and needs of professionals, academics and community oral historians was difficult to bridge. Further, although the format meant there was more time to discuss individuals' projects, we found it hard to tailor the workshops to suit such a diverse range of participants. For the series of workshops to be fully effective, participants should be encouraged to attend all five. We produced a teaching pack, consisting of PowerPoint slides, suggested readings, hand-outs and classroom activities, for sharing with members and other facilitators. This teaching pack can also be tailored to develop workshops for specific interest groups. After running these workshops, the feedback and reflection became the basis of the workshops we tailored for regional communities.

Cycle Two: Cardwell and Post-Disaster Narratives

As a result of our detailed advertising, community groups outside Brisbane took an interest in the workshop series. After Cyclone Yasi struck the town of Cardwell, destroying the historical museum and the Cardwell and District Historical Association's (CDHA) recording equipment, the association contacted OHAA Qld requesting workshops similar to those advertised, although CDHA could only afford to host facilitators for two days. As we had already developed the teaching pack, Klaebe, Van Luyn and Crawford were able to deliver a weekend-long 'emergency' workshop – a condensed version of the first three

workshops – teaching Cardwell participants to use OHAA Qld's equipment, and discussing ethical considerations and interviewing theory. We also supervised historical association members while they conducted three interviews with residents at the nursing home struck by the cyclone. This model reflected the focus on training participants to break the project into manageable parts with tangible outcomes; volunteers were able to produce three audio files and many pictures from the interviews during the weekend of our visit.

The historical association later received funding from a Regional Arts Development Fund grant for Klaebe, Van Luyn and Crawford to return to Cardwell and conduct a follow-up weekend of workshops on transcription and digital storytelling in September. Klaebe (2013: 2) argues that 'acknowledging the aims and goals of all stakeholders involved in arts-based narrative-driven projects ensures greatest impact' and that precious grant money is spent fruitfully. Klaebe (2013) describes this process as 'embedded evaluation'. We developed the storytelling workshops further by including an embedded evaluation element in the planning of content delivery.

In the six months after workshop one and before workshop two, we liaised with CDHA to support them in work that needed to be completed and to revisit and clarify their project aims. Volunteers concluded that they would like to put together an exhibition, featuring the oral narratives, images and objects from Cyclone Yasi; produce a book based on their oral history interviews; and safely archive any outputs with the historical association and the SLQ. Volunteers also hoped to encourage school children in Cardwell to work with the interviews and images to produce creative outputs. In line with these intentions, we supported volunteers to conduct five further interviews using the techniques developed in the first workshop, and to put together rich media packs for each of the interviews. The participants edited these packs, alongside the interviews and photographs collected during the last visit, to produce, with our help, digital stories in the second September workshop. In addition, drawing on creative writing techniques, we worked with volunteers to brainstorm reoccurring themes, metaphors and images from the interviews, which formed the basis of their exhibition.

Cycle Three: Creative Writing and Embedded Evaluation in Regional Communities

In May 2011, OHAA Qld applied for and received funding from the Gambling Community Benefit Fund to conduct oral history workshops in regional Queensland. The successful grant application marked a new direction for OHAA Qld, which had previously focused on delivering workshops only to the Brisbane metropolis. After the experiences in Cardwell and based on e-mail requests to their secretary, OHAA Qld felt that many communities in regional Queensland were interested in, and could benefit from, learning more about new media approaches to collecting oral narratives. Drawing on the two previous cycles of planning, action and reflection, we decided to work with regional communities to tailor the workshop series to suit their specific needs. OHAA Qld circulated an expression of interest

to its networks, inviting community groups and local councils to apply for training. Expressions of interest came from local council heritage librarians in Mackay, Townsville and Cunnamulla, and the secretary of the Cultural Heritage Network Toowoomba Region. All but the workshop in Cunnamulla (which was cancelled due to staff changes in the local library) were successfully completed.

In keeping with the embedded evaluation methodology and our previous experience, we worked with regional contacts to develop a plan for the workshops, most of which ran for two days over a weekend. We linked the training to projects the local libraries were undertaking; for example, in Mackay, which is situated 970 kilometres north of Brisbane and has a population of around 119,081 people (Mackay Regional Council 2012), the local library planned to launch the second phase of its 'Mackay through the Decades' project. In the first phase, Mackay community members donated to the library over 200 images of the region from approximately 1950s onwards. Staff members planned to gather oral histories around particular images, capturing the rich and personal history frozen in the snapshots.[1] We formulated a detailed description of the workshops to manage expectations and asked the regional contacts to circulate flyers among their networks, as they had the local knowledge.

