

Student reflections on the pedagogy of transitions into higher education, through digital storytelling

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Student reflections on the pedagogy of transitions into higher education, through digital storytelling. (6994 words)

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Abstract

Foundation year provision provides access to Higher Education by developing the skills and subject-specific knowledge required to undertake an undergraduate degree course. This article explores the experiences of students during transition onto an Integrated Foundation Year in Art and Design Year (IFYAD) at one UK Higher Education Institution. The qualitative data used was gleaned from an analysis of student digital stories and has been used to inform course and module enhancements. Three research questions are outlined: Is digital storytelling an effective medium for student reflection? In what ways is the experience of IFYAD students unique? and What does an effective pedagogy for IFYAD need to consider? The research found that IFYAD students had a range of complex and diverse experiences pre-HE and during transition. It also found that digital storytelling provided an effective medium for students to convey these experiences, many of which were previously unknown to the course team. The discussion centres around a *creative transition pedagogy* which adapts the notion of 'transitions as becoming' (Gale & Parker, 2014) to provide effective support for these students. The inherent value of this provision and the subject area for student identity, personal development and wellbeing leads the authors to champion the importance of the Foundation Year and encourage continued investment in this challenging higher education climate.

Keywords: Digital storytelling, higher education, foundation year, art and design, transition, pedagogy

Introduction

In the English Higher Education (HE) sector, foundation year (FY) courses are specifically designed to bridge the gap between degree study and prior learning by developing the skills and subject-specific knowledge required to undertake an undergraduate degree course.

Typically, students that undertake a FY may not have the necessary qualifications or subject knowledge to access undergraduate study. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have traditionally used them to support the access and participation of underrepresented groups. However, the purpose and delivery model of the FY can differ significantly between HEIs and even within the same institution (Leech, Marshall *et al.*, 2016).

The egalitarian motivations underpinning FY courses has been brought into question in recent years as HEIs respond to policy initiatives that radically changed HE funding structures and increased competition between institutions. As recruitment became increasingly competitive FYs have provided an additional revenue stream by the opening up access to students normally excluded from HE. In the six years since the restructuring of HE funding, FY students have almost tripled to just over 30,000 in England (Finlayson, 2019). 70% of these students progress onto undergraduate study within a year of completion, and of those that do progress 27% exit higher education with no qualification within four years (Finlayson, 2019). The 2019 Review of Post-18 Education and Funding, commonly referred to as the Augur Review, concluded that HEIs were using FY to create four-year degrees to 'entice students that would otherwise not meet their standard entry criteria' and result in 'poor value for money for both government and some students' (Augur, 2019, p. 101). The Augur Review recommended that student finance should no longer be made available for FY courses.

This research focuses on students undertaking an Integrated Foundation Year in Art and Design Year (IFYAD) which offers a route onto eight different courses at a large post-92 university. The course traditionally provided an avenue into HE for mature learners and those with no academic background in art and design. However, as the cohort size increased to an annual intake of over 60, the average age on entry has fallen to 18 with most students having previously completed A-levels or BTECs in art and design subjects. While many students are recruited through clearing as a result of low levels of previous attainment, others are direct entrants that choose this route due to limited opportunities to explore the discipline in secondary and further education.

The research presented in this paper aimed to explore how an innovative methodology - digital storytelling - could be utilised for researching student experiences within a sample of IFYAD students. It also aimed to produce findings which would enhance the pedagogy of the provision. To realise these aims, the research had three overarching research questions;

- Is digital storytelling an effective medium for student reflection?
- In what ways is the experience of IFYAD students unique?
- What does an effective pedagogy for IFYAD need to consider?

These findings are then discussed within the context of transition and the need for a bespoke pedagogy for IFYAD which we term *creative transition pedagogy*. This approach emerges out of a clear need to consider an effective approach to transition and pedagogy, specific to this subject area, so that incoming students on the IFYAD are supported to succeed and the value of FY can be maximised within this challenging HE climate.

Digital Storytelling

In its traditional form and core function, digital storytelling refers to the process of developing personal narratives based on certain life experiences. These stories, controlled by the storyteller, incorporate a combination of text, audio recordings, images, music and animations to create short videos with duration of typically two to five minutes. Software packages currently used to create digital stories include Adobe Spark, Powtoons and Powerpoint.

