

Participatory Video and Digital Storytelling

Innovative uses of video processes in non-formal educational settings with vulnerable adults.

Video in Education Process

IO1- Analysis of AV techniques in educational activities

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Introduction

This article looks at the development of innovative uses of video in non-formal educational settings for adults. It compares Participatory Video as a process for group development work with Digital Storytelling which has a more individual, autobiographic process. It presents Participatory Video as an approach to engage with groups in non-formal learning situations.

Participatory Video - a methodology predominately used to encourage individual and group development. Using video as a process to promote positive change at an individual and group level.

Digital Storytelling - the practice whereby participants use digital tools (smartphones, tablets, digital cameras, editing software) to tell their 'story' from their own perspective.

This article specifically explores how video and associated digital technologies can be used with marginalised or disadvantaged groups and individuals. It focuses on adult education, especially for groups of people with limited abilities or qualifications.

The European Union describes non-formal learning as:

"Learning which is embedded in planned activities not always explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but which contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view."

History

Both Participatory Video (PV) and Digital Storytelling (DST) combine visual images with audio. As film and video technology became more widely available, educators, social activists and community art workers began developing new ways to utilise these new technologies in non-formal educational settings.

In 1967, Challenge for Change, a community filmmaking project based on Fogo Island in Newfoundland Canada, aimed to pass control of the filmmaking process from professional filmmakers to community members, so that ordinary Canadians in underrepresented communities could tell their own stories on screen. This became known as the Fogo Process and informed many later generations of community filmmakers. Tony Dowmunt observed in 1987 how the development of technology was being utilised in educational settings:

"As the technology became more available practitioners were identifying the potential of video to work with distinct groups."

Dowmunt T (1987).



Early video Portapak launched 1965

Magic lanterns, in the 1600s were the first ways of combining images with a spoken presentation. With the advent of photography and sound recording technology, slide-tape presentations became a staple in educational settings. A slide-tape work consisted of a series of photos or images shown using a slide projector machine, with synchronised accompanying audio recorded traditionally on audiotape.

This originated with and was particularly associated with a particular technological era, namely the mid-to-late 20th century, where magnetic tape and slide projectors were common. During this period, they were also widely used by artists. The technology has moved on but the principle of combining still images and voiceover forms the key technical form for Digital Storytelling. The explosion in the availability and use of mobile phones, tablets and other affordable recording and playback devices with video capability, means that video is now ubiquitous in its use across all forms of education, including non-formal settings.

The expansion of video in teaching

The influence of digital videos on our everyday culture is undeniable. Online video sharing sites such as YouTube and Vimeo boast monthly audience numbers in the hundreds of millions. With digital videos continuing to gain popularity, it seems only natural that this familiar and widespread medium has extended into non-formal education settings.

“When asked how they’d most like to learn about a product or service, two-thirds of people (66%) said they’d prefer to watch a short video. This compares to 18% who’d rather read a text-based article, website or post, 4% who’d like to view an infographic, 3% who’d rather download an eBook or manual, 3% who’d rather attend a webinar or pitch, and 2% who’d like a sales call or demo”.

<https://www.wyzowl.com/video-marketing-statistics-2020/>

Students today are utilising educational videos as a tool for learning everything from changing a tyre to the latest dance craze. Remarkably, Millennials currently make up 92% of the digital video viewing audience. Abstract topics that once seemed difficult to teach and learn are now more accessible and understandable thanks to the availability of information or educational videos.

Teachers can use videos to deliver course information that can be extremely helpful in opening up class time. Lectures and other introductory information can be viewed before class, which allows for more practice and skill-related class activities. These videos are accessible at the student’s convenience and can be watched numerous times to assist with coursework and skill mastery.

The use of videos in teaching and learning serves to not only benefit students but also teachers and their affiliated institutions.

“Multimedia tools, such as videos, that are utilized in classroom environments positively affect student achievement and motivation. It is

reported that TVs and videos used in the class highly contribute to learning and increase student motivation to 70%”.

Cruse, E (2006).

They can also be delivered online, meaning students can work remotely without having to travel to attend lectures. Studies have shown that the use of short video clips allows for more efficient processing and memory recall. The visual and auditory nature of video appeals to a wide audience and allows each user to process information in a way that's natural to them.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a massive impact in terms of the use of video in all aspects of life, particularly education. Remote teaching and blended course structures have become the norm and are likely to continue to be important mechanisms for teaching whatever happens in the future. This of course has also created major problems. Not everyone has access to equipment or the confidence or skills to use it. Inequality has increased with a new digital divide separating those with online access and those who struggle with it.

Different uses of video with marginalised groups

The uses of video in non-formal education settings are extensive. Shaw J and Robertson C (1997) defined six distinct uses of video as a tool for education and community action in creating opportunities for underrepresented groups to express themselves and have their voice heard:

- Production for/with the community

This model aims to provide a vehicle for underrepresented communities to have their stories told. It operates within a more traditional production methodology where professionals often continue to undertake the creative and technical roles engaging with local people in content creation.

