# *USING DIGITAL MEDIA TO REPORT BACK INFORMATION RICH RESEARCH AND EVALUATION RESULTS*

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## Abstract

I have used digital stories to inform diverse stakeholders about research findings and produce stories about organisational change and growth. One story about the findings of research with refugee communities in New Zealand was particularly successful at informing agencies. Other stories have worked methodologically well to document change.

Since digital storytelling was first developed, technological changes have meant that they are now relatively simple to put together. In light of personal success with digital stories helping stakeholders and decision makers engage with research findings and their increased accessibility I have applied them in two modest research projects within the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) with Māori participants, some of them *kaumātua (elders*). Apart from the oral compatibility of digital stories with Maori values, the story telling composition fits well with Māori concepts of transferring knowledge. Using examples, and referencing the theoretical basis for story-telling and the literature about Māori epistemology and ontology, this following is discussed:

- the relationship between digital stories and Māori concepts of learning and evaluation
- how digital stories can be used as a method for participatory evaluation and to communicate research and evaluation findings back to stakeholders and
- how they can be applied to documenting institutional change.

Digital storytelling uses a narrative structure interlaced with digital media to tell stories and make sense of our world. It is a powerful medium for social change, because it frames people's experience within a larger context through a range of digital media. Started by the Centre for Digital Storytelling in the 1990s, this medium has come to be used in many different settings, education, community development, arts and activist to name a few. It is now being used as a tool in an organisational setting to reflect on and capture stories.

## Telling the story

I first came upon digital stories about 10 years ago in a workshop with Joe Lambert, one of the people who started the Centre for Digital Storytelling (CDS). Digital stories refer to the 'art and craft of exploring different media and software applications to communicate stories in new and powerful ways using digital media' (McLellan 2006, p.26).

Started in 1993, the CDS has grown along with the concept of using a digital media to tell stories. What first started as an opportunity to tell personal stories has now become a phenomenon used in many fora. Digital stories work on many levels, one of the most important being a forum to help explain our identities, be they personal, political or organisational. As we improvise our ways through our multiple identities, any tool that extends our ability to communicate information about ourselves and others becomes invaluable. (Lambert 2009, p.15)

Digital storytelling has been used in many settings with great success: particularly in education, social justice and social change.[1] The education sector provides evidence that digital storytelling is an effective tool for learning (McLellan 2006). Digital stories are used in the New Zealand educational system and are taught in schools as part of the digital literacy programme. The use of digital stories as a learning medium in schools and other areas has often been put down to their ability to empower people to be involved in telling their own stories.

The body of literature around the use of stories explores the resonance stories have had with humans and how they help with learning. Brown (2011) and Schank (1995) point out that the story has important attributes relating to learning and knowledge transfer. Norman further comments that:

> *stories are marvellous means of summarising experiences, of capturing an event and the surrounding context that seems essential. Stories are important cognitive events, for they encapsulate into one compact package, information, knowledge, context, and emotion.* (Norman 1993, p.129)

The use of stories in research and evaluation is part of a dialogue about the need for involvement of all stakeholders[2]. Methodologies that include stories and narratives are a key part of the shift from a post-positivist paradigm to a constructivist and transformational mode of thinking in which 'the claims, concerns, and the issues of stakeholders serve as organisational foci' (Guba & Lincoln 1989, p.50). Most importantly, using stories helps the researcher/evaluator understand what is important to the participants and what it means to be part of an organisation or programme.

## The Māori world view

The colonisation of Aotearoa/New Zealand included the introduction of Western philosophy and values. Maori who had settled prior to Europeans had their own distinct set of values based primarily in metaphysical belief systems. In its latest report, the Waitangi Tribunal discusses the development of *mātauranga Māori* from when Māori first arrived:

> *This we have come to know as 'mātauranga Māori' – the unique Māori way of viewing themselves and the world, which encompasses (among other things) Māori traditional knowledge and culture . . . it was through the interaction with the environment that Hawaikian culture became Māori culture.* (Waitangi Tribunal 2011, p.6)

Māori values continued to change as they have interacted with the Aotearoa/New Zealand environment and people who have come here. However, some key concepts such as *whanaungatanga* (*kinship/relationships*) and *kaitiakitanga* (*guardianship*) have remained defining forces in the Māori world view (Waitangi Tribunal 2011, p.65).

