

ARTICLE

Our stories are bigger than our cases: digital storytelling in a restorative conferencing programme

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Abstract

This qualitative art-informed case study explored a restorative conferencing media arts programme's use of digital storytelling practices with justice-involved youth. Specifically, the author was interested in the role of producing a digital story and its accompanying artefacts' ability to provide a concrete and reflective platform to engage participants in the restorative conferencing process. Data analysis revealed that participants' use of photography, video and musical overlays in their digital stories promoted awareness and reflection of the restorative justice concepts. For justice-involved youth, the environment provided opportunities to understand and explore the construction and detypification of criminal identities to enable participants to develop personal and social responsibility. This study highlights how digital storytelling practices lend themselves to the need for restorative conferencing interventions to focus on participants' accounts of the process by documenting participants' journeys through the programme and examining the artefacts created.

Keywords: digital storytelling, multimodal media production, art education, restorative justice.

1 Introduction

Far too often, the voices of justice-involved youth are neglected or ignored in empirical research. When youth voices are included, the focus is primarily on those housed within traditional detention facilities rather than those who participate in innovative restorative justice programming. Further, to the extent that voices are included, a dearth of research offers a window into the reflective stance that youth can share about their lives, crimes and punishment. In this study, the author shines a light on these voices, bringing them to the forefront. To do this, the author explores digital storytelling (DST) as an arts-inspired tool to support justice-involved

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youth in the restorative conferencing process. Specifically, the study describes how creating a digital story can be a tool through which justice-involved youth can expand the potential of restorative justice practices in their ability to build linguistic and social capital, as well as achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision-making (Wachtel & McCold, 2004; Willis, 2020).

The foundational principles of restorative justice are to maintain a focus on the harm done, emphasise the future and strive for personal accountability and inclusivity (Umbreit & Armour, 2010). Restorative justice interventions can take on many forms through reintegrative shaming. Modelled from a 'loving family social environment', reintegrative shaming has high levels of social control and social support to focus more on the criminal act and less on the offender's identity (Braithwaite, 1989). The theory and application encourage offenders to separate their identities from the delinquency and realise that the mere fact of having done a bad thing does not make them a bad person (Braithwaite, 2006).

In this article, the author will only focus on the restorative justice intervention, primarily known as restorative justice conferencing. Restorative justice conferencing engages a broader group of individuals (e.g. community members and agents of the criminal justice system) to resolve an offence (Rodriguez, 2007). Umbreit (2000: 5) states, '[b]y involving a broader range of people affected by the crime, far more citizens become direct stakeholders in the criminal and juvenile justice processes.' Past research on restorative justice conferencing with youth focused on general effects related to victim satisfaction and recidivism rates of offenders (Kim & Gerber, 2012).

Although this research demonstrates positive outcomes related to victim and offender satisfaction and reduction in recidivism (Umbreit, Coates & Vos, 2002), it has contributed relatively little to an understanding of youth participants' accounts of their experiences (Forget, 2003; Kim & Gerber, 2012). Thus, it is essential to conduct research that describes and interprets the restorative justice conferencing processes. Interpretive qualitative approaches centred on narrative identity are one such approach. According to Bazemore and Green (2007), implementing qualitative analyses is critical to understanding restorative justice values and principles to rehabilitate offenders effectively.

2 Narrative identity and offender rehabilitation

Narrative identity is viewed as a psychosocial construction, reflecting how one makes sense of the personal past, current self and future expectations (McAdams, 1993). At its core, narrative identity theory proposes that the act of narration shapes a speaker's sense of self by giving meaning to personal experiences, which teaches values and beliefs and assists in constructing and reaffirming one's identity (Koenig & Trees, 2006). Ward and Marshall (2007) posit that offenders lacking a clear narrative identity or having a maladaptive narrative identity (e.g. 'I do bad things because I am a bad person') likely do not have the skills, attitudes and discursive resources necessary to lead what society deems as a fulfilling life.

The narrative approach of offender rehabilitation requires offenders to complete narrative identity work by identifying what goal offenders seek through their criminal behaviour (Ward & Marshall, 2007). Narrative identity work is defined as the 'range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities congruent with and supportive of the self-concept' (Snow & Anderson, 1987: 1348). In all, narrative identity work enhances identities by crafting and supporting narratives about a person's experiences and how those experiences shape and influence who they are (McLean, Pasupathi & Pals, 2007).