- Provision of training and facilities

This aims to increase the access and use of video by providing training and affordable access to equipment. This has lessened in importance over the years as the costs of video equipment have fallen, meaning that many people now have access to smartphones and the internet. Many training courses are now available online.

- Exhibition and distribution

The promoting of work made by underrepresented groups or the specific setting up of screening opportunities to watch work made by community projects. E.g., screening films about health issues made by local people or communities.

- Media education

This activity uses video to teach about film, TV and the wider media. Often through deconstruction, this is achieved by breaking the programmes down into component images and sounds to analyse how it is put together. This aims to increase participants' understanding of the media in order to gain experience to construct their own programmes.

- Video feedback

This can be seen as a significant strength to video, over previous audio-visual formats.

The immediate playback allows an activity, event or interaction to be recorded and then be immediately viewed back so those watching can reflect, critique and learn from it. It is used extensively within educational settings but is also used widely for training, for example, to improve sports techniques, presentation skills or evaluate performances such as drama or music rehearsals.

- Participatory Video

Participatory Video utilises video as a social and community-based tool for individual and group development, used in this way, video can be a powerful aid in the cultivation and realisation of people's abilities and potential. Participatory Video is traditionally used with those

disadvantaged by physical, attitudinal, educational, social or economic reasons, who would not usually express themselves through video or attend formal education courses or training.

All these different approaches can be used to exploit video as a social and educational tool. Whilst there is a clear overlap, the approaches can be delineated by their intrinsically different objectives, which ultimately affect the emphasis of the approach, the goals set, the outcomes, the potential, and also the content output.

Participatory Video

Participatory Video is an approach predominately used to encourage individual and group development. While technical, organisational and creative skills are learnt, and video content created, the positive change that participants go through as part of the process is seen as the most important outcome.

PV grew out of the community arts movements of the 70s and 80s and was heavily influenced by the work of Paulo Freire.

“Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators.”

Freire, P (1972).

Participatory Video is often used to engage with the most marginalized groups in society, to build social cohesion, develop networks and support creative solutions to complex problems. This is done using videoing and playback exercises, as well as other creative storytelling methods to stimulate deeper exploration of reality. This opens space for learning and sharing, discussing the issues together means new stories can emerge that can offer solutions. In authoring their own pathways

forward, people are more likely to act to bring about change. The complex messages that emerge from projects can be effectively communicated.

"Video can be a powerful tool for stimulating self-expression and interaction in group development work. Used in a participatory way, video encourages people to examine the world around them, raise awareness of their situation and help them to become more actively involved in the decisions that affect their lives."

Shaw J and Robertson C (1997).



'Cameras in Hand' - a countrywide youth video initiative funded by the United Nations Peace Building Fund.
Real Time PV workshop for trainers in Kyrgyzstan.

The PV process

Participants develop not only the technical skills required for video making but also a wide range of communication, organisational and

social skills. They learn more about themselves and each other. Through group activity, video can help build confidence and self-esteem. PV projects are practically based using games and exercises. There is a great emphasis placed on co-operative working and the sessions are planned to be as enjoyable as possible. Co-operation is encouraged as is positive feedback rather than criticism.

Initially, games and exercises are used to engage people in the process using the equipment and appearing on camera. Generally, this takes place in group workshops. Technical skills are introduced in an accessible way, everyone takes turns doing all the roles and everything is watched back immediately. No one is allowed to take part unless they also agree to appear in front of the camera, but all the recorded material is confidential until such time as the group is ready and has agreed to start recording and sharing video with other people. These exercises are designed to teach different aspects of video production and to initiate content. Participants undertake interviews and learn how to construct stories to share with others. Through group exercises, they critically investigate what the challenges facing communities are and how to become involved in resolving them.

The PV process can provide participants with the opportunity to work experimentally and creatively together, placing them in positions of responsibility and control. Video is a powerful tool and used correctly can be an excellent motivator for group work. It can encourage the development of a community, as well as raising issues and developing in participants the courage to put their ideas forward. Participatory Video aims to develop people's ability and confidence to express their ideas and communicate them to others. It promotes interaction and cooperation.

The video workshop

Teaching basic video operation, including camerawork, interview techniques, sound, lighting and other programme production skills provides participants with hands-on experience of using video, and develops their awareness of the ways video can be used. This provides

a focus for people to develop and discuss issues by recording material and reviewing it.



Facilitators support participants in planning, identifying themes, subjects, and goals to be achieved and in recording material. The facilitator also manages the expectations of the group, the ground rules to be aware of and additional support issues required by the group members. The facilitator should also ensure that everyone in the group gains a basic understanding of the camera and audio equipment to be used.

It is vital that the participants use the equipment themselves and make creative decisions.

The facilitator should also make sure that production roles are rotated throughout the group, ensuring that everyone has an equal chance to develop skills and confidence in front of and behind the camera.

