Ipswich stories

Using digital storytelling to research intergenerational sharing of heritage, history, place, identity and community connection: A pilot study

Daniel Lalor
October 2009

Co-creative media production practices offer important new modes and opportunities for social participation and engagement. In mid-2009 Institute for Creative Industries and Innovation researchers at QUT adapted a specific model of co-creative media production, known as ‘digital storytelling’ and piloted it as an action research platform for facilitating and researching knowledge production based on intergenerational dialogue and exchange. Nine stories were produced and important insights were generated into this particular use of digital storytelling, as well as the impact of institutional constraints and opportunities on the possibilities and outcomes co-creative media practices and processes.
Contents
Acknowledgements..................................................................................4
Introduction..............................................................................................5
2.0 Project Design and Objectives .....................................................5
3.0 The Process.........................................................................................6
    3.1 SeniorNet Pre-Workshop Focus Group Findings.................................7
    3.2 SPCC Pre-Workshop Focus Group Findings.........................................8
    3.3 Workshops..........................................................................................10
    3.4 SeniorNet Post Workshop Focus Group...........................................13
    3.5 SPCC Post Workshop Focus Group..................................................14
4.0 The Stories .......................................................................................17
    4.1 Our Early Memories in Ipswich...........................................................18
    4.2 Cultural Connections to Ipswich, Queensland.....................................18
    4.3 Now and Then ....................................................................................19
    4.4 The Great Ipswich Trifle....................................................................19
    4.5 Changing Times of North Ipswich School........................................19
    4.6 We Love Ipswich Greg (SeniorNet) and Caitlyn (SPCC)....................20
    4.7 Something Old, Something New: A Story of Limestone Park.............20
    4.8 Play on Text .......................................................................................20
    4.9 Shift Happens ...................................................................................21
5.0 Further Developments......................................................................21
    5.1 Possible Linkages.............................................................................21
    5.2 Dissemination...................................................................................21
6.0 Recommendations............................................................................21
7.0 Conclusions.......................................................................................22
Acknowledgements

The ‘Ipswich Stories’ digital storytelling pilot was made possible with funding by and administrative support from the Institute for Creative Industries and Innovation at the Queensland University of Technology. iCi Director Phil Graham and Office Manager Kati Bell, along with other iCi staff were enormously helpful and accommodating. iCi support enabled the appointment of Daniel Lalor as the Research Assistant for this project. Daniel was enormously effective in this role, and made an outstanding contribution by bringing his knowledge of Ipswich and community-based media to bear upon the process of facilitating the execution of the project. Amongst other things, Daniel was instrumental in securing the support and participation of the two Ipswich-based organisations that were crucial to this project, SeniorNet and St. Peter Claver College. Members of SeniorNet were extremely generous supporters of this research and inspiring participants. The contributions of staff and students at St. Peter Claver College were also enormously valuable. The Research office of the Creative Industries Faculty also contributed to this project in the form of Mimi Tsai, Digital Storytelling Project Officer, whose command of project details and logistics ensured the smooth running of the workshop.

Jean Burgess, Christina Spurgeon, Helen Klaebe
‘Ipswich Stories’ researchers, Creative Industries, QUT, October 2009.
Introduction

The ‘Ipswich Stories’ pilot project was an initiative of Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and was funded by the Institute Creative Industries and Innovation (iCi) at QUT. It involved partnering two Ipswich based institutions to co-create digital stories around an ‘Ipswich’ theme. There are a number of distinctive characteristics which set this digital storytelling project apart from ones previously conducted: The ‘Ipswich Stories’ project was a pilot study devised to research the effects of digital storytelling in facilitating intergenerational communication; the framework for stories was place-based (Ipswich); a private school was chosen (ie a school not bound by Education Queensland (EQ) guidelines) with the majority of workshops being held on school grounds, and each story was completed in pairs. In order to achieve the projects aim of facilitating intergenerational communication, the institutions chosen each served different generations of the Ipswich community.

The two institutions involved in the project were St. Peter Claver College (SPCC) and SeniorNet Association (SeniorNet). SPCC is based in Riverview, Ipswich and caters for secondary level schooling (Grades 8-12). This school was identified as a partner for a number of reasons: Firstly, the school is a private school and therefore isn’t subject to EQ guidelines which in other projects have caused issues and delays in story dissemination and student involvement. Secondly, a relationship already existed between the SPCC Principal and iCi Director, so adapting the project into current school curriculum would prove to be quite easy. Ten students (5 male, 5 female) from Grade 10 were chosen to participate in the program as part of the schools’ Student Enrichment Program and their involvement and final stories would be used as assessment. The implications of this are discussed in more detail in Section 4.0.

SeniorNet are located in the Ipswich Mall and have been operating since 1993 for people over 55 years of age. Their slogan is ‘seniors teaching seniors’ and they run a number of workshops on a range of computing skills for a membership fee. A relationship already existed with members of this Association and the Research Assistant of this project and as a result 10 SeniorNet members were recruited to participate with the SPCC students.

As far as possible this report avoids identifying individual participants. Names are used in connection with the brief descriptions of stories produced in the course of this workshop in Section 4. This is because these stories are publicly available and identifiable. Information reported here and obtained by other means, for example, focus group discussion and participant observation, is not attributed to individuals and details are removed where they might enable the identification of an individual informant.

