



What's the (digital) story? Engaging with practitioners through
alternative and participatory forms of adult education

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Abstract

This research is a study into educational potential of digital storytelling (DST), a participatory narrative approach, to promote learning practices that are consistent with critical and liberatory ethos of community adult education. Qualitative participatory research in the format of digital storytelling workshops was conducted with six practitioners who work or volunteer in adult and community education context. My research argues that digital storytelling, as multimodal visual method, has an enormous potential to instil and promote participatory co-learning and the ethos of critical pedagogy, in this inclusive and diverse context.

My findings support the argument of appropriateness and potential of narrative pedagogy for adult learning. They contend that narrative and visual methods feature prominently in the teaching arsenal of the community education practitioners. This research also demonstrates the untapped potential of digital resources and urgency to approach the use of learning technologies in this context in a critical and creative manner.

This study outlines the findings that indicate that the multimodal and dialogical character of digital storytelling has the potential to enhance learning processes and instil deep personal growth that facilitates reflective practice and an increase in self-esteem. Digital storytelling also facilitates participatory research methodology, grounded in critical theory and humanistic learning, that fosters mutual learning and partnership.

Finally, this research reinstates the contested nature of adult community education, admirable resourcefulness and creativity of community education practitioners confronted with continuous lack of recognition and support for the sector.

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Chapter One – Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In this study I set out to explore the potential of digital storytelling, a participatory visual teaching method, from the perspective of practitioners in the context of community adult education. This study is set against the backdrop of major disruption to life, work and education caused by Covid 19, where our lives intensified, slowed down or transferred online.

When Covid 19 started, my social and engaging mature learner experience turned from face-to-face delight to sitting in my bedroom, looking at the icons on the screen and communicating through occasional WhatsApp message. Similarly, my practice was affected, as I was a new inexperienced volunteer attempting to adapt to online learning and my learners, who lived in direct provision centres¹, struggled with various difficulties of their circumstances.

I was always fascinated with storytelling, but my interest in digital storytelling arose from the desire to understand how to foster and deepen the dialogue between people engaged in learning, by allowing for more creative, flexible and accessible forms of storytelling. Digital storytelling involves digital elements, but my main focus and interest is in how these elements support and enrich storytelling and communication, rather than the other way around. In the education of adults, research methodology must align itself to the purpose and objectives of adult learning. I am therefore also interested in the potential of digital storytelling to facilitate creative and participatory research practices.

1.2 Personal Nature of Research

I first experienced community education as a learner, when I immigrated to Ireland from Bosnia in 2002, and enrolled in English lessons in my local community college. It was a transformative experience that I fondly remember and to this day I keep in touch with two people I met on that course. Attending the course introduced me to the Irish culture, it allowed me to share my culture with others, and steered me towards people and subjects that would sustain my learning for years to come. My scholastic interest in community education is strongly influenced by the Balkan interpretation of andragogy that rather than just theory, encapsulates the whole field of

¹ Direct Provision is a much-criticised Irish basic accommodation system for refugees and asylum seekers.

adult learning. This view of andragogy was promoted by a well-known and respected Yugoslavian andragogue Dusan Savicevic (2011) who argued that, in order to develop as a recognised and independent field, andragogy or adult learning, must focus on employing and developing methodologies that are related to and directly explore the challenges and intricacies of adult learning.

Savicevic (2011) promotes the idea that methodology of andragogy, like that of other sciences, must consider and be rooted in a specific theoretical approach. He further emphasizes interaction and participation as crucial to adult learning, especially in terms of research methodologies, that he too links to the philosophy of Paulo Freire (Savicevic, 2011). Thus, it is this Balkan intellectual heritage, combined with the philosophy of community education as outlined in the White Paper on Adult Education (Department of Education and Science, 2000), and my experience as an adult learner and immigrant in Ireland, that have shaped my research and influenced my affinity towards participatory methods and methodologies in the context of community education.

There is a value, I believe, in an experience from two different European contexts, that I bring to my exploration. I believe that personal stories give an important insight in not only how one thinks, but also why. For that reason, I will include personal vignettes between certain chapters of this study, to add a layer of narrative reflection to my research.

1.3 Research Question and Educational Context

The aim of this research is to employ participatory research methods and explore the narrative, learning and developmental potential of digital storytelling, from the perspectives of practitioners in the context of adult and community education.

The question I am to answer is concerned with the potential of digital storytelling as an alternative method of adult education, to promote participatory co-learning in the spirit of critical pedagogy. I set out to explore the prevalence and effectiveness of the use of narrative and participatory visual methods by adult education practitioners. I also consider the potential of digital storytelling to enhance the learning processes and encourage personal growth, as well as benefits and challenges of using digital storytelling to facilitate creative and participatory research in community adult education context.

I am interested specifically in the community education context because of its non-formal character, that often embraces the most marginalised of learners, while relying on the volunteers to keep the service alive. History of community education, especially the

endorsement of the sector in the White Paper is very relevant to my research. The Chapter 5 on community education, set out the vision for the sector that was about developing radical and innovative approaches that would allow the participants, who were often coming from marginalised and disadvantaged communities, to use their own experience as the learning resource (Department of Education and Science, 2000). It was accepted that this process would be challenging, both in terms of content and the methods used, but that this was inevitable, if education was about bringing social change and collective empowerment.

Furthermore, the learning process rather than the programme of study would be prioritised, as that would ensure continuous and equal participation of all involved in learning, as well as flexible approach to pedagogy, that would at its centre have the needs of learners and their communities. Strong involvement by community-based women's groups instilled feminist ethos in community education that aimed to rid the learning of hierarchy between the participants and practitioners, challenge dominant modes of assessment and, in reference to Paulo Freire, implement critical pedagogy, that would promote radical, liberating and participative democracy (Connolly, et al., 2007).

The ideas expressed in the White Paper strongly resonate with my research. When I recently re-read Chapter 5 on community education, I realised that the philosophy, terminology and methodology expressed in it match the key concepts identified in my own research study. Either I unconsciously 'borrowed' those ideas, or I, like many, feel that those ideas are still an unfulfilled aspiration, as the White Paper vision of community education has never been fully realized by the educational policy. Educational policy instead "has a primary focus on developing skills for the economy and courses that support core skills and personal development and are aimed at increasing equity, social inclusion and educational progression" (EACEA, 2022).

As such, community education is a contested terrain. On the one hand, it stands for radical learning that is rooted in its activist history, but on the other it has been on the receiving end of tough austerity measures, especially following the financial crisis in 2008. The recent developments in community education, such as loss of resources and identity, have been strongly affected by neoliberal discourse that in its latest Further Education and Training (FET) strategy (SOLAS, 2020) "aims to repair, repurpose and revive our economy and our communities over the course of the next five years" (p. 3). The language of the education policy is very careful to include social inclusion and the development of communities, but also always prioritises economy and employability. It is this lack of recognition of radical aspects of community education in FET policy that make me turn to the White Paper for values to guide

me in my own research. All the potential benefits of using digital storytelling, I feel, are in line with objectives expressed in the White Paper, namely using experience as a learning resource, critically, collaboratively, and creatively, while investigating human condition and striving for social change that is participatory and democratic.

Based on the findings and selected literature, this study will present the argument that the use of personal narrative features prominently as the learning and teaching method in the context of community education, due to its accessibility, the potential to facilitate dialogue and relate experience, all of which carry enormous learning possibilities for adult learners.

I will argue that use of narrative in adult learning promotes healing, creative and collaborative learning, and in the spirit of Freirean critical pedagogy fosters democratic and participatory education.

I will demonstrate that digital storytelling, due to its multimodal, reciprocal and participatory character, enhances learning processes and nurtures personal growth and skills of practitioners who engage with it. I will contend that DST can be used to stimulate conversation and involve learners and practitioners in mutual dialogue where they can learn about each other in a true Freirean hierarchy free environment.

I will also make the case for appropriateness of digital storytelling to facilitate participatory research practice in my chosen context. DST is a dynamic and communicative research practice that involves participants in the process, and gives them a sense of achievement, mutual learning and partnership.

1.4 Thesis Content

This thesis is divided into six distinct chapters. Chapter One introduces the study, educational context and personal nature of this research. Chapter Two reviews relevant literature and sets the theoretical foundations of the study. Chapter Three introduces my philosophical underpinnings and research methodology, procedures and instruments of the study. Chapter Four presents the findings of participatory research conducted with six participants. Chapter Five discusses the findings in relation to theory outlined in Chapter Two while Chapter Six concludes and summarises different aspects of the research, acknowledges limitations as well as offers recommendations for future consideration.

Mila's Vignette: Holograms

During the third wave of Covid 19, I held an online class for two adult learners who joined my 'weakly connected' Zoom classroom from their rooms in direct provision centres in Mosney and Sligo. We had never met prior to that class but I knew, from their introductory emails, that their English was very good. They were hoping to learn about Irish culture and history. Maybe because I was self-conscious and wanted to compensate for my 'naturalised' Irishness, or because I worried about undermining their daily struggle with light topics, I decided to introduce Irish culture with the presentation on the Irish Famine. I was a new volunteer, eager to make a difference, to be useful, to contribute. I was nervous, somewhat babbling, but sincere. The connection was terrible, the walls of our virtual classroom kept cracking and crashing, words were repeated and "canyouhearmes" exchanged, we were all like holograms, flickering in and out of the screen. But somehow, despite all that digital chaos, Basimah compared Irish emigration of 1840s to her own experience as a Palestinian who had to grow up in Saudi Arabia. Olivette saw an enduring relevance of absentee landlords in her own struggle to move out of refugee accommodation and start renting on her own. We were all sympathising with the irrevocable loss of Irish language and identity. I often reflect on that experience and try to mine that feeling of exhausted contentment I was left with, after the class ended. It was transformative.

(Pseudonyms were used)

Chapter Two – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will set the theoretical context for my research and look at the literature that is most relevant to my topic.

The focus of my study is investigation into perspectives of adult educators, on the use and potential of digital storytelling, to promote adult learning that is participatory, dialogic and democratic. I will start this chapter with a brief overview of the educational philosophy of Paulo Freire, whose contribution is particularly relevant to this study. I will consider and outline some of the benefits of using participatory visual methods, narrative and narrative pedagogy with adult learners. I will introduce digital storytelling, its rich history, benefits and challenges when used in a community setting and focus on the framework of digital storytelling that has at its centre the concepts of experience, voice and recognition, in reference to most prominent adult learning theorists. I will end the chapter by appealing to Freire again and the ways in which his pedagogy could be used to critically address digital spaces.

2.2 Theoretical Underpinnings: Paulo Freire and Participatory Visual Methods

Community education in Ireland is rooted in critical pedagogy, educational philosophy associated with Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire, that “has the explicit and particular intention of enabling disadvantaged people to claim their civil status in an envisioned just and equal society” (Connolly, 2007, p. 120) In Chapter 2 of his widely praised and quoted book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (2017) talks about “narrative” character of education, which he sees as “an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (p.45). According to Freire, this is an example of one sided, oppressive and “banking” education, that posits teachers as experts and learners as empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge. He argues that truly liberating education that employs critical pedagogy and values inquiry must ensure that the opposition between teachers and students must be resolved “so that both are simultaneously teachers and students” (Freire, 2017, p. 45).

Although my interpretation of narrative differs from that of Freire, as in this study narrative is mutual and reciprocal, this is the central and guiding idea of my study of participatory visual

methods, exploration of their potential to facilitate dialogue and co-learning of all involved in learning processes, in a critical and liberating manner.

Freire's conceptualisation of praxis, an inextricable coalescence of action and reflection, gives us the framework to consider these processes while developing consciousness of the power relations in the world around us, starting with the classroom. Freirean dialogue and co-learning involve removal of hierarchy in adult learning contexts that will facilitate an authentic communication between the learners, learners and educators, and learners and their communities. In discussion with Shor, Freire (1987) observed that "Dialogue is a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it" (p.98). I am interested in the potential of educational methods that can facilitate the type of dialogue that nurtures learning and inclusion and allows learners and educators to reflect on their lives and remake them, collaboratively (Shor & Freire, 1987).

Freire's critics warn about the difficulty in applying his radical principles, developed in a particular political and social context to a "nonrevolutionary situation" of the modern education (Peckham, 2003, p. 228). Indeed, Freire is not the most accessible writer, primarily because, I believe, he does not address any method without strong awareness of the contextual and philosophical implications of his arguments. As Peckham (2003) argues, despite the intensity of his writing, it is clear that Freire's value is in universality of his central idea, that education must encourage "coinvestigation of a specific educational situation with one's students" (p.228). This coinvestigation is the basis of praxis and involves decoding of the 'generative themes' that Freire (2017) explains are situations represented in sketches or photographs that learners attempt to describe. In the process of description or 'codification', the themes "begin to acquire meaning" and assist the learners to analyse and take ownership of their reality in order to be able to transform it (p.79).

These ideas are at the core of my interest in participatory approaches, especially the ones that involve visual elements as they have the potential to promote inclusive and radical ethos of community education outlined in the previous chapter. In the words of Peckham (2003) I am attempting to "reinvent" Freire and apply his concepts of decoding of generative themes to the learning processes involved in the creation of digital storytelling, that are, as I will address in more detail below, participatory, multimodal and reciprocal.

Participatory approaches implemented in the field of adult education have roots in Freirean educational philosophy and have as its aim a promotion of participatory democracy. Their definitions range from the ones that address learning processes and focus on collaborative and creative aspects, to those that consider the purpose of education and its potential for affecting social change (Norton & Malicky, 2000). In the broadest context, they enable participants to be involved in educational processes by providing multiple opportunities for communication, engagement and expression (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2012).

Digital storytelling is a participatory visual method that enriches the narrative of storytelling with application of digital media. In order to understand the potential of this method, it is important to place it in the context of participatory visual methods and narrative pedagogy and demonstrate its value to adult learning.

Yang (2017) defines participatory visual methods as:

a methodological approach that engages people in representing their experiences, perspectives, or cultures through the use of visual media, such as photographs, videos, paintings, murals, or mixed methods. (p.9)

As the definition suggests, participatory methods aim to encourage active learner participation, that is at the core of critical pedagogy, by offering multimodal opportunities for creative self-expression. Lawrence (2017) argues that participatory visual methods engage different senses and “rely on multiple ways of knowing and expression including visual, aural, embodied, affective, and spiritual domains, as well as a variety of artistic processes” (p. 95). Although many writers highlight accessibility and appropriateness of these methods in the context of adult learning, the consensus is that they are still relatively under researched (Wu & Chen, 2019). To understand the potential of these methods in a specific context, it is necessary to understand the learning needs of adults who engage with the context.

