Peace-building Through Listening, Digital Storytelling, and Community Media in Cyprus

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Abstract

Digital storytelling is a method for telling personal stories of significance using simple computer-based media technologies. Electronic community media include outlets and facilities for locally-oriented and generated programs and content, typically created by non-professional volunteers and focusing on technological tools as a process to engage people more completely in their communities, rather than the creation of a polished media product. This article describes the use of digital storytelling and community-based media for peace-building purposes in Cyprus in the fall of 2010. With support from the Cyprus Fulbright Commission and the Cyprus Community Media Centre (CCMC), classes and workshops in digital storytelling were held across the island. The Fulbright project, "Digital Storytelling as a Method of Self-Reflexivity, Oral History, and Community-Building" included participants from Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities on the divided island, as well as non-Cypriot story makers. The article draws from theoretic perspectives of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and communication methodologist Brenda Dervin's Sense Making Methodology (SMM). Additional perspectives and practices were provided by practitioners and scholars working in the areas of digital storytelling and community media. Digital storytelling suggested practical methods for self-reflexive and group communication practices in concert with SMM; community media contributed theories and practices drawn from over six decades of film and electronic media focused on community development. Personal reflexivity is utilized as a means to understand the wider research and project frames. Findings suggest that self-reflexivity, active listening, and authentic dialogue are skills cultivated within digital storytelling and community media that provide a sense of empowerment and facilitate personal bonding among participants. The findings suggest applications for digital storytelling and self-reflexive techniques in Lederach's "conflict transformation," community media, and pedagogy

> *We believe that [the Cyprus Community Media Centre] has some wonderful stories to tell: the untold stories.*
>
> *We believe there are stories that you are going to magnify. The unheard voices.*

Desmond Tutu at the opening of the CCMC 9 December 2010

Introduction

A widespread belief holds that community-based media are powerful because they provide a voice for the voiceless, for telling stories from people previously unheard. While there is truth in this perspective, less recognized is the empowerment that arises from listening and dialogic skills engendered by certain processes within community media. Listening and sincere communication are not intrinsic to community media, but cultivated through the process of participation in group activities involving active listening and the sharing of personal stories, thoughts, and emotions. Digital storytelling is a comfortable fit within community-based media, with its focus on personal story, group process, and community sharing of finished multi-media stories, all for personal and social empowerment.

This article focuses on the use of community-based media and digital storytelling for peace-building purposes in Cyprus in the fall of 2010. As a U.S. Fulbright Scholar visiting Cyprus, I taught a university class and conducted workshops in digital storytelling with support from the Cyprus Fulbright Commission and the Cyprus Community Media Centre. The project, "Digital Storytelling as a Method of Self-Reflexivity, Oral History, and Community-Building" included participants from Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities on the divided island, as well as non-Cypriot story makers.[1] The project also had university students enrolled in a "Self-Reflexive Writing" course collect oral histories from family and neighbor elders after the students had completed their own digital story. Self-reflexive techniques were then employed in the students' analysis of the oral histories.

The project was based, in part, on theoretic perspectives offered by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970/1989) and communication methodologist Brenda Dervin (2003a, 2003b, 2008). Theoretical aspects related to self-reflexivity, learning for individual and social empowerment, and the interplay between practice and theory (praxis) were drawn from Freire and critical pedagogy.[2] Dervin's Sense Making Methodology provided a method of implementing Freirean principles and modifying dialogue techniques from digital storytelling. In use since 1972 in a wide variety of contexts, SMM contributed a meta-theory and specific practices for focused, disciplined communication with one's self and others for empowerment and conflict resolution. Both Freire and Dervin provide a framework for implementing digital storytelling within communities to promote individual and collective growth.

Additional perspectives and practices were provided by practitioners and scholars working in the areas of digital storytelling, community media, development communication, and conflict resolution. In particular, digital storytelling suggested additional practical methods for self-reflexive and group communication practices; community media contributed theories and practices drawn from over six decades of film and electronic media focused on community development.

This article is primarily descriptive in nature, focusing on aspects of the project involving digital storytelling and community media. Discussion of the oral histories and self-reflexivity, as well as theoretical analyses related to the content areas mentioned above are beyond the scope of this article. As provided for within an interpretive research framework, and informed by Freire and Dervin, I assume the necessity of including self-reflexive personal references as a means to understanding the wider research and project frames. The article begins with an overview of community media; digital storytelling is explored as it intersects with community media. The context of Cyprus is described and the specifics of the 2010 Fulbright project are provided. Discussion surrounds the practices that build empathy within the digital storytelling "story circle" in concert with Sense Making Methodology and Freire. Findings are proffered, suggesting applications for digital storytelling and self-reflexive techniques in pedagogy, community media, and "conflict transformation" (Lederach, 2008).

Community Media

Overview

Community media are outlets for locally-oriented and generated programs and content, typically created and delivered by non-professional volunteers, and often also providing facilities for the creation of local programs.[3] These days, "community media" normally assumes electronic modes: radio/audio, television/video/multimedia, and social media/the internet.[4] Rather than focusing on selling audiences to advertisers, as is the case with the traditional model of commercial media, community media facilitate a community discussion encouraging the inclusion of voices and perspectives typically excluded from mainstream media. Media are tools as part of a process to involve people more completely in their communities.

