Community-based Indigenous Digital Storytelling with Elders and Youth

Judy Iseke and Sylvia Moore

Indigenous digital storytelling and research are as much about the process of community relationships as they are about the development of digital products and research outcomes. As indigenous researchers, digital storytelling producers, and academics, we research, share stories, write research results, and edit digital storytelling. We work in different communities with research collaborators who are indigenous community members, including Elders and youth.[1] We have strategized in creating digital storytelling within indigenous communities to create productions beneficial to those communities. In this article, we examine four community-based digital storytelling projects. Through these products, we consider the importance of indigenous storytelling and explore some of the strategies for creating, as well as designing, indigenous digital stories.

Judy Iseke, a Métis scholar and filmmaker, has worked with Métis Elders from various communities in Alberta and British Columbia in a research program that focused on indigenous storytelling. Elders share their stories and expertise through collaborative dialogues. The Elders have given Iseke the responsibility to edit their words and ideas, and she shares these with the Elders, working in a collaborative dialogue toward a series of digital storytelling products that can be shared with the community and more broadly. The

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focus on digital storytelling includes a grandmother's story of searching for more understanding of the history of her family and community in the digital video *A Living History of Métis Families as Told by Dorothy Chartrand*.[2] A second narration explores a Métis grandfather's storytelling by sharing selected tales that are presented through animation in the digital video *Storytelling with Tom McCallum*.[3]

Sylvia Moore is a Mi'kmaw mother, grandmother, researcher, and educator.[4] She works in her Mi'kmaw community making digital video with Aboriginal youth. In the first video project, *A'tugwet: Discovering the Culture That Is Immune to Time*, students interviewed Elders and community members in order to depict some of the Mi'kmaw history of the region.[5] The video challenged the dominant history told in local museums. In a second video project, *The Forest and the Trees: Teachings and Learnings from the Southwest Nova Biosphere Reserve*, students interviewed and filmed scientists, old-time loggers, and Mi'kmaw community members in order to draw attention to the various perspectives on the trees and forests of the area.[6] Local ecological knowledge and Aboriginal worldviews challenged the exclusively scientific knowledge represented in the school science curriculum.

Pamela Wilson and Michelle Stewart describe the indigenous workshops and film festivals as well as major institutional support for indigenous filmmakers as being focused on creating "success" and "excellence" in the global media marketplace while forces of globalization put pressure on indigenous cultural expression. But they also suggest that indigenous media is often "produced for non-commercial purposes and beyond the reach of the mainstream media industries" and emphasize that "indigenous artists and activists are using new technologies to craft culturally distinct forms of communication and artistic production that speak to local aesthetics and local needs while anticipating larger audiences."[7] The case studies described here focus on this second type of indigenous media production.

The authors draw upon select experiences in the production of the four community-based video projects in order to examine the relationships and purpose of making community-based videos, editing strategies, the transformations of oral stories, and the processes of honoring storylines. Finally, we draw conclusions about the complex process of indigenous community-based filmmaking.

Indigenous Digital Storytelling

Indigenous digital storytelling has, as Timothy Powell, William Weems, and Freeman Owle describe, "the potential to integrate indigenous artifacts, sacred

places, and stories in innovative new ways undreamt of between the margins of the white page."[8] Indigenous digital storytelling is created by or with indigenous peoples for indigenous communities.[9]

Indigenous digital storytelling, according to Carol Leclair and Sandi Warren, is based in indigenous theories "associated with proactive measures for addressing change," "reflective of our [indigenous] ways of knowing, being and doing," and built on strategic skills in community.[10] This storytelling aids in negotiating social priorities and contemporary community needs, expresses community viewpoints, and safeguards community values and norms.

