LISTEN TO ME: THE LEARNING AND EXPERIENCE OF ADULTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES USING AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL DIGITAL NARRATIVES

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Abstract

The research question explores the learning and experience of adults with intellectual disabilities using autobiographical digital narratives. The thesis uses a case study approach to apply the research question. A teaching and learning process was designed and developed for adult learners with intellectual disabilities that centres on autobiographical digital narratives. The process involved the delivery of workshops with a small group of adults with intellectual disabilities, examining the learning that arose as a result of the process of creating digital narratives, both on the part of the learners involved and the researcher as an adult practitioner.

The central research is, can autobiographical digital narratives be used as a tool for encouraging self-directed learning and creative expression of self for people with intellectual disabilities?

The thesis reviews literature around person-centred planning and access to education for learners with intellectual disabilities, narrative theory for self-learning, specifically autobiography, and the potential for digital narratives to generate learning across a wide range of areas such as; media literacy skills; self-direction in learning; self-presentation; agency; and communication.

The research presented key findings in the processes of self-learning through digital narratives. The learners developed relational connections to varying aspects of the learning process. They connected to each other as a learning community. They engaged with their digital narratives as a personal connection to self, illustrating their responsibility and self- direction in their own learning.

This thesis examines an experimental and experiential development of a teaching and learning process, connecting the area of learners with intellectual disabilities, autobiographical digital narratives and self-learning.

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Aim of research

This research explores autobiographical digital narratives and their place in teaching and learning. More specifically it examines their potential to generate learning for people with intellectual disabilities. The central research question is, can autobiographical digital narratives be used as a tool for encouraging self-directed learning and creative expression of self for people with intellectual disabilities? This research developed a teaching and learning process for people with intellectual disabilities that centres on digital narratives. This process involved firstly the design and delivery of workshops in digital narratives with a small group of adult learners with intellectual disabilities and secondly exploring the learning that arose as a result of creating digital narratives, both on the part of the learners involved and the researcher as an adult education practitioner.

Moreover the thesis examines where this learning fits into the wider context of digital narratives as tools for learning generally and the potential for a broader connection between autonomous non-traditional forms of communication and independence or equality for learners with intellectual disabilities (ID). In short, the research explores the learning and experience of adults with intellectual disabilities, using autobiographical digital narratives.

Key Concepts

The WHO define intellectual disability as

> a significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information and to learn and apply new skills (impaired intelligence). This results in a reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social functioning), and begins before adulthood, with a lasting effect on development.

The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) state that;

Intellectual disability is a disability characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior, which covers many everyday social and practical skills. This disability originates before the age of 18. Intellectual functioning—also called intelligence—refers to general mental capacity, such as learning, reasoning, problem solving, and so on.

In Ireland there are 27, 324 people registered on the NIDD database as intellectually disabled, which account for 5.96% per 1,000 population. 98% of these people receive services from HSE or voluntary service providers. 66% of people registered live in the family home, with 33% living in full-time residential services and just over 4% live independently or semi-independently. (NIDD, 2011).

In recent years supports for people in Ireland with ID have increased significantly and the disability movement has been striving for a more inclusive social model of independent living for all. McClean (date unknown, p.1) says that 'one way to look at the development of services is in terms of...models or paradigms, (that range) from segregation to empowerment.' He argues that 'disability is located within the environment', and that disabled people believe difficulties stem from the failure of the social and physical environment to accommodate their needs (McClean, date unknown, p.5). While much development has been made in the area of disabilities in recent times it is evident from the statistics above that fully independent living is attained by only a small percentage of people registered with the NIDD. The disability movement aspires to a model that relies on natural supports within communities to enable people to live the life they choose. However in an educational context there is still a long way to go in achieving full equality for people with ID.

For example, in community education programmes in 2002 according to a study undertaken by AHEAD, the participation rate of students with a disability was just 1% (NDA, 2002, p. 33). The White Paper on Education states that 'people with disabilities should be targeted by every Adult Education Programme so that they may avail of integrated mainstream options on an equal basis' (Learning for Life, 2000, p. 170). The paper also places an emphasis on creating and encouraging dialogue between

adult educators and learners with disabilities as to how they can adapt their methods and materials in order to be accessible for these types of learners. One way of making adult education methods more accessible is using arts education and creative approaches to teaching and learning.

Education and Approaches

The Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities (1996) recognises that -

> Arts education and arts approaches in education and training have a particular value for people with disabilities...for whom other subjects and teaching methods are problematic or who have difficulty in using conventional ways of making or expressing choices. Being involved in arts activities can help people with disabilities to avail of other possibilities and thus function as a channel for achieving other personal objectives.

In this way the use of artistic methods of expression can develop critical and reflective thinking about life choices and open lines of communication in expressing these desired choices to others, such as family members, key workers, service providers etc. Life stories are one such method which has proved to be a positive instrument in communicating the sense of a person outside of their disability. 'Professionals testify that life books and life stories are a resource that helped them to see the person with learning disabilities as a unique individual' (Meininger, 2006. p.187). He goes on to say that life stories help situate the individual in the context of their lived lives and past experiences as well as in the context of their relational lives with friends and family to ultimately see them as whole and full people and their personalities.

Thus the use of life stories is a powerful means of connection, communication and change. As illustrated above they have the power to shift perception and make service providers engage with and see people with a disability in a very real and human way. Life stories are also very powerful if they are collected or shared as part of a group, they give people a sense of self-pride in sharing. It eliminates the sense of invisibility that is sometimes attached to disability, stemming from past models of segregation and isolation. Looking at how life stories can affect change in a person's sense of self

and also in how others see them, makes this is an area worthy of further exploration in an educational context. I am interested to explore how narratives can be used in education for learners with ID.

While narrative studies is an area that has been explored in significant depth, the area of *digital* narratives is a relatively new subject area for study. Recent development of mass technology allows greater and more affordable personal access to computers and software. Digital narratives can be considered to contain similar dynamics to life stories. They can be personal, they can communicate information that is unique to that individual, they have the potential to be shared. Thus use of digital narratives can afford similar benefits to life stories outlined above.

I believe that their potential is greater on a practical level. Digital narratives can be richly layered texts creating an atmosphere, mood and sense of emotion with music, photos, videos, speech and text. They can convey so much through these elements. A picture can tell a thousand words and music has the ability move us emotionally or transport us in space and time. Thus the power of digital narratives to share and connect with others is immense. The potential for actual sharing is also far reaching as digital narratives can be very easily disseminated via social media, Youtube, Facebook etc. It is perhaps timely to think about how the power of digital narratives and internet consumption can be harnessed in an educational context and brought into learning environments as a method for teaching. Another way in which digital narratives can be useful is as a tool for personal planning for people with ID.

Personal Planning and Digital Narratives

Person-centred planning aims to facilitate an equalisation of power among service providers and people with intellectual disabilities whereby planning for service provision and activities begins with the individual. However the NDA (2005, p.12) clearly states that person centred planning is not an assessment nor is it 'a plan for person centred service provision... but is, rather, a personal, overall life plan for an individual.'

Creative ways of achieving autonomous contributions to personal planning can be a positive step in helping people with ID live integrated and independent lives. While it is understandable that there is no single method for encouraging independent contributions to planning, as each individual has strengths and weaknesses which are unique to them, the area of creative expression can be developed in a more systematic and structured manner in order to facilitate a non-formal learning space. This will allow thinking and reflection as a precursor to official planning meetings with service providers.

Personal educational interest

While my educational background is not related to disability I have volunteered with a large organisation which provides services for people with intellectual disabilities. My informal involvement in this area stems from a familial involvement from a young age. Growing up, my parents placed much emphasis on the values of education and equality which influenced me greatly. I am also approaching this research from an adult and community education perspective as part of an M.Ed.

During my higher diploma I worked as a volunteer support student with a person with intellectual disabilities in a pilot study for an inclusive learning initiative at third level. There were many benefits to the learner that I observed as part of the initiative. I saw how the person enjoyed the status of having access to third level. For example, having a student card gave a huge sense of pride and confidence and gave the student the label of *learner* instead of having *learning difficulties*. As the initiative progressed there were noticeable differences in the student's confidence, ability to handle new and unexpected things, organisation skills, socialisation skills, a sense of independence and the student gave off an overall impression of comfort and belonging on campus.

As we worked together, it struck me that much of the way meaning was constructed for the student was around stories and examples of narratives in television shows and movies. This was a method that we used together to explore more abstract themes and

ground them in the tangible learning tools of the narratives. Having worked in television and radio production, I had witnessed on many occasions how the telling of a life or of an experience could impact positively on an individual. Oftentimes there was a sense of relief or freedom from the person at having expressed or told their story to another human being. There was also a sense of pride in having another person express genuine interest in hearing their story and what they had to say. As the research developed, I found that I wanted to further explore the potential for personal narratives as means of self-expression in a teaching and learning environment for people with intellectual disabilities.

Overview of thesis

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter two will explore current literature around person-centred planning for the provision of services for people with intellectual disabilities and recent policy in relation to individualised funding for these services, as well as issues of equality in education for this particular group of learners. The literature review also explores the educational potential of autobiographical digital narratives and their capacity to generate self-directed learning and self-expression, in turn promoting autonomy and agency.

Chapter three looks at the philosophical underpinnings of the research design, my epistemological stance and methodology and how these influenced the research. The data collection and analysis methods are described. Chapter three also explores the areas of ethics, which constituted a significant part of the overall research process. Finally the limits of the study are acknowledged.

Chapter four describes in detail the process of designing and delivering the digital narrative programme. This chapter also lays out the findings of the field research arising from the data. I also examined my own learning as a reflective practitioner.

Chapter five discusses the findings from the research in relation to the literature explored in chapter two and places the learning from the research in the overall context of adult education.

Chapter six concludes the thesis with strengths and weaknesses of the research, naming areas for further research and making key recommendations for the use of digital narratives in education for people with ID

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter will draw on theory related to my research under three topics, the learner group as people with intellectual disabilities, self-learning through narratives and the capacity for digital narratives to generate learning. Under the topic of the learner group, I will look at how person-centred planning of services for people with intellectual disabilities facilitates choices so that the person can live the life they choose. This chapter also look at how access to education for learners with intellectual disabilities presents difficulties. It will use an example of an inclusive learning initiative at a third level university to illustrate how education can be accessed in a very real and practical way by learners with ID. The literature review will examine the possibilities for learning through autobiography and the narrating or representation of self. Finally the review will explore autobiographical digital narratives and their capacity for generating learning in areas such as self-directed learning, self-expression, agency and twenty-first century literacy skills.

Section One

Living the life you chose

The National Disability Authority (NDA) believe and advocate that 'the vision for people with disabilities, whatever their impairment, is that they are supported to live full lives, of their choosing, in the mainstream community' (NDA, 2010, p.8). Policy and funding allocated for services has also began to reflect this over time however there is still further growth to be made to full equality. The government document 'Towards 2016' states that, 'every person with a disability would be supported to enable them as far as possible, to lead full and independent lives, to participate in work and in society and to maximise their potential' (Department of the Taoiseach, 2006, p.66).

Person centred planning

The National Standards for Disability Services 'require that all planning for the provision of services to people with disabilities should be person centred', (NDA, 2005, p.11). Sanderson, (2000) states that 'person-centred planning is rooted in the principles of shared power and self-determination'. The NDA describe it as 'grounded in a social model of disability and a strengths-based approach' (2005, p.11). According the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps the social model 'sees disability as a socially created problem and not at all an attribute of an individual...[and]...demands a political response, since the problem is created by an unaccommodating physical environment brought about by attitudes and other features of the social environment' (ICF, 2002, p.9). Finkelstein (1980, p.47) argues that, 'disability is the outcome of an oppressive relationship between people with impairments and the rest of society.'

A social model requires society and governments to respect the rights of the individual with disability and afford them every support necessary to maintain these rights and live independent lives, where the individual is the driving force behind their life choices. Person-centred planning supports this.

> At the heart of a person-centred approach lies an appreciation of the person as a unique individual, requiring that all planning is based on supporting each individual to lead his or her own life as and how he or she wishes. In practical terms, this means that all planning around the design and delivery of all services for people with disabilities should be both based on, and actively involve, the individuals availing of these services, and each of those individuals' unique characteristics, capabilities, needs and wishes.
>
> (NDA, 2005, p.11)

The philosophical underpinnings of person centred planning are to promote autonomy and advocacy in making choices and creating a model of independent living. Sanderson's (2000) interpretation of the meaning of independence in this context however is interesting. She does not attribute it to the number things that people can do by themselves but in fact, independence, as she describes it, is the 'quality of life a person can have with whatever support they need' (Sanderson, 2000, p. 6). In this way she acknowledges that support is important and that some need more than others.

External support can contribute to people with disabilities leading independent lives. Sanderson (2000) describes this as the 'support model'. She also acknowledges that planning in this way stresses the importance of supportive relationships by putting 'people in the context of their family and their community,' (Sanderson, 2000, p. 4). A support model however, requires a freedom around funding to accommodate the implementation of independent and individual planning. Individualised funding can facilitate this.

