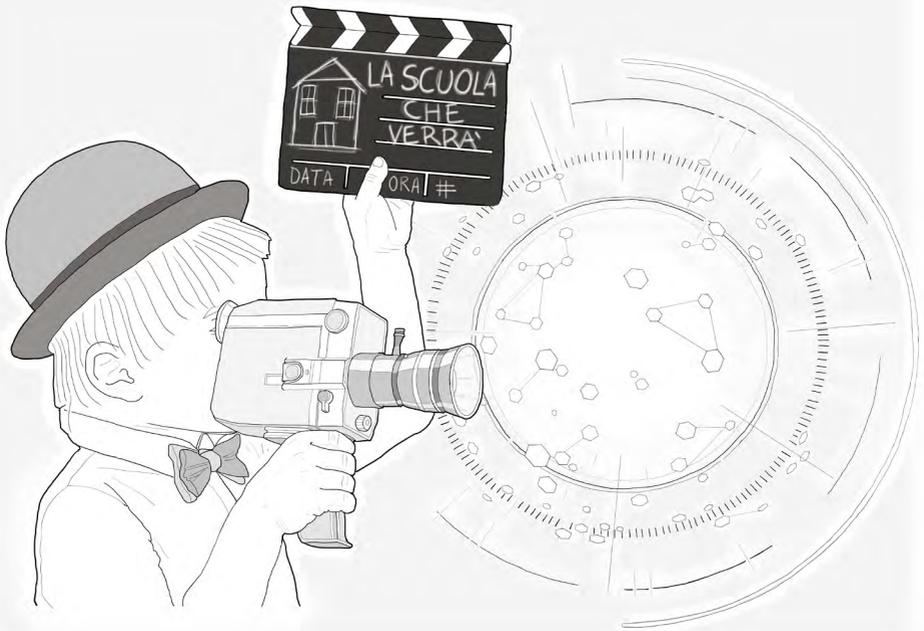# Digital storytelling.
Using creative methods for the "future in school"

By Alberta Giorgi and Micol Pizzolati

Stories ☐
Tools ☒
Studies ☐

Digital storytelling for imagining the school of the future

The *Biblioteca di Lavoro* (Work Library) was a unique and innovative editorial work, desired and directed by Mario Lodi and created between 1971 and 1979 by a group of educators made up of Fiorenzo Alfieri, Francesca Colombo, Tullio De Mauro, Caterina Foschi Pini, Alberto Gianola, Angelica Gianola, Roberto Lanterio, Palmira Maccarini, Luciano Manzuoli, Gioacchino Maviglia and Francesco Tonucci.

The idea was an educational project that emerged as an alternative to the single textbook. In a format carefully designed for essential functionality, 80 volumes including "Documents", "Readings" and "Guides", as well as 68 flashcards, offered ideas, suggestions and operational tools to teachers, leaving them the greatest freedom of choice for working according to the needs of their class.

A true encyclopaedia of the most significant teaching experiences carried out in Italy. A reference index from which teachers, parents and children were able to take inspiration to carry out activities, in any geographical and social situation, as alternatives to schooling based on the transmission approach, through a methodology structured upon tools permitting concrete and organic teaching interventions.

Mario Lodi and his collaborators wanted to help teachers and families get to know the child and help the child get to know him/herself and others.

We all want a better, humane and scientifically correct school that starts from the child's experience, in order to understand the world we live in. The *Biblioteca di Lavoro* (Work Library) helped to do this.

Cosetta Lodi
President of Casa delle Arti e del Gioco - Mario Lodi
http://www.casadelleartiedelgioco.it

Many years after the experience of the *Biblioteca di Lavoro* (Work Library), the desire to build a better school is still alive. However, still today, perhaps even more now than before, the resistance of schooling based on the transmission approach is strong and deeply-rooted, both in practices and in the imagination, as "normal schooling".

INDIRE has the task of providing support and visibility to research carried out by teachers that seeks to "carry teaching towards proposals, organisations and learning environments that enhance the value of students' autonomy and responsibility and are capable of developing significant knowledge, skills and lasting competences" (*Indicazioni Nazionali. Nuovi scenari,* 2017.) (National Directions. New Scenarios). The operational tools of the *Biblioteca di Lavoro* (Work Library) conceived by Lodi were very effective in this regard. With their simple, clear language, basic form and the credibility of the research work deeply rooted in the practices and in the living experience of teaching, they contributed to the spread of active, inclusive and democratic ways of teaching. More than many programmatic documents, the documentation and teaching techniques included in this "encyclopaedia" have offered teachers tools for making changes and for acting coherently in practical terms, with a view to pedagogical innovation.

The *Small School Notebooks*, divided into "Stories", Tools" and "Studies", pay tribute to this experience, which is an example of how to value and follow up on the research and educational experimentation conducted in schools.

We thank Mario Lodi's heirs for having authorised the use and reworking of the material taken from the *Bilblioteca di Lavoro* (Work Library) and also Grandi & Associati, who collaborated in the publication of this volume.

Researchers of the INDIRE - Piccole Scuole group
http://piccolescuole.indire.it

Summary

1. Inventive and creative: innovative methods for exploring and learning about the social world

Recent reflections and experiments in the field of teaching and research have highlighted the importance not only of the active involvement of students - who learn best by doing and getting personally involved - but also of the integration of tools that can stimulate ingenuity and creativity. Digital tools, which are part of everyday life and also effective tools of knowledge, require particular attention. This represents a pedagogical challenge of crucial importance for reflecting upon educational futures.

This approach has numerous advantages. First of all, students are stimulated for what concerns an inventive and creative dimension. On the one hand, it is important to learn about concepts, take possession of them and put them to use in order to interpret social reality. On the other hand, it is equally important to stimulate and enhance the value of the inventive, imaginative and creative dimension, as well as the ability to look at the world with different eyes, think of new solutions and question aspects that are sometimes taken for granted. Digital storytelling is a tool used to stimulate and enhance the value of ingenuity and creativity, because it puts students in a position whereby they can develop a narrative in response to a general and at the same time specific question. They can learn to use narration tools and also reflect on the different ways in which the social world can be interpreted and analysed and on the different forms of narration. In this direction, the digital storytelling method makes it possible

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to combine the inventive and creative dimension with a rigorous analytical practice.

Secondly, students are stimulated in the doing and materiality dimension. Constructing a digital story – thinking about it, creating it, showing it – stimulates a planning dimension that translates into a concrete product containing the different phases and it summarises them. At the same time, the concrete nature of the product makes it possible to go beyond the mental ideational and imaginative dimension of creativity, exploring its material, sensory and physical aspects. Furthermore, it is a useful starting point for reflecting on the material, sensory and physical aspects of the digital world, sometimes imagined as virtual and partly elusive.

Lastly, inventive and creative methods are tools for exploring the connections between the verbal and rational aspects of learning, on the one hand, and the emotional and material aspects, on the other. In this sense, they make it possible to highlight the relevance of elements that are sometimes taken for granted, for example recognising the importance of the emotional dimension, and to explore the intersections between ways of communicating and learning other than the verbal ones.

