



# The elephant in the room: Tensions between normative research and an ethics of care for digital storytelling in higher education

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**Background:** Digital storytelling (DST) has been embraced in classrooms around the world as a way to unpack issues of identity and positionality which are critical for any pedagogy concerned with social justice. However, adopting this process-orientated practice into higher education raises ethical concerns especially in relation to the normative approach to traditional research.

**Objectives:** The objective of this article was to explore the ethical concerns surrounding DST when used as a pedagogy and to determine if an 'ethics of care' approach could help to mitigate the ethical dilemmas experienced by teachers and researchers alike.

**Method:** A single case study, narratives, illustrations and reflections from a final-year arts education project were used to explore some of the ethical issues we encountered when employing DST as a pedagogy and in educational research.

**Results:** The results of this reflection show that special attention needs to be paid to the following issues: the collection and interpretation of data, how anonymity and confidentiality are ensured in DST, who owns the stories, how sampling is conducted and how consent is sought and, finally, how the tenant of 'do no harm' is adhered to in DST.

**Conclusion:** We argue that traditional deontological approaches to ethics are not able to fully respond to the complex, nuanced and ongoing concerns posed by DST projects. We adopt Joan Tronto's Ethic of Care to argue that ethical practice cannot be contained in codes of conduct alone and cannot simply be signed off on by institutional review boards, but is rather a matter of a daily personal, professional and political caring practice.

**Keywords:** Digital storytelling; Ethics; Ethics of care; Teacher education; Teaching with technology.

## Introduction

Digital storytelling (DST) has found its way 'into every corner of higher education' (Lambert 2017:vi) because of its potential to empower students through personal reflection, growth, and the development of new multimodal literacies. DST has also found a niche as a qualitative research methodology, notably in health sciences and health education (Gubrium, Hill & Flicker 2014; Haigh 2017; Hardy 2017; Hill 2014), but also in our own discipline of teacher education (Condy et al. 2012; Gachago 2015; Gachago et al. 2013; Livingston 2014; Stewart & Ivala 2017; Thomson Long & Hall 2017).

There are many definitions of DST, reflecting its diverse applications, but for the purposes of this study we follow that of StoryCenter,<sup>1</sup> founders of the specific flavour of personal DST that is widely adopted in higher education contexts (Hessler & Lambert 2017). DST here is defined as the process of creating a personal narrative that documents culturally and historically embedded lived experience, by combining voice, sound and images into a short video, developed by non-professionals with non-professional tools, during a structured workshop (Lambert 2010; Reed & Hill 2012). We have found this approach particularly useful as a pedagogical tool to unpack issues around students' identity and positionality and to start difficult conversations in the classroom around race, gender and class (Benmayor 2008). Sharing personal narratives on these issues often elicits strong emotional responses; many of our students, given South Africa's troubled history and present, have suffered traumatic experiences and these can surface when students bring their personal stories into the classroom. Not every DST project is equally charged, especially when the process is adapted to support content-based

1. <https://www.storycenter.org>

**Read online:**

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

storytelling, but we have encountered these responses often enough to warrant an engagement with the ethical implications.

Our position is further complicated by the fact that in addition to being educators, we are also researchers, and so our DST work has combined pedagogical and research agendas: we have wanted not only to use this tool, but also to study (and hopefully improve) its application. Those in our position have written about ethical dilemmas when using DST as a pedagogical practice before (see for example Gachago & Sykes 2017; Sykes & Gachago 2018). However, in this article we will focus on the ethics of using DST as a research methodology.