Individualised funding and adult education

Person centred planning has also begun to impact funding policy in Ireland. Funding in the area follows historical allocations of block funding for the provision of services distributed between the HSE and voluntary bodies. This is now starting to shift towards a model of individualised budgets and funding. The advice paper to the Value for Money and Policy Review of Disability Services Programme looks at how funding could be refigured to allow 'money to follow the person,' (NDA, 2010, p.8). Implementation of the policy is still in early stages. If person centred planning aims 'to provide the support required to achieve goals rather than limiting goals to what services typically can manage,' (NDA, 2010, p.20) then;

> funding for disability services should be explicitly linked to programmes to support people with disabilities to live the lives of their choice; to support people with disabilities to live in the community as independently as possible; to support people to access mainstream services and facilities and to give people choice about how their support is delivered.
>
> (NDA, 2010, p.25)

From an adult and community education perspective, individualised funding should also be considered in the context of education and equality of access to education. The Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities (1996, Section 11.7) noted that funding was 'the single greatest barrier to their educational participation' and recommended at that time that funding should follow the student as they move to 'appropriate educational settings.' The Commission advised that employment and training are important routes for people with disabilities to achieve economic and social independence. 'However, the Commission (1996) also stated that the potential

contribution that people with disabilities could make to the economic and social development in Ireland had yet to be recognised' (NDA, 2002, p. 11). The same could be said for the potential contributions of these learners to be made to educational settings. Thus equality of access to education is an area that needs to be considered further.

Equality in education

Looking at educational structures and institutions in Ireland 'while they propound the values of holistic education, much of their work is focused on developing linguistic and mathematical competencies' (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2009, p. 141). It seems that society has forgotten or chosen to ignore that access to education is a human right afforded by all. The right to education is valued as important as it affords the ability, and is seen as intrinsically linked to attaining other human rights. (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2009) The Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities (1996, Section 11) states that 'every individual has an equal right to educational provision, which will enable him or her to participate in all aspects of economic, social, cultural and political life, to the fullest extent of his or her potential.'

Education affords learning such as organisation, critical thinking, socialisation, personal development, sharing and building. 'Its aim is to enhance and enable the person to achieve his or her own goals' (Strategy for Equality, 1996, Section 11). In this way it can be said there are similarities between what education and person-centred planning hope to achieve. Both are driven by person-centred goals and both aim to achieve independence and autonomy in an individual's life through personal development. Education can be about learning about yourself, the world around you and your place in it. Education can be about questioning your place in society, in fact for Freire (1970) this is precisely what education is all about. All citizens have the right to actualise personal goals in education in a way that is appropriate and accessible for them. 'Equality in education matters...because of the impact of education on personal development' (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004, p. 142). If education is required for self actualization then it needs to be opened up to people

with ID, one such programme that aims to do so is the Inclusive Learning Initiative (ILI) at NUIM.

Access to third level education and ID

Students involved in the ILI have access to natural and existing student supports within the university which eliminate the need for costly individual support personnel. Volunteers from the student body or fellow classmates provide additional support in note taking activities, discussions around lecture material as well as assessment support. Lecturers and tutors have also adapted their teaching and assessment styles to meet the learner's needs as recommended in the Status for Equality Paper (1996). Using these existing supports substantiates the idea that inclusive education *is* possible where efforts are made to see the learner as an individual with unique needs, strengths, weaknesses and learning styles.

Considering communication

It is worthwhile considering *how* people with intellectual disabilities can best communicate personal information that can contribute to their planning for the future. Family members, friends, staff workers can support a person with intellectual disabilities to communicate information towards planning if the person cannot or does not feel that they can communicate effectively alone for whatever reason. (Sanderson, 2000) One particular reason might be difficulties with traditional forms of communication such as verbal or written. It is important to recognise that people with more complex communication needs still communicate information about the same things that people with stronger verbal or written communication skill levels do, such as likes, dislikes, needs, wants, fears, dreams etc. (Mencap, 2010). It is encouraged to consider communication *form* as a factor. Sanderson (2000) also advises that creative methods should be sought in order to involve the person as much as possible in the planning.

The same concepts can be applied to accessing education especially when it comes to assignments and assessments for accreditation. To consider alternate and creative

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ways of communicating information *learned* is to consider the individuality of the learner and their needs and is a key move towards equality in education.

Section Two

Learning through autobiography

In this section I will explore how the narration of autobiography can lead to self-learning and contribute to the process of construction and development of self. I will also examine how self-representation through narratives encourages active interaction between the author and the audience or consumer and can promote learning and understanding about others.

Stories to tell - telling and construction of self

Stories can provide a didactic function in society and have done so for hundreds of years, even prior to formal education systems. They were used a way of transferring moral codes, values and traditions between generations. Stories were also a means of historically recording information and events, and were designed to be told and retold in order preserve the past. Stories of an autobiographical nature allow us to examine the storyteller or the narrator and their personalised and individual way of describing or recounting events and experiences in their lives.

> Learning and memories are by-products of the transaction between individual and context...Events are continually constructed and reconstructed as an individual's context changes.
>
> (Mezirow, 1991, p.9-10)

Autobiographical narratives are thus concerned with the telling of the self, but maybe more importantly they are a means of constructing of the self through the positioning and repositioning of the self in context to the memory of the past as Mezirow outlines above. In a study involving written autobiographies Bruner 'discovered that we were listening to people in the act of *constructing* a longitudinal version of Self' (Bruner, 1990, p.120). There must also be reflection of self before this development of construction can happen. For Ricoeur (1991) a narrated self is a self-interpreted self or self-mediated self. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) state that '...we are always

becoming ourselves, and that the self is not a pre-existing unity to be discovered, but rather an ongoing project to be unfurled' (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 19).

There is a sense of figuring and refiguring what we perceive as our sense of self as we grow, reflect and develop. As learners we can explore ourselves through narratives and learn the skills of self-reflection in order to make sense of our world, our experiences and how they have shaped our views and values. 'People are physical and psychological entities. They do things in the world, they reflect on what they do, and those actions have meaningful, existential consequences' (Smith Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 34). Narrative construction can be an extremely personal process for learners but they are a way of creating personal understanding through the reflection on self.

Reflective learning through autobiographical narratives
Denzin uses a pentimento to illustrate how narratives can demonstrate personal development. 'They are like pictures that have been painted over, and, when paint is scraped off an old picture something new becomes visible' (Denzin, 1989, p. 81). Mezirow states that transformative or reflective learning 'views memory as an inherent function of perception and cognition, an active process of recognizing again and reinterpreting a previously learned experience in a new context (Mezirow, 1991, p.6). 'We give meaning to experience in large part by participating in dialogue with other' (Mezirow, 1991, p.58). Thus by engaging the other as a listener to an autobiographical narrative the narrator can make sense of an experience by telling their story. However, 'in a sense, pure experience is never accessible; we witness it after the event' (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 33). The experience is recounted after the event and is therefore a mediated truth or reality.

In autobiographical narratives the event or experience is told with the past self with past self assumptions as the protagonist and the narrator tells the story with new or altered views or knowledge, feelings, assumptions. Mezirow says 'reflective learning involves assessment or reassessment of assumptions,' (1991, p.6). In this sense narratives can illustrate reflective or transformative learning.

Section Three

Digital narratives and learning

> Digital storytelling is the art and craft of exploring different media and software applications to communicate stories in new and powerful ways using digital media.
>
> <div align="right">(McLellan, Hilary, 2006, p. 66)</div>

As it is a relatively new area of exploration the canon of academic writing on the subject of digital storytelling is by no means exhaustive. In this thesis the terms digital storytelling and digital narratives are interchangeable. Digital storytelling is the term coined by Lambert and is used in much of the writings about the area. However in the case studies of this thesis I am primarily dealing with autobiographical narrative aspects to the medium so I have called them digital narratives but the two terms may be used when looking at the literature.

The evolution of social media is indicative of how much personal media content and interaction, such as videos, blogs, forums, photos sharing etc, have become part of our regular media consumption and over '20 percent of total internet use' (Lambert, 2013, p.4). Digital narratives are part of this collaborative sharing of stories and information. They are part of the development of the human tradition of storytelling in the 21st Century. However there is much to be yet discussed and written about the area of digital storytelling. What is written is on a micro-level looks at individuals and their own particular stories. Narrative theory can be applied to these pieces in order to unravel the learning processes behind them. However there are added layers to a digital narrative that add depth, texture and a richness in a medium that is time and culture appropriate.

> Digital media offer a tremendous tool for storytelling. Digital storytelling makes it possible to capture, archive, and retrieve stories with greater ease and flexibility than ever before. And digital storytelling techniques make it possible to present and share stories with exceptional power.
>
> <div align="right">(McLellan, Hilary, 2006, p. 68)</div>

Cultivating expression

Lambert (2013, p.38) focuses on 'process over product', and believes that the process itself, rather than the finished product, facilitates a means of self-reflection and self-expression. His methods for facilitating storytelling workshops involve 'Seven Steps' (Lambert, 2013) for the creation and construction of digital storytelling. These steps ask the person to look deeply at the story they would like to tell, to take ownership of their story and experience, explore the emotional dimension and decide how to best narrate the story and its depths, visually and aurally. To tell or recount a story is to transfer information in a certain form. Lambert (2013) believes that by telling stories about ourselves to others we can find a deeper meaning and learning in the story through recounting, reflecting, answering questions from audiences, learn from it and perhaps even move on to begin telling our next story.

Following this process allows a person the time and space to reflect on what they would like to say and how. These choices in collecting and examining personal effects such as photos, memories, music give an opportunity to collate creatively and artistically in a way that is individual to the person and thus an individualised expression of their choices in the process. The stories themselves are a representation, depiction or a telling of a time, an event or an experience in a person's life which is personal to them. This telling of the story is also representative of the individual. The story cannot claim that is it a representation of absolute truth, it is the perceived reality of the storyteller and thus is an expression of the self according to the author. 'Ultimately we can never share entirely the other's experience, because their experience belongs to their own embodied position in the world' (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 19).

Potential for self-direction in learning

There is an assumption that self-directed learning takes place purely in isolation without any direction, facilitation or assistance. However Brockett and Hiemstra describe it as when the learner assumes responsibility for and control over decisions about planning, implementing, and evaluating the learning experience' (1991, p.12).

They also believe that the process of self-direction in learning is a dynamic of internal and external factors to the individual that push the learner to accept ownership and responsibility for decisions in the learning process.

> Self-direction in learning refers to two distinct but related dimensions. The first of these dimensions is a process in which a learner assumes primary responsibility for planning, implementing and evaluating the learning process. An education agent or resource often plays a facilitating role in this process...The second dimension which we refer to as *learner self-direction,* centers on a learner's desire or preference for assuming responsibility for learning... Thus, self-direction in learning refers to both the external characteristics of an instructional process and the internal characteristics of the learner.
>
> <div align="right">(Brockett and Heimstra, 1991, p.24)</div>

Figure 1 - The Personal Responsibility Orientation (PRO) Model. (Brockett and Hiemstra, 1991, p. 25)
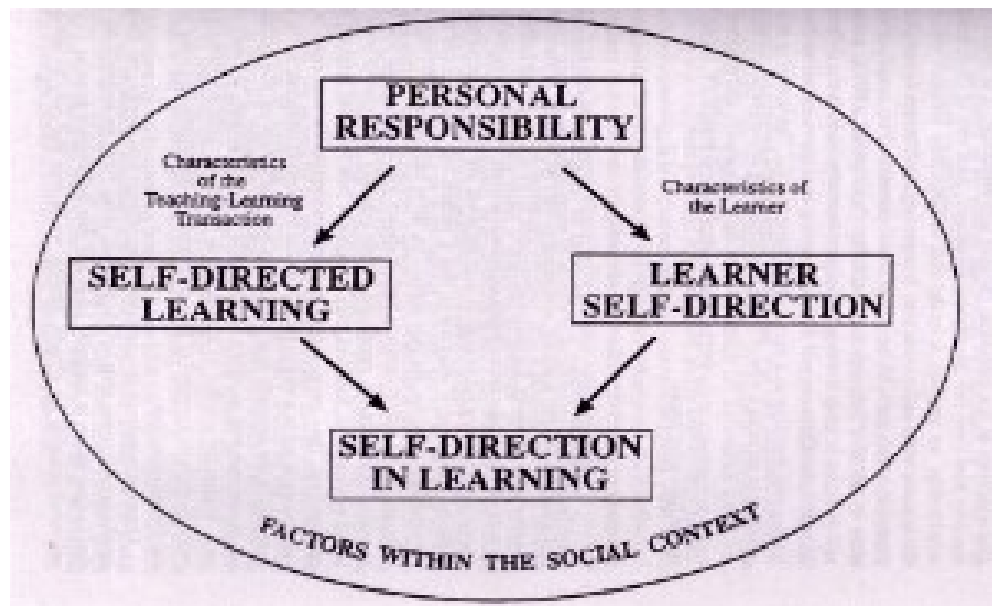
Digital narratives can encourage self-direction in learning as they encourage learners to create personalised narratives and to work individually on projects. To take ownership and responsibility for one's learning can be daunting and overwhelming but it can also be possibly empowering as Brockett and Hiemstra believe there is a strong connection between self-direction and self-concept. 'Self-direction in learning can be seen as a means, or a vehicle, by which individuals can more fully realize their greatest potential as human beings' (Brockett and Hiemstra, 1991, p. 122). As we have previously discussed, narratives can facilitate learners to explore and develop deeper levels and varying aspects of self and thus self-concept. Therefore narratives can be linked to self-direction in learning as they provide a personal and individualised means of self-development and self-understanding.

