



Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

This may be the author's version of a work that was submitted/accepted for publication in the following source:

[Klaebe, Helen](#)
(2012)

Framing local stories for community consumption facilitation and evaluation in narrative driven arts-based projects. In *Biennial International Auto/Biography Association (IABA) Conference*, 2012-07-17 - 2012-07-20.

This file was downloaded from: <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/58228/>

© Copyright 2012 Please consult the author

This work is covered by copyright. Unless the document is being made available under a Creative Commons Licence, you must assume that re-use is limited to personal use and that permission from the copyright owner must be obtained for all other uses. If the document is available under a Creative Commons License (or other specified license) then refer to the Licence for details of permitted re-use. It is a condition of access that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights. If you believe that this work infringes copyright please provide details by email to qut.copyright@qut.edu.au

Notice: *Please note that this document may not be the Version of Record (i.e. published version) of the work. Author manuscript versions (as Submitted for peer review or as Accepted for publication after peer review) can be identified by an absence of publisher branding and/or typeset appearance. If there is any doubt, please refer to the published source.*

<http://www.theiaba.org/2012-conference/>

Framing Lives

Abstract.

Cyclone Yasi struck the Cassowary Coast of Queensland in the early hours of Feb 3, 2011, destroying many homes and property, including the destruction of the Cardwell and district historical society's premises.

With their own homes flattened, many were forced to live in mobile accommodation, with extended family, or leave altogether. The historical society members however were more devastated by their flattened foreshore museum and loss of their collection material. A call for assistance was made through the OHAA Qld branch, who along with QUT sponsored a trip to somehow plan how they could start to pick up the pieces to start again.

This presentation highlights the need for communities to gather, preserve and present their own stories, in a way that is sustainable and meaningful to them – whether that be because of a disaster, or just as they go about life in their contemporary Australian communities - the key being that good advice, support and evaluation practices along the way is important.

I have worked with the OHAA in Qld for a decade, to design and deliver appropriate training for community groups, particularly those who have been awarded grant funding, to create narrative-driven events or exhibitions. I have also extended this research now to include evaluation methodology- that is, ensuring that the aims and goals of all the stakeholders are also achieved in arts-based narrative driven projects.

Framing local stories for community consumption

— Facilitation and evaluation in narrative driven arts-based projects

Name: Associate Professor Helen KLAEBE

Institution: Queensland Institute of Technology (QUT)

Address: Z6 508, Musk Avenue, Kelvin Grove Qld 4059, Australia

It doesn't matter if you are a little community history museum that visitors can stop and enjoy as they stretch their legs on a drive through from Townsville to Cairns or the internationally recognized Smithsonian Folklife Festival offering interactive cultural heritage to over one million tourists a year in Washington DC, audiences are interested in authentically learning more about 'real' peoples' lives — as we inevitably understand ourselves better in the process.

Even with the best intentions, not everyone can tell a good story on queue, or articulate their life's work or cultural practices in a way that is meaningful to public audiences. Facilitation, curatorial and production expertise is required. This becomes even more important if there are deadlines, such as event dates to meet, or if you have funding from a grant that needs to be acquitted within a certain period, while also delivering key outcomes for stakeholders.

My background is creative writing- specifically non-fiction creative writing using traditional and new media methods to tell stories about everyday 'ordinary' people. I have done this work by writing biographies of individuals, companies and of communities, as well as producing digital stories, oral history collections, image collections and gathering other ephemeral material. Along side my research, which has included the ethics of re-presenting others, urban and public history and transmedia storytelling, I have spent a decade working with the OHAA in training Queenslanders in oral history methods and digital storytelling as ways of encouraging co-creative authorship and production that is of quality and publically acceptable for an event or for sharing with wider online audiences, and will be the focus of my presentation today.

For this paper I will focu

Free to the public, over one million people usually visit the Folklife Festival, which presents over 23,000 musicians, artists, performers, craftsman, cooks, and much, much mor

In 2011 Queensland suffered both floods and cyclones, leaving residents without homes and their communities in ruins (2011). This paper

presents how researchers from QUT, who are also members of the Oral History Association of Australia (OHAA) Queensland's chapter, are using oral history, photographs, videography and digital storytelling to help heal and empower rural communities around the state and how evaluation has become a key element of our research.

