

My life. My story.
The Youth Digital Storytelling Project

Final Report
2022

Prepared By:
Kathleen C. Sitter
Brooke Allemang
Mica R. Pabia

Community Partner:
Bruce Howell
Calgary SCOPE Society

Funders:
The Azrieli Foundation
Private Donor

RESEARCH TEAM

Principal Investigator:

Kathleen C. Sitter, PhD, Canada Research Chair, Multisensory Storytelling in Research and Knowledge Translation
Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary

Community Partner:

Bruce Howell, Calgary SCOPE Society

Project Coordinator

Mica R. Pabia

Graduate Research Assistants

Brooke Allemang

Emma Gaunt

Carly-Ann Haney

Mihaela Slabé

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The team members would like to thank all who were involved in this project, with a special thank you to the peer-facilitators and participants who shared their stories and experiences which informed this research. Sincere appreciation to our community partner Calgary SCOPE Society. We would also like to thank Disability Action Hall, The Big Sky Centre for Learning and Being Astonished!, Melissa Turbuck, Bonnie Cummings-Vickaryous, Community Integration through Cooperative Education, Rebecca Dewar, and Hope Doucet.

This research was made possible by the generosity of The Azrieli Foundation and a Private Donor.

This research was conducted through the Multisensory Studio.



The logo for SCOPE features the word "SCOPE" in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The letter "S" is stylized with a red crescent shape on its left side.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BACKGROUND

RESEARCH APPROACH

FINDINGS

BEST PRACTICES

RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth Digital Stories REPORT

BACKGROUND

The purpose of *My Life. My Story: The Youth Digital Storytelling Project* was to create, implement, and assess a peer-based digital story pilot intervention for youth with developmental disabilities to support their growth through improved skills and competencies in literacy, multimedia, communication, and leadership. Over 11 months, we developed a novel online peer-based model focused on accessibility; we also assessed and identified best practices to increase the transferability of our findings. In doing so, the project increases the potential to improve education competencies for youth with developmental disabilities beyond this pilot study.

Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling combines the tradition of storytelling with digital technology. It invites participants to use multiple forms of media (e.g., still and moving images, music, narration, text) to tell a personal story. Digital stories are typically a few minutes long (3-9 minutes) and created over a number of sessions in a group-based setting. Centering accessibility and flexibility, the delivery of the workshops in this project focused on learning story formats and creation, decision-making, multimedia skills, and creating group connections.

As an adaptive learning process, digital storytelling can help youth with developmental disabilities prepare for transitions, particularly in the domains of post-secondary, employment, and residential living. Research has shown that youth can gain confidence in their ability to express ideas, while learning multimedia skills in a social context.¹

Life-Stage Transitions

Transitions were strategically chosen as a focus for this project, as the life-stage of transitioning into adulthood is identified as the most challenging time for both youth with developmental disabilities and family members. As transition periods can affect an individual's ability to be healthy, educated and economically self-sufficient, supporting youth through these life-stages is crucial.

1. Source: Lawler, J., Anthony, J., & Narula, S. (2014). Engaging college students on a community engagement with high school students with disabilities. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research*, 7(3), 195-204.

Youth Digital Stories REPORT

BACKGROUND

Community Partner: The Calgary SCOPE Society

The Calgary SCOPE Society is a non-profit agency supporting persons with developmental disabilities in Calgary and area. Their support in recruitment of participants and in the delivery of the workshop was key to the study implementation.

Delivery and Format

Our project included two phases

- 1) Phase I: Online training of peer-facilitators (i.e., “trainees”) currently enrolled in post-secondary education who self-identify as developmentally disabled. Through a series of activities, skill development focused on facilitation, presentation skills, and multimedia competencies. Peer-facilitators also created a digital story. Upon completion, peer-facilitators received a certificate, a digital copy of their story, extended access to the editing platform, and were subsequently invited to facilitate upcoming digital story workshops for youth facing a life-stage transition (i.e., Phase II). Peer-facilitators also received an honourarium for every workshop they facilitated.
- 2) Phase II: Delivery of online digital story workshops in a group-based format with youth who self-identify as developmentally disabled. Workshops consisted of 5-6 sessions, approximately 3 hours/session over two weeks. Upon completion, participants received a workshop certificate, a digital copy of their story, and a gift certificate.