Austen, Jones *et al.* (2019) recently concluded that digital storytelling provides a viable method of research 'to gather the feedback and voices of students' in HE, but there are challenges 'concerning the complexity of both the method and the analysis' (p. 27). Alonso, Plaza *et al.* (2013) suggest that digital storytelling is a 'new genre' in research, but its roots can be traced back to 1993 when Dana Atchley and Joe Lambert founded the Berkeley's Centre for Digital Storytelling at the University of California (McLellan, 2007). Since then, the growth of digital media in the 1990s and more recently the preoccupation with personal and social digital record keeping has increased the use of digital storytelling (Hopkins & Ryan, 2014).

In HE, digital storytelling has been used as a distinct pedagogic tool to build learning communities in both face to face and online learning environments (Jenkins & Gravestock, 2014; Lowenthal & Dunlap, 2010). Others have applied the method to develop student confidence and engagement through student-produced learning resources (Coventry, 2008; Grant & Bolin, 2016). Digital storytelling has also been used to aid reflection both in learning and socially through peer critique (Jenkins & Lonsdale, 2007; Sandars & Murray, 2009). The process of storytelling and digital production can allow students to connect to the affective

component of their learning and explore alternative means of representation, such as visual metaphor and this reflection is most beneficial when it is active and shared with others (Jenkins & Gravestock, 2014). Digital storytelling has been found to be effective as an inclusive assessment (Jenkins & Gravestock, 2012, p. 131), operating as an alternative to a written task and providing 'students with the opportunity to discuss personal issues in a way which they may not do so readily in a traditional essay or report' (Jenkins & Gravestock, 2012, p. 131).

One important aim of digital storytelling use within and beyond HE is to amplify hidden or marginalised voices. This method has been used internationally within learning spaces where the identity and agency of students and staff members requires liberation (Darvin & Norton, 2014; Matias & Grosland, 2016; Stewart & Ivala, 2017). Hopkins and Ryan (2014, p. 38) reflect on the highly emotive content of digital stories created during their outreach work with 17-18 year old prospective undergraduate students from low socioeconomic backgrounds who shared experiences of 'bullying, illness, family breakdown or disruption and dislocation'. They propose that digital storytelling highlights the 'inevitable overlap between the personal and the political, the rational and the emotional and the public and the private for both learners and teachers' (Hopkins & Ryan, 2014, p. 38).

Methodology

The digital stories analysed in this research were produced by IFYAD students as part of Personal and Professional Development (PPD) during their first semester and contributed towards a 60-credit module. Previously, students on this module completed a 22-page written booklet to evidence their PPD. Engagement was varied, raising questions about mandatory completion rather than completion due to intrinsic value. Based on the evidence of use in HE, it was believed that the adoption of digital stories would allow students a more

creative and engaging approach to reflect on their PPD. The students were given a brief which framed the story as 'the journey so far', they were asked to tell 'their' story and reflect on how they had met the learning objectives for the module. The tutor made a digital story of their own to share with the students as an exemplar. This enabled the tutor to describe the process and the product, although this may have influenced the students' creations.

Subsequently, 65 students completed a digital story for their PPD which reflected on the first three months of their university experience. These stories formed part of a body of work (included sketchbooks, models and a portfolio of chosen pieces) submitted at the end of the semester. As learning objectives overlapped for each element of this work, it was assessed holistically, allowing for the process to be just as important as the outcome.

The use of digital stories as research artefacts should be acknowledged as existing in a contested space. Visual analysts Van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2001), describe such spaces as manifestations of factual records of reality as well as constructed narrative. This positioning determines whether digital stories are analysed as reliable sources, or evidence of how their makers have constructed reality. The methodological approach outlined in this paper situates student digital stories within a constructivist ontology in which each individual constructs their version of reality. As such, the method of analysis draws on the constructivist approach to Grounded Theory in which the researchers are positioned as reconstructing the experiences and meaning of the participants.