I was holidaying at the beach town of Noosa, just north of Brisbane when the floods hit. The days leading up had been very wet so stuck inside, I found the time to apply for a Qld Smithsonian Fellowship, wanting to investigate the evaluation of narrative driven arts-based community projects, particularly where oral history and digital stories are used to build community spirit and resilience. We had experienced massive bushfires in the summer of 2009 that had affected thousands of acres in our southern state of Victoria, killing 173 people (120 in just one fire storm) and leaving the economical impact of AUS\$1.2 billion for communities who survived (2010) and so many projects were being trialed for this purpose.

A body of research on community storytelling had been building since 9/11 (2001), Boxing Day Tsunami (2004), Hurricane Katrina (2005), and in Australia, where these kinds of initiatives are run using government funding, research had also shifted to better understanding the impact or value of such initiatives (Arts Qld, 2010; Osborne and Walker, 2007; Belfiore & Bennett, 2010).

In that summer of 2010/11 unrelenting rains after nearly a decade of drought was soaking our land, and dam levies (and arguable poor management of those dams) resulted in devastating floods that left 75% of our state declared a disaster zone- we were being compared to New Orleans and Katrina¹. Less than a fortnight later, our coasts were battered by hurricane winds, the worse being the category five Cyclone Yasi, then three weeks later an earthquake hit New Zealand, followed an earthquake and tsunami hitting Japan less than a month later. The world was stunned by the enormity of it all- how many times did we hear 'devastating' while glued to the

¹ The phrase "Australia's New Orleans" is starting to be used in Brisbane. The Brisbane River is expected to cause significant flooding in Australia's third largest city. Three quarters of Queensland is now officially a disaster zone.

<http://m.digitaljournal.com/article/302423#ixzz1ryCvkoVj>

images on our television sets, yet we had no idea what it was like on the ground for people. In Brisbane you could get just hint, because experiencing it all locally made us in a small way tangibly connected to the pain and suffering globally.

Everyone was affected in Brisbane and beyond. I heard Lance Armstrong who was in Australia at the time say on twitter, "after hurricane Katrina, you never saw a traffic jam going into New Orleans, like we saw one going into Brisbane..." (Dunlevy, 2011) and he was right - we all pitched in.

Queensland University of Technology (QUT) researchers had been delivering Brisbane based workshops in oral history and digital storytelling before the floods and Cyclone Yasi struck Cardwell destroyed (along with everything else) their historical museum and recording equipment. They had wanted to come to the Brisbane workshops, but couldn't because of the sheer distance and associated costs, and had asked us to consider visiting them. Then after the cyclone, the OHAA Qld branch decided to offer any help we could, using saved funds. We emailed the historical society and asked how we could best assist and were surprised that they immediately responded by asking if we could send some facilitators up as soon as possible. There were not many houses still standing or businesses open, but if we would not mind 'camping' in at one of the members houses and could pay for the airfares, then they would organise the rest. We packed our bags and devised a plan.

Not all funders demand that evaluation is required from the outset of a program, but our research has shown that it is strategically smarter to embed evaluation mechanisms in from the outset if possible.

An evaluation cycle offers an alternative approach to the linear logic of traditional methods, by supporting the process of innovation. Evaluation can be credibly useful to brainstorm, develop and progress program ideas. Creatively entrepreneurial storytelling programs can benefit by: observing process; making quick changes; and problem solving (action research) - by validating the creative process because of how it is designed. Arts practitioners often are intuitively inclined to use this approach anyway, so may not see it as evaluation, but just the tacit way they go about their work. We wanted to capture and formalise this implicit knowledge. Evaluation is outcomes-oriented and can be useful where the outcomes are emergent and

changing. Within the Arts and academia this is also referred to as an action research cycle.

The evaluation process I had developed also aligns with the cycle of a project and falls generally into six stages: decide on the theoretical framework, based on the program's goals; identify all the stakeholders and determine logical outcomes; decide on the research methods; collect strategically appropriate data; analyse the data; and make the findings accessible. For Cardwell, it was decided:

- We would create a sustainable way in which the Cardwell Historical Group could rebuild their collection, using storytelling.
- The stakeholders were: the Historical society members, neighbouring museum/library/gallery facilitators; the local public; OHAA; and the QUT researchers.
- Our aims were to: enhance the capabilities of the stakeholders, so as to ensure that money spent on initiatives such as these are likely to have greater impact; help to inform the planning of public arts-based programs; and academically work towards improving evaluation methodology used in the field.
- We would use oral history interviews, digital storytelling, photography and creative writing as methods and so organise the collection of materials we would need accordingly
- We would capture and mine the data material with the historical society members, to make the process a 'hands on' experience, and so a timeline with two workshops, six months apart was proposed, along with a plan to gain funding for the 2nd workshop and post-production work.

