

Enabling Dominic's voice and participation through the cocreation of an 'I am' Digital Story for supporting his post-19 transition from special school to adult social care

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Abstract

Background: Transitions into adult services for young people with complex communication needs are often experienced as challenging and rarely include the voices of young people.

Methods: We piloted a person-centred method to enable one young person's (Dominic) voice to be included in his transition to adult services. An 'I am' Digital Story is a short video (c.6 min) that provides a strengths-based representation of a young person that is designed to be shared with and between settings. The process and outcomes of story cocreation were evaluated through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders.

Findings: The process of story creation was evaluated very positively by key stakeholders. The information about Dominic's strengths and preferences helped the new setting to prepare for Dominic's arrival.

Conclusions: The 'I am' Digital Story method provides a powerful and accessible method for including the voices of young people with complex communication needs in their transitions.

KEYWORDS

cocreation, methods, participation, person centred, transitions, voice

Accessible summary

- Young people and their families say it can be hard moving from school to adult services. We think young people with complex communication needs should be part of planning for this move.
- Often, young people with complex communication needs are not part of planning for this move. We have tried a new way for them to be part of the planning. It is called an 'I am' Digital Story.
- We created an 'I am' Digital Story with Dominic, his mother, his teacher and his speech and language therapist. They told the story of who Dominic is. The story

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tells people what Dominic likes doing and what Dominic is good at. The story helps people get to know Dominic, even if they cannot meet Dominic.

- We asked questions after to see if the Digital Story was a good idea. The people who made the Digital Story said it was easy to make the video. The people in adult services said it was a big help to watch the video. We are happy because the Digital Story made Dominic part of planning his move from school to adult services.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Transition into adult services from school has been identified as one of the most stressful times for young people and their parents/carers (e.g., Hudson, 2006), being described as 'fragmented' (Brown et al., 2019, p. 2421) and a period of 'great uncertainty and upheaval' (Kaehne & Beyer, 2009a, p. 139). Outcomes of transitions to, and experiences of, adult services are well documented as being poor across a range of indices, including health, well-being and support for greater independence, from different perspectives (e.g., Codd & Hewitt, 2021; Young-Southward et al., 2017). Most crucially, young people with intellectual disabilities and complex communication needs are often left out of the transition process, with limited opportunities to take an active or leading role (Crane et al., 2021).

While the UK government policy has long identified transition for young people with intellectual disabilities as a priority for national and local government (Department of Health, 2001; Grant & Ramcharan, 2007), progress has been slow, innovation has been limited and success variable (Kaehne & Beyer, 2009b). Guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) on transitions from children's to adults' services is targeted at improving this situation and places an emphasis on taking a strengths-based and person-centred approach which 'focusses on what is positive and possible for the young person', 'treats the young person as an equal partner in the process and takes full account of their views and needs' and 'involves the young person and their family or carers, primary care practitioners and colleagues in education, as appropriate' (2016, p. 35).

Such an emphasis is aligned with the principles of the neurodiversity movement which reconceptualises neurodevelopmental conditions as neurological differences that form part of natural human variation rather than as deficient or disordered ways of being. As Jaarsma and Welin (2012, p. 21) note 'Being neurodiverse or neurotypical are just different ways of existing as humans.' The neurodiversity movement therefore also emphasises the importance of rights, voice and agency of people with neurological differences, including people with intellectual disabilities, so that first-person accounts and lived experiences are sought, valued and respected to challenge marginalisation and epistemic injustice (Catala et al., 2021).

However, the voices of people with intellectual disabilities are mostly missing from the neurodiversity evidence base, with a systematic selection bias against their inclusion from across hundreds of studies (Russell et al., 2019). There is also an overreliance on in-person, oral interviews in research which means that '...individuals with speech and language impairments and complex communication needs tend to be the least represented in research capturing first-person perspectives compared to youth with well-developed verbal abilities' (Tesfaye et al., 2019, p. 1891). The challenge for researchers and practitioners therefore lies with finding and/or innovating methodologies that support and enable young people with intellectual disabilities who may have complex communication needs to express and share their voices.

Unfortunately, such methodologies remain rare in the literature (Lewis-Dagnell et al., 2023). As Ashby (2011) reminds us, 'We have to remember how often these voices that do not speak have been overlooked, dismissed or even discounted as invalid' (n.p.n). Ashby (2011) further argues for a more holistic way of understanding voice '...as the ability to express oneself and be heard by others, that can encompass typed text, nonverbal communication, gestural communication or silence' (n.p.n). This broader conceptualisation of voice recognises participation and engagement as centrally important and aligns with well-evidenced characteristics of positive quality of life for people with intellectual disabilities (e.g., Mansell & Beadle-Brown, 2012). It is, therefore, this broad conceptualisation of voice that we adopt within this paper.