Development of indigenous paradigms has taken place based on concepts of *mātauranga Māori*[3]. The need for Māori methodologies is clearly articulated by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) firmly based on a Māori ontology known as Kaupapa Māori. As a non-Māori researcher and evaluator working within New Zealand, I have written about the need to be aware of Māori ontology, in particular Kaupapa

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[1] Joe Lambert has written extensively on the use of digital storytelling since he first started in 1993. Information on Joe Lambert and publications from CDS are located at the following website: www.storycentre.org

[2] See for example Guba and Lincoln (1989) and Mertens (Chapter 1, pp. 1-246, 2010) for discussion about the changes in paradigm.

[3] Māori paradigms in other areas include Te Whare Tapa Wha developed by Mason Durie in 1982 and Te Hoe Nuku Roa (Māori Identity measure) framework developed by the Department of Māori Studies at Massey University.

Māori (Dibley & Simon-Kumar 2006) with regard to how research and evaluation is undertaken. Kaupapa Māori research is guided by and created through a Māori world view (Kaupapa Maori Research 2011). Bishop comments that Kaupapa Māori research:

> *…is based on a growing consensus that research involving Māori knowledge and people needs to be conducted in culturally appropriate ways that fit Māori cultural preferences, practices and aspirations in order to develop and acknowledge existing culturally appropriate approaches in the method, practice and organisation of research.* (Bishop 1996, p.15)

There are mixed views about whether non-Māori researchers can and should use a Kaupapa Māori methodology. Some would see Kaupapa Māori as a means for empowerment and that 'Māori people should regain control of investigations into Māori people's lives' (Smith 1999, p.185). There is also the view that non-Māori can be useful allies and colleagues in research and they have a desire to support the cause of Māori.[4] Working within a government agency provides an extra complication as one is working for the Crown, the Treaty partner to Māori in Aotearoa/New Zealand balancing the tenets of our research discipline within sometimes competing demands[5]. Researchers and evaluators working for the Crown examine programmes, policies and strategies that impact on a number of different client groups, including Māori. Most evaluations of government agencies services must be cognisant of the issues of working with different communities and the impact of its service delivery. This was articulated to me by a kaumātua I spoke to, he said:

> *I think the more we get to learn from each other, the more we can respect one another's views – think we will continue to learn from one another, true to say that on the whole, we will say to our Pakeha colleagues, we know you but you do not know us.*

Glenn Colquhoun, a New Zealand poet and doctor wrote about the concept of gaining a better understanding of a Māori world view in his 2004 essay, 'Jumping Ship'. He went on to work in a predominantly Māori community, Te Tii Mangonui.....

> *...to finish an argument my friend started with me three years before. He told me that if you are Māori in New Zealand then you have to learn to engage with Pakeha. There is no choice. The houses are Pakeha. The streets are Pakeha . but if you are Pakeha in New Zealand then you can live your whole life without ever knowing what it is like to engage with Māori.* (Colquhoun 2004, pp.9-10)

This therefore raises the question of how often personally and professionally, we need to walk alongside our participants, engage them, know them and respect their world views. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, this means not only Māori but other cultures who have made the migration.

## Working alongside other cultures

Amongst the notable changes in the composition of the Aotearoa/New Zealand population is the growth of ethnic communities in Aotearoa/New Zealand to a point where approximately one in four are now born overseas (Office of Ethnic Affairs 2011). This growth emphasises the need for researchers and evaluators to be aware of how they interact with people from ethnic groups other than their own.

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[4] Linda Tuhiwai Smith covers the issue of non-Māori undertaking kaupapa research in her book, Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples (1999). There is also a website: http://www.kaupapamaori.com/research/ that provides information on kaupapa Māori research with articles and references for further follow-up.

