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Using Digital Stories as a method for developing students’ understanding and recording of service users’ views.

Abstract

This paper is based on teaching sessions with students on social work courses at the University of Huddersfield. The intention was to help them to recognise both the importance of reflection in practice (Schon 1991), and also the views of people who use services (Oliver et al 2012). As part of their study, they have considered the experiences of people with learning disabilities (Thomas and Woods 2003) and person centred planning principles (O’Brien 2002). They were encouraged to apply this understanding to case studies that highlighted the experiences of people with learning disabilities who had left long stay hospitals (Kielty and Woodley 2013). Throughout the courses, students are encouraged to apply person centred approaches in their work with service users (Adams et al 2009, and Rogers 1986) as well as ensuring the inclusion of the views of service users (Warren 2007). The reflective practice modules before the start of their first 70 day placement aim to develop students’ skills in reflection and prepare them to work with service users and their families. They study a module; ‘Working together with Service users and Carers’ concurrently, where most of the teaching is carried out with the direct involvement of service users outlining both their lived realities, and their experiences of services. These experimental teaching sessions were designed to complement the module by asking students to develop one page profiles (Hughes and Roberts 2014) or person centred plans (O’Brien et al 2010) through the use of digital stories.

The sessions were co-taught with a technology adviser, so that my focus in the sessions was primarily on the links between theory and practice through the use of case studies and the medium of constructing a digital story. Examples of previous digital stories completed by students on placement were shown to the students to outline the possibilities of using digital stories. Students were shown how to access free images for insertion into their stories, and then encouraged to develop stories using one of four case studies from people who had moved into the community from Prudhoe Hospital (Kielty and Woodley 2013). There were issues in terms of accessing the software package in the first taught session, so a follow up (optional) session was offered later in the term. The opportunity to attend a refresher on the use of digital stories was also made available to final year students, as part of their critical reflective practice module.

Evaluation took place by individual discussions with students who attended, as well as by invitation for evaluation through the unilearn site.
Introduction and Rationale

‘Nothing about us, without us’

This slogan from the disability movement is fundamental to the teaching on the social work course (Oliver et al 2012). We strive to ensure that the views of service users and carers are an integral part of the teaching to our students, and this is developed through each year of the course. Whilst we have a specific module that incorporates the views of service users and carers, facilitated by a social work module leader, we use additional methods to support our students in recognising the centrality of the experiences of service users. These include: case studies, DVD and YouTube clips, as well as listening directly to people’s experiences. I teach a session on developing person centred plans with people with learning disabilities (O’Brien et al 2010) as part of the social work methods module. I also have responsibility for the reflective practice modules which focus on developing practice skills (Thompson and Thompson 2008) which are linked to the two placements that students complete during their course. We have used digital stories as part of the assessment for the reflective practice modules for some time, encouraging students to think about an aspect of practice on placement that has encouraged them to critically analyse their views and experiences. However, I wanted to develop how we use the session for teaching digital story skills so that this was not solely a skills based technical
session, but encouraged students to think about how we incorporate the views of service users in our recordings. Children and young people explain how important it is to them to be included (Marchant and Gordon 2001) but the experience of young people with communication impairments is that often they are not involved in decisions that affect their lives (Morris 1998b). I hoped that students would be encouraged to develop one page profiles (Hughes and Roberts 2014) or work on a person centred plan. The idea was to help them think about alternative ways of recording information with service users than just a traditional support plan. (see for instance the profiles developed by parents with their children with the support of Helen Sanderson: http://bringingustogether.org.uk/but-projects/one-page-profiles/ ) Technology has enabled service users and their carers to develop different ways of communicating their aspirations that can be encapsulated in one page profiles or Person Centred Plans for sharing with support workers and professionals. I chose case studies from the closure of Prudhoe Hospital (Kielty and Woodley 2013), which were one page summaries contrasting the experiences of people who had been ‘patients’ at Prudhoe hospital with their current life opportunities. These summaries are powerful reminders of how we can abuse professional power to disenfranchise people in institutional care (Goffman 1961) and are a salutary reminder of the importance of keeping the voices of people who we support central to the services that are provided to them, as we re-discovered with the situation of people with learning disabilities at Winterbourne View (Flynn 2012) and in the case of Connor Sparrowhawk (McNicholl 2015).

**Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

In preparation for the digital story teaching session, I taught the students about the history of the experiences of people with learning disabilities. This focused on some of the social policy and legislation that has shaped people’s lives over the past century; from the experience of segregation through specialist education provision, to the lives lived by people in long stay hospitals. Key legislation such as the 1913 Mental Deficiency Act, and the 1944 Education Act, have shaped people’s lives in a way that is still apparent today. It is possible that our students may still work with people who have lived in long stay hospitals, as identified in the case summaries from people in
Prudhoe Hospital. Whilst the historical significance of this legislation may be
lessening, some of the challenges for people with learning disabilities in a society
which has not valued inclusion may still be apparent, as the current campaign by the
developed a model of ‘normalisation’ which advocated the inclusion of people with
learning disabilities in society. Social role valorisation recognised the way that people
want to live their lives with valued roles in society, and this theory was crucial in the
development of inclusion. The social model of disability (Oliver et al 1994) is studied
by students in their first year on the course, and encourages them to recognise some
of the barriers faced by people with impairments. The disability movement highlights
the fact that it is not the impairment that disables people, but a society which has
barriers to their full inclusion in society. This is particularly the case for people with
learning disabilities, where the barriers may not be due to physical access, but the
attitudes that people and their families may face. (Thomas and Woods 2003). The
Valuing People White Paper (2001) was based on the key principles of:

- Legal and civil rights, e.g. education, to vote, marry, have a family.
- Independence
- Presumption of independence, not dependence
- Choice E.g. where to live, what work to do, and personal support
- Inclusion
- Making use of mainstream services and being fully included in the community.

The move towards more person centred care has been developing since the NHS and
Community Care Act 1990 with an increased focus on care in the community, and
continued with Putting People First: A shared vision and commitment to the
transformation of Adult Social Care (Department of Health 2007). This set out a future
for social care services which focused on the individual and person centred planning
used to develop outcomes that were important to them, rather than the professional
‘gift’ model (Duffy 2009).

Sanderson (2002) suggests that person centred planning is a way of supporting
people to make changes in their life in a way that enables them to plan for their
future. Different examples of person centred plans such as PATHS, MAPS and
Essential Life Style planning (O’Brien et al 2010) were outlined with the students,
with the opportunity to work together on some of the tasks that would be covered in a
One page profiles consist of three different headings, which are similar to some of those used in an Essential Life Style Plan:

- Appreciation (what we like and admire about the person)
- Important To (what is important to the person)
- How to best support the person

(see: appendix 2)

The use of photos as well as comments from people who know person well, highlight some of their hopes and aspirations which can be crucial to ensure that people are supported in the ways that they want. (Hughes and Roberts 2014). Gavin Croft, used a powerpoint for his support plan, including a poem about how he saw his life

(appendix: 3)

**The Digital Story Teaching Sessions**

The digital story teaching sessions took place with both first and final placement students before the start of their placements. The session for the first placement students was compulsory, but it was optional for final students who had already completed a digital story the previous year. The session was organised in the PC labs so that students could use a computer to practise the skills that were being taught in the session. There were a total of 75 students commencing a first placement, and for the optional session with the final year students, out of a total of 65 students, approximately 20 students attended. Each student was handed a case
study of someone who had been a patient at Prudhoe Hospital (Kielty and Woodley 2013). This was a one page summary, which highlighted people’s experiences whilst living at the Hospital, and their life opportunities since leaving Prudhoe. All of them were living in their communities, some in their own tenancies, or in shared houses with support. There were a variety of supports in place, including personal assistants, and residential care workers. One woman had subsequently married and was living with her children. As an introduction to the session, students were reminded about the earlier lecture and seminar about working with people with a learning disability (Williams 2006) and Person Centred Planning (O’Brien 2002). Students were asked to consider and reflect on the case studies that they were reading (Knott and Scragg 2013). Students were asked to share their thoughts in pairs in the session and feedback was obtained. The date of the closure was highlighted, as many people think of the long stay hospitals as a thing of the past, but in reality the last long stay hospital did not close until 2009 (Mencap 2009), despite the closure programme having begun approximately 30 years earlier.