A report from the National Adult Literacy Agency found that adults returning to education do so primarily to address their literacy needs and improve their self-confidence (Byrne, 2018). The same report found that adult learners engaged in the type of learning that was about the process itself, rather than accreditation. For a lot of learners, returning to education meant confronting low or dormant self-esteem as well as often negative prior educational experience. This, in my view, is the main reason why community education continues to resist the dominant neoliberal narrative and economically measurable policy objective that the role of adult education is to prepare people for employment. Instead, the role of adult education, looked

through the lens of critical theory, is directed at social change with the aim of increasing participation. Covid 19 crisis has brought into focus challenges that community education faces in addressing the needs of the most disadvantaged learners. Some of these challenges were lessened, to some extent, by the Mitigating against Educational Disadvantage Fund (MAEDF) allocated to the sector in 2021 (AONTAS, 2022). While many benefits of the fund were acknowledged and appreciated, especially the much-needed support for the community organisations that had inadequate access to funding, the fact remains that participation rates for the most disadvantaged learners such as Travellers, older people and lone parents, have decreased during the pandemic (AONTAS, 2022). Permanent supports are needed to comprehensively address these issues, in a systematic and continuous manner. What is also needed is a recognition for the sector, and appreciation of alternative forms of adult education, consistent with Freire's idea of 'conscientization' that increase inclusion, participation and well-being of marginalised communities centred on agency and autonomy. These benefits are crucial to a healthy and egalitarian functioning of a society but are not always measurable in economic terms.

Despite the lack of recognition and reduced status experienced by the community education practitioners since the publication of the White Paper (Kyle, 2018), community education in Ireland still provides the space for resistance and alternative methods of adult education. Recent research conducted in women's community education and adult literacy showed positive examples of practice strongly influenced by emancipatory and participatory pedagogies and social justice view of adult literacy (O'Grady, 2018). Prins (2016) conducted digital storytelling research in the context of family literacy in rural Ireland and found that "the class did provide access to technology access and skills, affirm parents' diverse knowledge, languages, life experience, and identities, and equip participants to design and disseminate their digital stories" (p.1). The value of these creative practices is reaffirmed by comprehensive research conducted by AONTAS², on impact of community education which restated the importance of use of participatory methods with adult learners. Promotion of participatory ethos is what makes this educational context unique and is also of huge importance for the development of participatory democracy (Bailey, et al., 2010). Furthermore, as these examples show, participation must be embedded within the educational processes, to be the outcome of the same.

² AONTAS is National Adult Learning Organisation, a voluntary membership organisation that advocates on behalf of adult and community education sector.

It is within this educational context that this research study is situated and within broad societal changes such as increasing cultural diversity and unstoppable technological innovation that results in digitalisation of every aspect of life. It seeks to discover if digital storytelling, a visual participatory narrative method, has the potential to facilitate learning and teaching through collaborative and innovative use of narrative, that will ultimately promote a more humanistic version of lifelong adult learning. According to Vargas (2017) in humanistic conception of lifelong learning “the capacity to influence, modify and transform reality and the self would be the core of the curriculum and the pedagogical approaches”. (p.11) Transforming reality, meaning and self are central tenets of narrative approach to facilitating adult learning (Bruner, 1994). Furthermore, they strongly correspond to Freire’s dialogic model of education outlined above, that argues that learners must be assisted in decoding the meaning of their lived experience, to be able to transform it (Freire, 1993).

The use of narrative is at the centre of my study as it is both the language and the method of delivery of storytelling. In the next section I will look at the importance of narrative to extract the meaning out of experience and stimulate dialogue in adult learning.

2.3 Narrative and Adult Learning

Why do we use story as the form for telling about what happens in life and in our own lives?... Even etymology warns that to narrate derives from both telling (narrare) and “knowing in some particular way” (gnarus) – the two tangled beyond sorting. (Bruner, 2002, p. 27)

Bruner (2002) further explains that narrative “gives shape to things in the real world and often bestows on them a title to reality” (p.8). Just as knowing and telling are the essence of narrative, narrative is the essence of human experience and knowledge. We use the narrative structure to make sense of events and experiences, to communicate our beliefs and values to the world and to give meaning a form and context. Bruner (2002) calls this phenomenon a “conventionalization of narrative that converts individual experience into collective coin which can be circulated, as it were, on a base wider than the mere personal one” (p.16). Experience is foundational learning resource for adult learners and as such has a prominent place in any discussion on the nature and aspects of adult learning (Barnett, 2013, p. 79).

In *Narrative and Practice of Adult Education* (Yung, 2009) authors argue that utilizing narrative with adult learners also advances the development of adult education as a field, as narrative succeeds in carefully connecting experience and learning that has profound effects on the questions of identity and the concept of self (Rossiter & Clark, 2007). Critically reflective adult education nurtures narrative methods that allow learners and educators to use narrative creatively and authentically interpret their experience and meaning attached to it (Mezirow & Associates, 1990). In the context of my research, a narrative is approached and defined as transformation of personal human experience into meaning, through reflective and transformative practices, in the context of social interaction (Goodson & Gill, 2011, p. 5). Transforming human experience into meaning is essentially a process of understanding of self. Reflection, observation, memory and frames of reference, concepts often used in theory of adult learning are all internal cognitive activities. But adult learning is more than just cognitive, it must also be holistic, creative and collaborative. Rossiter and Garcia (2010) argue that narrative meaning making and narrative acquisition of knowledge “is an increasingly essential capacity for adult learners” (p. 44). As such, it needs to be at the forefront of adult learning processes, rather than seen as a supplement to cognition (Rossiter & Garcia, 2010).

Narrative understanding and learning can be developed through the process of narrative encounter, “a dialogue with the world (through language) that gives rise to and shapes the individual’s meaning and understanding of diverse human experiences” (Goodson & Gill, 2011, p. 74). While human experience is personal, unique, and subjective, it is only through interaction with other individuals, communities, and cultures, that the meaning of that experience is structured, interpreted and re-interpreted. Narrative pedagogy attempts to analyse and explore the reciprocal potential of narrative encounter and its significance for learning, which Goodson and Gill (2011) define as “interplay of to-and-fro dialogic encounters at the core of which is enhanced understanding of oneself, others, one’s place in the world and a course of action more aligned with one’s values, beliefs and worldview” (p.88). It would follow that storytelling as a narrative method could deliver this type of learning. The depth of learning would depend on the nature of and structure of storytelling, whether through spoken or written word, or through the use of texts or artefacts. Bruner (2004) reminds us that “any story one may tell about anything is better understood by considering other possible ways in which it can be told” (p.709). This quote speaks directly to multimodality of storytelling. Patricia McGee (2015) describes digital storytelling and the process of interaction (and feedback) that sharing of digital story involves, as form of “social pedagogy” where “the intent of education is to

create agency in learners” (p.72). This is an interesting idea that corresponds to Freirean philosophy outlined at the start of this chapter.

Adapting this framework to learning contexts is inherently promising and optimistic but only if analysed in the current context and considered in reference to technological innovation and post-Covid environment. It becomes evident that any mention of social experience and communicative narrative encounter in relation to adult learning now also must consider the digital environment, since for many learners and educators, especially in the last two years, the classroom was synonymous with digital environment. And this is where digital stories reside.

2.4 Digital Storytelling: More than Words

Digital Storytelling is a visual participatory method that blends the practice of storytelling with the digital media such as images, text, video, audio and music. The result is a digital story, usually between two and ten minutes long, that can be of a personal nature, in the format of chronological/historical narrative, but also present content, information or ideas on a broad range of topics. Digital stories can be uploaded to the internet or shared digitally between people. I believe that digital storytelling is particularly suitable as participatory critical pedagogy because it is a creative and reflective visual method, that acknowledges experience as an important learning resource.

DST has gained popularity in recent years and is being used not only in education but also in business, training and marketing. The format of DST that is the focus of this study has been developed by a group of San Francisco Bay Area artists led by Dana Atchley, a media producer, and Joe Lambert, a theatre director, who discovered and pioneered the practice of making multimedia stories by people with little or no experience in media technology. The evolving digital technologies of the 1990s allowed the movement to grow and by 1998 the group had moved to Berkeley and established the Center for Digital Storytelling, since 2015 known as the StoryCentre:

Through our wide-ranging work, we have transformed the way that community activists, educators, health and human services agencies, business professionals, and artists think about the power of personal voice, in creating change. (StoryCenter, 2022)

Multimodality of digital storytelling is one of the key features of my research because of how it facilitates inclusiveness of the participants involved in the process. Personal voice and potential for creating change are the main features of digital stories that differentiate it from

any other video artefact. Robin (2016) summaries that digital stories differ from conventional videos primarily in the way they attempt to convey and create meaning out of events and experience, in a collaborative and reciprocal manner that does not seek to replace but rather enrich and intensify traditionally spoken or written storytelling. Digital storytelling offers multimodal opportunities for interpretation of experience, namely visual, textual, and aural (Robin, 2016). Use of any of these in a specific way serves to increase the authenticity of representation as well as to develop the relationship between the narrator and the audience. For example, the use of images can be used to emphasize the meaning of the written word or offer representation for experience or emotion that is difficult to express through words.

Lawrence (2017) argues for the importance and usefulness of digital stories, when implemented with low-literacy adults or ESOL speakers, as they are not restricted to verbal interaction and with its multiple uses, facilitate difficult conversation by offering more than one way of expression. Digital storytelling, due to complex multimodality (integration of visual, verbal and auditory elements) combined with the cultural and emotional contributions of the creator, has the potential to be used “as a tool for thinking, or a cognitive artifact, that is, something used by humans for the purpose of aiding, enhancing or improving cognition” (Herman, 2003 cited in Alonso, et al., 2013, p. 382). In the same article, the authors state that “Listeners and readers are thus not mere recipients of the stories, but active participants in the co-construction of the narrative” (Alonso, et al., 2013, p. 370). Thus, multimodality facilitates active participation in learning, that corresponds to Freirean critical pedagogy outlined at the start of this chapter.

Rao, Torres and Smith (Rao, et al., 2021) assert that using multimodal digital tools allow students with disabilities to express themselves through the medium that is the most accessible and appropriate for them. Thus, multimodality provided by technology enhances the narrative distinctiveness and learning potential of digital storytelling and could potentially facilitate implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles.

Another important feature of the DST that is relevant to my research is its potential to assist the development of digital and ‘future’ skills. This is pertinent to my study because it considers effect that digital technologies have on adult learning and the application of critical pedagogy to adult education contexts. McGee (2015) points out creating a digital story involves writing, visualisation and selection of images, critical thinking, creativity, presentational skills and

digital literacy, to name but few. These are considered 21st century skills that are found across disciplines, which would make knowledge acquired during digital storytelling process multidisciplinary. It is considered that the 21st century learner belongs to a “maker culture” that McGee (2015) describes as reflecting “early 21st century trends of do-it-yourself crafts and arts, as well as cross-disciplinary knowledge acquisition” (p. 65). It is unclear whether McGee’s learner is an adult, but the idea corresponds to self-directedness and autonomy, traits often subscribed to adult learners (Knowles, et al., 2005).

Montuori (2011) argues that a lot of educational practices still reflect the industrial age instructional methods that “reproduce existing social order and educate for conformity” (p. 65). He proposes a focus on creative inquiry grounded in constructivism, that in contrast to reproductive education, looks to creativity as essential human capability. Montuori (2011) claims that creativity facilitates and accompanies meaning making, which is fundamentally a co-creative act. Taken together, Montuori’s and McGee’s ideas would suggest that engagement in creative processes that encourage development of 21st century skills therefore potentially redefine learners as creators, rather than consumers of knowledge. Again, this resonates strongly with Freirean philosophy of liberating education that argues against consuming knowledge and valuing inquiry instead. Digital storytelling could facilitate development of 21st century skills in the spirit of creative and critical inquiry, that will see digital storytellers as creators of authentic and personal artefacts, with strong educational potential.

In a systematic review of educational digital storytelling Wu and Chen (2019), caution against conflating educational potential of DST with the “novelty effect of educational technology” (p. 9). They emphasize that most of the research on DST in education involved participants in one session/workshop only. Thus, subsequent and repetitive research is necessary to determine a more reliable results and outcomes. Rossiter and Garcia (2010) address the novelty aspect to some extent by specifying that digital storytelling is not simply another technological device but a “powerful narrative method of facilitating adult learning...that carries epistemological process and outcome implications.... a way of knowing that is constructive, contextual, and interpretive” (p.425). Their definition helps to relate the potential of digital storytelling back to the use of narrative and narrative pedagogy outlined above, as well as ground it in constructivism, that relies on social interaction in order to construct meaning. McGee (2015) points out that conversation and dialogue provoked by using digital storytelling differs from a debate, or the conversation grounded in argument, because those involved try to understand

the point of view of others and create a shared understanding, rather than convince others of the benefits of their own perspective. This type of dialogue occurs “without a definite conclusion or ending, resulting in an achieved outcome, and reflects a constructivist view of making meaning” (Fosnot, 1996 cited in McGee, 2015, p. 79). Constructive and respectful dialogue that promotes shared understanding, again, is an important characteristic of critical pedagogy. As such, these characteristics of digital storytelling are of much interest to my research.

Digital storytelling can be used as research methodology to gather, investigate and disseminate information on common challenges of the communities. Yang (2017) argues that using participatory visual methods with research participants can be rewarding as it often involves demonstration of the methods used, which is an inherently “give-and-take interdependent” process that involves mutual learning and partnership (p.10). A systematic review of DST in research references Joe Lambert’s digital storytelling as an example of “collaborative research with a flat hierarchy” that aims to conduct the research “in collaboration with rather than on participants” (de Jager, et al., 2017, p. 2550).

These characteristics are, I believe, what makes digital storytelling a method worthy of serious consideration as participatory practice in the context of community adult education. Considering the context of community adult education and characteristics of learners who engage with it, I will outline the framework of DST that specifically addresses the role of experience, voice and recognition.