Within the restorative justice conferencing process, offenders confront their violations by telling their stories and expressing their emotions about their offences. Offenders are challenged to think about how their actions caused others harm, in addition to being presented with opportunities to acknowledge the suffering of victims, their families and the surrounding community. Making amends can likely influence an individual's narrative identity, allowing offenders to create a redemptive narrative, where offenders re-examine their offence and reinterpret their current situation (Horan, 2015). Researchers deem that the ability to conclude a low point in life narratives with a positive tone and evidence of coherence and emotional resolution may influence further identity development and psychological functioning (Maruna, 2001; Stone, 2016). Thus, creating a redemptive narrative can be a catalyst for positive self-transformation, enabling an offender to implement socially acceptable life plans and goals. One medium for revealing and building narrative identity used in this study is DST.

3 Digital storytelling

DST inherits from oral storytelling its emphasis on the personal voice and the need to learn from and grow through storytelling. DST extends storytelling's scope, reach and power by drawing on traditional and multimodal communication technologies. As a form, DST is a unique narrative genre in which storytellers utilise narrative technologies that combine visual (including media images), audio, animation, written and kinaesthetic/interactive modes of communication to produce personal narratives or original stories (Curwood & Gibbons, 2010). The use of pictures, narrations, video, animation, music and other artefacts supports a greater level of understanding for both author and audience and augments the experience of the narrative's meaning (Flottemesch, 2013). For instance, authors may use images or music to attach concepts and messages that they seek to be appropriate for their own stories. The narrativity of a photograph or soundtrack is dynamically constructed, on the one hand, by the author's selection and, on the other, by the audience, whose spectatorship comes with its own cultural and social interpretations (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996[2006]; Nelson, 2006). Consequently, DST can provide a multisensory narrative experience to enhance the symbolic quality of the narrative message compared with only using written text or spoken word (Davis & Weinshenker, 2012).

DST workshops and digital stories themselves are 'mediated by a range of discursive, practical, and material structures, which bring meaning, shape, and

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structure to the individual's discursive work' (Wang, 2013: 48). The process of creating a digital story begins with developing a story about oneself and then focuses on how the available digital tools (e.g. video, photo, etc.) afford representation of that story and culminates in digital representations (Halverson, 2013). Further, Halverson (2013) suggests that through creating digital stories, storytellers build relationships with knowledge, communities and even themselves; the relationships built are worked out through an iterative making process that results in the creation of external artefacts. The importance of the digital artefact lies in the representation's ability to make visible the understandings, discoveries and misconceptions within a storyteller's story (Kafai, 2006). Roche-Smith (2004), Hull and Katz (2006) and Nixon (2008) assert that the creation of a digital story can shape a sense of self by creating a symbolic artefact for self-understanding on which one can reflect. Many view DST as a means of changing the way we engage in our communities, inspiring and promoting democratised media practices and civic involvement (Couldry, 2008).

Over the past decade, interest and research on DST has burgeoned. A systematic review by de Jager, Fogarty, Tewson, Lenette and Boydell (2017) noted DST research and practices as a means for developing counter-narratives, participatory research methods, therapeutic intervention, knowledge translation, preservation of cultural heritage, education training and community development. In particular, DST research highlights the affordances for assigning meaning to and reconstructing experiences, refashioning the self, realising personal empowerment and achieving social connection and social change (Davis & Weinschenker, 2012). Evidence that the process of DST can affect identity formation has emerged primarily from contexts such as extended after-school and community settings. Youth unite over shared experiences such as a minoritised status within these settings and spend an extended time authoring stories in a supportive and trusting community (Davis & Weinschenker, 2012). To that end, DST makes it possible to perform and author new selves that offer both counter-narratives and new sites of inquiry and exploration, disrupting entrenched social structures that are oppressive, discriminatory and divisive (Wang, 2013). DST within restorative justice practices is only beginning. However, theory suggests that the combination can be a public platform for individuals to express their rights and needs and conflict transformation owing to the affordances mentioned previously of DST (Claes, Lechkar, Huysmans & Gulinck, 2017).