Ethical considerations

Austen, Jones *et al.* (2019) suggest researchers need to implement 'stringent ethical practices' to account for the 'impact of storytelling on the research participants' (p. 27) As

such, ethical approval was sought through the researchers' institutional ethics committee. Retrospective consent was sought from participants which enabled students to 'opt in' rather than 'opt out' of the research. Once gained, the Module Leader downloaded the files from the Virtual Learning Environment where they had been submitted, and saved them in a restricted access folder, using initials as unique identifiers. The benefit of retrospective permission is the possible eradication of observer effect (Hawthorne Effect). However, the limitation of this approach is that the sample size for analysis is small as students legitimately chose not to opt in to the request for further viewings of their personal stories. In any further work, the deliberation of when and how assessment driven digital stories become research data is a key consideration at the outset.

During the consent process, the student storytellers were reassured of the boundaries of confidentiality. Given the personal nature of a digital story, anonymity could not be assured, however students were asked for their consent to include their story in an anonymised analysis of the sample for inclusion in research publications and for course enhancement. On this basis, the researchers gained access to 16 digital stories.

Data Analysis

During three collaborative analysis sessions, the digital stories were viewed by two institutional researchers who were commissioned as independent analysts. Notes were taken and compared for each story. In the first instance, three digital stories were analysed using Constructivist Grounded Theory to pilot the approach (Mills, Bonner *et al.*, 2006). This approach does not assume that a 'truth' will emerge from the data; rather a theory will develop which is a reconceptualisation of a reality as interpreted by the researchers. This initial inductive investigation reaffirmed the diverse, detailed and complex nature of these

multimodal artefacts. It was apparent that the different modes (verbal, visual and auditory) exhibited in the stories added significant complexity to the interpretation for the researchers. Alonso, Plaza *et al.* (2013, p. 370) advise that the different modes affect 'the processing of the narrative', therefore it is essential for the analysis to examine their interaction and the 'effects they produce on the receivers'.

The remaining 13 stories were viewed in the next iteration of the analysis, which avoided unrestricted coding, and coded the full sample via constant comparison of the data within three categories, each relating to the three research questions. Within these three categories, themes were identified. The researchers attempted to comment on the experiences and meanings expressed via verbal and visual modes and considered the impact of the story on the viewer/researcher. Like the analysis of Hull and Nelson (2005), this analysis chose to focus on the verbal (student narration, if apparent) and visual (use of images and text), with only limited attention to the auditory (background music).

The stories were collectively viewed, discussed, and often viewed again to allow for notes to be taken for each category. To strengthen the trustworthiness and credibility of the analysis (Guba, 1981), the interim findings were discussed with the Module Leader who validated or contested the interpretations based on their detailed knowledge of the cohort. A reflective commentary from the Module Leader is also presented as evidence, this provides a 'progressive subjectivity' as well as scrutiny of the theoretical sensitivity that is required for Constructivist Grounded Theory (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Mills, Bonner *et al.*, 2006). This voice is integral to making sense of the data, contributing to impact and enhancement, and for assisting those who may want to replicate this approach in the future.

Findings

Of the 16 digital stories, 10 were produced using Adobe Spark (the software modelled by the Module Leader), 3 used Powtoons, 1 used Powerpoint and 2 used media software that was unidentifiable. The digital stories varied in length, from 1.45 minutes to 5 minutes, with 3.08 minutes being the mean length in this sample. The sample, which was restricted by access and permissions, did not contain any mature students and was mostly female. This sample reflected the wider cohort population of the IFYAD.

Is digital storytelling an effective medium for student reflection?

Students were given a brief which encouraged them to reflect on 'the journey so far' by discussing how they had met the learning objectives for the module. Some stories followed the assessment brief prescriptively and as such, assumptions about the inherent creativity of art and design students proved largely unfounded. Some stories included all component parts of the assessment brief but used the medium to develop their individual style and creativity to express their personality.

The student stories included an extensive breath of reflection and covered a wide range of topics. Four broad themes were identified from these topics; '*development of self*', '*identity*', '*approaches to learning and learning gain*', and '*pedagogy and curriculum*'. The development of self included students' ability to make decisions about their personal life or academic work, it also covered the challenges they faced and the successes they experienced. A key element in this theme was the incorporation of the IFYAD into their personal narrative and how it would help them achieve their future plans. One student narrates that during her time on the course "I've understood how to be myself".