Indigenous digital storytelling provides opportunities for indigenous peoples to control the images and structures through self-representations that challenge the taken-for-granted and stereotypical representations along with the misrepresentations of indigenous peoples in dominant society.[11]

Indigenous digital storytelling creates opportunities to understand political activism and creates spaces for indigenous youth to affirm their identity and become agents of social change.[12] Yupiaq Elder Oscar Kawagley speaks of the need to teach youth their cultural traditions and the Western skills that will enable them to work in the wider world and to carry "specific cultural mandates regarding the ways in which the human being is to relate to other human relatives and the natural and spiritual worlds."[13]

Introducing the Researchers and Projects

A respectful way to work in a community is to locate oneself within the research process and in relation to the community.[14] According to Angela Cavender Wilson, kinship responsibilities relay "a culture, an identity, and a sense of belonging essential to life."[15] Each researcher embraces the belief of Bonita Lawrence and Kim Anderson that "the state of our nation[s] thus depends on how we rectify the injustices to our children of the past and how we ensure the well-being of the children of the present and future."[16] These responsibilities to the Métis and Mi'kmaw nations give each researcher a vested interest in our work. Research and production undertaken in relation to community is a founding principle upon which each work was based.[17] Reciprocity in these relationships involves honoring the community and the contributions of its members in the stories shared in the films and videos. Through establishing respectful relationships with community members, each researcher gained trust that enabled collaborative development of the digital videos.[18]

In negotiating these respectful relationships, Iseke and Moore reciprocate the trust of their collaborators through the production of films and the teaching of technological skills to community members. They stress the importance of

making digital videos so that a future generation of indigenous people can use technology to sustain their indigenous worldviews. This knowledge gives community members the skills to "appropriate the means of production to produce new sorts of meaning."[19]

Judy Iseke and a Living History of Métis Families with Dorothy Chartrand

Iseke is a woman from Northern Alberta of Métis and Nehiawuk heritage along with European ancestry. She is a researcher, educator, and educational filmmaker from St. Albert, Alberta, Canada, and a descendant of the Bellerose and Beaudry Métis families that are said to have founded this community. But this community is located on lands that have been traveled and inhabited by indigenous ancestors for millennia. Her video work is shared, first, to help her own children understand their heritage and, second, because many young people need to know the stories of their ancestors and communities, and film is one way to reach them. These stories also are shared to counter the silencing of Métis history that has occurred and to provide access to Métis stories and histories that will help Métis children and members of this nation be proud of who they are.

Iseke's research program includes working with indigenous Elders to create opportunities to hear the stories of Elders from Métis communities. In these projects, Iseke worked in communities that did not have a clearly defined set of community protocols. As a university researcher, she is well aware of mainstream protocols for research and adhered to these requirements, but in addition, Iseke developed a set of indigenous protocols that she provided to six Métis organizations that subsequently responded with letters of support for this research program, suggesting they were comfortable with this set of protocols. She introduced Elders to the project, asked them to be involved, and offered tobacco and cloth in order to ensure their continued participation throughout the project.

In the first project, Iseke went home to St. Albert and interviewed her great-aunt Dorothy Chartrand.[20] Dorothy had researched the St. Albert community for twenty-five years and had interviewed each of the Métis families from the community for a book about the history of St. Albert, and she assisted in writing or editing the stories of each family for the community book. She also spoke to her older brothers and sisters to glean any information they knew about the family and town history and then went to the archives, and for twenty-five years she searched for and found information about her ancestors and their descendants. When Iseke first visited Dorothy, she took

only a tape recorder. At a later time, she visited Dorothy with a videographer and a plan created from the transcripts of the stories Dorothy had shared during the previous visit. Iseke and Dorothy had discussed this plan on the telephone prior to Iseke's arrival, and Dorothy was prepared on each day of filming to discuss these stories and to share other stories.

Iseke drew upon her relationship with her Aunt Dorothy during this research process and continued to sustain that relationship with frequent telephone calls and visits, which kept the conversation about the filmmaking going. Iseke, as a family member and former resident of St. Albert with family living there, was able to tell the stories from her own connections to this place and its history. Even though Dorothy was consulted often, Iseke still felt a strong sense of responsibility because she oversaw the editing and knew what "landed on the cutting room floor." Iseke undertook this big responsibility in relation with Dorothy, and the decision making became easier through their continued dialogue.

