

Institution: Goldsmiths University of London		
Unit of Assessment: 23, Education		
Title of case study: Critical Connections pedagogical model based on multilingualism and digital storytelling boosts language learning and digital skills		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2010 - ongoing		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Vicky Macleroy	Reader in Education and Head of Centre for Language, Culture and Learning	2007 – present
Dr Jim Anderson	Senior Lecturer in Languages in Education	1996 – 2017
	Visiting Research Fellow	2017 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: September 2013 - present		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Critical Connections is a new pedagogical model which boosts young people's language learning ability by equipping teachers with digital skills that help students expand their multilingual repertoire through digital storytelling. Developed by Macleroy and Anderson, the pedagogic model has been applied in over 50 primary, secondary and complementary schools in the UK and 15 Partnership schools in 6 further countries around the globe (2013 - 2020). It has also been integrated into a Virtual Open Course for Educators (2015) and used in 33 European Centre for Modern Language (ECML) member states. To date, the Critical Connections model has engaged over 1,500 children in a digital storytelling community, helping them to develop their language skills and take pride in their intercultural understanding.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The multilingual lives of children (over 300 languages are now spoken in Britain) and language learning in the home with parents and extended families is often overlooked in mainstream schools. Our research sought to re-engage children and young people with language learning and promote active critical and creative engagement with digital technology (R1 and see Council of Europe grant 2013-2014). The Critical Connections Multilingual Digital Storytelling Project is funded by the Paul Hamlyn foundation (2012-17) and Language Acts and Worldmaking AHRC (2018-20). Led by Anderson and Macleroy, the work demonstrates the success of an integrated, interdisciplinary, inclusive, and student-centred approach to language and literacy learning focusing on translingual and transcultural communication and deploying the power of the digital media (R2).</p> <p>Critical Connections is a new pedagogical model that utilises storytelling in its relationship to language, culture and identity. Users build the skills to navigate difference and partake in constructive dialogue across languages and cultures, sharing experiences and developing empathy and respect. We define multilingual digital storytelling in our project as a short multilingual story (3-5 minutes) made using photographs, moving images, artwork, objects, shadow puppetry, stop motion animation, green screen, poetry, dance and drama. The expectation that students should create their stories bilingually has meant a strong affirmation of their bilingual identities as well as providing a context for valuable metalinguistic insights (R2; R5).</p>		

Our Critical Connections model has opened up opportunities for learning outside as well as inside school and for active participation in local and global communities online and offline. An important spin-off from the project is the way storytelling and filmmaking facilitates the involvement of parents in their children's learning (R3). This has happened in different ways: development of ideas, uncovering of family histories, and sharing of traditional heritage. In a current project school, parents with advanced media skills are helping to lead the project and support the integration of children's different home languages. Our pedagogical model is distinctive in the field of multiliteracies in foregrounding the importance of multilingual as well as multimodal dimensions and in promoting links between various strands of language education. Important principles within the model are: interdisciplinarity (most significantly the arts, media and humanities), interculturality, plurilingual repertoires, translanguaging and metalinguistics, process-oriented learning, student agency and collaboration, performativity, active citizenship, critical thinking, reflection and creativity. This reflects recent trends in language education towards translingual-transcultural approaches as well as project-based and digitally mediated language learning and teaching (R4; R5).

Recognising the influence of digital media in youth culture and embracing a dialogic approach to learning, the project enables students both to develop ideas collaboratively and to think critically and creatively. Student co-researchers' insights into digital storytelling have also shaped the approach (R2). A vital part of the approach is the sharing of the digital stories at film festivals, online audiences and schools across the globe (R4; R6). Collaborative research with lead teachers on the project, the [Multilingual Digital Storytelling project website](#) and the Critical Connections Handbook for Teachers (2014), have helped to embed the Critical Connections pedagogical model in schools and transform practice (R6).

3. References to the research

- R1.** Anderson, J. & Macleroy, V. (2015) Rethinking multilingualism: trajectories in policy, pedagogy and research in the UK. In A. Yiakoumetti (ed.) *Multilingualism and Language in Education: Current Sociolinguistic and Pedagogical Perspectives from Commonwealth Countries* (243-265). Cambridge: CUP. [Submitted to REF2]
- R2.** Anderson, J. & Macleroy, V. (Eds) (2016) *Multilingual digital storytelling: engaging creatively and critically with literacy*. Oxford: Routledge.
- R3.** Anderson, J. (2017) Engagement, multiliteracies and identity: developing pedagogies for heritage/community language learners within the UK school context. In O. Kagan, M. Carreira and C. Chik (eds) *A Handbook on Heritage Language Education: From Innovation to Program Building* (248-262). New York: Routledge.
- R4.** Anderson, J. & Macleroy, V. (2017) Connecting worlds: Interculturality, identity and multilingual digital stories in the making. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 17(4), 1-24.
- R5.** Anderson, J., Chung, Y-C. & Macleroy, V. (2018) Creative and critical approaches to language learning and digital technology: findings from a multilingual digital storytelling project. *Language and Education*, 32(3), 195-211.
- R6.** Stavrou, S., Charalambous, C. & Macleroy, V. (2019): Translanguaging through the lens of drama and digital storytelling: shaping new language pedagogies in the classroom, *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, DOI:10.1080/14681366.2019.1692058.