4 The current study

In this study, participants confront their violations within the restorative justice conferencing process by telling their stories and expressing their emotions about their offences through DST. The author argues that using DST as a tool to help these justice-involved youth process their delinquency may facilitate the (re) interpretation of their delinquency with stronger emotional and psychological consequences than just an oral retelling of their account due to the multimodal artefacts created. With this hypothesis in mind, the study explores what role, if

any, the production of a digital story and its accompanying artefacts play in the restorative justice conferencing process.

4.1 Methods

A qualitative art-informed case study served as the framework to investigate how justice-involved youth participants experienced the process of creating a digital story about their delinquency. A case study methodology was selected because this type of inquiry is unique in its ability to reveal information about a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2014). Arts-informed qualitative research was selected because art-making plays a supportive role within a holistic inquiry (Stanley, 2009). The quality of the art, according to an objective measure of quality, is less important than the ways that the art informs understanding (Knowles & Cole, 2008); this is critical when considering the role of DST in restorative justice conferencing – specifically, participants’ interactions, experiences and meaning as they engage in the DST process.

4.2 The setting

The site of this case study was a court-mandated, restorative justice media arts programme in Brooklyn, New York. The programme broadly implements a restorative conferencing intervention by involving family, friends, community members and criminal justice actors to address the full impact of participant offences. Various teaching artists, public defenders, community advocates and programme staff teach a series of six workshops over eight weeks. The workshops culminate in participants creating a digital story that reflects on the arrest, its effects on others and how to repair harm. This story is presented at a final exhibition, attended by various criminal justice actors, family and friends.

The programme’s mission is two-fold. First, to mitigate the collateral consequences of the traditional justice system’s treatment of youth accused of low-level offences, ranging from losing employment and housing to losing access to educational opportunities. By participating in this programme, justice-involved youth receive referrals directly from the prosecutor’s office, which can quickly resolve their cases, reduce the suffering from disproportionate consequences and lessen the burden of low-level cases on criminal courts (A guide to arts and diversion, 2022). Within the programme, participant infractions are deemed misdemeanours, ranging from graffiti to criminal possession of a weapon in the 4th degree. Within the traditional justice system, participants would receive jail time and a monetary fine. However, participants who complete all the programme workshops and satisfy the other sentencing requirements can avoid jail time, get their criminal charges dismissed and criminal records sealed.

Second, the programme simultaneously seeks to create an environment to allow participants to think constructively about their delinquency while also telling their life stories in a safe space to feel that their voices are essential. Restorative justice values and dialogue are explored through individual and group art exercises that use photography, video, illustration and design, culminating in a digital story about the participants’ delinquency. Programme participants receive a digital point-and-shoot camera to complete weekly class and homework art assignments.

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The programme's curriculum is structured to present all their multimodal artefacts into one narrative at the final exhibition on completing all workshop activities (see Appendix A). Within this counterspace, participants reflect on the underlying causes of an arrest through various media art practices. The curriculum encourages participants to develop stronger social bonds with their families and communities while taking responsibility for their unlawful actions via art practices. To foster authentic dialogue, recognition and reconciliation, the programme considers parents, guardians and community members as the victims of the participant's delinquency. Direct victims of participants' delinquency are not present in any workshops, as the explicit aim of the organisation is to move away from the polarising victim-perpetrator binary.

4.3 Study population

Youth Participants. This study examined an ongoing programme with already enrolled participants. The sample includes the digital stories of participants who completed the entire 8-week programme between September 2014 and 2016 (N = 18). The majority of participants – eight females and seven males – identified as black, and four participants identified as male and Latino. Of these eighteen participants, only nine agreed to be interviewed, seven of whom were males and two were females (See Table 1).

Table 1 *Participant demographics*

Name	Race	Age	Sex	Infraction	Interviewed	Cohort
Cameron	Black	16	M	Graffiti/Trespassing	Y	2016
Danilo	Latino	16	M	Petit larceny/Assault	Y	2014
Fredrico	Latino	17	M	Criminal possession of controlled substance	Y	2014
Holt	Black	16	M	Petit larceny	Y	2016
Jupiter	Black	17	M	Assault in the 3rd degree	Y	2014
Kai	Black	16	M	Criminal possession of a weapon in the 4th degree	N	2014
Kate	Black	16	F	Assault in the 3rd degree	N	2016
Kathryn	Black	16	F	Assault in the 3rd degree	N	2015
Kyle	Black	16	M	Disorderly conduct	Y	2016
Maurice	Black	17	M	Assault in the 3rd degree	N	2016
Olive	Black	16	F	Assault in the 3rd degree	N	2015
Princess	Black	17	F	Assault in the 3rd degree	Y	2015

