Enhancing Inclusive Practices in Initial Teacher Education through Digital Stories

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https://acorns-soton.org.uk/



Improve the lives and experiences of autistic children and young people

Transitions and trajectories in education & other services

Established with Public Engagement with Research funding in 2016

Key people



Prof Sarah Parsons – Professor of Autism and Inclusion, SEdS.



Prof Hanna Kovshoff - Associate Professor of Neurodiversity



Key stakeholders and Steering Group: professionals and students from a range of backgrounds

Key people



Kate Freeth – Principal Teaching Fellow, Southampton Education School



Lucy Hoyes – Principal Teaching Fellow, Southampton Education School



Chloe Eddy – PhD student – Southampton Education School

ACoRNS research addresses challenges for (education-focused) autism research

- Educational (and many other) outcomes and experiences of autistic children are often poor
- A very medical model of autism (focusing on 'fixing the deficits') and of evidence-based practice where knowledge based on experimental designs is prioritised
- Children's voices, and teacher expertise, often left out of research and practice
- Significant research-practice gap in the autism field persists
- An assumption that knowledge transfer or exchange is the answer
- Research questions derived from practice are often not prioritised

Core principles: collaborative research

Addressing marginalisation and underrepresentation (social justice and inclusion)

Participatory approaches and methods (collaborative and creative)

Voices and experiences of autistic children and young people are central

Research questions are relevant to practice and are often negotiated with practice-based partners

Making a difference

Language and terminology matter



The challenge: deficit-focused

"Matthew has very limited social skills. He has great difficulty communicating and he finds it difficult to understand the implicit rules of social interaction and appropriate social behaviour. Within a group he becomes isolated and introverted and appears to shut himself off from the activity and language about him … … … he is not yet able to play co-operatively or imaginatively with them (his peers) preferring to play on his own."

The challenge: absent voices

Child contribution
As provided in *My Views* (Appendix K2).

Oscar is not able to give his own views.



How? Through knowledge co-construction

The synthesis of ideas from research, theory and practice in a values-led way that forms conceptual and practical tools for impacting methods in research and practice

“Encompasses new knowledge creation (the what) through the shared endeavours of research and practice working together equally (the how)”

- Parsons et al., (2022; p.1065)

Research partnerships to build the evidence base

Collaborative research funding

FROEBEL TRUST

UKRI Economic and Social Research Council

UoS ESRC Impact Acceleration Account + Festival of Social Science

Co-authorship with education professionals

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nasen

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Using 'I am' Digital Stories to facilitate autistic young people to have a voice in their transition to adulthood

Stephanie Lewis-Dagnell[1,2] | Louisa Burden[2,3] | Kirsty Marsden[2,3] | Sarah Parsons[3,4] | Hanna Kovshoff[1,2]