It is also important to recognise that for many young people with intellectual disabilities, support is needed to enable them to participate and engage. This is in line with Article 7 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD; UN General Assembly, 2007) which requires that children and young people's views should be 'given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity, on an equal basis with other children, and to be provided with disability and age-appropriate assistance to realise that right'. Consequently, the appropriate application of methodologies necessarily requires the involvement of people who know the young person well to support their participation (Lewis-Dagnell et al., 2023), and so, our approach to innovating practice such that one young person was able to share his voice, involved professionals and a parent alongside the young person.

1.1 | Digital stories and the aims for this project

We piloted a strengths-based approach to supporting the transition of a young man—Dominic¹—who has complex communication needs and intellectual disabilities. At the start of this project in June 2021, Dominic was in the final year of his special school education in England and was due to transition into adult social care in September 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first author (a specialist speech and language therapist) wanted to support this transition in a way that would show Dominic as a rounded person with strengths and uniqueness through piloting the creation of an 'I am' Digital Story.

'I am' Digital Stories are short videos (c. 3–5 min but can be longer or shorter) designed to create a strengths-based representation of a child or young person to support their transitions within and between settings (see 'Procedure' and Table 1 for more details about structure and content). The process of creating an 'I am' Digital Story is an accessible and inclusive methodology that enables young people to present their 'best selves' to people in new settings who are meeting them for the first time and in ways that do not rely on spoken or written text to communicate meaning (Parsons et al., 2021). 'I am' Digital Stories draw on the principles of digital storytelling which aim to empower and enable people to share their experiences with wider audiences and has been described as a 'respectful, participatory research practice' that is 'especially appropriate for use with marginalised groups' (De Jager et al., 2017, p. 2548).

'I am' Digital Stories were initially created to support young autistic children in their transition from nursery to primary school to challenge the dominant, usually deficit-focussed, narratives that tend to be written or shared about autistic children within formalised processes such as transition planning and education, health and care assessments (Parsons et al., 2021, 2023). They have since been trialled successfully within transition person-centred reviews and education, health, and care needs assessments for preschool children (Wood-Downie et al., 2021) and for supporting transitions of older children within and between education and healthcare settings (Lewis-Dagnell, 2022; Parsons et al., 2023). In line with Lewis-Dagnell (2022), we adopted the position that the stories are akin to an introduction or resume that a person might share to highlight their skills, interests and capabilities (best self) to someone who may not know them. None of us would choose to share details of what we are like on a bad day as an initial introduction to who we are, and the same principle applies here. Accordingly, the emphasis was on showing the support, strategies, environment and activities that enable Dominic to be his best self so that a new or different environment can learn what helps Dominic to thrive.

In recognition of the underrepresentation of the voices of young people with complex communication needs within important transitions as well as the crucial role that advocates play in enabling young people they know well to share their voices, this project extended the

'I am' Digital Stories method to include a parent in the co-creation of the story. The inclusion of the home environment in addition to the school environment was aimed at enabling a more holistic representation of the young person. The research questions focussed on the process and the outcomes of creating the 'I am' Digital Story, respectively:

1. How can the 'I am' Digital Story methodology be applied to support the transition of a young adult from a special school to adult social care?
2. How do key stakeholders evaluate the usefulness of the 'I am' Digital Story within this transition?

2 | METHOD

2.1 | Participants

Dominic is a young man with intellectual disabilities and complex communication needs who was 19 years old during his transition to adult social care. Dominic does not communicate via speech and does not access alternative methods of communication such as Talking Mats or PECS. Dominic's mother and his main female class teacher also participated. The first author, a speech and language therapist (SaLT) with a local authority, was the project lead who instigated, developed and completed the 'I am' Digital Story pilot project with Dominic. As part of her SaLT role, she has been working within Dominic's school for approximately a day a week for 7 years and has known Dominic professionally during this time. This meant that the project was based within existing and established professional relationships, including Dominic's mother who was closely involved in his support and well known to the school and the SaLT. The first author is also a part-time researcher with the Autism Community Research Network @Southampton [ACoRNS], which focusses on participatory research with practice to address research questions that come from practice (Parsons & Kovshoff, 2019). As she was herself a co-constructor of the digital story and, therefore, a participant in trialling the approach, she was interviewed by the second author as an opportunity to reflect on her own learning and implications for her professional practice, as well as contribute that knowledge to this paper.

2.2 | Ethics

Although trialled, Dominic was unable to use a Talking Mat™ approach to share his likes and dislikes over three sessions. Therefore, it was acknowledged that Dominic would not have the capacity to access the more abstract language and verbal reasoning needed to consent or not to his own participation in the project. This was discussed with his mother who agreed that this accurately reflected her understanding of Dominic's capacity. Accordingly, a best interests meeting was held to discuss Dominic's participation,

¹Dominic's mother has given permission for his name to be used and shared in dissemination about this project

TABLE 1 Summary of the 'I am' digital stories methodology, how it was applied in this project and sources of more information.