The sessions were co-taught with a learning technology advisor, who was able to demonstrate some of the technical skills required. Rhem and Plank (2001) outline some of the advantages of team teaching in social work education and how to incorporate this into the curriculum. Team teaching can enable lecturers to provide additional support, particularly in large teaching groups, and in this instance students did require some individual support as they worked with the images.

A powerpoint presentation was used to demonstrate how to use Windows Photostory, which included links to Google image search, Pixabay, free music sites and a video resource about Photostory. (Appendix 4). This powerpoint presentation was available to students through the unilearn site, so that they could use the embedded links to access various resources, both in the teaching session and later as they worked on their digital story for submission.

Students were then encouraged to search for images to create a digital story to summarise some of the information that they had been reading. An optional follow up session was arranged with students to continue to work on their digital stories and support was available for the practical application of the technical skills.
Cowan (2006) highlights the importance of reflection in higher education. He suggests the use of software to help students in developing their understanding and reflective processes. His ideas are based on those of Rogers (1986) with links between purposeful learning and the facilitation of learning, rather than purely instruction. He suggests that the structure for the learning situation may provide the opportunity for reflection. Our students are encouraged to use Kolb’s reflective cycle (2015) from year 1 in the development of their portfolios, and we build on this for their placements where they are required to keep a weekly learning journal. Mezirow (1997) highlights the importance of the use of case studies and simulations in transformative education. He suggests that this needs to be an active process for students, incorporating new ideas into their frame of reference, so that teaching encourages critical reflection and discourse. As Cranton (2006:38) points out ‘premise reflection - challenging the very basis of the problem or issue- has the potential to promote transformation of habits of mind, the web of assumptions and beliefs through which we see ourselves and the world around us.’

**Critical Discussion.**

There were numerous challenges with this teaching session. Some of these resulted from the dual role of the session incorporating skills based teaching. What I hoped for, was the opportunity for students to engage with the process of reflection on the experiences of people in the case studies to think about the impact this had, not just on their lives, but for their future opportunities (White et al 2006). Student social workers are likely to be supporting people who have had the experience of living away from their families, friends and communities, and the effects this may have not just on their independence skills, but also on their support networks. The contrast in people’s lives following their moves into the community was a powerful recognition of the ways in which social policy can impact on people. (Thomas and Woods 2003).

I also hoped that student social workers would be able to consider applying some of the skills learned through this process into some imaginative ways of supporting people to document their hopes and aspirations in either person centred plans and one page profiles, or in their support plans.
In considering some of the successful aspects of the session, one was the recognition by students of the lived experiences through the use of real case studies. A student commented how shocked she was when identifying relevant images, to discover the positive way in which long stay hospitals had been portrayed. Another student who has a particular commitment to working with people with learning disabilities pointed out that this had brought home to him that the people with whom he worked may had had some of these experiences. A final year student stated that being able to use the case studies gave him a focus when he was working on applying the skills necessary to develop the digital story, and he found this beneficial rather than solely a skills based session.

Some of the challenges focused on the inherent problem of using the session for both technological skills learning, with reflective practice. The choice of the PC labs was important for students to be able to get the ‘hands on’ experience that was required. However, the size of the compulsory session for the first placement students meant that many students were simply sharing a computer screen as there were insufficient computers for all of the students present. This could have been avoided by arranging for the group to be provided with the information in two separate sessions. Another problem that we had not anticipated was that the photostory software had been removed from the PCs in this lab, and lack of administrator rights precluded the option of students being able to use the link from the powerpoint to download the software in the session. An additional problem was the timing of the session, as an assignment for another module was due later that week, and several students were focused on this deadline. In terms of the timing of the teaching, this could have been arranged to coincide with the start of placements, when students might be more focussed on the work for submission for the reflective practice module.

In terms of plans for the future, it would be possible to separate out the skills based teaching from the reflective element of the session. Whilst the powerpoint presentation is really helpful for students and one they can return to at a later date to help them with any technological issues, this is a time consuming way of developing the application of the necessary skills for the outcomes that we hope to achieve. One possibility is to develop a screen cast, so that students can access this at a time to suit them, and return to it later if they require. Bach et al (2006) highlight some of
the advantages to online learning that could be utilised in the way that students learn about digital story production.