Closely connected to development of self was the framing and reframing of changes in their identity, pre-HE, during transition, and within the cohort. Some students appeared to self-identify as mature through disclosure of their previous life experiences (rather than age), whilst other students identified as having a disability. These students reflected in great detail how these aspects of themselves impacted on their journey so far. Others used the discipline to ground their identity as an "Artist" or "Designer".

"My dream goal is to become an interior designer. I can't wait to do what I love as a job and see the outcomes, the smiles on other people's faces."

Students also reflected on their own approaches to learning, with a particular focus on what they learnt and how they learnt it. They also discussed their learning gains in academic knowledge, practical art and design skills and personal growth. While students in the stories manifested negative feelings, they also referred to working through it, "finding their path", developing a "personal process" and being motivated because they could "follow their own interests".

Lastly, the students reflected on the lectures, practical sessions and assessment and feedback, which related to the pedagogy and curriculum design present in the course (presented under research question 3). While the latter two themes were not unexpected as they were included in the task brief, the former two were, and demonstrate the level of autonomy this medium gives students to create and shape their own narratives.

Further evidence of how students took ownership of this medium was through their application of verbal, visual and auditory techniques to aid their reflection and storytelling. Students used a variety of stock images, personal images of themselves or their artwork, text, narration, music or inserted video. In places it was difficult to distinguish between personal artwork and stock images. Some students, who verbally expressed a lack of confidence in their drawing ability, chose not to include photographs of their own artwork. Two stories did not include audio narration and whilst a lack of audio narration can be a technique used to preserve the anonymity of the storyteller (Austen, Jones *et al.*, 2019), in an assessment context this was an unlikely intention. Unrealised audio narration was more likely related to the agency of the storyteller or access to/knowledge of the necessary technology.

In what ways is the experience of IFYAD students unique?

The digital stories provided a unique window into this underexplored HE student experience and provided many insights into distinctive journeys and transitions. The variety of routes into HE is well known, however the impact of these differences on student experiences may be hidden. The analysis of digital stories clearly showed that the IFYAD cohort is extremely diverse, and students arrived with a huge variety of experiences, expectations and motivations.

"I never really had any friends so art and design was there for me and gave me a sense of being".

There were distinct differences between those that had elected to do this pathway and those that perceived their choices had been limited. The most pronounced difference appeared to

be the association between the confidence and creativity of those students who chose the course, and those that faced rejection from other courses.

Some of the IFYAD students sampled in this project experienced a wide range of negative emotions that were predominately associated with this pathway. This was either a consequence of being rejected from their initial choice of course (e.g. for "having an under developed portfolio"), or failing to meet the criteria for undergraduate study. There was evidence of students' neutralising the impact of this rejection by explaining that the original course would have been too challenging, and that they chose to expand ideas and gain independence instead. There were also students who explained that they acted on "recommendations" away from specific courses or careers (e.g. "fashion" and "graphic design"), or to spend more time working on their portfolio. Some students resented this decision, viewing the Foundation Year as somewhere they "ended up" or saw this course as a step backwards. Conversely, those who chose the course explained that it allowed them to test the subject area without a fixed career path or clear employment goal. The flexibility of the IFYAD was a consistent theme for these students as it was perceived to be a less restrictive pathway that offered a year to "get used to it" (university).

Many students expressed a degree of uncertainty, making claims of indecisiveness or providing examples of times during transition when they were undecided. One student narrates transition to the IFYAD by reflecting on a lack of career path with no fixed ideas for the future. They outline a desire to keep busy during this period of indecisiveness and expresses that "I keep getting in my own head". There was more evidence of self-criticism in the sample; one student outlined his strengths simply as a desire to address disclosed weaknesses. The cohort tended to choose words such as "enjoying" rather than "I am good at". These reflections often highlighted doubt in individual abilities/skills and a lack of

confidence. One student described themselves as shy and previously “didn’t like my own work”. When discussing their areas for improvement they stated, “I will get it done eventually”. A mature student who struggled with illness and low self-confidence before beginning the course, embarked on the FY with a desire to “better myself”.

The affective language used by some students is also indicative of high critical appraisal and low self-confidence. “Nervous” and “lost” were repeated terms, along with “tired”, “confused”, “worried”, “stressed”, “scared” and “intimidated”. In one story, sadness was observed in the audio narration and qualified by an acknowledgement that “uni is not for me”. In contrast, some students described themselves as “intrigued”, inspired”, “happy”, “creative” and “free”.