Sylvia Moore and Mi'kmaw: Presenting Ourselves to/in the Museum

Moore is a researcher and recent graduate of a doctoral program and an educator who chooses to work inside the public school system in order to bring about change for Mi'kmaw students. She traces her Mi'kmaw bloodlines through her maternal family, and as a mother and grandmother of Mi'kmaw children, she feels a deep sense of connection to and kinship within the Mi'kmaw Nation. Even though the local heritage museum sits on the traditional lands of the Mi'kmaq and an existing Mi'kmaw community is in the region, the museum did not recognize the past or present existence of indigenous peoples in its collections. Moore discussed the situation with her nephew, Nicholas Whynot, a grade twelve student at the school and a member of the Wildcat First Nation.[21] Nicholas was eager to work with her and the technology class she was teaching at the time in order to address the situation by making a video for the museum that would reflect some of the past and present Mi'kmaw history of the area.

As a researcher and teacher, Moore worked collaboratively with community members and Elders guided by community protocols.[22] The planning stage of the project included determining what aspects of Mi'kmaw life would be reflected in the video and contacting community members in order to determine who would participate in the video. Nicholas and Moore worked closely with Elder Todd Labrador, with whom they discussed their ideas, and with Moore's daughter shalan joudry, a Mi'kmaw youth and filmmaker.

Although the digital video was a school-based learning project, it was also a community-owned project because the control of the information that was to be gathered was within the community and because it was to reflect the community's story. All the team members understood the need to challenge the exclusively Eurocentric perspective regarding the human history of the area, and all were personally motivated to ensure that Mi'kmaw history was evident in the museum.

Todd, Nicholas, shalan, and Moore discuss community members who might be approached to discuss the project further with the community. Everyone agreed to the video, and many offered to help even before they were each approached. Although the students had developed questions that the interviewers might ask, such a planning technique was not necessary because each community member knew the stories that he or she wanted told while the students videotaped them. For example, Elder Frank Jermey offered to explain the history of the community, Todd agreed to demonstrate birch bark canoe making and explain how he keeps that tradition alive, and a group of community women wanted to tell some of their childhood experiences including recollections of their experiences at the local school.

The enthusiasm and the community members' willingness to share their knowledge and personal stories enabled the students to gather a great deal of digital video footage. Once gathered, the team had to determine the story that would be told in the finished video: a video that would both reflect the Wildcat First Nation in the museum and digitally preserve memories and stories that the community needed about its own history and ancestral connections. Like Iseke, Moore drew upon her relationships with Elders, community, and family members in generating this project. She lives in relation to, draws upon, and sustains these relationships in the process of this project and in the outcomes within it.

Iseke—Storytelling with Tom McCallum

In another part of her research program, Iseke worked with Elders in regard to their knowledge of indigenous storytelling. George Burns describes Elders as "the carriers and emblems of [the] communally generated and mediated knowledge."[23] As "the most knowledgeable people in Aboriginal societies," they are interested in maintaining their culture and in sharing their knowledge with their people.[24] When filming Elders, Iseke gives them control over what they share; she gives them autonomy in the research and filming process because she typically does not ask direct questions. Rather, the Elders take it upon themselves to share with her any information that they believe will be relevant

to her broad research focus. Prior to filming, the research focus and process is explained to the Elders, and they are given an offering of tobacco. Iseke shares with the Elders a set of guiding questions or a focus topic in order to clarify the context within which their stories are being gathered. In the actual processes of storytelling, Elders working alone also want the interaction with the researchers, so they ask for questions to be repeated to them and for some input from the researcher so they can engage more with the process.

Elders reveal their knowledge in their own way with the understanding that what they share will be further disclosed through the distribution of the film. Iseke follows up with Elders and shares edited texts with them to ensure that, during the editing process, she has not unduly transformed their stories. Elders make suggestions and, based on these, the edit can be reworked into a story with which they agree. Often there are many rounds to these edits before the filmmakers get it right.

One of the Elders is Tom McCallum, who tells many kinds of stories and shares his understandings of the different kinds of storytelling and the purposes of storytelling in communities.[25] His stories were transcribed, sorted, and organized based on their content. Those deemed "filmic" were selected for inclusion in a film. Stories were filmic if they contained characters that could be illustrated and stories that proceeded in a fairly direct manner making them appropriate to share with children, the primary audience for the film.