The digital story is currently assessed as part of the reflective practice module linked to placement and gives students the opportunity to highlight an incident that has occurred on placement that has helped them develop their learning and reflect on their values and assumptions. (Schon 1991). Utilising the photostory software in a digital story linked to the social work assessment module might open up possibilities for students to consider some imaginative ways of working with service users and their carers to document their lives. One student is working with a person with schizophrenia to develop a digital story around their experience of hearing their voices. The example from Gavin Croft (www.in-control.org.uk/) highlights the different ways in which service users may wish to develop their support plans with social workers. This might be of particular interest to young people who may be more used to using computer programmes and might like to record some aspects of their lives, such as in Life Story work, using this medium (Hughes and Ryden 2016). We need to ensure that we respond in ways that engage with people and enable them to develop recording and plans that accurately inform those who are important in supporting them in their aspirations.

**Conclusion**

Service users are central to our teaching on the social work course. They regularly identify the importance of social workers ‘listening’ to them, valuing their experiences and recognising that they are the experts in their lives, and this is an important precursor to co-production. (Beresford 2012). Whilst we do this by regular direct involvement of service users in all aspects of the course delivery, and as an important part of practice learning on placement, it is important to develop diverse ways of encouraging students to engage with the views of service users, which doesn’t always rely on people repeating their stories to large groups of students in lectures, and contributing to ‘consultation fatigue’. (Butt and O’Neil 2004). We use a variety of techniques including case studies, You Tube clips and DVDs. What this teaching session aimed to do was to utilise case studies as a basis for developing digital stories. The students had already had a session on working with people with
learning disabilities and person centred planning as well as teaching on developing support plans with service users. The session started with an introduction to the lives of the people who had been patients at Prudhoe Hospital, and the contrast to their experiences on leaving the hospital. Students were then encouraged to search for relevant images to develop a digital story based on these case summaries. It was hoped that this would open up their eyes to different possibilities in terms of recording the views of people who use services, both in the development of one page profiles or person centred plans, as well as imaginative ways of involving people in their support planning. One student has subsequently chosen to use a digital story with a person with schizophrenia as a means of working with them around managing their voices, and this has been an interesting application of this process. All students will complete a digital story as part of the reflective practice module linked to their placement, in which they are required to demonstrate critical reflection on an aspect of their practice. One of the difficulties with this experimental session was balancing the development of technical skills alongside the reflective learning (Schon 1991) that was central to the teaching to enable transformative learning to take place (Mezirow 1997). In terms of future planning, one way of resolving this could be the use of screen casts available for students to enable them to work on some of these technical skills in advance of the session, so that the teaching could focus more on understanding the experiences of people outlined in the case studies, group discussion of the implications for people’s lives of social policy decision, and how to work co-operatively with people who use services to ensure that this is emancipatory practice.
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https://www.shabang.org.uk
Appendix 1 Case studies from the closure of Prudhoe Hospital

Malcolm Johnson

Malcolm doesn’t use a lot of words, his story of life in Prudhoe has been pieced together with the help of his advocate and his staff team.

Life in Prudhoe
Malcolm lived in Prudhoe Hospital for many years. The ward was noisy with little to do; Malcolm’s advocate at the time remembers Malcolm used to stand in front of the TV moving from one leg to another for hours on end.

His advocate said — “Often when I visited Malcolm he would not greet you or look in to your eyes, like he couldn’t afford to raise his hopes. If we went out together, he would cheer up and be chatty. Going back to the ward he would shut down again.” In Malcolm’s words at our steering group meeting: “It wasn’t nice.”

Life Now
Malcolm moved out of hospital 7 years ago and lives in his own house sharing with one other person. He loves going shopping and having food in the fridge, going to the pub, watching football on TV and doing to discos. Malcolm has had many new experiences like going on holiday, going fishing, feeding the chickens, going in a hot tub....Staff around Malcolm say that he is a great man to work with, he is funny and caring, and they feel he is so much happier now.

Suzie Fothergill

Life in Prudhoe
When I first went into Prudhoe they took my ragdoll off me, said I wouldn’t be needing it anymore. I didn’t make any real friends at Prudhoe, I had to be friends with one woman because she was very violent, so I felt I had to stay on the right side of her.

It was the most scariest place I’ve ever been to, I’ve seen horror films that are not as bad as that place.