Digital storytelling is therefore a tool that is part of a framework of experiments and explorations that aim to make educational contexts capable of responding to the needs posed by the challenges of contemporary societies and active promoters of innovation.

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2. Digital storytelling as an activity

Digital storytelling involves the creation of a short video (2-5 minutes) that puts together different elements – narrator, music, photos, filming of objects and environments – selected by the narrator in order to tell his story about a topic, an event or an issue.

The technique involves the involvement of participants in a workshop (which can develop over a period of time that varies from a few hours to a few days) in which moments of sharing experiences are associated with learning several techniques for creating short video stories, through the use and integration of different languages of expression and the student's own words and images[1].

Digital storytelling emerged in the artistic field. It was codified as a technique by StoryCenter[1], thanks to which it has become established as an internationally recognised form of work and has been used progressively in various fields, including the mass media, projects aimed at improving the social conditions of marginalised individuals, constructing counter-narratives or exploring local and group memories and social research[2]. In general, one of the crucial elements concerns the active participation of individuals and collaboration between knowledge that belongs to different spheres, such as professional, social research and regarding the specific context.

[1] Giorgi A., Pizzolati M., Vacchelli E. (2021), Metodi Creativi per la Ricerca Sociale (Creative Methods for Social Research). Bologna: Il Mulino

1. https://www.storycenter.org/history

[2] Meadows D., Kidd J. (2009), "Capture Wales" The BBC Digital Storytelling Project, in Hartley J., McWilliam K. (edited by), *Story circle: Digital storytelling around the world*, 91-117; Dunford M., Jenkins T. (2017), *Digital Storytelling. Form and Content*, Palgrave Macmillan, London; de Jager A., Fogarty A., Tewson A., Lenette C., Boydell K.M. (2017), Digital Storytelling in Research: A Systematic Review. *The Qualitative Report*, *22*(10), 2548-2582. Pizzolati M. (2021), *Creativi e collaborativi. Racconto digitale, teatro partecipativo e collage come metodi per lo studio delle esperienze biografiche di migrazione*, (Creative and collaborative. Digital story, participatory theatre and collage as methods for the study of biographical experiences of migration) Polis, 3, pages 467-480.

Annotations

> ## *Suggestions*
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> Referring to the indications and advice provided by the StoryCenter, based on twenty-five years of experience in this activity and in teaching the method, allows participants to create digital stories:[3] a) based on events brought into focus and shared during the workshop, b) told in the first person, c) constructed through a succession of scenes, d) that favour photographs over moving images, to give maximum emphasis to the narration, e) accompanied by a soundtrack, f) short and created using intuitive techniques, g) the result of a process that guarantees autonomy in the methods of expression and control over distribution.

[3] Lambert J., Hessler B. (2018), *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community* (5a ed.). New York, Abingdon: Routledge.

In the text that follows, we illustrate how digital storytelling can be used to explore different types of questions (section 3). We also explain its phases in practice (section 4), we discuss the ethical dimensions to take into account and, more generally, its implications in terms of media literacy (section 5).

In the text, we try to use a neutral, inclusive and non-binary language from a gender point of view as much as possible. When this is not possible, we use the masculine gender inclusive form, although we are aware of its implications. We adopt a style of delivery that favours the application of the method, but we still add some minimal bibliographical references in the footnote.

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3. Objectives and potential of a digital storytelling workshop

Digital stories can be grouped into three categories: personal stories, stories about historical events and informative narratives, often used in journalism and marketing to turn on emotional connections with the audience and to summarise, in a story that they can relate to, information that is intended to be transmitted. In this notebook, we focus on personal stories[4].

Digital storytelling is, primarily, a self-narration tool and this is precisely where its potential lies. First of all, talking about yourself is a way of confronting yourself, exploring yourself and putting your thoughts in order. At the same time, talking about yourself is a way of "owning" your own story and taking the floor; this is an important aspect, especially for those individuals, like young people, whose personal stories are usually told to them by others (by the mass media, for example).

Furthermore, in contexts, such as school, where an individual is mainly known based on a role, for example that of a student, talking about yourself is a way of showing other aspects of your identity and showing yourself in full, so to speak.

An example of this is a workshop with university student. We asked them to prepare a digital story on the theme entitled "the story of my relationship with animals": sharing daily and emotional experiences other than those linked to attending university made it possible for those who took part in the workshop to get to know each other better and create a climate of collaboration.

Thanks to the power of narrative, telling a personal story is also a way of arousing interest and empathy in those who listen. In this sense,

[4] Cersosimo C. (2020), Digital Storytelling, in P. Atkinson, S. Delamont, A. Cernat, J.W. Sakshaug e R.A. Williams (edited by), *Sage Research Methods Foundations*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

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digital stories are an excellent tool for increasing attention around little-known topics, places or subjects, by activating an emotional connection between narrators and the audience. They are often used by associations, NGOs and international cooperation organisations. More generally, individual stories can be interpreted as fragments of a mosaic of collective narration around events, places, topics and issues. The connection between individual biographies and social context, as well as the gathering of personal experiences around an event, a place, an important person, an experience or a topic, make digital storytelling an excellent tool for social research, to the extent that it is possible to explore different aspects of the same phenomenon or process.

Digital stories for exploring little-known topics and places

2. https://www.voicestoendfgmc. org/

3. https://www.patientvoices. org.uk/

4. https://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/ audiovideo/sites/galleries/pages/ capturewales.shtml

[5] LaMarre A., Rice C. (2016]), Embodying Critical and Corporeal Methodology: Digital Storytelling with Young Women in Eating Disorder Recovery, *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 17(2).

- The Voices to end FGM/C[2] project includes a collection of digital stories of female genital mutilation
- The *Patient Voices*[3] project includes a collection of stories about patients and healthcare workers based on issues related to care and illness.
- The BBC *Capturing Wales*[4] project includes a collection of digital stories about Welsh people of different ages, genders and social conditions.
- A project about eating disorders that involved young womens' self-narration of their experience. Comparative analysis of the stories has allowed us to delve deeper into the widespread stereotypes around this topic and explore the effects of processes of stigmatisation of those who suffer from such disorders[5].

As a tool of research and activation of a path of self-reflection, digital storytelling can be approached from two perspectives.

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3.1 Me in the world

The first perspective focuses attention on self, that is on individual identity and how it is positioned with respect to the context and the collective identities.
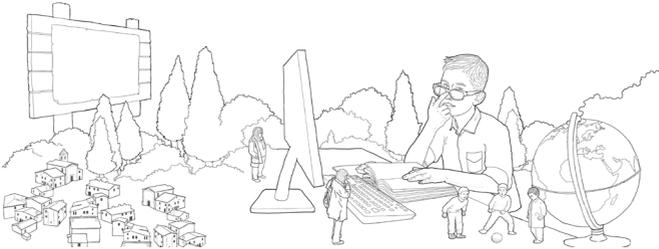
Me in the world

Within this perspective, the goal of gathering digital stories can be to explore "exemplary" stories, that is individual narrations that illustrate a common condition as they unfold. In this sense, it is a question of seeking connections between individual biography and the collective context.