Research involving humans is highly regulated, to protect participants from varieties of harm, and also to protect universities and other communities of science from the potential expense and damage of litigation (Posel & Ross 2014). Traditionally, the approach to ethics in an educational setting is normative and deontological: decisions are guided by a set of rules or code of ethics (Archer & Prinsloo 2017; Sevenhuijsen 2003). As researchers we have followed all the established bureaucratic routines for obtaining ethical clearance, but we are increasingly aware of the limitations of this approach. As Posel and Ross (2014) argue:

The trend towards more intense regulation does not guarantee a correspondingly full or thoughtful debate about questions of research ethics. Often, the regulatory concerns are more technical than ethically substantive ... the format of review can readily induce a 'tick-box' mentality: a preoccupation with filling the forms correctly, rather than attending to the challenging ethical issues – often unruly and abidingly ambiguous, their complexities resistant to simple and neat formal assurances. (p. 3)

Although StoryCenter offers guidelines for an ethical practice of DST, this is an area that is currently under-researched, specifically in higher education and when using these stories as research data (De Jager et al. 2017; Rieger et al. 2018). A recently published anthology on DST in higher education features only one chapter on ethics (Gachago & Sykes 2017), although some chapters do refer to ethical challenges when introducing DST into teaching, research or community engagement (Jamissen et al. 2017).

In this article, we will first introduce DST as a research practice before discussing the StoryCenter guidelines and how higher education institutions around the world have adopted and adapted these. After describing our own context, including the case study methodology of this study, we will unpack some of the issues we encountered in our practice (with a particular focus on the collection of data, the anonymising of that data, the manner in which the participants are sampled, confidentiality and their right to give and withdraw consent).

Finally, we will suggest a different approach to ethics framed by Joan Tronto's Ethic of Care framework (1993, 2001, 2013), which allows for a more practice-based, contextual, relational approach to negotiating ethical dilemmas.

## Ethical digital storytelling practices from StoryCenter to higher education

StoryCenter has attempted to move beyond generalised ethics to create situated guidelines for the ethical practice of DST. Their guidelines stress the well-being of storytellers and the importance of ongoing consent, as well as ethical knowledge production and ownership, cultural sensitivity and contextual awareness, and ethical dissemination of digital stories (StoryCenter 2018). The guidelines have been adopted and adapted widely to suit different contexts, such as research into gender-based violence and human rights (Silence Speaks<sup>2</sup>), health (PatientVoices<sup>3</sup>) or aging (Silver Stories<sup>4</sup>).

However, there has been little adoption of these guidelines into higher education. Ethical guidelines for storytelling research, in both oral and digital forms, have mostly grown from the lessons learnt in university history departments. Oral historians have long known about the ethical dilemmas and dangers inherent in collecting personal stories and were the first to put ethical practices in place. At the heart of ethical behaviour in collecting oral histories is informed consent, mitigation of harm and the right to withdrawal (Concordia University 2018). Specific interviewer behaviours have also received ethical discussion, such as dealing with cultural sensitivities and responding to emotional reactions by storytellers.

The use of images in DST complicates the issue: images may reveal identities of storytellers and others, there may be issues of copyright and ownership, and some images may be particularly disturbing to view, raising the possibility of harm to an audience. In conventional filmmaking the rights to use a person's image will often be granted using a standard release form which assigns extremely broad or even unlimited rights without time limitation (Rabiger 2004:253–254); this is legally safe but may not meet the higher ethical expectations of DST projects.

Internationally, institutions have started developing specific ethical practice guidelines for DST: the University of Wollongong<sup>5</sup> (Australia), the University of Toronto<sup>6</sup> (Canada) and the University of Brighton<sup>7</sup> (United Kingdom), for example, have placed caveats or offer training on their websites regarding ethical behaviour in DST. However, our literature review suggests that these guidelines often draw only from two specific disciplines, oral history and photography and filmmaking (Concordia University 2018; Jessee 2011; Prager 2017), tend to engage only certain ethical aspects of DST and are not as holistically concerned with the well-being of the storyteller as those of StoryCenter.

2. <https://www.storycenter.org/silence-speaks/>

3. <https://www.patientvoices.org.uk/>

4. <http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/projects/silver-stories/silver-stories-home>.

5. <https://uow.libguides.com/c.php?g=622444&p=4335982>.

6. <http://www.newcollege.utoronto.ca/event/new-media-digital-storytelling-in-the-classroom/>.

7. [http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/196448/SS-Guide-2015.pdf](http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/196448/SS-Guide-2015.pdf).

