Section IV: Voices, identities and citizenship

Chapter 12

How Weird is Weird? **Young people, activist citizenship and multivoiced digital stories**

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> *I took my camera with me all the time wherever I went. I didn't pay any attention to my surroundings and my life like this before (Student, FSHS, Taiwan).*

What happens when young people begin to frame stories from their communities through the lens of a camera? How can critical engagement with digital technology enable young people to construct alternative narratives and capture the languages and voices of their communities? In what ways can digital storytelling contribute to translingual-transcultural learning within global learning networks? In this chapter we look at how the process of digital storytelling is rooted in the community and how communities can be viewed as a 'space for collective learning, action and change' (Packham, 2008: 8) and as a space for reciprocity. Transforming personal and cultural stories into a bilingual film pushes young people to imagine other viewpoints, reconceptualise identities, and put across their ideas to a wider audience. As digital storytellers, young people start to think about how the lives of people in their community are understood and how the sharing and shaping of digital stories can be viewed as a political act (Hill, 2014). Young filmmakers are encouraged to engage in a form of activist citizenship (Isin & Neilsen, 2008) opening up new ways to represent and re-imagine their communities and advocate new kinds of citizenship.

Despite advances in digital technology, much school-based learning around language and literacy seeks to control and contain language and provides little opportunity for innovation and creativity, or an openness towards uncertainty. This chapter explores the power of putting digital technology in the hands of young people to construct their own narratives of freedom and social justice and the appeal to both teachers and students of this approach: 'It is Critical Digital Storytelling's ethos and approach to storytelling as life-affirming and transformative as much as it is their technological savvy and expertise that continues to draw newcomers' (Pleasants & Salter, 2014: 5). Digital storytelling has been connected with active citizenship and the politics of doing good (Hill, 2014); global citizenship education (Truong-White & McLean, 2015); a pedagogy of Human Rights (Benick, 2011); and as a site for resistance and restoration (Stewart & Ivala, 2017). However, there is a lack of research in the field making links between digital storytelling, active citizenship and language learning. Drawing on the work of our Critical Connections Multilingual Digital Storytelling Project (Anderson et al., 2018), this chapter looks at the way digital storytelling enables young people to develop and share other ways of knowing and experiencing language-and-culture.

International partnerships with schools were an integral part of the project from its outset (2012-ongoing) and we have developed particularly strong links with primary and secondary schools in Taiwan due to personal connections forged by the co-author of this chapter, Yu-Chiao Chung. Creating and sharing a bilingual digital story with a genuine global audience brings authenticity and purpose to language learning whilst supporting broader transcultural and citizenship aims (Chung, Y-C., 2016). The research presented here focuses on case studies of two Taiwanese schools (primary and secondary) in the project that made space for young people (aged 10-11; and 15-16 years old) to construct Chinese-English digital stories

about fairness and belonging. The young people become researchers and documentary filmmakers walking through their communities to uncover local stories and reflect upon what it means to be a citizen in the places where they live. Language learning and citizenship are examined through focusing on the different stages of the digital storytelling process and how young people crafted these digital stories to make sense of and shape their views of community. The digital stories present ideas of protest, reflection and reconnection with language-and-culture and a decentring of knowledge, what counts for knowledge, and who speaks for whom? (Campbell et al., 2018).

Building on our experience as language teachers, digital storytelling workshop leaders, and researchers into language learning and digital storytelling the following section explores the complexity of bringing together digital storytelling, language learning and citizenship.

Identities, digital storytelling and citizenship

How democratic is digital storytelling? Can the process of digital storytelling open up new spaces for young people to explore identities and think about citizenship and language in the digital age? In defining digital storytelling, Lambert talks about having agency: 'Being the author of your own life, of the way you move through the world, is a fundamental idea in democracy' (Lambert, 2013: 2). Digital storytelling is viewed as a form of cultural activism and a digital tool to explore lived experiences and create stories that matter.

In reflecting upon the emergence of the digital storytelling movement alongside the development of the Internet, Lambert (2017) looks back to the former belief that open access to digital media production tools and distribution opportunities of the web could 'promote global democracy and liberation' (Lambert, 2017: 22). Opening up access to digital media production became linked with an emergent movement of media justice and media activism. Digital storytelling, as well as being based in local communities, began to bring into being new communities and stories. However, access to media production is not enough in itself and these notions of open access and production link closely to concepts of critical literacy and how it relates to social action.