Stage of digital story creation	Main aim/activities	How applied in this project	More details about this part of the method are available from
Mapping	Mapping is the process of identifying the things that the young person enjoys, is good at and where they may need support. These will form the content of the 'I am' Digital Story. The 'I am...' Digital Stories framework helps with this and is based on the Froebelian principles of childhood. The Framework includes spaces; people and interactions; independence and agency; objects and interests; communication and expression; support; skills and capabilities	<p>Structured conversations using the seven mapping categories were held with Dominic's mother and his class teacher to ascertain what to show in his digital story to reflect a holistic understanding of Dominic: his perspectives, strengths and interests.</p> <p>Dominic was unable to complete a Talking Mats activity to show his likes and dislikes, and so, Dominic's mother and class teacher helped to develop this narrative. In May 2021, two separate in-depth hour-long conversations took place between Dominic's mother and the SaLT and the class teacher and SaLT. These discussions used the framework as a structure the discussion. Each area was considered individually, although there was some overlap between these for example, love of movement (being outside on the swing) was included in both the <i>independence and agency</i> and <i>spaces</i> category. Key themes were identified for Dominic (e.g., love of water, enjoyment of and skill with technology), and then, activities that could show these were discussed (e.g., Dominic using the remote control at home to control the music he is listening to shows his use of technology). A Venn diagram was created to show which themes and activities overlapped between home and school and which were distinct for each context. This helped identify what activities would be filmed and where.</p>	<p>How to create an 'I am' Digital Story (young person version) https://youtu.be/GkB4E8j7GZM</p> <p>How to create an 'I am' Digital Story (staff version) https://youtu.be/ortRVf9GWZg</p>
Describing	Using the mapping outputs, support the young person or person who knows them well to create a first-person narrative that can be used to describe themselves. Keep the statements in the narrative short with only one topic. For example, 'I am Nathan'; 'I like to cook and then eat the food'; 'I enjoy spending time playing on my PlayStation'.	The statements reflected what was felt to be the key theme of that video clip for example 'I say hello to my dog Brock' (theme: love of dogs (<i>objects and interests</i>), initiating interaction with dogs (<i>independence and agency</i>) and 'I know what I like and don't like'. In this case, the actual activity of the video (a craft activity) was not mentioned as it was not a key theme identified but a way in which to show how Dominic shows when he wants to engage with or end an activity. Water and technology had been identified as key themes so were mentioned directly in a caption with two accompanying videos, one from home and one from school. The digital story starts and ends with the statement 'I am Dominic' to reiterate that Dominic's voice is central to the digital story.	The importance of planning an 'I am' Digital Story https://youtu.be/D1IGGqVbLUo
Filming	Filming can be done over a few days, weeks or months using small wearcams, a video camera or a tablet until you have a set of	In June 2021, Dominic's mother, school staff and the SaLT all filmed some footage that included indoor and outdoor spaces and	How to film an 'I am' Digital Story https://youtu.be/1KedK1BIXg4

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Stage of digital story creation	Main aim/activities	How applied in this project	More details about this part of the method are available from
	video clips that cover the most important parts of the 'I am...' Digital Story that the young person wants to tell. The focus of the videos is on environments and activities that are meaningful for the young person and may include the young person communicating during the filming.	the home environment using hybrid laptops and tablet at school, and Dominic's mother used a smartphone. Videos were filmed not just to show an activity but to show <i>how</i> Dominic engaged in an activity. For example, there is a longer clip at the beginning of the story of Dominic bouncing on an exercise ball. The activity does not change but the length of the video but helps give a sense of Dominic's independence and agency in this activity as he engages with it for some time. The same is true for clips of Dominic using a water foot spa and a swing. The length of videos was not discussed with Dominic's mother, but videos from home tended to be shorter.	
Editing	Ideally, the young person – or someone who knows the young person well – will be involved in the editing process. Discuss where possible with the young person which 'I...' descriptions best show who they are and then select the relevant video clips. Where possible, plan the story sequence with the young person first and/or someone who knows them well before trying to edit the footage.	The story opens with an extended shot of Dominic bouncing on a ball to introduce him in his familiar environment, self-engaged and emotionally regulated. The videos were then shown in themes with shorter videos showing a range of Dominic's main interests. These were felt to be a way of introducing Dominic's interests, much as a conversation might start with 'what do you like to do?'. An extended clip of Dominic engaged with a craft activity with an adult comes at the end of the video, once the viewer has already had an introduction to Dominic. The digital story starts and ends with the statement 'I am Dominic' to reinstate that Dominic's voice is central. Dominic's mother was shown the video during the process in a 'draft' form to comment and advise on any edits she felt were required and was also asked specifically to comment on the captions. Dominic's mother was invited to send videos as she acquired them up until the point of the final edit of the video as it felt important to allow the process to be as flexible for her as possible. The video was finalised in July 2021.	Editing guidance https://autismtransitions.org/how-to-make-your-own/

and his mother advised that it was appropriate for Dominic to take part in the project. The ways that Dominic can convey what he enjoys and does not enjoy through his body language, facial expressions and through independently seeking out activities or refusing them were discussed with his mother, and it was agreed that videoing would be ceased if Dominic showed any sign of distress. Informed consent from Dominic's mother and teacher who were to be interviewed was also obtained. Dominic's mother was closely involved in the curation and editorial decisions of the final story. Once the story had been produced, Dominic's mother's consent was sought to share it more

widely for academic and other public dissemination, including deciding whether Dominic's first name could be used.