Creating agency

The creative processes of constructing digital narratives also develops the power of the voice of the individual and allows them to 'become heroes of their own learning stories,' (Ohler, 2006, p. 47). It is a participatory active practice by which the narrative is owned and authored by the individual and produces a product that can be consumed by an audience. No matter how large or small, that audience watches, listens, acknowledges and possibly reacts to the individual and what they have presented. Bruner describes this importance of interaction between 'the teller and the told' when he argues that the 'reality' of a life-story is a product of this interaction (Bruner, 1990, p.125). Lambert (2013, p.2) argues that by assuming authorship individuals can create 'agency in life and social interactions', which can lead to a cultural democracy for those involved.

Advocacy and agency are very important in the lives of people with disabilities, as outlined in chapter one. Digital narratives can be used as a tool of agency as they allow authorship which enables engagement in social and democratic interactions with audiences thus communicating lives, needs, wishes, desires, dreams. This in turn can lead to real changes in these areas in the lives of the authors. 'An important prerequisite for self-advocacy and empowerment is to acquire possibilities to present

yourself and to express what it means for you to lead a meaningful life', (Meininger, 2006, p.187). Digital narratives teach digital media skills pertaining to a digital media society.

Skills for the 21st Century

'Digital storytelling helps students become active participants rather than passive consumers in a society saturated with media,' (Ohler, 2006, p. 47). We are living in a social media society whereby active media participation is far more common than in the past. Media literacy skills are becoming the focus of attention from governments and policy makers, both nationally and internationally. The European Commission states that 'just as literacy was at the beginning of the twentieth century, media literacy is a key pre-requisite of the twenty-first century'(EC online overview of Media Literacy). They consider that media literacy skills are both necessary to, and promote active citizenship in today's information society.

From these recommendations, the Broadcasting Act of 2009 has provided space for promoting media literacy in Ireland under the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI). Under the official definition of media literacy, the act specifically addresses the 'processes by which individuals and communities can create and publish audio or audio-visual material by means of broadcast and related electronic media' (Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, 2009, p.15). This section of the definition, in particular, can apply to digital narratives and their contribution to media literacy.

> Digital stories provide powerful media literacy learning opportunities because students are involved in the creation and analysis of the media in which they are immersed. When students do the hard work of marrying story and technology to express themselves to others, they can see more clearly the persuasive nature of the electronic culture in which they live.
>
> <div align="right">(Ohler, 2006, p. 47)</div>

Brown, Byran and Brown (2005) have labeled associated skills as 'Twenty-first Century Literacy'. Examples of these skills are listed and defined below;

Digital literacy - the ability to communicate with an ever-expanding community to discuss issues, gather information, and seek help.

Technology literacy - the ability to use computers and other technology to improve learning, productivity, and performance.

Visual literacy - the ability to understand and produce visual images.

Information literacy - the ability to find, evaluate, and synthesize information.

These literacies add to the traditional written and numeric literacies meaning that new knowledge can evolve with this new means of narrative expression. The digital narratives provide a context for learning and generating knowledge as Lambert argues; 'inherent in this perspective is that these processes are learning environments, people understand themselves as not just sharing a story, but learning a technique or technology, and following the process forward to a completed product' (2013, p.42).

Limitations to the area as an emerging discipline

The area is not without its critics. While Lundby believes that 'this kind of digital storytelling is an emergent form and a new media practice, as well as a movement' (2008, p.367), Hartley and McWilliam also see digital narratives as an experiment in its development stages but with accompanying flaws. They observe these weaknesses under the following headings;

> as a *form*, it is too sentimental, individualistic, and naively unselfconscious;
> as a *practice*, the means of delivery are too teacher-centric, too caught up in institutional powers and structures;
> as a *movement*, its propagation and dissemination strategies are hopeless – most digital stories persist only as unused archive; and it has a very low profile on the Net, making little use of interactivity and social networking;
> as a *textual system*, the potential for "serious" work is underdeveloped –there is too much attention to self-expression; not enough to the growth of knowledge.
> (Hartley and McWilliam, 2009, p.14 - 15)

However the misgivings interpreted above do not mean that the area as a new discipline is inherently flawed or cannot develop and progress. I disagree strongly with their claim that there is not enough attention to the growth of knowledge. Self-expression is self-knowledge and much of the entire concept of digital storytelling is aimed stimulating thought, reflexivity, creativity and oftentimes agency, active citizenship and democracy. To dismiss it as not adding to knowledge I find their Positivist definition of knowledge limited and reductive.

Conclusion

This chapter outlines the context of where this research is placed in the area of disability in Ireland. It looks at the movement of policy from traditional institutional approaches connected block funding to a more person-centred planning approaches with individualised funding for people with disabilities. It looks at three key sections; learners with intellectual disability, self-learning though autobiography and the potential for digital narratives to generate learning. With these intersections of academic context in mind, as well as my own interests and experience in the storytelling of media production and theatre performance, I will examine non-formal learning spaces for people with intellectual disabilities, in order to facilitate creative methods of learning that might eventually contribute to autonomous contributions to personal planning.

In the next chapter the process of the design and development of the field research will be explained in detail and the findings arising from this will be outlined. Analysis of the findings in relation to the literature explored in this chapter will be in chapter five.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter my research philosophy and epistemological stance as a researcher will be established. I will give an explanation of my methodological framework, paying particular attention to the ethical considerations of my research as a significant amount time was spent planning and reflecting on this area.

Research philosophy

Due to the subjective and individualised nature of my research question I was not quite sure what this process would present. I felt that the process would be complex and broad and would present data that would not offer concrete solutions or answers. 'We cannot simply aggregate data in order to arrive at an overall 'truth'...post-positive researchers..recognise the complexity of the web of life and experience' (Ryan, 2006, p.19). As a result of this, a qualitative approach would be the most appropriate. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 3) 'qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.'

Pugach (2001) discusses Ferguson's take on researching disability and that our experience is socially constructed. Therefore our understanding of disability is developed within these constructions when we think we know what it is to be disabled or what makes a person disabled. Pugach argues that in order to make a positive and real impact with research in the area of improving the lives of this specific group qualitative research is a much more beneficial way of engaging and learning than quantitative methods. 'Qualitative research providing a structured means of giving voice to oppressed or marginalised groups' (Pugach, 2001, p. 442). But in dealing with an oppressed or marginalised group specific questions arise; how can we ensure that the power dynamics in research are mediated fairly? As researchers, we should ask

ourselves who will gain from our work and how? In reality the researcher will most probably gain more as they publish work or complete academic requirements for award and accreditation. However the power in a research relationship can be more evenly distributed if;

> Participants with learning difficulties stand to gain in power from the research process itself and to acquire new skills. Subsequently, empowered participants can also use the research findings to make changes in their lives
>
> (Walmsley and Johnson, 2003, p.34-35)

When choosing to enter into a research relationship with groups that are considered vulnerable or marginalised, or indeed with any subjective qualitative research, it is vital to give an honest and transparent account of the researcher's epistemological position.

Epistemological stance

Ryan states that (2006, p.18) 'investigating your own epistemologies and understanding how they affect you as a researcher is an essential part of the post-positivist approach.' Just as the research methods must reflect and suit the research topic, the methodology should represent the researcher as a person. There is much debate whether there is place for the personal 'I' or 'me' in research. For me, there is no extraction of the personal from my research. I am by nature an emotional and empathetic person. If I were to pursue a research topic and omit myself, my feelings, my emotion from the research it would not be a true representation of the connection between the researcher as a person, and the research. The researcher as a self is connected to a variety of other and co-existing selfs; myself as a woman, daughter, adult educator, citizen, colleague, friend etc. The researcher 'brings their fore-conception (prior experiences, assumptions, preconceptions) to the encounter, and cannot help but look at any stimulus in the light of their prior experience' (Smith, Larkin & Flowers, 2009, p. 25). However one must be aware of their pre-conceptions and practice reflexivity to ensure to listen and hear what is being said by those involved in the research.

Lived experience is subjective to the individual. I have always believed that there are not just two sides to every story but numerous facets and these depend on the

interpretations or recollections of people involved. I also firmly believe, from personal experience, that self-expression through narratives (both factual or fictional) leads to greater self-confidence and a sense of liberation arising from that expression. I have found that through my involvement in theatre, that a story and a character are a safe place to experiment with expression, feelings and emotion. For me it built confidence in negotiating painful and difficult experiences. It also can build empathy as you literally put yourself in someone elses shoes and sometimes you even begin to see aspect of your own life while in those shoes. The potential for learning and education in theatre however, is an area for separate research but my experience with it has lead me to believe in the power of narratives.

As mentioned above I believe that through narrative work, and with the self-reflection and increased self-confidence that arises, tools for driving change within one's own life or a situation can be manifested. This can lead to a transformation in self-perception or perception of the world around the person. The size or magnitude of the transformation is subjective to the person and the context of the situation. 'Adult development is seen as an adult's progressively enhanced capacity to validate prior learning through reflective discourse and to act upon the resulting insights' (Mezirow, 1991, p.7).

By outlining my epistemological stance I feel I have given an open and honest account to the reader of how I view the world and thus how this subjective view will examine the research. However there are pitfall and difficulties that can arise in trying to interpret someone else's interpretation of an experience or a situation or event or indeed even of themselves. How is it possible to maintain balance and a true representation of the information at hand. Perhaps there is no real truth only the individual's perception of the truth? 'A story is always an interpretive account; but, of course, all interpretations are biased' (Denzin, 1989, p. 74).

Methodological framework

Due to the structure of the research which involved designing and delivering workshops to a small group it would be most effective to examine the research from a

case study approach. The data set was complex in nature due to the variety of types of data gathered. It was difficult to choose a defined method that was appropriate, as much of the research I initially studied was based almost solely on in-depth one on one interviews. This method was not best suited to my research and the data analysis was more complex as a result. Case studies engage qualitative methods of examining what is happening in a particular context and what this means to the people involved. 'They are useful for examining levels of complexity that might otherwise be difficult to reveal' (Ryan, 2006, p. 71). Using a case study would allow for the different types of data gathered to be examined and explored in a full and deep way. This method usually involves the use of multiple data forms such as documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation, and physical artefacts. (Yin, 2009) In this research I have examined workshop transcripts, field notes and written observations, short semi-structured exit interviews and the content of the digital narratives.

Data collection

Data was collected in a variety of ways in keeping with the case study approach. Workshops were recorded on an audio recorder for transcription (with consent) and after each session observational field notes were recorded. Short, informal, semi-structured exit interviews contributed to the data, as well as the researcher's observations and descriptions of the content of the finished digital narratives. Collating these various forms of data allowed a depth of scope to examine the educational processes at work in the research. The data represented a dialogue of my observations a practitioner and the voices of the learners through what was said in the workshop transcriptions, exit interviews and their finished pieces.

Data analysis

'The fore-structure is always there, and it is in danger of presenting an obstacle to interpretation' (Smith et al, 2009, p.25). As stated earlier, qualitative research is undoubtedly influenced by the subjective epistemological stance of the researcher, however awareness and reflexivity on the part of the researcher can engage more

stringent practices of analysis as they suspend and challenge their own assumptions. In this research line by line coding was used on transcripts in an effort to reflect on a very 'busy' data set. Within a workshop setting multiple conversations are happening simultaneously. Some are talking, some are silent. In the initial coding attention was paid to the action, to what was happening as well as what was being said.

During the initial coding memos were made noting incidents where learning processes could be identified. The initial coding was descriptive and quite literally described the action and what was being discussed. Field notes were crossed checked with workshop transcripts to see if my observations from particular sessions could be enriched or discounted with transcripts. Detailed descriptions of the content of the finished narratives were also examined to generate and contribute to themes. After initial coding descriptive themes or patterns were identified and noted. These themes were then collapsed under slightly more abstract themes. These more abstract themes were then teased out to examine and analyse the essence or the motivating or influencing factor behind each theme to see if further patterns could be established. A table of themes arising from the photo content of the narratives which was generated using this process of analysis can be seen in chapter four. (Figure 2)

The researcher, the research question and existing literature are factors which contribute to the analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that to say that themes 'emerge' from data assumes a passivity on the behalf of the researcher in the selection of themes of interest. This assumed passivity misrepresents the active role of the researcher. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 82) 'a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set...more instances do not necessarily mean the theme is more crucial.' Themes were identified using thematic analysis which has six phases of procedure (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic maps were drawn and refined to generate and define the main named themes that are examined in detail in chapter four.

Ethical Considerations - the process

The ethical considerations of the research involved considering my role as a researcher and who my research was benefitting. It also meant following a practical process. Firstly the research project had to pass through the ethical guidelines of the university, and then the ethics committee of the organisation, who have very rigid guidelines built into their ethical practices surrounding research and the people who use their services. Once the project had passed through these filters, my major concern was the issue of informed consent of learners in the research.

