



DIGITAL STORIES: EMPOWERING AUTISTIC STUDENTS AND VIEWING THEIR POST-SECONDARY PERSPECTIVES FROM A NEURODIVERGENT LENS



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Background

The number of Autistic students pursuing higher education is increasing at an unprecedented pace. Regrettably, the existing higher education system does not promote the flourishing of Autistic individuals. This often leaves these students struggling to feel as though they belong.

University Belonging Model

University Affiliation

- Experiences of peer acceptance, peer emotional support, social engagement with other students, external recognition from peers or friends; subjective sense of affiliation with the university.

Faculty and Staff Relations

- The interactions and experiences that individuals have with faculty and staff members at their educational institution, particularly in the context of their Autism.

University Support and Acceptance

- The extent to which a university implements EDI policies, offers support, cultivates a welcoming environment tailored to address and mitigate stigma and fosters understanding surrounding Autism, all while promoting an inclusive climate for Autistic students

"I had to 'out' myself ... to my professors at the beginning of the semester before they could actually get to know me... which was really hard as I had no time to make an impression before revealing myself as disabled."

To me, the hilarious irony of suggesting that you are defined by your compassionate understanding of others – while in the same breath implying people who are socio-emotionally different from you are inhuman – is peak NT and emblematic of my experiences in a neurotypically-dominated [campus] environment.

"I have not felt belonging on campus. I constantly struggle with my sensory issues and feel overwhelmed by crowds and layers of conversation. I know that my headphones and sunglasses, comfortable and informal clothing, body language, facial expressions and stimming are odd and I constantly try to balance being myself with being accepted. I cannot have both belonging and being myself at the same time."



As a method of evocative, multisensory data collection and knowledge mobilization, we will invite a select group of Autistic advocates to create short films (i.e., digital stories) about their experiences at Canadian postsecondary institutions

