

Critical Connections: Multilingual Digital Storytelling Project (2012-2014)

Summary of project findings in 8 categories

1. Language learning, multilingual repertoires and identity

The project:

- a. provided an authentic context for language learning where students have been able to personalise their work and gain a sense of ownership
- b. developed a range of language skills related to pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar as well as encouraging students to move beyond the textbook to be more adventurous in their language use
- c. supported learners' metalinguistic awareness through composing in more than one language and responding to bilingual films incorporating a range of European and non-European languages, including children's home languages

2. Multimodal composition and creativity

The project:

- a. developed a range of skills involved in multimodal composition including effective combination of different modalities and shaping of stories to engage a multilingual youth audience
- b. stimulated creative and dialogic thinking (questioning, hypothesising, experimenting, critiquing)
- c. improved students' digital media skills (digital photography - still and video, video editing, use of Photostory3, Moviemaker, VoiceThread)

3. Culture, international partnerships and active citizenship

The project:

- a. enabled students to explore culture and identity in their own terms in flexible, critical and non-essentialised ways
- b. enabled students from bilingual backgrounds to deepen their understanding of the heritage culture
- c. built students' confidence in expressing their perspectives through their stories and sharing these with students in England and overseas both online and through film festivals

4. Learner autonomy, critical thinking and student voice

The project:

- a. revealed the motivation and ability of young people to carry out creative digital projects when teachers put their trust in them and provide appropriate support, structure and encouragement
- b. the importance of student involvement in identifying criteria for evaluating digital stories and in ongoing review of digital stories created by peers within own institution and in other schools (making use of VoiceThread)
- c. demonstrated the value of involving students as co-researchers and how, with appropriate training, they can contribute in ways which are thoughtful and critical

5. Engagement and motivation

The project:

- a. revealed the motivating effect of activating learner agency and making space for students to draw holistically on their backgrounds to generate new knowledge
- b. demonstrated that when students are provided with learning opportunities that connect with their life experiences and involve presentation to an audience there is a positive effect on commitment and sense of responsibility to their work
- c. showed that when projects involve students in making creative choices and critical decisions this develops confidence and engagement

6. Sites of learning: school, home, online

The project:

- a. showed how student motivation and learning can be enhanced when parents understand the purpose of school-initiated projects and how they can contribute
- b. revealed a range of different ways in which parents can support learners linguistically, culturally and in other forms
- c. demonstrated the flexible ways in which students and teachers can use digital media including email, texts, school blogs to work collaboratively on projects

7. Transformative pedagogy

The project:

- a. demonstrated clearly that, when teachers provide the space, encouragement and support for students to envision and create personal digital stories, quality of learning frequently exceed expectations
- b. showed that encouraging collaboration between peers is supportive for students when faced with the multiple challenges of multilingual digital storytelling, especially where students develop and apply their own criteria for evaluating work (including through use of VoiceThread)
- c. showed how multilingual digital storytelling can be embedded effectively within a thematic approach

8. Curriculum policy, planning and professional development

The project:

- a. showed the importance of professional development support to assist teachers in making the shift from a traditional to a more interactive student-centred approach and to develop the digital media skills required.
- b. revealed how students required some digital media training although skills were quickly developed and applied
- c. showed how schools can adopt different models for embedding multilingual digital storytelling work and provided evidence of the important role senior managers can play in extending and embedding multilingual digital storytelling in the curriculum in their institutions