[5] For more information on the Treaty of Waitangi, refer to http://www.treaty2u.govt.nz/

To engage effectively with people from a different culture, render useful data and properly frame analysis, the researcher/evaluator needs to have an understanding of that culture and its constructs. By being open to learning and working alongside and giving voice to other cultures, we gain a better understanding by expanding our own ontological reasoning. Participatory approaches allow for this understanding as Tacchi explains in her work undertaken in Southeast Asia (Tacchi 2009). It is important that when we work alongside ethnic groups different to our own, we need to be aware of our different cultural constructs and design the research appropriately. In short, methodologies should include participants in the process, be ethically appropriate, and be culturally responsive (Hopson & Bledsoe 2010). The methodologies should also allow the researcher/evaluator to consider an ontology of multiple, socially constructed realities of the participants but also to work with participants to tell stories of their realities.

## Paradigms

When Abma (2003) was considering the use of storytelling as part of an organisational learning intervention, she looked to the value of the emerging heuristic in narrative and dialogical approaches to evaluation. She noted the active involvement of stakeholders in these approaches commenting:

> *The core idea of the emerging heuristic in narrative and dialogical approach to evaluation is 'story-telling'. Evaluators not only gather and analyse stories, but also include and engage stakeholders as narrators in a dialogical process in order to foster mutual learning.*(Abma 2003, p.222)

Many of the methodologies that have storytelling elements to them fall under the social constructivist[6] paradigm. This section sets out my reasoning for their use as well as examples of reporting back findings of these projects with digital stories.

As researcher/evaluators, the way we approach our work has implications on the eventual methodology that we might use. We see the world in which we live and work and this underlies how we carry out our work. When considering where digital stories fit in my work, most projects would fall within the social constructivist paradigm. The ontological assumption of social constructivism has its basis in multiple socially constructed realities. As Patton (2002) comments, a social constructivist considers that tenable statements about existence depend on a worldview, and no worldview is uniquely determined by empirical or sense data about the world. Patton goes on to say, 'a constructionist evaluator would expect that different stakeholders involved in programmes would have different experiences or perceptions of the programme, all of which deserve attention and all of which are experienced as well.' (Patton 2002, pp.97-98)

In an attempt to capture different perspectives through open-ended interviews, storytelling, focus groups and building narratives, one can see how different and at times multiple realities, emerge to form the story. In many cases, the research or evaluation may be completed in a culturally-appropriate way but reported back in a traditional format. Using digital stories as a reporting technique provides an opportunity to further extend the participatory element.

Joe Lambert had talked about how the CDS has encouraged the development of programmes undertaken by different ethnic, cultural and social communities so that they can 'capture their own stories, using approaches and methods that reflect both historical cultural practices and contemporary

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[6] Guba and Lincoln (1989) discuss a new form of constructivist evaluation which represented a shift from the post-positivist paradigm. The new 'fourth generation' evaluation or constructivist was a form of evaluation in which the claims, concerns, and issues of the of stakeholders service as organisational foci (the basis for determining what information is needed).

expressions and ideas in these communities' (Lambert 2009, p.96). Using digital storytelling to tell the stories of research and evaluation conducted with different communities seems a logical progression. This is illustrated by Tacchi in her work in development contexts 'to increase understanding of how ICT can be effective and empowering to communicate their voices within and beyond marginalised communities' (2009, p.168).

## Methodologies

The methodologies that employ stories fall under the general area of qualitative research. This paper outlines three methods that team members and I have used[7]: Appreciative Inquiry, Narrative Inquiry and Participatory Action Research. These methodologies work well with a digital storytelling reporting method as well as in cross-cultural settings. They not only document social change for individuals, communities, workplaces and societies but they can also be used as reporting tools that include participants' voices., I am sure evaluators hearing this have all found the perfect quote that explains what the policy or programme has achieved. Digital stories enable us to embed these quotes as voices to stakeholders.

### Participatory action research – the inclusion of former refugees in making digital stories

When doing research with refugee communities, I realised that research or evaluation itself, is a construct of which some knew nothing (Chile et al. 2003). Furthermore, some refugee's experience of research was of something undertaken by a repressive regime that could harm these communities. Therefore, any method used with refugees needs to be based on partnership between the researchers, refugee communities, NGOs and government agencies providing services to refugees.

A Participatory Action Research approach was used so that we could work in partnership to negotiate and agree to the research prior to its commencement and throughout the process:

> *This approach is inclusive, empathetic and empowering, and is much closer to the realities of the project communities, which are low-income and comprises refugees...a participatory approach gives the community and other stakeholders the opportunity to help design the research project from their own context, identify the strengths and weaknesses of the project, share experiences on how to improve effectiveness and allows for participatory future planning.* (Chile et al. 2003, p.60).