I explored the area of proxy consent from a parent or guardian, however this did not fit with my epistemological stance as one of my philosophical underpinnings was the encouragement of autonomy and independence. 'The presumption should be of capacity rather than incapacity and this argues against seeking consent from proxies' (National Federation of Voluntary Bodies, 2008, p.2). To seek proxy consent from a parent or guardian would take the power, control and agency from the person to make the decision for themselves and this decision to avoid proxy consent was carefully considered. The Council of Europe warn that 'a measure of protection should not result automatically in a complete removal of legal capacity' (National Federation of Voluntary Bodies, 2008, p.5). Parents, however, were included in the decision making as letters explaining the project was sent to parents and guardians from both myself and the director of services within the organisation. These have not been included in the appendices as they have identifying details as to the geographical location of the project which can threaten the anonymity of the learners.

By choosing to seek consent from the person themselves meant that consent forms and information about the research project needed to be clear in a way that was accessible to the learner. Significant time was spent researching ways to construct accessible literature for people with intellectual disabilities. The construction of consent forms took a considerable amount of time and a number of redrafts in order to meet college ethical standards but more importantly to meet the learners' needs in order to give their informed consent.

Ultimately the person themselves gave their consent and consent forms were constructed in an accessible format similar to the information leaflets. (Appendix 2). Other ethical considerations were also given considerable attention. Anonymity was crucial. No identifying names, or geographical locations have been used. Data storage needed to be secure in keeping with the practices of the organisation and confidentiality agreements were signed. The learners were given memory sticks for a number of reasons but one was to ensure complete ownership and safekeeping of personal data such as photos and the projects in progress. This meant that as the researcher I had no access to personal data outside of workshop time. The finished DVDs were the intellectual property of each learner and again I did not keep any copies of these. Any of the data collected on the narratives themselves is made from transcriptions of workshops and from field notes and observations of content. Learners were told that they could keep a copy of their project on their file in the organisation for personal planning purposes but that sharing their narrative was optional.

With the methods employed in the course of qualitative research there is much social interaction between the researcher and the learners in interviews, focus groups, case studies etc. It is important to maintain sincerity and congruence in these connections and interactions. However while empathy and emotions are sometimes part of authenticity it is also extremely important to exercise boundaries and reflexivity on the part of the researcher. In order to create a safe, authentic and productive research environment I had to examine my role in the group. Understanding the researcher's context and role can diffuse or at least raise consciousness when it comes to power relationships. (Corbin Dwyer, & Buckle, 2009)

An incident
In the initial stages of the research I had a confrontational encounter with a parent of a potential member of the learning group. This parent's concern was that I was the only person who was benefitting from the research and that I was trying to exploit people with disabilities for my own gain. I was asked 'Why do you want to research people

with disabilities? Why not go and do your research with someone else?'. My initial reaction was almost defiant. Why shouldn't people with disabilities be included in research in education? They are entitled to contribute to the body of knowledge around education from their perspective as learners. However it is extremely important to acknowledge that any concern or question raised about the researcher's ethics or the motivations of the research project are valid and must be listened to respectfully and appropriately addressed.

This encounter made it even more explicitly clear that there are huge ethical considerations that come with working with any group of people who are considered vulnerable or marginalised. I understand that any parent wants the best for their child and goes to every effort to protect them. Yet I felt that these considerations should not discourage research with people who are considered vulnerable or marginalised from happening. There is also a statement used globally within the disability movement which states 'Nothing about us without us' which was part of the reason I was choosing to work with the learners themselves.

As a new researcher I was nervous about ensuring transparency of the process and upholding high ethical standards. This encounter with a parent did make me question and reflect critically on my motivations as a researcher and as an educator but also as a human being with even further scrutiny. The interaction affected me emotionally and personally, which gave me some insight into the emotional aspect of qualitative research which is subversive but prevalent. Seear and McLean (2008) talk of this hidden emotional labour and the internalised stress that it can cause a researcher who feels weak or wrong for experiencing emotions as a direct result of the research. Eventually, what I did take from the experience was an even deeper understanding of the complexities of research in this area. My epistemological stance was re-examined and reinforced as result of being questioned and challenged. It also caused me to place even more value on the vital importance of building strict ethical practices into the process. I was not discouraged to pursue the research as I felt that in the planning I had

significantly addressed the ethics of my research and my methodology and these personal values and ethics as a researcher were being upheld.

'A central tenant of ethical considerations about involving vulnerable groups in research is their protection from exploitation and harm...[which runs the risk of] non-inclusive and discriminatory decisions by institutional ethics committees' (Iacono, 2006, p. 173). By protecting people from potential exploitation you run the risk of disenfranchising them even further by not allowing a method or means for their contribution to be made and heard. Certainly it would have been easier for me to conduct my research with a group of learners to whom less sensitive ethical considerations were attached. But I felt and feel very strongly about the rights of *all* learners and their right to contribute and be heard. I wanted the research to be a mutually beneficial process whereby this group of learners would learn new skills in a new area. As a result, their learning, in this research, would contribute to the existing body of knowledge and also perhaps connect the areas of learning disability and digital narratives in a new and practical way that would have actualised benefits for the learners involved.

Limits to the study

There are undoubtedly limits with a small scale case study such as this. The findings of the research are bedded in the context of the learning group, learning environment and the interpretations of the researcher at that particular time. It can be argued that the findings are *only* relevant to the context. But yet there is much that can be learned even within the remits of a specified context. As stated earlier post-positivist based research does not attempt to solve, fix or generalise. It is an exploration and a figuring out of how and why. However Ryan argues that 'generalisability is present in any single case, that is, every individual is representative in some way of the social' (Ryan, 2006, p. 71). I feel that with more time for the workshops more attention would have been given to group critical and reflective thinking activities to generate further discussion as highlighted by one of the learners as important. 'More talking'. I felt the study opened the lid on a layered and complex process of learning that could benefit from further

development. The study was also limited by technical resources with regularly occurring computer and internet problems.

Conclusion

I have outlined the background to my research philosophy and my personal values and epistemological stance as a researcher. I have approached the research from a post-positivist viewpoint with a focus on a case-study qualitative approach. Beginning this research I did not know how the learning process would transpire. I had a limited period of time to observe what learning would occur in the group. I read and reviewed related literature and planned as best I could but all the preparation in the world could not have told me what was going to happen in that time. 'The post-positivist researcher assumes a learning role rather than a testing one' (Agar, 1988, p. 12). This learning is outlined in chapters four, the process of the research and the findings and in chapter five, discussion.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROCESS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

As previously stated my interest in the area of learning for adults with intellectual disabilities began with my involvement in a supportive role to a student in an inclusive learning initiative at third level. Having also taught practical production modules in television and radio at third level I was engaged in a teaching and learning dynamic in this digital capacity. These personal interests raised a number of possible research questions about how people with intellectual disabilities might use digital narratives for self learning. What would this engagement with digital production mean for a learner with intellectual disabilities? What was the anticipated learning? What were the potential benefits for the learner? What was I hoping to learn from the research and how would I facilitate field research in order to explore these questions? These questions helped to shape and refine my research question and the design of the field research itself.

The process

I approached a large voluntary organisation for people with intellectual disabilities that I had volunteered with in the past to see if my research proposal would be of interest to them and the people using their services. They were interested in the digital narrative approach that I was proposing to take as they felt it was a new and innovative way of generating a reflective and critical thought process. They were also interested in the layers of learning potential that the overall process may have for people using their services.

Following the approval of the research proposal from their internal ethics committee, the sampling process began. Easy to read, accessible information leaflets (Appendix 1) on the project were circulated throughout the day centres of the organisation. I also had access to meet key workers and people availing of day services as a way of introducing

myself and to answer any initial questions about the project. This began to build up a rapport with people who may express interest in being part of the group. This also meant that upon application and interview that we would have already met and that the interested person would feel more comfortable talking to me.

People were invited to email an expression of interest to be part of the workshops. In this way the sample group were self-selecting. Any emails that were sent by others such as key-workers on behalf of an interested person were asked to reapply on their own behalf. This was to ensure that the interest came directly from the person themselves. Sending this email also displayed a necessary familiarity with computers.

The research was structured as a series of eight weekly two hour workshops. The time was limited to eight weeks for a variety of reasons. Firstly the structure of the MEd programme does not facilitate lengthy field research. Also the consideration of the research proposal by the ethics committee in the organisation took time. Once approved, the work prior to beginning the workshops such as visiting day centres, meeting potential group members, interviews, consent forms etc all needed to be approached in an unrushed way so as not to put pressure on people making decisions about their involvement. In order to allow writing and completion of the overall research piece within university submission dates it was necessary to limit the research in the workshops themselves to eight weeks. With other learning groups, if time was an issue, intensive weekend workshops could have been held as Lambert (2013) does for his Digital Storytelling workshops. However with this particular group of learners intensive days would not be suitable as regular breaks were needed. Thus I felt a longer spread across eight weeks with shorter two hour workshops was the most appropriate style of delivery in this context.

The workshops themselves were held in a local community centre computer room which was not part of the organisation. This was to encourage participation in community spaces outside of day centres. If we are looking to inclusivity in community life then it is useful to begin to move away from organisational structures and facilities

and encourage the use and access of public spaces. The choice of venue was specifically influenced by this. In the workshops we used the Windows Movie Maker program on the PCs to create the narratives. By using this type of free software we were able to hold the workshops in the community computer room as this software is available on all PCs. This did not limit our choice of venue or location to a specialist editing lab and allowed us to use existing facilities in the community. The use of free software also meant that the learners could transfer their new skills from workshops into their lives outside of our time together and could use the same software on computers at home or in their day centre. The choice of software also aimed to create a sustainability of knowledge and a skills transfer. In this way, I hoped that the learning would not be isolated and apply only in the context of our time together.

Fourteen interested parties came for interview with the researcher and a supervising staff member. There were selection criteria which included; familiarity with computers; ability to communicate; access to computers and support outside of workshops; enthusiasm about the project; commitment to the workshops; anticipated benefit to the learner; and understanding of the course & project. I will now expand on the reasons behind the different criteria.

It was necessary due to the limited timeframe of the project that learners had used computers before and were reasonably comfortable with them. It was also important that they had access to a computer and support outside of the workshops to complete any gathering of resources between workshops. Their ability to communicate was important as it was necessary that they would be able to engage with the group. This communication was not based solely on verbal ability but instead an engagement with others and ability to reasonably sustain that engagement.

How the person viewed and valued their potential involvement in the project was also a determining factor. Due to the timeframe of the research it was important that the person was willing to commit to the project. Their availability within their existing weekly schedule was a deciding factor as a suitable time and day had to be coordinated.

The anticipated benefit to the learner was a subjective criteria based on how the person viewed the project and also on what was going on in their lives at that time. The interviewing staff member was able to give supplementary information about the person's life and their involvement with the services which contributed to this criteria. Their understanding of the project and the research was also extremely important from an ethical perspective as mentioned in chapter three.

When people were invited to be part of the final group, informed consent became a large focus before beginning the workshops. It was extremely important that each member of the group was fully aware and understood their role in the research. Once the final group had been decided I went to meet each person to talk through the consent forms and again to build up the relationship and rapport with the person. I felt that by giving time to the relationship with each person it would make the initial workshop a more comfortable and informal environment for the learner. I felt that this was an important aspect of the work prior to the workshops for these reasons. The final group consisted of seven members; myself, a supporting staff worker, three male and two female of the applicants from the services. Four of the group were ages 19-25 and one group member over 35. All group members had mild/moderate intellectual disabilities and availed of day support services within the organisation. All learners lived in the family home.

Initially time was spent in group discussions exploring the interests, like, dislikes and goals of the learners. The first few sessions were aimed at getting to know each other and also for learners to get to know themselves better by reflecting on, thinking about and communicating information about themselves. The support worker and I were also involved in this 'getting to know you' process so to build further relationships of trust within the group and to share ourselves just as we had asked others to share in the learning environment. This involvement and sharing aimed to make the dynamic between tutor and students less formal and engage more as individuals and create a desirable learning climate. (Gregory and Chapman, 2007).

We then progressed to learning computer skills and navigating the software. Time was split in the workshops between learning computer skills, group discussion around planning content and work to be done for the following week. In these planning discussions we explored, discussed and decided on things that learners wanted to include in their narratives. Goals were set to source or take a picture of that particular thing for the following week to include in the narratives. The narratives were built upon weekly by this layering of components and gradually photos, music and text came together to amount to the finished product. The finished narratives were burned onto DVDs and given to each group member. The final workshop was used a screening of the DVDs, whereby we watched, celebrated and acknowledged the work done, conducted informal exit interviews and formally closed the group and the project.