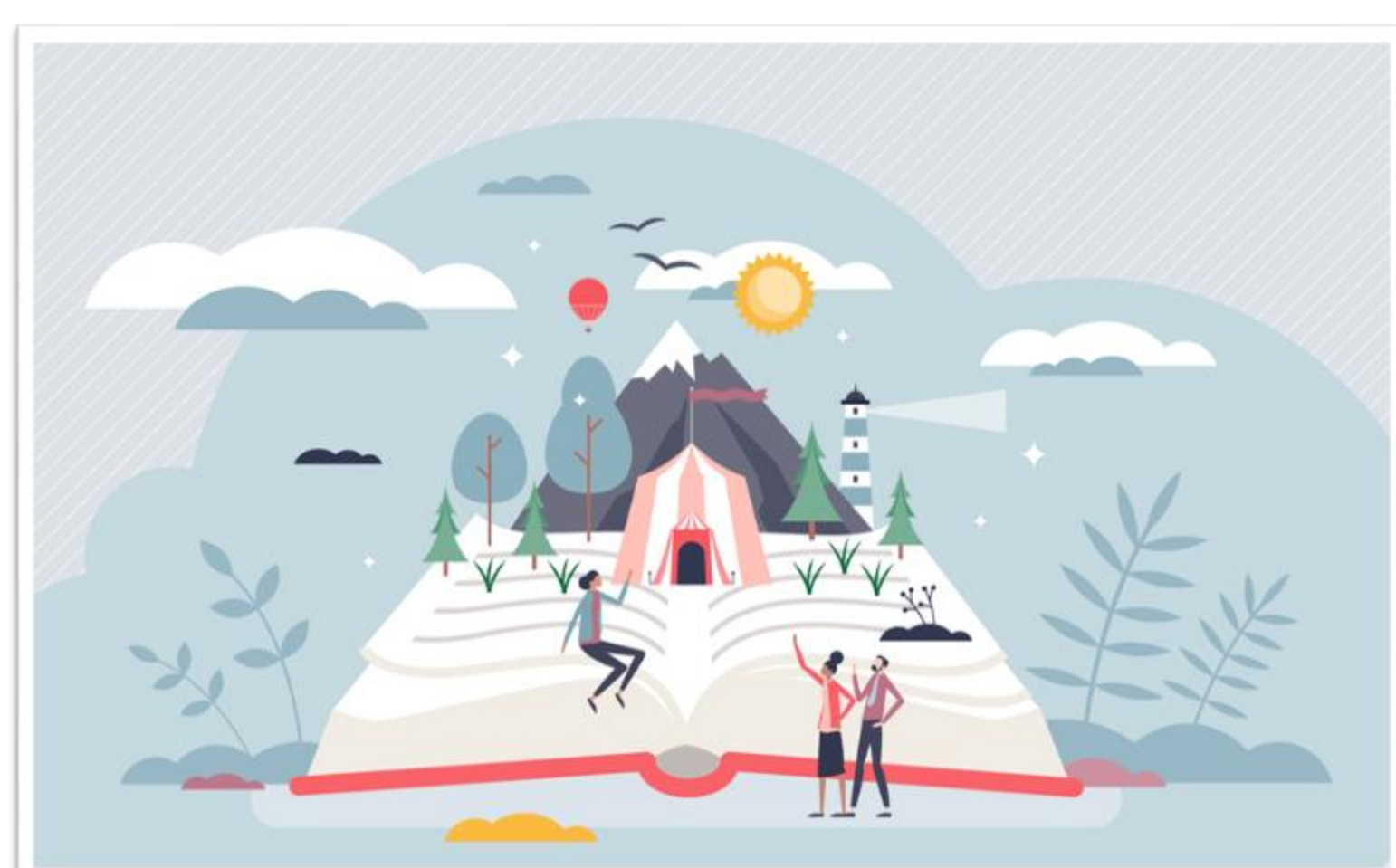


The creation of digital stories allows participants to share their lived experiences at Canadian postsecondary institutions, along with insights and messages about how institutions can make their spaces inclusive for Autistic students.



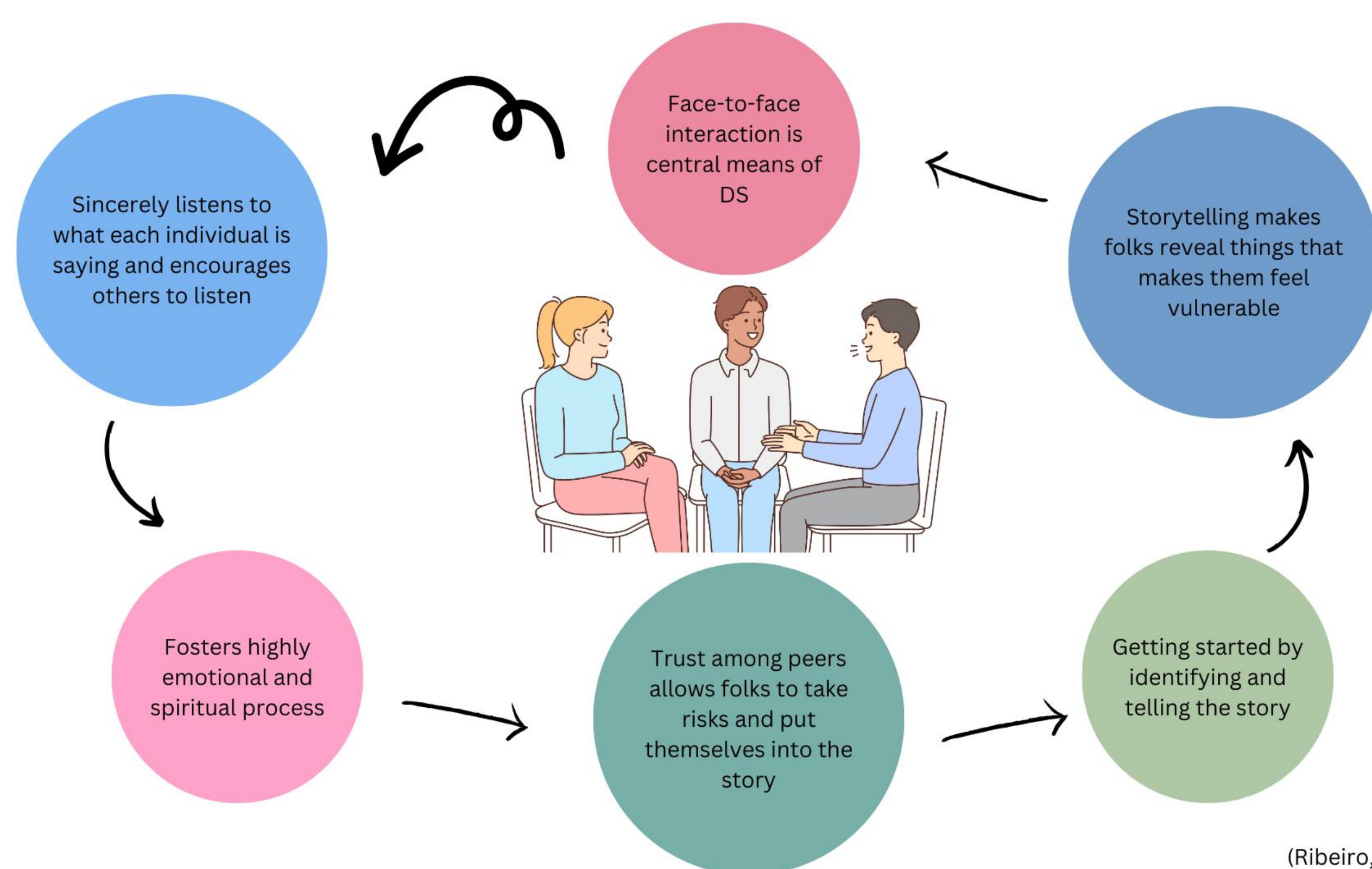
The storytelling process will provide Autistic students, who are 'historically marginalized', a chance to create and write their own social and cultural truths and to challenge the ways in which they have been socially and historically marginalized.

