



## Poetic reflection through digital storytelling - a methodology to foster professional health worker identity in students

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### **Abstract**

*In the field of digital storytelling research there is a focus on personal narratives, multimedia and the creative process in developing identity and voice. The project introduced in this paper has identified contexts in higher education where digital storytelling may be used as a promising tool to support students' learning, assisting them to combine theory and practical experience in their field of study. Students in the health professions need to develop a professional identity based on both social and technical competencies. Technical competencies concord with what students expect to be taught in a university college. The development of social competence and professional identity, however, requires a different approach, involving students reflecting on their experiences from working in health institutions. We suggest that a particular mode of reflection, a poetic mode, exemplified by digital storytelling, may serve as a tool for students in this process of learning from practice. Three characteristics of digital storytelling are discussed: the narrative approach, multimodality and creativity, all in search of defining characteristics of a personal professional story. A model is described through a three cycle development project, illustrated by the terms pioneers and pathfinders for the first two cohorts of students and digital storytellers for the changes planned for the third cohort in the light of our experiences.*

**Keywords:** Digital storytelling, professional identity, reflection, narrative, multimodality, creativity, experience-based learning

### **Background**

This article tells the story of our joint learning journey as we seek to integrate digital storytelling in the learning processes of students in a one year unit of

“Public Health Issues” in the Bachelor’s degree course “Sport, Outdoor Activities and Health” (Idrett, friluftsliv og helse) at Oslo University College (OUC). Our partners in this project are students who may occupy future positions as health and training therapists or general public health workers. In this paper we will refer to their future career path more generally as ‘health workers’.

The professional identity of a health worker is based on *social* and *technical* competency: the *artistry* and *science* (Willard & Spackman, 2003). The art of a profession’s practice, like most art, is a process of making connections, evoking responses and finding shared meaning (Schmid, 2005). Benner (1984) emphasises the importance of the shared world between the health worker and their clients in clinical work.

In describing the term ‘mentalizing’<sup>i</sup>, Allen et al. (2008) claim that collaboration with clients, their next of kin and colleagues requires preconscious imaginative mental activity, namely perceiving and interpreting human behaviour in terms of needs, desires, feelings, goals, purposes and reasons. The interaction between mental state and behaviour is crucial and the two are inseparably conjoined (ibid.). Within pre-service preparation, periods of practical studies are the primary opportunities where students experience and learn the ‘art’ of the health worker profession. Nevertheless, students’ reports and assignments in the practical studies are often descriptive and factual, emphasising rational and analytic thinking and reflecting the technical or science dimension of practice (Kaufmann, 2006). As the art component is most often missing in teaching and assessment processes in higher education this is not unexpected but it still represents a challenge in developing professional identity in students.

Our implementation of digital storytelling is an attempt to develop tools to support the *art dimension* of health work and to foster *reflection and personal learning* amongst students. We believe that recognition of emotional aspects of learning, in addition to cognitive processes, is a necessity in developing health workers’ personal identity and thus also the social and art dimensions of a professional identity.

Recognising the value of narratives is not new to health professionals, nor is the reporting of incidents and experiences as a point of departure for reflections from practice. Valuing the narrative also implies recognition of practice as a way of knowing, and emotion as a relevant dimension in learning (Eikeland, 1997, Hardy, 2007). Through stories, professionals have the opportunity to reflect on both feelings and technical aspects in clinical situations. Gauntlett (2007) describes the sense of self-identity as a construction: something we like to believe in to make life more tolerable and comprehensible, and Giddens (1991) claims that the stories we tell about ourselves are crucially important to identity.

## **The personal professional digital story as tool for reflection**

Our project was motivated by the above described need for more adequate tools for reflective learning and our experiences from various digital storytelling workshops (Jamissen, 2009) where we have observed what Joe Lambert describes as a “transformative experience that tends to be personal and emotional”<sup>ii</sup>. What constitutes this transformative experience may vary from one person to another. Lambert emphasises the magic of the story circle and the experience of being listened to: “*When you gather people in a room, and listen, deeply listen to what they are saying, and also, by example alone, encourage others to listen, magic happens*”(Lambert, 2009, p.86). We see the story circle as part of a larger creative process where participants are assisted

through phases of working with their experiences in search of key events, interpretations and meaning.