Journal of Early Childhood Research
Volume 19, Issue 2, June 2021, Pages 161-178
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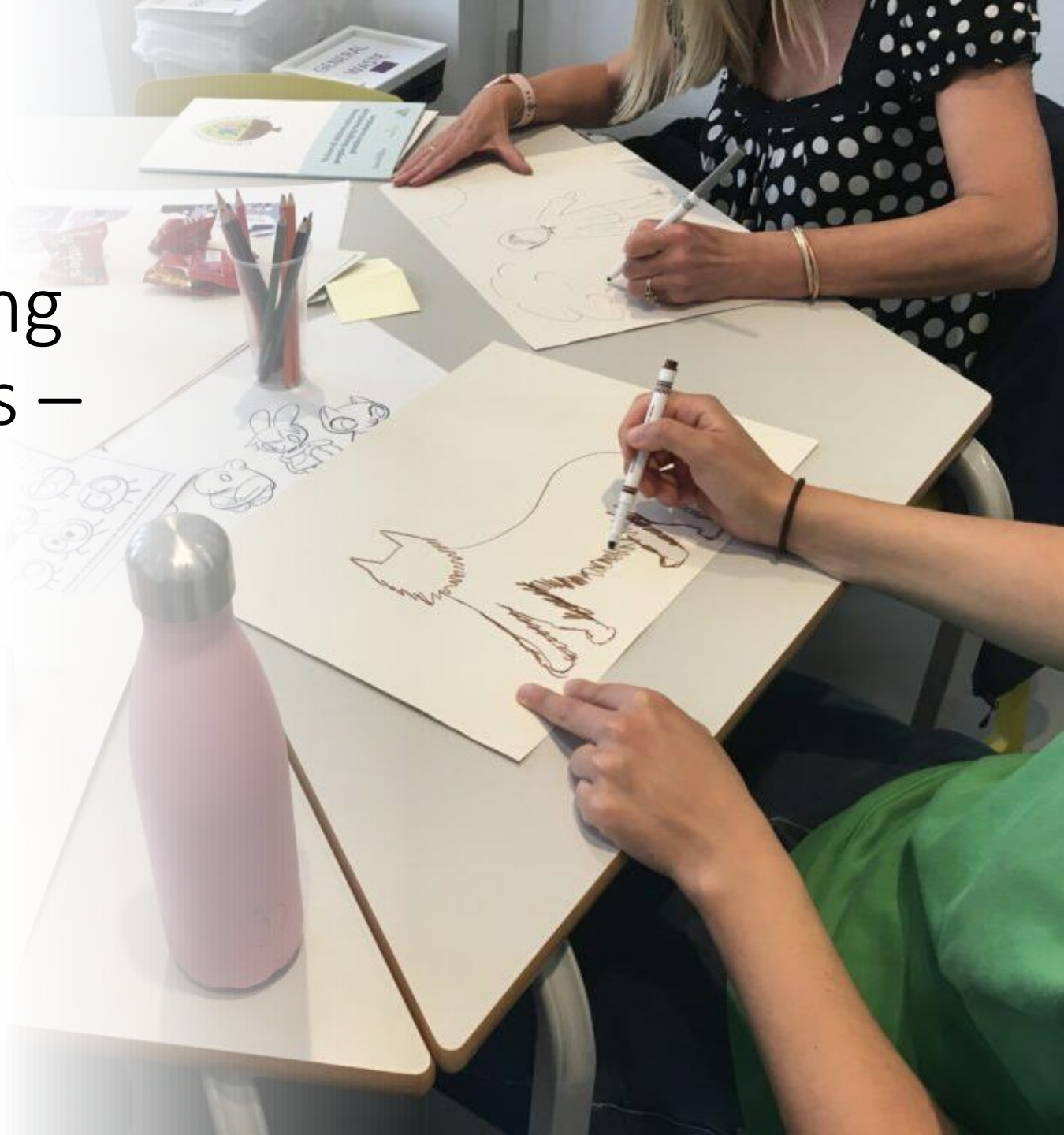
SAGE journals

Article

'Seeing is believing': Exploring the perspectives of young autistic children through Digital Stories

Sarah Parsons [1,2], Kathryn Ivil[3,4], Hanna Kovshoff[5,6], and Efstathia Karakosta[7,8]

Co-developing resources – such as Digital Stories



‘I am’ Digital Stories for supporting transitions

"‘I am…’ Digital Stories are short videos designed to provide a holistic, strengths-based representation of the child through enabling them to contribute their perspectives to transition planning”.

(Wood-Downie et al., 2021, p.62)

‘I am’ Digital Story strengths-based framework

Parsons et al., (2021)
https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1476718X20951235

Spaces
Where does the young person like to be or explore?

People and interactions
How does the young person like to spend their time and who do they interact with?

Independence and agency
What does the young person choose to do for themselves?

Objects and interests
What is the young person really interested in and like doing?

Communication and expression
In what ways does the young person express themselves

Support
What support is helpful to the young person?

Skills and capabilities
What is the young person good at?

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Birthday Present Rule



‘When you read a description of a learner, examine a report about him, or listen to his team discuss his profile, you should be able to generate an idea for a birthday gift for him. If you can come up with a great gift idea, you should be able to come up with good ideas for teaching materials, positive behavioral supports, and lesson formats too’.