In talking about power, language and social change, Janks in conversation (Turner & Griffin, 2019), connects the process of design/redesign closely with social action as it 'helps us to consider how we would produce that text differently. How would you produce that practice differently? What's your agency in relation to those processes?' (ibid: 319). This question of agency is central to the digital storytelling process and to understanding critical literacy. Janks put forward an interdependent critical literacy framework that identifies 4 dimensions of critical literacy (power, diversity, access and design/redesign) and argues that 'while the dimensions themselves are not new, what is new is the theorisation of their interdependence' (Janks, 2013: 225). In examining the process of digital storytelling, as well as looking at young people's access to media production and design/redesign we will also be looking at questions of power and diversity in relation to the digital stories that are produced.
In creating texts, such as digital stories, with an 'ethic of social justice … to protect our own rights and the rights of others' (Janks, 2010: 98), young people have to navigate the tensions existing within cultures, languages and communities. When young people become both consumers and producers of digital narratives there is a shift in perspective and power (Macleroy, 2016) and young people are motivated to interrogate these tensions and decide how to represent their lives and the lives of others. Negotiating these tensions, making decisions, and deciding how to frame their digital stories about lived experiences fosters

agency and opens up the space where the digital stories emerge: 'located in the field of tension between their own and others' lifeworlds' (Erstad & Silseth, 2008: 219).

In the process of digital storytelling in schools, teachers have to think of ways of carrying out digital storytelling linked to citizenship that enables young people to 'understand their own sense of agency, that they are not powerless, that they can change things' (Janks cited in Turner & Griffin, 2019: 321). Hartley (2017) links digital storytelling with citizenship, leadership and communication and an expression of a common humanity and human rights: 'our storytelling is our unique kind of advocacy as a citizen' (ibid: 223). Digital storytelling is seen as not about the grand narratives of conflict and conquest, but connected with alternative narratives of hope, justice and compassion and how new forms of political association can be created in contemporary digital culture by digital storytelling: 'what kind of political narrative is this; for what polity and what kind of citizen?' (ibid: 221).

Lambert (2017) perceives digital storytelling as a form of emotional self-examination and deeply rooted in a sense of identity. In crafting a story, young people are able to start interrogating how 'identities are influenced by social structures too, and how this impacts upon their everyday lives' (Habib, 2018: 144). In their digital stories, young people have the space and the media platform to critique aspects of society and imagine how things could be different. Their digital stories can become a powerful medium for social change: 'Empathy and desire for social change begin with an understanding of others; to listen to their stories and to share one's own' (Darvin & Norton, 2014: 60).

What happens when digital storytelling is combined with citizenship education? There is a growing concern that citizenship education is becoming, not about diversity and exploring and discussing cultures, identities and communities, but about a 'common national identity, advocating assimilation and conformity, not inclusion based on the rights which should be central to citizenship' (Packham, 2008: 94). The concept of citizenship informing our digital storytelling work views children and young people as having the rights and ability to be active citizens 'within their everyday lives, including school, not merely preparing them for a future role in society' (ibid: 95). This social justice approach towards citizenship runs counter to assimilationist approaches to citizenship frequently advocated in schools that tend to control and smother individual and group differences through focusing on responsibilities, social control and preparedness for work. Can digital storytelling affect the ways young people engage with concepts of citizenship and promote critical dialogue and a 'commitment to a critical, inclusive perspective' (ibid: 110)? In this chapter, we argue that through digital storytelling young people are provided with the media tools to investigate the rights of citizens within their communities, develop 'critical cultural awareness' (Byram et al., 2001: 7) and think about: 'in what ways can the sharing, bearing witness to and shaping of stories be construed as a political act?' (Hill, 2014: 24). In becoming actively engaged in the construction and reconstruction of lived experiences and stories, the young people begin to realise that 'transformation is an unpredictable, emergent process' (Nucera & Lee, 2014: 88).

In the digital stories shared in this chapter, the young people reflect upon how crafting and framing their stories becomes a 'process of learning with and through difference' (Phipps, 2019: 11). These young people raise the question that frames one of their digital stories about how weird is weird. This questioning of 'normativity' links to research in the field of community-based digital media projects: 'there are so many people who share that feeling of "otherness" – whether because they're mixed-race or adopted, or just "weird" in the context of where they were raised' (Nucera & Lee, 2014: 93). Nikolajeva (2009) in discussing

'discourse on the other' in relation to juvenile literature proposes the concept of 'aetonormativity' critiquing adult normativity in relation to children's literature and concluding that perhaps in the future 'the term children's literature will only be reserved for literature *by* children' (ibid: 23).

Digital stories by young people discussed in this chapter embrace these ideas and build on the notion of 'identity texts' (Cummins & Early, 2011) that foster young people's agency, languages and identities. Technology is seen as an 'amplifier to enhance the process of identity text production and dissemination (ibid: 3).