Contemporary community media have been built on a long tradition of socially-motivated media: the experiences of radical filmmakers in the 1920s, community radio from the 1930s and 1940s, alternative video artists and activists in the 1960s and 1970s, and social experiments with alternative media from around the world, including the National Film Board of Canada's "Challenge for Change" program in the 1960s.[5] The concepts behind documentary film for social change and community "free speech" radio adapted quite naturally to community video. In the United States, experiments in alternative media were institutionalized through the establishment of "public access" television channels and facilities beginning in the early 1970s. Local communities were able to require cable television companies to provide facilities, equipment, and channels for neighborhood people to make and air their own programs. Four decades later, the public access movement is currently challenged by loss of local municipal control over cable contracts; funding cuts; and shifts in viewing and distribution of digital media, and participation in digital content and the internet. For nearly forty years the U.S. public access movement has provided a living laboratory for implementation practices based on increasingly sophisticated interpretations of democratic principles. The cutting edge in these discussions of philosophy and practice has emerged from practitioners engaged in making the media tools available to the local community.[6]

Across decades and media, the guiding principle in media alternatives to corporate broadcast models has been to use the media tools to organize and animate a community. People facilitating access to these media tools are activists, "animateurs" – recognition of the political and social aspects of the position.

In recent years, much of the delivery for community-based programs has shifted to the internet. While there are advantages in this shift – in areas such as enhanced opportunities for collaboration and

social activism, widespread program delivery, interactivity, to name but a few – the change carries its own challenges. To identify but five significant issues:

- The internet allows for the potential loss of a cohesive, locally based geographic community, which is the heart and soul of community media.
- The internet provides a rationale to cut funding for existing community media. In the U.S., media corporations have been successful in moving control of cable contracts away from local communities and to the state level, where the corporations have more influence. Funding has then dropped or been eliminated for many community video facilities.
- The internet can encourage individual activity divorced from social action and group interaction.
- A focus on the internet tool encourages a loss of attention to the goals and objectives of socially focused, alternative, community-based media.
- With new participants focused on the "latest and greatest" technology rather than as a tool for social goals, there is a loss of a sense of history, values, and the lessons learned over the previous 60 years of community-based film, radio, and television.

Here are some of the lessons learned in six decades of community-based, alternative media practice relevant to groups seeking to extend alternative/community media to current contexts, application to emerging collaborative, interactive, and delivery channels such as the internet:[7]

1. Community-based media are about the *process* of personal and social empowerment, media and social literacy rather than as a *product* involving polished "TV" programs, mass audiences, or technological toys. Praxis: reflection and revised action, is crucial to this process and progress.
2. Community-based media are about helping people empower themselves and their communities, rather than focusing on the technological tools. In particular, community media emphasize "community" and deemphasize "media," focusing on the needs and uses of a core, geographically defined local community and less on any particular media tool. As a community resource, alternative media centers need connect to larger frameworks, such as existing social movements.
3. Community-based media are about encouraging meaningful dialogue among the relevant participants, not a large audience.
4. Community-based media are about the *quality* of the dialogue, not the *quantity* of the conversations; Free speech involves active listening to others, not just speaking your own mind; Free speech involves personal discipline and responsibility for the collective good, not merely extension of the cult of "individual right"; Quality dialogue is based on respect and focused on issues; Quality dialogue recognizes personal subjectivity, values and ideology, and conveys this to readers, listeners and viewers as "a truth" rather than "THE Truth"; The term "community," while typically used as a warm and nurturing term[8], also includes the less-than-friendly exercise of power between competing groups. Facilitating respectful dialogue among competing viewpoints is crucial for alternative outlets seeking to serve "free speech" needs.
5. Empowerment and authentic dialogue through media are best served by outreach to include traditionally underserved groups rather than so-called neutral policies such as "first come, first served" or individual rights based on longevity. Simplistic notions of democracy, power, and speech rights that are reflected in policies and practices merely serve to reinforce existing social power structures.
6. There is no single model for community media. Rather, each media center needs to adjust to the context of its own community, from "open access," to outreach, to curating stories. Within each facility there must be an agreement on basic values and philosophy, leading to practices that will implement these principles.

The lessons above were acquired through decades of successes and failures in implementing philosophical concepts and beliefs to relevant, alternative media practices. They are not specific to film, radio, television, video, or the internet, but applicable to the general use of media and communication tools to organize and serve people and their communities.

The Community Screening Festival

As noted above, community media centers that are particularly successful de-emphasize "media" tools in favor of stressing the "community" aspects of their purpose. They establish themselves as gathering places for the neighborhood and focus on facilitating collaborations, face-to-face relationships, and the sharing of stories. One long-standing practice in alternative media across the decades has been the screening festival, an event bringing together community people to celebrate riveting personal stories from everyday people. It is a folksy, carnival-like approach to affect social change.