2.0 Project Design and Objectives

Working within the school curriculum dictated how the workshops would progress and meant that the typical digital storytelling workshop method was particularly
adapted to suit this project. Instead of a typical intensive week long workshop, the ‘Ipswich Stories’ workshops would be held on average once a week, over roughly five weeks. In order to study intergenerational communication it was agreed by the research team that a comparative approach should make up one facet of the research design and pre and post focus groups were conducted for this purpose. Secondly, further qualitative data would be collected in the form of open ended questions in a workshop booklet which would be presented to each participant pre-workshop and collected after the final workshop, and also through field notes and observation conducted by the QUT research team. Visual documentation was also captured to support and extend field notes and the finished digital stories made available for textual analysis.

Whilst there had been a range of digital storytelling projects conducted in the past, there has been a gap in its effects on facilitating intergenerational communication. The QUT team saw this pilot study as an opportunity to create a historically significant collection of stories through the eyes of two different generations in Ipswich, and research the intergenerational uses of co-creative media for sharing knowledge of history, places, heritage, identity and community connections. The study aimed to provide a model that could be extended to other locations. Each participant from SPCC would be partnered with a SeniorNet member, creating ten teams of two people. In these teams the participants would co-create a digital story around the place-based theme of Ipswich. It was the aim of QUT researchers to have each team finish their story within the allocated workshop time.

3.0 The Process

As mentioned previously, two institutions were identified as possible participants, largely due to pre-existing relationships between these and members of the QUT research team. Initially, it was identified that a culturally diverse range of students would be beneficial to this project to study its effects (if any) on the finished stories, but was not essential to the main focus of intergenerational communication. Intercultural and intergenerational communication through digital storytelling however, may be an area of future interest and research. Due to existing curriculum and school programs, the QUT research team did not participate in directly choosing which students from SPCC would be involved, or even what year that would be from - this was left to the school principal and teachers to decide.

A preliminary meeting was held between the Principal, English teacher, IT teacher/Student Enrichment Program coordinator, and Curriculum Advisor from SPCC and two of the QUT research team. This meeting was conducted to determine student availability and discuss SPCC’s expectations the project. It was agreed that the students’ participation would occur during school hours as: there would be no guarantee that after school hours they would all be available; and mobilising them would be a lot easier if they were all together to begin with (the implications of this are highlighted in Section 3.3). The student’s availability very much determined how, when and where the workshops would be conducted and it was identified that the Grade 10 students were available for about 5-6 sessions of 2.5 – 3 hours, over a 5 week period. There was also space on school campus to run the workshops, however,
all participants visiting the school would require a blue card, or have a blue card application pending. This had to be followed through by QUT researchers for eight of the ten SeniorNet participants. Two SeniorNet participants already held blue cards. SPCC identified that a QUT Kelvin Grove campus tour would benefit the participating students and that their involvement and finished stories would be assessed as part of the school’s Student Enrichment Program. The research team were also given a school contact to follow up with regarding workshop logistics and developments.

After the preliminary SPCC meeting, members of the SeniorNet Association were approached in person by the QUT Research Assistant to generate interest around this project. Others were notified using the SeniorNet mailing list and the remaining participants were recruited this way. Four of the ten SeniorNet participants had worked with QUT before on another unrelated project.

3.1 SeniorNet Pre-Workshop Focus Group Findings

The first contact between QUT researchers and all of the participating SeniorNet members was held in the SeniorNet training facility in the Ipswich Mall. The QUT research team decided to meet with them in a space they were comfortable with, to create as much as possible an informal environment and encourage conversation. There was an overwhelming homogeneous response from SeniorNet participants, that their principal interest in participating in this pilot study was in the opportunity to work with young people and learn new skills.

“My main motivation for being involved is that so often the better type of youth aren’t recognised for what they are…to help and support that young person who wants to get ahead and have got any ambition, I think we are obliged as an adult community to do something about it”

“We might be in our later years but we are still open to what is going on around us…I like to know how things work.”

Some attendees showed anxiety to how/who they would be paired with to produce their story, and one member actually suggested QUT researchers consider a ‘match-making’ technique after our focus group with the SPCC students. A thematic approach (entertainment, transport, employment, education) was also suggested to best match participants in creating a story, and it is interesting to note that most finished stories ended up following these themes (discussed in more detail in Section 4.0). There was also some consensus in wanting to know whether the students would really want to work with older people, or whether they were being compelled as part of a school activity.

“You need to establish a connection...You can connect with any child if your motivation is to connect...We are the one’s with the mature developed skills hopefully. We are the one’s that can adapt and connect and adjust. It will cost us. We will change our attitudes and a whole lot of things but that’s part of inter-generational connection is that you change.”
The group also shared that view that young people are generally much better educated than older generations, which also contributed as a source of anxiety, but was balanced by the understanding that with age comes the wisdom of historical insight. The skills that this particular group of seniors have learnt as being a part of a seniors computing group, have key implications for the development of this project in other areas. These ten participants compared with others of the same age may be more computer and internet literate, which has obvious benefits in successfully creating a digital story in a short space of time.

“I’ve learnt more about the world in five years through computers than I’ve learnt in all my time before.”