Over 12 months, four peer-facilitator training workshops and seven participant workshops were delivered. A total of 47 adults (13 peer-facilitators, 34 participants) completed this study and created a digital story. Peer-facilitators and participants were invited to complete pre and post workshop questionnaires. Responses were analyzed for key themes associated with transitions. This report shares these findings, best practices, and associated recommendations.

Knowledge Translation

- Gala event (Three days, scheduled November 2022): Two-day virtual screening and panel, followed by an in-person screening in Calgary, Alberta
- Online digital story repository
- Three invited community presentations and screenings
- Three conference presentations (Virtual UCalgary Social Work Research Symposium, March 2022, Canada; Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, May 2022, USA; Arts & Society, June 2022, Spain)
- Two peer-reviewed publication submissions (May 2022, August 2022)

BACKGROUND
RESEARCH APPROACH
FINDINGS
BEST PRACTICES
RECOMMENDATIONS

RESEARCH APPROACH

Objectives

1) **Delivery:** to create, deliver, and evaluate an online digital storytelling workshop that includes two key steps:

Training: A minimum of 10 current post-secondary students who self-identify as developmentally disabled will complete the peer-training digital storytelling module.

Participants: A minimum of 30 adults who self-identify as developmentally disabled will participate in a digital story workshop and create a digital story about life-transitions.

2) **Impact:** to evaluate the digital storytelling process by investigating its impact on:

- I. Literacy skills
- II. Communication skills
- III. Multimedia skills
- IV. Building leadership skills through a peer-training model

3) **Model:** to evaluate and identify best practices as a peer-based intervention tool

Recruitment*

Purposive sampling was used via list-serves, social media, and invited community presentations.

Peer-facilitators:

- Adults who self-identify as developmentally disabled
- Ages 18-30
- Living in Canada
- Enrolled full or part-time in post-secondary education
- Interested in becoming a digital story facilitator

Participants:

- Adults who self-identify as developmentally disabled
- Ages 18-30**
- Living in Canada
- Facing a potential transition in the areas of work, education or community living in the next 12-24 months.
- Interested in creating a digital story

**The initial research design was in-person delivery. Due to the pandemic, delivery was moved online.*

***Due to challenges with recruitment, it was opened to people across Canada. A key learning was age was not a defining factor in life-stage transitions. Several trainees/participants suggested opening up the age to increase recruitment, which was done for phase 2. Based on demographics, only 6% of participants were over the age of 30.*

RESEARCH APPROACH

Methodology

Phase 1: Digital story training workshops

- Online Delivery: 5-6 sessions, 3 hours/session over 2 weeks
- Timing: May 2021 - November 2021
- 13 peer-facilitators participated and completed Phase 1

Phase 2: Digital story participant workshops

- Online Delivery: 5-6 sessions, 3 hours/session over 2 weeks
- Timing: November 2021 - May 2022
- 34 participants participated and completed Phase 2

A total of 47 people (13 trainees, 34 participants) completed this study, resulting in 47 digital stories.

Data Collection

Data collection:

Peer-Facilitator Questionnaires (Likert, open and closed ended questions)*

Participant Questionnaires (Likert, open and closed ended questions)*

Digital Stories

Phase 1 Peer-Facilitators Completed**:

- Pre-workshop questionnaires
- Post-workshop questionnaires
- 1 digital story

Phase 2 Participants Completed**:

- Pre-workshop questionnaires
- Post-workshop questionnaires
- 1 digital story

Data Analysis of Questionnaire Responses:

- Qualitative content analysis

**Pre- and post- questionnaires were informed by the Rasch rating scale model (Gomez, Arisas, Verdugo & Navas, 2012) and the written and digital literacy rubric for digital storytelling (Maureen et al., 2012)*

***Questionnaire completion rates: Peer-facilitators: 77% (10/13); Participants: 88% (30/34). Results are not reported on 3-month questionnaire sent to both peer-facilitators and participants due to high levels of attrition.*

BACKGROUND
RESEARCH APPROACH
FINDINGS
BEST PRACTICES
RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDINGS

Questionnaire Responses

Skills

Peer-facilitators (Trainees)

80% identified an increase in **multimedia skills** by one level.