## DST in the South African higher education context: Introducing a case study

This is a conceptual article, born from an attempt to narrate and theorise our own practice and its ethics. We use a single case study and attempt to narrate our experiences to allow for a systematic and thoughtful reflection (McDonough & McDonough 1997; Stenhouse 1988:50). We aim to bring to life the ethical conundrums we have encountered when *doing* research on DST, long after ethical clearance was given.

In 2013, we ran a voluntary, non-assessed project in pre-service teacher education, aimed at exploring how autobiographical learning, using DST, could be applied as a tool for improving students' ability to engage in art appreciation. The project, which students could include in their fourth-year student portfolios, invited students to make digital stories that linked personal narratives to contemporary artwork.

We facilitated the process of creating the digital stories and conducted the subsequent narrative analysis (Clandinin & Connelly 1994; Clandinin & Rosiek 2007) of students' stories and reflective writings. We followed the ethical procedures prescribed by the faculty ethics committee: completing a form that included an abstract of the project, describing sampling procedures and describing how the data would be collected. We attached copies of the data collection instruments, explained how data was to be kept confidential and participants' anonymity ensured, and addressed questions about risk and harm that needed to be addressed.

After ethical clearance was granted, the project was introduced to a group of students. One of these students was Nadine, a young artist who volunteered to participate as part of her fourth-year final exhibition. Nadine was a gifted artist and pre-service teacher who fully embraced the DST process. In her digital story, she revealed that she had been sexually abused as a child. Nadine's illustrations, reflections on the process of developing her digital story and Candice's and Daniela's contemplations on using this and other stories for their research provide rich insight into the ethical complexities of using DST as research data:

First ... I decided on the personal story I wanted to share through the digital story. Then I decided to use the South African artwork, *Heathen Wet Lip* by Alan Alborough [see Figure 1] to help to tell my story through connecting it to the artwork. The artwork consists of elephant ears hanging from pillars and elephant feet on a metal table. This led me to the main theme under which I was going to write my digital story – elephants. I decided to write my story around idioms consistent of the word 'elephant', but also idioms I could make applicable to my story about abuse. (Extract from Nadine's reflective essay)

The researcher was particularly touched by Nadine's beautifully drawn artwork (see Figures 2–4), poetically

inspired prose and the sensitive manner in which she spoke about a deeply traumatic event from her childhood. Yet Nadine's story and the ethical dilemmas it raised have haunted us ever since. It is for this reason that we chose Nadine's story, exemplary of many other cases that we have encountered (Yin 1994, 2009).

## Four ethical dilemmas in the practice of DST research

In this section we use vignettes and reflections by Nadine and other authors to discuss ethical dilemmas, that became apparent long after ethical clearance for the study had been granted, particularly in four identified areas of our research practice: the collection and interpretation of data, anonymity and confidentiality, sampling and consent, and the adage of 'do no harm'.



Source: ArtThrob, n.d., *São Paulo Bienal opens on October 2*, viewed n.d., from <https://arthrob.co.za/oct98/news.htm>

FIGURE 1: Heathen Wet Lip installation by Alan Alborough.