For example, how does an story about individual migration allow us to highlight the elements that characterise the migratory process? How does a story about the experience of losing a loved one highlight typical mechanisms of grief management? How does the narration of Christmas or Hanukkah holidays, or the period of Ramadan, demonstrate family habits and religious rituals? A first way of using digital storytelling in this direction is to focus attention on topics, experiences and stories that make it possible to exemplify and illustrate "typical" processes, experiences and mechanisms, bringing the specific back to the general.

An interesting example is a project on eating disorders, involving young women who talked about their personal experiences.

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Comparative analysis of the stories has allowed us to delve deeper into the widespread stereotypes around this topic and explore the effects of processes of stigmatisation of those who suffer from such disorders[5].

Alternatively, the gathering of digital stories can be aimed at finding anomalous, exceptional stories, different from the more common ones or, more simply, it can aim to highlight the aspects that differentiate people, rather than those that unite them. In this sense, rather than bringing the specific back to the general, it is a question of looking for the distinctive traits compared to what is general. For example, how is the daily life of a young professional athlete who studies at university different from that of her colleagues? How do the children of famous people live? In this case, the objectives may be different. For example, it can be a matter of exploring stories that talk about unique experiences and that shed light on something unknown, distant or different. Stories can also be used, by comparing differences, to highlight the characteristics common to other stories, characteristics that are sometimes taken for granted and, for this reason, invisible.

An example in this direction is a project that explored experiences of voluntary work in associations with different goals (such as support for the elderly, children's entertainment and cross-cultural mediation), highlighting the similarities in the participation mechanisms and in the motivations, beyond the specific features linked to the contexts.

3.2 Us and the others

A second perspective for the approach to personal stories narrated with the digital stories is to focus on collective identity, rather than individual identity, thus exploring the "us". In this case, it is a question of paying attention to the context of the digital story, involving people from the same community, the same group or the same culture.
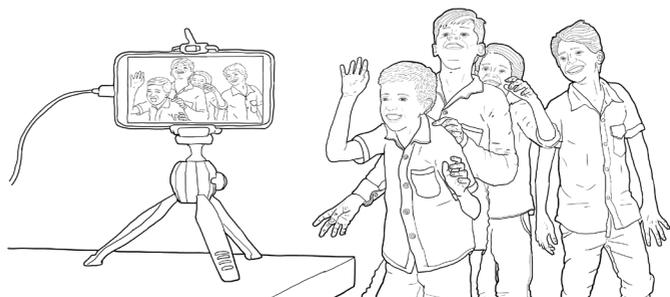
Us and the others

Within this perspective, the collection of digital stories can be aimed, first of all, at exploring the culture of a group – symbols, collective beliefs, social norms, shared values – as well as its history, but also other elements, such as hopes and imagination linked to the future of a community.

In this case, digital stories are a stimulus for reflecting on "who we are" and on the dimensions of the sense of belonging to a group.

For example, a workshop with elderly people from the local community can be aimed at creating digital stories that make it possible to analyse social memory (i.e. practices and knowledge that were once shared and have now disappeared), common memory (shared events that have marked the history of the community, people, episodes) and official memory (how the community officially and publicly celebrates its past).

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Digital stories for exploring identity and belonging to a group

An example in this direction is represented by the Giant Expectation[6] project, carried out with elderly Canadian people aged 58 to 98, on the topic of their ageing in the area in which they live, also aimed at raising awareness in the community regarding the needs of the elderly population.

Otherwise, the collection of personal stories can aim to reflection the uniqueness of the group, its boundaries and its differences compared other groups and contexts. For example, from a cross-cultural perspective, the digital stories produced by Erasmus+ students often focus attention on those cultural elements that emerge as different and distant from their own habits and, as such, they arouse curiosity.

6. https://www.storycenter.org/storycenter-blog//giant-expectations
The ten stories can be viewed here: https://www.storycentre.ca/giants-thunder-bay

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FLASHCARD 1 - USING THE DIGITAL STORY		
Approach	*Educational and research goals*	*Example of stimulus*
Exemplary stories	Students learn to relate history (or their own history) to the overall social context. Analyse phenomena, processes, mechanisms.	- Before I was born: my parents' story - An encounter that changed me
Unusual stories	Students learn to identify the differentiating elements compared to the overall social context. Analyse the factors that arise in determining the differences.	- Life at school and life on holiday - My musical passions
Community and group	Students learn to identify the elements that identify a group. Analyse culture (norms, values, symbols, beliefs), memory and history, belonging.	- My volleyball/football/basketball team - The festival in my village
Boundaries	Students learn to identify the elements that differentiate the groups. Analyse group boundaries and how they are established.	- My friends and me - When do we become adults?

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4. Creating a digital story: phases and timing

The digital storytelling technique lends itself very well to being adapted to the thematic, geographical, social and demographic contexts in which it is proposed. In this text, we illustrate ways of proceeding that are also inspired by our experiences and the specific features of the use of digital storytelling in educational contexts.

Digital storytelling workshops normally develop in three phases: the first phase consists of an introduction to the workshop, the work topic and the tool, as well as the preparation of the story to be told; the second phase consists of the material creation of the digital story; the third phase is the moment when the shared viewing and projection of the participants' stories takes place. The duration of the different phases can be modulated according to the organisational needs and the characteristics of the context: in some cases the workshop can last three full days, in other cases it can develop over the course of a day or a weekend, while in others it can be broken down into stages with multiple short sessions. In any case, it is advisable to plan at least two hours for each session. If possible, it is advisable to work with small groups (approximately 4 to 10 participants) or think about solutions for managing larger groups (for example, working in subgroups or multiplying the work sessions to allow everyone to participate fully). The ideal length of stories is three minutes on average, but this indication must not be a constraint for the participants.

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4.1 Before the activity: preparing the workshop

Key Points
Durata: variabile
Obiettivi: programmare l'attività

First of all, it is a question of establishing the workshop's coordinates: times, duration of the sessions, participants and methods for conducting it. For example, for a digital workshop activity carried out in a school setting, it is a question of choosing whether to concentrate the activities into a limited time frame (three days - a week), whether to develop the workshop over a longer period (for example with weekly or fortnightly meetings) or whether to integrate the workshop into the normal class timetable. Depending on the choice made, it will then be necessary to define the duration of the sessions, in order to organise the distribution of the activities. With regard to the participants, even though each one normally creates their own digital story, the flexibility of the tool makes adaptations and adjustments possible: in case of organisational needs, it is possible to create the stories in small groups (of two or three people maximum).