90% identified an increase in **communication skills** by one level.

100% identified an increase in **leadership skills** by one level.

80% identified an increase in **planning/organization**; 70% in building **self-confidence**, and 60% in **group facilitation**.

Participants

90% identified an increase in **multimedia skills** by one level.

87% identified an increase in **communication skills** by one level.

87% identified an increase in **literacy skills** by one level.

83% identified they would be able to **use what they learned** in the workshop in other areas of their life.

Workshop Delivery

The workshop encouraged disability pride amongst both participants and peer-facilitator trainees.

The format centered disabled perspectives and experiences in story.

The delivery fostered **crip connection***, community, and solidarity amongst facilitators, peer-facilitators, and participants.

Crip time plays a central role in accessibility within the context of both the delivery and format.

**term refers to disability coming together and building community. See page 23.*

***23 out of 30 responses indicated they spoke to someone about a transition plan prior to the workshop. 6 out of 7 indicated they spoke to someone about a transition plan since attending the workshop.*

Life-Stage Transitions

Since attending the workshop: Participants

86% spoke with someone (family, service provider) about creating a transition plan**.

89% are more comfortable talking about what they want.

79% have identified short-term goals for their future.

79% have identified long-term goals for their future.

FINDINGS

Questionnaire Responses: Peer-Facilitators

The workshop did a very good job at teaching/improving the skills I would need in order to be able to teach a person how to create a digital story, and do so in an effective manner.
[Teaching/Facilitation]

I asked for help when I had a problem. During the Zoom call when I was wearing headphones other people couldn't hear me on the other side so I took out my headphones. When I was recording, I had to plug in my headphones. The computer fan was making noise so I put the microphone right next to my mouth and speaked out what I said. [Problem-Solving]

I was able to have more experience in communication which allowed me to share more information about me in a positive manner and environment.
[Communication]

Q: If you selected any leadership skills (that improved) please explain?

I did my story about...and felt confident when everyone liked my story. [Self-Confidence]

I think it was a good opportunity for me to collaborate with others and learn from and with them and from their stories. [Reciprocal Learning]

FINDINGS

Questionnaire Responses: Peer-Facilitators

It was a good experience and I enjoyed participating!

I believe it was a useful experience, comparable to a very short college class.

It was fun. Meeting new people. It was hard at first but when you got started it was going easier and easier.

Q: What are your thoughts about the workshop?

I loved having a new experience creating an online story with my other peers giving others feedback.

I thought the people I worked with were great. They were helpful, informative, and gave the instructions on how to use the Wevideo software clearly.

The facilitators were wonderful to work with.

FINDINGS

Questionnaire Responses: Participants

Happy to learn new ways to tell my story in my own voice.

Everyone was super friendly and easy to talk to and had good vibes that made the whole process enjoyable.

The people were great and the support staff were very helpful.

Q: What are your thoughts about the workshop?

...and I do believe I have abilities to create a story about myself

I like how you worked with us one on one and supported everyone's needs.

I learned a lot about technology and storytelling

FINDINGS

Questionnaire Responses: Peer-Facilitators

Editing, recording, audio.

I learned that it's okay to tell my story.

About my own story and that I'm strong.

Q: What I learned was...

I learned a lot about others' experiences and how differently we all process those experiences. I would say that this workshop helped me to learn emotionally more so than technically.

...and how to keep conversations going throughout the entirety of a class/workshop.

I learned about the experiences of my fellow participants.

FINDINGS

Questionnaire Responses: Participants

I learned we all have or are going through difficult times...

I learned from other people with disability.

To recognize all the things I have done in my life and that I can continue doing.

Q: What I learned was...

I learned how to work with other people.