My early encounter with this type of event was after university in the U.S. Midwest state of Ohio in the 1970s, where I worked as a volunteer for community radio station WYSO, operated in Yellow Springs by Antioch College.[9] The station facilitated collaborations among various individuals and groups within the progressive communities in the Dayton area. As someone who performed with puppets in street performances with a one man, "walking" stage that roamed around the audience, I joined with musicians and dancers to attract and entertain an audience for the multi-media show coming after sunset in the local parks.[10] These projected slide and sound shows featured interviews with residents of a neighborhood, usually focusing on reactions and possible organizing actions surrounding local social issues: for example, increases in utility rates. The puppets, the local musicians and dancers, the large screen projection of local faces, their stories – all were part of a community multi-media party. Community screenings like the one in Ohio in the 1970s are a significant, time-honored tradition in community media worldwide. The event anchors community-based media in a geographical, physical time and place, with recognizable people from the neighborhood – key aspects of community media.

In 2003 I was transported back to those Ohio summer street festivals during a visit to Barranquilla, Colombia while visiting a community street festival featuring video stories of the community, "Ciudad Arteria" (city artery). Children were playing tag, running around the plastic chairs. A group of local musicians played to people gathering in the street, braving the occasional rain shower. Representatives of a beverage company passed out free shots of rum. Images flickered across the huge screen erected in the street, where a video program portrayed a history of the surrounding neighborhood, presenting a day in the life of local people as they talked about their lives and their dreams for the future.[11]

Other visitors to the Barranquilla celebration also made personal connections with the event, as well as Ciudad Arteria's link in the chain of community media celebrations around the world, over the decades. Here's an account by long-time media activist and Paper Tiger TV founder DeeDee Halleck:

> This screening reminded me of street screenings I organized in 1961 in the Lower East Side in New York City of work by our Henry Street Settlement film club. It was also like the projections of experimental video I saw one evening on a building in downtown Havana of work produced by the Cuban Video Movement as part of the Latin American Film Festival in the 1988. It resonated most closely, I suppose, with a screening by TV Maxambomba I attended in a favela of Rio in the nineties with a screen attached to a VW microbus. These screenings were all of OUR MEDIA. There may be different equipment, different themes, different imagery, different formats: It might be through the airwaves, community cable channels, the rumba drums, the xerox machine, the computer, or a dance stage. It may be in villages or barrios, in attics or basements; it may be on roof tops or bill boards, on a satellite or a mola. Our Media are united by being made and shared by people on a completely different basis from that of the mass media. This is media for cooperation and exchange, for peace and against exploitation and greed (Halleck, 2003, p. 39).

In Barranquilla that evening in 2003, visitors were not watching just another video program in a group party setting; rather, we were witness to a long-standing tradition and the essence of participatory, community-based, grassroots, alternative media: community building. To some of the aspects of community media that keeps the practice relevant in the second decade of the Twenty-first century: a physical, geographic locality made up of real people encountered every day. With their stories containing the people important to them, their loves, their lives and, yes, their fears. Most significantly, their dreams and hopes for the future.

The tradition of a celebratory gathering to share stories was followed by the Cyprus Community Media Centre in December 2010, when a screening festival featured the works of forty-four story makers from across the island, discussed later in this article. The screening celebration is also an established practice in digital storytelling, following the completion of workshops by story makers. Family and friends, often those featured in the stories, are invited to participate in the screening. The viewing festival is but one point of shared belief systems and practices between community media and

digital storytelling, discussed below. In a constantly changing media landscape, digital storytelling provides a path to refocus attention back to the goals and values of alternative, community-based media.

Digital Storytelling

Digital Storytelling is a method of telling personal stories using low cost digital media tools. These are typically stories of personal relevance – transcendence, transformation, and change – of people or events that have made a difference in our lives.[12] The focus of digital storytelling is on the writing and telling of the story, selected by the storyteller for its personal significance and created within a group context. Individual and group understanding and empowerment emerge as a part of the collective process involved in the development of these personal narratives. The process emphasizes the power in the *telling* of the stories of everyday people and their communities, as well as empowerment in *hearing* the stories. Digital technologies become tools in the ancient human tradition of storytelling.

Primarily initiated by the multimedia performance work of Dan Atchley and developed by Joe Lambert, founder of the Center for Digital Storytelling[13] in Berkeley, California, USA, the technique of digital storytelling has spread across the globe. Contexts have included support in healing and prevention of domestic violence, awareness of HIV, conflict resolution and reconciliation, community building, development, and self-reflexivity in the college classroom. San Francisco public media KQED's Digital Storytelling Initiative (DSI), initiated by Leslie Rule[14], added significantly to an understanding of the various permutations possible with the digital storytelling framework, as have initiatives from Australia and the U.K, particularly the British Broadcasting Corporation's "Capture Wales" project.[15]

Digital storytelling focuses more on the stories told, and less on the technical polish of the finished production. Production technologies typically involve everyday, low-end media tools. Stories draw from archival family photographs and artifacts, with the voice of the storyteller favored over that of the polished professional announcer. The final story product is typically a 2 to 3 minute digital movie that provides audiences with an insight into shared human experiences. Distribution is through private or community screenings, DVD, or presentation to a wider audience through the internet. The completion of the story process is always cause for celebration and a final screening of the stories, together with family, friends, and neighbors.