“They will know more about computers than we do but they might be surprised that we are not little old grannies sitting at home.”

“I didn’t even know how to switch a computer on five years ago. I have learnt more in the room (SeniorNet) than anywhere else.”

The SeniorNet participants were also shown a digital story to familiarise them with the concept. Three participants identified that they had created similar stories for wedding anniversaries, or group activities they had been a part of, except the ones they created didn’t include a voice-over. Instead, their stories were slideshows of photos with a music sound bed.

3.2 SPCC Pre-Workshop Focus Group Findings

A focus group with the ten SPCC students was held at QUT after the requested tour of the Kelvin Grove campus. This focus group aimed to understand the students’ perceptions of the project, of Ipswich, and of working with older people, and also to introduce them to digital storytelling, the research methods and how the project planned to progress. Two QUT researchers facilitated the focus group as the students were arranged around a circular table to encourage conversation. Their supervising teacher and remaining QUT research team members were seated elsewhere in the room. From this session, some key themes were identified:

It was identified by the students that the SeniorNet participants would perceive them to be better at using the computer than they actually are and some seemed anxious that they wouldn’t have the know-how to complete a digital story.

“What about the ones who aren’t so good on computers? I can type on it but…”

“Expect they think we know a lot about computers”

“I don’t want them thinking that we can use computers, when we can’t and then they’ll be like…oh.”

The students also made comments about how they think that older generations perceive them to be.
“Older people will perceive us as lazy...it’s true...not everyone is lazy.”

“The older generations are not trying to say that we are soft, but that they are trying to say times have been tougher.

One female student said that although technology has made things easier the magazines around telling us you have to look a certain way have made things harder.

“The older people never had that, they never had to be that kind of person, they may not understand that from our point of view. They have one way of thinking cause of how they have been raised...same for us.”

The students also had a lot to say about Ipswich itself. A number of students proclaimed their dislike for Ipswich and most students also agreed that there were two sides to the town: the ‘Bogan’ and ‘Non-Bogan’ side. Some students admitted they were unaware of this divide, one not knowing what a ‘Bogan’ was. Most believed however that the recently developed North side of the Bremer River was the modern side of Ipswich and reflected a more upper class side of the city. The Ipswich Mall side of the river was believed to be the old, run-down side and seemed to still carry a lot of the old stereotypes that people closer to Brisbane used to have (or still have) of Ipswich.

“Ipswich is split in two – new modern Riverlink side and the old mall side – I’m not racist, but there’s bums and bogans there. That’s how it is split, it is split by the bridge.”

“If you head back to the olden days, they probably see Riverlink as what we see today...the mall would have been modern...they probably think Riverlink is over the top.”

“Everywhere you go is bogan in Ipswich...”

“Ipswich is disgusting...its dirty ...it is sooo bogan...everywhere you go you have a risk of being stabbed and dying”

Students were also encouraged by QUT researchers to think about what they perceived the older people think about Ipswich, and perhaps about the stories they would like to share:

“They won’t perceive Ipswich has gotten better...How it used to be good, and how they used to like it, and how the children never used to be rebellious.”

“The stories may help us appreciate what we have now...they had brick phones, we have little ones. It might payoff to see that change has opened; it may open our eyes to the change that has happened.”

“I think that modern day society, they think that the way elderly people used to do things is more difficult, and that we are doing the right thing for making it easier for younger generations, whereas the older generations put the effort
The SPCC students were encouraged to think about what story they could share at the first workshops ‘story circle’ and to bring props to help in this process.

3.3 Workshops

Movie maker was chosen as the video editing software as it is a standard program on the Microsoft operating system and it was agreed that this would make it easier for workshops to be run on the school campus if they already had the program. It however caused problems which other editing programs may have avoided and in hindsight it may have been more beneficial to use another program. Opening a movie session on different computers proved to be very difficult as links were missing and this took up valuable time re-connecting the media. The timeline functionality also makes useability quite hard. Audacity was the sound editing software that was used to normalise and edit the sound recordings and this was easily grasped by the participants.

The ‘Ipswich Stories’ workshop was conducted in five sessions. The first session was held in the SeniorNet training room and the remaining four were held on the SPCC campus. It was identified by both SeniorNet participants and QUT researchers that in the spirit of partnership and collaboration, the ‘Story Circle’ be conducted at SeniorNet, so the students could see their facilities. The adjacent boardroom was also booked as its larger table and meeting space better suited the ‘story circle’ process. After participants were officially welcomed and briefed by QUT staff, the group of 20 was split into two groups of 10 to conduct story circles (5 SeniorNet members and 5 SPCC students in each group). This was done largely because of time and space constraints. One group stayed in the boardroom with three QUT researchers and conducted the story circle. The second group moved to the SeniorNet room with three QUT researchers to do the same. After each participant had spoken for 3-4 minutes, teams of two were created by a QUT researcher in each of the rooms, based on similarities in stories or personalities. Teams were formed for the participants because of time constraints and the assumption that some participants (mainly from the school) were still quite anxious and may not have been assertive enough to carry out this process. It was identified by SeniorNet members that this ‘story circle’ process should be extended for the entire first workshop in the future, to better familiarise each younger participant with the older, and hopefully create the trust and openness they deemed essential in co-creating a story between two strangers. The remaining time was spent in teams developing scripts and storyboards for their digital story idea.