2.5 Digital Storytelling Framework: Experience, Voice and Recognition

DST framework often referenced in adult education literature was originally developed by Joe Lambert and adapted for the StoryCenter workshops. Lambert (2013) summarises the process of digital storytelling in 7 steps that cover all principles from conceptualisation to sharing of the digital story:

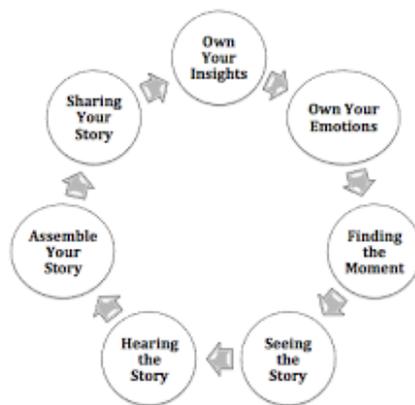


Figure 1

Each of these steps is self-explanatory and can be related back to characteristics of DS outlined above. What can be observed is that the start of the process involves reflective practices, the middle is about identifying a transformative event or a moment of experience and finding the best way to present it as a narrative, while the end of the process involves sharing the story with the world. Although this framework best represents the specific personal narrative form of digital story as promoted by the StoryCenter, it can be used as a starting point in development of original digital storytelling frameworks and adapted to different contexts and purposes.

As my study is concerned with digital storytelling as a participatory visual method that would facilitate democratic learning in the context of community education, I have focused specifically on the aspects of digital storytelling that encourage the use of experience as a learning resource, to facilitate reflective practices that help uncover or transform the self and foster reciprocal dialogue that encourages mutual recognition. This framework is important and relevant to my research because it considers the key adult learning theorists, Paulo Freire, Jack Mezirow and Axel Honneth and their ideas, related directly to learning processes involved in DST.

Experience as a learning resource (Self Image, Self-Direction)

As mentioned above, experience is an important learning resource for adult learners. Narrative approach to adult learning assumes that meaning making from experience takes a format of the story (Rossiter & Garcia, 2010). Adult learners who create digital stories in a form of personal narrative use autobiographical learning to deconstruct and re-interpret their experience to tell a story of some aspect of their lives. There is a possibility in this process, to understand oneself by representing oneself in multiple modes, thereby taking control of self-image. Furthermore, it is a process that is self-directed and thus holds promise and potential of autonomy. Threlates

directly to the discussion of Freire's generative themes and codification from the start of the chapter. DST process can facilitate reflective and mutual co-investigation of experience where meaning is negotiated in a creative and critical manner in an adult education context.

Reflective practices that help uncover or transform the Self (Voice, Self-Awareness)

The process of digital storytelling involves a lot of thinking and analysis. What do I want to say? What does it mean to me? How do I say it? Do I like hearing myself say it? Why? Narrating the digital story with one's own voice is one of the unique features of DST. Hearing ourselves speak and listening to ourselves as if we are someone else is a staple of self-awareness and reflection. Reflection and analysis of self is inherent in the process of digital storytelling concerned with the telling of a personal story. The combination of images, text and voice into a coherent narrative can either be a comforting process that affirms one's experience, or incoherent which can potentially lead to a reckoning of sort, that although potentially disorienting, has an enormous learning potential.

Jack Mezirow (1998b, p.197) developed Transformative Learning, a theory that considers critically reflecting on assumptions as vital mental activity in "learning to think for oneself" (cited in Kitchenham, 2008, p. 118). When analysed through the lens of transformative learning, digital storytelling primarily facilitates the type of learning Mezirow (1990) described as communicative, which is of immense importance for adult learners as "the approach is one in which the learner attempts to understand what is meant by another through speech, writing, drama, art, or dance" (p. 9). Transformative learning also pays close attention to the role of experience in learning and how the ability to reflect on experience can lead to a different interpretation of perspective. Perspective transformation is a consequence of methodical process that starts with a disorienting dilemma, usually triggered by a life-changing event, but it can also be achieved in an educational setting, through implementation of critical and reflective pedagogy (Cranton, 2016, p. 105).

Reciprocal dialogue that encourages mutual recognition

Use of digital storytelling in community education is not only about the potential of reflection, participation, and creativity. It is a mutual process of seeing and being seen, hearing and being heard, understanding and being understood. It is a process of mutual recognition. Axel Honneth argues that identity development in adult life can be interpreted as lifelong struggle for

recognition (Zurn, 2005). Recognition is a human need of acknowledgment by others and by the society “with self-realisation only achieved through interpersonal relations” (Fleming, 2016). According to Honneth, development of self-esteem is a life long and arduous process of attaining wellbeing, that is often non-linear and could only be developed in social context as outcome of respectful interaction (West, et al., 2013). As West, Fleming and Finnegan (2013) point out:

In attending to the experiences of students in the context of their relationships, Honneth provides a normative grounding upon which a new iteration of critical theory can be built, which connects ordinary human experiences and concerns about identity with more social struggles against exclusions. (p.24)

This quote strongly appeals to me, and is, I believe, consistent with the theoretical base I have outlined in this chapter. In my study narrative encounter is about connecting ordinary human experience while encouraging and facilitating self-discovery. Participatory methods are concerned with struggles against exclusions. Furthermore, critical pedagogy falls under the remit of critical theory, which as my ontology, will be explored in more detail in the next chapter. Honneth’s theory is relevant to my research as I consider that arranging participatory methods with Honneth in mind could instil intense personal growth, consistent with critical pedagogy and appropriate to ethos of community adult education.

Thus, this theoretical framework resonates with the Freirean philosophy of co-learning introduced at the start of this chapter, where both teacher and learners benefit from the learning process. Lambert (2013) and Reyes (2012) have argued that digital storytelling benefits the learners because of the deep engagement in the creative and reflective process and benefits their audience through their digital stories that offer authentic and personal perspective with a strong and relatable emotional impact. Already, the boundary between a learner and educator is becoming blurred and the learning process, in true Freirean ethos, becomes about creating and sharing, rather than consuming, knowledge. Furthermore, when reflection is embedded within a collaborative process, it is less individualistic and more critical, making DST a reflective Freirean co-learning method and a powerful pedagogy for social change (Lambert, 2013).

Prins (2017) makes link between digital storytelling and “Freire’s problem-posing education, which used drawings and photos to facilitate socio-political analysis and literacy learning” (p.29). I have to some extent considered this idea at the start of this chapter, when I introduced

Freire and his concepts of generative themes and codification of meaning. Freire's social-political analysis in the modern context of literacy would now have to include online environment and issues around digital literacy. Certainly, aspects of technology could be used to facilitate presentation and analysis of generative themes, such as utilising DST in a creative and critical way. However, technology can also reproduce inequality by the very unavailability of digital infrastructures and by withdrawal of opportunities for development of digital literacies of adults (Truong-White & McLean, 2015). Integrating digital technology into adult education in a gentle and accessible way is important for the development of digital skills of adults, as well as critical thinking about digitalisation of communication and interaction. Digital storytelling can lend itself well as an inclusive digital platform to explore these issues.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter set out the theoretical foundations of my research study. I reviewed and outlined literature on digital storytelling that is concerned with narrative and dialogue, in the context of participatory approaches to education, and in reference to narrative pedagogy and adult learning theorists.

In the next chapter I will introduce my research methodology.

Mila's Vignette: Worldview

My worldview is a product of complex and often contradictory myriad of perspectives, that unsurprisingly, has roots in my childhood. It is defined by three major life events.

- *I grew up during the last years of Yugoslavia, a unique European experiment in socialism that has since been globally interpreted as a failure but was nonetheless successful enough to give me what still feels like a true experience of growing up in classless society. **It instilled in me a lifelong interest in the idea of socialism and exploration of critical theory.***
- *I was seven years old when the Bosnian war started, and that experience is the most formative one in my life. Small cultural differences once celebrated as uniquely diverse brotherhood of Yugoslav nations, were turned into historically and politically charged grievances and weaponised into fear, hate, religious intolerance and nationalism that would sustain the 4-year war and the 'negative peace' retained in Bosnia in the decades since. **My experience of civil war makes me wary of identity politics which I perceive as a means of dividing a society. I find humanism a much more dignified, sincere and embracing perspective.***
- *Finally, I was 19 when I came to live in Ireland and I have, through a combination of hard work, cultural integration and persistent learning, built a life for myself here that often feels out of line with my pre-Ireland experience. **It is as if being content in a capitalist liberal democracy is somehow contradictory to the beliefs outlined above.***

Finding a paradigm that can house my experience of socialist classlessness, civil war and Irish integration is a considerable feat that involved a lot of reading and personal introspection.

I feel that it is important to be honest about our background and how it shapes our views, as it is a pre-condition to genuine reflexivity.

Critical theory and critical humanism are the paradigms that can embrace my critical, social, liberal and democratic reflection on broader human community.

Chapter Three - Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of my research was to explore potential and usability of digital storytelling in the context of community adult education, from the perspectives of educators who work or volunteer in the sector. I envisaged that my research would have participatory and collaborative character that would involve participants in the research process.

In this chapter I outline my ontological and epistemological positions, as how I view the world and the nature of knowledge influenced how the research was conducted. I also elaborate on my research methods and procedures and outline ethical considerations that are relevant to my research project.

3.2 My Ontological Position

First, educational research worthy of the name must be conducted within the context of explicit and adequately defined visions of the good in which non-dogmatic ideals are adumbrated to govern policies, practices and pedagogies. (Alexander, 2006, p. 215)

Ontology is a guiding philosophy that instructs one's approach to research methodology. It is synonymous with philosophical belief system, paradigm or philosophical worldview (Leavy, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). My ontological stance, as hinted in the vignette that introduced this chapter, is a product of deep analysis of my life experience and interpretation of that experience through narrative, reflection and education. I endorse the above quote, which argues that there should be no ambivalence about the non-dogmatic purpose of the research and agree with ontology being defined as a 'vision of good'. My vision of a good life and a good education is one where people are given respect, recognition and resources to meaningfully participate and contribute to the world around them. This involves challenging unequal distribution of power and "empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class and gender" (Fay, 1987 cited in Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p.62).

Therefore, my research is conceptualised through the lens of critical paradigm. Critical paradigm has roots in Frankfurt School's conceptualisation of critical theory, that stated that "the task of theory was practical, not just theoretical: that is, it should aim not just to bring about correct understanding, but to create social and political conditions more conducive to

human flourishing than the present ones” (Finlayson, 2005, p. 4). This definition is in line with the aim of my research, which is to discover if using participatory narrative method such as digital storytelling in adult and community education has the potential to produce emancipatory and democratic learning and knowledge. Critical research in adult education incorporates narrative methodological approaches that explore inclusive and critical pedagogy for the purpose of social justice (Mannay, 2016). Exploring these approaches, I came across critical humanism, as it was mentioned by Goodson and Gill (2011) as a way of placing narrative pedagogy within the new “self-reflexive, moral and political project in the human and social sciences” (p. 88).

The concept of critical humanism has been re-developed by Ken Plummer, Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Essex. He states:

I see Critical Humanism as a wide-open world project that aims both to critically clarify and re-energise the rich diversity of humanity and humanisms. It aims to learn from the plurality and conflicts over our differences and looks for connections, commonalities, and continuities in what it means to achieve and become human. It fosters a human creativity that collectively struggles to reduce the harm we do to our planet, seeks to enable people to live with differences, and works to make the planet a better place for all. (Polity Web Site, 2021)

Plummer (2021) himself acknowledges utopian elements of his conceptualisation of this challenging but hopeful new insight into an old concept. Reading his book excited me and infused my research with fresh idealism and purpose. Critical humanism argues for identification and appreciation of collective universal values that will bring humanity together. Narrative learning and narrative dialogue are important facets of this process (Goodson & Gill, 2011). Furthermore, it advises that this process is conducted with necessary criticality, with strong awareness of past harm and injustices, as that is the only way to flourish and live together with all our differences (Plummer, 2021). Critical humanism encompasses strong elements of transformative learning and Freirean criticality and reflection, but on a global collective societal scale. It has a strong social focus and as such corresponds to social constructionist epistemology that sees knowledge as constructed and social in origin (Slater, 2017).

3.3 My Epistemology

Social constructionism also maintains that the knowledge is socially constructed in learning contexts and interactions between the learners and educators. Schwandt (2003) asserts that social constructionists “focus on the process by which meanings are created, negotiated,

sustained and modified” (cited in Andrews, 2012, p.40). My research was participatory in nature, so I have engaged in meaning making processes with my participants. Slater (2017) explains that “The interpretive framework adopted by social constructionism contends that knowledge is not a thing that emerges from established phenomena. Rather, knowledge arises from a socially constructed communal process.” (p. 1626)

As a non-traditional learner, I came to an Irish education somewhat late in life and my research is about more than digital storytelling and its potential to promote democratic learning. It is also about me relating to and learning from my participants to explore the world of education from their point of view and learn about myself in the process. This position relates to transactional epistemology, characteristic of critical paradigm “in which the researcher interacts with the participants” (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

In Narrative Pedagogy, Goodson and Gill (2011) reference John Dewey’s ideas on the connections between narrative encounter and emotional closeness and suggest that “encounter allows individuals to form intense friendships, and through that encounter, a community takes shape” (p.89). This quote resonates with me because I strongly feel that my encounter with my participants allowed for the emotional closeness that I was researching in relation to digital storytelling. My epistemological position both influenced my research approach and conveyed itself in the dialogue with my participants. As such, it was consistent with participatory qualitative methodology.

3.4 Qualitative Research

In my research, I set out to find out about views, beliefs and experiences of my participants. Qualitative research was the most appropriate method for this type of enquiry as it allowed me to learn about, explore and describe the potential of the phenomenon of digital storytelling, in the context of community education and through the eyes of adult community educators. As Leavy (2017) states “the values underlying qualitative research include the importance of people’s subjective experience and meaning making processes and acquiring a depth of understanding (i.e., detailed information from a small sample)” (p.9).

I conducted small-scale research on digital storytelling in the past and discovered that people who responded to me had an interest in rather than experience of this method. Their views were

hypothetical, on what they imagined digital storytelling to be. Furthermore, as I continued exploring the educational potential of the method that does not feature prominently in adult education theory, I was deeply interested in establishing the type of research design that will give my participants an actual engagement with and familiarity of the method that I am exploring. I considered participatory practices which “situate the social scientist as the participatory facilitator, conducting research ‘with’ and not ‘on’ participants so that research becomes a joint enterprise or one that is participant led” (Mannay, 2016, pp. 49-50).

I decided to design a collaborative online workshop that would introduce digital storytelling, involve people in an authentic process of creating a digital story and give them the opportunity to reflect on the process itself. I received responses from a small group of 3 participants who volunteered in the same adult education centre and who would attend the online workshop. I also received interest from participants who were not from the same educational context, so I decided to conduct an interactive online interview as well, with the same elements and objectives as the workshop, but without the group collaborative aspect. Qualitative research method facilitated both the workshop and interactive interviews, as both instruments allowed me to gather views and experience of my participants, individually and collectively, in an online context.