Digital storytelling workshops typically involve three days, with activities moving between group meetings to share story progress and individual writing and producing tasks. Workshop topics cover finding the meaning of your story, effective and concise methods of organizing and telling the story, recording the personal narrative, selecting visual material (usually family photographs), using image editing and video editing software, and exporting the final movie file. Video software typically involves moderate "pro-sumer" software such as Adobe Premiere Elements or Apple's Final Cut Express. Abbreviated one day workshops might utilize consumer programs like Windows Movie Maker, the Mac's iMovie, PowerPoint, or provide non-digital final products, such as an oral reading of a finished story accompanied by hand-held photos and objects. In these condensed and adapted workshops, as in all digital storytelling workshops, the finished product is secondary to the process of finding and sharing stories and their shared meanings.

Personally, digital storytelling reintroduced me to the excitement of meaningful, personal stories that first attract many people to community media. Philosophically, storytelling fits within the research and practice framework defined by grassroots, community-based, "alternative media": a focus on the group process of finding the message in the individual stories; the sharing of stories; the development of active listening skills as well as "speaking" skills; the highlighting of meaningful stories by previously unheard voices; an emphasis on story and the de-emphasizing of technology; the goals of personal and social empowerment and change, with a recognition that humans are more alike than different. Additionally, there are striking similarities between the tenets of digital storytelling and notions of self-reflexivity, oral history, ethnographic methods of social science, and media as tools for affecting change. In particular to workshops I facilitate, Dervin's Sense Making Methodology (SMM) informs dialogic processes involved in the group and provides a method of enhancing self-reflexive aspects of digital storytelling, discussed later in this article.

Having explored the aspects of community media and digital storytelling, we approach the context in which these were applied in 2010: Cyprus.

Cyprus: Historical Context

The island nation of Cyprus gained its independence from Great Britain in 1960.[16] Power sharing between the predominant ethnic communities, Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots, broke down in 1963. Ethnic violence led to the arrival of the United Nations Peacekeeping forces in 1964; however, violence continued, primarily by extremists in the Greek Cypriot community seeking "Enosis": unification of the island with Greece. In 1974, supported by a military dictatorship in Greece, these extremists attempted to seize control of the Cypriot government through a military coup d'état. Turkey then exercised its options under an international agreement and staged an intervention with Turkish troops, effectively taking administration of the northern third of the island. During and following the events of 1974, Greek Cypriots in the north fled or were forced to move to the south while Turkish Cypriots in the south were forced to do the same, to the northern part of the island. Prior to relocation, many spent months in refugee camps.

Since 1974 negotiations have moved slowly. U.N. Peacekeeping forces continue to maintain the neutral buffer zone between the Greek Cypriot south and the Turkish Cypriot north, including Nicosia, where signs declare the city "the last divided capitol in Europe." Turkish troops continue to be stationed in the north while some Greek troops are in the south. In 1983 the Turkish north declared itself an independent state, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), but is recognized only by Turkey. The Republic of Cyprus has authority only in areas under direct control in the south. For twenty-nine years there was no freedom of movement on the island between the Greek and Turkish communities. Pedestrian and automobile border crossing points began opening between the two communities in 2003, when many Cypriots took the opportunity to visit the old family home – now occupied by others. Sometimes these meetings were cordial, even warm . . . other times distressing.[17]

A referendum about reunification in 2004 was defeated in the Greek Cypriot community in the south and approved in the Turkish Cypriot community in the north. So, in 2004, the European Union admitted Cyprus as a single nation but with areas where the EU laws were not in place, with promises to help the island address issues of reunification and reconciliation. Another round of U.N.-sponsored reunification discussions began in 2008 between the leaders of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities.

At the time of the events described in this article, fall 2010, regular interaction between most within the two communities was uncommon except cross-border excursions for shopping or tourism. Few Turkish Cypriot or Greek Cypriot university students know someone or have a friend from the other community. The levels of hierarchy in personal and social dynamics are not always subtle: pre-1974 Turkish or Greek Cypriot family; mixed Cypriot nationality; post-1974 Turkish "settler"; Greek or Turkish national; international: British, German, American, etc. Political perspectives are also delicate: use of terms such as "border" instead of "checkpoint" can become a litmus test for bias toward one side or the other. In the past, mainstream media in both communities have tended to question the loyalty and patriotism of individuals and civil society organizations involved in reconciliation and peace efforts. In both communities, everyday Cypriots tend to assign blame to politicians for the continued impasse in negotiations.

Peace-building Efforts and the CCMC

Today, many Cypriots are attempting to move beyond the divisions and discord, actively seeking to reconcile the past and rebuild relationships between communities. To facilitate Cypriot participation in peace building, in 2005 the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) established the Action for Cooperation and Trust in Cyprus (ACT), funded by the UNDP and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).[18] ACT identifies its role as joining with "civil society actors from across the island . . . strengthening civil society to contribute to the peace process; creating opportunities for Cypriots to promote social and policy change on issues of common concern; and promoting cooperation and common understanding between the island's communities." (UNDP-ACT Welcome, 2011). The approach intends to transcend conflicts by encouraging cooperation and decision-making among disparate groups, leading to trust and building peace.