Both process and products in our work with the students may differ from the original approach of Center of Digital Storytelling's (CDS), exemplified by their seven elements<sup>iii</sup> (Lambert 2006), later modified into seven steps (Lambert 2009, p.29)<sup>iv</sup>. We are in search of characteristics of the *personal professional* story as a tool for learning from practice and a process design for an adapted workshop to support students in this learning process. One key question is if and how the above mentioned science dimension may be integrated in the story by relating personal experience to relevant theory. Other questions concern didactical issues such as developing tasks that scaffold both the learning process and the development of a good story. Potential criteria for the personal professional story at the outset may be described in terms of i) involving students' personal engagement, ii) including references to facts and theoretical aspects and iii) using digital storytelling tools such as dramaturgy and multimodal effects. <sup>v</sup>

Before describing the cycles of our learning journey we will briefly discuss the three core concepts of narrative, multimodality and creativity which we see as corner stones of poetic reflection. It is not our ambition to contribute to new knowledge or new perspectives within any of these areas of research but rather to explore how the combination of perspectives can contribute to a better understanding and better workshops helping students build on personal experience in professional development.

### **The narrative approach**

We believe negotiating meaning is one of the most important aspects of reflection and learning from practice and that a narrative reconstruction is instrumental in this respect. Bruner (1986) claims that "*a good story and a well-formed argument are different natural kinds*" (p.11). While a logical argument seeks the truth, aims at explaining how things *are* and analysing *causal* relations, the story is more preoccupied with what things *mean* and how they can be *understood* or *interpreted*. While the argument seeks clarity and rules out ambiguity the story makes allusions and introduces layers of meaning, convincing through credibility. As Bruner describes it, a narrative approach to a text allows the reader to "*read the text for its meanings... not to prove or disprove a theory, but to explore the world of a particular literary work*" (ibid., p. 12). The poet and the storyteller share a preoccupation with the broader question of how we come to endow experience with meaning.

A narrative is characterised by a conscious dramaturgy which is different from the elaboration of the logical argument. Even without complying strictly with a classical dramaturgic curve the composition of a story has a beginning, middle and an end, a plot is introduced and finds a solution. Another dimension is transition, or turning point, as a story describes how something becomes something else, often through a conflict of values (Larsen, 2003).

A narrative is also a reconstruction after the event, as illustrated by South-African author André Brink: "*You only live twice. You live first of all in the experienced life and then you live in your interpretation of your experiences*". (Brink, 2009).

Dewey (1997) reminds us that realising potential learning opportunities in experience depends on a conscious reflection in what he calls a continuous *reconstruction* to gain insight into the complexity of the situation. The value of experience in an educational setting depends on the quality of this reconstruction. Connections, relations and meaning in a lived experience are made explicit through reflection and analysis, and thus new knowledge and

new understandings emerge. Jansen (2008) calls the story a fixation on an event in retrospect. Her concern is that the person constructing the narrative owns knowledge different from that of the person (who is) taking part in the experience, and that there is a difference between what's lived and what's told. In her words the reconstruction or configuration implies a narrative analysis which seeks to understand the meaning and how to communicate the event to others. The construction of our life story is a continuous process and we constantly renegotiate and reinterpret our narrative identity (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 32).

### **Multimodal texts**

A digital story is an example of a multimodal text where various semiotic resources and modalities (Kress, 2003, Løvland, 2007, Liestøl, Fagerjord & Hannemyr, 2009) create meaning and involve our senses in various ways, and we believe the combination strengthens students' learning processes. Written text and images affect our visual sense; spoken language, music and sound affect the auditive sense; images and music affect our feelings, separately and in combination. We are "touched", and in a digital storytelling context this engagement involves the producer, the peers taking part in the process and the audience of the finished product.

Multimodal texts can be found in both new and old media, but digital media have brought opportunities to work with stories in new ways. New technologies make new semiotic resources available and influence our ability to express and interpret meaning through multimodal interaction (Løvland, 2007).

According to Løvland (ibid) interaction between modalities can be characterised either as multimodal redundancy, where the various modalities in a text communicate the same information, or functional specialisation where the various modalities have specialised purposes and tasks. Lambert (2009, 43) describes a digital story as layers of multimodal effects that can be conceived as redundant, complementary, juxtaposing or disjunctive.