3.5 Research Instruments

3.5.1 Workshop

At the start of my research design process, I imagined that my research instrument would facilitate a presentation on and a demonstration of digital storytelling. I also envisaged that it would have a participatory character, in that the participants would give feedback on the process they have engaged with, rather than just observed. I anticipated a small group of participants and an online setting, due to Covid 19 restrictions at the time, identified itself as the most appropriate. In the process of refining and revising my research design, I came across a journal article that advised that “collaborative and immersive aspects frame workshop as a research approach that has the potential to advance meaning negotiation between researchers and participants” (Orngreen & Levinsen, 2017, p. 70).

Designing my workshop was quite a complex process as I had to find a way to deliver a session that would cover the most important aspects on digital storytelling and allow for demonstration

and participation, but not be too time consuming for my participants. Two people who responded that they cannot participate in my workshop due to time commitment made me reconsider two one-hour workshops and instead settle on the duration of 45-minutes.

3.5.2 Interactive Interview

The interview is a frequently used qualitative research instrument that “uses conversation as a learning tool” (Leavy, 2017, p. 139). I approached my interview design from the perspective of a visual and narrative data production employed in creative research methods, with an intent to design a semi-structured interactive interview that would be as collaborative and immersive as the workshop. Mannay (2016) suggests using visual prompts as “tools as elicitation” to direct and structure the conversation in combination with or instead the usually employed open-ended questions. I put together a short (5 slides) Power Point presentation that included 3 videos that covered introduction, short history and 3 examples of digital storytelling. Open-ended questions were asked to start the conversation and discussion following the presentation and demonstration of DST. Both the workshop and the interview were conducted and recorded on Zoom.

3.5.3 Online Research Context

There are clear advantages to conducting research that is exploring new digital technologies on an online platform that allows screen sharing, scheduling and geographical flexibility, as well as the obvious benefits of remote research during the pandemic, such as distancing and inclusion of immune compromised participants. In all these matters Zoom proved to be a very inclusive platform for my participants. One of them was immune compromised and another’s family member was immune compromised too, so these two participants could only attend online. One participant joined in from a country outside of Ireland. Perhaps the most important benefit of online context is time. I don’t think I would have been able to achieve the same amount of presentation, demonstration and engagement in a face-to-face environment, not to mention figuring out practicalities such as availability of the space and laptops for such an undertaking.

3.5.4 Sample

To maintain consistency with qualitative research and ensure that my research produces the best data, I have chosen purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling relies on focused strategies

that target participants that are “best positioned in relation to the topic” and will provide authentic, valuable and reliable data (Leavy, 2017, p.79). Firstly, I selected a strategy called “Exemplar of the Phenomenon of Interest” in that I have identified schools or adult education centres that correspond to the context I have set out to address and investigate in my research. (Leavy, 2017, p.81). I have personally contacted founders/managers of 2 centres and asked them to forward my invitation to their educators.

Five participants responded to me using this strategy and one further participant has been recruited through snowball sampling as one of the participants suggested another person who they felt would be interested in attending my workshop. In the end, 6 participants were involved in my research, all of whom work or volunteer with adult learners in the context of community education.

Participant 1 is facilitating several QQI modules as part of his Higher Diploma placement in three schools within the FET context. He has used digital storytelling before.

Participant 2 is a retired teacher who volunteers as ESOL³ tutor in an inner-city language school.

Participant 3 started volunteering as ESOL tutor during Covid 19. She is completing master’s in education outside of Ireland.

Participant 4 is an English teacher and adult literacy tutor who prepares learners for Cambridge exams and volunteers as ESOL tutor in a local community language school.

Participant 5 teaches Irish and works in community adult education centre run by local Education and Training Board (ETB).

Participant 6 teaches ESOL, facilitates community storytelling projects and runs an inner-city language school. He has used digital storytelling before.

3.6 Research Ethics

Leavy (2017) states that ethics are about morality and integrity and these two concepts stand for a lot more, than designing the research that is not in any way harmful to the participants. They also stand for selecting a topic that, as stated above in relation to ontology, in a non-dogmatic way explores an issue that will hopefully contribute positively to the educational context that is at the centre of the research and those involved and affected by it.

ESOL – English for Speakers of Other Languages

Once I was sure that my research will be safe and valuable, I considered ethical ways of recruiting participants, preserving privacy and confidentiality, obtaining informed consent and ensuring ethical collection, retention and analysis of data.

I included a reasonable amount of both personal and research details in my initial emails I sent to the potential participants. I wanted to reassure anyone who considered responding that my research invitation is professional and genuine. I sent my introductory email to literacy organisers of two community education centres in Dublin and asked if they would forward my email to their educators, ensuring that there is transparency in my conduct. My research did not involve the gatekeepers, but the managers of both centres were involved in sharing research information with the potential participants. Once I was contacted by my participants, I introduced myself and my research further by email, answering any questions that they had. Prior to commencing with the workshops/interviews, I emailed research information and consent form that outlined the specifics of my research, acknowledged the right to withdraw from research at any time and highlighted confidentiality, privacy and GDPR aspects of the research.

At the start of each interview/workshop, I asked my participants again if they are happy with me recording the session, before starting the recording.

My workshops/interviews involve demonstration of digital storytelling which could have potentially provoked a personal reaction. The selected stories were chosen with the principle of ‘minimizing risk’ in mind and did not contain any themes that are not reasonably encountered in daily life. Across my research, there was no adverse reactions to any of the stories presented (Maynooth University, 2020).

I approached this research with the conviction that the human dignity of all involved in the research is to be respected and always maintained and that research integrity and ethical obligation to participants and the communities in which they live, supersedes any research objectives.

3.7 Data Analysis

All interviews and workshops were transcribed in Word. Furthermore, recordings were watched/listened again to ensure that transcription is accurate and truthful. Data was evaluated using thematic analysis of conversational interaction, observation of the workshop process and artefact analysis of digital stories that were the outcome of the workshops.

Due to mixed nature of my data collection instruments, my data was rich but varied in nature. Individual interviews and workshop feedback sessions were very conversational and therefore suitable for thematic analysis while the workshop included presentation, demonstration and practical part where participants engaged in the process of digital storytelling. This part consisted largely of me guiding the participants through the process and them asking questions and giving feedback on different aspects of the process. Thus, I will present this part of my data (Theme 2) by describing the process, while relying on my observations and reflections, which will be supported and enhanced by participants' comments on the process. Themes 1,3, 4 and 5, were identified by conducting thematic analysis of data. All parts of the research were conducted and recorded on Zoom. Audio files of workshops and interviews were first transcribed in a Word application using Maynooth University Microsoft 365 platform, then listened carefully in order to correct any transcription errors and ensure deep familiarity with the data. Participants names have been anonymised as Participant 1, Participant 2 etc. I printed off all my transcripts and conducted thematic analysis 'old school' way by highlighting and underlining codes and ideas in different coloured markers on paper. Codes were then written on post it notes and stuck on the wall where they simmered for few days. Once I was familiar with my codes and knew to which parts of the data they correspond to, I started combining them into themes.

3.8 My Reflexivity

My life experience is best told through a story of immigration, lifelong learning, and cultural integration. My positioning is influenced by that diverse context and my interest in the topic of digital storytelling stems from the desire to give adults who engage in learning processes an opportunity to give an impression of themselves that genuinely takes their personal story into account. As qualitative research is context dependent and "the researcher is the research instrument", I am aware that my story and my positioning colour my research and influence my research findings, that have been filtered through my experience (Dodgson, 2019, p. 220). To acknowledge this is not to undermine the enormous contribution of my participants to my research, but to accept the limitations of objectivity in qualitative research and prevent any personal bias or misinterpretation of my findings.

Berger (2015) states that reflexivity flows through all stages of the research process, from the very start of design to discussion of the findings. My research was of participatory character,

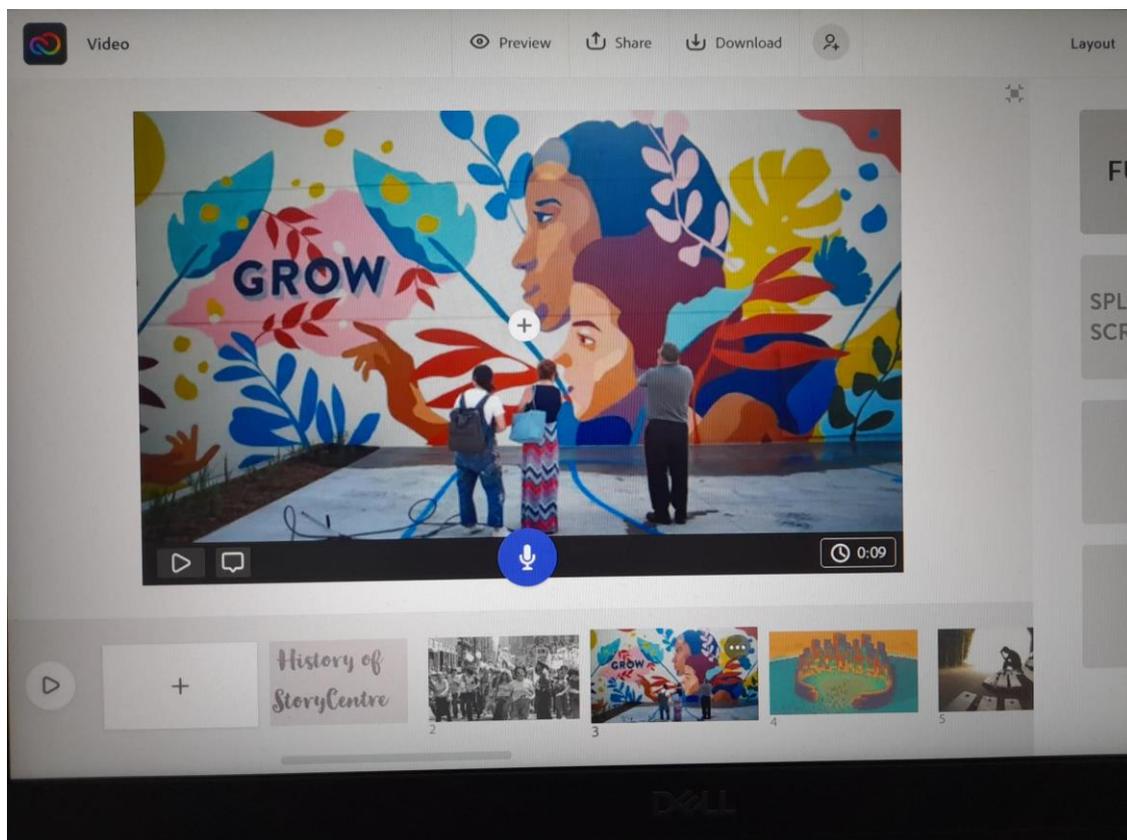
where I engaged in collaborative creation of knowledge with the participants and reflected on that process together. That collaboration minimised the power differences and allowed the participants to take part as equals in development and creation of research results (Dodgson, 2019). Furthermore, I made myself available for the participant feedback, that all who participated in group workshop availed of, individually. In that way I gave my participants an opportunity to be in control of the production of knowledge, that was also being developed outside the initial research workshop. This corresponds to what Cumming-Potvin (2013) refers to as “embedding reflexivity within the research framework, which is linked to production of knowledge” (p.222).

Throughout my research, I was strongly aware of the need to protect the wellbeing and privacy of my participants. I examined videos for my behaviour and comments and reflected on my ideas, thoughts, actions and biases throughout the process. Participatory character of my research positively impacted on the personal dynamics of my research and minimised power imbalance, that is often imbedded within the qualitative research and mitigated by sincere reflexivity. Sincere reflexivity means that I also must acknowledge ‘the imposter syndrome’ I often felt, as an inexperienced practitioner whose journey in community adult education is only in its infancy. The opportunity to be a part of M.Ed. programme and to conduct my research in a participatory manner that I envisaged, is an enormous privilege and the pinnacle of my personal and professional learner journey.