***All outputs available on request**

Selected Grants:

- G1.** European Comenius Regio Project: Meeting the Challenge of the Multicultural Classroom (2011-13) and Centre for Modern Languages (Council of Europe) Project: Collaborative Community Approach to Migrant Education (2013-2014) (Macleroy) €153,960.00.
- G2.** Critical Connections I and II: Multilingual Digital Storytelling Project (2012-2017) Paul Hamlyn Foundation (Anderson and Macleroy PI) GBP 279,230.00.
- G3.** Multilingual digital storytelling, museum artefacts and the arts: Creative pathways to language-and-culture learning and Deptford Community Multilingual Digital Storytelling Project (2018-2020) Language Acts and Worldmaking AHRC *Open World Research Initiative* and Qatar Foundation International (Anderson and Macleroy) GBP 13,425.00.

4. Details of the impact

The Critical Connections project informs and shapes a new multilingual pedagogy for learners resulting in the following benefits:

1. Teachers gain new pedagogic and digital skills which enhance their practice and lead to improved engagement in the languages' classroom
2. Young people take pride in their multilingual repertoires boosting their language skills, digital skills, storytelling and intercultural understanding
3. A digital community of multilingual story tellers creates new connections between different cultures, age groups and nationalities

New pedagogic and digital skills for language teachers

Through support in schools, workshops, conferences and online, Critical Connections has inspired language teachers to become part of a digital storytelling community and learn new pedagogic and digital skills. Digital storytelling was integrated into a Virtual Open Course for Educators (May 2015) for all 33 European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) member states engaged in the project. The ECML gathered data on the impact and dissemination of the project (December 2016): 'I am very pleased to inform you that both participants of your project events as well as national authorities from our 33 member states provided very positive feedback and examples of impact of your project' (S1).

A strong partnership also developed with Cyprus where digital storytelling has been implemented by primary school teachers and a drama educator in 3 schools (2016-2020) (as documented in R6).

The Critical Connections model supports language teachers working in community-based 'complementary' schools (that contribute to mainstream education) incorporate digital storytelling into their practice. Between 2015-2020, media training has been held at the British Film Institute and Goldsmiths. The National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education (NRCSE) was a key Critical Connections partner (2015-2017) providing training for over 100 complementary school teachers (February 2016; March 2017) and 8 complementary schools that became lead schools in the project (2015-17). Vassie, Head of the NRCSE, observed: 'We have seen the complementary schools that have been able to partner with MDST team over 2-3 years gain new pedagogical skills and confidence in the teaching of culture and mother tongue, leading to meaningful and lasting change in the delivery of their language classes' (S2).

Teachers from the Peace School (Arabic Supplementary) and Croatian Supplementary School have also trained teachers to implement the Critical Connections model in schools (2015-2020).

Fourteen project teachers have become skilled practitioners acquiring new technological and pedagogic skills and the confidence to lead workshops at 4 digital storytelling conferences (2014-2019) attended by over 400 complementary and mainstream teachers, policy makers, researchers and university students who commented on the benefits of the event, 'This conference was very inspiring and creative and provided opportunities for reflections around pedagogical practices on the multimodal nature of communication; from my perspective as a primary school teacher, it is essential that teachers open up to new ways of language learning instead of sticking to the traditional ones' (S3). Lead project teachers ran workshops in partnership countries (Algeria in 2014, 2016, 2017; Cyprus in 2017, 2018, 2019; Luxembourg in 2016, 2017, 2018; and Taiwan in 2016, 2018) to support local language teachers.

A Taiwanese teacher reflected upon the impact of using multilingual digital storytelling in the classroom: 'in a school like Laonong, no-one expected that the pupils would be able to take the initiative to learn to do research, or use media and computer-based tools, and compose something' (S4). However, the children embraced the opportunity, as demonstrated in one of the films, composed by 12 pupils in a rural area of Taiwan, that was subsequently exhibited at the BFI and featured in the list of [MDST Film Samples](#):



In this film, the children used digital storytelling to present the history of their local ethnic groups; their rich and precious culture and telling people to respect minorities and treat them equally.

Image: Still from MDST film: *Fairness in Ethnicities* (2016), Laonong school, Taiwan.

Young people taking pride in their multilingual repertoires

Before engaging with the Critical Connections pedagogical model, young people had very little opportunity to share their multilingual repertoire outside their homes and families (R2). The research team have hosted 7 public events for students, teachers, community members and VIPs (including Embassy staff from Algeria, Croatia, Cyprus and Taiwan) at Goldsmiths, Curzon Cinema, Deptford Cinema and the British Film Institute (the lead organisation for film in the UK). Over 1,500 young people have taken pride in presenting their multilingual digital stories to these international audiences in speeches, poetry, songs, dances (and recorded messages from schools overseas). A student reflects on the impact of attending the film festival: 'I saw all the other schools, even the school with the seven and eight year olds ... they were brave and they were able to stand in front of the whole crowd and speak about their video and that also encouraged me because I thought ... well ... they are seven and eight and I am fifteen. So, I should be able to speak more confidently' (S5).