### **Creativity**

Creativity is more than the generation of novel ideas (Gauntlett, 2007). Rather, at a basic level, it is about everyday ideas, writing, self-presentation, a creative speech or thought. It is a mental and social process involving the generation of new ideas or concepts, or new associations between existing ideas or concepts. Creativity often takes place when one perspective meets another and new perspectives, skills and challenges are developed (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997).

In many cultures creativity is linked to a spiritual dimension and self-development (Schmid, 2005). Creative activities may stimulate the learning process and development of professional identity. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) introduces the concept of *flow* experienced in situations where the level of stress is high enough to release necessary extra energy to obtain success but not so high as to create helplessness. In his view this feeling of flow or mastery is a prerequisite for developing new perspectives, skills and challenges and he emphasises a curious approach in daily life as a ground for development of creative abilities. We believe creativity, to some extent, can be learnt and that there are techniques we can apply to help students adopt a creative approach. Gauntlett (2007) sees creative activity as something that "simmers below the threshold of the consciousness" to surface in the work and it is our aim to assist in this release of creative energy.

## Our learning journey

With an explorative approach, and through actively designing, conducting and observing the students' processes, we have experienced an exciting learning journey. The data underpinning our reflections are based on participatory observations and in some cases recording of students' dialogue in story circles. We have not conducted systematic text or film analysis and the stories included as examples are chosen through purposeful sampling (Johansen et. al, 2006) to illustrate themes we want to highlight.

The main focus of our analysis has been the criteria for the personal professional story described above: i) students' personal engagement, ii) evaluating references to theory and iii) the use of digital storytelling tools and multimodal effects.

The public health unit of "Idrett, friluftsliv og helse" represents a cooperative venture between the Faculty of Health Sciences and the Faculty of Education and International Studies at Oslo University College. The first two years of the Bachelor programme are mainly devoted to the development of the students' athletic skills, and for most participating students this reflects their primary interest. In the third year, however, they have the opportunity to choose between qualifying as a teacher in sports and gymnastics and qualifying as a health worker.

The students choosing the public health unit meet professional challenges that are different in many ways from what they are used to. Not only do they need to modify their personal identity from that of a qualified athlete to that of a therapist, which implies involving themselves personally in their work. They also need to realise the importance of being aware of situations where it is vital that they show a *professional identity*, including listening actively and being aware of their own feelings and reactions. As agents of health promotion, which is different from care, understanding their own learning processes is key to understanding that of their future clients.

The number of students varies from one year to another: fifteen in the first cycle described below and eight in the second. Nine students will attend the third cycle. The second author is responsible for organising and teaching the unit and the first author, as project leader for digital storytelling at Oslo University College (OUC), is active participant in the processes described and discussed below.

Using a digital storytelling approach to learning inevitably raises the issue of process vs product. We see a close relation between the two dimensions. In the first phase, where students reflect, extract and produce their story, the main focus is on conducting a productive process. In the next phase the stories, as products, are shared with fellow students and teachers as triggers for discussions in a new knowledge creating process. The quality of the products, therefore, influences this second process. In addition, without claiming to be able to prove this, we believe that the realisation that a product is expected and will be shared influences the production process in a positive way and motivates the students to seek to understand the meaning and implication of their experiences.

In the following sections we describe and discuss two cycles of this learning journey and how a more systematic approach to the third group of students has emerged from these experiences. For each cycle we will describe the process employed and the students' products before providing some reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of the approach.

## Cycle 1 (2007/08): The Pioneers

Process: In a pre-practice lecture on reflection and experiential learning students were introduced to Kolb's model which discusses four steps in a learning process based on experience: 1) Experience 2) Reflective observation 3) Abstraction/generalisation 3) Active experimenting (Kolb, 1984). Students were asked, during their work practice, to pick an experience with potential for learning and prepare a digital story, including taking pictures. Building on McDrury & Altero (2002) we developed a set of criteria to guide the students in their selection of learning experiences, namely that it might be something that: i) puzzled them and challenged their pre-comprehension; ii) they wanted to find out more about; and iii) they could find relevant theoretical references to in the curriculum to support the emergence of new perspectives. In the same pre-practice workshop the students were shown examples of digital stories and introduced to some basic principles of using images. After the practice period, returning with pictures and a draft story they attended a production workshop where they developed their stories through peer feedback. In this workshop they were also guided by two experienced media students in their multimodal production process.