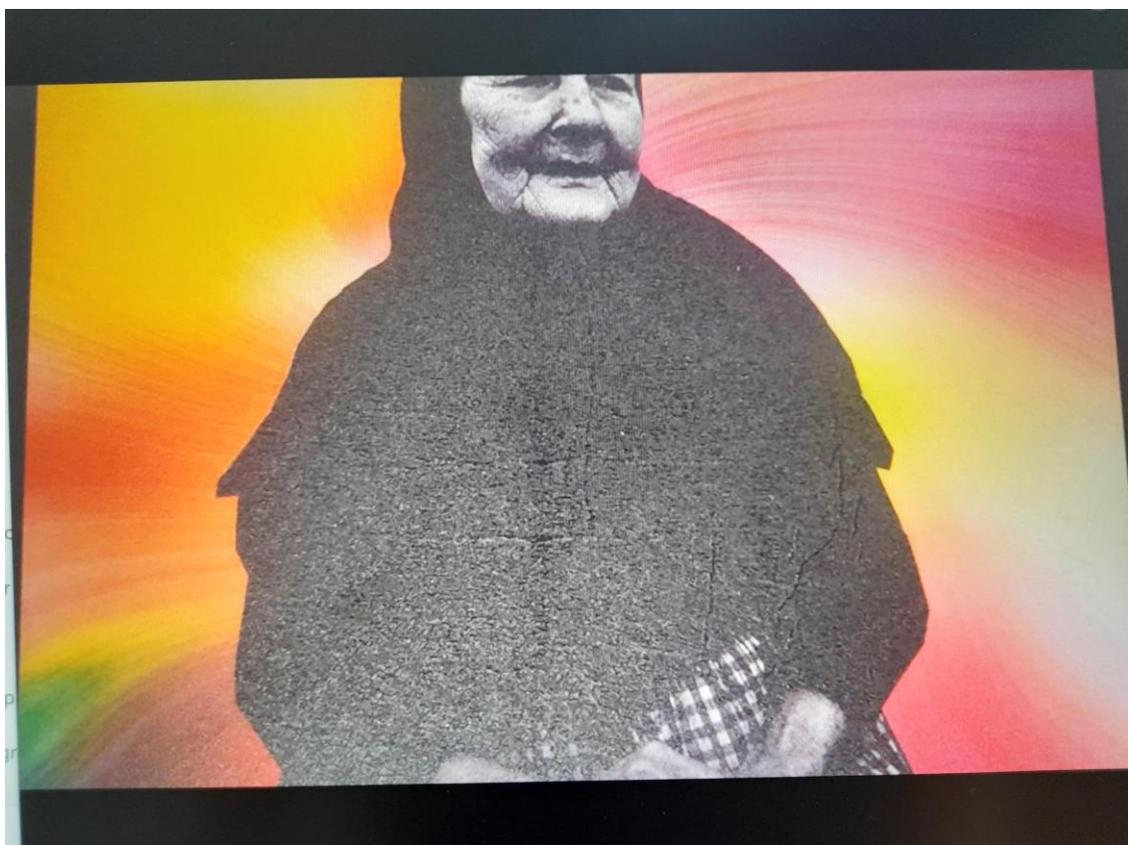
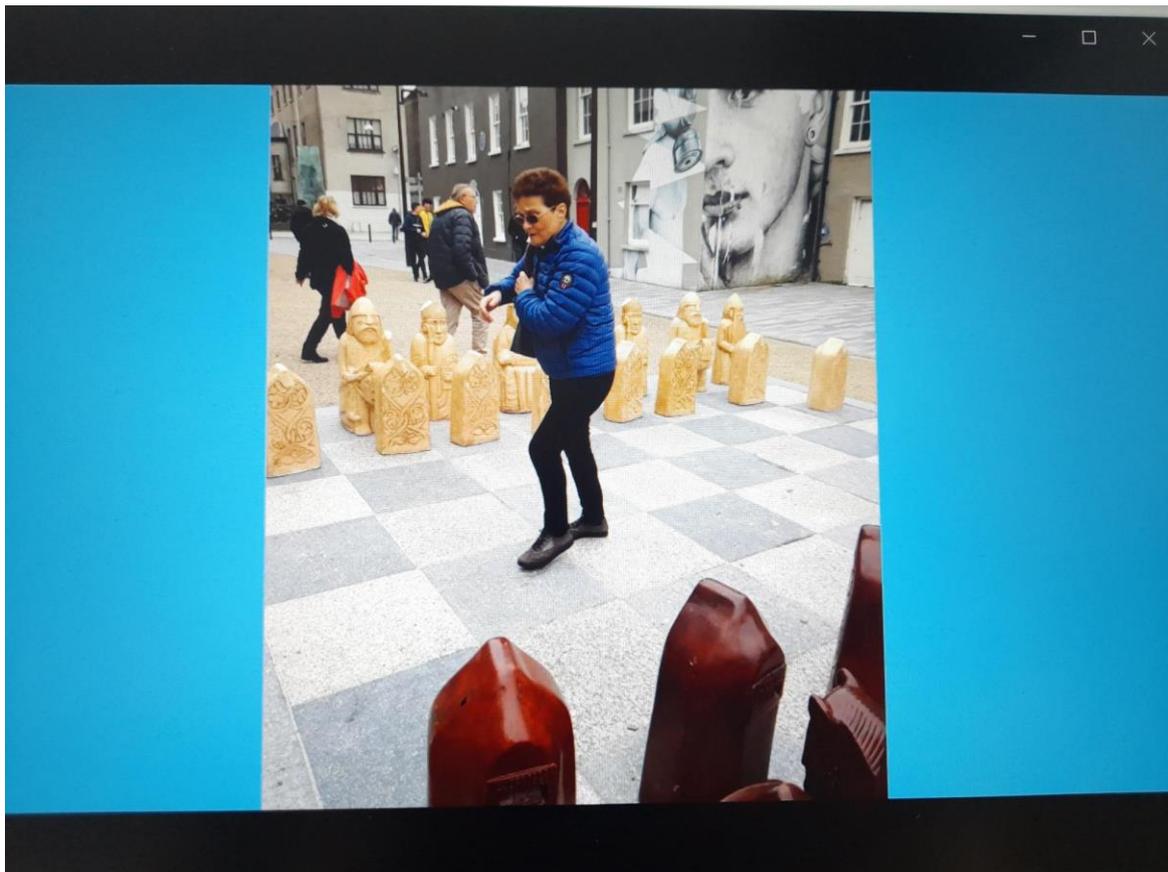
3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I introduced my worldview that encompasses constructivist epistemology and an ontology that is grounded in critical theory and critical humanism. I outlined suitability of qualitative participatory research for my study and referred to methods, procedures and ethical considerations that are relevant to my study. In the next chapter I will present my findings.

Mila's Visual Vignette: DST Workshop



Participants' Video Stills:



Chapter Four - The Findings

This chapter delves deep into the outcomes of processes described in methodology and presents and evaluates data collected with my six participants. My research explored the potential of digital storytelling in the context of community education, from the perspective of the practitioners, who participated in the process of digital storytelling. I had used two qualitative instruments to collect my data – workshop and interview. The workshop had elements of a focus group that was process rather than discussion based, while interviews had interactive elements but were rooted in conversation. I had conducted one group workshop with three participants followed by a follow up workshop with two participants. One participant could not make the second workshop due to health issues. I had also conducted individual feedback sessions with two of the group participants, one of which with the participant who did not attend the second group workshop.

I had also conducted individual interactive interviews with three participants, none of whom had participated in group workshops.

The themes I identified are:

1. Views and attitudes on the use of stories, visual methods and digital resources
2. Observations and feedback on the process
3. Potential for enhancing learning
4. Opportunities for personal growth
5. Potential disadvantages or barriers to digital storytelling

4.1 Attitudes on the Use of Stories, Visual Methods and Digital Resources

This theme reflects participants' experience, views and attitudes on the use of stories, visual methods and digital resources in the context of community education. My research, due to its participatory character, did not have a classical 'question and answer' format but involved conversation on those aspects of participatory narrative methods that were relevant to each participant's experience. This section covers topics we discussed as a prologue to the introduction of digital storytelling. I asked participants about their views on the use storytelling in adult and community education. We also discussed the potential of visual and digital resources for learning, as all participants taught online during Covid 19.

4.1.1 Storytelling and Adult Learning

Participants had a very diverse experience of or relevance for the use of personal storytelling in their practice. Some rarely used it, either because their learners were not proficient enough to express themselves through storytelling, or because they were nervous about potentially approaching subjects that their learners felt worry about.

Participant 5 contributed with insights, from her perspective as a language teacher, on the importance of linguistic ability of learners to express themselves through stories:

Yes, well, obviously you know that's a sliding scale, because if people haven't got a good mastery of the language, they are not going to be able to say very much. But, uh, yeah, as people move up, definitely yeah, and people do love to talk about themselves. (Participant 5)

Participant 4 did not think that personal storytelling is always the most appropriate method for learning:

It's something I've always been a bit nervous of approaching because my first teaching experience was with adult literacy students, so they often have a negative experience of education and they can be quite wary, so I've just been very nervous of approaching anything too personal. (Participant 4)

Others were enthusiastic about the use of storytelling with adult learners. They felt that storytelling is a natural way that people communicate and think about their experience. Some went even further and talked about people's personal stories as their main learning resource and about the necessity to integrate storytelling in adult learning practices.

Participant 2 pointed to the inevitability of narrative in our everyday lives. Whether we intend it or not, we perceive events as stories and relate our experience in the form of stories.

I think that people, when they think about their lives, they think about their lives in stories. I mean, lives aren't necessarily in stories, but that's what we do, we make a story. We'll even make a story about you know what happened to me when I went into town? You know whatever? Yeah so I think it's a very natural human thing. (...) Story is a very useful way of communicating. (Participant 2)

Participant 6 talked about designing the whole curriculum of his language teaching practice around the narrative of people's lives. He was interested in learners using their own lived experience to develop in another language because he believed that people's experiences and stories told about it facilitate personal development, learning and education. He talked about the philosophy that informed his initial interest in storytelling:

And so, we started designing the curriculum without any textbooks, without any other materials, we designed it around the idea of, I suppose, working with the people in front of us as material, their lives as the material that would drive the learning.

He also talked about using storytelling as stand-alone project in his current practice, as well as organising the rest of the curriculum around the idea that learning is based around people:

But the rest of the curriculum is based pretty much around that as well. It's based around people. It's not based on grammar, or functions, or notions, or any of that. It's basically on people being able to share their experiences and develop in another language. (Participant 6)

4.1.2 Talk, Trust and Narrative Therapy

As our discussions deepened, participants started giving examples of deep personal storytelling. They were relating to the power of talk and sharing stories, and a sense of comfort and release experienced by the storytellers. Participants agreed that these events occur in groups of learners who are familiar with and trust each other. One participant referred to this kind of storytelling as the form of narrative therapy.

I suppose that's when I started formalising this idea that it's people's stories are their, you know, can drive language learning, and can drive education, can drive development, it is transformative. It has its roots, and that this wasn't something I set out to do, but it is connected to the talk, I suppose talking therapy in some way because people are talking about their lives, and they talked about their experiences so they... You know on the Identifier programme, Learner said that it was therapy for him. And he wasn't the first, one of my volunteers said it when we were doing it in the first storytelling cycle, and she's said to me Identifier, this feels like therapy, you know so different people have commented on it... (...)

Talking as we know, it can help us can ease uhm, I suppose some of the weight that we carry around, you know we carry things around. And it's nice to talk. (Participant 6)

Participant 2 explained that personal storytelling features prominently in groups of learners that have been together for a long time, because the trust has been established and is reciprocated. I asked if trust was an important factor when it came to sharing personal stories. Participant responded that she thought it was, although the tutor could always choose to cover something that is not personal, however:

...but then really everything is (personal). (...) when I am teaching any aspect of English, I often will tell a little story from my life that might illustrate it you know. And if, if it's some tense that I want to bring in, and you know that kind of thing and so I think, and I think that people in turn tell little stories themselves, just verbally, and so that's a very natural thing, you know. (Participant 2)

Participant 2 also talked about using conversation cards in a Zoom class during Covid 19, that asked the learners to tell a story about the last time they cried. One of the learners, an older, quiet man, told of a recent phone call, that informed him that his mother had died.

I mean everybody is going to relate to the story of somebody's parent's death. ...I think it was good for him because (he's) he lived in a bedsit by himself, to share that and be able to share that in the group, you know? So, he wouldn't have done it probably unless he was comfortable in the group... (Participant 2)

Participant 1 was relating a story of facilitating a class with a group of young adults in the community context. Learners were from a disadvantaged area associated with drugs and social issues. He recognised that often, learners come to class to 'chat' and pointed out the importance of allowing the youth to engage in 'off topic' talk:

But there's a lot, a lot of these kids have serious issues at home and stuff and sometimes they just come in, they want to chat as well. And they talk about stuff off topic and they're engaging, so you don't want to say look, you're too off topic. You have to kind of pull it back, pull them towards where you want to go, but you can't tell them No, because if you tell them No they mightn't engage again so it's a balancing act, it's difficult, but it's rewarding, but it's just the way it is. (Participant 1)

4.1.3 Potential of Visual Methods

Participants also talked about using visual methods in their classrooms in the past. They were enthusiastic about the potential of images and visual methods to stimulate communication and engage participants in reflective and evocative processes.

Participant 5 pointed out that while she was curious to find out more about digital storytelling, she felt that she used a form of it in the past, where she would have handed the learners old photographs and asked them to consider if there was a story hiding there. Once she used an old calendar to evoke the memories of the past.

They loved it because it was, you know, they remembered., oh yeah, that used to be the market (...) in town or we had that kind of scales, or... You know, it's nostalgic I suppose. (Participant 5)

Participant 6 talked about the power of images, and where his interest in images come from. This is a longer quote but I felt it necessary to include almost in its entirety, to allow my participant to tell this story in his own words:

I mean people have so many images, well they generally have, they'll have some special images from their lives, so there's huge scope for, you know, exploring all of that and developing narratives from simple to quite complex narratives around it. Something I used to do was use postcards with students and I would just give them a set of three or four postcards and ask them to construct a narrative around the four postcards and so it's only limited by your imagination really. (...)

This participant also told a story about being influenced to learn through images by his father, who used comics to teach his friends to read, at a time in Ireland when literacy was a serious issue.

So, this is probably where I get it from. My dad was already doing this in late 1930s, 1940s. It's very powerful. Images are a very powerful way of evoking, provoking learning, provoking debate, evoking language. People find language a little bit easier to get when they're describing an image they have. And it's yeah, there's no limit to what you can do with this. But you know, and it's again something I think we should be using more. (Participant 6)

Participant 1 talked about using images to create a presentation on learning difficulties.

So, I was using images of like you know superheroes or whatever it was for the point I was making put in the context of what I was talking about, it really made sense, or at least it did to me, and I think that's powerful because you start associating those images with the points that are being made, that's just easier to digest. (Participant 1)

4.1.4 Learning and Digital Resources

All participants adapted to online learning during Covid 19, primarily on Zoom, so it was inevitable that the topic of digital resources would come up. Some participants had more experience with digital resources than others. Their enthusiasm for digital tools also varied, but all agreed that technology is an important part of the learning process.

Participant 6 talked about, how even after engaging with digital technologies during Covid 19, we are only at the start of exploring the potential of multimodal learning.

Yeah, there's lots of scope for it and I don't think we've even started exploring what, multimodal ways of engaging people both in in learning and in storytelling. And I think, you know, there's a lot, we only started, people are doing zoom OK for two years, but they weren't really using it in any creative way. It was just talking heads doing exactly what they were doing in the classroom.

He also pointed out that this process is slow and that a lot of methods used in education are old methods that have been used 50 years ago. He talked about being aware of digital revolution happening, but that it is happening too slow in adult education:

Education is like, it's a big big ship that is very slow to turn, you know.

He also talked about students engaging with digital resources as consumers rather than creators:

And I said we're going to do a blog and they said OK, yeah, how do you do that? And basic things like even creating documents that some of them found difficult to do you know, they're consuming content without creating content, yeah. (...) E-twinning is again another area. We're not... It's beginning to happen, you know. But it's yeah, everybody is a consumer but not too many people are learning how to create, to be creative with it. (Participant 6)

Participant 5 described her initial reluctance to engage with online learning at start of Covid 19, and realisation that it was inevitable:

But anyway, you know once this crisis arose and I was saying, but you know I can't. I can't, just can't do Zoom. I could hardly spell it! And so, and then I realised well, you can't just rock up and say, you're going to just lose your classes. So, I was like, Mount Everest! But now, now I'm nearly preferring it. I'm actually finding it fantastic, and I also find that the students are learning more. (Participant 5)

Participant 1 talked about his exploration of digital platform Nearpod, that he used to take his learners on a virtual trip from Dublin to Delhi, as part of lesson on interculturalism. Learners downloaded the Nearpod app and were able to look at streets of Dublin and Delhi on their mobile phones. This activity generated a discussion on culture, clothing, density of people etc. I asked the participant if creating that lesson had been a complicated task and he answered:

No. I did look at some videos on how to use a Nearpod, a couple. (...) I was literally just trying it out like it was a test. But I'd watched the video on microlearning on Nearpod like 2-minute videos to see how to use it. Then a talk about how we could use it in the classroom and then a talk about the applications of you know, interculturalism. I think it's a great way of getting that out, instead of needing the PowerPoint. This is what culture is. We dress like this or who dresses like this you know (...). So, I thought it was great and then the amount of little stories that come out are brilliant you know? (Participant 1)

4.2 Observations and Feedback on the Process

4.2.1 Impressions on Digital Storytelling (DST)

This section is a collection of the views that were shared following the introduction to digital storytelling. I told the participants before starting the presentation that afterwards we would discuss their impressions, relevance of presented methods in their own practice and their potential for learning. The introduction consisted of brief presentation on different forms of digital storytelling where I showed three examples of digital stories. The first story was a brief history of digital storytelling ('History of DST') that I created as an alternative to power point slide that contained the same information. The other two ('This locket unlocks so many stories' and 'Robin's Market') were personal digital stories sourced from the two leading websites on the uses of digital storytelling (DEPAL and Educational uses of DST). All participants had a very positive reaction to the examples of digital storytelling.