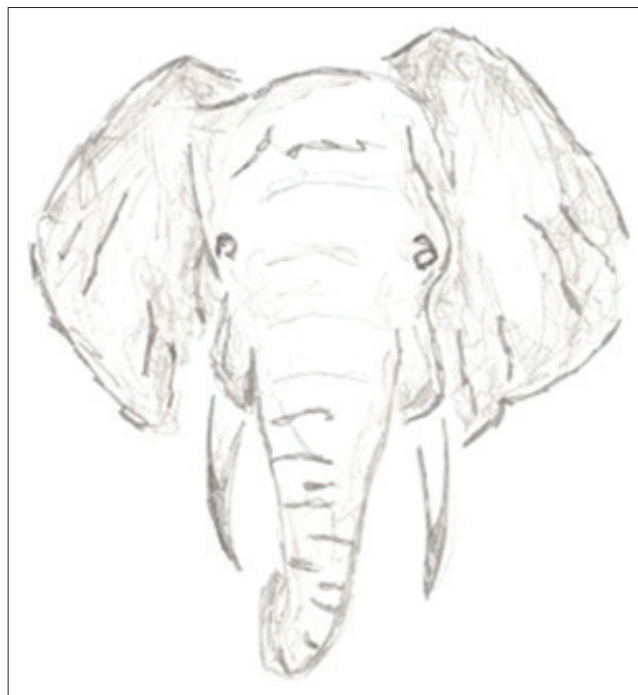
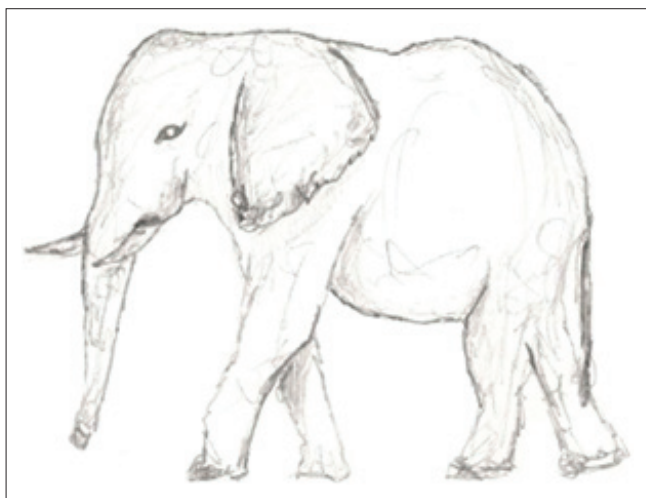


FIGURE 2: Illustration from Nadine's digital story.



**FIGURE 3:** Portrait of a young student Nadine used for her digital story.



**FIGURE 4:** Illustration from Nadine's digital story.

### Collection and interpretation of data

I open the folder on my computer entitled 'Art appreciation DST data' and scroll through the video clips until I come to Nadine's story. I am still uncomfortable, four years later, listening to the voice emanating from the screen: 'Some nights my memories are a white elephant, the memories of abuse a nuisance, an expensive burden I have to carry with me ... my loneliness is an echo that floats to the moon gazing from above ... memories controlling my thoughts like a puppet master ... what happened to me is an elephant in the room of society and watery tears paint my face as memories burn my thoughts'. I realise that I used Nadine's pain as data. (Extract from research study)

An assumption in research is that data should be collected using validated or reliable instruments. Most ethics

applications require that one provides an example of the instruments that one will be using (CPUT 2011, 2016). But is it possible to validate or ensure that digital story data – particularly when a story is subjective, deeply personal and emotional – is reliable? Can intensely personal stories be ethically viewed as data? How can data be collected ethically without the storyteller becoming a mere participant and the story an artefact? When and how does this data move from a personal sharing of stories space into a research space? And in what ways is it ethical to represent and write about this data?

Narrative inquiry has engaged with alternative ways of ensuring validity, such as exemplarity, transparency, authenticity and trustworthiness (Campbell & Amin 2013; Kohler Riessman 2008), which can be transferred into the practice of DST. As we will argue later, inviting storytellers to co-present or co-write a paper could help in facilitating this dialogue between storyteller, researcher and the audience and allowing the storyteller to be an active part of the research process. Often DST research involves watching a digital story with the storyteller, and asking them to explain the process of decision-making in relation to story, images or sound (Jocson 2015). Nelson, Hull and Roche-Smith (2008:437) stress the need to make apparent the necessity and potentials of combining detailed analysis of new media texts themselves with careful ethnographic investigations of the intentions, interactions, and environments that foster these texts and promote their circulation in particular ways. In similar fashion, Brushwood Rose and Low (2014:38) show that unpacking the choices participants make in creating multimedia narratives can reveal a great deal about the personal, as well as sociopolitical dynamics of representation.

However, there is an added element of complexity when dealing with DST: how can written text ever do justice to the magic created by a well-crafted multimodal artefact, with its unique pacing of narration, sound and movement? Innovative publications such as the multimodal online publications *Hybrid Pedagogies*<sup>8</sup> or the *Journal of Embodied Research*<sup>9</sup>, which solicits video articles of between 10 min and 20 min that document and share the results of research projects in which embodied practice is an essential part of the methodology, allow different ways of representing data and are a first step towards a more embodied and affective ethical engagement and representation of DST research.

