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The co-creation of a video to inspire humanitarianism: How an Educational Entrepreneurial approach inspired humanitarian workers to be mindfully innovative whilst working with technology.

Abstract: This paper demonstrates the value of embracing digital technology in order to effect positive change in a non-governmental (NGO) charity organisation, in this case the Irish Charity Crosscause. The outcome of the research was the creation of a charity video, Crosscause: Making a Difference, to showcase humanitarian work in Ireland and Romania with a view to inspiring others to contribute in some capacity to this cause. Video is an important medium to provide connections with a wider audience, as it gives humanitarian workers and marginalised communities an opportunity to tell their story by making a compelling and evocative case to others. Visual media not only makes connections with an audience, but can also positively challenge people to consider what is happening in the world around them.

The research process incorporated an entrepreneurial methodology – an Educational Entrepreneurial approach to action research–with four steps: Exploring, Understanding, Creating and Transforming, which is designed to guide practitioner-researchers as they embrace digital technology to resolve an identified need in a workplace context, including people in disadvantaged settings. In this research, there was an identified need for a charity video to link the giving in Ireland to the receiving in Romania, so that viewers could see the tangible effects of their contributions. A further aim of the research was to illustrate how volunteering can inspire solidarity among Irish and Romanian communities.

'Knowledge emerges only through the invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other' (Paolo Freire, 1996, p. 72).

1 Introduction

The paper highlights the importance of narrative and value-driven experiential learning when using digital technology to enhance and develop practice. The focus of the research was the work of Crosscause, an Irish-based Charity in Romania. The research involved the creation of a video to show how volunteering can inspire solidarity among Irish and Romanian communities. The video identifies thoughts, concerns, insights and narratives of participants and the researchers. Furthermore, the paper examines the effect of the video on the Crosscause Charity, its beneficiaries and the wider public.

The research was competed in part-fulfilment of the coursework requirements for the Masters in Education and Training Management (eLearning) programme – a two-year, part-time programme at Dublin City University (DCU). Dr. Yvonne Crotty from the School of Education

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Studies at DCU supervised the research dissertation. Laura Kilboy, a student on the programme carried out the research as part of her Master's dissertation.

Recent research indicates that not-for-profit organisations are turning to video to create an awareness of their work (Waters and Jones, 2011). Visuals and storytelling play prominent roles in engendering empathy from an audience (TED, 2008) provided of course that they are used appropriately without disengaging or desensitising the audience (Joffe, 2008). Hence, it has been recommended that charity organisations provide a link between their fundraising efforts and those receiving the aid, so that a climate of transparency and trust is created, particularly on behalf of those donating (Hart and Johnston, 2002). Video is an important medium for forging this connection, as it provides the opportunity for an organisation to tell its story by making a compelling and evocative case to encourage new donors (Allen, 2002).

In order to guide the creation of the video to show how volunteering can inspire solidarity among Irish and Romanian communities, an entrepreneurial methodology (Crotty, 2014) was employed. Action research is a form of research that is democratic, organic, collaborative and driven by values that promote the social good (Wood, 2012). It is research 'with' people rather than 'on' people. It is a democratic and public form of enquiry as opposed to technical rationality (Elliott, 2015). Social validity is used in order to judge the quality of the research and ensure that it is valid, rigorous and ethical. Hence the research findings are subjected to public critique through a series of validation meetings, which will be elaborated on later in the paper.

An Educational Entrepreneurial approach to action research was developed by Yvonne Crotty out of her experience as a supervisor of students, on the Masters in Education and Training Management (eLearning) programme. The research approach involves the design and creation of a multimedia artefact (for example, video, online educational resources or other educational materials that improves and enhances learning) and documenting the research as it unfolds. The output of the entrepreneurial approach demonstrates impact on the researcher(s) and the wider social enterprise. The four stages of this action research approach can act as a guide to researchers creating educational resources, as an integral part of the research process. We accept McTaggart's (1996) point that action research is not a 'procedure' for research but it is a series of commitments to observe and

problematise through practice a series of principles for conducting social enquiry.

The four steps will now be outlined:
– *Explore* – explore self, others and the workplace culture, identify an issue that needs to be addressed while using one's values as guiding principles.
– *Understand* – recognise what needs to be done in order to improve one's own work environment, use online journals to document the on-going reflection and analysis – a process which happens in each of the stages.
– *Create – design and create* an innovative multimedia artefact to enhance a situation and/or improve practice, create the shared vision based on ideas of collaboration, co-operative learning, co-create knowledge with others, include regular performance/presentation of research to enable honest feedback in a safe and respectful environment.
– *Transform* – show the transformation in practice, demonstrate the impact of the research, provide evidence of how the research has made a difference to the researcher and the wider community.