With regard to the methods used to conduct it, it is important to address some issues in advance: whether all the phases will take place within the same space or whether the creation of the stories also includes activities outside of school (for example interviews with relatives); whether to involve a facilitator with specific technical skills or with a tutor role in the activities and, if so, whether the facilitation is planned for the entire duration of the workshop or only in some phases; which technological tools to use. With regard to this last aspect, the person leading the workshop will have to decide whether or not to use the students' smartphones (if they have them). Using them could make things easier for participants, as there are plenty of

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free apps offering editing services. However, teachers may have little control over the type of use of the videos or their distribution. We suggest two options: signing a classroom agreement with participants, who will commit not to distribute the video produced without the explicit consent of the workshop leader, or use alternative tools, such as tablets.

The place where the workshop takes place must be large enough to allow for independent work and it must be equipped with electrical outlets for computers, tablets and smartphones, which will be used in the second phase. If you plan to concentrate the phases into a single day, it is important that the chosen place is equipped with a video projector, sheets of paper and writing materials and that participants are asked in advance to select photos and personal objects linked to the theme of the digital story, which will then be incorporated into the story, and bring them with them.

Scenarios

The participants' personal materials and the technological equipment available are crucial aspects for the success of the workshop. Even if everyone has been explicitly asked to bring objects and images on the theme of the workshop, it is necessary to think about what to do if, for different reasons, not all participants do so: a possible solution is to provide a little more time (and make the necessary material available) so that participants draw, photograph and package the materials needed to illustrate the story. To overcome possible difficult moments, or if it becomes necessary to reorganise the timing, it may be useful to allow (or encourage) participants to work in pairs or small groups, for some of the phases of the workshop, so that they can support each other.

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FLASHCARD 2 - CHECKLIST

What is the duration of the workshop?	*Enter the dates*
How many sessions will there be?	*Number and duration of each one*
Content and objectives of the individual sessions	*Scheduling*
Workshop spaces	*Where - and always the same space?*
Involvement of a facilitator?	*Who and for how many/which sessions*
Participants	*Individuals, groups, couples...*
Which tools and what software	*Are they already available?*

FLASHCARD 3 - CONTINGENCY PLAN

Risks	*Possible solutions*
Scheduling: One or more sessions must be cancelled due to extenuating circumstances	*Readjust the sessions, or schedule other meetings*
Technology: The planned tools are not available, the planned software is no longer available, downloading of the apps is too slow	*Prepare to have to use other tools (smartphone) or download the software on the chosen tools in advance*
Relationships: One or more participants skip one of the sessions	*Evaluate whether to schedule a small dedicated meeting, whether to prompt autonomous work or whether to have them work in a group with other classmates*

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The workshop can also be carried out remotely, keeping in mind a few adaptations and precautions.

FLASHCARD 4 - ACCOMPLISHING A REMOTE WORKSHOP	
Specific features	*Adaptations and precautions*
It is necessary to follow and support the work of participants who are in different places.	Each subgroup must be followed by a leader or a specially trained facilitator.
Other technological aspects also come into play and become prominent.	Make sure you do not take the availability of a device, the ability to use the chosen platform or a sufficiently fast connection for granted.
The time spent in front of the screen requires a different effort than that spent working in a physical location.	Create subgroups of about 6 - maximum 8 participants, in order to limit the time of some of the steps in the process.
Participants may feel uncomfortable asking for instructions to be repeated or admitting that they did not understand what to do.	Prepare written instructions, possibly to be sent to participants in advance or copied in the chatroom.
Creating a situation of sharing in which everyone feels at ease can be more complicated.	Avoid participants leaving the camera off during story sharing and other moments of exchange.
Recording the workshop through the features offered by the platforms is easier than when working in person.	Make sure that participants know in advance that the recording is going to take place and evaluate whether it is better to avoid recording some moments of the workshop.

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4.2 Phase one: preparing the story

Introduction

Key points

Durata: 15-30 minuti

Obiettivi: introdurre lo strumento e i software, creare un clima positivo, spiegare la domanda di ricerca
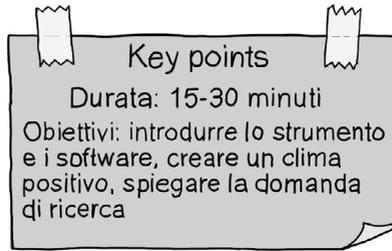
In the first few minutes of the activity, it is important to create a brief initial welcome moment, even if the workshop participants already know each other because they are classmates or attend the same school. This can be followed by a brief presentation of the work programme, by macro-phases, and the rules (for example: which spaces can or cannot be occupied, whether participants can or cannot go out, work outside the room they are in, tone of voice, sharing of images/videos).

Whoever leads the workshop must be able, as far as possible, to create an encouraging and supportive context, instilling in the participants the confidence to narrate, write and create a story. To this end, the suggestion is to project a few example videos, to show the participants what is expected of them. During a workshop conducted in an occupied space where projection was difficult, we opted to create a dedicated space (notebook and headphones on a small table) where participants could freely watch a few examples during the activities. To avoid the risk of standardisation, it is advisable to show more than one video, as different from each other as possible.

The function of the moment in which the workshop is introduced is also to develop a reasoning around the technologies to use to create the digital story. First of all, it is important to make sure that the participants know how to use the technological tools that have been chosen. Secondly, it is a question of focusing on the differences between

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the creation of a digital story and other forms of self-produced videos, such as Instagram reels and videos for TikTok. Lastly, it is advisable to start collective reflection on the implications – primarily in terms of privacy – of the use of technology.

Lastly, the moment of introduction will help the workshop leader to explain the purposes and the general question that will be guiding the digital stories. It is important to suggest that those participating reflect on an event, an experience, an episode or a place, which can be used as an "anchor" for the story.

During a workshop in English, conducted online, with participants we saw for the first time, we asked each participant to introduce themselves by answering the question "if I were an animal, which one would I be and why?" To trace a common thread with this moment, at the end of the second meeting held the following day, we sent each participant a digital sticker created from an image of the animal they chose to represent themselves.

 Scenarios

The general question proposed to solicit stories may possibly fail to bring out individual memories and experiences, but broader and more generic reflections instead. In these cases, it becomes necessary to offer the participants more food for thought, which are more limited and specific, such as "think of a positive and a negative episode that happened to you in the previous month".

The story circle and the storyboard

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At this point, participants are invited to reflect on the story they want to share for a few minutes (providing some materials for jotting down key words is useful). Then, in a space appropriately set up for sitting in a circle, participants are invited to tell their story, sharing it with the rest of the group.

Key points

Durata: 15-30 min. racconto storie
30-45 min. stesura storie

Obiettivi: produrre e condividere una storia legata allo stimolo iniziale

The person leading the workshop will have to decide whether to choose the order in which the stories are told, based on a logic that they consider important – but still leaving the participants some margin to do otherwise – or to establish it together with those present or otherwise to let the participants to take turns at speaking and spontaneously offer to speak each time. In any case, it is important that all participants have the same amount of time to tell their story and receive the same attention from the workshop leader and the other participants. Each story typically lasts 10 to 30 minutes, but in the case of large groups it is advisable to try to limit the story to 10-15 minutes and perhaps include a short break.