Life Now
My life now is totally different. I have the most beautiful children who have changed my life. I have a new house, I have a great supporter. My son is just a star - he protects me, talks to me, gives me cuddles every day. My daughter is my stroppy princess. We do acting together as a family.

My dog Pippen is lovely, a little Yorkie terrier, sits on my knee. I’ve got friends and life is great now. Smiles, laughter, kids, music playing, dog barking. Thank God I can watch my kids enjoy a good life. Life could not be any different.
Kay Warren

Life in Prudhoe
I was there for 12 years, I had my 21st birthday up there as well.

I saw the staff feeding them by holding their noses, that’s not right. I was trying to speak up for the people in wheelchairs. They dragged me out, took me back and doped me. I was just speaking up for the people in wheelchairs, they shouldn’t get fed by their noses, it’s wrong.

When I left some of the staff said, “You’ll come back you, you’ll be back in again. She won’t last five minutes”; I just said, “I’m never coming back to this stupid place.”

Life Now
Kay has now bought her own home. She lives by herself with some support. Recently Kay won an award for her services to the community recognising her as an Extraordinary Woman.

“I went up to Prudhoe and watched my old ward being demolished, I thought thank God for that.”

Phillip Atkinson

Life in Prudhoe
I was in Prudhoe a long time ago, I was IO when I went in and came out when I was 21. I was in Midway West, I liked it, it had a pool downstairs. I’d go in it down the lift.

I spent a lot of time in the corridor on Midway, to look out of the windows at all the pretty girls.

There were five other people on my ward with me, they are all dead now.

Life Now
Life now is alright, I want to get a bungalow, I go out for a drive, I get up to all sorts, I’ve had a good life.

I’ve got loads of CDs and DVDs and lots of technology to help me, electric curtains and I’ve got a box that controls everything.

“I see my sister a lot now.”
Appendix 2: One Page Profile examples

Jonathon

**How I communicate**

I walk very fast when I’m upset

I take turns blowing bubbles with staff I know well

I will sit down for 2-3 minutes when I am calm

**What I like**

White chocolate

Chips with mayonnaise

Having a bath

Blowing bubbles

Long walks in the

**How I like to be supported**

Please talk to me in a quiet voice

Please give me time to do the things you ask me to do

Please don’t make me sit down when I’m upset
AMANDA

What I like

My **vibrating cushion** placed upon my tummy.

**Listening** to One Direction in my bedroom.

**Being laid on the floor**, on my right side facing into the room so I can see what’s happening.

**Pink**

**Sitting** to the table to have my

How I like to be supported

Please make sure my food is ‘soft’ but not liquidised.

Please look at me when you talk to me.

Please don’t use ‘baby’ talk

Please approach me from the right side as this is the side I see best

Please use a plastic spoon to help me eat.

How I communicate

I **blow** raspberries when I want to ‘talk’ to someone.

My arms jerk up and down when I’m excited.

I **close my eyes** when I don’t want to ‘talk’.

I **cry out** and my body becomes arched out of my seat when I want to come out of my wheelchair

I **smack** my lips together when I’m hungry or thirsty

I **can choose**, if shown two items, i.e. cake
Appendix 3: Poem by Gavin Croft

Poem by Gavin Croft

Who do you see people? Who do you see?
Do you see the same person as in 2003?
I sit in this chair now, stand tall at 6’3”
I am the same person as in 2003
My vision is blurred now, my legs they are weak
My swallow where are you? It’s difficult to speak
My food through a peg now
Each day of the week I think it might be curry I say tongue in cheek
Tongue in cheek, if only my tongue moved...how sleek
Let’s just get on says Karen my wife
You’re still just the same, we’ve still got a life
Rose tinted glasses, they say love is blind
Cataracts and madness, they both spring to mind
Myelin sheath, nerve endings, muscles collapsing
My body my life it needs some adapting
Care manager, dietician, physiotherapist, OT
All part of my life now but yes I’m still me
Assessment, re-assessment, review and respite
Respite from what?
This is my life
I’m not a condition, a problem or issue
Just a person with rights so sit up and listen
The right to live and laugh and cry
The right to eat and choke and die
Some of these rights have got lost on my way
But it’s my right to live
And I shall do so each day
Who do you see people?
Who do you see?
Just the same Gavin Croft as 2003?

See: http://www.in-control.org.uk