As an attempt at presenting them with some alternative dramaturgic guidelines we stressed the steps in Kolb's circle. As an alternative to the classical critical question or conflict we introduced the concept of a "pivotal question" and reminded them of the need for a clear message and awareness of their target audience. In this context their target audience was fellow students and teachers, but stressing this point was also meant as a general tool to help them identify the message and develop a story with a purpose.

Products: Ten stories were produced with varied themes and quality. We provide a link to Cecilia's story (with her permission). She has secured permission from participants pictured in her story to publish it. Note that English subtitles have been added by us.

Link to story Cecilia's story:

[http://home.hio.no/dighist/filmer\\_engelsk/engfinnerud.wmv](http://home.hio.no/dighist/filmer_engelsk/engfinnerud.wmv)

Cecilia's story describes her practice in an activity centre where various groups, in her case two groups of elderly people, spend a day taking part in a training and social programme.

Cecilia shares a personal learning experience which seems to be a turning point for her. She describes how she developed a new and more balanced view on becoming old. She was surprised by the diversity in the elderly population, and by realising that old people may be a resource in a community and not only a burden. Through Cecilia's meeting with two different groups of seniors the story also points to general issues concerning the elderly in society and implies a change of attitude and reflection about her professional role. Through her realisation that working with people was more meaningful than she previously thought, these reflections form an important contribution to Cecilia's *professional identity*.

Among the multimodal effects used in the story we see a conscious use of contrast in text and images. She uses her own colour photos from one group, showing smiling resourceful elderly people taking part in out- and indoors activities, while the group of less healthy are represented by her own drawings. In addition to the contrasting effect the lack of pictures from this group also reveals a conscious ethical choice. Through opening pictures from beautiful winter scenarios accompanied by tranquil flute and guitar music she communicates a positive atmosphere, the lively conversation and laughter in the background illustrates the positive mood in the healthy group. The quality in her voice and the inclusion of images of herself in the story re-emphasises

her personal presence. Cecilia thus becomes participator through voice and images, even though she is spectator in the text.

### **Critical reflections on cycle 1:**

Without having conducted a systematic evaluation process we did observe that most students expressed satisfaction with the experience. We found the narrative approach and the production process promising enough to want to develop it further with the next cycle of students.

The importance of the process of writing, sharing, feedback and rewriting as success factor that we had previously observed was confirmed. In addition, through the introduction of Kolb, we stressed the connection to formal knowledge and theory, but the students only sporadically included this dimension in their products.

The technical challenges were smaller than we might have expected, but it also became obvious that the quality of sound, both in reading the text and adding sound effects, is not a trivial factor.

We have chosen the term “pioneers” in describing this first cycle to emphasise that the students and ourselves felt we were pioneering new ground. This was reflected also in the lack of detail (as we now see it) in terms of the task guidelines and marking criteria. We introduced the term personal professional story without a clear description of what this implied apart from stressing the reference to theory, and, lacking relevant examples, we showed them stories based on personal life experiences. Assessment criteria were vague to the degree that the only real measure was that a story was produced.

Thus, in reflecting on our experiences in cycle one, the priorities for changes in cycle two were the need for i) clearer task guidelines, ii) assessment criteria and iii) guidance on dramaturgic effects. Elements continued from cycle 1 were the writing process with peer feedback and the inclusion of references to theory.

### **Cycle 2 (2008/2009): The pathfinders**

Process: The students in 2008/09 were introduced to digital storytelling and narrative writing early in the year and they produced two digital stories. In the autumn term, as a training task, they produced a story based on a one-day observation visit to a centre for elderly people and a one-day visit to groups working with lifestyle redesigning and gymnastic exercise. Instead of a production workshop led by media students the students in this cycle, for practical reasons, were given a two hour lesson introducing the technical use of Windows Moviemaker, without any focus on multimodal texts or poetic expression.

Based on these experiences the students were involved in planning the production process related to their main four week practice in the spring term, and this included their involvement in developing assessment criteria. In reply to their expressed wish, support and feedback were constrained to *text development*. They claimed the challenge was to express their message in a short narrative, and not on “technical things”.

For practical reasons only three of the eight students took part in a half-day workshop after their practice period, which included writing and giving each other feedback. In this workshop we used free flow writing as a creative technique. The students not attending the workshop were given a “cookbook”

from the second author describing a process of free flow writing, mutual feedback and rewriting.