Research associates (associates) were recruited from former refugee and migrant committees and then trained in research techniques. The associates spent a lot of 'interview' time explaining the concept of research and the process and activities that they might take part in as well as ensuring that the interview was conducted in an appropriate way.[8] Throughout the research process, we relied heavily on the associates to help guide us through the process of collecting research, determining whether questions should be used and how people should be approached. It was particularly important to discuss research results with research associates as their experiences helped us understand the data more.

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[7] An implicit part of using storytelling is working alongside fellow evaluators to discuss and interpret the stories and build them. I worked with colleagues in the former New Zealand Immigration Service in the Department of Labour on Refugee Voices. The two examples from the Department of Internal Affairs are with members of the Research and Evaluation team along with other teams and Te Atamira themselves.

[8] In one instance, a researcher had to be changed as the community did not trust the individual even though they were from the same community. In another, I worked with an NGO to ensure that there was an understanding from the community that the research would not be shared with the government of their former country. (Further information about issues in relation to the research process is outlined in detail in Chile et al 2003).

When first employed, I suggested we use digital stories to report back our findings. My reasoning was straightforward as the project obviously had an emotional element with participants being asked to tell their stories of having to resettle in a new country with associated barriers and opportunities (New Zealand Immigration Service 2004). By working alongside former refugees and migrants, we were able to hear their stories and understand their resettlement experiences. That is why the inclusion of two research associates, both former refugees, a Kurdish man and a Somali woman, was important in making that digital story. While developing the story, we discussed the findings and how they would be framed. The narrative that my colleagues and I considered changed to reflect their experiences and the experiences of those they had interviewed. The story was reflected through the key areas that refugees saw as important parts of their experiences. Their narratives and images are included as part of the Digital Stories along with poetry from a former refugee who had worked with us on the project (Tasew 2001). The use of a diverse range of images in the digital story allowed us to reflect the many voices and experiences of refugees and their communities bringing forward these complex multi-ethnic, multi-cultural voices to be seen.

The completed digital story portrayed the experience of the journey refugees had to make leaving their homeland and starting afresh. It worked well alongside the written report with its detailed findings and two page fact sheets about particular resettlement experiences. The digital story was used at different forums: with government agencies, as part of World Refugee Day and other engagements. The response to this story snow-balled with some service delivery agencies asking me to show the story to their staff so 'they could understand the refugee experience'. By telling the stories of refugees, the digital story allowed for a better understanding of the whole refugee experience.

**Narrative Inquiry: change at multiple levels**

Another methodology that fits well with digital stories is narrative inquiry. According to Clandinin (2007), what narrative researchers have in common is the study of stories or narratives or descriptions of a series of events. Narrative researchers usually embrace the assumption that the story is one, if not the fundamental unit, that accounts for human experience. Narrative Inquiry is based on the study of our experience of the world *as story* and is intrinsically interwoven with the story of society and social change. It also places the researcher/evaluator alongside the participants of any study as they work together.

> *As narrative inquirers, our lived and told stories are always in relation to or with those of our participants. We do not stand outside the lives of participants but see ourselves as part of the phenomenon under study.* (Clandinin et al. 2010, p.82)

Using Narrative Inquiry as part of a cross-cultural project allows the 'seeing of difference" which lies at the heat of this research. Molly Andrews (2007) discusses undertaking narrative inquiry in a cross-cultural context by predicating her practice on 'narrative imagination'.

> *Our narrative imagination is our most valuable tool in our exploration of others' worlds, for it assists us in seeing beyond the immediately visible. It is our ability to imagine other 'possible lives' – our own and others – that increases our bond with 'diverse social and cultural worlds'. Without this imagination, we are forever restricted to the world as we know it, which is a very limited place to be.* (Andrews 2007, p.510)

Like Andrews (2007)who spent considerable time familiarising herself with the history of communities she was exploring, we also needed to understand the changes in wider society. The changes occurring in Aotearoa/New Zealand in the 1970s and 1980s had a huge impact on the narrative of the individuals interviewed. Through their stories, we saw these changes.

