Slide 1

Digital storytelling and wellbeing:
investigating the transformative and
therapeutic impacts of digital storytelling
and its contribution to lifelong learning

Dr Laura Mazzoli-Smith, Durham University
Dr Pip Hardy, Patient Voices

Durham University

Patient Voices

1

Slide 2

Patient Voices approach to digital storytelling

'Classical' CDS/Story Center model

Usually takes place over three days

Online version = six x 2-hour sessions + individual support between sessions

Digital stories are a *distillation* – they move us from the narrative to the *essential* story.

affective Voices Patient reflective

http://www.patientvoices.org.uk/

2

Slide 3

Brave

BRAVE

wonderful made day listening learn asking story Lucy group brave education younger talking child never reason going love ready trust telling understand knew connection school over-reading hospitalised accepting facing doctors choosing left thinking parent therapist friend changing

https://www.patientvoices.org.uk/flv/1344pv384.htm   Joanne Shalliker, 2021
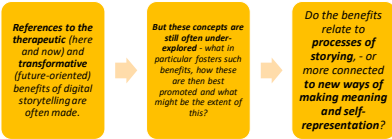
3

Slide 6

What people have said over the years....

'Since making my digital story, I feel like I've grown wings.'

'A truly cathartic experience.'

'I felt that it was like 10 years' worth of therapy in 3 days.'

'It moved me on seismically – it released me.'

'It felt like an almost spiritual journey.'

'It was quite transformative in that way of actually viewing myself and my situation through quite a different lens ...'

'I feel like it has been the best reflective practice I have undertaken throughout my career and that it has also provided me with clinical supervision that I have never achieved in the same way within work.'

6

Slide 7

The rationale and questions for the project

References to the therapeutic (here and now) and transformative (future-oriented) benefits of digital storytelling are often made.

But these concepts are still often under-explored - what in particular fosters such benefits, how these are then best promoted and what might be the extent of this?

Do the benefits relate to processes of storying, - or more connected to new ways of making meaning and self-representation?

7

Slide 8

Method: Patient Voices

- Open interviews (on Zoom) with one of three interviewers
- Purposive sample of 20 storytellers, many of whom had made repeat stories
- Questions based on the idea of conceptualisation not concepts

'I understand concepts to be fixed as substantive categories of difference, whereas I understand conceptualisation as involving active processes of concept making, where each making of a concept is a creative act in itself...' (Gale and Wyatt, 2018)

How would you describe the effect of having made a digital story?

Do you think the DS process has contributed to your health and wellbeing and if so, how?

- Thematic, and narrative analysis

8

Slide 9

Lifeworld existentials
(van Mannen, 1990)

This phenomenological lifeworlds approach is in line with fluid subject of human becoming as opposed to a more fixed version of who we are.

- **Lived space:** our sense of our being in space and how we have learned certain social and cultural conventions associated with space which give it a certain qualitative dimension.
- **Lived body:** our embodied experiencing, which reveals or conceals something about ourselves.
- **Lived time:** subjective time and our temporal way of being in the world.
- **Lived other:** intersubjectivity, that is the lived relations we are born into and maintain with others through the lifecourse.
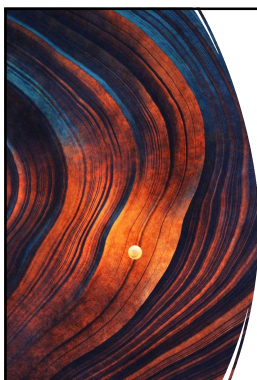
Taking a phenomenological approach we ask less how does the digital storytelling process have an impact, but more *what is the nature of the (ongoing) experience of having been in one or more digital storytelling workshops?*

9

Slide 10

Interview question	Themes
How did you feel watching your story/stories again recently?	Pride Affect Memory
What was your experience of making your first digital story/your digital stories?	Affect Connectedness Communication Processual
How would you describe the effect of having made a digital story? Do you think you've changed as a result of creating a digital story and if so, what has changed?	Catalyst for change Learning tool Unique context
What does this change feel like (knowledge, skills, behaviours)?	Self-acceptance Growth Others-oriented
What does it look like to someone else? How would a close friend describe the difference?	New skills Different behaviours
What do you think contributed to the change?	Story circle Process
What examples do you have of sustained transformation?	Ongoing learning Benefit to wellbeing Changed behaviours
Do you think the DS process has contributed to your health and wellbeing and if so, in what way or ways/how has it contributed?	Physical health Mental health Catalyst for change New dispositions
How do you feel about sharing your story?	Emotional