Methods



- Dispel myths about Autistic postsecondary students
- Showcase Autistic strengths
- Describe specific challenges they faced in postsecondary environments
- Offer recommendations and strategies for improving accessibility and belonging for Autistic PS students in Canada

Storytelling Circle Technique



(Ribeiro, 2016)

Participant Eligibility

Ten current or former Autistic post-secondary students with a powerful story to share



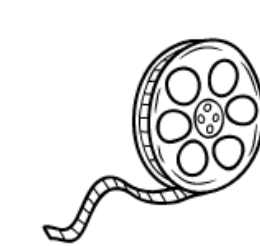
Methods

What are digital stories?

DIGITAL STORIES ARE PERSONAL NARRATIVES DRAWN FROM SPECIFIC LIFE EXPERIENCES



STORIES ARE ENHANCED WITH TEXT, VOICEOVERS, PHOTOGRAPHS, MUSIC, AND ANIMATIONS TO PRODUCE BRIEF VIDEOS.



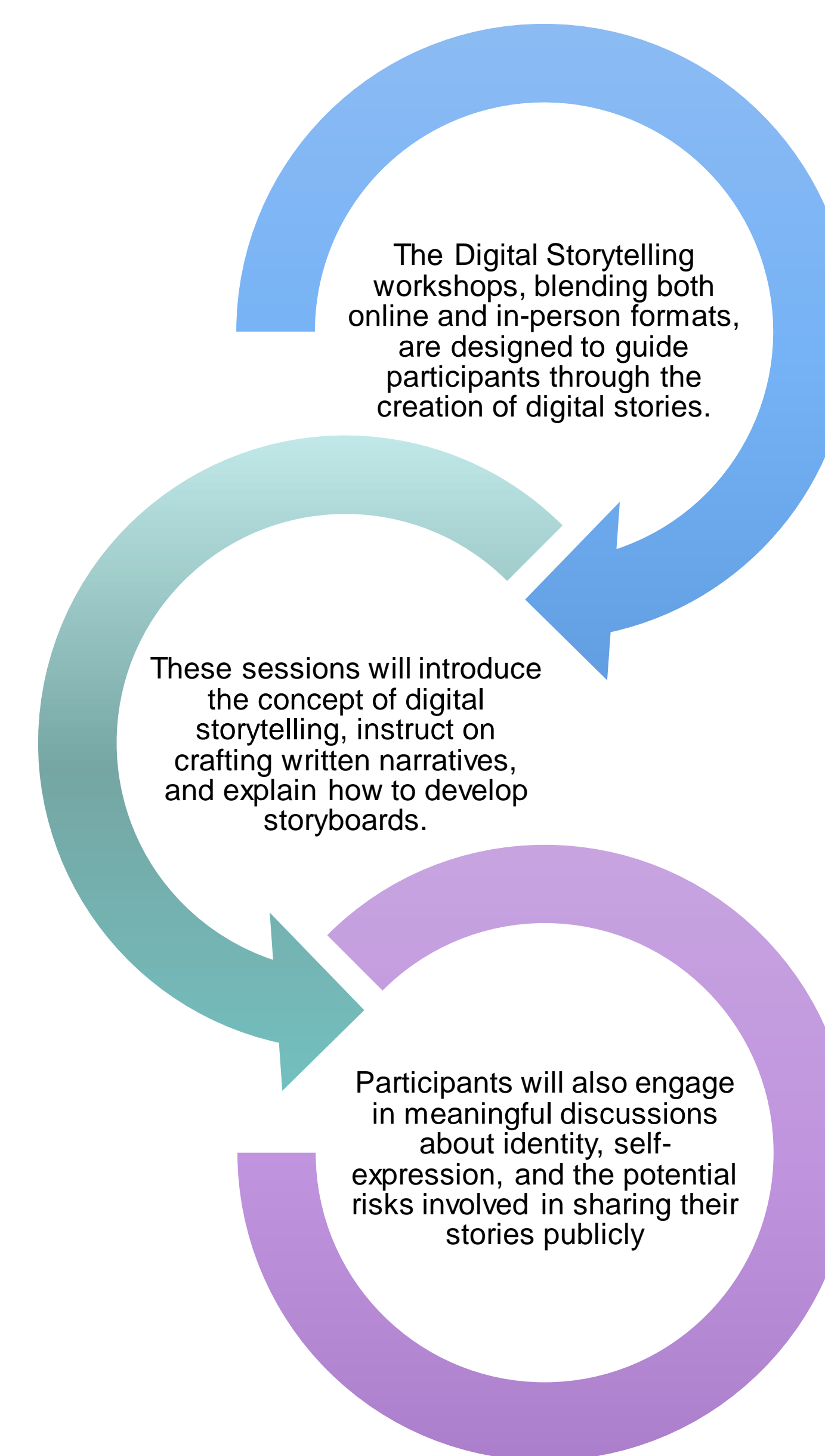
VIDEOS USUALLY LAST BETWEEN TWO TO FIVE MINUTES.