The following 3 characteristics define the Educational Entrepreneurial research approach (Crotty, 2014).
– Firstly, it is about engaging the imagination in the possibilities opened up by new forms of multimodal communication and building the capacity of practitioners to design and create a multimedia artefact for use in their own work context. The multimedia artefact is designed to bring about a change in workplace practices or to improve a situation.
– Secondly, the values of passion, creativity and excellence underpin the Educational Entrepreneurial research approach. The approach demonstrates the individual's ability to turn ideas into action, show initiative and take risks. The practitioners also articulate their own educational values as they develop their pedagogy of the unique (Farren & Crotty, 2014).
– Finally, the knowledge created is a cooperative process involving the practitioner and the university and also linking to the wider social context.

This approach to action research is reflective of Boyer's (1990) idea of a scholarship of application, with its focus on the use of scholarly knowledge for the greater good. In Boyer's words, '[N]ew intellectual understandings can arise out of the very act of application – whether in medical diagnosis, serving clients in psychotherapy,

shaping public policy, creating an architectural design, or working with the public schools. In activities such as these, theory and practice vitally interact, and one renews the other.' Boyer's idea of a scholarship of application in the academy is a scholarship that applies and contributes to human knowledge in a dynamic way rather than a one-way process.

2 Background

Crosscause Charity is an Irish NGO that was set up in 2003 in response to the humanitarian crisis in the orphanages in Romania in the 1990s. The volunteers who founded the charity had been working in an orphanage in a village, Nicoresti, in the East of Romania. Through fundraising endeavours in Ireland during Christmas 2002, they were able to purchase a house in the village and over the coming months convert it into a home for 15 special needs young adults whom they rescued from the state institution. Currently, the house provides:
–   a home for these 15 special needs young adults.
–   a day centre for up to 40 impoverished children from the village and nearby village.
–   the provision of food and assistance to vulnerable families.
–   a family home for three orphaned children in the village.

Laura Kilboy has volunteered with the charity since June 2013 and has spent several months over the past two years immersed in the project in Nicoresti. As a relatively new volunteer she was particularly inspired by the stories and commitment of long-term volunteers and full-time volunteers who have dedicated years of their lives to protecting and supporting the most vulnerable in society. Stories of local Romanians were also hugely inspiring as they told of how they were now giving back into their community based on the kindness they had received from volunteers. Hence, the themes of *solidarity and reciprocity* emerged, which are also identified in volunteer literature and EC policies (Jeffries et al., 2006; Villela, 2008; Devereux, 2008; European Commission, 2011; Disprose, 2012).

Laura was a student on the Masters in Education and Training Management (eLearning) programme – hereafter referred to as MEME – when she created the video. Her passionate interest in portraying the work of Crosscause combined with her emerging knowledge and skills in a range of digital technologies, including video and her growing understanding of research as a form of social enquiry led to the creation of the video 'Crosscause: Making a Difference'. The following section details the four step process of the research approach.

3 Educational entrepreneurial action research approach

3.1 Step 1: Explore

Students on the MEME programme are encouraged to keep weekly, online reflective journals in which to explore and document thoughts, ideas, insights and emerging values around their learning experiences as they progress through their studies. The process of journaling is beneficial as it can lead to an understanding and realisation of the role of values, both personally and professionally. As Laura became immersed in the MEME programme, she also used the reflective journal to document volunteer stories, all of which embodied insights of empathy, respect and reciprocity.

Laura gradually came to the realisation that one of her values was empathy and this became an important foundation for her work with the charity and consequently the production of a video to illustrate humanitarian work in Ireland and Romania. The following observation from Dadds is very relevant to this research, 'empathy can move us to engage more kindly and compassionately with others and to act positively on their behalf' (2008, p.80). Laura attempted to use her values as guiding principles throughout the research process to ensure that she stayed true to her own self. For the dissertation element of the programme Laura wanted to build on her previous humanitarian work and make use of the multi-media skills that she developed in the first year of the Masters, to create a meaningful artefact that would benefit the organisation. An important element in the research process was that she enjoyed using her newly acquired multi-media skills. She was able to marry the head with the heart to create something that would have a positive impact on her own learning and on the organisation.

The initial idea of a video production came about through a Skype call with Yvonne – the research supervisor – who suggested that the creation of a video would enable Laura to make use of her newly acquired multi-media skills and include her volunteering experience in the production of a video for the dissertation research. However, a number of doubts were raised by Laura during the Skype conversations as indicated in the following points:

– How could a video of volunteers or a charity be a scholarly piece of research?
– Is there an identified need for a video within the charity?
– What are the ethical issues in filming in such a sensitive environment?
– What story about the charity should be communicated?
– How could a multi–media resource be created given the researcher's limited video skills?