We appreciate that the decision to share Dominic's story publicly, including his first name, comes with ethical challenges, and it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss these in more depth here. However, the ownership of the digital story resides with Dominic and his mother on his behalf. It was their decision to share Dominic's story and his name; the story is about Dominic, and they wanted him to be seen and heard, including within this academic space. In this, we align with Grace (2022) who argues that sharing the

photographs and names online of young people with profound disabilities:

...gives families a way of celebrating and sharing the work that their children are doing. These children are often looked at as incapable, people may view them primarily through a lens of all the things they cannot do.... The families re-share these images celebrating the achievements of their young person in just the same way that they might share another child's exam results or swimming certificate ... Visibility matters.

This research was reviewed and approved by the University of Southampton's Faculty of Social Sciences Ethics and Research Committee (# 62326.A5).

2.3 | Procedure

2.3.1 | Creating the 'I am' Digital Story

There are four main stages to creating an 'I am' Digital Story: mapping, describing, filming and editing. The mapping and describing stages are based on the 'I am' Digital Stories framework which includes seven main areas: (1) spaces; (2) people and interactions; (3) independence and agency; (4) objects and interests; (5) communication and expression; (6) support and (7) skills and capabilities. How each of the four these stages were applied with Dominic, including decisions about what to include, is summarised in Table 1 along with

links to free, publicly available resources for creating 'I am' Digital Stories. Dominic's completed story (6 min 42 s) can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/X-FYpbUnO40>. Dominic's participation was mostly enabled through ensuring that he was engaged in activities that he enjoyed and which showed his communication preferences and behaviour when well supported and emotionally regulated. This reinforces a vitally important ethical consideration for the creation of 'I am' Digital Stories namely, that they are about taking a strengths-based and respectful approach and not using footage that would undermine the agency and capabilities of the person.

Figure 1 shows a series of still images from Dominic's story to convey the sequence and nature of the narrative of the story. The digital story does not have a voice-over since the purpose is not to place another voice on a video that is aimed at giving primacy to Dominic's (or any other young person's) voice. The 'I' statements introduce the important things to know about Dominic, but the accompanying clips focus on Dominic and how he communicates, interacts and engages; a voice-over would detract from what the viewer may interpret or notice in the video.

2.3.2 | Evaluation feedback from stakeholders

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in-person by the first author with Dominic's teacher (around 25 min) and online via MS Teams by the second author with Dominic's mother (around 20 min) and the first author (around 50 min). Interview questions focussed on the challenges and strengths of creating an 'I am' Digital Story, views about the final story and the potential for this methodology to

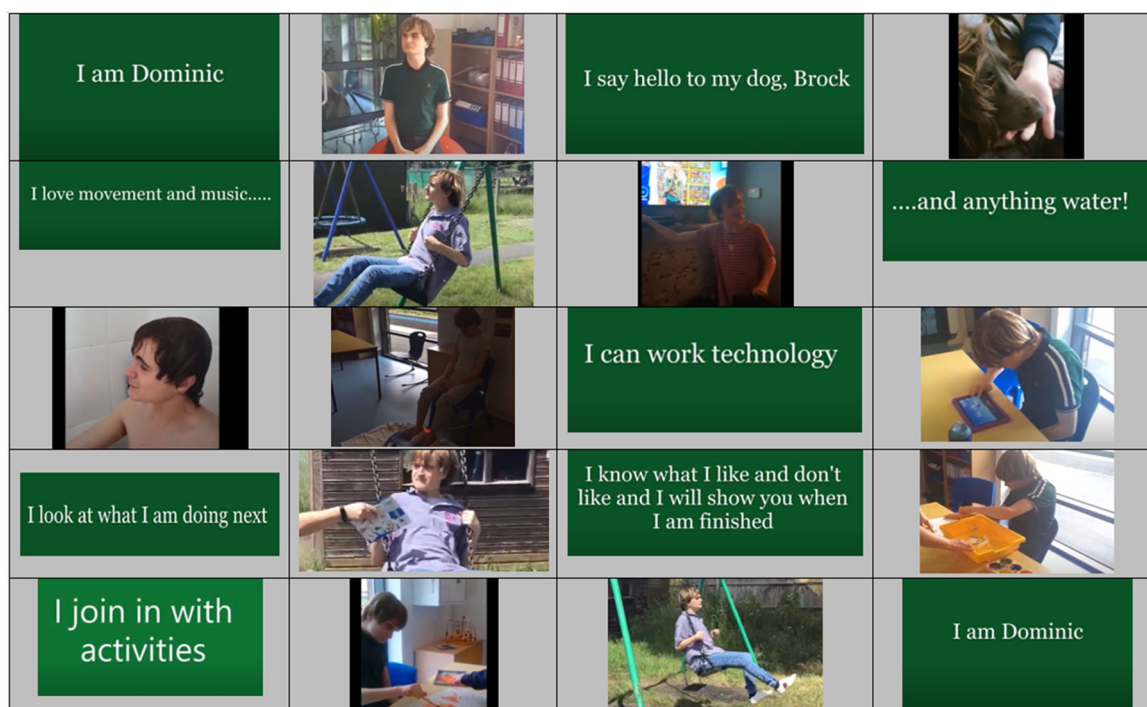


FIGURE 1 Storyboard showing the narrative of Dominic's digital story. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

