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American Literature Short Stories:
Information Transfer and the Anthology

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Introduction

Stories have played an important part of the American culture since the very first ones were told. Stories provide a learning tool and a lifelong connection to the world around them. According to Kearns (2003), Gamble states that “information, not simply the human brain, has been evolving since the existence of our earliest ancestors” (p. 121). This is significant because stories, whether told orally, or written, have become instrumental in building the cornerstones for our civilizations.

An anthology, as defined by Dictionary.com, is “a book or other collection of selected writings by various authors, usually in the same literary form, of the same period, or on the same subject”. Stories are prevalent and important to our way of life, and so by collecting these stories into one big anthology, we take the individual knowledge and transform it into a collection. By looking at this anthology, we can take the Information Transfer model steps and apply them to consider, and process, how we use a collection of stories to create knowledge.

Creation

Anthologies play a vital role in the information transfer process because they consist of many different short stories, by many different authors, in one book. The creation process of the Information Transfer model lies within the collections of these short stories, not the creation of the story themselves. As Johnston and Blumentritt (1998) indicate in their article, knowledge is “linked to an explicit theory or theories, is embedded in a social context of explanation, and is endorsed, explicitly or implicitly, by a discipline or group of practitioners” (p. 101). Their definition of knowledge lends itself to this example of anthologies because the short stories

contained in them have to be tested by certain criteria, receive criticism, be interpreted, and be given context in order to be included in an anthology.

Some criteria, as stated by the editors for the Heath Anthology of American Literature (1994), include stories that “change the traditional foci”, contain “significant forms of artistic expression”, and incorporates “how a text engages concerns central to the period in which it was written as well as to the overall development of American culture” (p. xxxii). Another criterion is how the chosen text “treats issues and subjects that have often been downplayed, even avoided” (p. xxxiii). The editors have also considered short stories for the collection based on how they are “interesting for reading and helpful to teaching” and how well they “represent different cultural voices” (p. xxxiv).

Anthologies are then created using criticism of the potential stories by the scholarly profession, to facilitate the editorial board to add the recommended texts. The academic professional is asked to provide suggestions for inclusion, as well as to provide a brief synopsis of why they asked for that particular story to be included.

As the editors for the Heath Anthology of American Literature (1994) assert, “we have been able to extend the range of this anthology far beyond the limits of the board as a whole” (p. xxxv), and the interpretation process they go through to incorporate different stories into the anthology “offers readers differing approaches to authors and varied writing styles” (p. xxxv). To wade through the numerous stories from American literature, the editorial group had to interpret the right stories to include in the anthology.

The editors of the anthology also have to consider how a piece has given context to the literary world. The editors have to give illustration using the stories selected for inclusion to cultures which the authors where from, historical period, language and imagery of the time

period, and how it was related to other pieces from its time period. Using these examples, the stories included in the anthology are selected by how they relate to the surrounding conditions of the collection.

Dissemination

Dissemination of the completed anthology is the next step in the information transfer process because the collection of knowledge has to be spread out and become available to the public. As Owens (2001) explains, one definition for dissemination is “consisting of purposive, goal-oriented communication of information or knowledge that is specific and potentially useable, from one social system to another” (p. 1).

Libraries are instrumental in disseminating the knowledge created in anthologies of short stories. These anthologies provide an educational and recreational purpose for anyone wanting to check them out. If a person was researching short stories for a project, the information could be scattered in multiple sections of the library. The researcher would potentially have to find individual authors to compare and contrast, which could take a great amount of time. Accesses to anthologies are helpful in finding all information in one place.

Bookstores are another place where anthologies are disseminated. Barnes and Noble® provides a large selection of multiple titles when searching for anthologies of American short stories. Some titles include short stories written by many different authors, others include short stories written by just one author, and still some include short stories written by only women. This is just a few examples of the many different types of anthologies that are available on the market today, and as Scullion (2002) states, “It is argued that dissemination needs to be carefully considered at the design state of research projects in relation to source, message, method, and

target groups” (p. 65). Since there are many target groups, there need to be many types of anthologies.

Organization

Once the anthology is available to be disseminated, it must also be able to be organized. Information organization can be defined as the “systematic arranging of data, information, and knowledge to facilitate identification, access and retrieval” (Achleitner, Definitions page).

Because anthologies are also found in libraries, they would have to be catalogued in a variety of places. The type of anthology defines what area of the library to look in. The general short story anthology might be located under American Literature, History, General Literature and English Literature. However, it also might be found under Native American Literature, Women’s Literature, Children’s Literature or Fairy Tales, or Folk Tales & Myths Literature, if the anthology has an emphasis.