Participant 2 liked the expressiveness of combination of image and narration.

It's very interesting. I thought it was really interesting 'cause (...) I would like to look at that picture for much longer, you know. So it's just, and also his narration and relating it to himself and everything it just made it come alive. You know, it's lovely. (Participant 2).

Participant 4 enjoyed the story and could see the potential of it being used in her own teaching:

The last one in particular, I started seeing how I could use that in a classroom, and then that you could have the next slide of each zoomed in on a particular part of the image, rather than having to print lots and lots of pages and use lots of paper. (...) It would be so much nicer to have it on a big screen in a classroom and you can focus on different areas. And if you, you can either speak in the class or add your voice over you like you could really choose how to use it. (Participant 4)

Participant 3 was surprised that examples somewhat defied her expectations:

Yeah, very nice. Yeah the two different samples, the samples of the girl telling about her life or her life during the pandemic. And it was very nice. And then you said and now there is one only one photograph and then the voice. And I was like, oh, that's going to be very boring. But actually, it's not! I said I wanted more! (Participant 3)

Participant 1 really enjoyed the use of narration and images to convey meaning:

I'll start with the first one, the girl, obviously just normal person took a few screenshots of her phone, their laptop threw it together and made a lovely minute and 10 seconds long video or something. But it's lovely. Like it's it really, like if that was written down, it would lose all meaning. (...)

He also found the simplicity of the stories very impressive, and concluded that he did not think that these stories were difficult to create:

It's perfect, you know. I mean it. Yeah, but it's so simple. Like the person is obviously not like someone that does Ted talks, just a normal girl talking about stuff that means stuff to her, so you really convey that sense of emotion and love and stuff like that, and I think that's lovely. But it's so simple and just shows you that you don't need serious digital skills to make a good digital story.

Participant 6 could see a lot of potential for narrative learning:

In terms of scope, (...) it can be used to develop so many different parts of the learning process, you know? It can be used for people to explore the past, their current lives, their futures, their imagined lives that can be used as the imaginary world that they would like, ideal worlds. You know it's..., you can just create, they can create worlds out of it.
(Participant 6)

4.2.2 Group Workshops

Following a conversation and a short presentation on definitions and examples of digital storytelling, I introduced my three group workshop participants to Adobe Creative Cloud (Adobe Spark) platform. Prior to the workshop, I emailed participants with step-by-step instruction on how to sign up and create an account with the platform, in order to prevent any potential anxiety of doing it in front of the group online. It took a little while to set up, but the atmosphere was relaxed, and participants were asking questions if they were unsure of any aspects of the platform. When we were all signed in, I showed them the main features of the platform. I was sharing my screen on Zoom so participants were able to see exactly what I was pointing to on my screen and find it on theirs. Once we explored the main video features of Adobe Spark, I talked the participants through the process of creating the story that I have already shown during the presentation. Participants were asking questions, such as if I could control how long the slide is on, or how to delete or re-record the narration. As I was sharing

my screen on Zoom I was able to both answer and demonstrate the question on the screen, for all participants to see.

Once I introduced them to the platform by showing how I created a digital story shown during the presentation, they started creating one themselves, following my step-by-step instruction and demonstration. This part of the process was not very conversational. I was talking through my demonstration and the participants would ask questions if something came up or if they could not repeat the action that I was demonstrating. I was conscious of time passing quickly and was a little concerned about taking too much of their time. I told them after 45 minutes that the time is officially up and if they wanted to finish but they were happy to continue. The first group workshop lasted just over an hour. Here are some of my participants' comments on the process:

Yeah, I like to try. I will try to prepare something for next time we see each other and. I will show you. I'm doing some classes English classes to teenagers, so I will prepare something for them because I will meet them on Tuesday, so then next time we met I show you what I did. OK, and it looks like it's kind of easy once you try. It should be easy to use the programme. (Participant 3)

It's actually perfect (...) because you get to practise it once. I figured out how I could... you even taught me a few things now today so. Yeah, I mean apart from the actual programme (...) so it's all learning, yeah? (Participant 2)

Sorry yeah, I've just created 2 little screens with music and the little caption. Yeah, I was enjoying using it, definitely. (Participant 4)

4.2.3 Reflection on the process

I really enjoyed facilitating the group workshop. I believe that my participants have enjoyed it too because they told me so when we met for follow up feedback session two weeks after the first workshop. Their feedback and responses have been thematically analysed and will be presented in the last two themes at the end of this chapter.

The workshop was my first experience facilitating this type of interactive focus group activity. I was very nervous, and I talked a little bit too fast. I felt that one hour is too short to introduce a group of 3 people to a new digital platform and achieve equal participation and interaction. It would have been beneficial to break after the workshop had ended, and continue for another hour, to give the participants time to explore the platform and ask further questions on its usability. However, considering participants' feedback and the fact that following the workshops, all 3 participants created and showed me their original work, digital stories of very

good quality, I would say that one-hour long workshop seemed to have contained just enough of learning, for all of us.

4.2.4 Interactive Interviews

The process was similar, and I followed the same structure during the individual interactive interviews as well, but interview participants benefited from more time spent on both conversation and the practical workshop part. Interviewees benefited from more guidance too:

Yes, exactly when I have to say you've very good skills because uhm, well I know you had it up on your screen, but you're completely, you know, you guided me right through it, which is, uh, is very good because you know the way if you missed even one step along the way, then you're kind of catching up, and you're distracted, but you are absolutely spot on. So well done. Thank you. (Participant 5)

One participant commented on accessibility of Adobe Spark:

I think the biggest thing that stands out to me is access and I think it's easy to use. Like you don't need to watch videos to figure out how to use it, I don't think. It's colourful, everything is on the screen. Sorry, I'm looking at the screen in front of me. Here, so like I have on the right-hand side the layout team, the resources, the music. Perfect it just juts onto. It's so easy. Everything down the bottom of the slides and I can record. And as you showed me there, how easy it is to record stuff and how to share it and download it? (Participant 1)

While some saw the potential to expand on the existing practices:

No, it is huge, huge scope for it. I mean, yeah, the idea of the one image which we've used and is used still in offline learning, where people bring in a photograph. And we did it a little bit in our storytelling as well, where they chose a photo of their favourite place and would talk about that and they wrote about that, there's huge, huge scope for that. (Participant 6)

4.3 Digital Storytelling: Potential for Enhancing Learning

This theme came out of data collected in feedback sessions or at the end of interviews, after the practical part of the workshop was finished. It refers to participants commenting on the potential of digital storytelling to enhance learning in their own practice.

Participant 1 found that digital storytelling was accessible and facilitated universal design for learning:

Definitely like the kind of UDL⁴, multiple means of engagement. Like you know, some people can't sit in front of a PowerPoint or listen to someone talking, so people can visualise and see everything and then they also get the audio side of it and they can see it whenever they want because I uploaded it. Then they can watch whatever they want, if they can't make a class or if in class they can't take it all in, they can watch it in bite size chunks press play and pause and write notes and stuff so it's so accessible. (Participant 1)

Participant 2 really engaged with the process, and had, in the first group feedback session, related her experience of creating a digital story of her trip to Town, that she intended to share with one of her learners in a one-to-one class. She knew that this learner liked the conversation aspect of learning and had hoped to use their mutual experience of visiting the Town, to stimulate conversation.

I did a thing about a trip to Town and the reason one of the reasons I chose that was 'cause I knew one of the people in the class has recently been to Town, so I mean, so the thing always I think is to get people, particularly the people when you're teaching people in Ireland, they want to get the opportunity to talk, you know, and to have this... I mean they want to do grammar and I do grammar as well, and I do articles and stuff, but they also just want that opportunity to talk, you know, to each other and to me. So, I'm hoping, I'm going to try it anyway tomorrow. We'll see how it goes.

I met Participant 2 in the final individual feedback session, and she told me about showing her digital story to the learner.

But it has only happened on the one time with Learner. Where I had to show it three times because she actually asked for it again and again and it was very interesting because I thought, I've got a really bored people if I kind of, you know, but she said she wanted to listen more carefully! And then I was saying things like well did you notice you know, do you remember the one about Identifier Tower? I said did you hear what it was used for, and she said, oh no, I'm actually learning! And listening for meaning is quite such an important part of language, that you have to do it with storytelling, so and it's not just answering a question that you can just give an answer to, but actually listening for its own thing. So that was another reason why we played it a third time.

Participant 2 really enjoyed sharing her story with her learner, and the learner enjoyed listening to it and watching carefully to decode meaning embedded in the combination of images and narration. Participant also talked about how the learner asked questions about the people in the images and the occasion for travel. This opened unexpected avenues for conversation that participant compared it to 'flowchart' of ideas. She also said that she enjoyed the interest her learners showed in original content:

⁴ UDL – Universal Design for Learning

Overall, I just think it's brilliant. It's brilliant for when you are doing an online lesson. It's brilliant. It just because it involves people, as you said, because you're producing original content, they're much more interested. (Participant 2)

4.4 Digital Storytelling: Potential for Personal Growth

This theme is a collection of views also collected in feedback sessions or at the end of interviews. It refers to participants commenting on how using or creating digital storytelling affected the development of their personal skills or confidence and looks at the stories they created, as their stories are the showcase of the newly acquired skills and confidence.

Participant 4 attended the group workshop and one individual feedback session few weeks later. Her experience of digital storytelling is best told through her own words:

So, I've been thinking of designing a course for quite a while, but I've never made videos before, have no idea how to go about it, so I'd sort of pull it to the back of my mind and was focusing on other things. And then when we were doing the workshop partway through, you introduced us to the Adobe software. I was something like, no, this is what I need to do, this is perfect. And we went through it and it was, I'm not bad with technology, but at the same time I'm not really really up to date with things, but it was perfectly manageable to use. So that was very exciting for me, and I realised I can use this to design my course. So, I made just a 30 second video recently as an introduction, and I sent it off to the platform to Udemy who, they host different courses that people can buy and you can send off a short video and they'll assess it for how well you can be heard things like that, 'cause I wasn't sure if my microphone was the right one and things, but it came back saying a five star video. So, I'm going to stick with this technology. (Participant 4)

Participant 4 also talked about using Adobe platform to create videos for her learners who are preparing for exams and need to practice their listening skills. She liked that the platform gave her the opportunity to create high quality videos, that in the past she often had to rely on her friends' IT skills, whereas with Adobe she can test different options, get familiar with it and give it a go while relying on herself:

It's very very basic, and so it's nice to be able to work these things out and be able to create something new, and I think it does boost your confidence a little. (Participant 4)

Participant 3 enjoyed using the platform but did not like hearing her own voice recorded. When we last meet, in the second group workshop, she had the workings of the story but was still exploring narration. She wanted to explore aural elements because she was working with teenagers, and she felt hearing the language was important for their pronunciation. Few weeks later she emailed me her digital story. Each slide was a photo of herself taken with her mobile

phone, in which she performs actions of the lesson (brushing her teeth, eating breakfast etc..) To my pleasure, each slide was narrated in her own voice.

Participant 2 previously talked about how enjoyable her digital story was to her learner and how stimulating it was for their conversation. She also talked about how the process of digital storytelling affected her own learning:

I had invested in doing it and you know was reasonably happy with the results and happy to share. Yeah, so I got more out of this than I would normally, you know. (...)

Participant 2 went on to explain, that exploring digital storytelling gave her the opportunity to get excited about preparing a lesson and that she was glad to explore something that has sparked her own interest, while at the same time investing time into creating original content for her learners. She had made plans to create at least another two stories, one personal story using her own images and one with images from the internet, to enrich geography lesson. She was really excited about learning from her learners:

I mean what I find with teaching adults language learning is that I tend to learn as much as they do because I know so much about Ireland and maybe ways of saying things in Ireland and that sort of thing and the culture. But then they know so much about other things their own culture that I know nothing about. So, it has always been like that, really, that's why, I mean it's one of the things, the reasons why I do it because it's so rewarding, you know.

She concluded with a very poignant quote:

So, with the pandemic it was better to say yes if there was something that was going to engage you. And you know, just that whole feeling of engagement and actually, uhm, you know making something is such a valuable feeling for any human being, you know. (Participant 2)

Participant 5 really enjoyed the workshop and our conversation. She was a bit puzzled, at the end of our conversation, about her role in my research. She said:

I mean I presume you want me now to do something, because otherwise you're just giving me a little free tutorial how to use Adobe Creative Cloud Express? (Participant 5)

4.4.1 Digital Stories

Four out of six participants made digital stories following the participation in the workshop. One, as quoted above by Participant 4, was shown to me privately during the feedback session, while three were sent to me by email. Two participants that did not make stories are familiar with DST and have created digital stories in the past.

None of the three participants that created stories engaged with digital storytelling prior to the workshop. Their stories were of very high quality, they all used more than one personal image and their voice was recorded as narration on each of slide. Participant 2 created a story about her trip to Town with her friends, that she used in class with one of her learners. Participant 3 created a video of her performing different daily activities, that she used as teaching aid with her learners whom she was teaching English (outside of Ireland). Participant 5 created a personal story where she introduced a well-known Irish writer and her family and thanked me for introducing her to digital storytelling. I felt very fortunate and grateful, receiving my participants' digital stories. Having an artefact, made by the participant with their newly acquired skills, is what really highlighted the value and fruitfulness of participatory research to me.