Key elements of a participatory approach

- Participants always operate the equipment
- Everyone attending must agree to appear on video
- Participants take turns at every role
- Play back everything recorded in its entirety
- Never video other people without permission
- Video material recorded in initial workshops is confidential

Generally, Participatory Video projects adapt to the needs of participants and contexts, rather than using a formulaic series of activities. Technical skills are developed alongside the creation of content. Participatory Video is a methodology predominately used to encourage individual and group development. While technical, organisational and creative skills are learnt and video content created, the positive change that participants go through as part of the process is seen as the most important outcome.

Contexts for Participatory Video

As video became increasingly available, many practitioners tested the social and research possibilities. Thus, Participatory Video has diverse roots including the participatory epistemologies and transformative pedagogies (e.g., Freire 1972) underlying bottom-up development communications in the Global South and the community arts movement in the Global North, where community video tackled disadvantaged group's concerns.

PV is used in a wide variety of settings with many different groups, in each context the aims may differ. The following provides some examples of how it can be used:

- **Community empowerment:** Participatory Video aims to get in touch with a community that lives in conditions of marginality and give it the opportunity to appropriate an expressive language and to represent itself, with the ultimate aim of building an empowerment path and claim.

- Advocacy: Participatory Video is used by a group of subjects who intend to report a problem and make claims through it to mobilise public opinion.
- Therapeutic: Participatory Video is used by a set of subjects who, in following this path, want to bring about a change in their personal discomfort in a collective way.
- Research: Participatory Video, in some cases, is used as an anthropological/social/ethnographic investigation tool within a specific area of study, an alternative tool to get in touch with the other and give space for free expression.

These diverse origins mean there is considerable debate on what constitutes Participatory Video and a methodological pluralism reflecting practitioners' different motivations and positions (e.g., Roberts, T and Munoz, S, 2020).

The original intention of the methodology, to use video as a process in personal and group development has been blurred. Often PV is used inaccurately to describe what are essentially traditional video production training courses. It may be useful therefore to consider PV as an approach rather than a predetermined methodology or set of exercises. Much of the literature about the use of Participatory Video is from the international development sector where it is often used as a tool in action research. This has skewed the debate about its use to more international contexts, often where there is substantial funding for its use, and away from more grassroots localised activities.

Structure of Participatory Video projects

Projects with the most marginalised groups aim to support them to safely express themselves and by sharing their stories build participation within the community and enable people to come together to discuss and promote a shared vision of a more inclusive society.

Projects often aim to address the need for more inclusive, mainstream participation which focuses the power to create positive change in the hands of communities and participants. Projects seek to tackle divides

within and between communities from different social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds and the feelings of alienation from politics and society. By providing positive role models both from within their communities and from people who share their challenges, projects can assist in the building of social capital within communities.

The videos produced and their exhibition, enhance community cohesion and projects address the need to promote common values. Participants share, learn from and celebrate each other's experiences and cultures in order to create a more inclusive and integrated society based on mutual respect, by working together to create new narratives and positive experiences. They explore how they see themselves and how they will face the challenges ahead.

A typical project structure for a PV project with both production and process outcomes might look like this:

1. Initial engagement

PV games and exercises to get the group working together, technical skills developed alongside looking at issues. Everyone swaps roles, no one becomes identified as a camera operator, director etc. Generally, none of this is shared outside the workshop setting.

2. Developing ideas

Storyboarding techniques and other exercises such as video chat shows, storytelling exercises on a particular issue to develop and expand content ideas. Participants work on visual sequences and interview questions.

3. Recording content

The sessions can be used for recording material by the participants themselves, reviewing content, working on visual sequences to support narratives.

4. Editing

As editing progresses, this is generally undertaken by facilitators who then share draft edits with the group online and in sessions for the group to make revisions. Further production can take place as required.

5. Sharing

The final content to be shared may not be a single traditional video programme. It could be clips on a website or social media posts. The project provides for participants to tell their own stories in their own words and control the process of how they are disseminated. They should be fully involved in discussions about how this takes place.

6. Evaluation, follow up and developing continued support for participants

Case Study - Open Mind, UK

Open Mind is a creative advocacy project for people recovering from mental ill-health based in Reading, UK. The project originally ran a series of Participatory Video workshops for local people who had mental health issues. These individuals are often isolated and heavily dependent on one or two people who may also themselves be under considerable stress. The project offered a creative environment where people were able to explore issues, meet other people and gain new skills.

After the initial workshops, it was clear that there was a need for a longer project and funding was found for the group to work on videos about their experiences of mental ill-health.



It has developed new ways to support people and build new relationships and community-based networks.

The project, now in its 5th year, runs weekly open-access practical video workshops where participants supported by workers and volunteers plan, record, edit and distribute videos to increase awareness about mental health issues locally.