It is important that the person leading the workshop is aware that listening to a story has an impact on the way the other participants will tell their own. Especially if the topic is a sensitive one, it is likely that, after a story based on sad events, a short break will be needed before the next story. It is essential to guide this activity in a way that makes the story circle a safe space, in which the people participating can share their experiences without fear of being judged or ridiculed. At the end of each story, the leader thanks the person who has just told the story and, if appropriate, makes a brief comment on what has been shared. The stories may possibly arouse intense emotions. For this

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reason, it is important that the person leading the workshop includes a moment of common reflection and a ritual closing of the circle (for example, by inviting participants to shake hands).

Listening to other people's stories and receiving feedback and comments on their own allows participants to develop and adjust it, make it effective and understandable to everyone and also incorporate any new ideas and reflections.

At this point, participants are invited to work alone to turn the story they have shared into a digital story, thinking about how to integrate words, images and sounds. It should be made clear to them that writing the story is a phase of the process, not a product in itself. In this sense, you can also write a list with bullet points, proceed with keywords or with a mind map. It may be useful to indicate an approximate umber of lines or words. It is important to adapt this phase to the participants' writing skills, given their age.

The duration of the activity can be adapted to different needs, but it is important to leave enough time for everyone to reflect and work calmly, meaning no less than 30 minutes. If the activity is carried out in small groups, then it is useful to assign more time, but not too much, to avoid any wasted time.

You might consider the opportunity to merge the moment for writing the story with that of preparing a storyboard, which helps participants decide which visual and sound elements to use to accompany their story.

The storyboard is therefore an important tool for fine-tuning the story. It is possible to plan the digital story by writing notes in the margins of the text, indicating images and sounds. Nevertheless, we recommend proposing a real diagram, to be made available on pages of A4 paper or on larger flashcards.

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Examples of models for creating the Storyboard

DIGITAL STORY TITLE	Images	Effects	Transitions	Voiceover	Soundtrack	(add more columns)

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STORYBOARD BY	STORY TITLE		
Photos/Videos/Drawings	Spoken text	Written text	Music/Sounds

(add more lines)

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The most basic digital stories generally include a voiceover, in which the participant reads his/her story aloud, inserted onto a video consisting of filming of objects and images accompanied by music. Some of the more complex digital stories also introduce other elements, like video clips, short interviews, outdoor filming and the activation of soundscapes.

If the students in the class decide to use existing music tracks, the issue of copyright should be discussed together. A good solution is to recommend searching for the most suitable music among the tracks released with Creative Commons licenses (numerous databases can easily be found via search engines). If the time dedicated to the workshop and the participants' skills are sufficient, a short soundtrack for the digital story can be composed (there are various free music composition programmes to be found using a search engine and students can choose their favourite and most suitable one).

The duration of the storyboard phase varies and can be adapted to different needs. It is, however, a very important moment. The definition of the storyboard symbolically closes the first phase of work. It is therefore important that the participants are satisfied and have had time to explore the different possibilities for achieving their creation.

Figure 1 - Working on the storyboard
Source: personal archive of the authors

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The story circle is a delicate moment and there are lots of things that can "go wrong". Starting from our research experiences, the risks are mainly linked to three dimensions: emotions, relevance and timing. From an emotional viewpoint, participants may express insecurity regarding their writing ability and sharing with other participants. Something that may also happen is that the comments received when the story is shared cause displeasure or anger. For what concerns relevance, participants may write stories that only relate tangentially to the proposed stimulus. In terms of duration, a story can be too long to be effectively transferred to the timing of a digital story and participants only realise this while reading their text aloud. It is therefore a matter of being prepared and able to manage the tensions and difficulties that may arise.

 Scenarios

It is important to think about how to manage the spaces available for the workshop and the furnishings they contain, to ensure that everyone feels comfortable while sharing stories. In some situations, it may also be desirable to involve the participants in the set-up: what is the best position for tables and chairs? IS IT important to create more private areas where each participant can work alone? Where can refreshments be made available? Ideally, it would be good to have at least two classrooms/spaces available, to offer participants the opportunity to constantly consult and discuss with the workshop leader/facilitator and, in any case, also an area in which they can work quietly on the subsequent phases of creating digital stories.

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4.3 Phase two: creating the digital story

Key points
Durata: minimo 1 h
Obiettivi: Realizzare
    un racconto
    digitale

Once the storyboards have been prepared, you need to move on to the creation and editing of the videos, which generally last between 2 and 5 minutes. In this phase, participants will probably ask permission to modify and add elements to what has been included in the storyboard: it is important to remember that the content of the storyboard is a guide, not an obligation, and that adding or modifying details and scenes during editing is normal and permitted. In fact, even though after having prepared the storyboard, the story may seem complete in every detail, the perspective changes when you start to assemble the digital story and you also start to see the story through the eyes of a spectator.

While creating, the participants first carry out the necessary filming, for example, by focusing an object or an image linked to the story and focusing on themselves or on spaces and landscapes. Secondly, they record their voice and choose the musical accompaniment. Lastly, they select (and, if necessary, digitise) any images or photos they want to insert not in video-form but as a static element. At this point, it is a matter of inserting all these elements into the software that was chosen and adjusting the editing: figure 2 shows the interface of the OpenShot software, which is a very simple to use and open source desktop application. In the image below you can see the different tracks, which include the elements to be inserted into the digital story (in this case two images, a spoken text and the MP3 of a song). At the top right, you can see the video preview, which can be activated to check the effect as you go. At the top left, there are various visual effects that can be applied to the images and the video, for example as transition

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elements. Furthermore, the left column shows the audio properties of the single tracks, which can be modified, for example by raising or lowering the volume, while the right column has a space for captions.
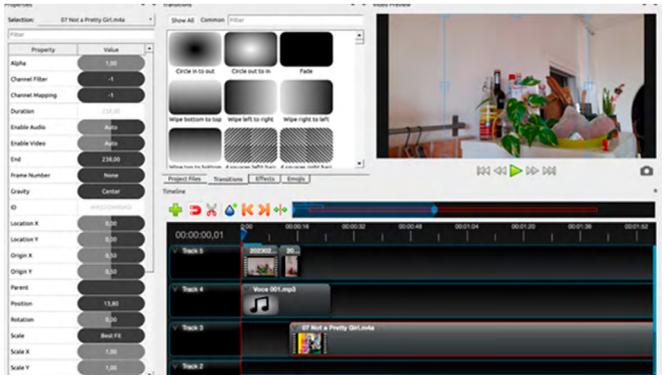
Figure 2 - Screenshot of the free Openshot application interface
Source: personal archive of the authors

Another very popular application is CapCut, which has both a smartphone and desktop version (the basic version is free). Once all the materials have been inserted, they need to be edited: what type of transition should be inserted between them, for example a fade-out? Is the music inserted throughout the story or only in some points? Is it used at high volume or as background music? Do I want to insert written text or elements like arrows, exclamation marks, polygons or keep the visual part visual only? If any faces are included, should they be recognisable or not?