As mentioned, the remaining four workshops were held on the SPCC campus. The QUT research team felt that the time lost in moving the students to an off-campus would venue be detrimental to each team completing their story in the allocated timeframe. Holding the workshops on school campus grounds also presented a range of issues:
• Interruptions to presentations/demonstrations by QUT researchers by school PA system.
• A number of students had to leave the digital storytelling workshops before their completion to attend other school meetings and commitments.
• Some websites needed to be approved by IT staff before they could be accessed, as they were usually ‘blocked’ to students. These included: Flickr, Creative Commons (CC), YouTube, Jamendo. Some sites could not be effectively ‘unblocked’ such as the Creative Commons site. This meant that sourcing music during workshops was not always achievable.
• A folder system needed to be set up on a secure and regularly backed-up school server to enable all groups to save their project files and project assets (images, audio files).
• Logging in to the computers required a student or staff account. This presented issues for SeniorNet members when their student partner was absent or late to a workshop as they relied on their partner to log-in to the computers.
• Consistent workshop space did not exist. The four workshops on the SPCC campus were held in three different rooms. Whilst this didn’t prove to be detrimental, it nevertheless disrupted any punctual workshop starts, as time was wasted organising teams in the new space.
• How to best record audio needs to be considered in the school environment, particularly in lunch breaks, due to student noise.
• Senior participants sometimes had to walk long distances or up hills to reach workshop areas, which created an unnecessary risk of injury.

Due to the time constraints of this project, it was decided that participants should aim to work on ‘homework tasks’ between workshops, so that stories would have the best chance of being completed within the allocated time. However, as the project involved students under the age of 18, only school email addresses could be exchanged, and were to be the only form of communication between teams between workshop contact hours. This was problematic as students rarely checked their school email accounts. In one team, phone numbers were swapped and one phone call was made from the SeniorNet member to student. One team also met outside of workshop times to take photos together for their story. After little or no contact from students on their school email addresses, some students gave their partner their more active email address. This seemed to help communication between workshops in some cases, but for the most part, the ‘homework tasks’ were rarely completed by the students.

“We work well together and have had no problems doing so – except for email communication using the school email address.”

“Had problems communicating because of lack of email address. School one was a NO GO, but finally got his own [email address].”

Two students were also absent for the second workshop which highlighted the need for a protocol to deal with such situations. The research team hadn’t given much prior thought to how teams should progress if one member wasn’t able to attend the workshop and struggled in this instance to quickly and effectively deal with the situation. As a result, one of the effected groups decided not to continue in the ‘Ipswich Stories’ project. The protocol for dealing with non-attendance in a co-
Dealing with non-attendance:

1. Reassure the attending member that this situation can sometimes happen, and that a finished story can still be achieved.
2. Look at what the attending member can do by themselves – keep in mind that in a school setting, passwords for computer access will exist, and if temporary logins cannot be granted, the member must be assured that going home is a viable option.
3. Offer them, if they aren’t able to work alone, the option to go home. They don’t have to stay the duration of the workshop. They can complete one task and then go home, or just go home straight away. Make them feel comfortable either way.
4. It’s important to reassure and calm down the situation. Stories can still be completed – their work schedule can be reorganised to help them see how the story will still be achieved.
5. If they choose to work alone in the workshop, monitor and offer more assistance/time to this person.
6. At the subsequent workshop(s), spend extra time with this team to see if they are on track with completing the required tasks.

With the help of the QUT research team, scripting and storyboarding were finished in the second session, and six of the ten groups had recorded their voice-overs. As the workshops progressed, so too did the relationships between the members of each team. It was interesting to note, that in every case and for every workshop, the student sat in the ‘drivers seat’ of the computer, taking control of the mouse and keyboard. There were also more obvious signs of frustration from members of teams as the workshops progressed and it was clear that some teams were progressing at faster rates than others. The frustration was sometimes a result of their partner, or at their own limitations in using the editing software.

“*My partner did not contribute to the story at all – however, she has enthusiastically contributed to the photos.*”

“*Could not access [music] at the school…Had difficulty at home due to my ignorance.*”

“*Moderately happy [with story]…I could see some flaws but I am not so computer literate to be too daring.*”

“*He doesn’t know much about photoshop…not keen to let me sit at computer.*”

“*Because we have to get it done quickly, he [student] is doing it [photo editing] while I watch. One day I will get time to learn more about it.*”

“*Students made to understand at the beginning that this is a joint project and they need to cooperate.*”
A number of SeniorNet members attempted to work on their stories between the workshop contact time. They would save a copy of their movie maker file in the workshops to take home with them, but struggle to get any more done before the next workshop, because of ‘missing media’. This is a Windows Movie Maker trait, that makes it hard to work on the same movie editing session on more than one computer. QUT researchers had outlined at the start that all assets for the stories, ie photos, audio should be saved into their team folder. This point however, should have been emphasised more often and supervised more thoroughly by QUT facilitators, as a number of groups failed to do this, which meant that valuable time was wasted in workshops, finding and ‘reconnecting’ the media for their stories.

