

Digital storytelling in low resource settings - a guide for teachers, psychologists, and youth workers



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Why storytelling?



Kwasuka sukela

This is how this story begins... (traditional Siswati and Zulu story opening)

Now we are about to begin, and you must attend; and when we get to the end of the story, you will know more than you do now... (Hans Christian Anderson)

We are all storytellers, everyday.

Stories are important because they draw us in, they ground us, they help us understand who we are.



Stories make it possible for us to learn from one another and to share our burdens. Stories give us role models.

When did you last tell a story?

- Did you tell a colleague about your journey into work?
- Did a friend tell about something funny that happened to them?
- Did you have a conversation that began 'You'll never believe what happened to me...'?

Getting started with stories

Things to talk about with children and young people

In small groups, ask each person to describe someone important to them. How does the person look? What sorts of clothes do they wear? How do they move and speak? What clues can the maker give in the description to suggest something about the person's personality?

Ask each person to remember a strong feeling they once had? What words can they use to describe the feeling?

Share a folk or traditional tale. Ask people to tell their favourite folk or traditional tale.

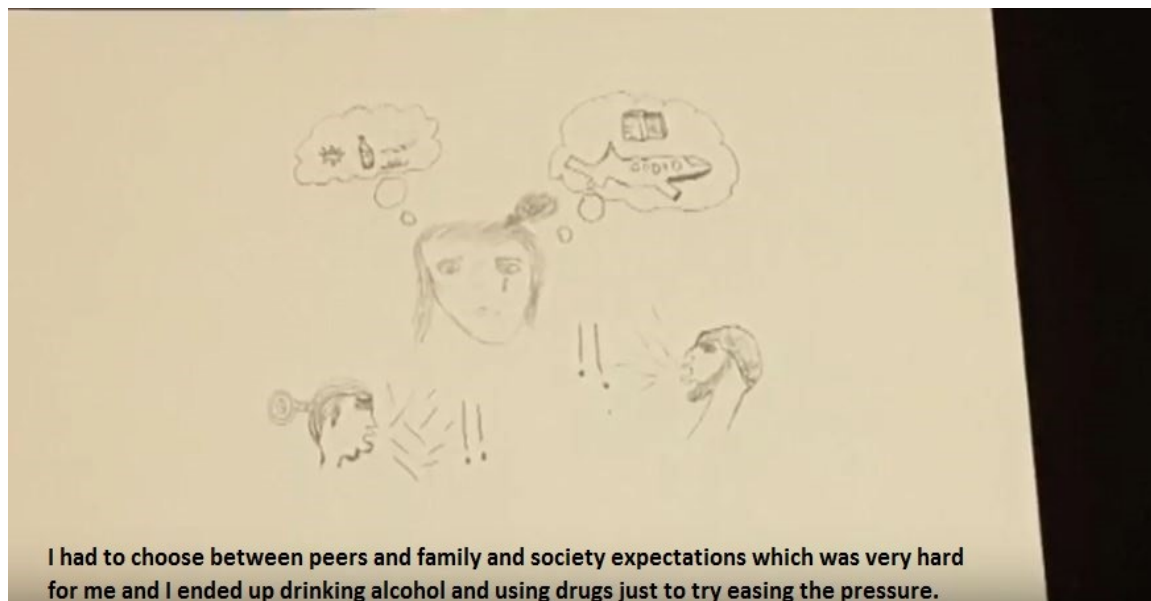


Why digital storytelling?

Digital stories can be a powerful teaching, learning or research tool in low resource settings. Because there are such a wide range of free apps, and can be used on most smartphone technologies, there are fewer barriers to their implementation than ever before. According to de Jager and her colleagues (2017), digital stories can be used to:

- Raise marginalised voices, presenting counter-narratives to the loudest and most powerful voices
- Generate social change
- Draw on the perceived universality of storytelling as a way of making and communicating meaning
- Carry therapeutic benefit
- Deliver and embed learning and professional development

Making stories using technology is unique because when we use technologies, something happens between us as the makers or viewers of a story, and the technology. This is called a *transaction* (Levine, 2019).



You can make your own images for your digital stories.