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Table 1 (Continued)

Name	Race	Age	Sex	Infraction	Interviewed	Cohort
Raymond	Latino	17	M	Disorderly conduct	N	2016
Sarah	Black	16	F	Assault in the 3rd degree	N	2015
Shawn	Black	17	F	Criminal possession of a weapon in the 4th degree	Y	2015
Taylor	Black	17	F	Assault in the 3rd degree	N	2015
Valerie	Black	16	F	Assault in the 3rd degree	N	2015
Yale	Latino	16	M	Disorderly conduct	Y	2014

Note: All names reported here are pseudonyms.

Staff Participants. In this study, the staff was composed of four core members: the executive director (ED) and three support staff. The ED acts as the leading facilitator of all 8-week programme workshops. The other support staff also act as facilitators of the programme by assisting the ED and visual artists in each workshop. These four core staff members attended every workshop and therefore had access to essential details about the process of how each participant created their digital story and their perspectives about the general programme. The teaching artists who led workshop sessions did not participate in this study owing to the limited interactions between the programme and the participants.

4.4 Data collection

A wide range of secondary data provided in-depth descriptions of the procedures and final products created. The author collected all curriculum documents to understand the application of restorative justice values in various art activities. Second, the author collected participants' weekly digital video diary assignments and in-class workshop written and art assignments. Finally, the author reviewed all the workshop recordings of the eight-week programmes in 2015 and 2016 to observe how the participants collaborated and interacted when discussing and working on the multiple artefacts within their digital stories.

After analysing the participants' digital stories, the author conducted 30-to 45-minute semi-structured interviews with 9 participants. These discussions explored participant experiences during workshop activities, including the decision-making processes they used for story selection, story construction and their presentation of the finished products to the exhibition attendees. In addition, the author conducted a one-hour semi-structured interview with the ED and one programme support staff to further how each participant created their digital story and perspectives about the programme's general dynamics.

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4.5 Data analysis

Multimodal discourse analysis theories were used to develop the analytical framework for investigating the participants' digital stories (Gee, 2001; Kress, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Nelson et al., 2008). Multimodal discourse consists of four essential parts: discourse, design, production and distribution. The use of discourse theory to closely examine the participants' digital stories provided a framework for connecting participants' decisions about the text, images and audio to a more sophisticated understanding of representation and articulation. The analysis of participants' digital stories focused on how participants construct their stories, their decisions to represent or not present concepts, and how they employed intertextual elements (text, audio, video, still image).

4.6 Data analysis procedures

Data analysis consisted of three main phases. Phase 1 entailed data reduction, where the author began by transcribing the staff and participant interviews and viewing digital video observations. The author developed an initial literature-based coding framework based on redemptive imagery and restorative justice values. Phase 2 involved data display using Dedoose, a web-based tool for qualitative analysis of video and audio data. Throughout these processes, the author was interested not only in the intricacies of the multimedia texts that the participants created but also in how, and to what effect, participants decoded restorative values from workshops and repurposed the messages through texts, images, photographs and music in their final digital stories (see Appendix B). In Phase 3, the author summarised findings by exporting the data from Dedoose and stacking the media parts of the eight-interview participant's digital stories to analyse each story for coherence and meaning-making. The stacking process acts as a form of triangulation to increase the credibility and validity of the study. Finally, once the conclusions from the stacking process were complete, the author used the interviews with participants and the ED as debriefers to ensure the author was aware of any biases, assumptions and attitudes towards the data and any emerging interpretations.

5 Findings

The findings will examine only Danilo's digital story, which is a concise representation of all eighteen digital stories created and analysed within the programme. Danilo's story also expresses the major themes deemed important by all nine interviewed participants, 'representing one's authentic self' and 'empowerment and agency'. By presenting only one participant's account in full, the author will show all the story elements and reasoning behind the structure and processes of putting together his digital story. This thicker description will allow for greater understanding of how participants interpreted the artefacts they appropriated for their story, and the role of each media part (images, audio and text) assisted participants in connecting with the restorative justice values within the curriculum in a meaningful way.