This initiative demonstrated the viability and the potential benefits of the approach. Participants in the project said of the work:

"It's the first time I've worked creatively like this with other people, it's awesome to collaborate."

"The people, the ideas, it gives me confidence, I feel less alienated."

The project has supported people recovering from mental ill-health to make positive, dynamic and inspiring contributions to the creative life of their community.

<https://www.real-time.org.uk/open-mind>

Participatory Video and social action

Often there is considerable pressure on PV projects to deliver 'product' which is too often narrowly defined as the video over the longer term and more difficult to achieve societal goals. This pressure is not only external, facilitators themselves may see making the video as the main outcome and participants may have been offered the chance to become 'filmmakers' raising unrealistic expectations. Shorter projects can also lead to more extractive practices, where under time pressure facilitators and participants are required to produce content related to external research or communication needs.

For Participatory Video to have a meaningful impact on social issues it needs to move beyond short term production-led projects. Increasingly, the importance is seen of ensuring that participants voices are heard and more importantly listened to and acted upon.

Projects that provide the framework for longer-lasting engagement with ongoing horizontal (peer-to-peer) and vertical communication (to decision-makers and influencers of policy) provide a way for people to share and learn, reflecting on what has gone before and building on it.

This way of working can be described as an extended PV approach which was developed to better mitigate the associated risks and is more effective due to the iterative spirals of videoing, reflecting and taking new actions over time.

This definition of Participatory Video is taken from the Participate project, convened by Real Time with IDS, the Institute for Development Studies, University of Brighton, UK. There are many understandings and

approaches to PV. This approach was selected as it links best to PV for citizen engagement and mobilisation.

Participatory Video (PV)

Participatory Video (PV) is one of the key visual methods used by Participate partners to structure their participatory research processes with people living in poverty. PV involves a range of video production and screening activities, which drive an iteratively evolving process of exploration and dialogue on shared issues. It can be empowering because it provides an accessible way for a group to take action on their own concerns, through deepening their understanding, engaging and motivating their wider community, and also shaping and creating their own films, in order to communicate their messages and perspectives to decision-makers and the public.

How is PV different to conventional filmmaking?

Participatory Video is an interactive group process, generally facilitated by a practitioner, which aims to build participant's social influence. Group members record themselves and the world around them and communicate their own stories creatively, but it involves more than collaborative filmmaking.

Practitioners use videoing and playback activities to mediate group discussion inclusively, establish collaborative relationships and catalyse group action. Video production provides a powerful way for participants to explore their situation, and reflect on experiences together, in order to deepen understanding about reality and forge ways forward based on the knowledge that emerges.

Extended PV projects

Projects aim to build a supportive and creative space for people to share their stories and experiences, gain new skills and confidence, whilst establishing and building support networks. Through working together and making decisions democratically, participants acquire skills in advocacy and intercultural communications, but also become more aware of 'the other.'

“Participatory Video (PV) is an interactive group process, mediated by video recording and playback activities, the early stages involve participants in videoing themselves and the world around them, watching these recordings together (playback), and then reflecting on what was said or shown. Later, group members create their own ‘films’ (e.g., video stories, messages or vignettes) for different audiences depending on the context and specific project purpose.”

Shaw, J. (2021).

Table 1 Framing the relational conditions for accountability through video processes

Basic PV process	Enabling spaces	Bonding and bridging communication	Power-shifting processes
Group-forming and building	Opening and enabling safe space to rehearse expression backstage	Progressive cycles of short video recording and playback exercises with turn-taking	Power within – building self-esteem, self-confidence and sense of ‘can do’ (self-efficacy)
Group exploration and reflection toward collective agency	Stepping in / out between the safe space and familiar local environment to develop agendas and performance capacities	Exploring experiences, ideas, issues, opinions and solutions through in-camera edited exercises and discussion on playback	Power to and power with – building group agency and group consciousness, understanding and meanings
Action through collaborative production	Pursuing agendas by story-telling and articulating messages in created space	Making short video stories, messages and clips for particular audiences	Power to – increasing as people move to action Power with – developing through collective awareness, identities and purpose and the energy of collective action
Performing influence through video-mediated exchange	Performing influence frontstage in public space (claimed or invited) within community or between social interests and levels	Directing videos or showing videos to different audiences (peers, wider community, leaders)	Power to and power with – to challenge power over and foster potential allies

Shaw, J. (2017a).

PV is now used in a variety of settings with a wide range of groups and individuals. It is used as an action research tool for international development projects, in work with people with physical and learning disabilities, with women's groups, minority communities such as the homeless, refugees and many others.

To navigate the ethical risk of inappropriate exposure, the first two stages clearly separate videoing in safe spaces, to establish inclusive dynamics and generate internally focused research discussion, from video's later uses to mediate external communication. Shaw, J (2020).

Case Study – Participate

The Participate network was created to bring lived experiences of poverty into UN deliberations during the creation of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs). As part of the project young people from the Spatial Collective used Participatory Video to explore local issues and communicate effectively with decision-makers.