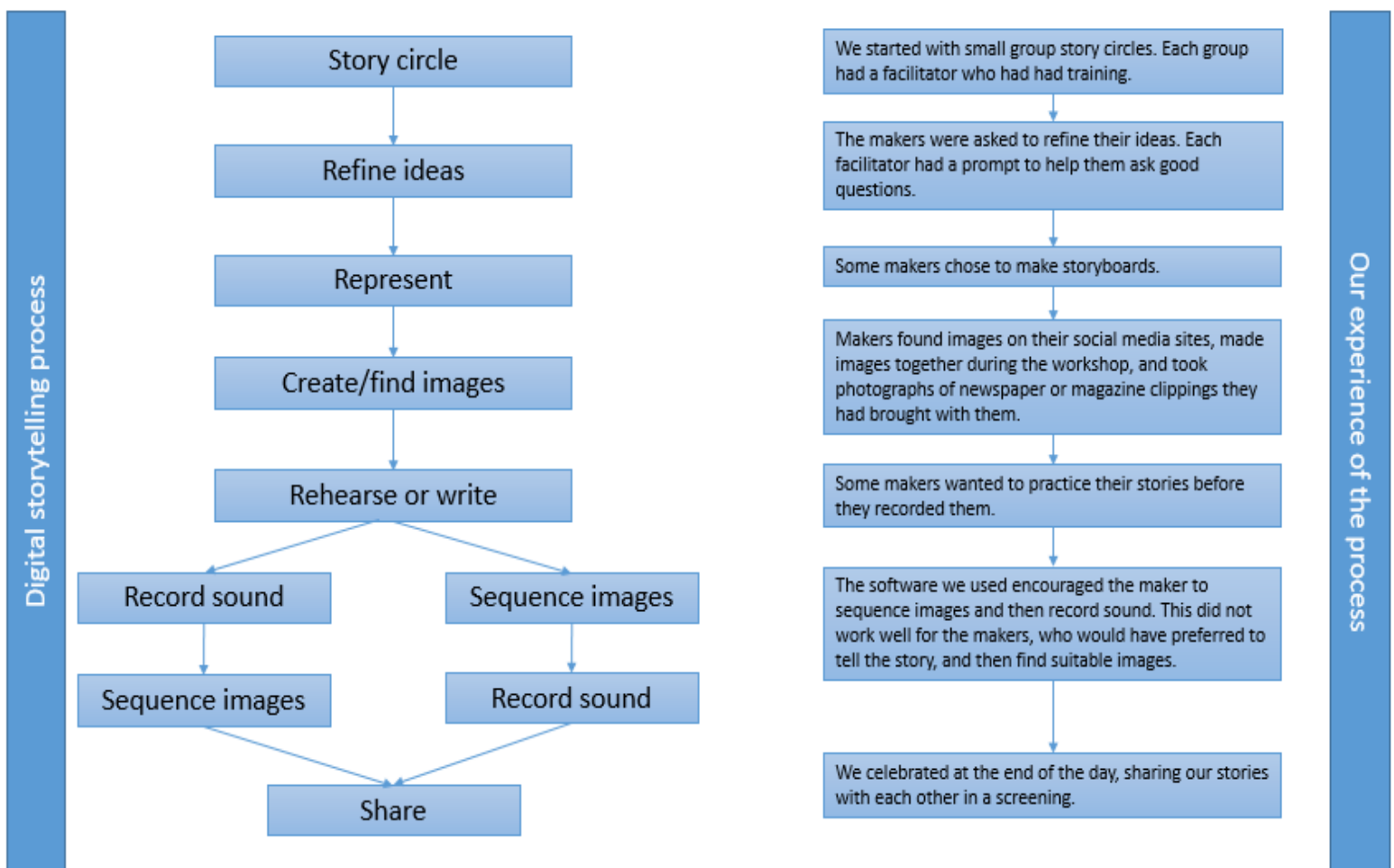
What is a digital story?

A digital story is a short movie, usually 2-5 minutes long. We call the person or people who make the story the storymakers or 'makers'.

It has a voiceover telling a story, with one or more of the following:

- Still photos
- Images or documents that have been scanned
- Music or sound effects.

We worked with a group of young people in eMbalenhle, South Africa, to make digital stories about what helped them to be strong when life was hard. We used a common digital storytelling process. The flowchart below shows a common sequence in the digital storytelling process. We also share our experience of each stage in the process.



Planning

How do you want to use digital storytelling?



Learning and teaching



Advocacy



Creating an evidence trail, documenting understanding, knowledge and skills

Storytelling can be therapeutic. But the process of making a digital story can surface a range of issues for the maker, audiences, for facilitators, and even for you as the guide.

