



Showtime

We've told our stories to people in numerous corners across this beautiful world. Our South Texas youth have shared their (and our) stories in South Africa, Japan, Brazil, Peru, Mexico, Canada, and we have shared our stories in Sweden, Italy, Austria, and across this country. Just about everywhere, people connect with the idea that there is tremendous power in our own personal narrative.

People from underdeveloped places especially relate; I recall folks from Indonesian and sub-Saharan communities commenting that while they may not own 'the store,' they certainly owned 'their story.' We absolutely own our story, and through digital storytelling we generate even greater power, which often leads to personal transformation and by extension, to community change.

Francisco Guajardo - Llano Grande Center



The Prologue

Welcome to the Llano Grande Center's Digital Storytelling Toolkit

This toolkit is a collaborative production shared by the Llano Grande Center, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and fellows from the Kellogg Leadership for Community Change (KLCC) series. The Llano Grande Center, a nonprofit organization located in rural South Texas, agreed to develop this toolkit, but only if it could be done in partnership with its KLCC friends from across the country. While much of the writing for this toolkit was produced by staff members of the Center, many of the stories were contributed by fellows from across the KLCC family.

Our most valuable resource has been the people from KLCC—a nascent and innovative model for collective leadership development. We were part of the first session of KLCC, with other sites including Buffalo, New York; Flathead Reservation, Montana; Eastern Cibola County, New Mexico; Twin Cities, Minnesota; and Northwest Wisconsin. Together with Session II sites including Bellingham, Washington; Benton Harbor, Michigan; McDowell County, West Virginia; Denver, Colorado; and Chelsea, Massachusetts, KLCC represents an emerging story on the challenges and successes for creating collective community change. Digital storytelling has surfaced as one of the tools to enact

change, as well as connect communities through technology training, relationship building, and most importantly—very powerful stories.

The toolkit is many things: it's a philosophical treatise on the power of the narrative form; it's a technical guide to enhance the personal story through digital technology; and it's a celebration of the stories of emerging community leaders from different corners of the United States. In the stories, we see how both individual and collective action can generate community change and more just communities. This toolkit is one example of what a dedicated collective could do, and with that we have to recognize the efforts of the KLCC fellows that include Karina Cardoza, Eric Dávila, and Juan Ozuna; as well as the KLCC hosts Ernesto Ayala, Francisco Guajardo, Delia Perez, Steve Wilson, Maria Yvette Rodriguez, who have collectively worked on this story, content, and logistics for the past year and a half. We have worked together as a staff to execute and idea born of our fellowship into an initiative on digital storytelling we call Captura.

As you read along, learn and immerse yourself in the stories. Also, realize that you are becoming part of a tapestry of nationally-connected storytellers practicing collective leadership and transforming communities. As with all tools, it is up to you to utilize this toolkit to its fullest potential.

We hope you find this toolkit useful. And that you are inspired to join the emerging digital storytelling community and create an impact.

What's Your Story?

Storytellers thrive on this question—both in responding to it, and in posing it to others. At the Llano Grande Center, this question is the mantra that drives our work: as we engage in community change initiatives; as we capture the stories of our community; and as we help



students get into college. We were raised through stories, and we deeply respect and honor the art of storytelling. It is a tradition we take very seriously.

So, what's your story? Let's begin the exploration!



Introduction

Defining Digital Storytelling

As the Llano Grande Center has worked with people and communities over the past few years in developing this skill, we have come to understand and define a digital story as a self-generated, short-length digital production that tells a story of personal or community relevance by combining visual and audio elements, such as video, photographs, documents, music and narration.



Overview of our experience: theory plus practice

The Llano Grande Center employs a constructivist approach to digital storytelling—that is, we build our community change efforts on experiences and stories that people have lived. Everyone has a story; what we try to do is identify that story, cultivate it, and use it for meaningful personal and/or community change.

"A theory of learning based on the notion that by examining our own experiences and stories, we construct an understanding of ourselves, and of the world in which we live."

Constructivism: Building on Experiences

The Llano Grande Center's approach to digital storytelling encourages us to look deeply within our bank of experiences in order to make sense of ourselves, our communities, and the world around us. We begin by reflecting upon the critical moments in our lives, the important people who have nurtured us, the ideas that have inspired us, and the formative experiences we have had. Then, we shape those moments, memories, and ideas into an organized story.

Through this method, we search for meaning: about ourselves and about those around us. Through this search, we also construct meaning, and that process transforms us. The purpose of digital storytelling is to find the meaning, the purpose, and the identity that is distinctly our own. We start with what we know, with who we are, and with what we believe. Our story becomes a representation of ourselves, of our transformation, and through it all we learn important skills: (1) the cultural skills of how to understand ourselves and the world around us, (2) the technical skills of how to produce a digital story, and (3) the political skills of how to use story for community change initiatives.

A few years ago, Myrta walked into her freshman English class in a rural South Texas high school. On the first day of class the teacher asked every student, "What's your story?"



Most students found it a challenging question. Myrta was especially perplexed. As a migrant farmworker she would not readily share her story—as if there were some sort of shame attached to her experience. But the teacher was relentless, and before long, Myrta found the courage to tell her story, later narrating her own digital story.

Click here to see [Myrta's script](#).

Since 2001 the Llano Grande Center has employed digital storytelling for community change initiatives, as well as to help students

"Digital storytelling affords us the opportunity to add an aesthetic quality to stories that already hold deep and important meaning to every one of us."

Storytelling: Conveying what's important

gain admission into college. In many cases, students' digital stories become their personal statements for college admission. In other cases, youth and adults have produced digital stories to build public support for various causes such as to renovate a town park, to pass a bond election to build new schools, or to train teachers on how to be more responsive to student and community needs.

Constructivism: an emerging theory

Constructivism grounds our digital storytelling development, and at the same time, is an outcome of the process. As we build digital stories we also witness the emergence of a new theory for community change, which is rooted in the following elements:

- respect for the narrative form;
- building trust with others as a result of sharing stories ;
- formation of deep relationships ; and
- cultivating a renewed understanding of story as a personal asset for the self and for community change.

If we accept that everyone has a story—and we do—then we understand that everyone has assets. Respect, trust, relationships, and story are among our most deeply cherished assets, and digital storytelling honors, cultivates, and celebrates each of those assets.

These assets coupled with digital storytelling are catalysts for personal and community change. To begin, it is necessary to understand ourselves and open ourselves to change. Once we do so, we can approach community change efforts from a position of greater strength. Our digital storytelling experience teaches us that social change is as much about personal transformation as it is about community transformation.

The cycle of digital storytelling

Creating a digital story is a process of understanding the self through story. Because our stories are influenced by our surroundings, digital storytelling often includes many components including family, work, and community. Although these components may seem separate from personal identity, digital storytelling helps us understand the interconnections between them.

By creating a digital story, we begin to understand ourselves in a circle of interconnections. This process is best illustrated by the “cycle of digital storytelling”: our personal story becomes what inspires our organizational work; our work becomes what leads community change; and community change creates a new context for personal development.



Digital storytelling is useful for people dedicated to social justice. As we understand how our personal story interacts with the organization or community we are trying to impact, we realize that our story is an integral part of our community and our organization. Thus, we view our story as a powerful tool to enact organizational and community change processes.