Voices, digital stories and activist citizenship

In imagining a decolonial multilinguality, Phipps (2019) argues that we have 'to work to share the power of representation and presentation' (ibid: 89). In shifting the focus of language learning to the different voices within communities, Phipps advocates a decolonial multilinguality that 'would take to the streets and learn from many patient speakers; it would be part of a befriending, community practice, a purposeful consideration of how the world around us is shared in speech' (ibid: 92). It is these indigenous voices and this precarious knowledge that the young people seek out during the storytelling process and in their stories provide space for 'indigenous peoples who know all about the loss of land and languages' (ibid: 5). Bakhtin's (1981) notion of multivoicedness is used to describe these stories to emphasise the 'living dialogical threads' (ibid: 276) of these voices and communities and how 'each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life' (ibid: 283).

A key characteristic of community learning is identified as 'active self-directed engagement' (Packham, 2008: 110) and in creating their stories the young people actively sought out knowledge in their communities and shifted perspective to these voices. These young people realised the potential of digital stories to become tools for advocacy (Crisan & Bortun, 2017) when storytellers were located and filmed in their communities. In connecting digital storytelling with a pedagogy of human rights, Benick (2011) discusses the emergence of new concepts of citizenship and belonging which include human rights discourse around the right to one's culture within and without national borders. Digital stories can act as a catalyst for young people to research their communities and uncover untold stories: 'Digital storytelling, then, can be an effective mechanism for preserving a culture of one's own, an opportunity not only to collect invisible histories but to authenticate them' (Benick, 2011: 40).

In discussing transformative global citizenship education, Truong-White & McLean (2015) point out that although digital storytelling is firmly situated within an ethic of social justice there is a 'paucity of literature explicitly connecting digital storytelling with classroom practices of global citizenship' (ibid: 7). The classroom practices reflected upon in this chapter are starting to link the process of digital storytelling with global citizenship as the young people share their stories across the globe and teachers recognise digital storytelling has 'the potential to support teaching from a global perspective' (ibid: 7). Teaching global citizenship through the process of digital storytelling can also 'offer counter-narratives to negative ideas and perspectives' (ibid: 21) and critique relations of power. Young people are not told what they should think or do, the focus is on historical/cultural production of knowledge, and 'notions of power, voice and difference are central for critical citizenship education' (Andreotti, 2006: 49).

In a project 'Through Other Eyes', Andreotti & Souza (2008) focused on indigenous perceptions of global issues and invited participants to examine their own perceptions and cultural values to 're-evaluate their own positions in the global context and to learn from other local ways of knowing and seeing' (ibid: 4). In analysing the programme 'Bridges to Understanding: digital storytelling and problem solving for youth – worldwide', Truong-White & McLean (2015) investigated the extent such 'technology-based initiatives could support a transformative approach to global citizenship education' (ibid: 3). Digital stories were seen as reproducing dominant ideologies as well as creating spaces for activism and challenging how things stand and that ideological tensions within digital stories 'can be used as starting points for further dialogue' (ibid: 20).

In thinking about citizenship in relation to activism, Peutrell (2019) reflects upon relationships between individuals, communities and the state and the highly contested debates about 'status, rights, responsibilities, identity … and what it means to participate as a citizen' (ibid: 46). Citizenship should be approached as a lived experience whose ideas and practices are open to change: 'citizenship learning should be participatory, ethnographically informed and grounded in students' real experiences of and capacities for citizenship' (ibid: 56). Activist citizenship is about contesting citizenship norms and demanding new citizenship rights and identities. These public 'acts of citizenship' may involve demonstrations and protests but they 'can also be found in everyday practices, such as community building, cultural production' (ibid: 57). The young people in the case studies explored in this chapter research what it means to be a citizen in their communities and debate representations of citizenship within their stories.

The older students (15-16-year-olds) are also learning English as a foreign language (EFL) through creating their digital stories and this participatory approach to language learning 'not only assists students to develop competence and confidence as users of English but also, by enabling them to shape their own learning, their sense of agency as citizens' (Peutrell & Cooke, 2019: 231). Creating digital stories to learn English contrasts with pedagogical approaches that these young people are used to in Taiwan's high schools where teaching is heavily reliant on EFL textbooks. These EFL textbooks are a product of large international markets and tend to support a 'dominant cultural hegemony and ideology' (Ya-Chen Su, 2016: 394). In our case studies, the young people move beyond the EFL textbooks used in their classrooms and use the process of creating bilingual Chinese-English digital stories to explore a range of diverse groups holding different values and beliefs and experiencing 'other ways of knowing and being' (ibid: 404). Recent research in Taiwan found that primary school teachers wanted a 'shift from competition to co-learning' and for students to learn in 'interaction with peers, family members, and real society' (Chen et al. 49). The younger students (10-11-year-olds) in our research were developing literacy through real situations and their dialects and languages.