Eighteen people attended the workshop in Toowoomba. Toowoomba is located 127 kilometres west of Queensland's capital, Brisbane, and has a population of about 157,669 (Toowoomba Regional Council 2012). The participants were staff from the geographically diverse areas of the Western Downs Libraries, Dalby branch and volunteers from Milmerran Historical Society, Boondooma Museum and Heritage Association, Bowenville History and Heritage Association and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Services, Clifton Progress Association and Museum, Murphy's Creek Neighbourhood Centre, Gympie Woodworks Museum, Toowoomba Grammar School, National Trust, Toowoomba, Glennie School Archives, Blackbutt District Tourism and Heritage Association and Surat Aboriginal Corporation. Participants attended for diverse reasons, such as collecting oral histories from past staff and students who went to Glennie and the Boys' Grammar School; collecting the stories of Indigenous elders, focusing on those dwelling on the fringes; using oral histories in the Woodworks and Blackbutt Museums and depositing them in their archives.

In Townsville, 1366 kilometres North of Toowoomba, attendants included volunteers from the Performing Arts History Society Townsville who were hoping to record oral histories from Townsville artists; a member of Writers in North Queensland planning to rely on oral histories to augment his playwriting; community members wanting to capture stories from men and women who worked on cattle stations in the centre of Australia; and a member from the local Indigenous community who wanted to collect oral histories to complement her work in Indigenous education. We invited the participants to share this information early in the workshop, and tailored the focus in discussion to meet participants' needs during the delivery of content.

Eight participants attended the workshops in Mackay. Some participants hoped to learn more about their family histories, while volunteers from Greenmount Homestead,

five kilometres outside of Mackay, hoped to collect oral histories documenting the rich history of Greenmount and surrounds. Others came simply to learn more about oral history.

In each of these workshops, we trained participants to conduct oral history interviews using narrative techniques informed by creative writing practice and to produce rich media packages that they could modify, adapt and engage with for a variety of different purposes and contexts. We also encouraged participants to share contact details to ensure local sustained support. In Townsville, this resulted in the establishment of an oral history group, who meet once a month to conduct interviews with community members that the group has identified as having rich local knowledge and stories to share. The city council library purchased audio recording equipment to support this activity, which is available for loan to community members, and Heritage Librarian Annette Burns acts as secretary for the group. This group runs autonomously, although we are available via phone or e-mail to answer questions. Local communities are thus equipped to continue to gather oral histories in a sustainable manner.

Reflecting on experiences in Brisbane and regional communities, we observed that the workshop forums offered an opportunity for community members to access local knowledge. The opportunity to interview each other allowed participants to tap into shared memories and experiences of local areas, generating new knowledge. Local libraries played a key role in this process, becoming a repository for local stories and a central site at which like-minded community members could meet and interact.

Conclusion

Our experiences in regional settings demonstrate the complex negotiation between research commitments and service to the community. After engaging in planning, action and reflection cycles, we came to see that our theoretical research into new media and creative writing techniques can be used pragmatically to facilitate impactful outcomes for communities. By re-shaping oral history workshops to encourage participants to gather rich media packages that can be modified and adapted for a variety of purposes and forms, a deeper understanding of the constructed qualities of oral narratives can be introduced. Embedded evaluation, a methodology that encourages stakeholders to negotiate outcomes from the outset of a project, is another practical and effective way to support regional Queensland's professional and amateur oral historians as they engage in creative new media storytelling projects in their local communities.

Oral stories can connect regional communities because they offer a metaphorical means to make sense of past events, including natural disasters. Our facilitation of oral history workshops encourages participants to see memory as a meaningfully constructed narrative and, in doing so, appreciate an interviewee's unique reality. In a new media age, oral histories can be shared and re-used on multiple platforms, increasing connectivity between regional

locations and the wider community. Facilitators may best serve regional communities to produce innovative narrative-based projects through consultation at all stages of the project, equipping community members with the skills to complete the project themselves and a realistic understanding of the commitment required to achieve their goals, and encouraging the formation of local networks at workshop events.

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Note

1 For more details on this project, see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jZEX_aEBSA&feature=youtu.be and http://www.mackay.qld.gov.au/about_council/newsletters/content/council_connect_april_202