support transition experiences and practices for and with other young people with intellectual disabilities. Feedback from the social worker at Dominic's proposed new adult placement was also sought through a brief email exchange but without description of the wider research. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and stored safely on secure platforms.

2.4 | Analysis

Interview transcripts were analysed by the second author using a simple narrative analysis (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003) which involved identifying patterns within the data and organising these into meaningful categories to enable the construction of main themes. This coding approach can draw upon deductive ideas or emergent data with, commonly, a combination of both used. Deductive categories were initially drawn from Lewis-Dagnell (2022) who co-created 'I am' Digital Stories with three autistic young people making the transition from residential special school to adult services. Additionally, some comments from participants were coded inductively into new categories and themes that were not present in Lewis-Dagnell (2022). In line with the cautions offered by Braun and Clarke (2021), this analysis was more reflexively conducted and, therefore, not amenable to the importation of positivist assumptions and practices such as consensus building or interrater reliability.

3 | RESULTS

Given that this was an individual case study concerned with both the process and outcomes of creating an 'I am' Digital Story with Dominic, his mother and the school, the four main themes identified are represented within a process diagram (see Figure 2) that begins with 'getting started', moves through to the process-focussed facilitators and challenges of digital story creation and ends with

the reported outcomes of the process. Each of these four main themes and their subthemes (in bold text) are described and illustrated below.

3.1 | Theme 1: Getting started: 'giving it a go'

Dominic's mother, his teacher and the SaLT all commented about the importance of this transition for Dominic and **recognised the challenges** within existing transition practices and expectations. As his mother said, Dominic had been at his school for a long time and staff had got to know him well:

Obviously there's staff that come and go. But then there's also a basis that has followed him through the school, and they know these clues to pick up on, his likes and his dislikes.

The SaLT recognised that there were aspects of transition practices that could be improved within in her own service and that the COVID-19 pandemic had particularly focussed her mind on how this vital transition could be managed more effectively:

...we're kind of mindful of transitions being an area we could improve and also particularly so with Covid as well..., it just made transitions, what was already kind of quite a fraught process anyway, just a million times more uncomfortable really.

In recognising this challenge, all were keen to make changes and to try something new: there was a strong sense that they wanted to **'give it a go'** (i.e., create a digital story) as the SaLT explains:

I think my motivation really was to give it a go and see what happened because I thought it had a lot of

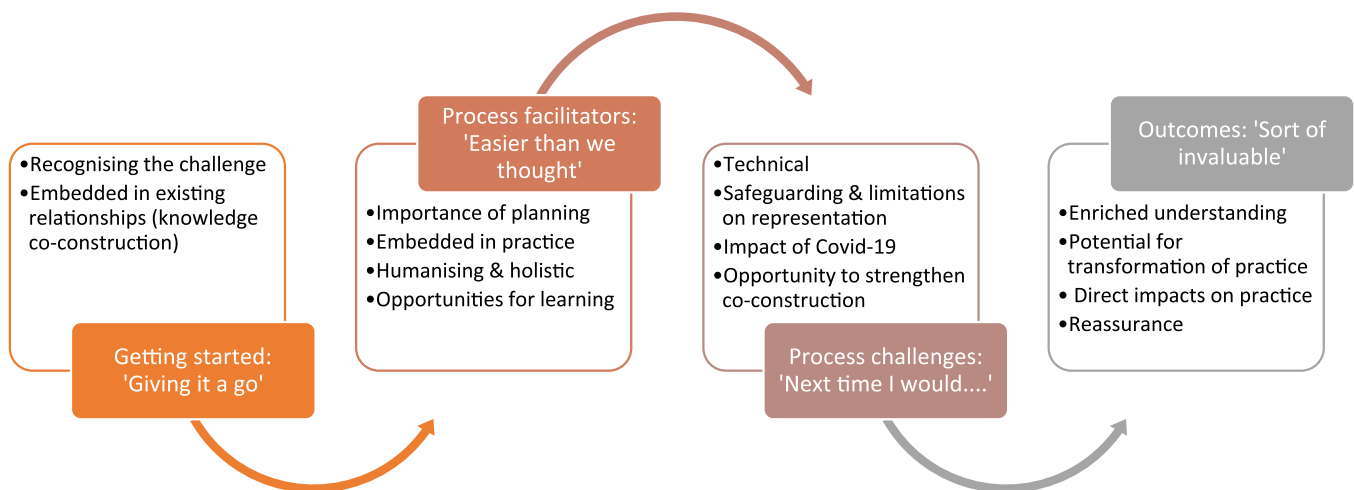


FIGURE 2 Process diagram for main themes from the qualitative analysis. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

potential and I think it's difficult to know what potential something's got without actually giving it a go!