A critical ethnographic research approach towards digital storytelling

The case-studies presented here were part of the international 'Critical Connections Multilingual Digital Storytelling Project' (MDST) (2012-ongoing) which connects children and young people with a new pedagogical approach to learning languages and fosters an active, critical and creative engagement with digital technology (Anderson & Macleroy, 2016). Critical ethnography was adopted as the overarching methodology as we wanted to understand different classroom contexts through a qualitative, context-based, participatory, multi-perspectival and interpretive approach and take a critical stance towards language

pedagogy in schools. Our research methodology embraced both the pedagogical and political, placing social justice as a core principle in relation to language-and-culture learning. The critical ethnographer is seen as contributing to discourses of social justice and other ways of knowing and the research process is viewed as a dialogical performance (Madison, 2005). This collaborative research approach created a research paradigm that was responsive to the local contexts of teachers and students and flexible in its approach. This chapter focuses on the case-studies of two Taiwanese schools. The Taiwanese students' digital stories are viewed as embodied objects of study (Alexandra, 2017). Research data were collected from a range of sources (audio-recorded interviews with students and teachers; videoed presentations for film festivals; and digital stories on the project website) capturing the 3 stages of the digital storytelling process (pre-production; production; post-production). We have set out to look at the extent to which digital storytelling enables young people to explore notions of democratic citizenship and the ways people use language to make sense of and shape the world.

Research context: International partner schools in Taiwan

In this section we discuss the Critical Connections Multilingual Digital Storytelling Project (MDST) carried out in two mainstream schools in Taiwan: Fengshan Senior High School (FSHS) and Laonong Elementary School (LES). Both were key international partner schools in the project which was implemented in an EFL class in the high school and a cross-curricular context in the elementary school. The project lead teachers at FSHS were university friends of Yu-chiao Chung (co-author of this chapter) and have been actively involved in the project in Taiwan. The partnership with LES was facilitated by collaboration with the National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan.

Fengshan Senior High School - the digital story *How Weird is Weird?*

> Yu-Chiao asked me if I would like to join this project of making digital stories. Little did I know that from the moment I said yes to her, an interesting and rewarding journey had begun (Peggy, EFL Teacher, FSHS).

In Fengshan Senior High School, comparable with many other mainstream secondary schools in Taiwan, the prime goal of students (15–17-year-olds) is to be admitted to a good university. A student's academic achievement in English plays a decisive role in their admission to higher education and English is considered one of the most important school subjects. English is taught as the main foreign language from junior high school (aged 12-15). Mainstream schools in Taiwan follow the National Curriculum and are allowed to choose a set of textbooks authorised by the Educational Bureau. The EFL textbooks only consider the culture and environment of the English-speaking world. Due to time constraints and the volume of material in the National Curriculum, EFL teachers are normally only able to cover the specified content. The learning and teaching environment in EFL classrooms is exam oriented not learner centred. Teachers lecture on grammar, vocabulary and reading whilst students are asked to sit and listen.

The EFL teachers at FSHS took the opportunity to implement the project in their classes hoping that their students would benefit from the project and from collaborating with children in other parts of the world. The overall theme of MDST (2015-16) was Fairness. The class at FSHS explored fairness in the Taiwanese education system; inequality between teachers and students; prejudice towards those of different appearance; and biased gender identity.

Pre-Production: Deciding collaboratively the citizenship/identity topic and storyline for digital storytelling

The digital story on gender identity - *How Weird is Weird?* - was created by a group of six students (15–16-year-olds). It was based on the true story of a 15-year-old student who died in his school toilet block in 2000. This boy, Yung-chih Yeh, was also called the 'Rose boy' because, unlike the other boys in his class, who liked playing sports outdoors, he preferred to stay in the classroom reading, drawing and sewing. Biased gender stereotyping caused him great trouble; he was bullied at school. To avoid conflict, he adopted the rule of going to the toilet before break time. On the day he died, his body was found in the toilet block. This incident is now well-known in Taiwan and is included in the Citizenship Education curriculum which, amongst many other topics, covers human rights and justice.

> Our citizenship teacher told us about this 'Rose boy'. He was the same age as us. We are lucky that it didn't happen to us. When we knew that the theme of the digital storytelling project is 'Fairness', we thought this would be a good topic to present, to remind people not to be biased (Student A, FSHS).

When the students were choosing the topic and forming their story, they went through several stages: participating, mindmapping, discussing, disagreeing, debating, voting and finally reaching an agreement. One of the students recalled the process.

> We were in the same group because we were good friends. We still are. We always like to work with friends because it is easier. Not all of us agreed to use this story as our topic. I didn't want to work on this topic because people didn't like to talk about it. Finally, we voted and agreed on this topic. It was good for us to be able to express different ideas (Student B, FSHS).

