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Community and Information Science Converging: Co-Development of Digital Storytelling in the Inuvialuit Digital Library (Paper)

Abstract

The Inuvialuit Voices Project is a collaboration between the Inuvialuit Cultural Centre, the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, and communities within the Inuvialuit Settlement Region to enhance the Inuvialuit Digital Library (<https://inuvialuitdigitallibrary.ca/>) with real-time digital storytelling functionality. In this presentation, the authors will describe the community-based methodology being used to co-develop the system, report on a recent elder storytelling gathering that was held to better understand storytelling in-context to inform the design and functionality of the system, and discuss next steps in the development process.

1. Introduction

This paper will report on the emerging results and on-going development of a collaborative research project titled Inuvialuit Voices. For this project, the research team is currently working on the co-design of a real-time digital storytelling system for the Inuvialuit Digital Library (<https://inuvialuitdigitallibrary.ca/>). The project uses an innovative methodology, combining co-design, community-based methods, and Indigenous methodologies to underpin the development of a digital storytelling system specific to the needs of the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (ISR).

The Inuvialuit Voices project is a collaborative effort by a team of researchers from the University of Alberta and from the Inuvialuit Cultural Centre and the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (ISR). The ISR is located in Canada's far north in the northern Northwest Territories and Yukon (see Figure 1). Inuvialuit Voices builds on previous work conducted in the region, including the development of the Inuvialuit Digital Library, a library created to increase the accessibility of cultural heritage resources held by the

Inuvialuit Cultural Centre (see XXXX). The ISR is home to six geographically dispersed communities: Aklavik, Inuvik, Paulatuk, Sachs Harbour, Tuktoyaktuk, and Ulukhaktok. The communities are spread out within the ISR, which spans ~91,000 square kilometres. Year-round roads do not exist between all of the communities, and travel by aeroplane is expensive. The digital library was created in order to address these issues by making the Cultural Centre's resources more accessible electronically. Inuvialuit Voices expands on this project with the goal of creating a real-time digital storytelling system, to not only make oral stories more accessible across the region, but also to enable the community to capture and preserve their stories within the library.



Figure 1: Inuvialuit Settlement Region (Joint Secretariat, n.d.).

2. Literature Review

The Inuvialuit Voices project has the tangible goal of creating a digital storytelling interface. Digital storytelling has been recognized as an important community and cultural practice since the 1990s, heavily revolving around the work of the Centre for Digital Storytelling, known today as StoryCenter (Lambert 2013). Early storytelling stations were set up in public libraries in California with the key objectives of facilitating training for new technologies, building relationships with community members, and strengthening the cultural heritage of the geography and communities (Lambert 2013). In continuation of these origins, the general process of digital storytelling today involves creating a personal narrative from a variety of media, such as images, audio, video, and text, in a workshop setting. These narratives are then shared in a public setting to demonstrate the similarities and diversity of these collective experiences (Wilcox et al. 2012). Because audio recording devices and software are becoming more widespread and affordable (Perley et al. 2016, p. 9), digital storytelling is prominently used in both academic and community-oriented environments.

It has been used as a methodology for research and education for Indigenous health (Cueva et al. 2013), reconciliation (Bissell & Korteweg 2016; Hildebrandt et al. 2016; Adelson & Olding 2012), decolonization (Hampton & DeMartini 2017), youth development (Wexler, Gubrium, Griffin, & DiFulvio 2013; Adelson & Olding 2012), technological literacy (Weston & Biin 2013), self-representation (Iseke & Moore 2011; Cherubini 2008), and social change (Rice & Mundel 2018; Palacios 2012). Wilcox et al. (2012) suggest that interview-based narrative research can sometimes continue to objectify Indigenous knowledge and be appropriated to fit the narratives of the researchers, whereas digital storytelling research can better centre the voice of the participant and capture the nuances of lived experience. In the context of the Inuvialuit Voices project, digital storytelling is part of the method, but also a part of the end goal, that the

Inuvialuit Cultural Centre will have a living digital library of stories, and a system to continue collecting those stories, that can be added to and accessed by their community beyond the duration of the initial project focused on its design.

3. Methodology

The digital storytelling interface is being created through a process of community-based co-design, influenced by Indigenous methodologies. As a part of this process, other similar projects and tools were reviewed (for examples, see the literature review). A key step was to gain a better understanding of storytelling in-context. Towards that goal, the research team organized a storytelling workshop held at the Inuvialuit Cultural Centre November 12-15, 2019. Two to three elders from each of the six communities were invited to attend and share their stories. Having representation from all communities in the region was important, not only to ensure inclusion of voices from all of the communities, but also to be sure that speakers of each of the three regional dialects of Inuvialuktun (Kangiryuarmiutun, Sallirmiutun, and Uummarmiutun) would be in attendance. Arrival from some communities was slightly delayed due to weather conditions affecting their flights; however, a total of 12 elders and community members were eventually able to attend. The workshop was moderated by Beverly Amos, a member of the research team and Regional Language Consultant for the Cultural Centre, and most of the stories shared were told in Inuvialuktun. Beverly invited everyone to introduce themselves, to tell stories of their own choice, and presented topics of interest for discussion (e.g., genealogy and the pronunciation of names, preservation of language). The entirety of the workshop was photographed and recorded (by David Stewart, Inuvialuit Communications Society and Elizabeth Kolb, Inuvialuit Regional Corporation) so that the stories told could be preserved and added to the Inuvialuit Digital Library, and after the workshop concluded, the video was segmented into smaller portions (to facilitate online viewing) and copies were shared with participants.

4. Discussion & Next Steps

The workshop was deemed a success by participants and team members. Local team members emphasized that the workshop was enjoyed by the participants and valued by them, and noted they were planning on doing some individual recording with elders. There was discussion of the value of holding similar workshops in each of the other communities and some early discussion of grant opportunities to fund these have been discussed. Other upcoming opportunities for capturing stories, such as the Northern Games in Inuvik in the summer of 2020, were also discussed. The video and photographs from the workshop will be added to the Digital Library and plans for translation and transcription have been put on the agenda for future. Following the workshop, the research team met in Edmonton in December to discuss the project and directions for a prototype audio-recording system. The prototype was demonstrated to the Cultural Centre team and they had a chance to use and test it themselves. A good deal of important feedback on improvements and desired functionality was gathered. Among the key suggestions for the improvement of the system were: checking/reviewing of stories before they are public, changes to the identification information of the storyteller, visual and interface features such as start and stop recording and their visual cues, downloading story files and their formats, and browser and platform compatibility issues. The real value of the digital storytelling system will be in its use by the Cultural Centre team to record more stories at locations distant from the Cultural Centre. Further development of the prototype will happen during the early part of 2020, with the intent of the team heading back into community in the summer or fall for further demonstrations, usability testing, and user feedback.

5. Conclusion

The Inuvialuit Voices project is building on successful collaborations and community relationships to enhance the Inuvialuit Digital Library with a digital storytelling platform in support of language and culture sharing and revitalization. It demonstrates the potential power of projects that combine the knowledge and expertise of community members and information science practitioners and researchers to co-develop knowledge creation and sharing tools that are responsive to the needs and interests of the community.

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