Consider a range of protective mechanisms and ethical issues. Find out if your organisations has a policy about making or sharing digital content.

Make sure the makers understand the implications of using images created by others in their stories. Find out if your organisation needs consent from the makers or their carers before you start.

Think about who the audience is going to be. Is it the makers? Their parents or carers? Other teachers? Peers? A general online audience? What do each of these audiences mean for how you make digital stories, and how you might handle personal information and copyright of images?

As facilitator, recognise the need to look after yourself:

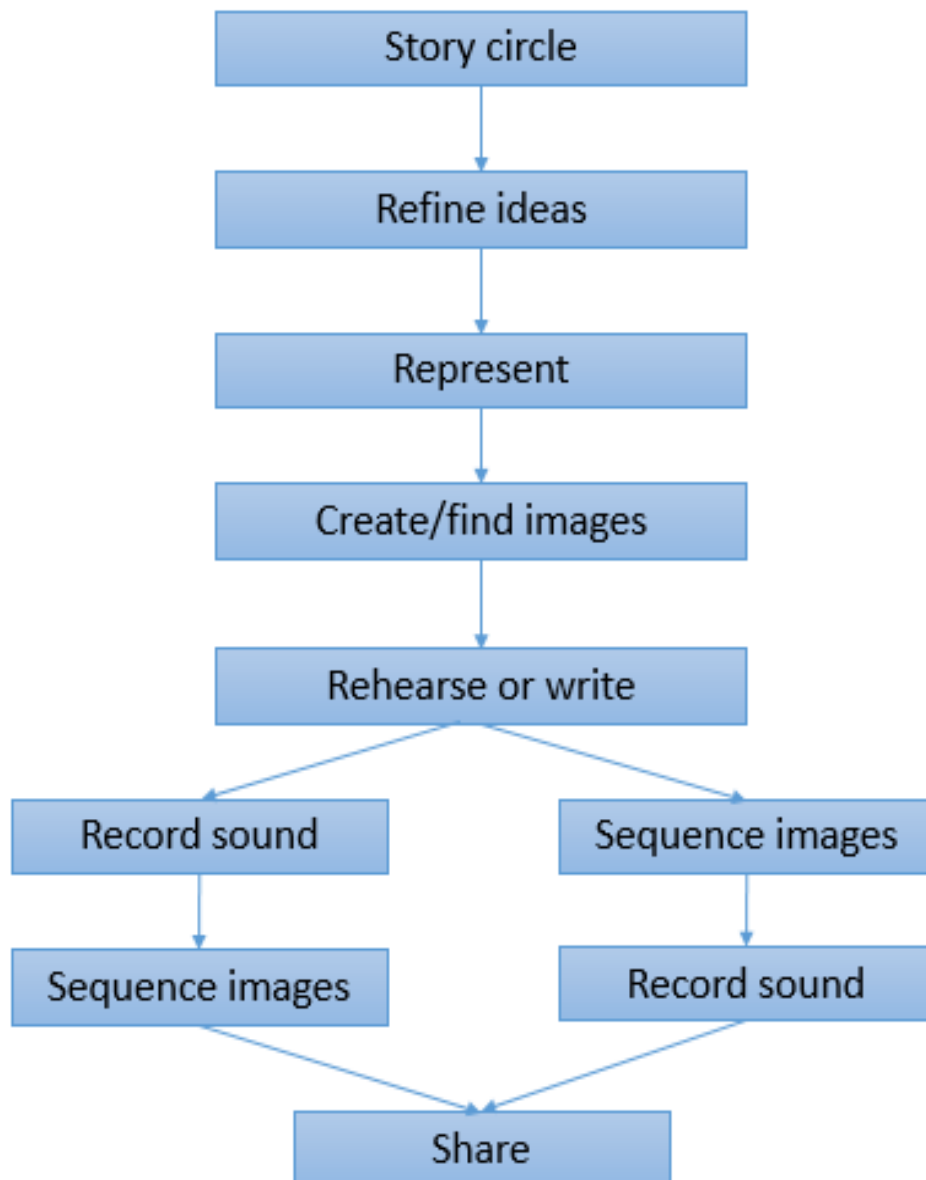
- Eat as healthily as you can.
- Spend time with people you care about you.
- Process and talk about things if you need to.
- Do an activity you enjoy.



Photographs taken during a storymaking session can be very powerful.