This group of young people decided to pose the question: 'How weird is weird?' There were many other questions they wanted to explore in their digital story:

- What would be different if the boy's fellow students had acted differently?
- What was the boy like at home?
- What did his mother think about her son? (Figure 1)
- What was the reaction of his mother to this terrible incident?
- How did his mother cope and continue her daily life after her son's death?

Insert Figure 12.1: Screen shot of Yeh's mother in the digital story *How Weird is Weird?*

Production: Doing citizenship and designing (selecting semiotic resources and exploring modalities) the English-Chinese digital story

The young people showed their creativity and skills in designing their film. They re-imagined what it would be like to be Yeh and his fellow students and acted out their roles. The scene of Yeh's death, depicted in black and white with English subtitles and voice-over, shows their empathy and sadness.

- What kind of boy was he?

The story turned to colourful moving images of Yeh's mother riding her motorbike to work on a farm. The mother spoke warmly, yet sadly, about her son and how he had been considerate and gentle. She referred to other farm workers complimenting Yeh for his kindness and helpful nature. Her statement clarified the students' question and left the audience in no doubt as to how kind Yeh had been. While she was talking, photographs of him as an innocent, care-free, little boy were shown.

- Did you know your son was different?

The young people cleverly addressed the main theme of their film. They showed Yeh's mother quoting the psychiatrist who he had been referred to by his teacher:

> I have to tell you that your son is entirely normal. If anybody thinks he is weird, this is the one who is abnormal (Psychiatrist quoted by Yeh's mum).

The film revealed that although Yeh's mother had visited his school several times to report the bullying, neither the school nor the teachers had reacted. The film suggests that this might have precipitated the tragic incident. This group of young people advocated in their story: 'We should never let such a tragedy happen again'. The MDST project also opened up spaces for them to imagine and hypothesise: 'What if people fairly treat those who are different from us?'. They acted out a scene in which Yeh's fellow students engaged positively with him, included him, and invited him to play basketball during break time. They imagined how the story could have been very different.

- Epilogue: Be yourself.

The students included live footage of Yeh's mother speaking out at a Pride march in 2010 (Figure 2). She bravely made a stand for her son and for others being stereotyped: 'My kids, God created people like you. There must be a light to fight for your human rights. Be yourself!' She further expressed her determination in the interview and the group of students made their strong and heartfelt appeal at the end of the film.

Insert Figure 12.2: Screen shot of Yeh's mother at the Pride March in *How Weird is Weird?*

> Though Yeh's mother lost her beloved son, she devoted her love to all of those being stereotyped or discriminated against.
> So do we.
> So, will you? (Subtitles, *How Weird is Weir*d)

On being asked the reason for the use of a rhetorical question as the ending of their film, one of the students reflected.

> We had a lot of debate about the ending. In the end, we felt that inviting and including our audience was the best way. It was better than just telling them what to do (Student C, FSHS)

Post-Production: Activist citizenship and voices (editing, reviewing, peer-assessing and redrafting) in their digital story

The class had a weekly presentation to show their progress and for peer-assessment. Peter, EFL teacher and project lead teacher, reflected upon his experience of mutual learning from those weekly presentations.

> For myself, I have learnt the importance of 'process'. Every draft that the students finished and showed me during every stage was not the end product. There were always some things that needed to be amended and improved. Through discussion with me, or between themselves, they always found problems requiring them to do more, deeper research, to change their way of presenting the story, or to record some part of the story again (Peter, EFL Teacher, FSHS).

Peter mentioned that he always expected the submitted work to be perfect. However, he witnessed that through the making of the digital story and through the ongoing process of peer review and discussion, the students learnt what they needed to improve and redraft. The ongoing process of peer-review and redrafting was a significant opportunity for the students to practise activist citizenship: taking responsibilities, being actively involved in the community; tackling problems, bringing about change or resisting unwanted change. They developed the skills, knowledge and understanding to be able to make decisions and to vote in democratic processes.

Peter commented that the MDST project was not just an opportunity for his students to learn but also for himself.: 'This process has overturned my attitude towards teaching'.

> I previously had a lot of conflict with the students. As a teacher, I tended to give the students suggestions which I thought would be the most efficient way for them to tell the story and complete the project. Sometimes, I got worried because I could see them going around in circles, taking a long time. However, not all of them would accept my suggestions. They insisted on telling the story in their own way – since it was THEIR story. (Peter, EFL Teacher, FSHS).

He recalled a serious conflict he had with the students designing *How Weird is Weird?*' After their weekly presentation, he provided some ideas. The students were stressed and embarrassed by his suggestions. One of them shouted angrily: 'What do you want Our story to be like?'