5.1 *'Our stories are bigger than our cases' – Danilo's story*

Danilo, a Latino male participant, was 17 years old when he participated in the programme. He was arrested on the subway after fighting with another group of males over an alleged stolen phone. As with many other participants, Danilo's story primarily used video and photography overlaid with narrations and music to retell how his arrest affected his life and how he was ready to take responsibility and move on to finishing high school.

Danilo's title sets the stage for his story *'Our Stories are Bigger than our Cases'*. Danilo states:

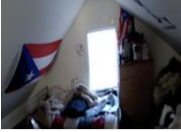


My title and structure ... show that my arrest was just a hiccup in my life. And, I was ready to move on. This has only made me a stronger person and is helping me grow up to be a responsible young man.

Danilo's story begins with the 'World Tour Video' assignment. The first workshop and corresponding homework assignment ask participants to show their lives and personalities outside of their court involvement. In his interview, Danilo explained how he first wanted the audience to see that he came from a family with strong values, so he began his story with his *World Tour* video. He shows the audience his room, emphasising his Puerto Rican flags, Yankees memorabilia and various clothes and sneakers.

Danilo walks out to his street to pick up his papers for his morning delivery route. He points out to the audience that he lives in a neighbourhood with houses, trees and cars; he does not want people to think he lives 'in the projects'. The video cuts away from that scene, and the audience now sees Danilo's second job, where he works as a counsellor for a vacation Bible school – a job he has had throughout high school. Danilo explicitly wanted to demonstrate how his commitment to his family and working were signs of future leadership and were contributing meaningfully to his community (Table 2).

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Table 2 *Danilo world tour video stacking*

Images from video			
			
Narration	There's my Puerto Rican flags and my Yankees stuff. For life!	This is my block. Houses, houses, streets, cars. I wake up every morning basically, and I walk to the end of my block to get my papers because I'm a paper boy. So right now, you guys are on a journey with me to get my papers.	This is my daily life. I'm working. I work at Vacation Bible School. It's exactly what I do during the summer every year.
Interview	I thought using some of the videos was key because it allowed us to document our own lives, and I was able to show that I came from a good community and had a stable job. I've been a paper boy for years, which is important to show because I was making money. I also wanted to show I had more than one job, and I was grounded.		

Interviewed participants also deemed the 'World Tour' video diary and other self-representation photography and collage activities included in the first two programme workshops helped to establish a climate of safety and respect for participants, as programme staff and participants develop a common ground of expectations and community. Further, these activities help participants to step into a place of openness, which is necessary to learn about the impact of their behaviours.

Danilo's story moves onto a video diary related to his arrest. The programme's third and fourth workshops address the participants' choices that led to their arrest. In these workshops, participants complete worksheets and a 'restorative justice choice interview', which requires participants to retell the situation that brought them to be justice-involved in the present tense. Programme staff act as facilitators of this activity to ensure full participation. This video diary activity is also assigned as homework, to be completed with at least one family member and one friend. All participants interviewed believed this was one of the most challenging and most emotional activities to complete. Workshop footage shows participants providing monosyllabic answers, slouched in the chair, looking down on the floor or away as they answer the questions. Participants appear to be frustrated or embarrassed as they retell their stories.

Danilo refilmed his 'restorative justice choice interview' after the workshop, in his home. He stares directly into the camera, answering the questions related to what choices led up to his arrest, the impact the arrest had on himself and others,

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what other options he had beyond his choice, and what he needs to prevent the same thing from happening again. This segment takes up the majority of his story (Table 3).

Table 3 *Image from Danilo diary video stacked*

Images from video



Narration I was on Sunset Brooklyn on 3rd avenue. I was with one of my friends at the time. I did understand what was going on. I was feeling scared um. I didn't really know what to think ... actually I did. I honestly though I let down my parents. Once they were gonna find out then they were gonna be really disappointed ... When I had to see the judge ... I was scared. It was my first time in the court room ... I was sentenced to 36 sessions of therapy, 15 days of community service and this programme. I've completed 20 sessions of therapy, 3 days of community. It's limiting me and my freedom ...

Interview Putting in the video diary where I talked about my arrest was important. I didn't want to use the one we did in class, because I wanted to show I understood what happened to me on my own, and that I was taking responsibility for what I did, with no one else forcing me to do so. I wanted to show I was committed to clearing my record.