Digital storytelling is good way for people who don't use words to speak to tell their story.

To plan something out and how to write a script.

FINDINGS

Questionnaire Responses: Peer-Facilitators

Q: What I liked was...

I loved the positive environment the facilitators and peers around me had.

Being able to talk to new people.

...I also enjoyed the working environment that was created by the friendly participants and facilitators. There was good communication and it everyone seemed to work well together.

Breakout rooms, ice breakers, pace of workshop.

The whole idea is amazing and having that chance to create a mini film was fun and educational.

I felt comfortable to share and felt heard in this environment. I was also happy to be able to provide the same comfort to others.

Q: What I didn't like was...

That is seemed to go really quickly and then ended.

I didn't like recording my audio because I am getting better at reading. It was hard to pronounce some of my words in my story.

The struggles with copyright.

...I would like to see participants having the autonomy to express what works best for them even if it lies outside the project design.

FINDINGS

Questionnaire Responses: Participants

Q: What I liked was...

Meeting everybody.

I really liked that my team gave me time to tinker around in WeVideo. When I had questions, they humped right back in! I liked how they ask me what is the best way to help me.

I like what I learned about myself and others.

I really loved creating my WeVideo and very proud how it came out so well!

Learn something new I can do.

Q: What I didn't like was...

Because of the limited time left and being that it was our last workshop day, I wasn't shown how to do a couple of things that I was curious about doing.

Audio recording.

Nothing.

...there wasn't enough time to really get to know someone. It felt too short.

BACKGROUND
RESEARCH APPROACH
FINDINGS
BEST PRACTICES
RECOMMENDATIONS

BEST PRACTICES

Online Workshop Delivery

Flexibility

Work with groups to ensure format meets the needs of participants.

Extend the length of the workshops with shorter session times to accommodate for online fatigue.

Use icebreakers at the beginning and end of each workshop to support rapport-building and connection in an online space.

Keep facilitator and participant ratios 1:1 with an aim of 4-6 participants per workshop.

Adapt the story process

Use breakout rooms to support crafting stories.

Use both small and large groups to allow participants the chance to work collaboratively with the same team member, build confidence in their story, and share updates with the larger group by way of end-of-day group check-ins.

Revise story elements by removing and addressing ableist constructs, including having a written script.

Use interview style formats in development, more visual imagery, and less text in tutorials.

Development: Consideration with mobility and technology tools includes support workers to assist as required, and facilitators driving as needed.

Shifting to digital platforms

Ensure video editing platforms are accessible across both Windows and Mac.

Ensure proper supports are in place to assist with unanticipated technology issues.

Enable live transcript feature in Zoom.

Build in time for reviewing Zoom etiquette.

Model and review options to share in different ways (e.g., verbal, chatbox, emoji reactions) to help adapt the workshop to the online space.

Breakout rooms where one-to-one support is offered is critical to support timelines.

BEST PRACTICES

Online Workshop Delivery

Do

Ask for accommodation needs before the start of the workshop so supports are in place.

Support creating stories without sound, and/or story lines that are not always linear.

Celebrate different ways of sharing e.g., signing, emojis, gestures, sounds. Use plain language.

Honour the choices of the participants, not their support workers. Support decision-making through appropriate formats of questioning.

Be flexible. Stories can be created through interview styles, conversations, facial expressions, or gestures.

Celebrate accomplishments and stories by ending with a screening and discussion. Provide certificates to honour achievements.

Ask for feedback about the process.

Do not

Ignore accessibility issues.

Ascribe to ableist norms of what a story should look like.

Prioritize the written or spoken word.

Dismiss capacities because of complex communication considerations.

Always build the story based on creating a written script of a prescribed length.

Rush through the screening process. Make space and time to introduce and respond to each other's stories.

Assume the process is perfect.

BACKGROUND
RESEARCH APPROACH
FINDINGS
BEST PRACTICES
RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Cripping digital storytelling is the primary way to develop accessible designs that support first-person accounts of disabled people.

2

The peer-based digital storytelling model offers a long-term sustainable format that supports training and employment opportunities for facilitation, skill development, decision-making, and connections within and outside the disability community.