DST raises another data collection issue: What is done with that data and the artefacts, in this case the digital stories, once the research project has been completed? Digital afterlife (Soep 2011:93) refers to maintaining or transforming digital content after the death of the person or the completion of a project, and can also be linked with the digital footprint of the person involved with creating the data (Bassett 2015:1129). What are the ethical implications of the afterlife of research data that has been posted publicly online or kept on a

8. <http://hybridpedagogy.org/>

9. <https://jer.openlibhums.org/about/submissions/>.

researcher's computer? One way to give students control over their digital products is to encourage them to create their own distribution channels (i.e. private YouTube channels); however, researchers should also regularly check in with students as to whether they are still comfortable with sharing their stories online.

### Anonymity, confidentiality and ownership

As the story progressed and the imagery of the 'elephant in the room' became explicitly linked with the hidden nature of sexual abuse in society, I noticed that many of the other participants started looking around and their eyes fell on Nadine, her voice had been recognised. One of the participants slowly raised her hand to her mouth and another one actually gasped. (Extract from research study)

There is an assumption in educational research that research participants will be granted confidentiality and that the data produced will remain anonymous. When digital stories are publicly disseminated, this is next to impossible. This is probably the greatest concern when using student stories for research: students might feel safe when sharing their stories in a story circle, and may also give consent to share their story during a class screening (Stewart 2017). However, if their stories are shown at a conference or finally published, this feeling of safety might be compromised.

On the other hand, anonymity can deprive students of the recognition of their authorship, and some argue that it is actually good ethical practice in DST to invite storytellers into the conference space to introduce their stories (Low, Brushwood Rose & Salvio 2017). Digital stories are very short (typically 2–3 min) and highly compressed, providing little background information. Inviting storytellers to co-present or to co-write (see for example Low et al. 2017) would make contextualisation of the story more authentic and affect how the audience 'reads' it. Hill (2010) asks us to:

[*resist*] simplistic and passive readings in favour of readings that encourage viewers to reveal their own stories and open themselves to raw vulnerability (comparable to that exercised by the storytellers in sharing their lives in the first place) and a form of emotional distress or confusion which makes simplistic explanations or solutions impossible. (p. 138)

How this might be realised in a traditional conference setting, where time for presentations and questions and answers is often limited to 20–30 min, is another challenge. Alternative conference formats such as longer panel discussions, workshops, or screenings followed by audience discussion are important avenues to explore.

Again, ongoing honest conversations between digital storytellers and facilitators or researchers about the risks of exposure are necessary to allow students to understand the true impact of sharing their stories with a broader audience. Stories to be screened should be carefully selected, based on a mandate to keep students safe. This might mean not showing certain stories to a larger audience, even if students give consent.

The sharing of digital stories online introduces additional complications, not only around the digital afterlife of stories and the attendant risk, but also around issues of copyright. Who owns the stories created in DST workshops? The institution? The storyteller? The researcher? The StoryCenter argues that the story should always remain with the storyteller. Some organisations negotiate 'right of use agreements' rather than copyright agreements (Concordia University 2018) to allow researchers the use and sharing of participants' stories for their research.

### Sampling and consent

Although Nadine gladly signed the consent and release forms, and was quite happy to share her story with the class and the greater research community, I, as both facilitator and researcher, couldn't help but wonder what psychological fallout could have arisen from her disclosure. The fact that I still watch her story, four years later, leaves me wondering if Nadine is ok, as I have never followed up on her wellbeing, not at the time of the writing of the story, or now, many years later. As she has left the institution, I wouldn't even know how to contact her. (Extract from research study)

An important principle of qualitative research is that sampling is purposive but also voluntary. This was the case for Nadine, but in many projects digital stories are part of formal assessment and participation is thus not voluntary. Is it ethical to include a research component in an academic DST project when students are obliged to take part for assessment? Students may opt out of making their stories available as research data – but might the blurring of boundaries between classroom project and research, especially when the researcher is also the lecturer, reduce students' confidence in their ability to say no without repercussions? What does this mean for the idea of informed consent? In addition, Stewart (2017:96) argues that students may produce stories that they think the lecturer may want to hear. It is important that students are made aware of the fact that they do not need to barter emotional content for grades. This requires an extra level of attentiveness on the part of the lecturer, who should negotiate this awareness throughout the digital story process (Stewart 2017:97).