One of the projects supported by ACT is the Cyprus Community Media Centre, opening its doors in 2009 after two years of organizing efforts by Cypriot civil society organizations (CSO).[19] Members from twenty-five Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot CSOs met regularly for two years, forming a

consortium that established the founding and operational principles of the CCMC. According to ACT and the CCMC:

> One of the most significant gaps in civil society's role in the social development of Cypriot society is the limited media space given to local groups to express their concerns and interests. CCMC's community-based radio, television and Internet projects build the capacity of civil society organisations to become media producers, working together to increase opportunities for dialogue and cultural expression (UNDP-ACT, Fast Facts: CCMC 2011).

Digital storytelling and oral history were mentioned within the expected outcomes of the 2009 CCMC project description: "Digital 'storytelling' of individuals, for instance to document disappearing communities which will explore elements of oral history and personal memory particularly in relation to communities that have been affected by urbanisation in rural/remote areas." (UNDP-ACT Project Document: Cyprus Community Media Centre, 2009)

The staff of the CCMC were energetic collaborators in the digital storytelling project fall 2010, providing professional skills and friendly faces to the university students using the facilities. The students appreciated the encouragement -- the CCMC facility was located within the UN buffer zone on the grounds of the Ledra Palace Hotel, once a fashionable hotel in Nicosia and now home to some UN personnel. The CCMC's location in the buffer zone made it accessible to all communities in Cyprus. Surrounding the Ledra Palace area was razor wire atop sediment-filled walls to provide protection against unlikely blasts; the five minute walk through the buffer zone from one checkpoint to another passed rusted old razor wire, rubble, and buildings untouched since the events of 1974, with walls still carrying the pockmarks of gunfire. Students appreciated the CCMC staff, services, and facilities but found the location in the buffer zone somewhat "creepy."[20] Nonetheless, they showed up on 9 December for the screening of the digital stories – as did most of the digital story makers . . . and many others from their communities.

The Digital Storytelling Project

From August to December 2010 I organized and facilitated workshops in digital storytelling in Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities in Nicosia. Participating institutions in the Greek Cypriot community included the University of Cyprus Department of English Studies where I taught the course "Self-Reflexive Writing: Digital Storytelling and Oral History," and the European University of Cyprus, where faculty member Dr. Elena Stylianou incorporated aspects of the story circle and storytelling into three of her classes in the Department of Art. Near East University in the Turkish Cypriot community participated through workshops in the Faculty of Communication organized by Dr. Gökçe Keçeci Şekeroğlu. The Cyprus Community Media Centre provided an opportunity for members of the general public and civil society organizations in all communities to participate in a weekend workshop. At Highgate School, Media Studies instructor Bérangère Blondeau with the International Children's Film Festival of Cyprus, applied digital storytelling in a 6th grade class.

Prior to the workshops, in consultation with collaborators from various organizations, an organizing theme was selected for the stories: "a significant location" or "a significant object." Each workshop participant was asked to think of a specific moment in time when a place or an object played an important role in her life – or a time when they recognized the significance of the place or object. As the stories developed, it became apparent that the objects or locations usually had connections with significant people who influenced the life of the storyteller.

The workshops involved thirty-one primary participants (sixteen workshop hours or more): fourteen upper division students at the University of Cyprus in thirty workshop hours, eleven upper division students and faculty at Near East University in twenty-five workshop hours, and six community members at the Cyprus Community Media Centre in twenty workshop hours. Also completing digital stories were an additional seven college students from the European University of Cyprus Department of Art's "Processes and Structures" second year course in an abbreviated workshop of eight hours. Six grade six students from Highgate School created stories as a part of their media studies course; they were not involved in the story circle process. At the European University of Cyprus, thirty additional first year students in a first year "Idea Generation Techniques" art class engaged in five hours of the story circle process to generate ideas. Later in the semester students created an autobiographical, alternative "book" from their stories as part of a class assignment.

All totaled, seventy-four participants were involved in digital storytelling at various levels of engagement over the four months. Of these, the sixty-eight adults participated in a story circle process.

Of the thirty-one primary participants, twenty-nine (ninety three percent) completed a final story in digital form. Forty-four digital stories in all were created, including the Highgate School stories.

Of the thirty-six adult participants from whom the information was collected, national identity was provided as Cypriot (18), Turkish (7), Greek (2), British (2), and one each of Armenian, Bulgarian, Libyan, Palestinian, Polish, Russian American, and Serbian. While data regarding age was not collected, the estimated break down of ages by the seventy-four participants was 18-22 years (63); 30-40 years (8); 10-12 years (6). Of the thirty-one primary workshop participants, 19 were female, 12 male; an additional 4 females and 3 males were involved in the abbreviated story workshop in the EUC art class.

All adult participants were familiar with computers; most created their stories with Microsoft PhotoStory3 or Windows Movie Maker; three used iMovie on a Mac computer; five were familiar with and used Adobe Premiere Pro. The Center for Digital Storytelling typically uses more sophisticated video editing software in workshops. However, I was aware of difficulties encountered with an overemphasis on technology in a conflict resolution project involving Palestinian and Israeli youths in digital storytelling (L. Rule, personal communication, 14 October 2008), so we opted for software most participants might have utilized and would have available to them after the workshops.