Findings and themes

The main findings reveal a number of aspects of self learning through autobiographical digital narrative that were in evident in the data. The key aspects of the learning are presented below under the headings:

> *relationships and support networks*
> *independence and transition*
> *self-direction and ownership of learning*
> *creation and presentation of stories of self*

Relationships and support networks

One aspect of self learning through autobiographical digital narrative that was revealed in the data was that students were able to express their relationships to others through the process. In the field research relationships played a role in social interactions in the group and peer learning. Relationships that were important to individuals also featured strongly in the content of the finished digital narratives. The narratives had photos of family, friends and in some cases people that they worked with. All of the learners in the group lived in the family home and family featured strongly in the narrative pieces. There were varying pictures of immediate family, extended family and the individual

photographed at home with family members. Tom had a favourite Aunt who he saw everyday and their relationship featured prominently in his narrative.

Relationships often play a vital role as part of a supportive network for people, not just those with intellectual disabilities but for all individuals. For example, looking at my own life, when I think of this research process I have a significant number of supportive relationships, both personal and professional,that have greatly enhanced my learning throughout. As discussed in chapter two Sanderson (2000) acknowledges the importance of using support networks effectively to bring about independence in people's lives. Another dimension of their relationships that were important for their self learning in the digital narrative workshops were peer relationships.

Peer learning

In an educational context, relationships with fellow students or classmates can aid learning as 'the strongest single source of influence on cognitive and affective development is a student's peer group' (Zepre & Leach, 2006, p. 512). This was evident in the workshops when two group members worked together in order to add writing to one group member's piece. On tape Nathan can be heard asking the types of questions that allowed Niall to make choices, 'What would you like to put on this one?', 'What would you like to say about this one?' Nathan repeated things that Niall said to ensure that it was correct. Niall gernerally preferred to work and interact on a one-to-one basis. However in this case it was with a fellow student rather than a facilitator or key worker so social interaction and learning was occurring as a result of peer relationships. Another learner commented that the group were helpful.

> RH - And how did they help you?
> Ann - Every way, if I got stuck they'll probably come over and help me or that.

It can be seen from the examples above that in the group the students supported each other in their learning. This shows that the learners can also be teachers to each other and thus have much to contribute to a teaching and learning environment. Learners with intellectual disabilities typically tend to be supported by a special needs assistant

in a classroom or learning environment. But in this case fellow students provided extra support that may have been needed. Peer learning can also contribute to self-direction in learning as there is a shift from a reliance on the tutor or special needs assistant to the support of fellow students. This was also the case with group dynamics which served to support the students in creating their digital narratives and self revelatory learning

The group

One of my main aims for our time together as a group was to create a fun, friendly and positive environment in order to encourage interaction and informal discussion in the group. Literature in disability studies argue that good relationships with empathetic key workers and volunteers who make an effort to listen and get to know the person are important qualities (Kroese, Rose, Heer & O'Brien, 2013, p. 26). These traits of sincerity and congruence are also valued in adult education. (Rogers, 1966)

The group itself, was a learning environment and membership of the group provided social interaction, peer learning and a learning space to use and engage with as they wished. Thus the group could be considered a valuable educational resource for these reasons. In adult and community education, group work is typically favoured as a valuable facilitation and teaching method, due to a potential for a collaborative sharing of knowledge and a supportive environment and relationships. As an educator, I would have agreed with this and mainly use group work in my practice.

However Niall's relationship with the group was interesting to me. He preferred to sit away from the others during tea break. In a group activity involving story cubes (dice with pictures printed on them) whereby each person rolled the dice and told something to the group about themselves inspired by the picture on the dice, Niall began coughing badly and ended up having to leave the room with the support worker. I later learned that this is a coping mechanism used to avoid situations which cause discomfort. The incident made me rethink the emphasis that I had placed on the positives of group work and its use in my practice. I realised as a result of this incident that a person can still be

an active member of the group and maintain a relationship with the group in a learning environment while engaging at a level that is comfortable for them as a learner.

In the following session I gave Niall the choice of working on his own project or to join the others for a planning activity. He chose to work by themselves and did so quite happily for the duration of the workshop. I felt it was important learning for me in my role as facilitator to make Niall feel part of the group while still recognising, respecting and facilitating his need to work alone at times.

Tea breaks also played an important part in forming relationships within the group. This was a relaxed way of getting to know each other and also to allow for learners' needs for breaks. Entire group tea breaks became less towards the end of the project with time constraints and some group members commented on this and missed the designated break. Towards the end group members would go for a cup of tea in smaller groups and took it upon themselves to build in their own breaks when they needed or when they had time during the workshops. This to me demonstrated social interaction within the group as some would decide to go for tea together while others worked. It also illustrated a sense of self-direction in setting a personal agenda for the workshops by taking breaks when needed but also at appropriate times in the progression of work on their project. The students generally came back to their work in their own time and never had to be called back in.

 In the exit interview Emma commented that she would have liked 'talking more' with group members. Even though Emma's verbal communication skills were not at the same level as others, she enjoyed the social aspect and group discussions around the table. She identified 'talking in the group' as her favourite element to the entire project. The discussions and chats with peers in the group was beneficial for sharing and learning about how others see their own lives and the world. Social interaction in the group also gave the learners an opportunity to hear and see the lives and experiences of others. Lambert (2013) uses a more formalised approach called 'The Story Circle' to

allow for the development of individuals stories and for others to listen, learn and offer feedback on these. This sharing and collaboration develops the intimacy of the group even further, by building on the initial rapport and can encourage a discourse in the group around the projects outside of facilitator lead activities.

With this set of learners, the Story Circle concept was adapted to accommodate the diversity of the group and the needs of its learners. The concept was broken down into steps over the course of the workshops. People were not expected from the onset to have an exact idea of what they wanted to include in their narratives. It was shaped layer by layer over the weeks. However the concept of sharing of ideas and stories remained and it required individuals to participate in and contribute to the shared learning environment. For group discussions about likes and dreams and hobbies etc we sat around a table and all group members including the tutor and support worker contributed to discussions. By sharing in this way we learned much about each other as individuals but also how to listen to and engage with others in a group learning environment. Each person had an opportunity to contribute as little or as much as they wished to group discussions but yet all were equally involved in the group by their presence and their listening and acknowledgement of what others were saying. In this way the students were learning to *be* in a group.

In the short exit interviews the overall experience of the group as a unit was evaluated positively among learners. 'Yeah I don't mind working in a group like, it's actually great fun'. 'The group is fantastic...very happy, excited. Sometimes don't like talking'. So for this group member, even though they didn't always verbally communicate in the group, being part of the group itself was an enjoyable experience. Ann had mixed emotions about the workshops coming to a close as she didn't want it to end and had preferred working in the group setting than by herself. Niall postponed his holidays by a day to come to the last workshop as it was important to him. To counter any acquiescence in evaluating the group, I asked additional questions such as 'Can you tell me then what you liked about the group?' and 'item-reversal techniques' (Prosser, Bromley, 1998, p. 104) to attempt to cross-check the information. These techniques

gathered some supplementary information but nothing to contradict their initial responses.

During the course of the workshops my supervising facilitator within the organisation reported 'I have met a few of the guys *[group members]* here in the offices and all have been enjoying it!'. Upon completion of the workshops my supervising facilitator also reported that the support worker who had been part of the group 'felt that it was a really positive experience for everyone who took part and challenged them to think more in terms of their goals etc.' This information, informally relayed through a third party source, from some of the learners and also the support worker, added an extra dimension to collaborate the data gathered in the exit interviews about their enjoyment and positive experience of the group as a unit.

Why does it matter that the learners enjoyed the group? Their enjoyment of the group is not simply a validation of my practice as an educator. Gregory and Chapman stress the need for bonding between students and also with tutors in order to foster an inclusive and thus 'positive learning community'(2007, p. 3). If the learning environment i.e. the group is a space that learners feel happy, safe and it is enjoyable, the climate of the learning space is then more conducive to meeting the basic needs of the learner as a human being which can encourage learning without fear.

> This establishes the state of "flow"...the condition that exists when learners are so engaged, excited about learning, challenged, and receiving appropriate feedback that they are oblivious to anything else. Students are at their most productive and most creative in this state.
>
> (Gregory and Chapman, 2007, p. 4)

The group provided a learning space which served as a forum to explore self-learning and an environment in which to reveal information about themselves as learners. The group was also a supportive resource in the creation of their individual digital narratives. This supportive network complimented their existing supportive relationships with family and friends.

Family and friends

Relationships with family and friends, in both the day services and in the wider community, can provide invaluable resources in supporting the individual in living the life they choose. The WHO conceived community-based rehabilitation model looks upon support networks and relationships in the lives of adults with intellectual disabilities as being of utmost importance to living an integrated independent life away from institutional settings (Barnes and Mercer, 2010, p. 262). McClean (2011, p. 11) states that according to an Irish study of people with intellectual disabilities who were unhappy with their current services and wanting to move, 'the strongest predictor of whether or not people moved to the life of their choosing was actually not money, but relationships'. Thus supportive relationships to a person with intellectual disabilities are a very important and influential factor in their lives and this was reflected in their narratives.

McClean (date unknown) states that 'disability requires connectedness.' This 'connectedness' was important for the learners in the group and this was evident from group discussions and the narratives themselves. The finished narratives were particularly useful in indicating the importance of relationships in the lives of these learners. There were many photos of family, friends and staff who, by their inclusion, were determined by the learners as key or important people in their lives. The workshops also often involved conversations about and around these key people. It was clear from the numerous conversations in the workshops that relationships were intricate in the fabric of the lives of the learners. There are too many examples to list but the evidence of many photos in the finished narratives supports this claim.

 Maintaining these relationships was also important to these learners and many relied on social technology to support this connectedness. Skype, Facebook and mobile phones kept them in contact with family members who were overseas or away from the family home, as well as friends. Yvonne talked regularly to her brother in Australia on Skype as did Tom to his sister. 'I enjoy playing on my mobile phone and texting my

brother and calling other people' (Nathan). Mobile phones and other social technology afforded an independence of connection with the important people in their lives.

So in summary, a key finding about relationships is that autobiographical digital narratives aid students in learning to reveal information about themselves by allowing them to discuss their relationships thorough the digital medium. The overarching theme of relationships permeated the entire process of the research from initial meetings and introductions right through to the finished narratives pieces. Relationships in this context can also relate to support networks. From an educational perspective relationships played an important role in this learning environment for students. Peer relationships in this space were supportive, assistive and aided learning. The student's relationship to the group was also part of the overall learning arising from the field research, as they learned to be a part of the group in the learning environment.

Independence and transition
Pushing boundaries to gain independence and make autonomous choices is a natural progression in almost all stages in human development. Most people have a very innate need and desire to make choices about what they do and how they do it, which is personal and individual to them. In the context of the research and the literature explored in chapter two it is can be said that adults with intellectual disabilities would like to live as independent lives as possible. They do not want to be segregated and grouped away from their local communities.

There was evidence of desires to push for further independence among learners. All of the group members lived in the family home. There was a very definite pattern in discussions that occurred in the workshops around pushing boundaries and limits for greater independence, especially with some of the younger members of the group. There was evidence of turning of age related desires and topics arose such as moving out, going to college, going away for a weekend or a holiday. Nathan recalls the first time he went away for the weekend with a group of friends. 'It was good to get away

from Mum and Dad.' Two other members of the group said they would like to have their own house. Nathan associated having his own house with being able to do the things that his parents wouldn't let him do at the moment, such as going to college.

> I'd love to go to college. That's a big thing. But I suppose I have to get older a little bit and you know when I have my own house and I can actually go to college coz Mum and Dad won't let me at the moment.

Learning to drive also arose in some of the narratives, especially among the males. They wanted to sit their theory test and learn to drive. In one workshop Ann spoke of her dream for her mother to pass her driving test as it would mean they could go places together, as they lived quite far from of the closest towns. Driving represented further independence and freedom of movement in their lives.

Social technology featured again as a positive contribution to independence as mobile phones provided safety in the area of mobility and freedom of movement. This is turn enabled the person to be more independent. Important numbers were on speed dial such as home, key-worker, other support workers etc. Having numbers on speed dial highlighted how supportive simple technology can be in facilitating independence with considerations for personal safety. Jobs or places of work featured in most narratives. These were both current and dream jobs. Some people were paid for their jobs. Others were involved in different unpaid projects or activities in the community where they were helping out on a weekly basis. Jobs involve a taking on of responsibility and commitment which again indicated transitional themes towards independence.

The theme of independence and transition incorporate a variety of descriptive sub themes that arose from the data, in particular through conversations in the workshops but also from the content of the narratives. They are as illustrated above such as going away, living independently, college, jobs, driving etc. The right to live and exist in a manner which the individual chooses applies to these various aspects of a life. Independence does not necessarily mean being given a carte blanche to do whatever one wants. But if a person strongly expresses a desire to explore a specific activity or experience they have the right to follow through and explore new things with whatever

supports they may need. In this group the learners highlighted areas of their lives where they would like to explore new things. They wanted to engage in new experiences. They were not expressing a need or a want for people to do things for them. They wanted to do things for themselves. In part, this research hoped to teach new skills in the creation of digital narratives, as a means to express those desires in a way that would communicate clearly, strongly and effectively to others. In this way their engagement with their learning and their personal digital narratives was an important aspect of the research as it could serve as a means to communicate the desire for further independence in their lives.