The final workshop consisted of adding final touches to the stories, exporting them as movie files and screening the stories. One or two groups had finished editing the workshop before, whilst others were pushed to complete it even in this final session. Non-attendance was also an issue in the final session, as one of the school children was unavailable. The Non-attendance policy derived earlier in the workshops, was implemented, however, as it was the last session to work on the story, a few extra steps needed to be taken. A QUT researcher worked closely with the SeniorNet member through this session and for the screening of the in-class screening of this film, it was outlined, that work still had to be completed. The QUT researcher also met with this participant at their home outside of workshop hours to complete the story. At the end of the final workshop, some groups were still not completely happy with their stories – as a result, QUT researchers added music to some stories and in one case, added images to further improve them for the final public screening. These were then shown to participants in the post workshop focus groups for their approval.

3.4 SeniorNet Post Workshop Focus Group

Two weeks after the workshops, a second focus group was held with the SeniorNet participants at their office in the Ipswich Mall. All of the participants were in attendance except for one. It would have been better obviously if all participants were able to make this meeting time, however it became apparent in the preliminary organisation of this meeting that it would be hard for all 9 participants to be free on the same day and time. The meeting nonetheless proved useful in determining whether the SeniorNet participants benefited from the Ipswich Stories project, and provided insight into how the workshops met their expectations.

In the pre-workshop focus group the SeniorNet members assumed that they would have to adapt to suit the students’ needs and story ideas and it was unanimous in this second focus group they all thought this was the case. Ruth sacrificed her desire to make a story about Ipswich because her partner seemed more interested in her mobile phone then anything else. As a result, Ruth scripted their story around communication technologies. It was also widely agreed that letting the younger people take the lead in the story development process was not very practical, as their story telling capacity wasn’t really developed enough to suit this leadership role. The SeniorNet participants mentioned that when they didn’t organise it themselves, it generally didn’t go too well. Trish also identified that she had to sacrifice some parts of the story she wanted to produce because Sarah was very busy with other assessment and working to the
workshop deadlines with these extra commitments proved difficult. It was felt generally that the students were not very proficient at managing their time.

Whist they felt their partners were all friendly, most of the SeniorNet members felt like they had to work hard to establish an initial connection with their partner. The older participants all felt as well that it was very important to make the students feel welcomed and valued if they were going to achieve a finished product. It was suggested by a number of SeniorNet participants that more time should be spent getting to know each other better. It was suggested that this could be done through an extended story circle process, or once paired up, allowing the two to continue sharing stories instead of having to start straight away on scripting. It was also recommended that if the project was to reoccur, that it be held at a time which didn’t conflict with school exams or assessment. It was also felt that the lack of communication outside of the contact hours made the process harder. The students generally were very unresponsive to email contact the Seniors had with them between workshops, which increased the frustration and anxiety that stories wouldn’t be completed on time.

As mentioned in Section 4.3 Kevin felt a little anxious in working with a younger girl, because of how he might be viewed by others. He didn’t want his relationship to be at any risk of being misconstrued and chose not to email his partner first, but instead waited for her to make first contact with him. This adds another layer of complexity in the intergenerational co-creation of media which has implications for future projects.

It was unanimous that all the SeniorNet participants felt that it was a beneficial experience. They all appreciated feeling valued and they loved taking part in “something they never thought they would get a chance” to do. They felt that sharing some of their history and sharing their stories with someone who was generally interested in them was a very good experience.

“Even if the kids now don’t think has been good process, they will look back on it down the track and realise (it was)…”

It was widely supported by the Seniornet participants that the young people were good at communicating with people of different ages, but that sometimes they hide behind technology, which they feel is a problem. The group were divided as to whether the workshops helped in addressing this. Individual accounts of the SeniorNet participants’ working relationship with their partner can be found in Section 4.0 – Stories.

3.5 SPCC Post Workshop Focus Group

Two weeks after the final workshop a focus group was held on the SPCC campus. QUT researchers were interested in determining whether the student’s perceptions of older people had changed as a result of the Ipswich Stories project and more specifically whether the way they communicated with the older people had changed. Also of interest was whether the students felt that there was a sharing of knowledge and heritage through the co-creation of these stories. It was important for this to take place to compare the students’ thoughts and expectations prior to the
workshops with what they felt now and this focus group allowed us to show them all their finished stories again and encourage them all to attend the final public screening.

Some students felt that Ipswich wasn’t a great place to live pre-workshops. As mentioned earlier in section 3.2 some thought Ipswich was very dangerous, and that there was a ‘bogan’ element to Ipswich. After the workshops, some students commented that they had learnt some new things about Ipswich, but also about how some perceptions about the older generations had changed:

“I learnt that it isn’t as dangerous as once thought...Blackstone isn’t as scary as others.”

“I didn’t know about SeniorNet, and it interested me that older people wanted to know about technology. Young people think it’s entertaining etc. but I didn’t realise older people were into that sort of stuff...”

“Widened my view of Ipswich.”

“I’ve lived here a long time so I knew some of the stuff...I thought the old people didn’t want to know about how we are now ‘cause they think we are feral and stuff ‘cause we just party. They don’t want to know about how we are now, but now I realise they actually do want to realise how we are now, and what the differences are now, and about technology. We learnt that the elder people can learn from us too.”