As a result of the first cycle of our learning journey the concept “professional identity” had emerged as an important dimension in the personal professional story. Building on our experience from the pioneers we wanted to clarify the task more closely and make sure it was reflected in the assessment criteria. The refined task description consisted of the following points: i) describe the institution, its ideology and the specific tasks you were involved in; ii) choose one specific incident and describe what happened and how it made you feel; iii) relate this incident to how the underlying theme is discussed in your textbooks; and iv) share the implications for your professional identity as a future health worker.

The text should consist of 300-400 words. Images should be associated with the text and/or strengthen the effect of the text, be of good quality and give a holistic impression. Sound should consist of a clear voice-over in a quiet tempo, and other sound effects should be suited to images and voice-over.

Products: Eight stories were produced after the main practice, one from each student, and we provide a link to Mona’s story (with her permission). Mona’s story was an important catalyst in our own learning process. She was one of the students we followed closely in the writing process. She arrived at the writing workshop without having decided what event to focus on. During the process of free flow writing, reading and feedback from her peers and us, she decided to describe and reflect on an incident that she initially felt embarrassed about. It included a client who had an “accident” in the lavatory and turned up for weighing accompanied by an unpleasant smell that in other circumstances would have made her react strongly.

Link to Mona’s story:

[http://home.hio.no/dighist/filmer/minne\\_for\\_livet\\_mona.wmv](http://home.hio.no/dighist/filmer/minne_for_livet_mona.wmv)

Link to an English translation of Mona’s text:

[http://home.hio.no/dighist/filmer\\_engelsk/memory\\_for\\_life\\_mona.pdf](http://home.hio.no/dighist/filmer_engelsk/memory_for_life_mona.pdf)

Mona’s story describes her four weeks practical studies in a health and nutrition clinic called “4M: meals, movement, medicine, mastery”. The patients suffer from obesity, and her job was to weigh patients and motivate them for regular exercise. True to the task given by us she describes both the clinic and her functions there before describing the “memory for life” which is the title of her story.

After our involvement in Mona’s learning process we were somewhat surprised that her reflective work was only vaguely mirrored in the finished product, apart from the fact that she chose this instead of other, less painful, incidents for her story. We observe that the turning point in the story, her struggle with her reflexes in confrontation with the smell is almost drowned in facts and her reflections on professionalism are not elaborated. In hindsight it is easy to see how this is a result of her being loyal to our expectations and the assessment criteria.

### **Critical reflections on cycle 2:**

We observed that the free flow writing and feedback session helped the students both choose a focus and develop their reflections. For instance Mona remarked that the term “professional” had not carried any meaning for her earlier. Students also indicated that the text developing process including peer collaboration was exciting, and one of them, referring to the perceived support and interest of her peers in the feedback process and the value of learning to



express herself accurately, said: “I would have loved it if all our writing assignments could be done this way”.

The final results, however, demonstrate that there is still a challenge in stimulating students to provide more in-depth reflections. In addition, our overambitious agenda regarding the content and a lack of attention to multimodal dimensions resulted in the production of a number of “reports” rather than stories.

In hindsight we also find that we probably too easily accepted the students’ dismissal of the need for production support and advice on the use of multimodal effects. In spite of their perceived confidence in handling Windows Moviemaker and digital cameras most students would have benefitted from guidance in the conscious use of multimodal effects in expression of personal reflections.

### Moving into Cycle 3 – digital storytellers?

As we now design tasks and frames for the students in cycle three we want to make a more explicit move from reporting to reflecting. Figure 1 represents our learning journey through two cycles and the planning of a third cycle. It summarises the aspects of the personal professional story: the task given to trigger the reflective process, the relationship to the science dimension and the approach to multimodality in the process.