Self-direction and ownership of learning

From the very beginning the learners in the group displayed a propensity for self-direction in their own learning when they emailed their expression of interest. This initial contact set the tone for taking ownership of their learning from the outset. This tone of ownership also continued throughout the project on a conceptual vein as they were making individualised pieces about themselves. Therefore they as learners had to direct the course of their learning in the creation of their personal narratives. They were responsible for choosing what was included in the narratives from the photos to the music to the text and they made personal and deliberate choices about these elements. The level at which they engaged with and took ownership of their pieces varied from learner to learner. Some learners were happy and preferred to work by themselves at the computers editing their narratives. They asked for help and direction when they needed it. Others waited to be told what to do.

'Me own dongle'

Memory sticks were also given to each person in the group so that they could store photos and their project as we worked weekly. One learner expressed especial excitement in the ownership of the memory stick, 'I'm just excited I've got me own dongle.' The memory sticks were formatted to be labelled with the person's name which furthered the implication of ownership. This also meant that when it came to locating the memory sticks on the computer screen it allowed ease of familiarity as,

while literacy levels varied in the group, each could recognise their own name. There was a responsibility on each group member to bring the sticks each week to the workshops in order to work on their projects. The memory sticks represented an ownership of their work and also reflected their commitment and engagement to their overall learning in keeping them safe and bringing them weekly. As previously discussed there was also an ethical dimension attached to this ownership as it meant that I had no access to projects or personal photos outside of the workshops and they were not saved on public computers in the community space. This upheld the view that the projects were exclusively the intellectual property of the individual as was considered in planning stages under ethical considerations.

Planning and gathering

In planning activities learners were asked to take photos in their daily lives of thing that they liked doing or that were important to them and bring them to the following workshop. This displayed ownership of the process and a linking and interactive flow between activities within the learning environment to outside daily life and then back to the learning environment again. All gathered personal photos, some took many and some took very little. One group member commented in their exit interview that taking photos was their favourite part of the process. The gathering of photos allowed the learners to take ownership of their own involvement and engagement with their narratives to a level that they wished.

At the end of the workshops the support worker informally pointed out that asking service users to carry out tasks for the following week is not always followed through by them. The support worker also commented on the high level of engagement by the group in their projects, the workshops and their own learning which was illustrated by their commitment to the gathering of their photos and music. Nathan attributed formality and importance to the workshops referring to it as 'my course' and expressed frustration for others disturbing his learning when seeing a missed call on his phone. 'I don't like when people are ringing me during my course'. To him the workshops were

a learning environment which held similar status to a college course and asserted his position as a learner and student.

Recognising the learners' work

Each person closed the workshops with a DVD. Their finished pieces were a solid tangible *thing* that was a product of their work during our time together. There was no award of official certification or results, however it was important to acknowledge each person's work and contributions in a way that was celebratory and ceremonial in its own right. We held a screening and watched each narrative on a big screen and held a small party afterwards. The DVDs in covers printed with their names and the name of their project were then presented to each participant. This formalised and acknowledged their contributions to the workshop and also their contributions to their own learning. The DVD was a concrete connection to the key aspect of how digital narratives had contributed to the self-learning and self-presentation that had arisen through the process of their creation.

Creation and presentation of stories of self

At the very beginning of the workshops I showed the group a digital narrative about myself. It was composed of pictures of some things I liked to do and some things that I would like to do in the future, a song and some brief on-screen text. The group were able to tell a lot about me as a person from watching the piece. In the next workshop I showed a different digital narrative which had quite a lot of text on screen as well as a voiceover corresponding to the writing on-screen. The narrative was based around an event that had happened in a girl's life. However with this particular example they were not able to describe or tell as much information. The structures were different. My piece was based on things and activities, solid quantifiable nouns. The other example was based around an event, similar to a short story structure with more reference to abstract nouns such as feelings and emotions. By offering these different examples to the group and talking about them it was clear that a less layered structure with no voiceover might work best with this particular group.

The elements of the digital narratives

In the workshops the digital narratives made by the learners consisted of three elements - pictures, music and text. Each were added at different stages of the process culminating in a layered text of which each component had its own merits and significance. Given the media literacy skills of the group members, I felt using digital tools to collate pictorial representations of an individual and their life and experiences, was a more age-appropriate and skilled means of composing the self-narratives as opposed to a scrapbook or collage. Scrapbooking can be a very useful means of collecting and communicating information or stories; however in an age of social media; Youtube, Facebook, etc, using digital tools to compose stories about ourselves afforded us a richer narrative text with layers of music and a finished product that has the potential for copying and sharing as the author wished.

Photos constituted the main component of the text of the narrative. Some were personal photos that had been brought in from home or had been taken after planning activities for the project. Some were pictures from internet searches used to represent something that was important to the author. The photo choices were made by the individual. Each person's finished piece represented sections of their lives that were individual to them and through getting to know the learners more, the pictures held a deeper level of information for me as a researcher. However to someone on a less involved level the pictures still told or conveyed knowledge or information about the person.

Photos are 'good'

In the first workshop after watching my digital narrative one learner, Emma, commented on the pictures saying 'they know what it is...it's easier'. In the exit interview interview she said that the pictures were 'good'. The transcript from our interview encapsulates the dynamic of how Emma communicates and how difficult it is for her, sometimes to be understood by others.

> RH - Why is that good for you?
> Emma- Nobody knows what I say to them.
> RH - Nobody else…?
> Emma - Yeah.

RH - Ok we'll try that again coz I'm not hearing am I? I need to listen more.
Emma- Yeah!
RH - So pictures are good for you because….
Emma - Everyone knows what I say.
RH - Everyone knows what you want to say?
Emma- Yeah.

Later in the interview Emma said that she would like to make another digital narrative with photos of her 'walk' (route) through the town - 'which way I go'. Emma has mobility issues and travels around the local town independently but not easily. 'Yeah, it's a hard one'. Lundby believes that 'self-representation in digital storytelling may build competence and media literacy through informal learning in mediation or mediatization processes' (2008, p.364). Emma's relationship with pictures was influenced by the need or desire to use them to aid communication in order to mediate her life and personal experiences to others.

For the members of the group who had higher levels of verbal communication the pictures were not essential for their communication of self but they did help. One learner commented 'Probably both ways, I wouldn't mind either way' but said later on 'Coz sometimes when I'm trying to say something then it's a lot better with pictures. They'll understand it better'. Their need for the use of pictures could be argued reflects their ability to verbally communicate.

Music choices
The music that learners picked added another dimension to their personal narratives. The music choices, to me, were some of the more surprising elements of the narratives that stood out as encapsulating and representing each learner in a way that was extremely personal to them. I was surprised to experience the addition of the music to be as powerful a means of communication as it was. In all of the pre-workshop interviews the learners had mentioned music as one of the things they liked.

In the group their songs were chosen for a variety of reasons. Some were by favourite artists representing aesthetic and individualised tastes, some had emotional meaning

attached. For example, one learner chose their late grandfather's favourite song. Another learner chose a pop song that was played at their graduation ceremony from school. Another chose a lively song that made reference to their home county representing their love for the place. This learner often spoke of their home county and said things like 'Up *[county]*'. It was a large part of this learner's identity and made this very clear, both in how they self-identified and how they self-presented others. The addition of music added another layer to the richness of the narrative and I observed that when learners watched their projects back for the first time with both pictures and music they were visibly pleased with the results of the combination.

Giving context - adding text

As a way of adding more information to the construction of narratives most of the group added some text or captions to their pieces. They gave their narratives titles such as 'Myself', 'My Life'. The text gave context to the photos and offered information identifying family members, friends and in some cases, pets. It also gave additional information on activities such as jobs and hobbies. Text was not used on every picture but on ones selected by learners. Writing and spelling was supported as literacy levels varied in the group. On one learners's first photo of a person cupping their ear in a listening action, they had included the caption 'Listen to me', which was interesting as this particular learner needed time and space to verbally communicate. Also one of the underpinnings of the project was to move away from the need for articulated verbal communication of information and more towards non-traditional modes.

Themes arising from photo content

The digital narratives were complex pieces to analyse as they were individualised pieces, a subjective representation of the person and contained much information. However there were patterns and similarities that occurred in the narratives collectively. The content from the photos were analysed by noting photos of people, things or activities that occurred in two or more of the narratives. These were translated to descriptive themes which described the person/place/thing that the photo represented. These descriptive themes consisted of examples such as own house, going

away for weekends, driver theory test, a job, family members, friends, pets, horse-riding, art, baking, music, concerts etc. They are listed in the table below. (Figure 2) These descriptive themes were then grouped under more abstract and overarching themes interpreted by the researcher. In summary there were three main overarching themes arsing from the content of the digital narratives section of the data set. These were interpreted from the descriptive themes; independence, relationships and leisure. Some of the descriptive themes fell under two overarching abstract themes and thus connected them. Two of these main themes, independence and relationships, also contributed to observations from other elements of the data set and thus the overall key findings emerging from the entire teaching and learning process.

Figure 2 - Table of themes from photo content of narratives.

Abstract theme	Descriptive themes	Photos of -
Independence	Own house	House
	Going to college	Classroom
	Going away	Hotel
		Planes
		Holidays
		Car
	Driving	Tractor
		At work
	Job	Helping out
Independence	Social Technology	Mobile phone
Relationships		Facebook
		Computer games
	Leisure technology	Internet
Leisure		
Relationships	Relationships	Family
		Friends
		Keyworkers
		Animals/pets
Leisure	Art	Doing art
	Swimming	Swimming pool
	Horse-riding	Horse-riding
	Baking	Cakes/buns
	Sports matches	Sport
	Music	Concerts
		CDs
		In the community radio station
		Favourite singers

In summary a key aspect of the self-learning through the process of creating digital narratives were the narratives themselves as a product or a piece. Lambert (2013) focuses on 'process over product' and the narratives created represented the individuals' learning process and were representations of self. However the narratives also presented and demonstrated different types of learning such as self-learning, new computer skills, creative and artistic editing skills, narrative construction skills. The narratives communicated information about the learners in a way that was new for them.

There was also an element of contribution to the shared learning space as we played each piece for the group as an audience in the final screening workshop. In this way the group also learned from each others pieces and took on the role of media consumers. Each learner's contribution was valued and acknowledged. It had the potential to be shared with others outside of the learning space as a contribution to the planning of their own lives or as a means of sharing themselves, their work and their new skills with others. As each person's piece was appraised positively by the groups' reaction, this affirmed and gave credence to their production of media, their contribution to the learning environment, their investment in their own learning and in a way to themselves.

However before examining the themes there is still one large section of findings to be examined; what can I as a practitioner take from having been part of the field research? This research was an experimental, experiential process which was new to me and pushed me out of my comfort zone as a practitioner and as a novice researcher. I feel that it is necessary to reflect on this, as my own learning came about in the same space and time as the students' learning and there is a symbiosis between the two.

Reflective Practice - My learning from the field research

> Effective teachers believe that all students can learn and be successful.
> Effective teachers consciously create a climate in which all students feel

included. Effective teachers believe that there is potential in each learner and commit to finding the key that will unlock that potential.

(Gregory and Chapman, 2007, p. 1)

My objective for the process was to foster an environment that allowed people to create a representation of themselves through narrative that could enable independent communication of likes, wishes, dreams, plans etc to others without the need for key-workers or psychologists or other care professionals or indeed anyone to speak for or on behalf of the individual. I was very aware that this idealistic aim may not materialise in its entirety or perhaps at all. However I felt it important to hold to that notion of a mission statement-type driving force in order to maintain the authenticity of my intentions and energy in the learning environment.

Challenging pre-conceptions and ideals

The main conceptual learning I faced was the challenge of my own ideals and assumptions. My research question began as open, broad, optimistic, idealistic and possibly even slightly naive as an inexperienced researcher. The practicalities and realities of a learning environment challenged this and it was extremely important to allow the space for reflexivity to be open and aware of these challenges. In being open and aware you can adapt by listening to what is happening in the environment but by also reassessing what is necessary to reach the learning objective and aims.

In practical terms I had anticipated that we would have enough time to complete the projects in a non-rushed way. I was wrong! I will explore the importance, influence and implications of resources below. I had also hoped that there would be space to further develop independent thinking and self-reflection. I believe that for some this did happen but at a more realistic level than I had initially anticipated. In acknowledging this overestimation, I found myself making conscious efforts to really listen to the learners and trying to understand where they were coming from and what they wanted to show and include. This relates to the method of interpretation employed in IPA. 'It can be said that the IPA researcher is engaged in a double hermeneutic because the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them' (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 3). The idea of listening to the

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person and readjusting behaviours and practices in accordance with what is being said or told also reflects much of the information that disability research has collated and strives to disseminate in the area.

> People are the experts when it comes to their own lives. They know their strengths, preferences and needs. They expect their opinions to be heard, respected and acted upon.
>
> (Council of Quality and Leadership, 2010)

Resources

In my learning as a tutor I became acutely aware of the importance of available and reliable technical resources. In our case these resources were computers and internet access. 'A bad workman blames his tools', however sometimes the tools are paramount to the progression of the work! The technical problems increased pressure on time. Time itself was also a precious resource. Tea-breaks became fewer in the latter half of the workshops.