From the focus group it was unanimous that the students felt that the SeniorNet participants’ perception of Ipswich is different to their own. Some students also perceived that older people in Ipswich would think that the city has socially declined and that the youth today are generally more trouble:

“I think they think we are all mean now, but back in the old days it was nice.”

“People in general were nicer back then, today people are mean.”

“They could walk around the streets and not be scared of being stabbed.”

The students agreed that they each communicated differently with the SeniorNet members than with people of their same age out of respect for the older participants. More generally however, they felt that their communication with all people depended on how well you knew them and wasn’t based on age. They also mostly agreed that gender wasn’t an issue in communication. From this we can suggest that because the participants still didn’t know each other extremely well, the students’ communication with them was altered out of respect. If the teams were to continue to build their relationships, the ease of communication between the younger and older participants may increase. Some students found that their confidence had improved in talking to older people as a result of the workshops.

“I thought we wouldn’t have stories that mattered ‘cause we are too young for them (seniors). My confidence improved.”
“definitely talk to old (people) differently…it is a respect thing.”

“Don’t pay out on older people as much…” one student said, but this was countered with a comment that it depends on how well you know them, “because I pay out on my parents.”

The QUT researchers got a sense from some students that the largest benefit of participating in the Ipswich Stories workshop was that they got out of usual class and their assessment for one subject was halved to accommodate their participation in this project. Others however, mentioned that they enjoyed learning new skills and getting more of an insight into the lives of older people. Some students felt that their story telling skills had improved and that generally the digital storytelling process was easier than they had first anticipated. Some benefits of taking part in the project were mentioned by students:

“Initially thought it was going to be tough…it was easier than I thought.”

“Just did it to get out of class – had an assignment due the same time.”

“Only had to do half of an assignment.”

“Get a firmer relationship with the older people.”

“Learnt how to use movie maker, which was good.”

“Storytelling skills are a little better.”

Perhaps the most interesting finding from this post workshop focus group was around ownership of the stories. Some students revealed that some parts of their story were not true to their real thoughts and opinions but were told in a conscious attempt to portray a certain image to their partners. These students felt that they wanted to give the perception that they were good students/teenagers and felt a little “constrained” as a result of this, so some modified their stories and behaviour to portray this positive image to their partners. They also said that they wanted to keep their partners happy and the story making process as easy as possible, so some small sections of their story were not 100% accurate. This creates an interesting area for discussion. Digital storytelling aims to amplify the creator’s voice but if the students do not completely own their story, the benefits they derive from completing a story may be diminished.

In one story a SPCC student comments on how the school uniform policy is a good thing. However, in the focus group she outlined her real thoughts:

“If I was to do it again – without (my partner) – I would change the uniform policy bit – I hate it, they don’t have to be so strict about it. I actually hate uniform policy…I didn’t want to be mean though…I was trying to be nice to (my partner)…I didn’t want (them) thinking: look at her, I had to do this (in the old days) and this, and she’s complaining about little things (like her uniform).
Another student suggested that if she was to complete another story she would change some things:

“I would probably not act like I like exercise so much, ‘cause I don’t.”

One student provides probably the most clear example of the ownership issue. Her story entitled ‘We Love Ipswich” seems quite far-fetched after the focus group:

“To be honest I really dislike Ipswich.”

“I would change Ipswich to Brisbane…(if she was to do another story)”

“It’s just that he was so happy that his daughter lived in an historic house, and he was happy about that and I just wanted to keep him happy…I’m a people pleaser.”

Furthermore, a student explained that the finished storyline was an ‘accident’, and that there was a misunderstanding at the story development stage, which meant that the story went in a direction it wasn’t really intended to go:

“I tried to explain an idea, but he didn’t understand it, and so we just went with that, so it’s not what it was supposed to be. I made that bit up in the story (before school activities) – I don’t do anything before school I just sit there.”

Whilst some students seemed to fabricate some of their stories to better suit a pain-free story making process, others said that they felt no need to try and create another image, or make up stories to suit their partner. It was interesting to note, that the two students who said they were true to themselves the whole time, actually didn’t create stories about themselves.

“I didn’t have anything to lie about. The story wasn’t about me.”

“I was myself from the beginning”

4.0 The Stories

Most of the 9 finished stories followed an overarching theme of ‘Old days VS today’. In reflection, the QUT researchers hoped that the stories would be more diverse and believe that the ‘Ipswich’ theme may have constrained ideas to this safe and predictable theme. Within this theme, stories compared: school life; transport; lifestyles; societal roles; aspirations, and communication technologies. One story chose a different theme and based their story around their common interest of a local Ipswich Park – Limestone Park. Whilst the ‘old days VS today’ theme was prevalent, not all the stories could be directly associated with Ipswich, but rather to the era in general.

“Sadly, I have been unable to initiate a story about Ipswich. I have had to concoct a story which could apply to any region or audience…”
The implications of working with school children as part of their assessment were that the students’ stories weren’t always accurate. Some students were aware that the teachers and wider community would see their stories and as a result, created stories which they thought this audience would like to hear, rather than what was actually the real case. Some students seemed concerned that their partner would view them negatively if they spoke what they really felt, so instead scripted things they thought would keep their partner happy.