Making digital stories

You already know about a common sequence for making digital stories.



Telling stories
(activities on
p.g. 6)

Making digital
stories (activities
on p.g. 7)

Sharing
stories (activities
on p.g. 8)

Telling stories

Activities for making safe spaces

A youth worker made digital stories to help young people tell their parents and carers what worried them. They started by passing a smooth pebble around the circle. The makers shared words or phrases that came to mind when thinking about the pebble. The makers chose to use the pebble as an image in the last frame of their digital stories.

Before you begin storytelling, you will need to build trust with the makers and create a safe space. You could:

Tell a story of your own, showing the makers that you are also vulnerable and human

Ask the makers what they notice about themselves as storytellers and as listeners? What were their most striking moments in the stories they've heard? Are there any threads or ideas that they would choose to 'catch' to build a new story?

Ask each maker to draw a dream they once had. What was the mood of the dream? What was striking about the dream?

A story circle is a way to share stories, explore cultural perspectives and variations, vocalise, inspire, emote, and amplify creative expression.

In pairs, ask each maker to share a personal story that is relevant to the theme of the digital story they will make to one other maker. Now ask the listener in the dyad to retell that story to the rest of the group in the form of a fairytale or folk tale.

Talk about story structure. Depending on the kinds of transactions and products you are expecting from the digital stories produced, provide a strong prompt as to the kinds of story structures you are anticipating. You could provide additional structure through giving prompts to your facilitators, and/or limiting the number of images or sentences your makers can produce. This may also be limited by the software you use and the length of time you have available, and the literacy levels of your makers.

A teacher wanted their students to improve their characterisation. The students were asked to make digital stories about someone important to them.

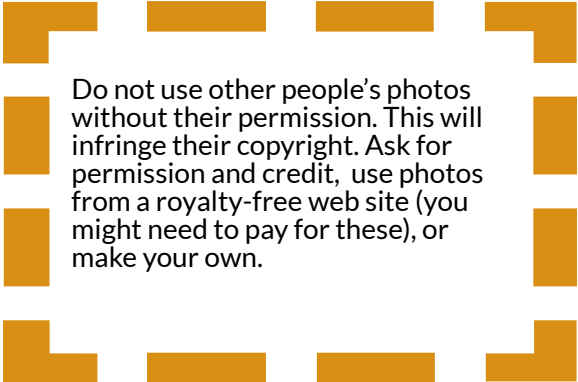
In the story circle, each student was asked to describe a person important to them. They were asked to use their senses to describe the person. They were asked to give an example of how the person talked, or a phrase they commonly used.

Making digital stories

Most free digital storytelling software is led by image, onto which voice and/or music is added. Examples include Storybird, utellstory, and FilmoraGo. (Please note, the desktop version of Filmora is more like conventional video editing software. It has more functionality but is much more complicated to use).

Some free storytelling software channels parallel voice/music and image, or allows you to create voice first. Examples include SpeechJournal (iOS only) and Voicethread.

You can use very familiar presentation software (such as Google Docs or Microsoft Powerpoint) to make digital stories. This can help if you do not have a lot of time to allow the makers to familiarise themselves with new software. You can choose to make your story using a smartphone, tablet, or desktop computer.



Do not use other people's photos without their permission. This will infringe their copyright. Ask for permission and credit, use photos from a royalty-free web site (you might need to pay for these), or make your own.

Stills

Ask the makers to assemble the images that represent the key points in the story. They could use images already stored in phones or on social media (with appropriate permissions), scanned images, photographs, photocopies or drawings.

Some makers may prefer to create the audio first, and follow this with images.

This is the quickest digital storytelling process if you have very limited time.

Live action - single shot

In a single shot, the whole story is filmed in one shot. You do not need to edit together video footage. A single shot requires a lot of planning and creation time as the maker might want to take the single shot many times over before they are happy. You might need to add voice/sound later on if you do not have access to good microphones and quiet spaces.

Live action - edit on camera

Here the maker sets up a camera and records the images or action they want in exactly the order they want it.

If you are going to use edit on camera techniques, you might want to encourage the makers to create storyboards of the shots they want and the sequence they need to go in.

Shoot and edit

This is the most effective technique to use if you are taking a diary approach to digital storytelling.

Here, the maker brings together a series of short images or videos made over a longer period of time. Examples include a 'day in the life' or documentary-style story.