Likewise, Dominic's mother could see the potential of the approach from the start:

I ... instantly thought the idea was fantastic and the difficulty, particularly when the young people are nonverbal, for me, moving on to the next stage was always ... quite daunting.

That the project was based **within existing relationships** was an important factor that seemed to facilitate the confidence in all three stakeholders to 'give the digital story a go' together, as the SaLT explained:

...because the mum is a very easy person to work with and because I already have that good relationship with the school, that worked well in terms of when I went to them to say oh this is what I'm suggesting we do, they were kind of straight away on board with that.

It was important that the team around Dominic who supported his participation in the story creation knew him well and could use their knowledge built up over time and shared between home and school to generate ideas for the digital story and know that these ideas were appropriate and authentic, as the teacher explained:

...yes, he can't tell us that he'd like to go and have a foot spa but you know, by knowing him we can give him that as an option and obviously he engaged with it and that shows that he likes to do it and ... he wouldn't do something that he doesn't want to do ... so ... the fact that he was happily doing those things ... gives you a good indication that he's liking them or that he wants to do them.

3.2 | Theme 2: Process facilitators: 'easier than we thought'

There were several important aspects that seemed to facilitate the process of creating the 'I am' Digital Story. First, being able to **embed the process in existing practices** was vital for making the project work from the perspectives of the professionals since '... as a long-term thing, if it's not easy and quick and practical to make then it's just not going to get done' (SaLT). The teacher explained how this worked in practice:

...obviously we were doing things that he liked ... and wanting to do them because they were his favourite

things so ... we were able to manage it within the school day, within the class setting ... I didn't feel I was being ... asked to do anything that I didn't want to do or, you know put anything extra on me or the other staff members.

Through being embedded in practice and existing relationships, the **planning** for the digital story could be well supported. As the SaLT explained, the discussion about the seven main categories of the 'I am' Digital Stories framework was vital for creating a successful story:

... it was the planning. So, the structured conversation that I had with the mum beforehand, and then the structured conversation I had with the teacher beforehand where we planned out exactly what we... needed to ... be part of this video and that just absolutely made it. So, the mum ...knew what she wanted to get ... her videos of. And then at school we ... knew what we ... wanted to get videos of which we thought were really going to reflect this young man.

These conversations also enabled the team around Dominic to see how the Digital Story was more **humanising and holistic** for Dominic compared to other ways of sharing information, including being able to show the home and school environments:

...it shows what he likes, shows his communication ... I think it's a really lovely way of showing somebody just Dom, who he is, what he likes.' (Teacher)

...you know if they came out with a little booklet and asked a few questions about him ... that's all very good. But I think this just brings it to life, in a way that as a parent, I felt if you watch that you would kind of know who Dom was. More than reading a report on paper ... far and above what you could get from a report. (Mother)

Taken together, these facilitative factors meant that the process of creating an 'I am' Digital Story was **easier** than anticipated:

I think it was really nice and straightforward. (Teacher)

...it came together very easily because again fortunately you've got that the staff with the knowledge of Dom, when to capture him, the things that show him off as it were. So yeah, I think it came together fairly organically and was quite natural really' (Mother)

...the thing that was most pleasing about it was that it does seem like a really manageable thing to be able to do ... we just ended up with what we needed, put it

together and off we went. It really was a lot easier than I thought it would be. (SaLT)

3.3 | Theme 3: Process challenges: 'next time I would...'

Inevitably with a new approach, there were some challenges that were encountered, but the key message is that these were not sufficient for the stakeholders to think that they would not want to do it again. Thus, the challenges experienced were constructed as learning opportunities for things that could be done differently next time rather than as barriers. For example, there were some **technical issues** related to the sharing of video clips:

I think there was a problem with the size of the file sharing when it was sent to the day centre ... [but] it was able to be shared with those [in the end]. But yes, for us to be able to have and keep [would be nice], it's a little bit trickier... (Mother)

However, the team was confident that the knowledge they had gained from doing the process this time would help them to overcome this for the future. Other technical issues, such as editing, were experienced as less challenging than anticipated:

I managed to have a really good video editing tool on my ... laptop ... which was just already on there magically! (SaLT)

There were some **impact of COVID-19** restrictions on the conversations between the stakeholders and the involvement of some learning support assistants (LSAs), but these were not major issues:

I guess because at the time we had to do it over Teams due to Covid restrictions ... maybe face to face might have been more ... helpful but I still think we got all the information that we needed. (Teacher)

We were also limited by the fact of Covid. We were in bubbles so there weren't that many LSAs working with him at that point because we were kind of sticking to the same groups... (SaLT)

Indeed, as already noted above, the pandemic mostly served as a catalyst for wanting to make positive changes to the way that transition planning and practice was usually done and galvanised action to try out the new 'I am' Digital Stories method.