> I asked Yu-Chiao for her suggestions in dealing with this conflict. She told me to ask them questions and not just give them suggestions - How do they feel about this part? Do they think they can improve it by doing something else? I suddenly realised that this was something I had to learn. I always gave feedback and expected them to accept my comments. I should have respected their ownership of their story and raised questions when I had doubts. I should have allowed them time and space to review their story and consider whether any improvements were needed; just as I expected they would do with their classmates. I had forgotten I should have done the same. (Peter, EFL Teacher, FSHS)

The digital story *How Weird is Weird?* completed in 2016 continues to have an impact on the teacher and students. Peter reflected that the project was the first project his students had carried out and completed from the initial stage to its final presentation. This digital storytelling project

provided an opportunity to combine learning EFL with citizenship. The students used English in meaningful contexts and for specific purposes. Peter commented on the profound and long-lasting influence of the project.

> It is like you have planted seeds in our heart and they keep growing. The students became very sensitive about 'fairness' around them. During the years following completion of the film, I often heard them commenting on their surroundings and on news, saying 'this would be a good topic for the digital storytelling project' (Peter, EFL Teacher, FSHS).

One of the students who created the digital story *How Weird is Weird?* is now studying in university and reflected on the project 3 years later. He was very proud to be able to talk about their film and about Yeh and Yeh's mother: 'it seems we have been in the battle together'. He admired Yeh's mother for her bravery and persistence and her strong, loving and caring attitude: 'We saw her at the Pride Parade cheering people and shouting firmly to them - We have to face the sunlight. To fight for our rights!' Taiwan became the first nation in Asia to legalise same-sex marriage on 24 May 2019.

Laonong Elementary School – the digital story *The Indestructible Belonging*

> I hope one day my pupils have the ability to create their own stories independently. They are able to tell people their stories about their life and their hometown (Jimmy, Teacher, LES).

The second digital story *The Indestructible Belonging* was created by children in Year 5 (10-11 years old) at Laonong Elementary School. Lao Nong is a small village in the mountains of Southern Taiwan. It is in a financially and educationally deprived area with poor connections to the outside world. Most of the residents there are of aboriginal ethnic origin and speakers of various dialects. Adults tend to leave to find work in the cities, leaving children and the elderly in the village. Laonong Elementary School is a small, rural school for children (6–12-year-olds). The teacher turnover rate is high; most teachers only stay for a year.

The children working on the MDST project were all of aboriginal ethnicity; some of them lived with their grandparents (or other non-parental relatives); some of them were under the care of social services. The lead teacher, Jimmy, was the children's Humanities teacher with expertise in ICT, photography and digital storytelling. He was concerned that this group of children lacked motivation to learn and had a poor record of school attendance. The MDST project was embedded in the 'Local Culture' curriculum, where primary schools have flexibility to design the curriculum to explore and incorporate the resources in their local communities. Jimmy integrated the digital storytelling project with his Local Culture Humanities class, exploring traditional culture of the PingPu (or Taivoan) Tribe. This project was interdisciplinary combining: language, art, ICT, history, geography, music, citizenship education.

In 2016, the first year in which Laonong Elementary School participated in the MDST project, Jimmy's Year 5 class designed a digital story *Fairness in Ethnicities*. They introduced the history of their local ethnic groups, wearing traditional dress, and proudly presented their rich cultures. Their message was a plea for people to respect minorities and treat them as equals. In 2017, the next Year 5 group at Laonong Elementary School designed *The Indestructible Belonging* – a prologue to *Fairness in Ethnicities*. The 2017 film covered how the PingPu/Taivoan people fought for recognition as an aboriginal tribe. As in the previous digital story, the children spoke to tribal elders and scholars.

Pre-Production: Exploring citizenship and identity (doing fieldwork within communities using digital media tools)

Although most of the children were from families with poor living conditions, they considered the local community to be their extended family. In order to motivate the children to attend school, Jimmy engaged them in rediscovering their traditions and the culture surrounding them and to make a digital story.

> The children enjoyed doing fieldwork in the village. They liked to listen to the older generation to talk about the olden-times. It was like stories from a different world. We started from Kuma, the temple where the Pingpu /Taivoan Tribe held sacred rituals to worship the spirit of their ancestors. It was also a place where people settled arguments or fights within this community. The children walked past these places every day but only in their fieldwork did many discover what these places were for. I think this reconnection with community is powerful in engaging the children to reinforce their local culture identity (Jimmy, Teacher, LES).

The children also attended the traditional night-time sacred ritual which celebrates a peaceful year within the community. After this oral history from the elders, the pupils visited Professor Jian, whose research interests are in Cultural Anthropology and Taiwan Pingpu/Taivoan Ethnic History. He gave the pupils a detailed lively introduction into how the Pingpu/Taivoan Tribe was forced to leave their land. Another precious experience was the contribution of a researcher/bookshop keeper, Mr Yu, who worked with the pupils at weekends and later wrote *John Thomson Formosa - the discovery of Taiwanese cultural heritage, 1871*(Yu, 2019). Thomson was a Scottish photographer; one of the first photographers to travel to the far east and document the people, landscapes and artifacts of eastern cultures. He travelled to Laonong and took many photographs. Mr Yu showed the pupils around by following in John Thomson's footsteps and comparing the present with past photographs.

