**THOMSON — Making**

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**Making Digital Histories: Developing Students as Historians**

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Making Histories is a level 2 History undergraduate unit taught as a collaboration between historians at Monash University and curators at Museum Victoria. Students research their own history project, drawing upon the Museum’s rich collection or their own family or local history resources of images, documents, and recordings. They develop a history project proposal based on primary and secondary research, write a film script based upon their research, and produce a three-minute digital video history. Students present their work at a Showcase event at Museum Victoria, which includes family members whose history they may have researched, and curators who may add their video histories to the Museum’s online collection. For student video histories produced in 2014, see https://vimeo.com/groups/makinghistory/albums/10825. For the Museum Victoria Making History website, a resource for both school and university students, see http://museumvictoria.com.au/discoverycentre/websites/making-history/.

After the Showcase event the final assessment for the unit is a class test for which students have known the question from the first day: What have you learnt about making history from making history? Thus the students not only develop a range of historical skills; they are also encouraged to become reflective practitioners and to better understand the processes and issues of historical research and production (see Cullen, 2009; Curthoys and McGrath, 2009; Gunn and Faire, 2011). Initial research using the exams suggests that the students have developed a wider understanding of what constitutes history (intimate personal histories as well as big-picture history), and that histories are always constructed though not fictional. More specifically, while they develop expertise in historical writing through the production of their research proposal, they also develop the sort of transferable skills—like succinct writing for an audience and digital video production—that are now essential tools of the trade in public history and indeed in many professions.

The course draws upon the methodologies of digital storytelling (see Lambert, 2013; Burgess and Klaebe, 2009). Digital storytelling offers tremendous potential for historical pedagogy and for the production and dissemination of student history research. Students are engaged by the opportunity to make histories that many people will view, unlike the essays they write for one or two examiners. They are excited by seeing their own families and localities as sites of history; they enjoy gathering family photos, documents, and interviews; they see their histories in new light as they research the secondary literature on their topic; they bring extraordinary digital skills to the classroom but adapt and develop them to historical production; and they feel immense satisfaction and pride as they realise that they are history makers and not just history consumers (for historians’ use of digital storytelling see Benmayor, 2008; Coleborne and Bliss, 2011; Coventry et al., 2006). Though the three-minute digital story seems worryingly short for many students when they start the course, the time length and format does work well within the limits of a single-semester course when students have to conduct original research *and* produce a history video.

In this paper we argue, however, that the digital storytelling model advocated by Joe Lambert and others can also be a limited and problematic approach to historical research and production, because it does not require extensive research or critical thinking, and because the storytelling model and emotive intentions that underpin standard approaches to digital storytelling frame good stories that are not necessarily good histories (see Poletti, 2011). In this presentation we assess the opportunities and challenges of teaching historical skills and understandings through the production of digital video history, drawing upon our own experiences of teaching the course and student reflections upon their own learning. We argue that digital storytelling can be adapted for history research and production but with important provisos and qualifications: topics need to be underpinned with deep and extensive research; intimate stories need to be connected to larger historical forces and issues; the analysis and evocation of emotion needs to be developed with both intellectual rigour and due care.

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