The original project design intended to include students from both communities in story circles at various times throughout their story creation process. This proved difficult to arrange, since groups started and ended at different times points in the process. As a result, participating story makers did not meet until the screening event in December 2010. A few students were concerned that politics might be cause for divisions at the festival, saying that they hoped that "everyone would behave." At the time I wasn't entirely sure if the student's reference was to the unknown "them" group or concerns about acquaintances in the "us" group. Later, I identified the statement as coming from attitudes cultivated by family and culture, and a lack of interaction with the "other" community. In any event, most of the students showed up at the screening; those who attended enjoyed themselves, and interacted a bit with other students from across the island. The shared stories and festival setting encouraged friendly interactions.

The Cyprus Community Media Centre (CCMC) held this community screening festival in connection with the Cyprus Fulbright Commission on 9 December 2010. The date also celebrated the one year anniversary of the opening of the CCMC facilities in 2009, attended by Desmond Tutu, Jimmy Carter, and Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN "Elders" peace-makers who officially initiated the CCMC facilities. The 2010 event, "What's Our Story? Personal Stories from Across the Island: A Community Screening of Digital Storytelling," featured digital stories completed in workshops and classes across the island during the previous four months, and was well attended by people from Cypriot and international communities. Of the twenty-nine primary workshop participants completing a story, twenty-five story makers attended the community screening, an eighty percent turnout. All story makers were awarded certificates of accomplishment from CCMC and provided DVDs of all the completed stories. The turnout of seventy people was far beyond the expectations of the CCMC staff, who transformed the adjoining J. William Fulbright Center and CCMC entrances with strings of decorative star lights over the Ledra Palace's razor wire and gates, and provided slices of the CCMC birthday cake to attendees. Story groups from different institutions mingled to a limited degree after the screening, posing for a group picture.[21] The audience sat entranced during the screening of forty-plus digital stories; a planned intermission was cancelled in order to avoid breaking the mood. The celebration reflected yet another example of the power of listening . . . community-based media . . . digital storytelling . . . and heart-felt stories focusing on transcendent life moments.

What is it about these types of stories that is so appealing to people? And just what occurred during the workshops that were so meaningful to the participants that so many of them made a point of being present at the screening festival? A cursory look inside the process of digital storytelling and its connections with concepts and processes of SMM provides some clues.

Discussion: Digital Storytelling and Sense Making Methodology

At the heart of the story discovery process is what Lambert (2006) terms the "story circle," a safe, respectful place to share stories. Participants often call these "therapy sessions." A set of procedures guides the discussion, including complete deactivation of all electronic devices, encouraging total focus on the person speaking. Within the story circle, participants first present story ideas and receive feedback from the rest of the group, then move to a private space to write a script 250 words or less. The circle reforms to hear each revised story. As each person presents, they are given the focus of the group and all other activity ceases. Participants engage in active listening and then provide to the storyteller personal responses to what was said: thoughts, ideas, emotions, visual images that come to

mind, similar situations and what was learned, etc. One by one, each person receives the attention of the focus of the group's "deep listening" (Lambert 2006). Digital storytelling participants typically marvel at the insights into themselves and others they acquire as a result of the sessions. And, typically, the shared insights lead to a group bond and understanding that humans are more alike than they are different.

When I attended a digital storytelling workshop at the Center for Digital Storytelling in Berkeley, California in 2004, I was struck by the story circle's similarity in philosophy and process with Freire and Dervin's Sense Making Methodology (SMM).[22] In particular, SMM has informed the approach to story circle process I have used in workshops and university media production classes since 2005. SMM assumes that authentic dialogue does not typically arise from spontaneity, but requires a disciplined process of communication to help address inequities of power relations among discussants. SMM also argues that authentic dialogue is served not by *more* communication, but by *better* communication – and provides a manner of asking questions and listening that aid quality discourse. In addition, SMM provides a set of conceptual and methodological tools that enable everyday people to act as social scientists and analyze aspects of their own experiences . . . or stories. As is the case in the digital storytelling process, SMM asks participants to focus on a moment of time in which a specific experience occurred, from which ideas, thoughts, emotions, and connections might flow.

Using SMM since 1994, I have been struck by the repeated comments of interview participants who said, "I never thought of [my experience] in that way before," typically in a voice reflecting the surprise of a new discovery. I saw in the story circle the same empowerment of storytellers to look deeply into the meaning of their own experiences and stories, and those of others. And, in the same way that SMM helps participants empower themselves within the context of an interview or reflexive process, digital storytelling provides tools for everyday people to find, explore, and tell their own story using dialogic processes and simple media tools. And (re)discover the joys of active listening. If SMM reflects Freire and provides processes to implement Freirean ideals, digital storytelling allows for participants to apply SMM and Freire in an enjoyable and rewarding learning experience. Since 1995 I have been asking students to reflect on their experiences using questioning derived from SMM; since 2005 this has included digital storytelling. Based on the responses, the digital storytelling experience appears to be successful for several reasons:[23]

- The activities are fun and present a learning opportunity that is engaging and entertaining;
- The structure is an effective mix of social interaction within the group and individual reflection and work;
- People learn something about themselves and others in the exploration of the story and by listening to the stories of others;
- People are surprised to realize that other people were interested in their experiences, stories, insights regarding the human condition;
- Listening and sharing deeply personal experiences and emotions can join people together;
- It is surprising to realize that people are more alike than different;
- People learn skills in organizing and telling an engaging story;
- People learn some technical skills and become more confident with digital technologies;
- It is a thrill to have a crowd of friends and strangers watch a screening of the personal story, and receive accolades after the event.