The stories that Tom shared included Wasakechak—a trickster character who was part spiritual creator and part human.[26] Wasakechak always gets into some kind of trouble. We are able to learn from the lessons of Wasakechak so that we do not make the mistakes that he does. Trickster characters in stories for children are not dissimilar to Bugs Bunny, in that silly and unreasonable things happen, but in indigenous stories there is a point to the story: to learn something while being entertained. In addition, Tom told community stories used for entertainment as well as stories of events from his own life in which he is the main character. The film of Tom's stories reaffirms the knowledge and values of the community and is a resource from which others can learn.

Sylvia Moore—Can We See?

Moore maintains that she chooses, as a teacher, to work within the education system in order to bring an indigenous perspective to what she teaches and to what students learn. *The Forest and the Trees* was a result of her work with a group of students learning about forests in their region of Nova Scotia. The video was made in order to legitimate indigenous knowledge systems in the presence of dominant knowledge systems regarding forests. The students

interviewed people who could bring a voice to Aboriginal, scientific, and local ecological knowledge about trees, and the final product was to be disseminated to other schools in order to bring the same balance to other students' learning.

Moore initially discussed the idea with her daughter shalan, who was now also a biologist as well as a filmmaker, and with Todd. Both supported the project and contributed ideas for it. Moore then contacted various other Mi'kmaw community members she knew who had the knowledge to contribute ideas to the project. She discussed the project with them and asked if they would agree to be interviewed by the students. All those contacted supported the project and agreed to be involved. Moore also contacted researchers and forestry workers to ask if they would participate in the project, which they agreed to do. Each interview began with a student asking an initial question of an interviewee about his or her personal connection to the forests in the area, and in all cases, the speakers then continued on with other forest-related knowledge that they wanted to share. This technique provided a great breadth to the stories that the students collected.

Although the students were the videographers, it is clear that such films involve many people in various roles. This collaborative work included arranged discussions and informal talks as the video project progressed. Such collaboration, through frequent discussions, meant that control of the film remained with the community. The video-making process reflected the shared experience of the community members and centered the community as the site of power.[27]

When Moore works with students to make films, there is a dual purpose in the product and the process. First, students learn filmmaking skills while making these indigenous films.[28] Second, because the focal point of the films is indigenous knowledge and perspective, the work increases students' indigenous knowledge and enhances their understanding of the political issues important to their nations, thus affirming their connection to their culture and legitimizing their indigenous worldview.[29] Like Mi'kmaw filmmaker Cathy Martin, who worked with indigenous youth to tell their stories, Moore found that filmmaking reaffirms the storytelling tradition and provides the youth a means to resist "the privileging of text and dominant cultural constructions."[30] In making the video, students acquired technical skills and learned the issues of epistemology related to forests.[31]

Editing Strategies

Editing is demanding work that the writer of the film script must undertake—even in a documentary format. Those with a relationship to the Elders and the community and those who are aware of the political, historical, social,

and economic implications of the stories are in a better position to make decisions about what to include and exclude as a result of the editing process. Once Elders and community members have shared their stories with each researcher, the researcher or filmmaker has a real responsibility to consider how to proceed.[32] Researchers must be respectful while they ensure that Elders and all other participants are comfortable, have what they need to participate meaningfully, can trust that their words will be acknowledged as theirs, and know that their affiliations with their indigenous groups will be properly acknowledged in names that these groups choose to use. Iseke notes that it is important to maintain the integrity of the story and to consider the needs of the community during the editing process. Moore adds that, in her work with youth, the editing process must sustain the efforts of the youth who create the video as well as preserve the voice of the interviewees. In the case of the forestry video, it was also a challenge to ensure that the completed video reflected a balance of Mi'kmaw, scientific, and local ecological knowledge. In order to set the tone for the video, Moore and her filmmaking team collectively made the decision to put the first half of the Mi'kmaw creation story at the beginning of the video. The second part of the creation story introduces the second part of the video in the two-part production. This editing decision to return to the creation story set the stage for the remainder of the video and put the Mi'kmaw perspective on forests front and center.