The final public screening of these stories was held in an auditorium in Ipswich. The attendees included the: ten SeniorNet participants and their families; SeniorNet President and Secretary; members of the general public; five of the participating students with their families; SPCC Principal; QUT researchers and; Ipswich Library Digital Archivist. Certificates of participation were presented by the iCi Director to all participants, followed by a screening of all the films. Each was received with a warm round of applause. At the time of finalising this report final consents had been obtained to publish four out of nine of these stories on the Digital Storytelling at QUT website (available at: http://digitalstorytelling.ci.qut.edu.au/). A brief description of each of the stories follows.

4.1 Our Early Memories in Ipswich
Kevin (SeniorNet) and Amy (SPCC)
Running Time: 2.23 minutes

Kevin and Amy’s story consisted of an interview style where questions were asked by each member to the other. The photos in the story mainly consisted of both the members as their younger selves (consistent with the story’s title) and didn’t always match the dialogue; instead the pictures seemed to tell their own independent story. The themes they covered included: where they were born; before school activities; first day of school; primary schooling; transport to school; favourite school subjects; after school activities; and activities in their teenage years.

4.2 Cultural Connections to Ipswich, Queensland
Doreen (SeniorNet) and Andrew (SPCC)
Running Time: 1.58 minutes

Doreen and Andrew’s story focussed on their genealogy, specifically where their ancestors were in the 1800’s and progressed to how they each came to live in Ipswich today. Doreen discussed her family’s history in Lancashire, England and the family memorabilia she still has. This story saw each participant take turns to speak of their family’s history but didn’t really follow the typical interview style seen through most of the other stories - Doreen asked only one question of Andrew. The majority of Andrew’s story consisted of his famous 4th generation Grandmother who fought in the New Zealand Land Wars in 1863. The photos in this digital story complimented the voice-overs throughout and the last slide featured a quote by Soren Kierkegaard: “Life Can Only Be Understood Backwards, But Must [Be] Lived Forwards.”
4.3 Now and Then
Lesley (SeniorNet) and Dylan (SPCC)
Running Time: 2.03 minutes

Lesley and Dylan’s story involved comparing schooling in the 1950’s to schooling today, and involved each participant speaking about their experience across themes such as: educational materials; subjects taught at school; uniforms; rules and discipline; and technology. Their story required extra supporting images to be sourced by QUT researchers, as this team had difficulty sourcing images. Creative Commons licensed pictures could not be sourced at school and this could be a contributing factor to this. The pair were happy with the QUT revised product.

4.4 The Great Ipswich Trifle
Edna (SeniorNet) and Conor (SPCC)
Running Time: 2.28 minutes

Edna and Conor’s story used reference to Edna’s trifle recipe as a metaphor to describe what Ipswich was “made of”. This was a unique and creative approach to the digital stories produced in this project and some SPCC participants thought this story was the best one.

“Conor’s took it to a new level, instead of doing what everyone thought he would do” (SPCC focus group 2).

The story starts with Conor asking Edna about the history of her “famous” trifle and pictures showed the ingredients which go into making the dessert. It continues with the interview style, with Edna asking what Conor’s recipe for a good trifle is. His reply was “Well, my trifle is sort of like Ipswich” and he compares each of Edna’s ingredients to the ingredients which make up Ipswich:

“The sponge cake is like the scenery that you can see everywhere in Ipswich. The Ipswich annual festivals which happen every year are a fitting example for the fruit salad...” (The Great Ipswich Trifle)

Other photos in the digital story included one with both Edna and Conor, taken from the workshops in this project and also an entire group photo taken from the last workshop, where Edna actually brought in her famous trifle to share with the group. The interactions between both the young and older participants at this afternoon tea seemed at its most relaxed and it was evident that most participants had progressed in their relationships.

4.5 Changing Times of North Ipswich School
Graham (SeniorNet) and MacKenzie (SPCC)
Running Time: 2.55 minutes

Graham and MacKenzie’s story features a Creative Commons licensed piano piece for the first 30 seconds. Accompanying this is text over past and present pictures of the same landmarks to indicate how they have changed. These included the
Bremer River, The Church of St. Thomas, and the Railway Tarpaulin Shed which is now apart of the new Riverlink shopping centre. The voice-overs are conducted using the interview style and complement the text and photos to show the changes over time.

4.6 We Love Ipswich (SeniorNet) and Caitlyn (SPCC)  
Greg  
Running Time: 1.43

Greg and Caitlyn’s story focuses on the Ipswich suburb of Blackstone and challenges the popular association of Ipswich’s apparent high crime rate with the whole of the city, instead of the suburbs in which the majority of these crimes are committed. Greg explains that he is happy that he and his wife chose to retire in Ipswich because the people are generally friendly and approachable. The connection in this story between the pair was that Greg’s daughter owns an historic house in Blackstone, where Caitlyn used to live and play soccer.

4.7 Something Old, Something New: A Story of Limestone Park  
Coral (SeniorNet) and Loretta (SPCC)  
Running Time: 2.22 minutes

Coral and Loretta’s story centred around Limestone Park, which they both had an affiliation with. Their story highlights the history of Limestone Park, including its past uses. Coral outlined that in the early years of Limestone Park there were only a few sporting options that could be played there, in contrast to today where Loretta explains there are a lot more diverse sports that can be played. Coral also explains how Ipswich is the first city in Australia to have an exercise trail especially for Seniors, which she uses with friends every Monday morning. Loretta highlighted how she uses the Park for netball and even won a grand final there. Photos support the voice-overs throughout the entire story.