In this particular learning environment, certain activities such as learning how to save a picture from the internet or opening and saving a project, were demonstrated to the group with the use of a projector. After the demonstration it involved one-to-one time with learners to put the steps into practice and to support and reinforce the learning. As the learners began to display different levels of skill and confidence with the computer program it became necessary to check in with them on an individual basis in order to meet their progress and support them in this. This is also where a group of five seemed enormous at times. But as discussed above there were social benefits to the group as it was. This is why I felt that group activities were still worthwhile and beneficial, so I aimed to split the time between working individually and group discussions to plan for the following week or to talk about what we had done that day.

Balancing the compromises

The balancing of compromises became a learning process for me. What was I willing to sacrifice in the process to allow another aspect to exist or live? On a personal level I felt that the overall experience was a dynamic, organic and evolving process whereby there was a constant pull and push between striving to maintain idealistic aims and

allowing change and new things to occur. Dominicé acknowledges that 'most of the knowledge necessary for [adult educators'] professional practice has to be acquired on the job' (Dominicé, 1990. p. 205). In this way I felt it was important to recognise the immediate needs of the group and individuals and try to meet these needs as best we could while working towards our end goal. This required a level of reflexivity that was necessary to maintaining congruence to my beliefs in a self-directed learning environment.

In practical terms these compromises meant that sometimes I or the support worker would do things for a learner in order get some of the more technical tasks done. For example, on one occasion towards the end of the workshops, I sat with one learner, Tom, and asked what he would like to write on his photos. Instead of supporting Tom to spell and allowing time to type, I typed for him as he told me what to write. This is not how I would have preferred or envisioned the completion of the task but the time constraints to completion meant having to compromise on personal values around independence and experiential learning. The question is what is the base line? How do we, as practitioners, compromise without undermining or throwing our values aside completely? In this case I endeavoured to ensure that Tom still maintained editorial control over the content of his project but I took on the mechanical task in order to make sure we had it finished in time for the final screening.

Another example of how time and learner needs influenced my facilitation was in giving signposts or suggestions of how we could begin to structure the narratives. This was also based on a recommendation by my supervising member of staff, who suggested that having a concrete theme would be more accessible for learners to work towards and think about. 'Typically, people with intellectual disabilities often experience difficulty in describing subjective feelings and internal emotional states' (Prosser, Bromley, 1998, p. 100), so broad thematic suggestions such as 'I like' allowed a focussed method of self-reflection in order to think about personal preferences, planning and organising of these solid things which were then translated into the pictures and thus the narrative. We discussed themes such as 'I like' and 'My dreams'.

They served as springboards to allow learners to develop their own stories and representations of self through the filter of the themes. This signposting reflect similar methods in personal planning for people with intellectual disabilities, specifically Individual Personal Planning (IPP). In the IPP model key areas are looked at such as home, work, community, fun and leisure. These key areas can help focus the individual on addressing and thinking about that particular aspect of their lives and can make overall planning easier by taking tangible units to concentrate on. However Domincé argues that by giving a narrative structure to a group that 'the structure of each narrative [has] to be considered as part of its meaning' (Dominicé, 1990, p.197). IPP is seen as more traditional model and disability organisations have been moving towards a model called Person Centred Planning (PCP) which is less standardised and structured than IPP. PCP 'requires that staff have a flexible and responsive approach to meet people's changing circumstances, guided by the principles of good planning rather than a standard procedure' (Sanderson, 2000, p. 2). The two methods are not mutually exclusive.

Putting theory into practice

Before I began my field research I researched the pitfalls of acquiescence when working with and interviewing people with intellectual disabilities. The literature suggests avoiding closed questions which elicit a yes/no answer as the risk to acquiesce is greater. (Prosser & Bromley, 1998). It also suggests ways to open up understanding and confirmation of interpreted information from people with ID. While the group and I were working together I attempted to maintain and uphold these methods of communication and inquiry. But there are times during the workshops when I phrased things in a way that could elicit a prompted response. Sometimes I caught myself and I asked a more open or an opposing question. By their disagreeing with the opposite this clarified and confirmed that their original agreement was their opinion or thoughts. This is also a method recommended to cross check information. (Prosser & Bromley, 1998).

However the support worker also slipped into this positive phrasing at times. I often took my lead from them in the learning environment as they had many years experience working in the area. Reflecting on the occurrence of phrasing positively prompted questions and statements, in this particular environment, I think that the positive phrasing comes from a personal intent to creative a fun, positive, enjoyable atmosphere and dynamic in the group rather than any agenda, conscious or subconscious to persuade or influence. However in terms of trying to find out or gather information these methods, regardless of motivation, can prompt acquiescence and thus negates any data gathered in this way. To the best of my knowledge and efforts I have not used any data which I interpreted to have been given in an effort to please or from a prompted or leading question and I feel has not been substantially qualified by other means of inquiry.

My own learning in this process has been significant. I feel it would be disrespectful to the group not to acknowledge and identify what they have taught me. I have learned to be wrong. I have learned to be at the mercy of limited resources and have learners laugh and display a level of patience that made me almost shameful at my panicked reactions. I have learned to listen to others more and really hear what they are saying. I have learned new ways of seeing lived and experienced lives. I have shared myself with a group of learners and can say that I learned as much from the group than they did from me. McClean (unknown year) says;

> To live in the world of disability is to live in the question of quality of life. The values are care, tolerance, difference, creativity, meaning, satisfaction.

Conclusion to findings

As explored above the findings were grouped under four main themes arising from the process of self-revelatory learning through digital narratives: relationships and support networks; independence and transition; self-direction and ownership of learning, and creation and presentation of stories of self. These aspects of self revelation and learning through digital narratives were derived from the interactions, events and observations that occurred during the field research. These findings will be analysed in greater detail

in Chapter five, both in the context of the literature reviewed and also in the overall context of adult and community education as a field of practice.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

In chapter four the findings from the field research were outlined as well as my own learning as a practitioner. In this chapter I will contextualise these findings in relation to the literature reviewed in chapter two. I will also explore where this research sits in the context of adult and community education and its practice, focussing specifically on an Irish perspective. It is necessary in my role as researcher to structure analysis and discussion in relation to key areas of the study and ask; what are the significance of my findings from the research in relation to the broader areas of digital narratives,; self-directed learning; and education and learning for learners with intellectual disabilities?

Digital narratives - a medium for teaching and learning

From the findings it is clear that digital narratives as a medium offer a range of learning opportunities. Firstly they engage 21st century literacy skills such as those of Brown, Bryan and Brown outlined in Chapter two, which are timely with the current social media movement, and are also age appropriate for adults. They encourage and develop media literacy by engaging with digital media, both their creation and consumption. 'Digital storytelling can help promote skills such as visual literacy, collaboration, and mastery of technology--all skills needed for the 21st century' (McLellan, Hilary, 2006, p. 68). Secondly, their creation serves as a vehicle for representations of self and a personal information resource that can be easily shared with others and consumed as media by an audience if desired. Building skills in media literacy and technology can build confidence in engagement with and use of other media and digital platforms such as online learning spaces or social media.

Digital narratives are individualised, subjective self stories which offer a modern and layered approach to autobiography. Each learner in the group created a text that was a

visually and aurally rich presentation of self. While the digital narratives themselves were all very different their commonality was their revelatory nature. As discussed in the literature reviewed, both Bruner and Mezirow value the interaction between author and audience as a process for creating meaning arising from the creation of autobiographical narratives. The author has had time and space to reflect on their own lives and learn how to translate personal thoughts to narrative structures that teach and inform the audience or the viewers (people that they chose to show the narratives to). There is a negotiation of a revealed self as choices are made about what to tell and include.

The findings also illustrated how the transferring of the narratives onto DVD represented a concrete connection to the learning and was significant as a way of recognising and acknowledging this learning. The workshops had resulted in a product or a *thing* that was the property of each person. In this way the learning was not abstract. It was touchable, watchable, shareable. This meant a lot to the learners involved and their excitement and satisfaction illustrated even further how important it is to acknowledge the learning that arises from non-formal learning environments. Their learning was validated in a tangible way that could be transferred out of the space and into their private sphere. This shows that, in the context of the learning group and an informal learning environment, validation and celebration of learning is valuable for instilling a sense of accomplishment and self-pride in each person and their individualised efforts and self-direction in their own learning. It can boost self-confidence for future participatory learning and creative experiences.

Creating digital narratives can contribute to personal planning or can explain, illustrate and communicate goals, dreams, desires or needs. Issues such as wanting to go to college or move out or learning to drive were only some of the dreams for the future expressed by the learners in the group. By including these goals in their digital narratives they have not only reflected in order to identify personal goals but they have also revealed and communicated this self-learning. Again, McLellan and Hilary (2006, p.68) echo this ability for narratives to stimulate more meaningful, engaged self-

learning but more specifically; 'digital storytelling can also promote creativity and problem solving while encouraging self-direction and personal initiative, all valuable skills.'

I believe that using this method to aid personal planning is a creative development in methods currently employed and can add greatly to autonomous planning and communication with others. All of the learners confirmed that they were going to share their narratives with the important people in their lives specifically family, friends and key workers. Sharing their narratives with others could potentially stimulate a discussion about the content of the digital narrative and address any goals or dreams that were included, thus potentially leading to the actualisation of these dreams or goals. This supports Lambert's belief that digital narratives have the potential to augment change in a person's circumstances and encourage agency and engagement in cultural democracy.

In summary digital narratives can be used a means of autonomous non-traditional communication for people with intellectual disabilities to tell others about their lives and thus an effective tool in the redistribution of power in communication exchanges but also in promoting advocacy and equality. A learner driven agenda in communication displays a self-directed attitude to a self-determined life.

Self-direction in learning - self-determined lives
Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) refer to a continuum of self-directed learning whereby a person's propensity to take on the responsibility for trying and learning new things can begin at any point on this range, from making small or few choices about one's own learning to assuming entire responsibility for planning, direction and outcome. The findings indicated that the learners engaged in self-direction of their learning to the point at which they were most comfortable. In the research each student took responsibility at varying levels for their own narrative from planning stages to completion. By assuming this responsibility, it can be said that self-direction in learning occurred among all learners. This is connection between assuming

responsibility and self-direction in learning is supported by Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) in chapter two.

As outlined above self-directed learning is not necessarily an education set apart from a learning community, doing everything for oneself. Sanderson's (2000) definition of an independent and inclusive life which can also be related to independent and inclusive *educational* life, referred to in chapter two, is ironically directly related to relationships and the support from others in order to live a life of the person's choosing. Therefore it can be argued that living an independent life requires connectivity with others. Similarly, determining and living an independent educational life also requires the same supportive relationships. This is supported by observations arising from the ILI model explored in chapter two.

My research has illustrated on a micro level how beneficial, valued and necessary supportive relationships were to each of these learners, not just in the research workshops but also across their daily life. In our education system learners are typically taught to concentrate only on themselves and position themselves in competition with other learners, isolating the learner from peers and limiting the potential for collaborative learning. However this research has highlighted the need as learners for personal and professional supportive relationships. 'Education is human service work. It is based on a dialogue between students and teachers and between students themselves' (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh, 2009, p.164). As learners we cannot exist in isolation, we need support from others. Some learners will need more support than others in order to attain personal development goals.

Relationships of all kinds can provide effective learning support networks and are necessary in moving towards equality and an integrated and inclusive community and educational life as argued by McClean (date unknown) in chapter two. This can result in an environment which supports and embraces a more holistic approach to education and recognises that relationships are key to reaching goals in an education for personal development. It is also important to recognise that education is specific to each

individual learner's needs and that a one size fits all approach to teaching and learning is neither appropriate nor effective.

Education system Vs Learner needs

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2011) state under Article 24 Education that;

> States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning directed to:the full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity.

However these rights have not yet been ratified by Irish government. The White Paper on Education (2000) places an emphasis on creating and encouraging dialogue between adult educators and learners with disabilities as to how they can adapt their methods in order to be accessible for these types of learners. Informal learning environments where the learning outcomes are not assessed in a standardised fashion are learning spaces that have the potential to be explored and can aid a move towards educational equality by recognising and acknowledging learning in all its forms.

In the findings the learners demonstrated their propensity and ability to connect and engage in a learning environment and took responsibility for their own learning in this space. The findings illustrated the importance they attached to being part of a learning group or a 'course' and committed themselves as learners to the project until completion. If life choices and service provision for people with disabilities are focused around person-centred planning why can we not begin to engage these principles and philosophies into approaches to adult education for these learners? What is difficult about facilitating person-centred educational planning?

How is it possible that a learner, who is self-directing, committed and eager to learn new things, encounters difficulties in accessing education in an inclusive way? Fully inclusive post-secondary education is not an option that is usually considered for these learners. The Inclusive Learning Initiative referred to in chapter two, is innovative and a pilot model of inclusive education from which there is much to be learned. From an

Irish perspective the ILI has already achieved an unfounded educational equality for learners with intellectual disabilities. In a seminar (2013 Maynooth) the ILI team identified one of the main problems with the continuation of pilot as funding. However as discussed in chapter two, when individualised funding begins to come into practice, funds may follow a learner if they desire to access education in this way. The education system needs to practice reflexivity in looking at who can access education freely and each learner's ability to engage with current education systems in a way that matches their needs as an individual learner.