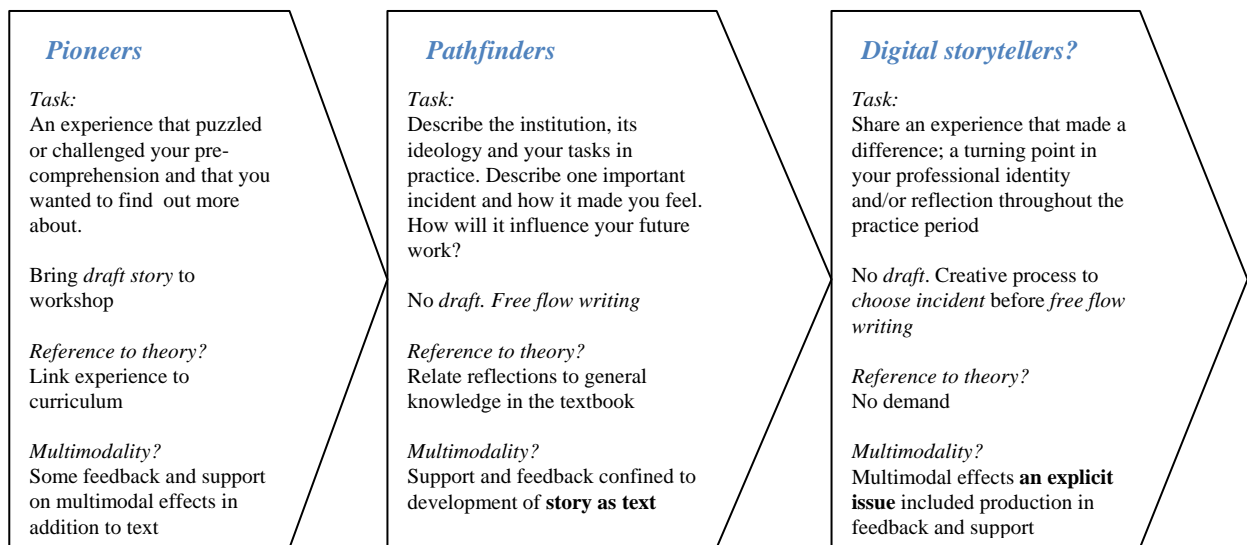


Fig. 1 Three cycles in our learning journey

Rather than encouraging students to capture the *whole story* of the practice period, including description of the institution and reference to theory, we will use creative techniques to help students select the *experience with the greatest potential to make a difference in developing their professional identity*. We will encourage students to look for a climax or turning point but will also be open to continuous reflection throughout the practice period as in the case of Cecilia’s story. In both cases the experience may be recognised by a perception of a turning point or a conflict of values or understanding. It will probably also include an experience of challenge combined with successful coping, described as *flow*, or a situation of unsolved conflict. In response to theories of mentalizing discussed above we ask students to choose incidents where their own actions play an active part in the plot. Most importantly we have realised that the strength of a digital story for exploring professional identity lies in the focus on personal learning and emotions, and accordingly

there will be no demand for theoretical references in the stories. References to theory and more general issues related to each story are instead a part of the process where stories are shared and discussed with peers and teachers.

As discussed above we believe the learning experience both on behalf of the student producing the story and the peers in the discussion following the sharing of stories benefit from good quality stories. Process writing and story circles take time, and as we believe this time is justified to engage personal reflections we need to include enough time. Given that the power of a digital story, both as product and process, lies in the combination of personal voice, narrative and multimodality we also need to strengthen the focus on development of storyboards and the conscious use of artistic effects.

### **Our reflections: themes, issues and dilemmas.**

Through two cycles of scaffolding students' production of practice stories as a tool for reflective learning we have gradually developed a better foundation for what we have called a personal professional story: moving away from including references to theory and back to building on the values of the personal narrative. Above all we believe there is a need to use radically new methods to lift students' learning and reflection beyond a rational and scientific mindset and to scaffold students in engaging other dimensions of the learning process. In our reflections below we draw on the totality of our experiences, including examples of stories not demonstrated above.

### **The poetic qualities of digital storytelling in reflective learning**

A personal digital story is an example of what Bjerknes & Bjørk (1994, p. 109), building on Britton et al. (1975), calls *poetic* writing. Based on studies of writing in schools these authors describe the functions of reflective writing on a continuum (ibid., p. 81) all starting from the expressive dimension which is an utterance that "stays close to the speaker". As these authors continue, expressive writing should remain as free as possible from outside demands, either that of a task or of an audience. When we, for different purposes, want to communicate thoughts and ideas to our surroundings we move away from the personal, expressive function and the authors describe this move in two directions: towards transactional writing which is the "language to get things done: to inform, to advise, persuade or instruct" and towards poetic writing which uses language as "an art medium; a verbal construct, an 'object' made out of language" (ibid., p. 90).