Walker (2015) suggests that researchers consider levels of consent, allowing participants to choose a pseudonym if they wish, and to state whether or not their stories may be shared in public viewings or online. These are issues that need be discussed with students in advance, before project start, shaping the stories that would be told and the images that would be used depending on the level of sharing that is envisaged. It is important to note, that this may impact on the direction of the research.

StoryCenter stresses ethical engagement as an ongoing process rather than a 'once-off' gaining of consent. In Nadine's case, consent was a once-off action, and was never revisited. We now believe that with a story of this nature consent should be sought every time it is shown, even if it is

years later. This suggests it would be ethically responsible to withdraw a conference presentation or an article from publication if the student changes the conditions of their consent at a later stage, drastically challenging established research practices.

### Do no harm

During a public screening of digital stories, a particularly harrowing story was shown involving sexual abuse and halfway through the viewing of this story, a mother and her young son got up and left the screening space. (Extract from research study)

The final principle of research is to do no harm: that a participant will not knowingly be put in a situation that could harm them or expose them to unnecessary risk, and that the reputation and legal position of the institution must be protected (CPUT 2016). But is it possible for a facilitator (who is often both the lecturer and researcher) to mitigate the emotional harm that may arise from disclosure of personal information, especially if the only ethical training that the facilitator has received was perfunctory? Are we properly equipped to, firstly, identify the risk and, secondly, deal with the consequences of emotional fallout? What about the audience, be it students in a classroom or a conference audience? As researchers we have a responsibility to treat an audience with the same ethical sensitivity as storytellers. We have come to believe that it would be wise to supply trigger warnings at the beginning of a digital story screening that will include sensitive issues.

Finally, what of the consequences for researchers themselves? We have both experienced 'compassion fatigue', after having read through and listened to hundreds of stories of the 'everyday trauma' (Frankish 2009) our students experience. Self-awareness and reflection is essential if we are to remain compassionate and listen with open hearts; if we do not, we risk falling into the trap of 'fetishising' stories or reducing individual experiences to their role in larger collective narratives (Hampton & DeMartini 2017:252). Establishing communities of practice among those involved in DST facilitation and research, to share and unpack some of the dilemmas faced in our practice, has proven highly valuable.

## Towards an ethics of care approach to DST

For a long time I loved discussing various art pieces. I never thought I would be able to combine my love for art with my love for writing and use it to heal emotional pain. At first it was a very difficult piece of art to discuss but after thorough research the artwork became clear and it was easy to attach my personal reflection and interpretation to the knowledge I gained. (Extract from Nadine's essay)

In this article we have tried to unpack some (by no means all) of the ethical dilemmas we have encountered in our use of DST as a research methodology, to open up a discussion about the challenges of only adhering to traditional research

guidelines and processes (we recognise the importance of ethics processes, but an ethical practice must go *beyond* ethics approval). We believe DST can create a valuable space for sharing and learning about self and other, which is rare in the higher education context in which we operate. However, to continue promoting this practice we have seen the need to alert colleagues to the ethical perils they may encounter when working with the most powerful and personal forms of DST, especially when using these stories as research data.

Following political philosopher Joan Tronto's Ethic of Care approach, we believe that ethical practices come down to everyday decisions of care in caring relationships (Tronto 1993, 2001), rather than adherence to guidelines. It is in our everyday practices of caring for ourselves and others that we most need to consider and practice ethical behaviour (Tronto 2001). Tronto defines care as a complex ethical relationship, in which all participants or actors need to be involved:

A species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web. (Fisher & Tronto 1990:40 in Tronto 1993)

There can be no one person solely responsible for decision-making in a caring relationship or web of relationships such as the DST research practices discussed in this article: all parties involved should contribute to the discussion on caring, needs and how they should be met.