THESE STORIES WILL BE GATHERED FROM STUDENTS AS A FORM OF SCHOLARLY INQUIRY, AND A STRATEGY TO FOSTER A SENSE OF BELONGING AND COMMUNITY WITHIN PS SETTINGS.

DIGITAL STORIES SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING SEVEN ELEMENTS: POINT (OF VIEW): DRAMATIC QUESTION: EMOTIONAL CONTENT: VOICE: SOUNDTRACK: ECONOMY: PACING (RIBEIRO 2016)

(AUSTEN ET AL. 2018)



DIGITAL STORYTELLING WORKSHOPS

1. WHAT IS DIGITAL STORYTELLING?

- Group member introductions
- Review group guidelines and workshop structure
- What digital storytelling is and what it can be used for.
- Watch and reflect on example video



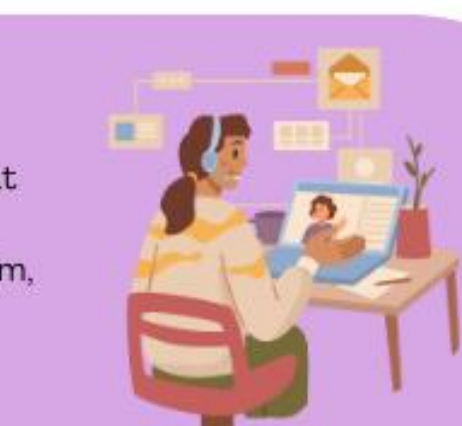
2. FILMING

- Learning to use equipment for filming
- Work with visuals
- Provided with resources
- Given guidance by TechnEd



2.5 FILMING DROP-IN

- Held at the scheduled time participants are to attend the workshops but it allows them to chat with TechnEd to...
- Ask clarifying questions regarding how to film, how to use the software, and how
- Ask about tips for filming
- Learn more about filming on their phones



3. WRITING AND STORYTELLING

- Sharing writing prompts
- Free writing time (in breakout rooms or alone)
- Storytelling circle
- Mental wellness check



3.5 WRITING DROP-IN

- Optional for participants to attend over zoom to chat with researchers and research assistants to...
- Ask clarifying questions about their writing for their digital story
- Ask questions about the workshops



4. EDITING AND STORYBOARDING

- Set up and learn to use the editing software
- Choose voice over, sound, & music
- Add in captions & audio description
- Edit: either by themselves or have TechnEd help
- Finalizing the story



4.5 STORYBOARDING DROP-IN

- Zoom call at scheduled time allowing participants to chat with TechnEd...
- To ask clarifying questions about storyboarding/editing
- To receive suggestions on their storyboard



5. SCREENING

- Watch participants' digital stories and have group give their thoughts/questions
- Review public showing consent and anonymity
- Closing remarks