Our team was commissioned to make a digital story outlining the changes to the two Māori networks within the Department of Internal Affairs. The request arose from a concern to document these informal institutions for posterity, to provide a description of current circumstances in the context of historical change and as an aside, to help demonstrate the effectiveness of the digital story telling method itself. The most recent change to affect the networks saw them combine for one joint *hui* (*gathering/meeting*) every year as opposed to two separate hui. Interviewees included former and current members of both networks. For those who had worked in the Department since the early 1980s, they were part of the transformation of the public sector.

The establishment and growth of the two networks were part of the changes that saw the beginning of the so-called Māori renaissance[9]. The narrative of interviewees who were part of the beginning of the networks referred to changes happening in society and how they impacted in the Department. The use of a digital story was able to (literally) illustrate the narrative of change these interviewees were talking about. *Waiata* (*chant/psalm/song*), popular music, photographic images and quotations from interviews, for example photographs from government archives (National Library of New Zealand 2011) of Māori protest were used to reflect their experiences. The digital story was able to illustrate the complex change from the 1970s onwards that helped to develop both networks.

As part of this project, we decided to focus on those key aspects that made both networks work and what might help both networks flourish as a single entity[10]. Both were uncertain about whether the networks coming together would meet their particular needs. However, the digital story showed that they had more in common than not i.e. the opportunity for whanaungatanga, to be able to *kanohi-ki-te-kanohi* (*face to face/in person*) and to support themselves in their work in the Department.

**Appreciative Inquiry and working in partnership to tell a story of partnership**

Appreciative Inquiry is a group process of inquiring into, identifying and further developing the best of 'what is' in organisations in order to create a better future (Preskill & Catsambas 2006). As opposed to asking what is not working well, those in organisations are asked what is working particularly well and asked to envision what it might look like if this occurred more frequently. Preskill and Catsambas comment that 'when people ask affirmative questions, reflect on and share past experiences, and use strengths-based language, they will have more energy, hope and excitement about creating their desired future' (Preskill & Catsambas 2006, p.14).

Preskill and Catsambas (2006) highlight the link between evaluation and Appreciative Inquiry in particular the emphasis on social constructivism whereby participants learn and grow together through asking questions, reflection and dialogue, that they are both committed to conducting culturally competent and responsive studies, grounded in story-telling, a common qualitative data collection technique used in evaluation. Cram looked at appreciative inquiry through a Kaupapa Māori lens commenting that its strength based approach was 'compatible with Māori concerns that strengths be recognised and built on order to create flax root change' (Cram 2010, p.38).

We documented the history of Te Atamira Taiwhenua (DIA's Kaumātua Council) and described how it worked. A Digital Story was undertaken because those commissioning the project had seen the Māori network story and wanted something similar. The story was then to be made available for all staff to

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[9] The Māori Renaissance is a term used to refer to major changes in society with regard to Māori. More information is available from Te Ara – The Encyclopaedia of New Zealand (Royal 2009)

[10] Efficiency measures within the Department meant that the networks combined for a joint annual hui rather than two separate hui. Research and Evaluation Services were commissioned to research the history of both networks and evaluate how network members felt about them coming together.

get a better understanding of their role so they could work with the kaumātua more effectively. We used the Appreciative Inquiry model because of its strong narrative component and the compatibility between its strengths-based approach and its ability to highlight the elements of success of Te Atamira as a Māori institution.

> *Organisations and images grow toward the images they hold. Thus, if organisations and communities share positive images of their future, they will be able to develop the programmes, policies, processes, systems and products to achieve that future . . . the notion of positive images also plays a role in the* narrative of stories *that people share in organisations and communities. It is through the stories people tell in their appreciative interviews that the process of recognising elements of success, positive experiences, and connections with others begin.* (Preskill & Catsambas 2006, p.13)

Having completed a number of projects that focused on elements of the DIA's 'effectiveness for Māori' strategies (Department of Internal Affairs 2006), we understood the positive role Te Atamira Taiwhenua played and how Māori staff saw them as important role models. Kaumātua are seen as leaders in the community and 'as custodians of Māori culture to safeguard and transfer traditional knowledge for future generations (Te Rau Matatini 2009, p.3). The project, therefore, had to be appreciative of kaumātua leading to a partnership model between Te Atamira Taiwhenua, the Pou Ārahi team and the researchers.