Education and learners with intellectual disabilities could be described as opposing monologues. On one side the education system is biased towards literacy and numerical skills and linguistic intelligences with an emphasis on certification, accreditation and awards. 'This is how we do it and this is the system.' On the other side the learner is speaking of their desire for education and learning, for challenges and new experiences, to feel like they can contribute to their own education as well a community of learners. 'I have needs as a learner that are different, I have a right to learn, I want feel that I belong, I have something to say, something to offer. Listen to me.' How do we begin to turn these monologues into a dialogue? How do we begin to engage learners with diverse needs into a system that until recently has not considered the possibility that diverse learners actually contribute positively to education? 'If education is inegalitarian in its outcomes and processes, this undermines the worth of education' (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh, 2009, p.143).

Learners with diverse needs challenge the current education system in Ireland. In fact learners with intellectual disabilities challenge the entire system in a way that is much more profound than those who are considered conventional learners. By accessing adult, further and third level education and challenging the traditional structures within which they lie, learners with intellectual disabilities will help to generate new and innovative ways of approaching teaching and learning and assessment methods by challenging existing educational systems and structures. It will keep the field fresh and in a state of development and thus keeping practitioners open to new ways of teaching.

Again, as happened in the field research, the learners become the teachers. In this way learners with diverse needs such as intellectual disabilities have much to offer and contribute to the field of education. A fully inclusive educational environment benefits all students as it broadens a capacity to experience and embrace understanding of difference and change. A diverse community of learners contributes to a diverse breadth of shared knowledge and exposure to different ways of knowing.

> If schools and colleges are to promote equality, they need to abandon their inegalitarian inheritance and adopt an inclusive and consistent approach to the realization of equality objectives.
>
> (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh, 2009, p.140)

Conclusion

The research process overall offers insights into the aspects of digital narratives as tools for teaching and learning with learners with intellectual disabilities. This research was experimental and experiential and tried to do something new in its approach. The learners and I, as the tutor, were exposed to a new and developing type of teaching and learning context.

The process of creating the digital narratives itself offers much in teaching 21st century skills, as well as a level of required self-reflection in order to determine what to include in the narrative. In creating the narratives the learner engages in the self-direction of their own learning and the narratives are a connection to the learner themselves. In this way digital narratives are an effective tool of communication of self for a learner.

The research also illustrates that an inclusive, informal and friendly learning climate is very important for these learners as well as being an active member of a learning group Their presence and contributions to the learning community were acknowledged and valued. The research also presented the importance of supportive relationships in their learning network and interestingly that peer learning in the group was very valuable and also tenible. These learners, who have typically been marginalised from current adult education structures, in fact became teachers in some instances.

Coming from the research I have found that learners with intellectual disabilities have much to offer the educational system as stands. The findings indicate that these learners have the potential to be self-directive in their own learning and engage in a learning environment in a way that is individual and unique to their personal learning needs. This demonstrates an interest in education and learning which should be encouraged. Perceived obstacles to their inclusion and access to adult education are stemming from a traditional system of teaching and learning and it is vital to observe that these perceived obstacles stem from the system and not the learner. It is my hope that equality of access to education for these learners will be developed further and in this context explore the potential benefits that using digital narratives in education and learning can have for learners with intellectual disability. In the final chapter I will discuss my hopes for further study and the strengths and limitations of this research.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Introduction

The research examined the learning and experience of adult learners with intellectual disabilities using autobiographical digital narratives. The process of the research was an experimental design in teaching and learning and as a result was unpredictable but exciting. The findings indicated that the learners took on the responsibility to self-direct in their learning and thus make self-determined educational choices. The findings also showed that autobiographical digital narratives can provide revelatory learning about a person, not just as a learner but also as a whole person in all their uniqueness. The research illustrated how the process of creating autobiographical digital narratives contributes to learning across a range of areas such as, reflective self-learning, 21st century literacy skills, digital media production, alternative forms of communication. The learning occurs mainly in the process which is concretely actualised in a finished digital media text. This text can also continue to generate learning with others through its sharing and dissemination of self-revelatory knowledge.

Strengths and limitations of the research

The research benefitted from the support and openness of the organisation who were willing to allow initial access to the people they support in their services. They were open to the idea of this research as a beneficial learning experience to people availing of their services. As a tutor I have experience delivering digital modules so I was comfortable with the software and the area that we were exploring. However it was extremely beneficial to the group, myself as a tutor and to the overall process to have the help of the support worker as part of the group. This presence was extremely valuable to all and it was a new experience for the support worker also, to see the potential of using new methods such as digital narratives for the people that they work with.

The group size was appropriate as it allowed for the benefits that come with working collaboratively as a group yet was still small enough to work closely with learners and build congruent relationships. The overall process provided a data rich study prompting much learning in the research. The entire project would not have been possible without the willingness of the learners themselves to take part and go on this journey with me. It was an experimental process but their good-nature, patience and dedication made each workshop an exciting, vibrant place to be and to learn.

However every study is not without its limitations. The richness and complexity of the data made it difficult for me, as a new and inexperienced researcher to analyse. The time-frame of the project limited the depth of the study and limited technological support in the community space meant that crashing computers and broken internet impeded even further on precious time. While I had worked on an informal level with a student with intellectual disabilities and volunteered throughout the years with this organisation, and also having experience teaching and tutoring, it was a learning process as a practitioner to work with a group of learners with intellectual disabilities.

The study could have benefitted greatly from a follow-up meeting with the learners to see how they felt about the workshops and the process on reflection. I would have been very interested to know if they had shown their narratives to others, if so, who and in what context. Similarly I would have been interested to interview people in their lives who they had shared the pieces with and hear what they thought about watching the narratives. A follow-up workshop with the learners would have provided insight to observe the sustainability of skills learned in the initial workshops and if the learners were interested in creating new digital narratives.

Areas for further study
The research has the capacity to be explored at a much deeper and broader level. In terms of the practical digital aspect there is much, much more that could be developed. Videos could be filmed and included in the narratives. Scripts or voice overs could also

be used. Editing skills could be developed with the use of transitions and effects on photos and videos to create atmosphere and add even further texture to the pieces.

From a pedagogical perspective, I don't believe that the depth at which the potential for self-learning to be translated to autobiographical digital narratives was truly accessed in the research. It merely scratched the surface. With more time and attention dedicated to the process rather than the end goal of a finished piece, I feel that the potential for augmenting change and developing agentive learners through digital narratives could be examined in a more detailed and expansive way. However coming from the research, it is clear that autobiographical digital narratives can provide a means of exploration, self-revelation and self-learning which can contribute to self-directed learning for learners with intellectual disabilities. Self-learning is necessary for personal development and a person-centred educational approach. Knowing oneself and one's needs and wants as a learner can promote a more active engagement in driving the agenda for a meaningful education which is centred around personal development.

Recommendations for the future

The area of digital narratives is a relatively new field for exploration so it is an exciting area to research as there is much to be learned. In the future I feel that the process of creating autobiographical digital narratives could be explored further as a means of exploring personal development goals in the life of a person with intellectual disabilities. In this way it can be a way of preparing and contributing to personal planning meetings or as part of advocacy groups or work to communicate on issues that are important to a group or individual.

In an educational context they can be used as an alternative to written assignments in education by communicating and demonstrating the learning of a student from classes or lectures. As I was finishing this research, at a seminar as part of the Inclusive Learning Initiative in Maynooth, I watched a student's digital narrative which was submitted as an assignment. The capacity of the digital piece to demonstrate the

student's learning in their subject area was insightful, creative and of an extremely high standard. The digital text displayed a very high level of media literacy. Policy has included media literacy as part of its agenda thus it is timely to begin introducing these skills into formal educational systems and acknowledging the benefits that they can have for learners in communicating knowledge.

Conclusion

On a personal level as a practitioner, the research was exciting to work on. I had the opportunity to create a series of workshops integrating two of my major interests, storytelling and education .It was particularly exciting and interesting to be part of a teaching and learning process with a group of learners who have struggled in the past and still do, to attain equal access to education and a recognition of their rights as learners. In a way as a practitioner I felt quite privileged to share in this research process with them and present in a sense a collaborative contribution to adult education.

We are all learners, we all learn in ways that are personal and meaningful to us as individuals. There is no right or wrong way to learn. What is wrong however is to assume that one learner deserves or needs education over and above another learner. Education is not a luxury or a privilege, it is a right and it is necessary in living a life that is independent and driven by personal desires, dreams and choices. Glasser (1998) outlines the basic needs for any person to live full lives; they are; to survive; to belong; to have power; to be free; and to have fun.

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Do you want to use computers more?

Do you want to make your own DVD with pictures and videos and music?

Do you want to show people about yourself and your life in the community?

Roisin Hunt is doing a college project.

She wants to find out if we can learn new things about ourselves by making DVDS about our lives.

You can apply to be part of this computer course in [the community centre] by telling your key-worker.

BUT FIRST! Some questions.....

Can you use a computer?

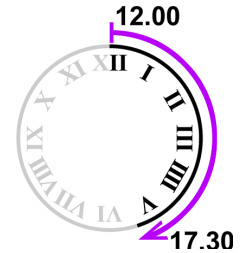Is there a computer at home or in your day centre?

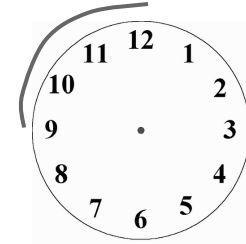Can someone help you with the computer during the week?

Can you come to [the centre] on Wednesday afternoons?

12.00

17.30

OR

Can you come to [the centre] on Friday mornings?

OR

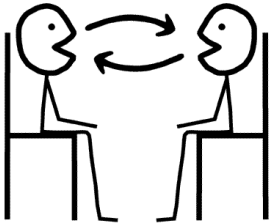Can you come to [the centre] on Friday afternoons?

12.00

17.30

You can write an email to Roisin to apply.

Roisin's email address: [omitted]

You must send your email by Tuesday January 15th.

You will meet Roisin and [name omitted] for a short interview on Friday January 18th in [the office].

They will let you know if you will be part of the course.

The course will start in February.

It will be on for 8 weeks.

Consent form
Question 1

The computer course helps you to make your own DVD called 'This is me and my life in the community'
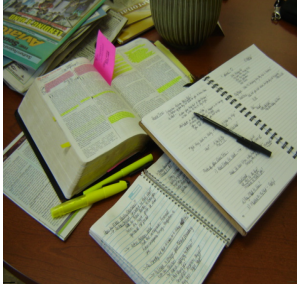

Yes, I am ok with this ☐

No, I am not ok with this ☐

Question 2

When you do the course you will be part of a research study for Roisin's college work.

 Yes, I am ok with this ☐

 No, I am not ok with this ☐

Question 3

Roisin is trying to find out what you learn about yourself when you make the DVD.
She also wants to know if video and picture stories about our lives are a good way to express yourself and communicate.

 Yes, I am ok with this ☐

 No, I am not ok with this ☐

Question 4

Roisin will record the workshops on her recorder so that she can remember what happened when she writes her notes.

The recordings will be stored securely on her computer with a password. They will be deleted after her project has been marked by her college in the autumn.

Yes, I am ok with this

No, I am not ok with this

Question 5

Sometimes Roisin will chat to you about the workshops.
She wants to know what you think about the project.

 Yes, I am ok with this ☐

 No, I am not ok with this ☐

Question 6

Roisin will record your chats on her recorder so she can listen to it later and write notes.
The recordings will be stored securely on her computer with a password.
They will be deleted after her project has been marked by her college in the autumn.

   Yes, I am ok with this   ☐

   No, I am not ok with this   ☐

Question 7

In her notes Roisin will use a different name instead of yours so that your privacy is respected.
For example if your name is Mary, in her notes she will call you Joan.

 Yes, I am ok with this ☐

 No, I am not ok with this ☐

Question 8

The notes will be kept on a computer server in the [office] for 5 years.
The notes will be safe and private.
The notes will use different names so that the information is anonymous.
After 5 years the notes will be destroyed.

Yes, I am ok with this

No, I am not ok with this

Question 9

its mine not yours

Your DVD belongs to you. It is your property.
You may show it to people if you wish or you may keep it private.

Yes, I am ok with this ☐

No, I am not ok with this ☐

Question 10

Roisin will not keep any copies of your DVD.
There is personal information on your DVD that is private and belongs to you.

Yes, I am ok with this ☐

No, I am not ok with this ☐

Question 11

A copy of your DVD can be given to the [organisation] with your permission.
The copy will be stored in your personal secure and private file in the main offices.

Yes, I am ok with this

No, I am not ok with this

Question 12

Did **YOU** make the choice to take part in the course because you wanted to be part of it?

 Yes, I decided myself. ☐

 No, someone else decided for me ☐

Question 13

If you want to leave the project at any time you can.
There is no problem. Nobody will be upset or angry with you.

 Yes, I understand ☐

 No, I do not understand ☐

Question 14

Have you had enough time to ask Roisin any questions?

Yes, I had enough time ☐

No, I did not have enough time ☐

If you are unhappy or want to complain about anything please contact your key-worker.

Please sign your name if you are happy to be part of the group

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Today's date is