> The fieldwork built their understanding and connection to the community. Based on these stories, we started to work on the storyline, hoping to document the fascinating history of the people and the land (Jimmy, Teacher, LES)

During the fieldwork, the children were provided with mobile electronic devices to capture their work in still and moving images. They learnt how to shoot from different angles to achieve the effects they wanted. The pupils were encouraged to be critical and creative to frame and focus the theme they wanted to illustrate.

Production: Activist citizenship and voices (discussing the storyline, scripting, acting, filming and creating) in a digital story

- Where do we belong?

The children worked in groups; filming and uploading the still or moving images. They selected images based on Jimmy's training: clearly focused images which illustrated ideas and fitted the storyline. This process helped the children to be critical, to provide positive suggestions and to listen to different opinions. The film started with a scene of children wearing traditional clothes and singing the traditional chant of the Pingpu/Taivoan Tribe in front of Kuma. They cleverly linked their film with *Fairness in Ethnicities*; their film starts with the same firm declaration with which the previous film ended: 'We will keep fighting'. They stated

that the 2016 lawsuit brought by the Pingpu/Taivoan people for tribal recognition had failed. This failure had become increasingly upsetting for the children as they learnt more about their tribe. This complicated political disagreement led to their question: 'Where do we belong?'

- Our struggle for survival

Drawing on their talk with Professor Jian, the children explain how their ancestors originally lived on the plain but were forced to move to the mountains by foreign invaders and Chinese government. They created call and response poetry to illustrate how their ancestors struggled for survival. The children dressed in tribal costumes acting out the poem with the call of the invaders and response of their ancestors (Figure 3).

Invaders	Ping Pu Ancestors
We need land to live on	We lost our land
We need women to marry	We have lost our daughters
We use the Min-nan language	We have lost our language
We gave you Han names	We have lost our own names
Our culture is expanding	Our culture is diminishing
We have more and more people	We have fewer and fewer people
We need more land	We are forced to move
We are fighting for survival	

Insert Figure 12.3: Screen shot of the conflict in their digital story *The Indestructible Belonging*

The children came up with the idea of the drama, but Jimmy helped with composing the poem and use of repetition to remember the lines.

> Family assistance in school work almost doesn't exist here. The pupils' Mandarin ability is very low due to lack of linguistic input. In this story, improving their language ability was one of my main aims; the other was to raise their sense of belonging to their community (Jimmy, Teacher, LES).

- A dangerous balance - left with no choice

In this part of the story, the children continued to describe and hypothesise about their ancestors' lives: how the Pingpu would have lived after they were forced to move to Laonong. To support their description, the children showed Thomson's photographs of their ancestors (1871) and compared the location of the photographs with 2017.

> We saw an old photo of the house we always walk past. It was taken 150 years ago. It is very interesting that we saw our ancestors standing in front of that house. The old house, the old people, the way they look and their clothes. I just cannot imagine the time that long ago. It is fascinating. I think it is very important for us to record what the Tribe is doing now. Our descendants will have something to trace back (Student A, LES).

The children continued their story introducing how their ancestors lost their official identity and citizenship which would have allowed them to keep their original names and culture.

Our ancestors had to use the Han culture to disguise themselves so that they would not be discriminated against. Just as we mentioned in our story. I didn't realise how hard their life was at that time. This is very sad but they were left with no choice. Thanks to them, we still have some tradition left (Student B, LES)

- The indestructible belonging

At the end of this story, the lens turned to the traditional night-time sacred ritual that the children attended and documented. They stated that people were still fighting for the official recognition of their name. The children also acknowledged that they were the descendants of the Pingpu and they should learn their heritage culture and history and recover their long lost identity. They wore traditional Pingpu dress and sang a traditional song 'Tat a Heng' about a running competition at their annual night-time ritual. The film ended with an encouraging message: 'We are The Tavioan Tribe from Taiwan! Our culture needs to be passed down; it cannot be forgotten!' (Figure 4). During the entire production process, through constant questioning and research, the children uncovered the history of their ancestors. They collaborated in small groups to incorporate various art forms: drama, dance, singing and artefacts to depict their story.

Insert Figure 12.4: Screen shot of the children at the end of their story *The Indestructible Belonging*

Post-production: Activist citizenship and voices (editing, reviewing and peer assessing) in their digital story

The children were taught to use an app to edit their film. With ongoing reviewing, peer-assessing and editing, they participated in discussion, gave and accepted suggestions and became flexible towards making changes.