With video being used there were understandable concerns about who could be included in the digital story and what that might mean in terms of **limitations on representation**. A crucial consideration was an ethical one in ensuring that the strengths-based focus of

the 'I am' Digital Story was maintained rather than showing the young person when they are distressed:

I know it's got to be positive because ... obviously you don't want to film him in distress ... I guess that would just be a conversation you know between mum or someone like myself ... I do think that it is important because he can have quite some very challenging behaviour so obviously people do need to be aware of what that can be but ... you know, you don't really want to video that. (Teacher)

Limitations on representation was also evident when considering the safeguarding of other students in the story and what that might mean for showing interactions and communication:

...I didn't have permission for students to appear in videos ... so it meant that we couldn't capture any circle times or ... interaction with other students. So ... I just had to be careful about filming, which was fine. I mean it was easy to do. It didn't make the filming more difficult but ... it meant there were some things which could have been in the video which weren't. (SaLT)

Some staff were also reluctant to appear on camera which impacted which videos could be shown. However, again, this was felt to be more of an **opportunity to strengthen co-construction** for the next time a digital story would be made in terms of starting the process a bit earlier in the year and providing the time and explanation for staff to feel more comfortable with getting involved:

...I think had we started it earlier, had it been just part of what they were doing everyday ... I think that would have ... got the LSAs involved in a bit of filming as well. To film themselves and to actually take [on] the filming ... (SaLT)

3.4 | Theme 4: Outcomes: 'sort of invaluable'

The final theme examines the impact that making the 'I am' Digital Story with Dominic had on the key stakeholders. First, an **enriched understanding** of Dominic was gained through creating and viewing the digital story. As the SaLT and teacher commented, they had known him for a long time at the school, but there was still valuable information that emerged through the story creation process, including the opportunity to share information between themselves about Dominic, and to see him at home:

SaLT: When I watched it, I didn't realise that he such a good relationship with dogs actually, which I think you may have already known that?

Teacher: yeah we knew with the PAT [Pets as Therapy] dog he used to love the PAT dog [and] ... mum had mentioned about their dog so I know that he does love dogs [but] I thought it was really nice to see that at home, what he is like at home.

This enriched understanding provided a basis upon which the stakeholders felt that the digital stories could be **potentially transformative for practice** in the future, with the teacher and the SaLT seeing opportunities to apply the method within the school and their clinical team respectively:

I think use of this sort of video is a good thing ... especially maybe the more complex and probably the nonverbal students ... I think ... that would help ... different places to get to know them quicker ... it's them being able to settle in the new place quickly and I think that would help with that. (Teacher)

...within our team ... [this is] something that we can ... offer or at least have as part of ... what we offer. (SaLT)

Dominic's mother was also clear that through being able to see the things that Dominic liked and was able to do, the 'I am' Digital Story could help services to know how to support him and the kinds of choices they could offer, thereby potentially transforming their understanding and practice:

I think because it shows him in such a positive light that's really good for where he is transitioning to so they can see all those lovely things and ... it just helps them know what they can ... offer him and the choices and ... his communication. It really helps with how he can then start to move forward with wherever he is going ... it was really sort of invaluable ... [and] I think with nonverbal young people ... I could see it as almost being essential.

The social worker who was managing Dominic's transition independently and was also the day centre care manager offered a similar view by saying that viewing the Digital Story was 'really beneficial—it has given us more ideas of what Dominic likes and how he engages'.

Crucially, Dominic's mother was sure that the digital story had made a positive and **direct impact on practice** and that this had made a difference to his transition to adult services:

I guess the measure of its success is that it did ease transition. And it can't be stressed enough, what a big change that is for the young person, for the family and for everything. Even the first few sessions at the day centre ... I obviously spoke to them, and they did a home visit, but from this [the Digital Story] they

seemed to know what sort of tools they'd need there as well to continue those sort of things ... they'd picked out things in their environment that ... matched what they had seen.

Similarly, while the SaLT was clear that this was not an experiment and there was not an alternative transition experience that could be compared for Dominic specifically, the digital story had seemed to make a positive difference based on feedback received:

...the fact that with her [the teacher's] experience of what transitions have been like over the years ... she was coming unprompted saying we need this for our other students was really important because she's ... the most experienced in those transitions ... and mum celebrated the video as well, in terms of it being a great video and just a lovely video of her son ... [and] I sent it to the Social Worker and that was quite gratifying that he then saw the worth of it and sort of directed me to send it to other people involved.

Another important indication of impact was how the creation of the digital story provided **reassurance** for his mother about the information about Dominic that services would receive:

So, it was quite comforting really to know that they'd seen that and kind of knew who was coming their way it made me feel a lot more confident that they'd get the essence of him as it were.