Through unstructured interviews with Te Atamira Taiwhenua members and former and present staff members of the Department, we gathered stories about these kaumātua and about the history and changes in the Māori-Crown relationship. Our respect for their knowledge of *mātauranga Māori* has grown and they have come to trust us and share stories about their lives. The researchers feel enriched through the relationship as they have developed a multi-layered understanding of the role of Te Atamira in their wider communities, *whānau*, *hapū* and *iwi* (*extended families, sub-tribes and tribes*) as well as how they work alongside the Department. This, consequently, makes for a richer story to be told. As Witherell and Nodding say,

> *stories and narrative, whether personal or fictional, provide meaning, and belonging to our lives. They attach us to others and to our own histories by providing a tapestry rich with threads of time, place character and even advice on what we might do with our lives.* (Witherell & Noddings 1991, p.1)

In making the digital story we developed a structure in partnership with the kaumātua asking for their advice and input throughout. They have helped develop the structure of the story. *Waiata*, images and *whakatauki* (*proverbs*) are chosen by them to represent aspects they considered important to reflect in their story. One example is the waiata, *tūtira mai ngā iwi*[11]*,* chosen to one kaumātua to represent the concept of working together. Through the process we decided to adopt, we were able to work alongside Te Atamira Taiwhenua and Māori staff in partnership, more closely than if we had produced a report. The story, therefore, reinforces the important message of partnership and listening to each other and not past each other. It allows us, as researchers, to tell a complex story of partnership between Māori communities and government agencies using a deceptively simple story.

Through using Appreciative Inquiry and a story telling format, this project has been able tell a richer story and allow us to reflect on the positive contribution Te Atamira had made to the Department in

[11] Wi Huata wrote this song and taught it to his children whilst on a family gathering to Lake Tutira, north of Napier. He was explaining how the iwi came together here to support each other. From: http://folksong.org.nz/tutira_mai_nga_iwi/index.html

improving outcomes for Māori. It is rich in terms of its reflection of partnership and acknowledging and using Māori ontology as part of the story. For example, the story opens with a karanga to welcome everyone to the story with the appropriate response. In discussions with Te Atamira Taiwhenua members, the digital story has been able to highlight the essence of how they see themselves, as Treaty partners providing balance to a government agency. At the same time, it shows how working alongside a group such as Te Atamira Taiwhenua can add value to the Department in many fora. For example, the access Departmental officials gained to Māori communities through Te Atamira Taiwhenua.

## Conclusion

> *Ehara taku toa, i te taki tahi, he toa taki tini – My success should not be bestowed on me alone, as it was not individual success but the success of the collective.* (Brougham et al. 1989)

Digital Stories are a collaborative enterprise that is made richer by the experience of working across cultures and with different individuals. The collaborative process allows for trust to develop as we share our stories across cultures and build a relationship. Methodologies that include stories give researchers and evaluators the opportunity to develop these relationships and walk beside another culture gaining insight. The use of digital stories allows for rich reporting to the many stakeholders that we in Government have. Working with participants to tell their stories of change, both personal and organisational, helps us gain a better understanding of the impact of our programmes.

Digital stories help us to tell complex stories in ways that bring the voices of participants alive. Through the use of a range of media, concepts are able to be explained in one image or song and be understood by a wide audience. Though they do not replace reports and other documents; rather digital stories work well alongside these traditional formats highlighting the key points of the project.

As digital storytelling is used more in many different sectors, we can learn about how we could make our findings more accessible and relevant to our stakeholders. In documenting their experiences of our agency, policy, programme or strategy, we lose less information and maintain fidelity with the meaning of what is said in the research. As researchers and evaluators using digital stories we are confronted by our role as editors to develop the story in a participatory manner. . We can better manage this dilemma if we give ourselves, as others have written, the best opportunity to be aware of the cultural and ontological differences between ourselves and those we are researching or evaluating. This minimises the risk of losing important meaning and makes the choice about story composition and what data to include and exclude more manageable.

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