3

Ongoing opportunities to share and discuss digital stories from the perspective of disabled people are needed to shift attitudes and change systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Crippling Digital Storytelling

Crip theory combines disability studies with queer theory and questions why some bodies and minds are normalized while others are excluded. It challenges ableist language, structures, attitudes, and assumptions about knowledge and considers how it impacts disabled persons.

Crip time is one example of crip theory in practice. Crip time is “flex time not just expanded but exploded; it requires re-imagining our notions of what can and should happen in time, or recognizing how expectations of ‘how long things take’ are based on very particular minds and bodies. Rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds” (Kafer, 2013, p. 27).

Crip time requires extra time to perform a task due to barriers of ableist time. One example would be extra time needed to use augmented communication or devices (Baril, 2016).

Crip connection is another example of crip theory. It is when disabled persons come together to build community. It is a recognition and celebration of disability pride and the strength that comes from the diversity of the disability community. It is connecting with disabled individuals, recognizing how ableism affects our communities, and resisting this in a united way.

Through crippling digital storytelling, different ways of knowing, being, and doing are honoured.

More To Consider:

One key opportunity is to embed crip theory in the design of digital storytelling offerings.

Delivery: Instead of text-heavy tutorials or scripts being the primary focus of developing stories, flexibility is key. Meet participants where they are at. Tutorials should consist of more visuals, less text. Stories can be created through interview-style format or talking or be more image-based. With complex communication considerations, give time for participants to communicate in their own way (i.e., honour long pauses, give time for someone to type or have the iPad speak). This means that the facilitators must have strong skills in active listening to tailor their involvement with the participants’ preferences and needs (e.g., driving the video editing or just being a support in decision-making).

Resources are important to allow support workers and interpreters as needed.

Timing: Being cautious of online fatigue means more sessions, with shorter length. Timing requires a delicate balance with sessions, pace, and ensuring participants complete their stories within the timeline. This can bump against ableist norms with agendas and scheduling. A 1:1 ratio for facilitators/participants is important to support a nuanced timeline where people don’t feel rushed.

Connection: Fostering crip connection involves a strengths-based approach. Prioritize inclusive language (pronouns, person first vs. identity first language) based on participants’ preferences. Use ice-breakers and jokes at the start and end of each session to build connections. One-to-one break-outs for production time are also important. The group story session and the final day to celebrate these stories and the time together are key.

Sources: Kafer, A. (2013). Feminist, Queer, Crip. Indiana University Press.

Baril, A. (2016). Doctor, am I an Anglophone trapped in a Francophone body? An intersectional analysis of ‘trans-crip-t time’ in ableist, cisnormative, anglonormative societies. Journal of Literacy & Cultural Disability Studies, 10(2), 155-172.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2 Peer-Based Digital Storytelling Model

The peer-based digital storytelling model offers a long-term sustainable format that supports training and employment opportunities for facilitation, skills development, decision-making and connections within and outside the disability community.

For peer-facilitators, it is important to build on strengths, goals, and preferences.. Do not subscribe to Social Role Valourization. For example, if a peer-facilitator enjoys working with editing, but does not like presenting, then foster opportunities around digital support in group and individual production, and behind-the-scenes technology creation.

Caring for one another in the facilitation space is important. Days are long, and there is a lot of behind-the-scenes work to ensure the stories are completed in time for the screening day. Facilitators should meet before and after each session for 30 minutes to review the schedule, talk through questions and concerns, and work through solutions. Always identify a lead facilitator for each workshop who can help identify roles and communicate with participants.

The peer-based model is not solely for working with disability organizations; due to the format and training, our peer-facilitators have worked with staff facilitators in leading projects with non-disabled groups. This is a key factor in marketing and considering the sustainability of the model.

More To Consider:

Facilitators do a lot in these workshops, especially behind the scenes. Payment for peer-facilitators is important as it reflects the reality of the role.

There are several considerations regarding roles and responsibilities:

Pre-workshop: Be consistent in sending information and reminder emails to participants. Send an introductory package with everything the participants will need a few days before the start of the workshop.