Within his story, Danilo does express the emotional toll his arrest had on his parents and best friend. Explaining that his parents were not only disappointed but felt they were 'bad parents' and were ashamed to go out in their community. Danilo also finds out that his best friend was not allowed to hang out with him for a time because his friend's parents did not want their son to get in trouble or be seen as a 'criminal'. During his interview, Danilo even acknowledges how much these conversations affected him nearly three years after his arrest.

To further demonstrate his understanding of the impact of his arrest, Danilo's story next displays a series of photographs re-enacting his arrest as he continues to talk about the impact (Table 4).

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Table 4 Danilo 'Arrest' photograph stacked

Image



I was transported to the precinct in a cop car. When they handcuffed me it was so tight, it really hurt my wrists. They did the paperwork and I was there overnight. They actually had me and my friend in a different cell. I felt scared and worried but I knew it was gonna pass ...

I am committed to clearing my record, definitely. I'm a kid with a lot of values, um, school being one of them, family being another one, I'm just trying to graduate high school and go into college and do something with my life. I messed up but I am definitely very very committed to clearing my record. I know if you have a record it's hard to get jobs and do a lot of things.

I wanted to use the images of what it was like being arrested. How upsetting it could be and how serious I took it. Since I knew I was in a lot of trouble. My family was so disappointed in me. I never want to see them like that again.

Next, Danilo's story transitions from taking responsibility to talking about his future and projecting a more aspirational self-concept. Beginning in workshop four, participants learn about art and activism. After the lecture, participants work with photography and collage to identify 'what is important to you?', 'what would you like the future to look like?', 'what kind of personal characteristics are you going to take on as a person to make these choices to create that future?' By making these artefacts using various magazine and newspaper clippings and photographs of himself and his community, Danilo wants to establish different values, strengths and weaknesses and focus on creating a better future for themselves (Table 5).

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Table 5 Danilo public art photographs stacked

Image



Music I fly with the stars in the skies. I am no longer trying to survive. I believe that life is a prize (Moment 4 Life – Nicki Minaj + Drake)

I added these public art photographs because we learned a lot about public art and how important the messages contained within them are. So, you can't see it, but it says, 'beware of your impact'. And the other one says 'All Ways Junction'. I thought they expressed how I felt about me getting in trouble and how I had moved on better than I could. And I added some music at the last minute, wanting some more positive tone.

This shift within the story aligns with the shift within the workshops and signals the final aspects of the restorative justice conferencing process to making amends. By now, the programme aims for participants to develop a new understanding of their delinquency and better see what needs to be done to repair harm and their familial and community bonds. The final feature of Danilo's digital story is his public art project design.

Participants began working on their public art project in workshop five after hearing a final lecture about how public art often sheds light on issues concerning a group of people or places. Participants receive a sketch pad and sketch out social issues that are important to them and what messages are missing from the issue that a public art project can highlight. Sketches range from stick figures to word clouds highlighting ways to reform larger institutions like the criminal justice system and healthy food options in their neighbourhood to more personal adversities like teen pregnancy or deaths in the family.

Danilo's public art idea focuses on his neighbourhood and its feeling of isolation between all community members. While completing a walking exercise during workshop session five, Danilo noticed many vacant billboards in Brooklyn. He decided to create a public art project to address this called 'Community Art Boards' (Table 6).

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Table 6 Danilo public art project design 'Community Art Board' stacked

Image



Narration The project would give all the vacant billboards back to the community instead of the corporate sponsors. So, the community can use canvases for their art. To depict real community members and maybe the values of the community. Some of the billboards could also be used for musical performances as well. The project aims to bring the community together when painting the billboard. This project also aims to celebrate local talent in a responsible way.

Interview My public art project and all my work was really trying to focus a lot on the values I learned in the program, especially community. How important your physical and spiritual community is and how it brings everyone together. We grew a sense of belonging throughout the process, but I don't know if others felt that way.

Danilo felt that showcasing the talents of local community members could break down barriers and create more connections, thus improving community strength and resiliency. Danilo believed that by creating these stronger bonds his community may experience less violence because '... you're not gonna attack your brother or sister'. For Danilo and others, these public art designs supported the creation of a pathway to a critical awareness of the causes of a variety of quality-of-life problems in their neighbourhoods related to the silence of community voices and achievements. The explanation of the public art project concludes Danilo's digital story.