> The children participated in group discussion and gave feedback actively. In the past, local community classes only occurred during a few weeks in the whole academic year. Most of the class was lectured by the teachers, not allowing students any time to contribute their ideas. This year, because of the digital storytelling project, the children were given space to contribute their thoughts. I could see ownership shifted to the students and I am very pleased with the outcome. The local community is their community after all. They should feel close and related to it (Jimmy, Teacher, LES).

Citizenship and the digital story – *The Indestructible Belonging*

The Indestructible Belonging is a touching, motivational film which took the children a year to complete. It is a story about their ancestors and, for the children, it is a reflection of their past, a reconnection with their present and anticipation for their future. In order to create this digital story, the children started to pay attention to their community and culture. It raised their awareness of public affairs related to them, such as the legalisation lawsuit of the Pingpu Tribe and the annual traditional night-time ritual. The MDST project helped these children to understand what it means to be a citizen with rights.

> We are very pleased to see the local children interested in our community and its culture. The school children came here with their teachers to investigate the history. We

did our best to help. I think this is a good connection and it has mutual benefits. Their excellent films have been sent to different places to be watched by the people who care about our tribe (Mrs Yang, Community Director of Laonong).

In the MDST project, the children were given the opportunity to present their story abroad which was a very precious experience for them. This experience also gave them a sense of participation in a global community. Both the teacher and children felt very proud of their digital story.

> I set up a big screen in the middle of our school field to project the film festival in London on the day our film was shown. All of us were very excited, every staff member and every child in our school. These children had hardly been to the city, let alone abroad. This project linked many disciplines: the humanities, local culture, language and citizenship (Jimmy, Teacher, LES).

Conclusion: Representing communities and advocating multivoiced citizenship

In arguing that a decentred view of language and literacy learning can enable young people to engage with new ways to represent their communities and advocate new kinds of citizenship, we have drawn on our digital storytelling work focusing on two case studies in the context of Taiwan. The research findings from these two contrasting school contexts demonstrate the transformative power of putting digital technology into the hands of children and teenagers to tell their multivoiced community stories. These young people raise vital questions about what it means to be a citizen and the tangible difference between learning about others' lives and becoming activist citizens and walking in others' lives in their communities.

In creating these digital stories, the young people have skilfully shifted power to their communities and liberated knowledge and what counts for knowledge. The young digital storytellers are beginning to understand their own sense of agency and teachers are learning to trust their students and give them time to move through their stories. The question that arises out of project-based learning is whether an approach that links language learning, digital storytelling and activist citizenship can be fostered and sustained within mainstream elementary and secondary schooling.

> For me, since we finished this project, I have run an elective English module every year and continue applying MDST in every single one of them (Peter, EFL Teacher, FSHS).

Creative teachers are key to opening up classrooms to experiences and learning that matters to their students and the EFL teacher and Humanities teacher in these two case studies recognised a sharp shift in their role: 'overturned my attitude towards teaching'; 'I could see ownership shifted to the students'. This points to the need for teachers to 'take seriously the use of both non-mainstream and mainstream knowledge to engage students in grappling with multiple viewpoints' (Truong-White & McLean, 2015: 18). These case studies demonstrate the importance of activist citizenship and participative, experiential learning (Brownlie, 2001) to prepare young people to act and contribute to local, national and global communities. In crafting their digital stories, the Taiwanese students were developing an intercultural competence seen in their curiosity, openness and 'ability to decentre' (Byram et al., 2001: 5).

Stewart & Ivala (2017) researching digital storytelling in a South African higher education classroom noted that 'students broke down barriers of both language and culture and walked away from the project having changed the way they perceived each other – at that moment in time' (ibid: 1172). In this chapter, we have made a point of capturing more sustained self-reflection on the effects of using digital storytelling for language-and-culture learning with a focus on citizenship. Reflecting on the digital story *How Weird is Weird?* three years after the classroom practice, the young person remembers the process intimately.

> Our group chose a very powerful topic to illustrate fairness. We are very sympathetic and empathetic for Yeh. Anyone of us can find themselves in a minority and be called weird one day. Everyone has the right to be treated fairly (Student, FSHS).

Notes

How Weird is Weird? **-** https://vimeo.com/169446882
The Indestructible Belonging – https://vimeo.com/221545542
Project website - https://goldsmithsmdst.com/

Questions for further reflection

1. How would you plan and set up a digital storytelling project in your local community and ensure that local voices and stories were told?

2. How can young people be encouraged to frame their digital stories from a critical standpoint and be encouraged to think of alternative narratives?

3. How do you think digital technology and online learning networks can open new spaces for activist citizenship and translingual-transcultural learning?

Acknowledgements

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