Depending on what type of library the researcher is using, the types of classification may vary. Some public libraries use the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system for cataloging, whereas academic libraries mostly use the Library of Congress Classification (LCC) system. This difference should not interfere with the classification aspects, just the way the call number is displayed.

Diffusion

As Lievrouw and Pope (1994) look at the diffusion model as explained by Everett Rogers, they state the “four main elements of diffusion [which are] an innovation [that] is communicated through certain channels, over time, among members of a social system” (p. 381).

In applying this model to an anthology, the term innovation needs to be defined as “a creation resulting from study or experimentation” as by dictionary.com. Anthologies are created

by an editorial board that selects the short stories that have been studied and meet the criteria for inclusion.

These anthologies are then communicated through various channels. One of the channels through which these are disseminated consists of teachers or professors who use this collection of short stories to teach English classes. However, many other avenues are available to be used as a form of literary learning.

Seminars and workshops for writers are another way through which anthologies can be communicated. Many writers attend these seminars in order to learn about literary works, as well as to hone their literary skills. Hopefully some stories will affect how they write or what they write about. These workshops might also feature a writer who has had their work published in an anthology.

Other editorial boards use anthologies in order to help them see what is needed in their collection and what criteria they need to use to select the work. Student-run literary groups can also use anthologies as a building block toward producing their own literary magazine, journal, or anthology of undergraduate and graduate students' talents.

For the "over time" part of the diffusion model, anthologies have been published for many years as a way to group certain types of stories together. These anthologies have withstood the test of time and continue to get published with each current year. Many older anthologies are updated by new editions, which continue to add new work to them. There have also been different genres of anthologies published recently like the first literary comic book anthology and the first anthology of Lesbian plays.

Members of the social system in the diffusion model will include all that make use of the literary world. This would comprise of educators, students, recreational readers, board members, critics, other writers, and anyone else who wants to access and study literature.

Utilization

Utilization speaks primarily to the purpose and the impact of the information readers obtain from the anthology. What use of the information, and how readers are actually using the anthology, are important steps in the utilization of knowledge.

Anthologies can be used to disseminate the stories that teach people about life and other experiences. Anthologies like Aesop's Fables and some Native American short stories portray characters in the stories that have something to tell the readers of life experiences and what we should learn from them. As stated by Machlup (1993) the "value of a delivery service depended on the value of what is being delivered" (p. 449). In looking at Aesop's Fables, this has been around for generations and continues to be taught to young children because the continuation of these stories is dependent on how the information is utilized. Since the information is an important lesson, it will continue to be put to use.

It does seem that knowledge utilization links back to the creation and dissemination components of the Information Transfer model. With the example of anthologies, if someone was to further utilize the knowledge in the anthology, then they would be starting the Information Transfer model over again by creating an interpretation of their own for whatever short story they read. They then would disseminate that newly created knowledge to the rest of the literary world and the process would start over again and again.

Preservation

Libraries are one place where the preservation of anthologies is the most prevalent. A library holds millions of books (both in print and digital) and is in a natural position to ensure the preservation of an anthology, particularly an academic library. Libraries will also have the long-term ability to provide access to anthologies by keeping numerous additions and volumes of the same title for research because of economic budgets and space.

Professors are also part of the preservation process by keeping these anthologies in use in the classroom. They are the ones using it as a teaching aid and therefore are keeping it on the shelves of libraries for students to use as a research possibility. Also, preservation is obtained if students have to buy these anthologies for their classes. They might keep them on their own personal shelves as a resource for future use, or just for recreational reading.

Bookstores are another way to preserve anthologies. Physical bookstores make anthologies available to the community outside of academia to examine, purchase, and read anthologies for recreational use. They do this by supplying anthologies to the general public and potential future class members. Online bookstores also help preserve anthologies by using digital resources that are now readily available. Electronic books will continue to make advancements and expand the points of access for users of anthologies. As Yakel (2001) says, “the development of strategies, technologies, and methods will enable digital preservation to become an established reality” (p. 367).

Conclusion

American literature short story anthologies are part of the Information Transfer model because they are a collection of stories that are created using criteria, criticism, interpretation, and context. This collection of knowledge is then disseminated to a wide range of audience, who

uses this creation to further their personal knowledge on this subject. This collection is classified, making it available to users by organizing it in such a way that it is relatively easy to find in libraries, bookstores, or online. Diffusion is present by the way anthologies are used by professor, seminars and workshops, and student-run literary groups. The anthology is then utilized by different people to get the information across and create new knowledge of their own. Libraries and bookstores then preserve the knowledge, and the process begins anew.

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