Through Danilo's example, the audience sees how the creation of various multimodal artefacts aided participants in thoughtfully curating stories that demonstrated how participants critically analysed their actions and explained to external audiences how they have clarified their values and grown as individuals. Thus, the production of the digital story allowed participants to give voice to their understandings, discoveries and misconceptions about their crimes and their rehabilitative process through the programme.

At present, there is a dearth of research concerning participants' perspectives of the restorative conferencing process. The investigation of the production process of participants in a restorative conferencing media arts programme sought to highlight any affordances of using DST to address this gap. Further, this study highlights how DST practice lends itself to the need for restorative conferencing interventions to focus on participants' accounts of the process by documenting participants' journeys through the programme and examining the artefacts created. The following section will discuss how the multimodal artefacts created primarily from the digital videos and photographs serve as a mechanism through which participants explore the systems of oppression they live within, clarify or develop their values, and increase their ability to recognise and utilise the resources they require to overcome obstacles.

6 Discussion

This qualitative art-informed case study explored a restorative justice media arts programme's use of DST with justice-involved youth. The author investigated the contextual factors and conditions under which the participant's digital stories were developed and found that the programme scaffolds the restorative justice conferencing process through DST practices. Scholars perceive DST as a venue for participants to learn to describe emotionally challenging events; develop intertextual understandings of race, gender, ethnicity and power; re-author their social worlds and social identities; and send poignant messages for change (Nixon, 2008). Data analysis revealed that the programme relies explicitly on the affordances of DST to engage in meaningful identity play through creating multimodal artefacts and the curation of those artefacts into a digital story as a concrete and reflective platform to engage participants in the restorative justice conferencing process.

6.1 Affordances of DST practices

According to Bazemore and Stinchcomb (2004), within restorative justice interventions, the identity of the lawbreaker as an individual and a valued community member needs to be separated from the disapproval of their actions. Studies of the role of the arts in learning have described how arts participation supports positive developmental trajectories by building physical artefacts that gradually lead to the construction of conceptual representations (Halverson, 2013). Interviews revealed that by producing multimodal representations using video diaries and documentary photography, participants established personal values, strengths and weaknesses. Specifically, video diaries and photography activities engaged participants in meaningful identity work by stimulating their capacity to associate inner thoughts with images, leading the participants from a judgmental stance to a self-expressive outlook (Claes et al., 2017). Ultimately, these artefacts served as the foundation for new projections of the self, aligning with the restorative justice goals, wherein participants must develop the capacity

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to clarify and explain their values and goals and link both their values and goals with their actions (Braithwaite, 2006; Bruner, 1994; Ochs & Capps, 2001).

Research on offender rehabilitation posits that the ability to reframe one's problems by shifting the gaze from their criminal identity to political, economic and structural inequalities empowers individuals to pursue better futures for themselves and their communities (Stone, 2016). Through the design of their public art project, participants were able to actively construct meaning based on their experiences in the criminal justice system and interactions in the world. This process also empowered participants to counter dominant narratives about themselves and their communities, furthering their ability to step into a leadership role and contribute meaningfully to their community. These public art designs created awareness, gathering citizens around a shared project to bond and activate solidarity and a new sense of social responsibility (Claes et al., 2017).

Finally, the use of observations and the think-aloud interview revealed evidence of the participants' ability to author with multiple forms of digital media. Most participants felt that using digital media affected their stories' ability to deliver a clearer message and aided their ability to describe their experiences more accurately. Participants used the affordances of the interaction between the visual, musical and verbal narratives to create a multimodal dialogue to construct meaning based on their experiences in the restorative justice conferencing process and interactions in the world (Hull & Katz, 2006). This dialogue demonstrates the construction of knowledge as participants connected restorative justice values to older existing personal values to facilitate new understandings (Kafai, 2006). Further, the DST platform allowed participants to express themselves using their individual linguistic skills and abilities, in contrast to the verbal-heavy dialogue usually practised in restorative justice conferencing, which privileges middle-class verbal communication styles (Willis, 2020).

In all, the creation of a digital story developed a redemptive narrative through a staged and structured process that taught participants to gradually shift from talking about something to talking from within (Claes et al., 2017). Participants were able to repurpose their arrest and involvement in the criminal justice system in such a way as to see the good emerge, and this was evidence that they were fated for greater things. This type of cognitive transformation realises that an adverse experience can result in new opportunities and reinterpreting that experience from one that is primarily traumatic to one that promotes emotional resolution (Maruna, 2001).