Documents include tutorial sheets, packages, confidentiality agreements for support workers and interpreters, and photo consent forms.

Have a chart that outlines the roles for each workshop session and which facilitator will complete them.

Modelling behaviour through a strengths-based approach is important. Being flexible to meet participants where they are at means active listening: being attentive to communication formats, use of plain language, and checking biases.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3

Create ongoing opportunities to share and discuss digital stories

Create ongoing opportunities to share and discuss digital stories from the perspective of disabled people to shift attitudes and change systems.

This requires identifying spaces where stories can be screened, shared, and distributed in public forums and in community and educational settings.

With the visual focus of social media, short digital stories offer opportunities to mobilize innovative ways to communicate experiences and celebrate differences. This can be a critical channel in effecting change.

Stories must be coupled with opportunities for discussion, lead by the authors or disabled people. Online or in-person screenings should be accompanied with panels that can include peer-facilitators, authors, and staff.

The process is as important as the product. Sharing creative formats and models that strive for accessibility can have an important impact on who gets to tell their stories and where they are shared.

More To Consider:

Exploring different multimedia formats (e.g., stop-animation, photography, cellfilms, or other multisensory story methods) offers rich opportunities to consider how experiences can be shared while inviting audience engagement.

Digital stories that are shorter in length can access more sharing spaces while also holding audience attention. For instance, 3-4-minute videos can be embedded in presentations, are more easily digestible on many social media platforms, or can act as stand-alone communication tools.

As a communication tool, digital stories can be used to advocate and share perspectives about topics with individuals (e.g., family members, case workers, etc.) that could be difficult to do live. It provides an opportunity to think through and craft the message over time.

Unsolicited Feedback

Just a quick note to say how much (name) and I LOVE the digital story she created with help from your team and project. We use it all the time to help her share what her life looks like and to challenge people's assumptions about what they think her life looks like 😊.

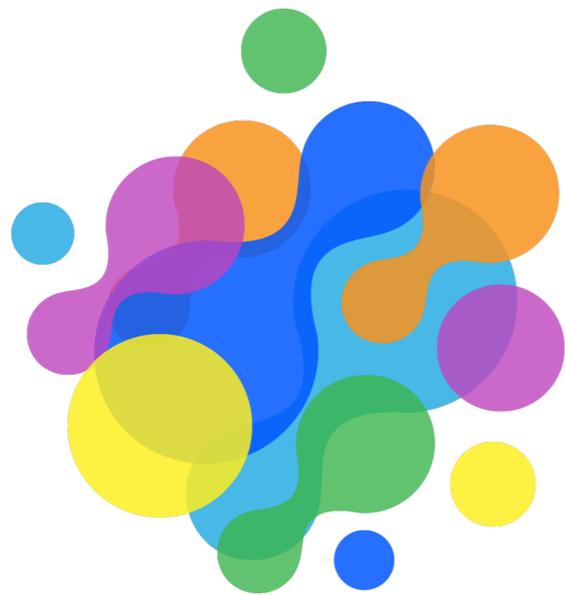
I also use it to help with staff training. It's a powerful tool for people to tell their own stories in a compelling way- especially people who haven't had the opportunity before for all kinds of reasons. I also know that (name) from our group has used it as tool for self advocacy and story sharing in conference and other large audience situations.

Feedback from Self-Advocate Advisor
(permission granted to quote)

Appendix Demographics

Demographic	Descriptor	# of Peer Facilitators (n = 12)	# of Participants (n = 28)
Race	White (European)	7	17
	Arab/West Asian (Afghan, Iranian)	2	1
	Filipino	2	0
	Black (African, Afro-Caribbean)	1	5
	Chinese	0	2
	Indigenous	0	2
	Latino/a/x	0	1
Gender Identity	Female	8	13
	Male	2	13
	Gender fluid or non-binary	1	2
	Transgender	1	0

Please note some respondents chose not to fill out demographic questionnaire. The above is based on number of responses.



MULTISENSORY
S T U D I O