These questions were all explored by Laura in order to come to an understanding of the actions that she needed to take in order to impact on the current work practices.

With regard to producing scholarly research. Boyer's (1990) vision of scholarship of application is very relevant with its focus on the use of scholarly knowledge for the greater good; "[s]uch a view of scholarly service – one that both applies and contributes to human knowledge – is particularly needed in a world in which huge, almost intractable problems call for the skills and insights only the academy can provide" (p. 22–23). Traditional research assumes that the researcher remains external and fully detached from the research process. This type of research produces knowledge obtained by facts that are verifiable and observable (Morrison, 2002). Friederes (1992) argues that in order to carry out valid scientific research, a researcher must put aside any subjective, emotional or prior convictions about a subject so that knowledge generated remains unbiased, suitable for generalisation and tested according to logic rather than personal ideology. We concur with Freire (1998, p.48) that subjective experience and emotion should not be detached from learning and must be submitted to methodological rigour in order to become epistemological.

3.1.1 The need for a video within the charity – importance of establishing a shared vision

It was necessary to discuss the idea of a creating a video with the Crosscause founder in order to determine whether they were interested in the idea. Whilst the literature

recommends that NGOs turn to multi-media to create an awareness of their campaign (Allen, 2002; Waters and Jones, 2011), there was also a need to be sensitive to the needs and culture of the organisation and the delicacy of the environment in which the video would be situated. Thus, while the end product would be the creation of a video, the ethical process to realise this had to be a priority. It was pertinent to involve the project manager in Romania to see if they too would be willing to partake in a video production. At the time of the enquiry, Crosscause did not have any videos or multi-media resources to link the giving in Ireland to the receiving in Romania, so donors did not see the positive, tangible impact of their contributions**.**

3.1.2 The ethical issues in filming in such a sensitive environment

There was a recognition by Laura that ethical concerns needed to be addressed in this study before any video production commenced. Written permission had to be sought from Crosscause Ireland and Fundatia Bunul Samaritean Romania; authorisation also had to be obtained from the individual volunteers who might participate in the video. To this end a plain language statement which would explain the research needed to be drafted and in addition informed consent forms were required to be signed by all the participants and submitted as part of the study.

In order to gain approval from the local Romanian care workers, the research aims, objectives and Laura's role in producing a video was required to be translated by the project manager in Nicoresti and then communicated to all stakeholders involved; this work could be all recorded on video as evidence.

3.1.3 What story about the charity should be communicated?

Once all parties agreed to partake in the video production process, there was a need to explore the type of story that would be communicated in the video. It was agreed that the video would take a multi-faceted approach and include the volunteer work being carried out in Ireland. The bi-annual loading of an aid truck destined for Nicoresti and various fundraising activities as well as the project work being carried out in the foundation and community in Nicoresti would provide such examples.

The key focus would be to communicate the organisation's story through its long-term volunteers and the local

Romanian people. This personal, on-screen testimony would help to shape the perception of the organisation in the public's mind (Waters and Jones, 2011). The use of video in NGO research recommends the addition of internal stakeholder voices, as well as 'client success stories' (Waters and Jones, 2011). The addition of these voices of the charity (volunteers and local Romanians) adds personality and authenticity to the project. Personal input and stories alone can be powerful and filmmaker Andrew Stanton (TED Radio Hour, 2013) contends that one of the affordances of narrative in video is that it allows people to connect through story, find meaning and realise similarities across boundaries.

3.2 Step 2: Understand how to make it happen

3.2.1 Develop video skills

Whilst there was an abundance of ideas, motivational stories and personal motivation to pursue the project, there was the issue of Laura's limited skills in video production and post-production. It was important to understand the time and level of commitment needed to realise the project goals and the work involved in creating a video that might help raise awareness of the charity's work. In order to do the research justice, there was a need to ensure that the production would be the best that it could possibly be when presenting the final video to an outside viewer. There was an understanding of the number of months, which would need to be spent filming the various events to best capture the work of the charity (the loading of an aid truck, fundraising activities, interviews, various project work in Romania). Laura was aware of the steep learning curve that lay ahead which would involve experimenting with camera angles, editing footage and refining the story.

3.2.2 Collaboration and Participation

Laura began to understand that by opening the communication channels to all involved, a culture of participation and collective learning could be fostered so that it was not only her experience of charity work that was being explored, but also the individual stories of volunteers, local Romanians, the special needs adults, the children

of the day centre and the families in the community. All stories could be documented for the video.