4.5 Disadvantages or Barriers to Digital Storytelling

As I hope is evident from the data presented above, there were very few disadvantages identified in engaging with the digital storytelling process. Several participants mentioned that lack of confidence in using technology might deter some learners and educators from trying, but they also pointed out how surprisingly simple the process was. One participant pointed out that what is necessary for the development of digital literacy and creative use of digital resources is encouragement within the community education sector for the use of such methods:

But I don't think there's a push. I haven't seen a push in one in my workplace and in the tree educational places I'm in in FET anyway, and the Youthreach kind of, I would like to say is FET /community and I don't think there's a push generally. I think you know, when you look at documents and policy documents might be written in there, but on the ground it's not. It's championed by individuals, not by the organisations. (Participant 1)

I would like to end this chapter with the quote that Participant 6 made, not in relation to digital storytelling but in relation to innovation, progress, investment and general survival of voluntary

groups within the community education context. My research looked at the potential of digital storytelling in the context of community education. My focus was on giving my participants a taste of digital storytelling, so that we can engage in a genuine conversation on its potential. The big picture, that we mostly did not have time or opportunity to discuss, is the flexibility of the context, to encourage and nurture the use of innovative teaching methods. But Participant 6 was thinking about the big picture, and I feel it is very important that it too is included in my findings:

I mean I have had very strong opinions on this. I suppose my journey started out in 2003, working with refugees for the first time, nearly 20 years ago. And the government just continuously cut funding to it, and they are continuously and continuously and none of it made any sense. It doesn't make economic sense. It doesn't make social sense. And they've left it to voluntary groups, which can be a good and bad thing, really, you know? Uhm, they've abandoned the people who need them most in in in terms of integration and language training and in specific terms this continues. (...)

Uh, we're dealing with people who really need it and our funding has been cut and we're finding it really difficult to get funding, and you have the feeling that people really just don't consider it worth funding... (Participant 6)

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the findings of my research, which were presented thematically. The emphasis was on truthfully presenting participants' impressions and views on the use of narrative, visual and digital resources and digital storytelling, as well as my own observation and reflection on the research process. In the next chapter I will discuss my findings in relation to theory outlined in Chapter Two.

Chapter Five – The Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This study explored the potential of digital storytelling as participatory visual method in the context of community education, through the eyes of the practitioners who engaged with this method by participating in the digital storytelling workshops. This chapter discusses the findings that broadly suggest that digital storytelling, a multimodal visual method, has a significant potential to instil and promote participatory and dialogic co-learning.

I start the discussion by identifying benefits associated with the use of narrative, visual methods and digital resources with adult learners. I demonstrate that narrative pedagogy succeeds in making meaning out of experience by facilitating a genuine and constructive dialogue. I outline the findings that imply that the multimodal and dialogical character of digital storytelling has the potential to enhance learning processes and instil deep personal growth that facilitates reflection and an increase in self-esteem. I discuss finding that suggests that learning technologies must be approached with a creative and critical eye. Finally, I argue that my research demonstrates admirable resourcefulness of the community education practitioners as well as acknowledges the lack of support for the sector.

5.2. Views and Attitudes on the Use of Narrative, Images and Digital Resources with Adult Learners

This theme introduces the background of the story which refers to views and attitudes my participants expressed about individual elements of digital storytelling, prior to engaging with the process. It explores the prevalence and effectiveness of the narrative, participatory visual methods and digital resources in the community adult education context.

My findings suggest that the narrative is a powerful method of communication and participation, that seems particularly suitable to the context of community education. Participants related stories of learners who used narrative to talk about family member's death and struggles of living in marginalised areas riddled with drugs. Some of them cried, supported their peers who felt isolated or lonely, and referred to the storytelling cycle as the form of therapy. These examples correspond to Bruner's (2002) interpretation of narrative as a

phenomenon that shapes and organises our thoughts and experiences into something tangible that operates as cultural and communicative currency, that we can exchange with others. Narrative facilitates dialogue embedded with mutual understanding of individual experience.

My findings demonstrate flexibility, learner centredness and inclusivity of community education. This diverse context provides the space for learners to relate their experiences and engage with each other in the form of stories and narrative. I referred to Rossiter and Garcia's (2010) argument that the narrative acquisition of knowledge needs to be at the forefront of adult learning processes, and not side-lined to the secondary role of supplementing cognitive learning. My research indicates that practitioners value the narrative acquisition of knowledge as it develops trust amongst adults, who in the process of narrative learning, develop reciprocal and meaningful relationships.

This is not always comfortable, and one participant did report on being nervous of approaching personal storytelling and potentially triggering topics. This finding is isolated but significant because it does contradict the theory, that is largely supportive and encouraging of storytelling. Perhaps we do need to consider that while everyone has a story to tell, not everyone is a storyteller, or that we must not assume one's ability to tell or receive stories. On the other hand, the White Paper acknowledges that radical and inclusive educational practices centred on lived experiences that promote social change will appear radical and challenging. Further research is advisable, to investigate factors that might deter practitioners from using personal storytelling in the context of community education. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to invest into promotion of participatory visual narrative methods in this context, that would introduce practitioners to the practice in a gentle and collaborative manner. Recognising the potential of community education to support learners and educators who might find personal storytelling challenging is an important step in promoting inclusion, and as such has implications for the future policy development.

However, the findings overwhelmingly indicate that narrative is not only at the forefront of learning processes but forms the basis of the curriculum and in true Freirean ethos, by learning together through dialogue, drives the learning. In prioritising narrative experiential learning over teaching of grammar, Participant 6 is endorsing and nurturing holistic, creative and collaborative learning. As Rossiter and Clark's (2007) stated, the narrative acts as a connection between experience and learning. Goodson and Gill (2011) discussed narrative encounter as

series of exchanges that lead to increased understanding of self and others, and narrative pedagogy that relied on the reciprocity of narrative encounter in which diverse experiences are exchanged. My findings strongly relate to these ideas. Participants' contribution and examples on the communicative and learning potential of deep and therapeutic talk was profound and insightful. Learning through narrative encounter is not transporting information into an empty vessel, it is the type of learning that leads to understanding, confidence and friendship (Freire, 2017).

Participants talked enthusiastically about the use of images and visual methods in their practice. These examples accord with Yang's (2017) definition of participatory visual methods as approaches used to help represent "experiences, perspectives or cultures through the use of visual media..." (p. 9). Lawrence (2017) argued that using participatory visual methods employ various senses and foster multiple means of knowing and expression. My findings indicate that using images facilitated many different types of learning events, visualisation that aids understanding and memory, narrative construction to develop in another language or evoking nostalgia by learning from old calendars. Creative and constructive use of visual prompts also suggests that Freirean concepts of generative themes and codification are relevant and timely. This might be because participants, in their examples, largely related their experience of teaching during Covid 19, which was in its own way a revolutionary situation. It involved adapting to a digital learning environment in a way no one anticipated. And in the spirit of critical pedagogy and the White Paper, it was done so that those on the margins are not literally, screened out.

In terms of literature on digital resources, my focus was on the ways in which digital elements enrich or facilitate learning through narrative. I emphasized that, in reference to Freire's problem-posing education, the use of digital resources needs to be approached with criticality and creativity. My findings indicate that digital resources represent a yet untapped potential for learning and that adult education must apply elements of critical pedagogy to learning technologies as well, as content was said to have been consumed (or conzoomed!) rather than created. Most participants adapted to technology and have embraced Zoom initially as a necessity. While I am somewhat uncomfortable to refer to this phenomenon as potentially 'banking', it is important to consider implications of unanticipated and rapid digitalisation of learning during Covid 19. The change was abrupt and there simply was no time to consider how digital resources could be used in a creative and critical manner. The priority was to

establish and remain in contact with the learners. This finding has important implication for future development, that will inevitably lead to hybrid forms of education and adaptation to blended learning, in all educational contexts. Digital resources must also be looked at through critical lens if they are to promote the tradition of critical pedagogy within the community education sector. This finding indicates that it would be beneficial to explore the potential of digital storytelling to facilitate this transition and allow for individual and collective opportunities to engage with the digital resources in a creative and critical way, while utilising learning potential of narrative outlined above.

An insight into how this could be achieved was offered by example Participant 1 gave of benefits of using interactive platform Nearpod, to deliver a lesson on interculturalism. He talked about how he learned how to use Nearpod by looking at short explanation videos and online talks on using it to talk about interculturalism. His was example of creative, self-resourceful and self-directed use of learning technology. This finding supports my argument on the resourcefulness of community education practitioners, who persist in utilising participatory and innovative approaches, despite the lack of recognition and support experienced by the sector. While their resilience is admirable, this finding is also in line with the findings identified in relation to usefulness of MEADF fund. Community education sector is flexible and responsive to learner needs, but they need stable and reliable support, resources, and digital infrastructure, to continue to thrive and develop, individually and collectively, into an uncertain and potentially a lot more virtual and digitalised future.

My findings support the idea of appropriateness and potential of narrative pedagogy for adult learning. I discovered that the creative and innovative use of narrative facilitates the convergence of experience and social interaction into a mutually beneficial learning event, that has the potential to engender dialogue and understanding, and develop relationships. My finding also identified the need to apply critical pedagogy to the use of digital resources, that are embraced with curiosity and resourcefulness, but due to suddenness of Covid 19 remain underexplored. This can only be done by investment into supports, resources and infrastructure for the adult community education context.

5.3 Digital Storytelling as the Research Method

This theme refers to participants becoming familiar and engaging with the process of digital storytelling and will generally attempt to outline the findings that discuss the benefits of digital storytelling as the research method.

One of the concerns identified in the systematic review of DST pointed to the fact that most DST workshops consisted of one session only and that positive feedback could be the product of “novelty effect of educational technology” (Wu & Chen, 2019, p.9). My findings suggest that more sessions result in deeper engagement with the method and exploration of educational technology, but it does not affect the quality of initial feedback. However, I do feel that further research would benefit from more sessions that would allow the participants both the sufficient time to explore the method, as well as to practice and experiment with it, before providing the feedback.

Participants enjoyed the workshop and were impressed and intrigued by the DST. They felt that it was accessible, visually engaging, emotionally expressive and had the potential to develop many different parts of the learning processes. They also enjoyed the guidance and learning that the process afforded, and all remained, at their own initiative, in the workshop longer than planned. It is very encouraging to compare this finding with Yang’s (2017) study that found DST research process as “give and take interdependent” process that results in mutual learning and partnership. Indeed, Participant 5 remarked, near the end of the workshop, that I must have some expectation of her otherwise she essentially availed of the free tutorial on digital storytelling. Another benefit of DST as research method is the lack of hierarchy between the researcher and participants. As an ethical and reflexive researcher, I had to assume the responsibility over the process, considering especially that the whole endeavour was initiated and designed by myself. But this was a “collaborative research with a flat hierarchy” that was conducted “with rather than on participants” (de Jager, et al., 2017, p. 2550). It was therefore very Freirean in nature as it allowed me and my participants to engage in creative co-learning that resulted in creation of digital stories, valuable learning artefacts. Furthermore, it made me appreciate my Balkan andragogical heritage even more, as I understood, through my own learning in this process, the value of utilising creative and participatory research methodologies that simultaneously explore and nurture adult learning (Savicevic, 2011).

My findings, observations and reflections demonstrate that DST offers enormous opportunities for participatory research in adult community education context. It is inclusive and collaborative and corresponds well to an ontology that is rooted in critical theory and critical humanism. It facilitates learning events that allow for contextual interpretation of meaning and experience and as such is consistent with constructivist epistemology. I demonstrated the use of DST to my participants. By learning to use it, they taught me different ways that DST can be used creatively, emphatically and critically. My research yielded visual digital artefacts that represent tangible and meaningful learning, and serve as evidence of engagement, collaboration and mutual learning.

5.4 Potential for Enhancing Learning and Personal Growth

This theme demonstrates participants' impressions or experience on the potential of DST to enhance learning in their practice and develop their own personal skills and confidence.

My findings strongly endorse the benefits of multimodality of DST, particularly accessibility and multiple means of expression, that are at the centre of multimodal character of DST.

As mentioned in the literature review, DST allows for multimodal and collaborative opportunities for interpretation of experience, and due to not being restricted to verbal interaction, facilitates conversation and learning by offering more than one way of expression (Lawrence, 2017). Participants recognised the potential of DST to accommodate learners of various abilities and in that way enable implementation of Universal Design for Learning, that is an important accessible framework for expanding inclusiveness of adult learning. Participant 1 pointed out that learners can watch, visualise, listen or access DST in bite size chunks, pause and write notes to aid memory, inside or outside of class. This example speaks directly to Rao, Torres and Smith's (2021) assertion that DST allows students with disabilities to express themselves in ways most suitable and appropriate for them. This is an important finding that resonates with the philosophy of critical community education in Ireland, to enable those who are at a disadvantage to participate equally and rightfully in learning and education.

Another important benefit of DST is in how it facilitates meaning making through interpretation of experience. My research suggests that DST is valuable and prominent particularly when utilised with ESOL learners. It is particularly congruent with the argument that DST promotes "a way of knowing that is constructive, contextual and interpretive"

(Rossiter & Garcia, 2010, p. 425). Participant 2 created a digital story that her learner enjoyed so much that she asked her to play it three times, each time listening carefully to different elements of the story. She was interested in the characters and the context of the story because it gave her intimate insight into her tutor's life. Participant 2 remarked that the learner was engaged in "listening for meaning" which is important in storytelling as it involves comprehending the whole story, rather than just focusing on one aspect of it. This finding strongly resonates with another aspect of multimodality identified in the literature review, that DST can be used as "tool for thinking, or a cognitive artefact..." (Herman, 2003 cited in Alonso, et al., 2013, p.382). In this example the emotional and cultural investment of the creator of the story was acknowledged by the listener and used to enrich both their relationship and the learning process. Furthermore, they have both engaged in a rewarding and respectful dialogue that resulted in mutual learning and understanding, reflecting a potential of DST to inspire constructive and dialogic meaning making.

Interaction that DST facilitated gave Participant 2 the opportunity to re-interpret her story in the context of Covid 19 disruption, while the learner gained an insight into her tutor's life and habits (through images narrated by her tutor's voice), while learning about the town they both visited in the past. I believe that this finding, had it occurred over several connected workshops, would lend itself to a deep analysis that could be linked to several adult learning theories. However, since it was one class only, I would conclude that the benefits of DST identified in this paragraph are certainly consistent with promotion of shared understanding centred on lived experience, which is an important characteristic of critical pedagogy. Furthermore, they correspond to McGee's (2015) categorisation of DST as social pedagogy that creates agency in learners. Reciprocity is embedded in the process of sharing DST. As the literature suggests, the narrative encounter of DST offers opportunities for the participants to develop increased understanding of themselves and others, as well as be exposed to a different point of view, in a non-argumentative dialogic situation, that reflect constructivist meaning making.