There are several reasons that the notion of a poetic approach appeals to us in our search for tools for reflection. It alludes to arts and literature in a broader sense and thus contributes by widening the frames for what kind of knowledge and knowledge representations are relevant in education. Literature provides a language to express personal reflections and emotional dimensions in the learning processes. In addition, poetry represents a particular style of fiction writing, often concise and rich in metaphor that in many ways resembles a digital story. We see the three dimensions described above, a *creative* process towards a *multimodal narrative*, as a way to concretise the notion of poetic reflection.

Communication research has long recognised storytelling as important in the construction of identities, relationships and communities (Polkinghorne, 1988, McEwan & Egan, 1995, Hull, 2006). Katriel (2008) suggests that storytelling may serve as *an important meaning-making mechanism ... serving to integrate the self by creating a life story that is embedded within the culturally shared understanding of what constitutes continuous, reasonable, proper, and worthwhile life trajectories* (ibid.). In our

understanding, our students' shift in personal and professional identity from that of athlete to health worker is an example of a transition in their life trajectories discussed through working on the narrative.

As described earlier we also see creativity as a quality that can be learned and prompted by the conscious use of tools and processes. Working in a creative mode and a poetic form may bring out reflections and associations that are not relevant in an analytic-rationalistic mode (Kaufmann, 2006). There is also a dimension of energy involved in creative work as described by the concept of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Mona's story is an example of this as her strong emotional engagement in the incident, both as challenge and success, contributed to her "discovery" of the concept of professional in relation to herself.

### **Identity and voice – aspects of mentalizing**

We have described the challenges facing the students in developing a health worker identity and how we believe digital storytelling may be a useful tool in this process of identifying and investigating the stories that are most vital in constructing a professional role. After four weeks of practical work and production of a digital story about her experiences one of the students said: *"At the end of the practice I felt mature and professional. Now I am ready to work with health issues and people!"* Her new way of understanding laid the groundwork for behaving as a health worker, and the development of self- and professional identity.

As observed in Mona's story her personal narrative, both in the finished product and even more so in the process of developing the story, was instrumental in building her *professional* identity. The realisation that professional, among other things, means doing what is required in the situation to help preserve the dignity and self respect of a client and suppressing immediate personal impulses, grew out of her discussion of possible meanings and implications of her experience in a group of her peers.

A powerful dimension in the stories we tell about ourselves is the personal voice, both the physical voice, recording the story, and the more abstract notion of voice as in having something important to say. Hardy (2005) claims that *"a story with the sense of value taken out would simply be a list of events"*, and according to Elbow (1981) a text which doesn't "want" anything lacks voice. One aspect of giving voice to identity, personal and/or professional, is the discussion of possible interpretations of the meaning and implications of experiences. This meaning making process is institutionalised in the story circle (Lambert, 2009, p. 86). Mona's story exemplifies mentalizing in the way she distinguishes between the personal self and the professional self and we believe her reflection contributes to her development of professional identity. The capacity to reflect on the various meanings of mental states depends on the health worker's sense of sincerity. In the writing and feedback session she said: *"Earlier I would have thrown up from the stench, but now I understood I had to behave professionally. I put my personal reactions aside and focused on the professionalism of my behaviour."*

### **Written or multimodal text – artistic effects**

We can see how we were happy to comply with the students' wish to focus on developing the *written text* at the expense of working with images and other artistic effects, and we still think working with the story in words is an important part of the learning process. On the other hand one of the most important learning outcomes of our own learning journey is that we may have

underestimated the value of multimodality, not only in the communicational qualities of the finished product but also as tools of expression that enrich the process for the learner.

A poetic expression implies trying to communicate the pieces that are not so easily expressed in words, written or oral, the feelings and atmosphere (Jamissen, 2009), and what better way to do so than by the use of images and music in addition to a conscious focus on words and rhythm in a spoken text. In addition *“Text and images ... complement each other. Image may concretize parts of the text or a text may give more precise information. ... Text and image may also tell separate stories which then may be read as comments on each other”* (Tønnesen, 2007, p. 84). The multimodal is like a woven fabric with different threads.