4.8 Play on Text  
Ruth (SeniorNet) and Megan (SPCC)  
Running Time: 2.00 minutes

Ruth did all of the scripting and voice-overs in this story and it was the only team in which this occurred. This was due to Megan being away during the voice-over recording session. Ruth starts the story with the question, “How do 15 year olds communicate?” and compares her communication methods in the 1950’s to those available today. It contrasts changes in communication in classrooms between classmates, how assignments are written, how information is sourced, how phone calls are made. Photos supporting the voice-over are seen throughout and sepia tone and static effects are placed on some older photos to further emphasise their age.
4.9 Shift Happens
Trish (SeniorNet) and Sarah (SPCC)

Running Time: 2.48 minutes

Trish and Sarah’s story compared life in Ipswich in the 1950s to today. Some historic photos of Ipswich were sourced and approved by the National Library of Australia for use in this story. The themes covered were schooling and school uniforms, socialising and leisure activities, clothing and fashion, career choices and changes in technology.

5.0 Further Developments

Two to three teams have stayed in contact after the completion of the project. One team in particular have remained particularly close, with the student introducing his SeniorNet partner to his family; together they are now working on the students’ family history (SeniorNet Focus Group 2). One SeniorNet member is also using the skills learnt in this project to develop a digital story for her 60th wedding anniversary. A number of possible linkages also present themselves for future rollout of this project:

5.1 Possible Linkages

Possible linkages and interest have been shown by the State Library of Queensland and the Ipswich Library. These should be explored further in the coming months. Both libraries have expressed interest in archiving the stories and see the benefit and value in generating more stories from different regions.

5.2 Dissemination

The finished stories will be disseminated through a number of websites and libraries. The Ipswich library and State Library of Queensland have both shown great interest in being able to archive the stories for future generations. The stories will also be published on the QUT Digital Storytelling website and the SPCC website. The QUT marketing department have also used this project for advertising in brochures and magazines.

6.0 Recommendations

- IT support is essential when working within a school environment. The school computers are often only accessed with a username and password login, and then often sites are blocked. It is also essential that all information and assets for each group are saved in the one location, and that this location is backed up to the school server. It is highly recommended that time be taken in the first workshops to explain how the movie editing software saves the files which
may show the importance of keeping all the digital story assets in easy to
navigate folders.

- It is recommended that an alternative to Windows Movie Maker be used. Whilst many computers have this software already installed it has some useability issues, mainly around timeline editing which can cause problems for people unfamiliar to movie editing.

- Student workbooks need to be collected after every workshop. An online version of the workbook was recommended by SPCC teachers as an alternative to the handouts. QUT researchers were told after the workshops by the teacher that “students usually lose handouts anyway”. Allow time in each workshop for students to fill out the workbook questions and then collect them.

- Investigate other areas outside of a school in which access to children could be granted. Youth groups etc. may provide participants for an intergenerational study and may not be restricted by school guidelines of consent etc. Allow time for blue card applications to be developed if entering a school ground for a future project. This may also address the student ownerships issues, where stories may be told more accurately if there isn’t any assessment linked to them.

- More supervision of the students’ participation outside of contact hours. A SeniorNet member proposed that a “tracker from the school should be asked to check with students if they have done their work and been in touch with their partner.” This may make workshops less stressful for participants if work could be achieved between contact hours.

- If working within school curriculum, ensure that the digital story project doesn’t conflict with an exam period or heavy assessment period. This will allow students to contribute more time and effort into their stories and in communicating outside of workshop hours with their partners.

7.0 Conclusions

The Ipswich Stories project has given insight into how a co-creative digital story workshop can be rolled out in future areas. It is clear that the benefits derived from the seniors participating in particular indicate that the project is a worthwhile one for community development. Some students also felt as if the experience was very worthwhile. The sharing of stories amongst different generations is a valuable process in expanding people’s perception of place and identity and this project helped highlight the different views shared of Ipswich by different generations. The stories also highlighted the huge changes Ipswich has seen over the past 50 years and provide a rich source of heritage for future generations. Operating within a school context created some problems as highlighted throughout this report, but allowed QUT
researchers to test how workshops may operate in this environment. This is useful for any future co-creative intergenerational projects.

The process also highlighted the need to have a protocol for dealing with non-attendance in the workshops and a sound means of communication between team members outside of contact hours. The project facilitated intergenerational communication in as much as each team had to discuss and share their thoughts on creating their stories and by the end of the workshops, many seniors felt as if the students’ confidence and communication skills had improved from their first meeting. Ownership of stories proved to be an issue for a number of stories whereby students didn’t really believe in what they had scripted, but instead presented things they thought their senior partner or school teachers would want to hear. Operating outside of a school context may address this issue.

The pre and post focus groups gave valuable insight into each participant’s expectations and reflections and allowed participants to speak of their partners in a confidential setting. This allowed QUT researchers to better understand each team dynamic and the communication that occurred within each partnership. Obviously, more time would have been welcomed in running the workshops, however this format allowed all but one story to be completed in the workshop contact hours. By the time of the public screening all stories had been completed.