The comments below, from the 2010 workshops at universities and the CCMC in Cyprus, are similar to responses from digital storytelling workshops and courses I have conducted over the past six years using SMM.[24] Theresa noted benefits that came from developing the skill of active listening to others:

> *A `lesson for life' is listening to others. When in the story circle I actually listened and heard the inner message and emotions that others were sharing. I learned to give them their time and managed to keep ideas and comments until the end. I learned to respect the feelings of others more and give them the attention that they were due . . . It is important to share feelings, and listen to the feelings of others, to a point where it can be cleansing and calming. This is something I can use not only in this course, but in life generally.* (Theresa, University of Cyprus, 2010)

John illustrated the interplay between listening to others and being heard by them, and integrating other people's perspectives into his story:

[The best of what I have achieved in this workshop ... is]: Active listening. It was wonderful to have the opportunity, the length of time, the challenge to be attentive to others' stories and respond to them. To gain so much from the others' listening and feeding back their own impression to my story. It was fascinating to experience the process we all underwent in shaping and reshaping our stories according to the group's responses – to play a part in each other's narratives – to hear the echoes of each others' response in redrafted stories . . . (John, CCMC workshop, 2010)

Alex described bonds that developed after students began to view others in a different light, based on the shared stories:

We have to thank you. We have bonded in this class in a way we haven't in other classes. In other classes, maybe we hate each other. But in here we bond together. We see that we are much alike. So thank you for helping us see we are a lot alike. I didn't dream we had so much in common. (Alex, European University of Cyprus, 2010)

Boracan focused on the transformation experienced through sharing emotions:

It was a `lesson for life' to see how our feelings which we keep inside (happiness, sorrow, longing, regret etc.) started to transform and gave way to different emotions after sharing them with other group members . . . After participants told their funny or sad stories and shared them with the group, the sorrow was not too tangible and things that we had found funny were not too funny any more. Even our frustrated moments left themselves to the serenity . . . Sharing our emotions was very powerful instrument and transformed our feelings, perspectives and understandings. Experiencing this change helped me to see that. (Boracan, Near East University, 2010)

The responses indicate directions for future exploration of the data gathered in Cyprus during the course of the project: theoretical and practical aspects of pedagogy, digital storytelling, oral history, self-reflexivity, Sense Making Methodology, dialogue, and conflict resolution. Following the positive experiences and personal bonding within groups at Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot universities and the mixed group at the CCMC, one next step is to conduct digital storytelling in bicommunal groups of university-age students to aid relationship-building across cultural lines.[25] Another possible course is to train digital storytellers in the collection of oral histories, and assist elders create their own multi-media stories. Following the creation of their digital stories, students in the University of Cyprus "Self-Reflexive Writing" class collected oral histories from elders in the family and community, using interview approaches and self-reflexive techniques from SMM. There was not sufficient time to work with the elder and create a multi-media story based on the oral history; the stories are in text form.[26] The self-reflexive analysis of the students to the material they encountered as a result of the interviews is quite powerful and will be explored in future articles. The experiences with reflexivity as a tool in aiding the processing of "lessons for life" by participants suggest that classes and workshops might consider attending to this element during post-workshop/class evaluations.

Conclusion

The selected reflexive responses above suggest a sense of empowerment arising from *active listening* to others and being *genuinely heard* by others. Digital storytelling's ability to cultivate these attributes in a supportive and fun environment is notable, as is community media's capacity to nurture the practice as a part of its commitment to community development. Freire and Sense Making Methodology inform concepts and practices of dialogue of which active listening is an integral aspect. Lederach identifies quality dialogue as essential to peace building:

Conflict transformation views peace as centered and rooted in the quality of relationships . . . Rather than seeing peace as a static `end-state,' conflict transformation views peace as a continuously evolving and developing quality of relationships . . . Peace work . . . is characterized by intentional efforts to address the natural ebb and flow of human conflict through non-violent approaches, which address issues and increase understanding, equality, and respect in relationships. Conflict transformation suggests that a fundamental way to promote constructive change . . . is dialogue. Dialogue is essential to justice and peace on both an interpersonal and a structural level. It is not the only mechanism, but it is an essential one. (Lederach, 2006, p. 27)

Digital storytelling and community media provide opportunities to apply notions of conflict transformation within stimulating and pleasurable learning environments. Digital storytelling and community media, with direction, are able to cultivate skills of self-reflexivity, active listening, and authentic dialogue that provide a sense of empowerment and facilitate personal attachments among participants. With stories rooted in the experience of the storyteller searching for personal or universal human truths, digital storytelling and community media offer a unique method of cultivating practical self-reflexivity, building community, and sharing basic human experiences across cultures – empowering both the storyteller and the listener.