Annual film festivals have attracted audiences of between 200 – 300 people and these public events have exhibited over 150 award winning digital stories produced by schools in the UK and overseas (2014-2020). Young people have become lead practitioners in the project and gained key skills in storytelling, filmmaking, photography, editing, subtitling, interviewing and researching. These students have been translating across two or more languages and using their languages critically and creatively to tell stories about their identities, journeys, belonging, fairness, our planet, and their communities. A student co-researcher poster displayed these words: 'I belong to friendship – my friends are my lifejackets. We are so proud of ourselves for what we made' (S6).

Establishing a digital community of multilingual storytellers

The Critical Connections MDST open access website for the research project hosts over 250 digital stories created by more than 1,500 young people and curated on a MDST Vimeo channel. Helping to establish and connect this global community of digital storytellers, the MDST website has attracted thousands of views every year from 124 countries across the world, including nearly 30,000 visits from audiences in the UK since 2013. Digital stories have been created in 15 languages: Arabic, Bengali, Bulgarian, Croatian, English, Estonian, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Mandarin Chinese, Portuguese, Spanish, Tamil and Turkish (with either voice-over or subtitles in English). Budach, project external advisor, observed the impact of multilingual digital storytelling on students' language learning: 'It allows students to actively connect the different communities to which they belong and to understand language learning (and use) as an integral part of making this connection happen. Language learning is not only a subject that they are concerned with during the hours of schooling. But students understand through multilingual digital storytelling that experiences with languages in these different worlds actually do link up' (S7).

Due to the online presence of the Critical Connections digital stories, young people have been able to create their own community which breaks down language barriers and connects children

around the world. Holmes, the organiser of Europe's largest language event 'The Language Show', endorsed the global reach of the Critical Connections project to; 'inform and enrich an interdisciplinary approach that prioritises learner agency and develops a range of transversal and soft skills such as communication, empathy, transcultural understanding and a truly global outlook' (S8). The Critical Connections website supports this digital community through professional development resources created with the British Film Institute; a *Handbook for Teachers* developed with project teachers; and a *Pedagogical Resource Pack* created with teachers and the [British Museum and Museum of London](#).

In highlighting projects that have made significant advances in language pedagogy using digital technology for greater learner involvement, communication and creativity, King, previous National Director for Languages singled out Critical Connections: 'One very striking recent example of the use of technology to support learners' creativity is the Critical Connections multilingual storytelling project coordinated by Goldsmiths College' (S9).

The Critical Connections team have also taken their pedagogical model into the local community (2019-20) and implemented the multilingual storytelling project across 4 sites: Deptford Cinema (a community-led cinema); the Albany (a performing arts centre); Deptford Lounge (a local library); and Goldsmiths. Boyle, Language Acts and Worldmaking, reported on the public screening at Deptford Cinema (March 2020): 'This project doesn't come from nothing. It comes from the long experience of its directors, from their work over decades in education, in multilingualism, pedagogy, in the skills of storytelling ... This is a project about how languages live and how storytelling educates us' (S10).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

S1. Susanna Slivensky, impact report and covering note in the name of all ECML colleagues (2016). The ECML is an intergovernmental institution to promote excellence in language education in Graz, Austria. [Report, December 2016]

S2. Pascale Vassie is Head of the National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education and key partner on the project (2015-17). [Letter of support, March 2018]

S3. Conference and MDST Workshop Evaluations (2019), published in a Report on the Language Acts and Worldmaking website: '[Multilingual digital storytelling, museum artefacts and the arts: Creative pathways to language-and-culture learning](#)' [Report, 2019]

S4. Taiwanese Language Teacher, Laonong Primary School (Taiwan), quoted in video presentation. [Testimony, 2016]

S5. Student, Project School, Sarah Bonnell School (London), quoted in research study by lead project teacher, Luma Hameed. [Testimony, p.49, 2014]

S6. Student Co-Researchers, Lammas School (London). [Poster created by students, 2017]

S7. Gabriele Budach, External Advisor for the Critical Connections Project (2012-2017), quoted in the Interim Report for the Paul Hamlyn Foundation [Report, p.10, 2016].

S8. Bernadette Holmes is campaign director for '[Speak to the Future](#)' and organiser of the high profile Language Show, [Letter of endorsement, September 2017].

S9. Lid King was National Director for Languages for 8 years and set up 'The Languages Company'. He has attended MDST conferences and workshops and led panel discussions on MDST (2016; 2017). He cited the project on [The Languages Company](#) website, [Website, 2018]

S10. Professor Catherine Boyle, Primary Investigator and Strand Lead for Translation Acts, Language Acts and Worldmaking, AHRC Open World Research Initiative (2016-2020), writing on the Language Acts and Worldmaking blog, '[Deptford Storytelling Project 2020](#)'. [Blog post, April 2020]