3.3 Step 3: Create

3.3.1 Involving the Stakeholders

In order to capture the story in Romania, Laura travelled to Nicoresti in February 2014 to listen to and document the 'insider stories'. The project was discussed with the local Romanian care workers (translated in Romanian by the project manager), who each contributed their story to the research project and the value of the work being done in the foundation. Local Romanians were also eager to share their stories of how they were now giving back into their community based on their experiences of kindness and compassion from the charity and its volunteers.

Whilst in Romania, short video clips were sent via Dropbox (a personal cloud storage service – sometimes referred to as an online backup service, that is frequently used for file sharing and collaboration) to Yvonne to ensure that the footage being captured was 'acceptable' for an outside audience. As Laura was a volunteer and researcher, it was important that whatever and whomever she was representing would be sensitively and respectfully portrayed. Whilst the online feedback was positive with regards to sensitive portrayals, there was still a need to tailor the video to make it more appealing for an outside audience, that is, getting establishing shots to give viewers a sense of where they are and framing the images in interviews to eliminate 'noisy' backgrounds.

3.3.2 Co-create the video

Once the interviews and footage had been taken, there was a need to work on the post-production stage of the video, this involved editing the video and making it relevant to an outside audience. This stage involved everyone working together to offer constructive and honest feedback so that the video could reach a quality standard but most importantly it must have a positive effect on the viewer through a dignified account of the charity's work.

The key collaborators in the feedback process included the following:
a. Crosscause charity feedback via Skype – (telecommunications – application software product that specialises in providing video chat and voice calls from computers, tablets, and mobile devices via the Internet to

other devices or telephones/smartphones), face-to-face, email, Dropbox

b. Local Romanians (feedback via Skype, email, face-to-face, Dropbox)

c. Research supervisor (Yvonne) (feedback via Skype, face-to-face, email, Dropbox, Moodle – a free and open-source software learning management system)

d. Peers on the MEME programme (feedback via Moodle, face-to-face).

Whilst the charity was happy with the story and footage used, there were recommendations to include the names of all 15 special needs adults since they are the reason for the charity's existence. Furthermore, in spite of the literature that recommends including graphic images to appeal to the emotions of an audience (Fischer, 2000; Waters, 2008), it was decided through a series of meetings and conversations with the charity that no such images from the institutions would be used, as it would deter from the overall message of the video. The local Romanians who partook in the video production were also contacted via email and Skype to ensure that they were satisfied with their portrayal in the video.

Yvonne, as the research supervisor was a significant link in the collaborative process, as she provided technical expertise and advice about the length of video, redundant shots, transitions and pacing of the video as well as support in the research and a belief that what was being created would be a valuable and meaningful video resource.

The peers on the MEME programme provided invaluable and constructive feedback for improving the video. Through a series of validation meetings and online forums advice, recommendations and encouragement, were provided to Laura in order to enhance the overall quality of the video. Such feedback was essential for the emerging story to appeal to an outside viewer. Like Penz (2014, p.10) we agree that 'innovation involves experimentation with options, many of which turn out to be disadvantageous'. By being completely immersed in the project Laura and the volunteers had an emotional attachment to the video; hence, the social validations meetings as part of the MEME programme were vital. For example, it was recommended to reduce footage (from 60 seconds to 20 seconds) of a food delivery to a family as sixty seconds could potentially desensitise an audience. Therefore, short but insightful scenes were used.

The research and video was presented to the MEME peers, Yvonne as research supervisor and an external evaluator at a final validation meeting in May 2014. The video sensitised the audience and succeeded in having a positive impact on the viewers. The audience confirmed that the representation of the charity, its volunteers and its clients was carried out in a compassionate and dignified way. The outcome of this meeting was the recommendation to create a 90-second trailer video to entice the audience to the longer version. The trailer video can be accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFECJUAtIFE

3.3.3 Sustained engagement

The creation stage of the research has highlighted the importance of dialogue and open communication channels with all parties, hence everyone contributed to the development of the video. Laura collaborated with the charity and local Romanians via Skype or email at all stages of the research process. It was important that each person and the charity felt comfortable with how they were being portrayed. It was important to involve local Romanians, as their stories alone inspire. In this way, it has shown how critical it was to have a *shared vision* and an aim to co-create something that everyone could feel proud of. It has also ensured that the collaborative end product would be well received by an outside viewer.