The PV process starts by opening up spaces for the group to engage in a 'safe' environment, followed by group building exercises and video work to establish a shared purpose and collaboration amongst the group. This internal process provides time for group exploration and reflection on the issues in confidence, before communicating to external audiences. Next, groups produce video material to stimulate dialogue with peers, outside of the immediate group. When there is sufficient time, participatory video processes can unfold through further cycles of production and playback action in a variety of social and political forums.

Shaw, J. (2017).

Initially, five 2 hour workshops took place, these involved short video recording and playback exercises to explore issues. Videoing activities mediated the exchange of experiences and ideas. Structured progressively, the emphasis shifted from 'I am' to 'who are you?' to 'we

are' to 'what are our interests?'. The group used the statement-in-a-round format to share positive and negative experiences and to later complete the statement 'I feel strongly about because..... ', which elicited diverse viewpoints. The group then recorded shot by shot documentary exercises.



At this community-level stage, they scaled horizontally by screening their videos to mediate wider dialogue at community events. On slum sanitation, this increased the range of perspectives with community elders and women joining young people to identify solutions, such as working together to build closed sewage culverts. On reflection, the youth group considered that showing videos drew in more people than usual and involved them in sense-making processes. The young people were supported in developing compelling policy messages and worked alongside experienced video-producers using parallel production processes to co-construct output videos suitable for global policy space.

The Mathare young people created a video, Working Together for Change, which illustrated systemic barriers and what local security action can achieve. The Kenyan videos alongside visual outputs from the other 30 Participate countries formed physical and online exhibitions leading up to the UN SDG summit and influenced development of the SDG 'leave no-one behind' narrative.

<https://www.real-time.org.uk/knowledge-from-the-margins>

Project example description from Shaw, J. (2021).

"We are trying our best to bring about change, but we cannot tackle wider social problems alone, so we want you to work with us. In tackling security, we have had success and setbacks, we have learnt what we can do together and where we need your help".

Spatial Collective participant.

<https://www.real-time.org.uk/working-together-for-change>

A participatory video approach:

- Provides tools for development work
- Is active rather than passive
- Promotes group-based co-operative working
- Is grounded in participants' experience and revolves around their needs and ideas
- Stimulates creative expression
- Develops confidence and self-esteem
- Generates interaction and discussion
- Builds group identity and cohesion
- Increases awareness and critical enquiry
- Provides a means to communicate with others
- Cultivates participants' capabilities and potential
- Develops planning and decision-making skills
- Transfers control and responsibility to participants

- Encourages self-determination of goals
- Facilitates empowerment

Digital Storytelling

Digital Storytelling (DST) is a learning/creating experience supported by technology, allowing participants to create their own short films containing voice, imagery, and music. The aim generally is to complete a digital story that is 2-3 minutes in length and made up of about 20-25 images and has a script length of about one page, double-spaced.



"People make sense of their lives by creating life stories. People use narratives to try to derive some measure of unity and purpose out of what may otherwise seem to be an incomprehensible array of life events and experiences"

McAdams, D.P. (1985).

Background/development

Digital Storytelling is a methodology that was developed in the mid-90s at the Centre for Digital Storytelling in San Francisco. It has been widely used since then by activists, researchers and artists. The process involves intensive workshops during which participants develop a personal narrative, usually around three minutes long. They then record and illustrate this narrative with still images or photographs. The final product is a short film, which has been produced and edited by the narrator. A first-person voice is used in the narration.

Some tools can be used in feminist ways, to protect and promote women's human rights. Digital Storytelling lends itself extremely well to feminist projects. The process of women creating their own digital story is designed to transform their 'inner' embodied worlds, as well as have an impact on 'outer' material or structural conditions. In articulating their stories, the women are developing both technical and creative skills and confidence.

Digital Storytelling differs most obviously from Participatory Video, in that is a personalised process usually undertaken from an individual perspective, even if this may often take place in group environments. In that sense, it can be described as a form of autobiographical narrative. These can be described as the stories people remember (and often tell) about events in their lives. Some autobiographical stories refer to memories of important personal events, like 'the day my father died.' Others may seem more trivial.

People often share their stories of important personal events with friends and acquaintances. Personal storytelling, therefore, often promotes interpersonal intimacy. Parents often tell their children stories from their own past, teachers often employ autobiographical narratives to promote learning in the classroom, and many adults see personal narratives as effective vehicles for socialisation and imparting moral lessons for young people. The stories people tell about their own lives, furthermore, reflect the values and norms of their culture.

Many storytelling projects take their lead from Freire's process of building critical consciousness and also have strong collaborative and participatory elements. The benefits are therefore not solely focused on the individual. Workshop participants are given the space to reflect on the world they live in and on their position within that world. They are encouraged to imagine and be part of a shifted power arrangement that increases personal and social agency.