(Kluth, 2010; p.195) https://www.amazon.co.uk/Youre-Going-Love-This-Kid/dp/159857079X

I am Oscar



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BkNbIPnfDCk

Parsons, Ivil, Kovshoff & Karakosta (2021)

I am Noah



I am Noah (youtube.com)

I am Lil



https://youtu.be/rAgxO_l6ju8

Ward, Parsons & Kovshoff (2023)

Why this matters

"this really shows who she is, that was my overarching feeling about it. It is the way forward. It is an innovative and creative way to show people differently, move away from a 1-dimensional written report, and showing a bit of a 360-degree view of somebody"

Social Worker

"It facilitates a really positive conversation between people who watch the story. I was able to see how Adi does certain things and activities. You can learn things about the person. What stuck with me is the positivity that stuck with me after I watched the story. I felt like I knew him a bit more and I liked him as a person. I think it's really important"

Speech and Language Therapist

So – we decided to develop…

Digital Stories for ITE!



Southampton used a traditional written introduction from Beginning Teachers to Mentors in schools…

We often had Mentors ‘complain’ about our neurodivergent beginning teachers

These communications tended to focus very significantly on the deficit model – on what the beginning teacher could *not* do rather than what they could do.

Mentors tended not to be able to hear the voice of the Beginning Teacher – and were not prepared to make allowances or reasonable adjustments/accommodations

As Digital Stories were already being used to overcome these exact issues in other contexts, we decided to pilot them in our Secondary PGCE programme for a year

What we did initially…

We worked with an incoming beginning teacher (Angus) who had declared his autism at interview – and who had asked us to aid his integration into the course.

We worked with Angus on developing a Digital Story instruction sheet that would explain the idea, give clear instructions for creation and enable the beginning teacher to share this with their Mentors before meeting them in person.

We decided to ask all beginning teachers to create, and share, a Digital Story – so being inclusive in practice.

Angus' written 'All About Me':

- *Include a short section (150-200 words) that introduces you and your reasons for learning to teach. You may wish to include something brief about relevant employment/experience you have had e.g. working as a TA, observations in school. It will be of use to your school Curriculum and Professional Mentors*
- I want to teach English as I was lucky enough to have some fabulous English Teachers myself who bought English alive for me and who encouraged my love of Drama and acting as well as my love of reading and writing. I want to show all students that they can be capable of achieving good work in English and I want to show them my passion for the subject. I also want to really get to know students so that I can help and encourage them to be themselves and to achieve all that they are capable of achieving – whether that's in English or in another subject that they themselves love.

Angus' written 'What would you like your Mentor to know' statements:

I manage my workload by… Trying to get everything done – even if I have to work late

When I get stressed, it looks like… I may be getting short with people or frustrated

What I get passionate about… Top Gear; Drama; Acting; Ben & Jerrys

The thing I am most worried about… Being able to be organised

Anything else you would like your mentor to know about you… I have a diagnosis of Autism and Dyslexia

Angus’ story:

Thoughts…

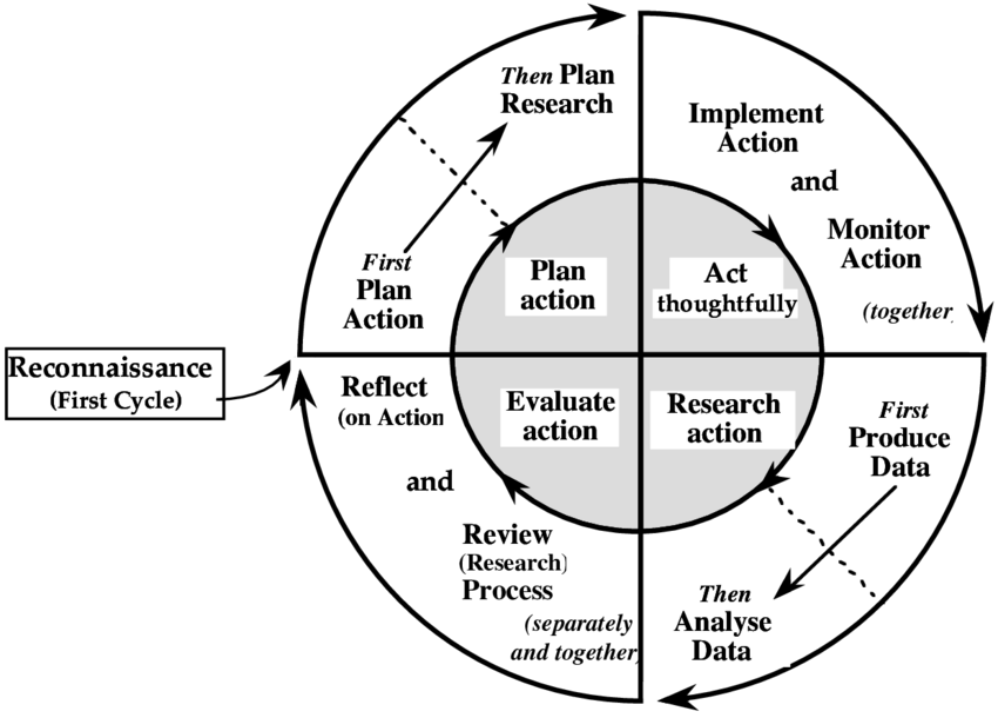
How well would his Mentors have got to know Angus via the written method (before he arrived in school)?

What did the digital story give Angus and his Mentors that a traditional written introduction could not?

Is anything lost from not having a written introduction?

What are your general thoughts and responses?

The Action Research Cycle



We adopted an Action Research methodology to guide the implementation and evaluation of the Digital Stories initiative.

Data collected from:

- 36 beginning teachers
- 39 school mentors (and 3 interviews)
- Focus group with ITE tutors

Feedback directly informed our evaluation process and delivery of Digital Stories for next academic year.

Beginning Teachers

Survey of 36 beginning teachers:

Most beginning teachers understood the purpose of Digital Stories and found the guidance helpful, but their experiences were mixed!

> ***"It could be useful for mentors but anxiety inducing for trainees"***
>
> ***"It helped with my confidence getting in front of the camera"***

Many described the process as a creative way to introduce themselves. Several felt it helped "break the ice" with mentors and tutors, offering a more personal first impression.

However, only 28% felt it improved their comfort when meeting mentors, and 42% did not feel it supported relationship-building.

> ***"Whilst initially it felt a bit awkward and 'cringey', I do see the benefit of it as my mentor on my focus placement watched it and gave feedback saying that it was a nice way to get an introduction."***
> *(Beginning Teacher)*

A significant concern was whether mentors actually viewed the Stories.

School Mentors

Survey of 39 school mentors and interviews with 3:

Most mentors felt confident engaging with Digital Stories: 95% understood what they were, and 84% understood why they were being asked to review them. Many described the Digital Stories as a valuable way to get to know beginning teachers before meeting in person, with 73% agreeing they helped them get to know the beginning teacher.

> ***"It was good to be able to see a face before meeting in person so when approaching trainee on first day it was with confidence and a welcoming smile rather than a hesitant 'are you..?'"*** *(School mentor)*

Over half (62%) felt the Digital Stories made a positive difference to relationship-building, and 86% supported using them with future cohorts. Mentors appreciated the efficiency of the format, describing Digital Stories as "quick," "to the point," and "more personal than a written profile."

> ***"I think it also made more of an emphasis on, this is a working relationship. So this is your mentor. This is your trainee. You are going to be working together for the best part of a year, how are you going to introduce yourself?"*** *(School mentor)*

Access remained a key barrier: only 57% found Stories easy to view via OneNote Portfolio.

ITE Tutors

ITE tutors shared their reflections on supporting Digital Stories during a focus group:

Tutors saw Digital Stories as a powerful tool for trainees to express personality and identity beyond written formats.