Tronto's five-phase model (1993, 2013) and Maio's core elements of Ethic of Care (2018) could be used as a template for engagement in the DST research process and we propose that the following moral elements and phases of this approach be considered as guidelines for how to ethically engage with DST as a research method.

The collection of DST research data, from an Ethic of Care perspective, is situation orientated (Maio 2018:57) and relies on practical and situated wisdom. Researchers are required to adhere to what Tronto (2013) calls 'Attentiveness', where the researcher suspends own judgements, where the unmet needs of the participants and is able to see the world from the perspective of the ones in need. Tronto calls this the 'caring about' phase, and it is essential that any researcher involved in the collection of DST data be attentive. Being attentive in the research process, also requires that one is responsive (Maio 2018:58). Tronto (2013) states that responsiveness is a phase of 'care receiving', where you listen to the responses of the participants being cared for or, in the case of DST, who are sharing their stories. Being attentive to the needs of the participants in your study and responding to their needs, places a burden of responsibility (Tronto 2013) on the researcher, in which one enters into the phase of 'caring for', and the researcher takes on the burden of responding to the needs of their participants.

The next phase that the researcher then enters into with their participants should be that of 'caregiving' (Tronto 2013) and it

highlights the competence of the researcher to care. As a researcher in DST, one should be competent to care, but what this entails on a technical, moral and political level, is open for discussion. This is one of the limits of an Ethic of Care though (Maio 2018:61), as this approach still places excessive demands, both technical and emotional, on the researcher (although care is shared among all participants) and also points to the often competing needs that emerge in a care relationship. The final phase in Tronto's model (2013) is that of 'caring with' or engaging in solidarity. This implies that the research process is one of collective responsibility, where both the researchers and the participants act as receivers and givers of care.

When storytelling enters higher education, the educator and researcher becomes an active participant in this process, learning from and with students and participants, through dialogue and mutual respect. It is essential that we as academics and researchers learn to navigate this terrain, not by consulting a checklist of ethical rules relating to gaining consent and 'doing no harm', and making the requisite ticks. Rather we argue that we need to see DST from a situated practice perspective as explained above, where consent is a contextual, scaffolded, ongoing and layered process and the principles of mitigating risk and harm become embedded in the project, before, during and long after the process has been completed.

This would allow us to seek guidance for the 'sometimes impossible choices between doing what is professionally required and what seems personally necessary to do as an ethical human being' (Posel & Ross 2014:5). There is a need for improvisation and flexibility, rather than rigid rules and regulations, in teaching, learning and research practices of this nature (Bliss 2017:326). We as facilitators are challenged to think on our feet – together with students and participants. If the ethics of care is to be embedded in a DST project, we will have to begin with an ethical appraisal of ourselves and our motives, as photographer Paul Weinberg (Posel & Ross 2014, emphasis added) states:

But it's not only about professional guidelines ... you actually need to take a set of values. *And you need to be quite sure of where you are, and who you are in this world ...* we have a responsibility, and that responsibility is to be human, really, finally ... It's a whole set of values that is going to have consequences and you need to be wired to them and take responsibility. (p. 252)

## Conclusion

In essence, the rules of engagement have to be continually negotiated and agreed upon, not only with regard to issues of scaffolded consent and choice, but also to those of power sharing, ownership and digital afterlife of the stories as more than data. We also need to accept that ethical quandaries sometimes 'don't resolve clearly or fully, even with the advantage of hindsight', as Posel and Ross state (2014:6).

This means that all of us, lecturers, students, and researchers, need to take responsibility for our DST projects – and to care for both ourselves and others involved in these, by actively

engaging in the phases of care ethics. Communication, negotiation, active listening and response, and witnessing are important elements in this process. Telling stories about stories, the research on DST, then becomes a caring, consensual mutual practice (Bliss 2017:329) of ethically sharing and listening, responding and acting in and beyond the higher education classroom.

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The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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This article followed all ethical standards for carrying out research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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## Data availability statement

Access to data can be sought through the authors.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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