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According to Joe Lambert[6], 7 elements must be taken into account in order to create an effective digital story:

1. the point of view, which should be in the first person;
2. the structure, which should be simple and linear;
3. the emotional content, which helps the listener to empathise;
4. the voice telling the story, by adjusting the story around its characteristics;
5. the soundtrack, which must accompany the story;
6. the organisation of the story, which must contain all the elements necessary for understanding the story and making it easy to follow;
7. the rhythm.

The phase in which the digital story is created is the one that requires the most time. The participants basically work autonomously, even in the presence of the workshop leader. For this reason, the workshop needs to take place in a large space, so that the participants do not disturb each other. Depending on their age, it is also possible to think about spreading them out in different spaces, so that they can work independently. It is however important that the workshop leader can be reached, especially during editing, to provide help using the software, when necessary.

[6] Lambert J. (a cura di) (2007), *Digital Storytelling Cookbook*, Berkeley, Calif., Center for Digital Storytelling, https://wrd.as.uky.edu/sites/default/files/cookbook.pdf

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Scenarios

It is possible that the recordings may present some audio problems, especially if they are sounds, voices and noises recorded with external footage. If possible, it is advisable to provide suitable tools (even just one per class, to be shared). Sometimes, the sound quality can be cleaned and restored later on using specific software. If this is not possible, it is advisable to eliminate the audio of the footage and add a recording later on. This can be a further point to reflect upon, both in terms of learning about tools, as well as learning, for example, to reproduce sounds or add them from specialised websites like Freesound or Free Sounds Library, and also in terms of content to share.

4.4 Phase three: sharing with the group

Key points

Durata: dipende dal numero di racconti

Obiettivi: condivisione, valorizzazione e discussione

The third phase is that of screening for the collective viewing of the digital stories created by the participants.

The sharing phase within the group is the moment in which the results of a path, which is at the same time individual and collective, are validated, promoted and celebrated. It is therefore important for the leader to comment on each video, offer feedback and highlight elements of specific interest. This is a moment in which expectations and mutual recognition are combined. Furthermore, those who create the digital

Annotations

stories sometimes express the desire to comment on the videos or offer explanations - leaving time to do so is advised, as is possibly encouraging a round of applause of recognition at the end of the screening of each story. At the end of the screenings, it is important, once again, to celebrate the group, the individual participants and the results achieved, both individual and collective, .

Depending on what was initially decided by the workshop leader and upon agreed with the participants, the collective screening moment can be followed by other moments for sharing the results of the workshop, also with regard to its goals. For example, a temporary exhibition can be organised by making the videos available on different screens, or they can be made accessible via a website created specifically for this purpose. In the case of schools, for example, a digital archive could also be created and made accessible to and shared between different institutions, to build a collective and plural narrative. Furthermore, the different digital stories can be assembled into an overall video that provides different aspects of a question that is individual and collective at the same time. If you decide to pursue this last path, it is important that each digital story has the same time amount of as the others in the overall story. Sharing outside the group is a delicate moment, because the audience that was imagined while the video was being (i.e. the participants of the group) changes and is extended to different figures. Therefore, it is important to again check that the individual participants and the group are willing to share the digital stories. Sharing the digital stories created within a specific workshop can have different purposes. First of all, it can be a moment for validating and enhancing the value of the participants' work and showing the results of collective work and research. Secondly, especially if the topic concerns the local community, viewing can be aimed at stimulating a broader and more comprehensive debate on several shared issues. Again, it can be a way to raise attention regarding a broader range of topics and issues. In contexts, like that of the school,

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whereby participants and the workshop leader meet at other times, it is extremely interesting to collectively discuss the elements that emerged in the debates following the collective screenings of the digital stories.

Suggestions

To create an archive of digital stories, it is advisable to organise the videos according to a classification that reflects the specific features of the contents, for example divided by Identity, Community, Relationships, Family or others. Alternatively, they can be attached to a map and geolocated. Each digital story must be accompanied by a title, the name of the narrator (or the wording "anonymous") and a short caption (about fifty words) illustrating the content. If you do not have a website, you can use an online platform (there are several that offer a free account).

4.5 Guide to reading digital stories

Key points
Durata: minimo 1 h
Obiettivi: analizzare
e confrontare
i racconti digitali

The moment for analysing the digital stories depends on the organisation and methods adopted by the workshop. It is advisable to separate the moment of collective screening from that of shared analysis, which can be done later, because it is important to dedicate the necessary time to celebrating.

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Depending on the workshop's objectives, the digital stories will be analysed through one of the perspectives highlighted in section 2: personal stories as illustrative of collective phenomena, as lenses for observe diversity, as part of the group stories or as a focus on the boundaries of the group or community.

The elements to consider for the analysis are non-verbal and verbal ones (as well as a combination of both). From a visual point of view, it is interesting to focus attention on what is shown, including people, objects, spaces, images and type. Depending on the specific topic being analysed, questions to ask, for example, could be if the spaces are internal or external, what is the gender of the people shown, if they are young or adults, if they all have the same origin. In the same way, by comparing different digital stories, it is interesting to focus on what is not shown. It can also be interesting to analyse the elements that accompany the story, for example by paying attention to the type of sounds used – musical or otherwise. In verbal terms, attention can be focused on the content of the story, the emotional tone of the narration, what is said and (as in visual cases) what is not said. Lastly, it is interesting to explore the relationship between verbal and non-verbal elements, for example by asking whether they are consistent with each other or whether there are different and even contradictory elements, as can be the case of a story of mourning accompanied by a brightly coloured image and very cheerful and engaging music.

The moment for the shared analysis can be organised in various ways. First of all, you can plan to give participants a flashcard with a few questions on it linked to the different elements (verbal, non-verbal, interaction between the two) of the narration, to be answered by thinking about their own video, all the others, or a specific digital story. For example, you can ask each participant to answer the questions with regard to the digital story of another participant (see Flashcard 5).

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In this case, you need to make the other participants' digital stories available to each participant, so that they can review them calmly at their chosen speed, stopping the video when desired. Alternatively, this part can be guided by the teacher, who asks the participants to answer a series of questions, discussing them together or by developing a written reflection.

FLASHCARD 5 - READING GUIDE		
Elements	*Questions*	*Objectives*
Verbal	What topics are discussed? What are the focuses of attention?	Depending on the approach: highlight common elements, highlight different elements, highlight the group culture and highlight the group boundaries.
Non verbal	What does the story show? What does it not show? Which people, objects, places, images?	
Interaction	Are the visual and verbal-sound parts of the story coherent with each other?	

A second step is to collect all the answers and compare them with each other, looking for common elements and gathering all the ideas, in order to enrich the analysis as much as possible. It will then be a matter of the teacher systematising the different elements of analysis and sharing the results with the participants, generally at a later time, in order to have time to do so. Sharing the results initiates a moment of discussion with the participants who can suggest further elements and adjust the overall and shared reading of the digital stories.