- ***"it just felt richer"*** *(ITE Tutor)*

Helped mentors understand trainees earlier and build stronger relationships.

Limited mentor engagement and access issues (e.g. OneNote) and some stories lacked context or came across informally.

> ***"was quite helpful for the mentors to see it at quite an earlier stage, and it kind of facilitated a closer relationship between the mentor and mentee"*** *(ITE Tutor)*

Suggestions included providing clearer guidance and purpose to mentors and offering more support and inclusive prompts for trainees.

> ***"We've got a trainee with dyslexia, and it has been quite a significant barrier for him, at times in the programme, both academic assignments as well as lesson planning. And he chose not to mention it at all. And I don't know if it was an active decision to not include it"*** *(ITE tutor)*



Review

From the feedback on our first cycle we:

- Updated the guidance including positive feedback from mentors (to emphasize why the DS matter)
- Updated guidance on how to create the stories to ensure a focus on getting to know the person in a way that moves beyond a written CV or summary
- Changed guidance on the practicalities of how DS could be shared with schools and mentors
- Added in GDPR related guidance
- Shared a couple of real examples of DS from last year to support discussion of what works well

Some more stories…

Toni’s Digital Story:

Katie’s Digital Story:

Impact - anecdotes

Trans Beginning Teacher (Maths)

Neurodivergent Beginning Teacher (English)

Other examples

Where to next? The Impact of the Impact!

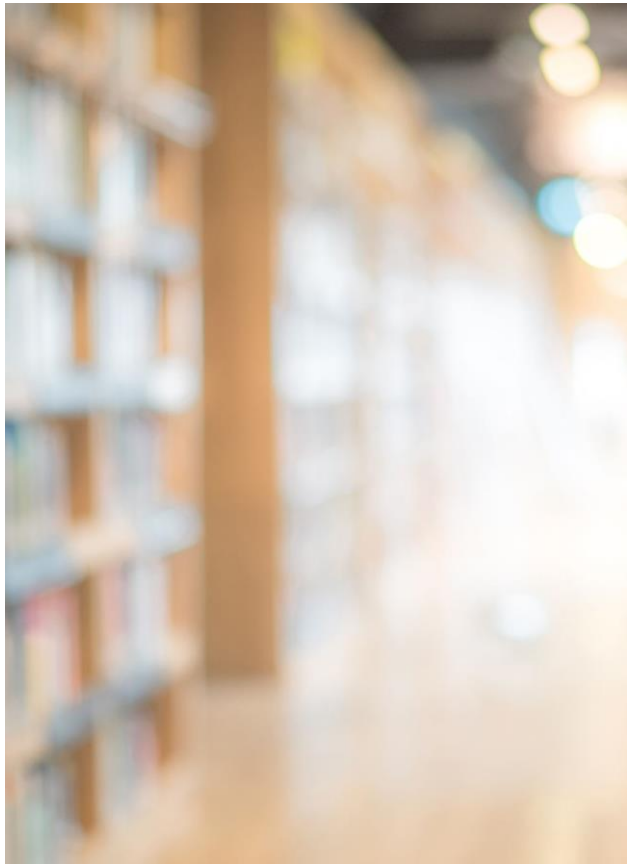
- We will extend this project for an additional year – and re-collect data to further inform practice going forwards
- Southampton Education Forum Ops group sharing
- ITECs – using Digital Stories in their schools (1 example happening already)
- Proposal to invite schools to further develop Digital Stories in contexts that would be useful to them

Publications, links + resources

ACoRNS publications

ACoRNS info and resources:

- ‘I am’ Digital Stories with young children
- ‘I am’ Digital Stories and ‘we are’ virtual tours – resources for making your own
- Some real examples of ‘I am’ Digital Stories
- Some methods resources about ‘I am’ Digital Stories for including in research



Finally, many thanks for our funding:

CHEP at the University of Southampton - to develop inclusive practices within the ITE programmes