In the early 1990s, the non-profit Centre for Digital Storytelling codified a process to create compelling 3-5 minute short films that synthesise still images, video, voice recordings, music or sound, and text. This provided an instrumental model for production but there is now some confusion when the term DST is used about whether it is this US model, or a wider more generalised methodology being described.

If a wider definition of the process is applied then it can be said that stories can be used to: empower participants through personal reflection, growth, and the development of new literacies; educate and raise awareness among viewing audiences about issues presented in the stories; inform public policy, advocacy, and movement building; and provide visual, narrative, and multi-sensory data to support public health research and evaluation efforts.

Technological advances and reduced costs have meant a spread of availability of resources to allow people without a technical background to produce works that tell a story using 'moving' images and sound. The lower processing and memory requirements for using stills as compared with video, and the ease with which the so-called 'Ken Burns' pan effect, can be produced with online or regular video editing software, have made it easy to create aesthetic but short films. The criticism of this approach is that the films all have the same look. This approach appeals to researchers, as many short pieces of individualised qualitative research can be generated.

DST has been widely used in therapeutic, health education settings and as a process to contribute to making change.

Joanna Wheeler sets out the case for transformative storywork as an approach that can contribute to social change. Transformative storywork is a complex and multimodal process, which operates on an emotional, creative level. It uses storytelling as a form of inquiry, including the exploration of the self and of daily experiences in connection with life history and social context. Through personal and collective creative expression, transformative storywork builds opportunities to challenge unequal relations of power in our own lives and the lives of others. Wheeler J., Shahrokh T., Derakhshani N. (2020).

Participatory storytelling methodologies

This approach often uses the 'story circle' as described in Circle of the 9 Muses. Hutchins D (1967).

Tessa Lewin's Digital Storytelling Handbook describes a typical DST methodology:

1. Planning and writing with scripting/story circles

Digital Storytelling first begins with constructing a story – it is very important that the story is a first-person narrative. This stage is very important. Stories should be structured around a theme. Stories are prepared using a mixture of group work and individual work – where participants brainstorm ideas together and share potential stories and give each other feedback in 'story circles'. The end result of this process is a refined script. This step should not be rushed.

Participants should start by planning and get feedback at this stage from other participants before they then work on refining it.

2. Audio recording

Once someone has finished their script, they are ready to record the audio narrative. Often one workshop facilitator will be assigned to support this process – when a participant is ready they will find the facilitator, record their story (ideally in a single take) and then the facilitator will give them a digital file (WAV/MP3) with their audio narrative on.

Because people are often nervous recording the voiceover it is best to record it in 2-3 sentence 'chunks' so if people make a mistake, you can re-record just a small section, not the whole thing.

3. Storyboarding

The next stage is thinking through how to match images with text. Participants may have brought photographs, drawing or images with them, or they may want to act out/illustrate their stories in the workshop or find images online to illustrate their ideas. It is sometimes a good idea to get participants storyboarding prior to locating any multimedia as it forces them to think through exactly what images they want before looking for them. Images that participants have brought with them can be scanned in/photographed at this stage. As a rule of thumb, digital stories tend to work best with about 20-25 still images.

4. Editing/creating the story

This stage of the process is done on computers using basic editing software (there are lots of free apps such as iMovie or Lightworks, for more advanced features - DaVinci Resolve). It is a good idea to start with a basic demonstration of the software, and back this up with simple handouts that describe the process. Participants place their audio recording on a timeline and then use their storyboard as a map to construct the edit. Another ambient/music track can be added if desired. The final projects are then 'rendered' to give a self-contained movie file.

5. Sharing the stories

This is perhaps the most moving stage in the process. Participants see their own completed stories for the first time and those of their colleagues. Screenings often give participants unexpected insights into their colleagues.

Benefits of storytelling

"We know that good communication is a two-way process. To engage the public and have an impact on the people who shape policy we need real stories, told by people in their own words, on their own terms. But there is an inherent tension between making a communication product that speaks for itself—which is powerful enough to elicit a strong emotional response from an audience or change their views—and one

where the emphasis is on the integrity of the process. A process that is concerned with engagement and voice has participation at its core. A process overly concerned with the quality of the final product will privilege this end at the expense of the means by which it is arrived."
Lewin T (2011).

A wide range of claims are made for the benefits of storytelling, for example, increased confidence, better socialisation, increased communication, motivation and ICT skills levels.

These can be loosely grouped into the following categories:

- Those that benefit the person directly through the process of storytelling (me)
- Those that benefit the person by the participation in a creative process with other people (me and others)
- Those that benefit their immediate communities in which they live (me and the world)
- Those that have a wider benefit for society (the world)

Psychologists have studied the extent to which memories of personal events are accurate and question whether the stories are true or a distortion of what really happened. Studies have also looked at what autobiographical narratives say about a person's self-understanding or about social life and social relationships more generally.