Through the collaborative process in which participants engage with Iseke and Moore, the collaborators came to trust the judgment of the researchers and placed the responsibility with them to edit the film. Elders and community members want to see the film finished. To this end, they will look at various versions of it, but they do not necessarily want to be involved in the time-consuming editing process. Rather, they entrust the editing process and production of the final product to the filmmakers. It can be a daunting position to edit the voices of the community.

Moore works with the community youth as a coeditor, ensuring that the youth participate in the critical thinking that must go into editing. The challenge is to work with youth to make informed editorial decisions when they have limited experience and understanding of the possible implications of the film. For youth, being involved in the editing is a learning process. They learn the technical skills of editing as well as the implications of creating knowledge through the process of choosing what to put in a film, what to leave out, and how segments are sequenced. Moore and the youth continually check back with the Elders for guidance in editing, and through the teachings of the Elders, they learn the most important point of editing—telling the story that the community wants told.

Elders codirect the story through the decisions they make about how their stories are to be told and through their guidance in the entirety of the research process. Iseke had the audio files of Dorothy transcribed and worked to generate a story from the many hours of footage. Her first cut created a story one hour and fifteen minutes long, and from there she worked with an editor to pare the story down to forty-four minutes. When she showed the story to a visiting filmmaker, he indicated that it seemed too dense. There was so much information from Dorothy that it was exhausting for the viewer to watch. Iseke reorganized the film again, adding and rewriting narrations to retell some of Dorothy's stories with less detailed information. This made it easier for the viewer to comprehend and follow the stories. With an editor, Iseke reworked the images for the film so that this history had interesting historic and recent photographs as well as illustrations from historic publications that helped tell the stories. From this script and initial still images, the editor and Iseke devised a plan and digitally recorded dramatic recreations at three historical parks. These were devoted to the locations and historical periods that Dorothy explained. This provided interesting sequences related to the stories.

Dorothy was consulted on the first draft of the film in which she had delivered such a large amount of information. She liked the film but suggested changes to make the information clearer. The second draft of the film was also shown to Dorothy. She noticed that much of the detailed information from the previous version had been reduced but that the dramatic recreations brought her stories to life. She had lived many parts of the story and recognized the attention to historical detail that was evident in the reenactments. The third version of the film that was shared with Dorothy included a sound track with Métis fiddle and flute music, another recording of the narrations that had been slightly rewritten, and more dramatic recreations and historic photographs. Taken together, this film was now more like those one would see on television. Dorothy really liked this version because it was livelier with the added music tracks and yet still told the stories of her family.

Editing is part of the telling; it is about telling a particular version of the story. After looking at the many stories that Tom shared, Iseke determined that there was about thirty minutes of stories in a format appropriate for animation, but our intention was to create a forty-four-minute film. Iseke asked Tom to return to the studio over a weekend. He shared more stories, which were also transcribed. From these were selected several more stories suited for a children's storytelling production. Tom's preferences were also considered in this shared decision among the design team, Iseke as film director, and Tom—the master storyteller.

Researchers who are in relation to the community have an interest in which versions of the story are told.[33] Filmmakers work with community members and Elders making decisions about the editing. Because editing can transform how voices are heard and how stories are understood, it is a central aspect of digital storytelling.[34] Digital storytellers and researchers collaborate with the continual involvement of the community to ensure that storylines meet and reflect the community's needs and perspectives.

Transformation of Stories on Film

Indigenous storytellers have long used techniques to assess what the listener knows. They vary their presentation of stories to provide context and to make a story at a level appropriate for the audience. In telling indigenous stories there is "a simple version for children, [that] then moves to a slightly more complicated version for adolescents, to a deeper version for initiates, and to a still deeper version for the fully mature."[35] Over time, listeners learn to view the story from many sides and learn different things each time the story is told, thus developing creativity and intuition. When we freeze stories in film or text, we lose the ability to adjust the telling to the listener. Therefore, a more generic version of the story may be told in order to make it as accessible as possible. This reduces the complexity of the story and dilutes the nuances that are not accessible to a varied audience.