Sharing stories

Choosing whether to share a digital story is not a decision for you to make. Rather, asking the makers whether they would like their stories to be shared - both online and offline - should be a really important part of the process.

Makers need to think about:

The long-term implications of placing their story on the internet, for example for future employment.



The persistence of having a digital story on the internet; it is close to impossible to remove content completely once it is available online.



Disclosure and personal safety issues.



You might want to see whether there are any common themes or ideas that appear across the digital stories that have been made. You could do this yourself, or ask your makers to do this.

An NGO worker made digital stories with girls who were worried about being subjected to Female Genital Mutilation. Once the stories were finished everyone gathered around a small screen to watch each others' creations.

The group watched the stories again. This time each maker called out the name of category they believed was an important theme in the story.

The group looked at the categories and grouped them together into themes. The themes and categories became a list of codes that the NGO used to see the common ideas and issues that arose for young girls worried about FGM across a larger area. They used clips from the stories to make a evidence slide show.



Helping one another. We need one another to help us to achieve our different goals.

If you would like to find out about different ways of finding common ideas and issues across more than one digital story, here are some places to look:

<https://www.colettedaiute.org/published-books.html>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68fEOQ5dDeM>
https://uk.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/ubinary/5171_Berger_Final_Pages_Chapter_1.pdf
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HXh7Y9yIE8E>

Checklists

You need to plan digital storytelling sessions carefully. A session can be a series of lessons, full day workshops, or even a full week. Use these checklists to help you.

	Must have	Would like
Physical environment		
Is the physical environment safe, comfortable, clean and dry?	Y	
Will there be enough for participants to eat and drink?	Y	
Is there enough space?	Y	
Is there quiet space for recording?		Y
Is there space to screen the completed stories?		Y
People factors		
Do we need facilitators?		Y
Are the facilitators trained in the software and in facilitation processes?	Y	
Do the facilitators need prompts?	Y	
Have we taken account of heritage and culture in your story-making activities?	Y	
Do we have the right process and tools to make sure people can learn together, although they are working on individual stories?		Y
Technological functionalities		
Is there internet and/or Bluetooth access? Is it reliable? Can all of our devices access the internet, or are they Bluetooth-enabled?	Y	
Is the software free and accessible?	Y	
Does the software serve the process we want to use?	Y	
Have we got enough devices?	Y	
Do our devices have up-to-date antivirus software?	Y	
Have we got enough power sources?	Y	
Do our devices have microphones built in, or do we have access to microphones and cables?	Y	
Can the software be learned quickly and collaboratively?	Y	
Have we got access to the right editing features, such as clipping, trimming, or text location? Do we have enough to use these well?	Y	
Do we need headsets or headphones?		Y
Do we have a secure external hard drive for backing up the digital stories?		Y
Documentation		
Do we need consent forms, and if so have we got these?	Y	
Do we need evaluation forms, and if so have we got these?		Y
Do we need certificates of participation, and if so have we got these?		Y

Resources and references

de Jager, A., Fogarty, A., Tewson, A., Lenette, C., Boydell, K., (2017) Digital storytelling in research: a systematic review, *The Qualitative Report*, Vol 22, no. 10

Haffejee, Sadiyya, & Theron, Linda. (2017). Resilience processes in sexually abused adolescent girls: A scoping review of the literature. *South African Journal of Science*, 113(9-10), 1-9

Levine, D. (2019) Troubling the discourse: applying Valsiner's Zones to adolescent girls' use of digital technologies. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education*, Special Edition

Levine, D., Theron, L.C., (under review) Digital storytelling with South African youth: a critical reflection, *Qualitative Research*

Theron, L. C., Theron, A. M. C., & Malindi, M. J. (2013). Towards an African definition of resilience: A rural South African community's view of resilient Basotho youth. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 39, 63-87.

Toolkits:

<https://www.actionforme.org.uk/uploads/pdfs/digital-storytelling-toolkit.pdf>

https://www.womenwin.org/files/pdfs/DST/DST_Toolkit_june_2014_web_version.pdf

Free sites and apps:

<https://www.techlearning.com/tl-advisor-blog/30-sites-and-apps-for-digital-storytelling>

<https://elearningindustry.com/18-free-digital-storytelling-tools-for-teachers-and-students>

<https://www.wabisabilearning.com/blog/a-list-of-the-best-free-digital-storytelling-tools-for-teachers>

Resources and examples:

<https://www.storycenter.org/>

<http://ryseproject.org/about/>

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