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Notes

[1] The project was a success thanks to the efforts of the workshop participants and story-makers; workshop translators and co-facilitators Beran Djemal and Gizem Kavaz; co-facilitator Sarah Malian; CCMC staff Larry Fergeson, Alana Kakoyiannis, Michalis Simopoulos, Katherine Kotsireas, Beran and Sarah; Dr. Gökçe Keçeci Şekeroğlu of the Near East University Faculty of Communication, Department of Visual and Communication Design; Dr. Elena Stylianou of the European University of Cyprus Department of Art; Bérangère Blondeau of the International Children's Film Festival of Cyprus and Highgate School, and the remarkable people at the Cyprus Fulbright Commission. In addition, I am grateful for the contributions from Anber Onar and Johann Pillai of *Sidestreets Educational and Cultural Initiatives, Ltd.* in Nicosia during a fellowship there in 2008 that provided a pilot program for the 2010 digital storytelling workshops in Cyprus.

[2] See Higgins (1997) for a personal exploration of Freire's work and community media.

[3] This section is based on my experiences with alternative radio, video, and internet for over 30 years, as well as early accounts from Berrigan (1977), Boyle (1997), Gillespie (1976), Halleck (2002), Lewis (1978), Stoney (1986), and Waugh, Baker, and Winton (2010). More recent accountings include Higgins (1999, 2007), Howley (2005), Rennie (2006), and Rodriguez (2001).

[4] Throughout this article "internet" is used as a common noun – as is typical with other media forms.

[5] I distinguish the terms "alternative," "grassroots," and "community" media as maintaining focus on process over product, challenge to hierarchical power structures, and neighborhood.

[6] In particular, the Summer 2002 issue of the *Community Media Review 25.2*, "Rethinking Access Philosophy," was noted by Rennie (2006; 59) as "one of the few texts that unites community media theory with the concerns and observations of practitioners." The issue is available at www.allcommunitymedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/cmr_archive/CMR-v25n2-Sum_2002.pdf or www.mediaprof.org/acmwhitepaper/

[7] These are informed by Devine (2001), Higgins (1999, 2007), Johnson & Menichelli (2007), and Stoney (2001), as well as Freire (1970/1989) and Dervin (2008).

[8] See Williams (1976).

[9] Antioch College's role in the emergence of community-based video is discussed by Antioch's Robert Devine (2001) and Boyle (1997), who notes the college's participation in one of the earliest alternative video groups, TVTV.

[10] In 2010 puppets were included in the Fulbright project in Cyprus as a way to interest families in storytelling events. See www.nightvisionpuppets.org; also on this site is the essay "Puppets and Politics," describing a show at the U.N.'s 50th Anniversary bi-communal celebration at the Ledra Palace Hotel in Nicosia in 1995.

[11] The program was one of a series produced by Grupo Creativo Los Buenos Muchachos (the Good Guys Creative Group), a local media production group involving students from the Universidad del Norte. The screening fiesta, "Ciudad Arteria" (city artery), was an event held regularly in neighborhoods throughout the city. The community screening was included in the schedule for a

conference convening in Barranquilla, OURmedia/NUESTROSmedios, a group composed of activists, practitioners, academics, and policy leaders engaged in community-based, grassroots media around the world.

[12] This section is based on Lambert (2006) and insights provided by Joe Lambert, the staff of the Center for Digital Storytelling, and workshop colleagues during a three day workshop in 2004 and a week long "Train the Trainers" workshop in 2007. Additional contributions were provided by Leslie Rule of KQED media's Digital Storytelling Initiative during conversations in 2007 and 2008. Further perspectives are informed by my experiences utilizing variations of digital storytelling in college classrooms since 2005, focusing on the process as a self-reflexive tool in concert with SMM. Additional information, as well as links to digital storytelling resources and examples, is available at www.mediaprof.org/d-storytelling.html

[13] See the Center for Digital Storytelling CDS website at www.storycenter.org/.

[14] See KQED's Digital Storytelling Initiative website at www.dsi.kqed.org/.

[15] See www.bbc.co.uk/wales/audiovideo/sites/galleries/pages/capturewales.shtml

[16] This section draws from Bray (2011), Economist Intelligence Unit (2011), Immovable object (2010), Europe: Aphrodite's troubled island (2009), United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (2011), and the United States Central Intelligence Agency (2011).

[17] "A Picture of Hope," one of the digital stories created at the CCMC workshop in fall 2010, mentions such an encounter. See http://youtu.be/xgr5h5GVbKo

[18] I am grateful to the UNDP-ACT staff and Larry Fergeson of the CCMC for helping me sort through the processes by which the CCMC was supported through the UNDP-ACT program.

[19] See the CCMC website at www.cypruscommunitymedia.org/

[20] Conditions in the buffer zone have improved somewhat with the opening of the "Home for Cooperation" in May 2011 through the Association for Dialogue and Research of Cyprus (AHDR). See www.ahdr.info

[21] Digital stories approved for online posting by story makers from Cyprus 2010 are available online at the CyprusStories channel on YouTube at www.youtube.com/CyprusStories. Stories are arranged in playlists: #1 includes all on-line stories; #2-5 arrange stories by organization; #6 provides stories created in workshop in 2008 at *Sidestreets* in Nicosia.

[22] See Dervin (2003a; 2003b; 2008).

[23] The responses and insights came primarily from university students between the ages of 18 and 24, from 2005 to 2010.

[24] Participants selected their own pseudonym for their reflexive responses.

[25] At the time of this writing, a bicommunal digital storytelling workshop for young adults was scheduled at the CCMC for June 2011.

[26] The oral histories are continuation of a project started in 1996: "Cypriot Voices." See www.CYvoices.org

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