The overall and collective analysis of the results can also be shared outside the work group, if the results are believed to be a further element of stimulation for the community (or, in general, for the audience).

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In-depth analysis

We offer a few ideas for reading digital stories, thinking about a project dedicated to exploring male and female students' experiences of volunteer work. First of all, it is important to focus the attention on a thematic analysis of the digital stories, listing the topics and emotions raised (for example, personal satisfaction and/or frustration, wasting of time and conciliation with school commitments and political or religious reflections). This allows us to highlight the general categories of the narrative linked to volunteer work and compare them to those commonly encountered in public and media discourse (for example, are the students' stories similar to those we are used to hearing? Are we used to hearing "negative" stories about volunteer work?).

Secondly, you can focus on the narrative style and the focuses of attention, such as: is the story focused on an encounter with a special person or a particular episode, or is it a more general narrative about volunteer work as a social practice? Is the general tone serious and passionate or light and cheerful? Is the story constructed with the aim of demolishing stereotypes and/or showing what the everyday routine of volunteer work is like? Then you can analyse the visual dimension – the sequence of images and footage and the elements of non-verbal communication (particularly the language of sound).

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4.6 An example of a digital story

The images narrate the possible outcome of a digital story that could explore the experiences of students who attend schools in small villages. For example, the story could start with Gregorio, who stands before the video camera and explains his daily routine and which school he attends and then shows images of the route to school and the people and places he meets along the way. The images could be accompanied by real sounds, or by Gregorio's voice explaining what they are, or by the music that Gregorio listens to through his earphones while on his way to school. The images could then show the school environments and Gregorio's classmates, accompanied by the sounds of the classroom. Lastly, the story could show the return journey from school with Gregorio's voice talking about what it is like to live in a school in a small village where everyone knows each other.
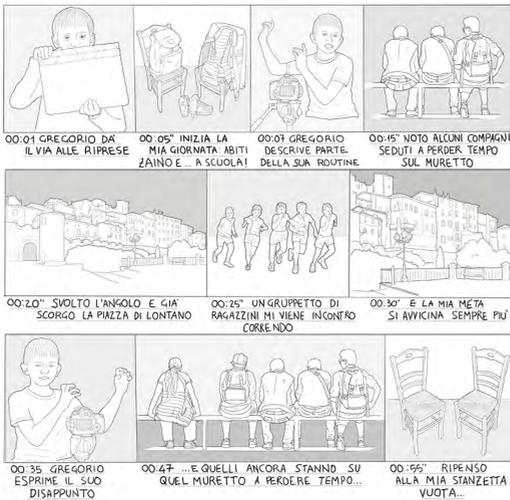
Take 1: how my day begins

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4.7 Limits and strengths

If the workshop is led by the teacher of the participating pupils and students, maximum attention must be focused on making sure that this relationship, which is at the same time hierarchical and familiar, is not a weak point, for example by holding children and young people back from sharing their stories or causing them to fear that their ability to write or use the technology for editing the digital story is being judged.

At the same time, this knowledge can also be a strength: the teacher is in the ideal position to sense their moods, reasons for any small conflicts within the group or the need for support, and intervene (or not).

An important strength of digital stories, as explained in section 2, is the power that comes from talking about yourself and telling a personal story. However, this can also be a limit regarding the capacity for abstraction; in this sense, it is important that the person leading the workshop promotes a discussion around this aspect.

From a practical point of view, creating a digital story has the advantage of stimulating the participants' first-hand involvement in topics and questions of study and research and of activating forms of knowledge linked to the near and distant social context. Furthermore, makes it possible to reflect on the use of digital tools - on their ethical and practical implications (see section 4) - which is particularly important in the case of younger participants, who are already somewhat familiar with these tools.

This familiarity can also be a weakness: in fact, when inventing and creating the digital story, participants could activate automatic mechanisms linked to producing audio-visual content, for example thinking that a digital story is like producing a video for TikTok. Also in this case, it is important that the person leading the workshop discusses the similarities and differences between telling the story

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through digital storytelling and other tools (see section 4).

Digital stories also require participants to get involved on an emotional level. On the one hand, this is an important stimulus for getting them interested in life and exploring forms of analysis of reality that also include the emotional dimension, as well as strengthening the bonds within the group through sharing. On the other hand, this is undoubtedly a demanding request – it is the workshop leader, in this sense, who needs to define the tone of the story and clarify that the choice regarding what and how much to share is always in the hands of the person creating the story.

Lastly, creating a digital story requires a certain amount of time: depending on the situations, this can be a limitation, even though the technique is quite flexible from this point of view.

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Suggestions

A digital storytelling exercise: what I'm going to do when I grow up
The aim of this exercise is to reason about future expectations and cultural images linked to professions (approach: from the perspective of myself).

1. Think about what you would like to do when you grow up: what profession do you imagine yourself doing? Why are you attracted to that profession and what is the path for getting there? Will you live here or go to live somewhere else (and where)?

2. Now list a series of objects, photos and songs linked to the profession you imagine and the place where you will live.

3. When comparing the stories with those of your classmates in the story circle, did any interesting ideas emerge to clarify yours? Use a storyboard template to outline your story and try to create it.

4. Shared analysis:
   a. What professions emerge from the stories? Are some more common than others? What type of professions were not mentioned?
   b. What are the elements associated with the different professions? How can we define the imagery that emerges from the digital stories with respect to the different professions? (E.g. heroic and enthusiastic teachers? Rich and ruthless lawyers?)

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5. Ethics and Media literacy

The complete success of the digital workshop experience depends on three things. The first is that all participants complete their audiovisual story and are satisfied with it. The second is maintaining a protected and adequate relational context for everyone. The third is keeping a balance between the various dimensions, both during the process and regarding the sharing of digital stories in other environments and with other people.

ESSENTIAL GUIDELINES	
Elements	*Questions*
During the workshop: the participants' experience • make sure that each participant feels like telling a story linked to the chosen topic; • help each participant choose the most suitable tone and the most appropriate materials for constructing the story; • explain the importance of keeping the information that emerges during the moments of sharing confidential; • adapt the context and the instructions so that no one is (or feels) excluded; • plan moments dedicated to discussing how things went.	***After the workshop: the (possible) sharing of the digital story*** • do not take the participants' consent for each possible circulation of the story for granted and involve them from time to time; • carefully consider the appropriateness of the audience (small groups are better) and prepare it; • prepare the participants for the possibility that their digital story may receive criticism, even of the constructive kind.

A digital workshop is an important opportunity to reflect on the methods and implications of composing and communicating a message and on the specifics of the visual and sound levels of this product, as shown in flashcard 6.