Sometimes a taped story is interesting but is too long or cannot be understood without an appreciation of the community. Other times a story might bog down in details or move too slowly for a young audience. Summarizing narrations can be inserted to provide information, move the story along, or replace story segments that are too long or are difficult to hear or understand. These narrations, inserted by the writer, can aid in the story development, but they also transform a story. The kinds of transformations that are acceptable or unacceptable can be determined in consultation with Elders and community members.

A typical film project generates a tremendous amount of film footage with only small amounts being used (often 10 to 15 percent) in the final version. Decisions regarding inclusion are based on what can be worked with visually, as in the dramatic recreation in the Dorothy video and the animations of Tom's stories, which move beyond "talking heads." Some important stories may be too complex for a typical audience, require that too much contextual information be provided in order to understand the story, or may be excluded because they do not lend themselves to visual presentation. This difficult part

of editing decisions may be eased with inclusion in another format such as a DVD or a book accompanying the digital video.

In the *Storytelling with Tom McCallum* film, Tom explained how a second storyteller who adds additional details to the story might embellish a story. As an example, he told a story about a horse that lost its footing on ice and slid all the way home. The Elder explained that a second storyteller had told a similar story but with additional details including that the horse was sliding and lost control, resulting in the sleigh breaking. The point of the story was to show how embellishment is a part of community storytelling. In the editing process, Iseke and her team looked for ways to shorten the story in order to fit it into a broadcast format of twenty-six minutes. Given that the main part of the story was told twice, the editor, who was unfamiliar with the Elders and their stories, cut the explanation and example of the second storyteller. Now the focus was simply on the story of a horse and no longer served as an example of how storytelling and embellishment "works" in communities. The edit was returned to its original version, and other ways to tighten the story were used to bring it down to a broadcast length.

A challenge that Iseke and Moore have encountered is working with soft-spoken Elders who frequently pause when speaking. The initial uncut videos are full of information but are very slow. We sometimes speed up a story and cut out the pauses or repetitions that are used to provide emphasis in indigenous storytelling. It is a compromise between retaining the storytelling style and moving a story at a pace similar to the mainstream productions to which children and youth have become accustomed. Such speeding up is a form of transformation that changes the story. The pace of the story that the Elders set is lost, and this changes how one connects to a story. When Elders pause, the people who are listening can stop and think. In eliminating these pauses, there is less time for the important points of the story to settle in the viewer's mind and for the story lessons to be learned. One solution is to use the Elders' voices in small clips with visually appealing materials that follow and complement the Elder's story. This engages the visual and the auditory senses. The viewers can be directed by the visuals and the storyteller to focus on the character, the landscape, or whatever other focus that the Elder sets.

The story may also be transformed by equalizing the volume so that the voice becomes loud enough to hear over the music audio tracks. This adds a quality of "sameness" to the volume and eliminates the quietness and loudness that may be used by Elders to encourage listening skills, add emphasis or highlight a particular idea, or encourage more active listening. The resulting dilemma is that the Elders then sound "like everyone else" and the story loses the flavor of the storyteller's distinctive speaking and storytelling style. The story is transformed into a television-like version that is fast-paced and

visually engaging with uniform sound. The viewers of the story do not learn through the nuances of the Elder's storytelling voice. Nor do the viewers have the opportunity to witness the story changing a bit with each telling, as the Elder makes changes in order to fit the listener's location and understandings. Instead, the audience gets the uniform story—the "one-size-fits-all" story—that is fixed and finite.

Honoring Storylines

The struggle is not just to tell a good story but also to tell the story that the community or Elders intend to share based on the collaborative dialogue between the digital storyteller and community members regarding the intention of the video project. It is easy to disrupt the story that the community or Elder is telling and to supplant it with another story that the researcher, writer, or editor wants to tell. If the filmmaker is involved in a real way with the community and has a sense of the story, it helps keep the story that was negotiated with the community or guides the evolution of the project in new directions that can be renegotiated. This is not an easy task because these films are narratives that are embedded within the lived experience of cultural struggle and can be transformed by those whose sharing appears on film.[36]

Iseke found that moving from twelve hours of footage of Dorothy to a one-hour cut entailed a great deal of decision making. What was important was examining the storylines and determining which ones best served the purpose and intent of the story of the film and which could be summarized in a narration or edited out completely. Decisions were based on familiarity with the community, knowledge of the topic, and understanding of the desires of the Elders and the community.