4 | DISCUSSION

This project piloted a person-centred methodology—'I am' Digital Stories—for supporting the transition of a young man (Dominic) with complex communication needs and intellectual disabilities from special school to adult services. The aim of piloting the method was to enable a strengths-based representation and participation of Dominic within his transition so that his voice could be heard and knowledge about his interests, capabilities and preferences shared between key stakeholders in an authentic and respectful way. The 'I am' Digital Story provided insights into how Dominic communicates and what engages him; viewers can see how he enjoys playing with water, bouncing on his ball and swinging on the swing. They can see how much he loves his dog and likes to engage in craft-based activities. All these things offer potential points for engagement with Dominic and ideas for strategies for building a bridge to communication with him. The project demonstrated that the 'I am' Digital Story methodology was successfully applied for supporting Dominic's transition based on positive feedback received from the stakeholders involved. Guidance from Mencap (Goldbart & Caton, 2010, p. 19) on the strategies that work for enabling communication with people with complex needs emphasised that 'for both parents and

researchers, the most important [communication strategy] was taking time to become familiar with the individual and their personality and communication style'. We suggest that the 'I am' Digital Stories method could be useful in practice since this is what it enables viewers of the story to do.

The use of video to create the story was both easier and more powerful than anticipated and helped to ensure that Dominic's strengths and interests were represented in his transition. The 'I am' Digital Stories mapping framework (Parsons et al., 2021) provided a vital planning and discussion structure for conversations with his mother and the school about what should be filmed to best capture Dominic's strengths and interests. These discussions were helpful for everyone involved, even when they felt they already knew Dominic well. Crucially, Dominic's mother gained considerable reassurance and confidence that he was appropriately represented within the transition process and that she also had some control over, and input to, this. All three stakeholders also felt that the creation and sharing of the digital story had made a positive difference to Dominic's transition through enabling the new adult service to be better prepared and informed about how they could best support him. The new adult service confirmed that this had been the case and that viewing the digital story had made a difference to their understanding of how Dominic could be supported. Overall, creating and evaluating the 'I am' Digital Story seemed to align with the NICE (2016) guidelines on supporting children's transitions to adult services by focussing on what was positive and possible for Dominic, treating Dominic as a partner in the process, and taking account of his views and needs in the ways he can show them and involving the family and professionals as appropriate.

The creation of the digital story was a collaborative endeavour between his mother, teacher and the SaLT, all with a shared purpose of keeping Dominic's voice at the centre of his transition and working with him as fully as possible in the creation of the story. Thus, knowledge co-construction was a foundational principle upon which the success of the method rests because authentic knowledge co-construction *requires* existing relationships based on good knowledge of the young person (Parsons, Kovshoff & Ivil, 2022). These long-established relationships, with Dominic and between the professionals and his mother, meant that knowledge about Dominic could be shared and a more holistic representation of him gained because both school and home contexts were included (Parsons, Kovshoff, Karakosta et al., 2023). Accordingly, the range of activities, preferences and interactions that were shared about Dominic via the digital story offered new possibilities for practice, which were then taken up.

This is a good example of a praxeological framework being applied in research such that a pathway to impact was established at the start of the process. According to Parsons, Kovshoff and Ivil (2022), a praxeological framework for research is one where research and practice work in partnership on questions of shared interest (in this case, the application of a method designed to support the transitions of neurodivergent children and young

people) and which encompasses core principles. Specifically, there was *power redistribution* in this project since it was led by the SaLT, working closely with the teacher and Dominic's mother, and not by the research lead. There were opportunities for *reflection and action together* since the research questions came from practice and the research was planned, implemented, evaluated and written-up together. *Values and ethics* informed the project from the start since the focus was on supporting Dominic's voice to be at the centre of his transition and to positively influence the transition in real time; in other words, the stakeholder team was advocating for and with Dominic and taking an active role in supporting him. The digital stories method is 'nonorthodox' (Pascal & Bertram, 2012) since it enables the sharing of different forms of knowledge including the embodied knowledge of Dominic and the practical (exemplary) knowledge of his mother, the SaLT and the teacher (Thomas, 2012). In working together in this way, the shared activities of the project created a more direct *pathway to impact* because the research (method) was *invited into practice* rather than the other way around, and key stakeholders in Dominic's transition took responsibility for the implementation and evaluation of the research (Parsons, Kovshoff & Ivil, 2022).

Overall, all three stakeholders felt that the 'I am' Digital Stories method was successful and expressed a desire to apply the method again (Dominic's mother has another son at the same school with whom she would like to create a digital story for his transition). This pilot provided experience, insights and confidence for these stakeholders that the method could be embedded successfully within their existing practices, thereby avoiding creating unnecessary or onerous demands on time and resources. Most crucially, this pilot project demonstrated how key stakeholders working together in Dominic's best interests and the shared aim of enabling a successful transition to adult services positively impacted on practice through a willingness to try something new.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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