Broadly, the participants' creation of a digital story about their restorative justice conferencing process can be seen as a transformative pedagogy, offering participants, their families, communities and the criminal justice actors insights into the issues, struggles, identities and worlds of the youth themselves (Eglinton, Gubrium & Wexler, 2017). DST offers potential learning environments for the making, reworking and reimagining of the self. For justice-involved youth, the process promoted using their narrative voice to create a discourse about their crimes, their impact and ways to improve their communities, which proved to be transformative in that new insights were gained about themselves. The criminal justice system should continue developing and implementing arts-inspired

programmes. These environments provide opportunities to understand and explore the construction and detypification of criminal identities and to enable participants to develop social and personal responsibility and become productive members of society.

6.2 Limitations

The primary limitation is that the study was designed within the bounds of an existing organisation's programme; therefore, there were limitations concerning the data collected and the work being situated within the specific context. Further, given the small sample size and the fact that participants are individual cases in a particular learning context, these results cannot be generalised to a broader population or extended beyond the specific context. Nevertheless, the focus of this arts-inspired case study was on the quality of information (interviews, observations and artefacts) gathered and triangulated rather than the number of cases in the sample. Although the dependability and trustworthiness of the data are more important than generalisability in case studies, the opportunity to generalise results to other learning contexts is the ultimate goal of research.

6.3 Future research

There is ample opportunity for future research on the use of DST and other arts-inspired activities as a pedagogy within restorative justice interventions. At a minimum, research should examine how their programmes may affect participants' identity and behaviour change (e.g. self-worth, self-efficacy and civic identity) through pre-post intervention, as well as six-month and one-year follow-up surveys. This data can add to the depth of understanding of how arts-inspired environments may provide participants with stronger opportunities to develop these competencies.

7 Conclusions

In this study, the author sought to bring to the fore the voices of justice-involved youth who are far too often neglected or ignored in empirical research. The author aimed to shine a light on the voices of participants involved in innovative, arts-inspired restorative justice programming. Further, the author sought to provide a window into the reflective stances that youth can share about their lives, delinquencies and punishments. This research suggests that DST as an arts-inspired tool to support justice-involved youth in the restorative justice conferencing process can be important in facilitating youth voice, youth reflection and youth restoration. This notion is especially true for youth who contend with minoritised identities because of their race, ethnicity or class. Implications from this study will add to the restorative justice conferencing literature, which has not focused on participants' perspectives of the programming. With greater information and understanding of participants' perspectives, restorative justice initiatives can be customised and improved to promote increased and more consistent behavioural

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and cognitive changes for youth. Such programmatic efforts should continue to be developed, enhanced and encouraged across multiple restorative contexts.

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Our stories are bigger than our cases: digital storytelling in a restorative conferencing programme

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Appendix A

8-week curriculum outline

Session	Goals	Activities	Homework
Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Introduction to the programme – Participants are having fun and are connected and making friends. They want to come back next week. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Presentation on importance of Public Art – Choice: Icebreaker and Video Exercise – Word: Recreating Our Future – Portrait Exercise 	Find an example of art that tells a story and is 'public'
Week 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – As a group, reaffirm and reset the container – Identify personal choices in connection to our case/s, and their impact – Begin exploring self-belief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Choice/Impact worksheet – Guest Teaching Artist Presentation 	Selfie Assignment
Week 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Expand work on choice and impact – Look at personal responsibility, as a source of personal power – Explore self-belief and self-awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Guest Teaching Artist Presentation – Restorative Justice Video Interview Exercise 	Sketchbook Symbol Assignment
Week 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Practice aspirational self-concepts – Examine personal responsibility – Gain empowering skills in order to create the strongest possible outcome of this court-involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Know Your Rights presentation – Guest Teaching Artist Collage Exercise 	Photo/Video Assignment

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(Continued)

Session	Goals	Activities	Homework
Week 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Practise aspirational self-concepts – Examine personal responsibility – Begin to look at social issues and how they connect to our stories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Collage Exercise (cont.) 	
Week 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Step into a leadership role – Develop a public art exhibition – Celebrate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Public Art Lecture – Public Art Project Proposals 	Prep for grand finale

Appendix B

Dedoose interface

Coded video segment



Our stories are bigger than our cases: digital storytelling in a restorative conferencing programme

Coded eCollage exercise