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FLASHCARD 6 - COMPONENTS OF THE DIGITAL STORY AND IDEAS TO REFLECT UPON

Level	What	Questions for reflection	Ethical issues
Visual level	Single images: content and possible effects Combinations of different images (put together or one after the other) Sequence of different images Written text (captions, titles) linked to images, voice and sounds	What is the message conveyed by the images? What is the relationship between the images and linked to the written text and sounds? How can a message be made effective? Do the images I am using also refer to other meanings? How do images connect to shared culture (for example, to films, collective narratives, etc.)?	Which images can be used? Do I have the right to use other people's images (not only in terms of copyright: can I use a friend's photo)? If I film in a public space, do I need permission from the people I film?
Sound level	Recorded voice Relationship between recorded voice and sounds (music or environmental) Music	What does the voice communicate (tone, rhythm)? Are there emotional noises (such as laughter)? What do sounds and music communicate?	What music can I use? What are the copyright limits?

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5.1 Reflecting on the product and the process

It is advisable that the person conducting the workshop also includes an opportunity to reflect on the media product resulting from it, unless this is unwise for specific reasons, by preparing some points of discussion to be used in a group (if possible) or suggested as individual work. Furthermore, asking specific questions can stimulate observations regarding the overall experience of participating in the workshop.

FLASHCARD 7 - QUESTIONS TO STIMULATE THE DISCUSSION	
Product	*Process*
Which element of the story is the one that most effectively communicates the experience shared?	How do I feel when others watch my story?
How was the right rhythm created?	How do I feel when I watch the stories of others?
Would different music/sounds be more suitable than those used?	After other people watched my story, did I change my mind about showing my digital story outside of the workshop?
Could the story be understood differently by people of different ages or from different cultures?	

5.2 Media literacy

Lastly, it is possible to include some reflection in terms of media literacy, referring to different topics. A first topic concerns self-narration and the implications of talking about yourself through different tools. The act of talking about yourself is generally something participants are familiar with: each of us talks about ourselves, in different ways and forms. Furthermore, it is likely that those who participate are familiar with the expression "digital storytelling", which

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generally refers to applying the narrative form to data and topics to make them more attractive and memorable for the audience – as happens in the marketing field.

Digital storytelling has several aspects and connections common to other training, participation and research approaches, methods and techniques that, coming from different traditions, facilitate biographical storytelling, privileging and balancing the modes of expression to varying degrees. For example, digital storytelling has some similarities with *photovoice*[7], a technique that consists of asking participants to produce a certain number of photos around a common theme. Both techniques have a connection to the perspective of popular education, which offers people tools and opportunities to document their experience in order to promote social change[8]. Another similar technique is the video diary[9], which consists of asking participants to produce short videos, usually on a regular basis, over an agreed period of time. Some aspects of this technique are similar to those of digital storytelling, particularly the activation of multimedia, while others are different, given that the video diary focuses attention on creating the events, rather than on their diachronic reconstruction, and involves individual rather than collaborative work. Using different techniques also implies different ways of talking about yourself: a video diary, for example, initiates a more intimate and personal reflection than a digital story does. Similarly, talking about yourself through static images devoid of any other elements (such as verbal storytelling or music) initiates a more abstract and symbolic narration.

Digital storytelling and video technique: questions for the classroom discussion

Not only the technique used, but also the purposes and environment of the narration influence the ways in which we tell our stories. In contemporary societies, social media platforms are a very

[7] Santinello M., Surian A. Gaboardi M. (2022), *Guida pratica al photovoice. Promuovere consapevolezza e partecipazione sociale (Practical guide to photovoice. Promoting awareness and social participation)*. Trento: Erikson.

[8] Frisina A. (2011), Prendere la parola a partire dalle immagini. *Il «photovoice» e gli sguardi conflittuali di una nuova generazione del Nord Est (Extracting the word from images. The "photovoice" and the conflicting looks of a new generation from the North East)*, in "Studi culturali, Rivista quadrimestrale" (Cultural Studies, Four-monthly periodical) 3, pages 433-456.

[9] Giorgi A., Pizzolati M., Vacchelli E. (2021), *Metodi Creativi per la Ricerca Sociale (Creative Methods for Social Research)*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

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popular multimedia environment, within which different forms of self-narration circulate, including the sharing of different elements, such as thoughts, memories, images, videos or pieces of music. Even if the tools are the same, the audience on social media is potentially much larger and much less controlled than that of a workshop adopting forms of biographical storytelling. In addition, talking about yourself on social media is a way of presenting yourself that often implies a certain form of control over the self-image that you want others to see, even when there is a general framework promoting authenticity, like the social media platform BeReal, which encourages users to show themselves without filters. Given that talking about yourself always implies some form of filtering and adjustment, the degree of control over what to show is very different, depending on the tool used.

From this point of view, digital storytelling can be used as a starting point to promote a discussion around self-narration and its sharing, through different techniques.

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FLASHCARD 8 - QUESTIONS THAT STIMULATE DISCUSSION	
Social media promote a dual relationship with the authenticity of showing yourself: on the one hand, they enhance its value, while on the other, they allow a high degree of control over how and what you show about yourself.	• What differences have I found between talking about myself in a video on social media and doing it through digital storytelling? • What are the differences? • What does being "authentic" mean in a video on social media and in a digital story?
Talking about yourself briefly, through a photo, a video, a sentence, on the one hand limits the possibilities of expressing yourself, while on the other, it pushes you to summarise and concentrate your message into a few symbolic elements.	• How does my way of talking about myself change in these two forms? • Do I show the same things with the same level of importance?
Talking about yourself through a few symbolic elements can push you to use communication codes, which are widely recognisable and therefore reinforce the stereotypes concerning the way you talk about some aspects of yourself and the world.	• What sound and visual elements do I use, for example, to talk about sports, joy and family? • What do they show and what do they not show? • How could I talk about the same things using different sound and visual elements instead of the predictable ones?

Talking about yourself and narrating: the true, the false and the digital tools

A second topic concerns the process of creating a story. Smartphones, tablets and video cameras allow us to capture the social reality around us through images, videos and recordings of sounds and voices. Applications like those indicated allow us to modify images, videos and recordings later on, adding sound and visual

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effects and musical comments. The spread of free applications based on Artificial Intelligence has recently made it possible to create texts, images and videos that are sometimes indistinguishable from the real ones - as shown by recent examples of deep fakes involving well-known politicians and celebrities, but also fake news spread through social media such as TikTok about the ongoing wars.

In relation to this, a digital storytelling workshop can also be a starting point for collective reflection on the implications of the use of technologies and how the relationship changes between true, false and plausible.

FLASHCARD 9 - QUESTIONS THAT STIMULATE DISCUSSION

Even if deep fakes and, more generally, images and videos generated by AI are not real, their effects are often real: in fact, people believe them and react to them as if they were real.
• What responsibility do the creators have towards the audience?

In some contexts, awareness of the possibility of creating fake images and videos may lead people to react with scepticism towards any audio-visual product.
• So what are the potential implications of these technologies?

• Thinking about the reflections that developed relative to the two previous questions, can we reason about the relationship between true, false and plausible?

• Did the app or software we used to create the story also constrain us with respect to what we wanted to convey?

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