Iseke reminds us that the sharing of knowledge is a gift, and it is the filmmaker who takes on the responsibility of receiving and formatting that gift in the spirit in which it was intended. In her collaborative work, Elders pass on knowledge to specific people they trust so that the knowledge will be shared. A responsibility comes with this gift.

Researchers and digital storytellers have this responsibility and ensure that the Elders are comfortable with the finished project. In this process of editing stories, the Elders will listen and advise if they have specific questions or challenges. Therefore, it is the filmmaker's responsibility to check in with the Elders regarding what the filmmaker is doing during the editing process. Elders do not necessarily have to see the edited clips, but they need to know about the decision making and the process. Moore works with the Elder by describing a section of digital video and the challenge with the section in terms

of the editing process. The Elder will advise her regarding how to deal with the problem, and the section is then edited. This way, Elders can give their opinions regarding these most important decisions. Iseke sends copies of early edits of the film to the Elders and then follows with a telephone call or an e-mail to discuss the details or, preferably, works in person with the Elders by watching an edited version in order to gauge reactions.

Moore explains that another dimension of this checking occurred during the taping of *The Forest and the Trees* when an Elder told the Mi'kmaw creation story to the student filmmakers. The team was unsure if the Elder supported the inclusion of the story in the video and wanted to ensure that other community members agreed to the use of the story in this format. The team checked with the Elder and the community members, explaining how it considered placing the story in the video. Everyone agreed to its use as it was explained, and they were satisfied that it was incorporated respectfully to introduce the video, set the tone, and fostered initial understandings of the Mi'kmaw worldview.

Conclusions

Harald Prins describes the indigenization of visual media as the appropriation and transformation of technologies to meet the cultural and political needs of indigenous peoples.[37] As described earlier, indigenous digital storytelling integrates indigenous stories and sacred places and artifacts in innovative ways, is created by and for indigenous communities, addresses change, reflects community knowledge and perspectives, and enables negotiation of the community's social priorities. It creates opportunities to understand political activism and reflects the cultural mandates of communities. These case studies document the lives and work of indigenous people as is typical of the *cinéma vérité* movement (also known as direct observational cinema) and the ethnographic film movement among anthropologists.[38] Because ethnographers and indigenous peoples recognize that these forms of filmmaking can produce highly problematic film products that stereotype and misrepresent, they have advocated for self-representation.[39] As Prins explains, "In an intervention that paralleled the postcolonial move to 'write back' against colonial masters, Indian activists began to 'shoot back,' reversing the colonial gaze by constructing their own visual media, telling their stories on their own terms."[40] Wilson and Stewart describe a growing movement in Australia and Canada in which indigenous peoples are increasingly exposed to mainstream media, and as a result, they demand dedicated airtime as well as indigenous productions that support culture and language.[41] Along with this development comes a shift in the focus

of interdisciplinary film studies away from ethnographic films produced by others to cultural expressions of indigenous peoples that Faye Ginsburg calls the "anthropology of media."[42] Wilson and Stewart suggest that

> contemporary Indigenous media demonstrate the extent to which the hallmarks of an earlier regime of empire—colonization, forced assimilation, genocide, and diaspora—are being challenged and displaced by new constellations of global power. Indigenous media often directly address the politics of identity and representation by engaging and challenging the dominant political forms at both the national and international level. In this landscape, control of media representation and of cultural self-definition asserts and signifies cultural and political sovereignty itself. As such, Indigenous media are the first line of negotiation of sovereignty issues as well as a discursive locus for issues of control over land and territory, subjugation and dispossession under colonization, cultural distinctiveness and the question of ethnicity and minority status, questions of local and traditional knowledge, self-identification and recognition by others, and notion of Indigeneity and Indigenism themselves.[43]

The case studies of community-based indigenous digital storytelling that we have shared are about working with the community to tell and share community stories. For both researchers, working collaboratively with a community provides opportunities for indigenous communities to control the images they want to see and to express their understandings and connections to themselves and a broader audience.

