

Chapter 8

Technology: Impact on the Practice of Storytelling

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ABSTRACT

Thousands of years ago storytelling was available primarily in one format, the oral word passed down from generation to generation in order to communicate wisdom. Each of us represents the intersection of many generational stories blending fact and fiction. In the context of a continual search for ways to define, secure, and shape our existence, it is vital to expand the understanding of the evolving forms and applications of storytelling so societies can continue in the tradition of using stories to define, preserve, and shape society (Benjamin, 2006; Sax, 2006). This chapter looks at how technology impacts the practice of storytelling and how it affects not only the relationship with storytelling, the concept of the story itself, but also the practice of collaborative storytelling through the power of technology.

TECHNOLOGY: IMPACT ON THE PRACTICE OF STORYTELLING

The purpose of this chapter is to report on a literature search conducted into the phenomena of technology's impact on the practice of storytelling. The chapter shows how the power and pervasive use of technology affects storytelling, and in particular representation of the context of storytelling as it appears to have developed in archaic times to transitional times such as the present.

Story telling is grounded in a tradition of a synthesis of values and rituals and has often been referred to as "restoring the ancestors" (Miller & Crabtree, 1999; Faulkner, 1997 as cited in Banks-Wallace, 2002). Nurturing the spirit-self

is a primary function of storytelling (Baker & Greene, 1987 as cited in Banks-Wallace, 2002, p. 411). Stories are everywhere, filling our cultural and social environments (Polkinghorne, 1988; Simpkinsos & Simpkinson, 1993 as cited in Banks-Wallace, 2002). Storytelling also provides a means of articulating our hopes, fears, and dreams (Klinger, 1997 as cited in Banks-Wallace, 2002, p. 411).

Farrar states:

The genre and process of storytelling, the tradition of orality, is one characterized by the conjuring of image, by stylistic rhythm and thematic poignancy...It is the griot's song, retelling the story of those who have come before and reinvigorating

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the essential wisdoms for the life of the human community and its future (Farrar, 1995 as cited in Banks-Wallace, 2002).

However, technology may cause deficiencies in the way stories are told; meaning much of the language, the gestures, and the mimics will be lost (Bordahl, 2002, p. 173). Key words provide insight into the embodied context of the teller's world (Sewall, 1998 as cited in Banks-Wallace, 2002, p. 417). Understanding why specific words are chosen to describe an event or convey an idea becomes a critical part of being able to correctly interpret a story (Cannon, 1995; Etter-Lewis, 1993; Hine, 1989; Hurston, 1990 as cited in Banks-Wallace, 2002, p. 417). Boutain (1999) asserted that 'language connects history, time, and people (as cited in Banks-Wallace, 2002, p. 418). Those who use technology to tell a story must examine the role language plays in constructing and conveying the story. Technology may paraphrase or substitute a word for another, and this might unintentionally change the meaning of the story. Thus, Banks-Wallace, state the prioritizing of plot over dialogue can result in story tellers being left holding the "skeleton," having thrown the "meat" of the story in the trash (Banks-Wallace, 2002, p. 418). Researchers need to examine the role of technology in connection to the underlying use of specific words to tell a story, which are essential prerequisites for interpretive skills (2002).

The process of storytelling establishes a common experience between teller and listener, creating a connection between them (Malone, 1994 as cited in Banks-Wallace, 2002, p. 411). Stories often support the development of relationships among tellers and listeners by serving as *touchstones* (Banks-Wallace, 2002). Touchstones are things that remind people of a shared heritage and many of these bring forth a whole series of deep-seated memories about experiences that either cannot be or are not easily articulated (2002).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Once upon a time, pictorial histories on cave walls constituted the earliest forms of early-human communications and such visual delights represent the essence of storytelling (Hulburt & Voas, 2011).

The word story has its origins in the 13th century, with roots in both French and Latin, and literally means an account of incidents or events (Tobin & Snyman, 2008). A long time ago, stories it seemed were at best a quaintly humanistic preoccupation and at worst understood as the building blocks of oppression and inequality (Cameron, 2012). "Understanding stories is fundamentally implicated in the production of cultural, economic, political, and social power" (Barns & Duncan, 1992; Blunt & Rose, 1994; Gregory, 1994 as cited in Cameron, 2012, p. 573).

While it may be impossible to give a precise definition of a story, some basic characteristics are clear. According to Armstrong (1992), stories are simple, they are timeless, demographic-proof, a way to empower people, a form of recognition, spreads the word, great recruiting and hiring tool, and memorable (p. 7). Story telling is done in a way that is stimulating and memorable and told with passion (Armstrong, 1992; Parkin, 2001).

A story is a series of connected events in chronological order, is a simple structure on experience and helps us to make sense of the world (Sax, 2006). Stories were perhaps developed as a means to deal with the information overload, a contemporary word for what is actually a very archaic phenomenon (Sax, 2006). The great library of Alexandria, before its destruction sometime before 270 AD, held many treasured stories of its time, preserved on the extremely fragile papyrus (Hurlburt & Voas, 2011). Transcribed stories, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, have survived to this day and provide insight as to how written language evolved and preserved the stories of the time (Hurlburt & Voas, 2011).

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