There has been an increase in interest among theorists and researchers in autobiographical recollections, life stories, and narrative approaches, to understanding human behaviour and experience. D. P. McAdams's life story model of identity asserts that people living in modern societies provide their lives with unity and purpose by constructing internalised and evolving narratives of the self. The idea that identity is a life story resonates with a number of important themes in developmental, cognitive, personality, and cultural psychology. Life stories are as manifested in investigations of self-understanding, autobiographical memory, personality structure and change, and the complex relations between individual lives and cultural modernity.

Sherrey Hamby writing in Psychology Today states (3)

“Almost all of us will experience some kind of adversity... Emotional, autobiographical storytelling can be a path to truly owning your story”.

She outlines four benefits:

1.Realizing that sharing your story can help others

Stories can be very healing and many people benefit from getting the opportunity to pass on their wisdom to others. This can be especially powerful for people who do not always feel that they have the chance to help others. Resilience is strengthened by recognising that we are all experts in our own lives and we all have something to share with others. Another piece of this is starting to understand that words can have power—positive power—on others... this is an under-appreciated benefit of narrative and storytelling.

2.Finding your voice

Another well-known benefit of storytelling is finding your own voice. What does it mean to ‘find your voice’? It means learning how to express yourself and learning how to think about what has happened in your life in a way that makes sense. Developing and organising your story often means imposing a traditional story structure on the events of your life. Sure, in some sense it may be true that many of the events of our lives are random and unconnected. From a psychological point of view, however, it does not help to think about them that way. It helps to think about your life as a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end. It helps to think about how the various events—even the bad ones—have been part of a journey toward the person you want to become. Writing it down or telling it to someone else can help you impose that organisation on it, help you identify key events, and even help you just rehearse and remember the details in a way that helps you become the author of your own life.

3. Re-affirming your values

Sometimes you learn things about yourself from the act of writing or storytelling. It can be a way to clarify what is important. Many of the people we have spoken to have mentioned that pausing to tell your story can be a good reminder of your priorities. It is so easy to get swept up in the day-to-day hustle and bustle. Taking some time to focus on values can be beneficial.

4. Finding peace, finding hope

People who have found their voice, shared their story, and reaffirmed their values often find a sense of peace and a hopefulness that they did not have before.

DST case study - Egypt

The Coptic Culture Conservation Collective initiative was a 3-year project to create a narrative and visual archive of contemporary Coptic intangible cultural heritage (ICH).

The project coordinated by the Institute for Development Studies in the UK used DST as one of the approaches to identify, capture and document Coptic ICH. It aimed to build local communities' repertoires, and capacity for long term heritage preservation.

A number of training workshops were held for participants from a number of different Coptic communities to learn how to use DST to record their intangible cultural heritage.

Real Time supported the delivery of the DST training. The feedback from the training highlighted some of the issues and benefits of DST.

The project was for young adults to share what it has meant for them personally to identify, capture and document their own community's heritage through digital stories.

The DST project intended to support them in the creation, development, planning and production of a digital story. It proposed to them a number of questions to help them decide on their Digital Story these included:

- What did they think heritage was at the beginning?
- Of all the stories, incidents, situations that they 'captured' what spoke to them most powerfully and why?
- What do they believe they are offering to their communities now through this work?

Due to the political situation in Egypt where photography in public is banned, this meant it was very difficult for participants to create visuals by taking photographs or video. By building the project around the individual's community, heritage gave a focus and avoided some of the personal exposure that the DST approach can cause. For many of the participants, this was still an unusual activity, and most hadn't had much previous experience of using technology or creating content. DST is very reliant on the use of technology and many projects are beset by technical issues.

There were variations in literacy levels and education within the group, which posed a challenge as DST is very reliant on people's ability to write. A lack of confidence in participants meant there was a tendency for people to want to rush the process. Some struggled with being able to adapt their stories and make them more interesting to the audience. Often DST uses stock footage downloaded from the internet but there was a general lack of understanding on the use of copyrighted materials, which as a result posed another problem, as these DSTs would be seen widely and therefore unauthorised images or music could not be used. Introducing drawing, such as the use of storyboards and drawing software on iPad helped produce additional images for use in the films and help make up for a shortage of appropriate visuals.

All the participants successfully completed their stories, and everyone participated in the activities. There was a genuine sense of teamwork,

collaboration and support developed over the few days people worked together.

Having a theme beforehand helped participants be prepared and preselect stories. Participants proposed 3 stories, and with the support of others in the group and workshop leaders, they were able to select one. This helped provide better stories and ultimately helped to prevent people from replicating stories.

Using smaller groups for the story circles saved time, was less intimidating and more supportive. Not providing the digital recording and editing equipment (iPads in this case) from the start meant they were not distracted by the technology too early and were able to concentrate on their stories. Seeing all the films at the end was a very good way of celebrating the work and offering a sense of achievement.

The benefits of DST need to be balanced with the risks, an extensive examination in the field of public health highlighted some of the issues. These are well summarised by Table 1, Gubrium A, Hill A, Sarah Flicker S (2014).