Development of a systematic approach to working with multimodal effects and picture quality, therefore, is an important area of improvement in designing a conceptual frame and a process for the personal professional story and a challenge that raises instructional issues with students who are not primarily media students. Both pioneers and pathfinders were insufficiently briefed in the use of semiotic resources and modalities and how to integrate these in making and communicating meaning. We find frequent incidents of redundancy (Løvland 2007), for instance where Mona shows a random flight of stairs as she speaks the word stairs. We also see frequent use of symbols like “smilies” accompanying statements like “I felt good” and big question marks accompanying “I was uncertain what to do”. According to Løvland (2010:3), citing Bergstöm (2004:263), a strong redundancy often entails “overcommunication” and the multimodal interaction may be experienced, at least among adults, as irritating, uninteresting and pacifying. In contrast a digital story with a high degree of functional specialisation (Løvland 2007) of images, voice, sound and music, intentionally building the multimodal layers (Lambert 2009), is often experienced as rich in terms of content and open for interpretations by the viewer. For instance Cecilia never expresses in words that the scenery was beautiful or that the elderly people were in a good mood.

Another quality in Cecilia’s story is her conscious use of personal pictures and sketches. We have encouraged both pioneers and pathfinders to avoid downloading thematic images from the internet as we find that these images often come through as clichés and the stories are experienced as lacking in coherence.

### **Quality in process or in product – or both?**

Nilsson (2008) introduces a dichotomy between the digital storytelling process and the products that come out of it. In our experience both dimensions are important. In addition to the sharing of stories as triggers for discussion described above we have also observed the students’ pride in their products in other contexts. We have for instance observed students giving an introductory speech to new students sharing their digital stories with pride, and seen how the stories worked well for the audience.

The issue of product quality has become increasingly compelling to us. On the one hand there is the recurring experience that the quality of the process is not reflected in the quality of the product, not only as a multimodal production but also as a reflective text. In addition we want to investigate if greater emphasis on the artistic quality of the products may contribute to more in-depth reflection in the process and thus to more conscious professional identities in students.

Issues that need to be considered include when and how to introduce digital storytelling, how to design assignments, what level and type of support is

required and how to assess digital stories. In addition to the focus on quality and effect of multimodal texts, producing and sharing digital stories raise both legal and ethical issues concerning copyright and permission to publish. The biggest issue has been negotiating time. In addition to being a technical issue involving schedules and colleagues' time it also reflects differences in acceptance of alternative ways of knowing and learning differing from the traditional scientific approach. To make the most of the potential of digital storytelling for personal learning we need to accept that creative processes not only take time but also involve conscious use of creative techniques. Tasks like free-flow writing encourage students to work in a different way: writing without censorship, reflection in and reflection after the experience, reconstructing the written piece and letting peers assess (Mc Drury & Altero, 2002).

### **Conclusion – from rational analytic reporters to digital storytellers**

We have experienced that digital storytelling has the potential to scaffold students' reflection on experience from practice towards developing professional identity. Students have expressed satisfaction with the opportunity to share their experiences in a reflective narrative rather than a rational-analytic report.

Peer support and feedback during writing seems to be an important part of the learning process. Stories are developed in interaction between the owner of the experience and his or her peers through listening and feedback over several iterations. The stories are elaborated in a process where both storyteller and listeners are involved in interpretations and construction of meaning. What we have experienced is that *the magic in the story circle works both ways*, and we believe this accounts for some of the potential for learning. I create a story and share it with my fellow students and in doing so I become involved in both the content and the social relationship.

As educators we are still on a learning path. In our search for the *personal-professional story* we will continue to build on the magic of the story circle and return to focus on the personal learning experience. We have seen that the ambition to combine the art and science dimension, by including a demand for reference to theory in the personal story, probably was a wrong track. We find the main characteristics of a personal professional story do not differ substantially from those of a traditional personal story and our workshop design will build on the seven steps described by Lambert (2009, p. 29-47). "Poetic reflection", concretised by the terms *narrative* and *creative* approach to a *multimodal text*, forms a promising framework for working with the art dimension of a professional identity.

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<sup>i</sup> Throughout the article we will use the American spelling of this concept

<sup>ii</sup> Presentation given at Oslo University College on February 11<sup>th</sup> 2010

<sup>iii</sup> The seven principles outlined by the CDS are: i) a point of view, ii) a dramatic question, iii) emotional content iv) the gift of your voice, v) the power of the soundtrack, vi) economy, vii) pacing

<sup>iv</sup> i) owning your insights, ii) owning your emotions, iii) finding the moment, iv) seeing your story, v) hearing your story, vi) assembling your story, vii) sharing your story

<sup>v</sup> In this article we discuss the value of multimodal effects in the students' narratives as opposed to narrative as written text. We use the term effects here as in "artistic effects" referring not to outcome but to multimodal means of meaning making and expression.