The subject area was very important to this cohort, with their personal journey either influencing their art, or that art was helping them to deal with challenges. This also appeared to impact motivation towards engaging in the course content and learning and this should be considered alongside access to HE. Holistically, this course is providing benefits for these students that extend beyond pragmatic attainment and progression outcomes. For example, one story had a profound emotional effect on the researchers as the student described a “turbulent home life” and struggles with mental health. For this student, art was being used as a therapeutic mechanism and to aid “recovery”. In addition, many students discussed the current importance of art and design in their lives (and as an influence in early childhood), including “art makes me happy”, “art was there for me and gave me a sense of being”, and “I want to spend my life doing creative art”.

The importance of family and friends during transition was a common theme and impacted positively on student experiences. Friendship was discussed as both an outcome of the course and holding importance as a process of support. Family figures also featured as motivators during difficult transitions. There was a strong sense that place and space was important for this cohort both during the course and before higher education. The facilities and the campus location featured as important drivers for choice and retention. This contrasts with evidence of negative imagery of unrewarding employment and unsupportive communities in pre-HE environments, and struggles with commuting, the strains of employment and the intimidation of the “huge” physical space whilst undertaking the course.

What does an effective pedagogy for the IFYAD need to consider?

The consensus of expression throughout the digital stories was that the course had been of benefit for both personal and creative development. The benefits included overcoming a fear of failure, providing defining/critical moments in understanding creativity (“I grew as a creator”), challenging abilities, and developing confidence (“I’m less insular now”). One student positively described “how the course has treated me”. This student spoke quietly, almost childlike, and their voice trailed off at the end of each sentence. They describe drawing as “comforting” although it had taken time for them to settle into the routine and activities of the IFYAD. As previously noted, the importance of art and design to the wellbeing of these students came through strongly.

In addition to a sense of being and/or wellbeing, these digital stories provided evidence of the complexity of the learning needs of the cohort (previous experiences, transition, confidence, stage of learning). In most cases the student storytellers described the pedagogy of the IFYAD positively, noting that it balanced artistic freedom alongside

structure, support and guidance. One student described being stretched “out of my comfort zone” whilst developing confidence to affirm that their outputs “didn’t need to be perfect”.

The notion of self-development, critiquing the need for perfection and exploring new ideas through doing, was seen as important for this cohort who often referred to feeling lost and confused at the start of their study. There was a constant comparison to previous learning and the pedagogy of school and college. The approach of the IFYAD was seen as more appropriate. “It’s a lot different to college, in a good way” states one student who valued the need to be independent, although acknowledging that this was different to initial expectations. Sometimes the language and concepts used in the teaching and learning unsettled the learners, but overall the evidence in the student reflections suggested that the provision provided the necessary support to combat this.

Module Leaders Reflexive Commentary

The digital storytelling approach seemed to capture students' imagination by providing the opportunity for more autonomy and ownership, there was certainly more engagement with the digital stories than the written PPD. Using digital stories somehow facilitated greater depth of reflection and criticality. The personal nature of the digital stories gave me the opportunity to find out more about the students, even though I had been teaching them for a semester. With over 60 students, it can be very hard to get to know each student personally, especially the more reserved in the group. As a tutor, I was able to refer to the digital stories when providing summative feedback, it enabled me to see a more authentic journey and distance travelled, personally and academically. Part of the first semester for these students is about beginning to see themselves as an artist or designer, it’s about a transition into a way of being, as referred to earlier in this paper. This transition can be unsettling and

confusing for some students, it is often a very different approach to any previous educational experience. What the digital stories have illuminated for me as a tutor is that the students who navigate the confusion emerge more confident, self-assured and do identify as an artist or designer, in their minds, they have 'become'. The digital stories which included this kind of narrative show how successful the Foundation Year can be in helping individuals access higher education who would not have had the opportunity to otherwise. They also highlight that not all students have this experience and that there is work to do in curriculum design and choice of pedagogical approach to help all students feel as though they are transitioning into an artist or designer.

More formal forms of student feedback such as module reviews tend to atomise feedback and provide a disjointed view of the student experience. The digital stories better reflect the ups and downs and working through times of confusion in a more authentic manner. The digital stories revealed that students who understood and developed ways of managing their work felt more confident and fully prepared for progression onto the degree.