Through exploration of DST, both in the workshops and in engagement with the learners, participants, as evident in their digital stories, considered their experience and the meaning attached to it, in order to interpret it in DST format. There is evidence of exploration of experience for the learning purposes, and acceptance of personal voice as one of the methods to present the story by recording a narration over the images. While more continuous engagement with DST is needed to demonstrate occurrence of transformative learning and link

these findings to Mezirow's theory, it is apparent that these reflective practices involve independent thinking about lived experiences and result in communicative events (Kitchenham, 2008). These communicative events indicate that DST enables methodical reflection on experience that could encourage perspective transformation, that Cranton (2016) suggests could be achieved in educational settings by implementing critical and reflective pedagogies.

This DST experience positively affected personal confidence of Participant 2. She remarked, to my absolute delight, that "making something is such a valuable feeling for any human being..." (Participant 2) This finding is a wonderful example of positivity and enrichment that engaging with creative processes can instil. There are strong similarities expressed by Participant 2 in relation to this specific finding and those described in the section of literature review that looks at the learning potential of DST, namely enhancement of 21st century skills such as creativity, visualisation and digital literacy, development of DIY 'maker culture' mindset and critical thinking (McGee, 2015 and Montuori, 2011). Participant 2 was not consuming and repeating pre-packed learning materials, she was a creative creator of her own learning content.

Her quote about the purpose of her engaging with volunteering following her retirement is very insightful. She finds the process rewarding because she learns as much from her learners and their culture, as they learn from her. This is a wonderful example of inclusive and mutually respectful character of adult learning in the voluntary community education context. It goes back to the very core of my research, Freirean removal of hierarchy in adult learning with teachers who learn and learners who teach (Freire, 2017). Furthermore, Participant 2 remarked on the contentment that creating personal educational content instilled. I would agree that making something for the sake of it is also rewarding. But this Participant shared her creation and was rewarded by her learner's interest, engagement and reciprocity. I think this outcome corroborates the ideas expressed in the literature review that link DST to Honneth's (2005) conceptualisation of recognition and the increase of self-confidence through respectful and supportive interaction. The narrative encounter facilitated connection of ordinary human experiences, that resulted in mutual learning and development of self-esteem (Zurn, 2005). Participant 2 related this encounter to rewarding purpose of teaching and to invaluable feeling of being able to create knowledge out of her experience, with the help of DST.

Participant 5 shared her experience of using DST platform to enable her to create her own course which she got a five-star review for, and which boosted her confidence. Although she did not use DST in interaction with others, she also experienced personal growth and increased self-esteem due to external acknowledgment of her developing skills, assisted by creative and independent engagement with DST. This finding is also consistent with the theory outlined above, that argued that DST encourages development of 21st century skills and enables increase in self-esteem by nurturing mutual recognition in learning that is grounded in respectful interaction.

My findings demonstrate that multimodality, accessibility and expressiveness of DST enhance learning by fostering dialogue, collaboration and inclusivity. They correspond to literature which argues that DST encourages active learner participation, that is at the core of critical pedagogy, by offering multimodal opportunities for creative self-expression (Yang, 2017). DST is effective in instilling the narrative acquisition of knowledge that cultivates mutual understanding centred on lived experience and allows for emotional, cultural and social engagement of participants, as well as encourages potentially transformative reflective practice. I also discovered that engagement with DST increases personal confidence and promotes the development of 21st century skills, which allowed the learners to create rather than consume knowledge, thereby giving them sense of autonomy, recognition and increased self-esteem.

5.5 Disadvantages or Barriers to Digital Storytelling

As stated in the previous chapter, there were no disadvantages identified in relation to use of DST or participation in a DST workshop. My participants, although most with no experience of using DST, had adequate digital literacy skills that allowed them to follow the process without interruptions, with occasional question and relying on my guidance and the flexibility of Zoom. The question remains about the potential of DST to be used with learners with limited digital literacy.

However, two participants identified structural barriers to implementation of DST. One unanticipated discovery was in relation to promotion of creative digital methods in FET context. Participant 1 remarked that, although application of methods like DST might be mentioned in educational policy, they are not championed by organisations, only by individuals. Participant 6 talked about how difficult it is to get funding for the school, and how

one just gets the sense of those in charge not thinking that this cause, helping adults learn and integrate in local communities, is worth funding. This finding can be analysed through two distinctive but related themes, practitioners' dedication to cause and implications for the context.

Participants' dedication to use participatory methods resonates with the paragraph in literature review that looks at participatory approaches in Irish context. It argued that community education sector, despite experiencing reduced status and lack of recognition, remains responsive to alternative and participatory methods of adult education (Kyle, 2017). However, considering the benefits associated with the learning potential of DST (referenced by the literature and supported by my findings) and its usefulness of facilitating the type of critical and creative education that the community education sector endorses, it would be interesting to imagine the opportunities and learning DST would afford, if the context could properly embrace, rather than just remain responsive to participatory visual methods.

Implications for the context reinforce previously stated argument about the contested nature of community education. The role of adult education, rooted in critical and liberatory Freirean pedagogy and directed at social change, is to provide inclusive space where those at a disadvantage would be given the opportunity to participate, engage in dialogue with the society, and ultimately thrive and flourish, while acknowledging the value of their lived experience. This is contested with the policy objective of neoliberal educational agenda to revive the economy through the development of skills for employability and educational progression. This contest is unequal and oppressive. It corresponds to a running thread of my thesis, parallel to Freire's educational philosophy. Community education refuses to be the oppressed context waiting to be filled with the 'right' kind of oppressive knowledge. But this refusal is difficult without the recognition of the values and benefits inherent in participatory and critical pedagogy. Many have dedicated their research to demonstrate the appropriateness of these methods when used with the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our society. Hopefully, with the assistance of digital storytelling, our story will continue to be told.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research findings in relation to theory introduced in earlier chapters. The summary of my theoretical statements and arguments will be outlined in the next and final chapter.

Chapter Six – Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Findings

This qualitative participatory research explored the educational potential of digital storytelling as visual multimodal method, from the perspective of community education practitioners who engaged in digital storytelling workshops.

The central question of this study was concerned with the potential of digital storytelling, a multimodal narrative teaching method, to promote creative, critical and participatory adult learning, as per the ethos and philosophy of adult community education in Ireland.

My study demonstrated that the narrative and visual methods features prominently in teaching arsenal of community education participants. My findings support the idea of appropriateness and potential of narrative pedagogy for adult learning. I discovered that the creative and innovative use of narrative facilitates the convergence of experience and social interaction into a mutually beneficial learning event, that has the potential to engender dialogue and understanding, and develop relationships. My study identified the lack of criticality in relation to use of digital resources and the need to apply critical pedagogy to learning technologies, which due to suddenness of Covid 19, remain underexplored. It is evident that individual practitioners champion innovative and participatory methodologies. However, a true progress can only be achieved by consistent investment into supports, resources and infrastructure for the adult community education context.

My findings, observations and reflections indicate that DST offers enormous opportunities for participatory research in adult community education context. It is inclusive and collaborative and it facilitates learning events that allow for contextual interpretation of meaning and experience consistent with inclusive and participatory spirit of critical pedagogy. DST is valuable as the participatory research method that can simultaneously explore and nurture adult learning processes. Autonomous and creative learning activities conducted within this research yielded digital stories that represent tangible and meaningful learning artefacts, and serve as evidence of engagement, collaboration and mutual learning.

This study demonstrated that multimodality, accessibility and expressiveness of DST enhance learning by fostering dialogue, participation and inclusivity. DST is effective in instilling the narrative acquisition of knowledge that facilitates mutual understanding centred on lived

experience and allows for emotional, cultural and social engagement of participants. I also discovered that DST cultivates personal confidence and development of 21st century skills, which allows the participants to create rather than consume knowledge, thereby giving them sense of autonomy and increased self-esteem.

Finally, and crucially, my study demonstrates the enduring relevance and importance of the White Paper for the development of adult and community education sector, especially in terms of development of radical and innovative approaches that would include and assist those most in need of participatory learning. The willingness to adapt to change and expand practices is apparent and deeply ingrained within the sector. What is needed is robust acknowledgment and recognition of the value of these approaches, by those in charge of resources, supports and funding.

6.2 Limitations

This was small-scale research conducted with only six participants and over one, two or three sessions, depending on the availability of the participants. The findings would have been more definitive and valid, had there been consistency in approach to research method i.e., equal number of interviews and group workshops and equal opportunities for follow up feedback. More consistent approach and over a longer period would allow for a more in-depth analysis of the learning processes and research potential of DST.

Small-scale research certainly impacts on the overall universality of the findings. However, this was exploratory research that aimed to discover views and experiences of practitioners in a particular context and as such did not anticipate making broad generalisations. Adult and community education context is diverse and multifaceted, and this study intended to make a small but valuable contribution to an ever-expanding field of research.

I must acknowledge my own experience as potential limitation of this research. I am an enthusiastic and inquisitive learner, but I am also an emerging practitioner and workshop facilitator. Designing and delivering a DST workshop was a wonderful experience for me during which I learned so much, from my participants, and about myself. I am sure that it will make me a more competent researcher in the future. But it is important and reflexive to note

that the facilitation of the participatory research is a developing skill that will, with advancing practice, produce still more solid and consistent results.

6.2 Recommendations for Further Research

Considering the theory, methodology and the findings outlined above, in the context of post Covid 19 era, with increasing digitalisation of educational spaces, I believe that it would be very beneficial to conduct further research exploring the learning and teaching potential of DST as well as exploring the potential of DST to facilitate participatory research in adult and community education context. As my research indicates that the use of digital storytelling facilitates creative, narrative and emphatic co-learning, it is crucial to explore supports that would assist practitioners in using this learning method with skill and confidence. It has been suggested that familiar and trusting learning environment enables deep and personal storytelling. Promoting creative spaces and obtaining resources for the development of innovative narrative practice in community education would be invaluable for the development of the field of adult education.

My findings emphasize the need for an urgent exploration of the critical potential of digital learning technologies. They also offer a potential answer to this pertinent question in recommending a DST as dialogic and creative way of utilising multimodal potential of digital resources for accessible and autonomous learning. Further research is recommended to explore the full potential of DST to assist in the development of 21st century skills while staying true to the critical, inclusive and innovative character of community education.

6.4 Conclusion

This study was conducted as a small-scale exploratory research, but my findings have considerably exceeded my expectations. Digital storytelling is a truly social, collaborative and meaningful way to learn and to conduct research. What's the digital story? It is a story that can be told, read, seen, heard and felt. We need stories that can achieve all that. I started this story by pledging to re-invent Freire for a non-revolutionary situation, but I realised that every generation experiences at least one revolution during their lifetime, some, as I can attest, more than one. We need to tell stories about our revolutionary struggles, and we need community education and its inclusive and radical learning environment, so that we can continue to use all our senses to tell our stories and continue to learn together, and from each other.

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Appendices:



INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Information Sheet

Purpose of the Study

I am Mila Popovic, a master's student in the Department of Adult and Community Education, Maynooth University.

As part of the requirements for M. ED. In Adult and Community Education, I am undertaking a research study under the supervision of Dr Michael Murray.

The study is concerned with exploring potential advantages and disadvantages of implementation of digital storytelling as mainstream participatory teaching method in the context of community education, from the perspectives of educators who work or volunteer in the sector.

What will the study involve?

The study will involve participation in 30-45 minutes recorded online interview that will consider use of digital storytelling in community education. The interview will include demonstration and examples of the type of digital storytelling that this research is concerned about so no prior experience of digital storytelling is necessary to participate.

Who has approved this study?

This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from Maynooth University Department of Adult and Community Education. You may have a copy of this approval if you request it.

Why have you been asked to take part?

You have been asked because you are an educator with experience of working with adult learners in the context of community education. Your valuable views and experience are the focus of my study.

Do you have to take part?

No, you are under no obligation whatsoever to take part in this research. However, we hope that you will agree to take part and give us some of your time to participate in a group workshop and focus group with a researcher. It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not you would like to take part. If you decide to do so, you will be asked to sign a consent form and given a copy and the information sheet for your own

records. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and/or to withdraw your information up until such time as the research findings are analysed and assessed by an external examiner. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your relationships with Maynooth University.

What information will be collected?

You will be asked for your views/experience on the potential of digital storytelling as participatory teaching/learning method in your educational context. The interview will be conducted online, and audio/video recorded, depending on your preference and consent.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?

Yes, all information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept confidential. No names will be identified at any time unless you give explicit consent to allow this.

All electronic information will be encrypted and held securely in a password protected folder on a private computer and will be accessed only by the researcher, their supervisor and external examiner.

No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party. If you so wish, the data that you provide can also be made available to you at your own discretion.

'It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.'

What will happen to the information which you give?

The interview will be recorded on Zoom, transcribed and analysed for the common themes. All the information you provide will be kept safe in password protected folder on researcher's personal computer, in such a way that it will not be possible to identify you. During transcription, all your personal details will be anonymized and/or redacted. On completion of the research, the data will be destroyed or kept for a period as specified by Maynooth University.

What will happen to the results?

The research will be written up and presented as a thesis. A copy of the research findings will be made available to you upon request.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

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I don't envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part, but it is possible that talking about your experience may cause some discomfort.

What if there is a problem?

At the end of the interview, I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. You may contact my supervisor Dr Michael Murray at michael.j.murray@mu.ie if you feel the research has not been carried out as described above.

Any further queries?

If you need any further information, you can contact me: Mila Popovic, 0857335055, mila.popovic.2022@mumail.ie

If you agree to take part in the study, please complete and sign the consent form below.

Thank you for taking the time to read this



Consent Form

I.....agree to participate in Mila Popovic’s research study titled *Digital Storytelling: Engaging with the community through alternative forms of adult education*.

Please tick each statement below:

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me verbally & in writing. I’ve been able to ask questions, which were answered satisfactorily.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview participation with Mila Popovic to be audio/video recorded on Zoom.

Audio

Video

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether that is before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data up to June 2022.

It has been explained to me how my data will be managed and that I may access it on request.

I understand the limits of confidentiality as described in the information sheet.

I understand that my data, in an anonymous format, may be used in further research projects and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

Select as relevant:

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts or artefacts from my interview.

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview.

I agree for my data to be used for further research projects.

I do not agree for my data to be used for further research projects.

Signed.....

Date.....

Participant Name in block capitals

I the undersigned have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a manner that they could understand. I have explained the risks involved as well as the possible benefits. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

Signed.....

Date.....

Researcher Name in block capitals

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact Michael Murray (michael.j.murray@mu.ie) or Angela McGinn (angela.mcgin@mu.ie) Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.