The first 'emergency' workshop was planned to offer participants hands on use of the equipment, ethical and interviewing theory, so that the community could start to build a new collection. We included introductory theoretical sessions on oral history and digital storytelling as well as sessions on how best to use a video camera, digital camera and creative writing sessions, so the neighbouring facilitators from various community -based

organisations would also know how to make 'products' or exhibition pieces out of the interviews they were recording.

While this plan went well for the nearby facilitators, we had to spend far more time than we expected with the historical society group members, who had all been affected personally by the cyclone. They were wanting to capture the stories of others, but needed to 'debrief' over their own stories with someone first – which the researchers were only too happy to do. This revealed a vulnerable group of people who loved their community, but their personal lives had also been physically shattered, so 'moving on' quickly was not going to happen. Most still did not have a house to live in and were lodging with friends or family nearby, some were in caravans, but they had wanted us to come up anyway to help them record stories – and hear their testimony. They seemed to focus on their community's needs, in order to contextualise their own grief — you do not think about your own strife, if you were busy helping others.

The budget was tight for the first visit, the researchers gave their time, and we leveraged off funding from OHAA-Qld and QUT for airfares, car hire and equipment. We slept on mattresses on the floor in one of the few houses still standing and conducted the workshop in the local indigenous community hall, which was the only cyclone proof structure on the foreshore.

The last evaluation question I asked the group was to tell me the most important thing that they had learnt from our visit. They all had similar responses- "we just couldn't believe that you would come and help us... you don't know how much it means to us that you would just drop everything and come to be with us." I was finding out more about the real value of our visit – another lesson I have learned in conducting evaluations- be open to being surprised by your findings. We were seeing patterns of the same behavior that occurred after the bushfires. People determined to keep their minds on community issues, so they did not think about their own, so they could try and hold on to some kind of 'normal'.

PHASES OF DISASTER: COLLECTIVE REACTIONS (2011)



With evaluation in mind from the start, the trip's main objective was to provide basic training with technical support to as many arts workers and museum/gallery/library staff in the region, so that they would be able to carry on the hard work ahead and have each other as a support network. We spent time interviewing local people *with* workshop participants- guiding them as we went on the material we had covered in the workshop. Then we left the historical group milestone targets (accompanied by plenty of support material) to complete, and scheduled the 6-month follow up visit.

We stayed in close contact by phone and email, talking through logistics and giving step-by-step information. The historical group had applied immediately for funding for this revisit, we emailed with homework and expectations of what they would have to prepare before we could return. For the next six months they conducted more interviews, transcribing and collating material and collected appropriate images from numerous sources, adhering to our plan. They successfully secured the funding for the follow up visit.

Six months later we returned as paid research-based facilitators and stayed at a newly reopened resort. The group had also bought laptops and we found that the material gathered by the community was amazing. We had quality primary data at our fingertips ready to mine for outputs together. While one team member worked with a group on transcripts, using them as primary source material to find appropriate anecdotal accounts for exhibitions or digital stories, while some of the members joined researchers in filming.

We created two digital stories in a workshop together, based on transcripts and photographs they had prepared, as we digitally edited and cut the audio. We did a little post-production work back in Brisbane, but importantly the group got to 'make things' that they could use while we were there, giving them a sense of empowerment, and that they could sustainably continue on with after we left.

Together the outputs we produced included: three video recorded oral history interviews: 10 audio recorded interviews, two digital stories - all fully transcribed; catalogued thousands of images; and produced edited text for exhibitions, as well as delivering educative upskilling for the participants, furthering our research on evaluation, and boosting the morale of the local community. The work led to sustainable outcomes. We are still offering backup support to the historical group, but they continue the work independently. We are not just breezing in and breezing out, leaving people enthused, but with no direction or instruction to continue without support.



Image from: <http://world.edu/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/kiss-my-yasi.jpg>

The project was designed with evaluation in mind from the outset - I planned ahead, I thought about all the stakeholders and what it all meant for the community as well. I feel I can tick off all these boxes very comfortably with the Cardwell project – all for under \$10k with three facilitators, four days on the ground, but only because of a lot of hard work completed before, in between and after.