3.4 Step 4: Transformation

3.4.1 Impact on charity

The research and the Educational Entrepreneurial approach to action research employed led to the creation of an innovative video, which shows the impact of humanitarian work being carried out by Crosscause in Romania. The inception of the project began in September 2013 and was fully realised in June 2014. The impact of this project has been immense for Laura, the charity and the community in Romania. The video itself has not only created an awareness of the work of volunteers but also shows the value of humanitarian work and the sense of solidarity and reciprocity among Irish and Romanian communities. It sought to engender empathy and sensitivity from the audience and thus far it has succeeded in its aim.

The final video can be accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oChR_CIK1Vo

The video was officially launched in November 2014 via Facebook and the comment from the project manager and long-term volunteer, Claire Melinte, in Nicoresti shows the sense of pride and positive emotions and contributions that have come about through this research.

In addition, the public response has been positive and confirms the sensitive nature in how the work has been portrayed. It has succeeded in generating an empathic

3.4.2 Impact on the researcher

Claire Melinte
November 3, 2014 · 🌐

Here it is....the CrossCause Charity video documenting our story and work! Anyone who has ever supported us, or wondered what exactly we do, should watch this heartwarming 10 minute film! It starts by showing just some of the hardwork carried out by our volunteers in Ireland and then shows exactly how that work and generosity benefits our community here in Romania. There are also brief interviews with Conor Hughes, Claire Colvin, myself, Ionel Melinte and Crina Rusu. I'm very passionate about this video and it brings a tear to my eye everytime I watch it 🙂

Many thanks again to the wonderful Laura Kilboy Laura Nic Giolla Bhui

Please share it amongst your friends to get us some much needed publicity!

Crosscause: Making a Difference
The story and work of the Crosscause Charity in Nicoresti, Romania. All its volunteers are self-funded, which ensures that every donation goes directly to be...

YOUTUBE.COM

Great video, shows the amazing work you all do to make such a difference to so many people's lives, **F. Deans, 3 November 2014**

Wow, well done! It certainly brought a tear to my eyes. Brilliant timing too! It's a lovely warm but informative film showing how people can and do help, **P. Bignal, 3 November 2014**

Great video. Really shows how you are making a difference out there. We would like to make a donation to your Christmas appeal...hope you and your family are all well. **J. Gibson, 20 November 2014**

This year people's generosity meant we were able to make Christmas special for even more people than in previous years. I think our charity video helped to show the public in Ireland and England the many ways that we are helping the community here in Nicoresti. The donations this year brought a lot of happiness to a LOT of people this Christmas. Many, many thanks to all of you! **C. Melinte, 1 January 2015**

For Laura, the creation of the video has demonstrated a sense of personal transformation insofar as she has developed a completely new skill set with regards to digital production. At the beginning of the MEME programme, having never held a camcorder and having had limited experience of using digital technology, the research has enabled her to link both the affective and cognitive elements of learning and pursue a piece of research of personal, social and academic value. Perhaps, more importantly the transformation came through the experience itself; the stories, the collaboration and the in-depth understanding of the invaluable work of a few who strive to make the world a better place for the many in Nicoresti. This attitude aligns with Disprose's (2012, p. 188) idea that 'the measure of success in such an approach is not necessarily what volunteers achieve in their projects, but their experiences of changed consciousness, and what enduring impact, if any, it has on attitudes, values and behaviour.'

The constant collaboration and social validation has ensured that everyone who partook in the production was portrayed with dignity and respect; the video has succeeded in raising awareness of the positive contributions of a few that has a lasting impact on many.

4 Concluding comments

Blake (2008, p.11) reminds us that 'technology is theoretically and methodologically neutral'; it is however, up to the designer to orchestrate its use for positive outcomes whilst adhering to sound pedagogical practice and theories. This research sought, through the creation of a digital video, to raise awareness of humanitarian efforts of an Irish-based charity, Crosscause, in Romania and to hopefully inspire people to contribute to the charity.

The research demonstrates how taking an Educational Entrepreneurial approach to action research has empowered Crosscause humanitarian workers to be mindfully innovative whilst working with digital technology. It highlights the active collaboration amongst the following: volunteers, Crosscause charity, host community in Romania, peers on the MEME programme, Yvonne as research supervisor and Laura as the researcher, in order to create an innovative video of personal and social value.

While the technical skills took time to develop, the story itself had to be the cornerstone of the research. The final research showed how the story and technology complemented each other as the power of the story led to the sensitive way in which the technology was used. The values of respect, empathy and reciprocity remained paramount in guiding the research process. Through this research we have witnessed how higher education facilitated the innovative process and the safe educational space so that Laura as a practitioner-researcher could be entrepreneurial by taking risks and confidently undertaking research that has a transformative impact.

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