10

Slide 11

Lifeworld existentials:
lived space

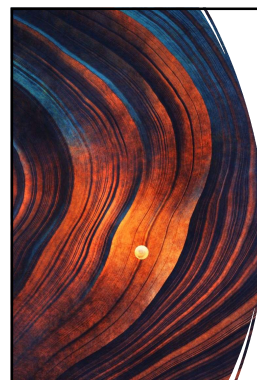*'I think it's just the most powerful session…. It's almost like you leave the real world behind and you've got this protected space and it is definitely a safe space where people are incredibly vulnerable and feel that they are safe to be'.*

'This space that you get given, huge space to stop, that I've never in my entire life had anywhere else'.

'It's a change for yourself, a deeper look, a deeper understanding/ to question things more, which I think I have picked up, is huge'.

'The fact that it started with a story circle, I think the story circle felt like a very important space and almost like a sacred space, really, the story circle'.

11

Slide 12

Lifeworld existentials:
lived body

'You do start to see the stories, see embryo stories everywhere'.

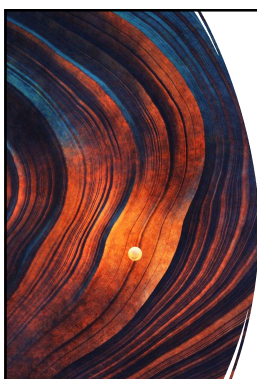'It added more layers to me/ gave me more confidence, and I was excited'.

'Because it really clarifies your head'.

'I hadn't found my voice, it was trapped inside of me and I think it was the start of it being a voice'.

'It's transformed me. You seem to understand people better, you become more aware if people aren't well'.

'Because you see the world in a different way through the lens of a camera…when you're walking with a camera, you are looking and you're seeing, and you're taking it in. It's very different.'

12

Slide 13

Lifeworld existentials:
lived time

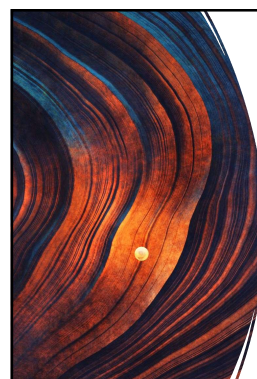'Emotional longevity that I hadn't expected the workshop to have'.

'You are walking past dragons and it's that it was a way of dealing with something and then being able to see it in a different lights and move forward from that'.

'It had felt like years worth of therapy in three days'.

'Part of the joy and the transformation and the, the whole process is the time that we spent together as a group you know, having dinner, making lunch, having coffee, talking in the evening. So that kind of whole…'

'I go back to the fact that it was time out. I always felt it was time out from every day. So a time to really stop and hear your head and be with others who are stopping with you'.

13

Slide 14

Lifeworld existentials:
lived other

'It wasn't an individual process, but a group process.'

'You know, we are making ourselves vulnerable to other people, and letting them in. And when you let people in to a certain level, they're there forever'.

'Power of the story circle was the listening, actually listening to other people's stories'.

'And it was a big thing also being in touch with people that experienced the same feelings as well'.

14

Well-being, relational and pluralist

- *'phenomenological research has, as its ultimate aim, the fulfilment of our human nature: to become more fully who we are'* (van Manen, 1990: 12).
- Conceptual pluralism; *'multiple competing concepts of well-being which are appropriately invoked in different contexts'* (Mitchell and Alexandrova, 2020)

15

This process is itself not unlike such a phenomenological construction for the participants, as set out in a van Manen's six methodological themes for hermeneutical phenomenological research:

- **turning to the nature of lived experience;**
- **investigating experience as we live it;**
- **reflecting on essential themes;**
- **the art of writing and rewriting;**
- **maintaining a strong and oriented relation;**
- **balancing the context by considering parts and wholes.**

16

References

- Hardy, P. and T. Sumner (2016). *Cultivating compassion: how digital storytelling is transforming healthcare (Second edition).* Palgrave Macmillan
- Mezirow, J. (1990). *Fostering critical reflection in adulthood* (pp. 1-20). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Mitchell, P., & Alexandrova, A. (2021). Well-being and pluralism. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *22*(6), 2411-2433.
- VanManen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy.* Uni of New York.

17