Iseke and Moore acknowledge the kinship responsibilities within their research and filmmaking projects. Moore followed existing community protocols while Iseke developed indigenous protocols and vetted these through community organizations to ensure that the protocols were acceptable to the communities. Iseke and Moore have demonstrated how they engage with Elders, youth, and community members in ways that provide a video reflecting the story that the community and Elders want told, respect all participants in the project, and provide ongoing dialogue with community members in order to ensure that decisions about what to include and exclude are appropriate. The Elders' input in this process is invaluable. Elders in the digital storytelling process share the knowledge that they feel is appropriate to share, guide the process of digital storytelling, aid in decision making about what to include and what can be left out, and give feedback to the production team regarding the ongoing projects. Elders are invaluable in the processes of both digital storytellers.

The editing of a digital storytelling video is an onerous responsibility. The same footage can be cut together differently to produce different versions of a story. Both researchers involve Elders and community members in this process

to ensure that the story that is told is the one that the community wants told. Even if the Elders and community members do not actually sit at the editing suite, they can be involved in decision making in order to ensure the digital stories remain relevant.

Editing can transform a story by speeding up the storyteller's voice, standardizing the sound level, incorporating narrations, adding visuals and reenactments, and adding an audio track of music and sound effects. Iseke and Moore ask which transformations are acceptable to the community and the Elders. By continually involving Elders in the decision-making process, the films reflect community input and perspectives, thus honoring the storylines.

Indigenous digital storytelling challenges not only the stories of the dominant society but also oppose the exclusivity of text-based resources. Collecting community stories through digital means ensures that communities honor their oral traditions and resist the dominance of texts that are prevalent in the dominant society. These community-based productions and processes are powerful for communities. They support knowing our own stories, taking charge of how our stories are told and heard, and encourage community members to take pride in where they come from and the histories and cultural traditions of the communities. These are important aspects of community-based digital storytelling and research that are reflected in these research programs.

First and foremost, our work as digital storytellers is for our children, our grandchildren, and the generations yet to come. The work always takes us into the heart of our communities, to the Elders and the youth. Our relationships with community members and with our storytelling traditions are strengthened as we gather, edit, digitize, and honor the storylines of our indigenous nations.

Notes

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1. The term *Elders* is capitalized in this article to signify that we are speaking about knowledge and culture keepers in communities rather than people who have reached an advanced age.

2. *A Living History of Métis Families as told by Dorothy Chartrand* (historical documentary film), directed by Judy Iseke (St. Albert, AB: Voices in the Wind Productions, 2008). See online at www.ourelderstories.com (accessed November 9, 2011).

3. Judy Iseke, *Storytelling with Tom McCallum* (animated educational documentary film), directed by Judy Iseke (St. Albert, AB: Voices in the Wind Productions, 2010). See online at www.ourelderstories.com (accessed November 9, 2011).

4. The *Mi'kmaw Resource Guide* (Truro: Native Council of Nova Scotia, 1994, 2) explains that Mi'kmaw "(1) is the singular of Mi'kmaq and (2) it is an adjective in circumstances where it precedes a noun (e.g., Mi'kmaw people, Mi'kmaw treaties, Mi'kmaw person, etc.)."

5. *A'tugwet: Discovering the Culture that Immune to Time*, produced by Nick Whynot, directed by Sylvia Moore (Caledonia, NS: North Queens School, 2003), DVD.

6. *The Forest and the Trees: Teachings and Learnings from the Southwest Nova Biosphere Reserve*, produced and directed by Sylvia Moore (Caledonia, NS: North Queens School, 2005), DVD.

7. Pamela Wilson and Michelle Stewart, *Global Indigenous Media: Cultures, Poetics, and Politics* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 10.

8. Timothy B. Powell, William Weems, and Freeman Owle, "Native/American Digital Storytelling: Situating the Cherokee Oral Tradition within American Literary History," *Literature Compass* 4 (2007): 19.

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