**TABLE 1—
Summary of Situated Ethical Issues When Using Participatory Visual and Digital Methods**

Challenges	Situation	Issues	Considerations
Fuzzy boundaries	DST falls at the nexus of public health practice, research, and advocacy.	Confusion between where priorities lie (research vs practice) can lead to very different implementation approaches.	All partners should be clear on their objectives, policies, and priorities.
Recruitment and consent to participate	Sponsors want to recruit diverse participants to share their stories.	There is a fine balance between protecting individuals who are in the midst of trauma from further harm and patronizing potential participants through exclusion.	Critically engage with participants about benefits and potential risks, and ensure safety and supports (e.g., counseling) are available.
	Consent to participate is sometimes indirect: a story may feature people (voice, images, names) other than its author.	Those featured in the digital story may be unaware of or upset about their inclusion.	Optimally, oral or written consent should be obtained from all individuals featured in a story.
Power of shaping	Storytellers are encouraged to tell their own personal stories; however sometimes tensions arise between emphasizing processes versus products.	Facilitators may help “shape” the narrative to produce stories that will resonate with audiences, inadvertently imposing their own agendas. Sharing power often means losing control over messaging.	Reflexive attention to power dynamics and humility are key to ensuring the autonomy of voice.
Representation and harm	Participants sometimes tell stories that make us uncomfortable or expose themselves to harm through the process.	Digital stories can misrepresent communities or reify stereotypes. Exposing illegal or illicit activity might endanger storytellers or participants.	Storytellers’ well-being should be supported. Supports should be in place and implemented for storytellers. Facilitators can engage audiences to challenge harmful representations.
Confidentiality	Confidentiality may not always be possible or appropriate.	Stories are sometimes so distinct that it is impossible to guarantee confidentiality. Often participants want to be credited by name for their contributions.	Wherever possible, stories should be anonymized by name (or chosen pseudonym) and location.
Release of materials	Consent to participate in a digital storytelling workshop is not the same thing as release of materials: giving permission for your story to be shared in a variety of manners.	Release of materials needs to be negotiated on an ongoing basis. Some stories reveal very personal issues (e.g., HIV status, a history of violence) that can make participants vulnerable to stigma and discrimination. Storytellers might want to change their stories or to change their minds about dissemination over time.	Workshops should include discussions about videography, which can be a spoken voice. Where release is needed, it should be posted online for educational purposes of education workshop forums, to be discussed on a case-by-case basis. Release of materials is an ongoing process.

Note. DST = Digital Storytelling.

Conclusion



Video can be a particularly good method for reaching out to marginalised groups and individuals. Specifically, it can be used as a way for people to explore their lives and find explanations and possible ways forward for issues that have proved hard to address in other ways. Video can also be used to improve individuals' skills through peer support and used as a method to successfully address and develop employability skills.

Using video and digital media to work with the most marginalised and disadvantaged adults can help build social cohesion, develop networks and support creative solutions to complex problems. Using videoing and playback methods can stimulate deeper understanding which opens space for learning and sharing, discussing the issues together means new stories can emerge that can offer solutions. In authoring their own pathways forward, people are more likely to act to bring about change.

Whether it's DST or PV, a degree of caution is needed in presenting the benefits of using video. The approaches aren't necessarily appropriate

in all situations, as some methodologies such as PV are more useful working with groups while others are more focused on individual development, DST and CV Video.

When we consider the benefits of particular video methodologies, we need to consider a wider range of criteria than the methodologies alone to evaluate their effectiveness. The context in which the activities take place, who with, the participants' situations and skills, literacy and language levels, the experience of the facilitator and many other factors all impact on the possible benefits to participants.

When discussing a particular methodology, it is worth remembering that it is not only what is done but how it is done that brings benefits. The methodology cannot be examined in isolation.

"Video offers many benefits... it must be noted that using the medium does not automatically guarantee success. Video is only a tool, not a process in itself. It cannot do development work or magically deliver a desired result. To be of value it must be employed by a group worker in an appropriate way. Some video work with groups is participatory and some is not. In fact, precisely because video is such a powerful medium, it is open to abuse, and it can be used very badly. Often this is for the simple reason that workers are unaware the effect that video has on people and of the possible pitfalls."

Shaw J and C Robertson (1997).

Participatory Video, Digital Storytelling and CV Video (employability) all offer innovative ways to engage with adults in non-formal educational settings. They all have benefits and risks but provide a wide range of approaches to working with those people who often have few educational opportunities.

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Links

1. <https://www.wyzowl.com/video-marketing-statistics-2020/>
2. Tessa Lewin
<https://visualmeths.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/a-handbook-for-digital-storytelling-c2ad-by-tessa-lewin1.docx>
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3. [Sherrey Hamby](#)
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/the-web-violence/201309/resilience-and-4-benefits-sharing-your-story>