The findings from this research are important in understanding the diversity of student backgrounds and the sometimes fragile foundations we as tutors are building upon, our cohort is changing and we need to respond to this. I found it fascinating that the researchers have gained the insights they have from the digital stories, not knowing the students or the course. The insights described have had a profound effect on me professionally in making pedagogical approaches within art and design more visible. Further, I see the value of a pedagogy based on transition or becoming through individual narratives and how some students now see themselves. As a result of this research I've attempted to address the challenge of providing structure so that students feel safe but also enough freedom for them to follow their own lines of enquiry without an overwhelming sense of confusion. For

example, the second module (60 credits over the entire second semester) has been divided into four distinct sections to help students manage and plan their own time. I have utilised a visual tool based on the Design Process diagram used by the Design Council, more widely known as the 'Double Diamond' (Ball, 2019). This is intended to help the students visualise the second semester as a process and understand that ambiguity, not knowing, and finding their way, is an essential part of becoming an artist or designer. The tool is used to help students visualise this process and take ownership of it.

Discussion

Like Jenkins and Gravestock (2012), the module leader observed that all students showed a deeper level of reflection in the digital stories which was more personal and had greater criticality compared to the traditional written PPD. Considering this alongside the analysis of the reflections suggests that digital storytelling can be used as an effective medium for student reflection. However, the complexity of the cohort and the current and previous life experiences of the students suggests that a specific pedagogy of delivery and support during transition needs careful consideration.

Economic and social changes since the 1980's have resulted in extended and complex life transitions especially for young people (Furlong & Cartmel, 2009; Mendick, Allen *et al.*, 2018). The IFYAD, which now predominately recruits young people, extends transition into HE and represent a year in which students experience uncertainty, adjustment and re-evaluation of their own narratives. *Transition as becoming* (Gale & Parker, 2014) proposes that our lives are in fluctuation, driven by a perpetual series of fragmented moments that we transition in and out of. It also suggests that lived reality is subjective and individuals construct multiple narratives and subjectivities at any one time. The digital stories evidenced the formation and reformation of multiple identities through the transition experience. Even

during pre-transition some students appeared in a state of flux, side tracked from their chosen trajectory, and transitioning into HE while readjusting their plans, resulting in manifestations of confusion and uncertainty. These experiences, align with *transition as becoming*, where events are not linear but 'rhizomatic, zigzag and spiral', and transition is framed as a positive and negative at the same time (Gale & Parker, 2014, p. 738).

The first semester of the IFYAD was reflected upon by some students as navigating times of confusion, and emerging with a deeper understanding and sense that the answers are brought about from within, reflecting research by Taylor and Harris-Evans (2018). The evidence showed a transformation of negativity into motivation and self realisation. Given the context of the IFYAD and the constructivist ontology adopted and evidence from the analysis, the theoretical approach of *transition as becoming* seemingly captures the fluidity of learning and lived experiences in this context.

Transition as becoming requires the development of an IFYAD pedagogy that acknowledges the diversity of the students and stretches each one to an appropriate point. It also needs to support what can be a very uncertain and insecure period so that students can continue their journey as artist or designer. Art and design pedagogies support transition as becoming because of the unique collaborative exchange between student and tutor (Shreeve, Sims *et al.*, 2010) which is manifested in these approaches. These pedagogical approaches embody 'co-production and co-construction' and position students as the 'owners and producers of their work' (Orr, Yorke *et al.*, 2014, p. 41). This gives students the opportunity to learn and experience 'what it means to be part of the practice, not simply about how to do it, but what it means to be an artist or designer' (Shreeve, Sims *et al.*, 2010, p. 132). More research into art and design pedagogies, specifically in this year of transition, would help

deliver a course which caters for all students wishing to become an artist or designer and support widening access to HE.

This research proposes a *creative transition pedagogy* that transforms teaching and learning into a conversation or dialogical exchange which facilitates critique and criticality between students and tutor rather than the transfer of, or giving of knowledge from one to the other. The studio environment aids this pedagogy as it gives individuals the space to 'become' through the development of 'dual identities as students and professionals from the moment they embark on their studies' (Orr & Shreeve, 2018, p. 3). In this context, learning objectives are process based and loosely defined to allow students the autonomy to create their own journey. Assessments are designed to embrace the individuality and originality of the work - there is no definitive right or wrong answer.