In summary, the main reasons evaluation should be a key consideration in oral history project is that it will enhance the capabilities of the stakeholders - both internally as externally; it will ensure that money spent on initiatives such as these are likely to have greater impact for the stakeholders; help to inform the planning of public arts-based programs; and academically work towards improving evaluation methodology used in the field.

OHAA Qld used the evaluative impact of the Cardwell project to successfully win another grant in late 2011. Unsuccessful in gaining funding support in the past, this time we highlighted the need for a multi media approach, to leverage the most out of oral history interviews as a mechanism to restore and promote community resilience and pride, including evaluation embedded throughout, and we were successful. The team plans to replicate the audio/visual/writing workshops in other remote rural Queensland communities including Townsville, Mackay, Cunnamulla and Toowoomba in 2012.

I have since travelled to the US (Dec 2011-April 2012 & June/July 2012) to undertake the Qld Smithsonian Fellowship I was awarded – actually hearing the news that I had received it while in Cardwell on the 2nd trip. I have since produced a US and Australian version of an evaluation booklet, freely available for communities to use.

The research on the evaluation in narrative driven arts-based community projects is also valued in the US and I visited New Orleans and NYC, particularly looking at 9/11 and Katrina projects that use oral history or digital storytelling, to see if resilience and community rebuilding were outcomes there as well, which they seemed to be.

Researchers are starting to also ask, *how do you value 'the value' of people collecting and sharing their local stories in their townships and*

neighbourhoods? - a question that will also emerge from evaluative research, but in the mean time, starting with any kind of evaluation embedded in projects is a start in the right direction.

to Two 2-day workshops were held in March and then September, augmented by plenty of email correspondence and phone calls in between. Participants learnt that if they could conduct quality oral history interviews, they could later use these in many exhibitable ways including: documentary pieces; digital stories; photographic collections; creative short stories; audio segments –while also drawing closely together a suffering community.

This story is not only about the people who were interviewed about the night Yasi struck, but the amazing women (all over 50) of the historical society who were willing to try and leap the digital divide that faces older Australians, especially those in rural Australia, so that their older local stories would not be lost and so that new stories could also be remembered.

References

“Queensland Disaster Relief” *Samaritan’s Purse*, International Relief Australia, 2011, accessed Feb2012 from:

<http://www.samaritanspurse.com.au/project/queensland-disaster-relief/>

“The Arts in Community Recovery, rebuilding and renewal”, Arts Qld, Queensland Government, 2010, accessed at: <http://www.arts.qld.gov.au/docs/arts-community.pdf>

“Phases of Disaster: Collective Reactions”, Department of Mental Health, California Government, 2011, accessed at: <http://www.dmh.ca.gov/Disaster/CCPToolkit/PhasesOfDisaster.asp>

“Victorian Bushfires January February 2009” *Disaster Assist*, Australian Government, 2010, accessed Feb2012 from: http://www.disasterassist.gov.au/www/disasterassist/disasterassist.nsf/Page/Currentdisasters_VictorianBushfiresJanuaryFebruary2009

Belfiore, E. & Bennett, O. “Beyond the Toolkit Approach: Arts Impact Evaluation Research and the realities of Cultural Policy-making”. *Journal for Cultural Research* 14:2, 121-142, Routledge, London, 2010 accessed at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14797580903-481280>

Dunlevy, G. "Armstrong Awed By Qld Flood 'Heroes'" *Sydney Morning Herald*, Fairfax Media, 24 Jan 2011, accessed at: <http://news.smh.com.au/breaking-news-national/armstrong-awed-by-qld-flood-heroes-20110124-1a2fh.html>

Levy, M. "Bligh's tear-filled cry: 'We are Queenslanders'", *The Brisbane Times*, Fairfax Media 13 January 2011, accessible at: <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/environment/weather/blighs-tearfilled-cry-we-are-queenslanders-20110113-19oxt.html#ixzz1ryDty6le>

Osborne, D & Walker, D. "Arts Development Program Evaluation" Research Report, Arts Victoria, Australia, August 2007, accessed from: http://www.arts.vic.gov.au/Research_and_Resources/Evaluation_Projects/Arts_Development_Evaluation