There is often a disconnect between the 'intended curriculum' of official documents, the 'enacted curriculum' of day to day activity and the 'received curriculum' that the students experience, with the latter being much less understood (Knight 2001). The digital stories explicitly showed how students 'received' and 'experienced' the curriculum, making the *creative transition pedagogy* approach described above more visible (Cullen, Harris, & Hill, 2012). The narratives in the digital stories also provide an important and contextualised understanding of the diversity of student needs and backgrounds, and how this influences interaction with the curricula. An understanding of how IFYAD students 'receive curriculum' can facilitate better cohesion between the intended, enacted and received elements of that curriculum. This cohesion could potentially lead to an effective transitional experience for all students.

Methodologically, this approach to research has some challenges. Firstly, it is important to draw on notions of authenticity and question how the storytelling context could change the content provided by the students. As the stories discussed in this paper were produced as part of an assessment; did students feel they could 'risk' being honest and open when it might impact on marks? While the assessment brief did influence the narratives, students also demonstrated high levels of autonomy in their creations and as such provided a context for the tutor to provide a good level of feedback and develop the course, practice and pedagogy.

Blikstad-Balas (2017) also identifies three challenges when using video data: getting close enough to details without losing context; 'death by data' – namely magnifying events that may not be significant to participants; and representing data so that an audience can actually assess whether inferences drawn from the data are plausible. These are valid considerations which were appeased by the use of multiple researchers who were removed from the data collection and collaborative in analysis. However, whilst Constructivist Grounded Theory positions the researcher as co-producer of meaning, researchers who align more closely with visual methods and specifically semiotic analysis may go further and suggest that multiple methods and analysis are necessary to add contextual information to theory building (Mills, Bonner *et al.*, 2006). In this context this could be interviews with the students to explore their meaning and process which would go beyond researcher interpretations. Barthes (1968) work on visual semiotics differentiates between denotation: what or who is being depicted and connotation: what ideas and values are being expressed through what is represented and how it is represented? This could also provide an alternative analytical framework for future research with digital stories.

Conclusion

While this research was exploratory in nature it was aiming to appraise digital stories as a source of data, a methodological theory and a process of analysis. The analysis suggests that digital storytelling could be a more effective approach to reflection than written accounts and this should be explored further. It has also produced findings which will enable evidence informed practice in future iterations of the IFYAD. There are associated implications, not least in relation to the emotional impact on the storytellers and the viewers. The complexity of the IFYAD cohort and the importance of subject area were key findings from this research. The creative transition pedagogy proposed would respond to this diversity and support a student's transition through negative educational experiences of 'failure' and 'rejection' and build belonging and confidence.

This paper has shown that digital storytelling provides rich qualitative data for effective evaluation and monitoring and resulting pedagogical and curriculum enhancements. To move beyond this exploratory pilot, further work could consider using a framework for analysing reflection rather than applying a thematic approach to analysis (Jenkins & Lonsdale, 2007). This would provide an understanding of the depth of reflection, although distinct groups for written and digital story reflection would allow for useful comparisons. As assumptions about the inherent creativity of art and design students were largely unfounded, the utility of digital storytelling could also be tested across disciplines. Consequently, this evidence suggests that this technique could be effective in relationship building between students and Academic Advisors (where these exist) but that this may need to be carefully managed within modules and assessments. Finally, there may be scope to encourage the use of sequential digital stories for longitudinal reflections of learning gain throughout the duration of a course, providing for the first time, qualitative data on the overall impact of the IFYAD.

While the authors of this paper acknowledge the concerns of the Augur Review and the challenging UK political climate in which this research was conducted (Augar, 2019, p. 101), the authors are also confident that this work shows the role and value of FY provision in supporting access into higher education. This paper is very timely and will inform policy makers, universities and specifically academic decision makers about the future of FY provision. This research has also shown that the value of these courses may be hidden within normalised data collection methods. In response to policy agendas which seemingly undermine the role and function of Foundation Years, these findings suggest that dedicated, subject specific investment in the development of creative transition pedagogy for this HE provision has the potential to transform student experiences.

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