

MOVING STORIES – EVALUATION OF PROJECT

Aims

'Moving Stories – Digital Storytelling Partnership for Secondary School Migrant Children' set out with 3 key original aims:

- 1) To set up an ongoing digital storytelling partnership between Blatchington Mill school and the University of Brighton enabling the school to integrate digital storytelling activities into ongoing support for migrant children within the school.
- 2) To develop specific workshop activities appropriate to the needs of the children.
- 3) To develop volunteering and research opportunities for students within the University of Brighton

A further aim developed during the project which was to explore avenues of dissemination for these children's stories in ways which mean their authorship was not left behind. We discuss this in dissemination below.

Needs

These aims came about in response to several identified needs at both the school and the university.

First, there was a perceived need to develop voice, visibility and empathy for migrant children in the school. BME and EAL students are underperforming educationally compared to their white British peers. A key reason suggested for this is the under-representation of BME voices in a predominantly white British community. The project aimed therefore to contribute to acknowledging and addressing this important challenge and give these children opportunities to highlight their personal successes which they may not otherwise have. At Blatchington Mill and a number of schools in the local area, the number of EAL and migrant children are relatively low. Due to this, there is a need to continually find innovative ways to engage staff and students with the stories and experiences of these children allowing all to work together in a more informed and compassionate manner.

Secondly, digital storytelling was introduced into the core media studies curriculum in the School of Humanities in 2014. Digital storytelling was developed originally as a community/activist based media practice, whereby people who have made their own digital story can go on to share and show their experiences to others and hence pass on the story creation process. With this philosophy in mind, the project responded to this need by creating volunteer opportunities for undergraduate students to work with the children in sharing their experiences and expertise in DST through a second year 'Media in Practice' community engagement option module. We will comment below on the reasons why this part of the project was unable to fulfill this need. An additional need was identified in the School of Education. Students studying the Bachelors in Education are required to carry out original research in educational

settings for their compulsory third year placement module. Two students carried out their placement at Blatchington Mill school as part of the Moving Stories project. We comment below on their research contributions to the project.

Finally, the project perceived the need to enhance teacher training opportunities using a personal storytelling methodology. A key national priority for student teachers at UoB is EAL and one component of this is 'meeting the needs of newly arrived learners of EAL' <http://about.brighton.ac.uk/education/study/itt/resources/national-priorities.php?PageId=311>. The evidence of importance of adapting to the strengths and needs of all pupils (Teaching Standard 5) is also a priority for the School of Education in its teacher training. This is evidenced by a focus on individual stories and experiences as a part of the ethos of teacher training at the University. Four children from the project took part in the annual inclusion conference for PGCE students and this participation is discussed below.

Activities

To achieve these aims, several key activities were identified and implemented:

First, we co-devised and ran a digital storytelling workshop for 7 children sharing expertise between school and university.

From the school side, the EAL (English as an Additional Language) coordinator, Christine Heaton, has extensive experience in working with children with specific cultural and language needs. From the university side, Ross Adamson, has had several years' experience of running digital storytelling workshops in both Higher Education settings (undergraduate students) and a community/European project



setting with young homeless people. We developed a workshop model adapted from established Digital Storytelling (DST) practices which were appropriate to the children. Activities based around games and storytelling strategies in comics were jointly conceived and trialed. Due to the large variation in English language acquisition, visual methods such as storyboarding, drawing 'lifelines', and drawing emotions, were used to help children express their experiences.



Meetings with School of Education staff and students resulted in the identification of the annual PGCE 'Inclusion Conference' for over 160 students as an appropriate arena for the children's stories to appear. Approximately 20 PGCE students signed up to the session with four children from the project attending. As we felt it was important to keep child and story together, we gave each child an iPad and access to the Edublogs



website where we hosted all of the stories. Each child sat with a group of four or so PGCE students, showed them their story and then the group subsequently discussed with the child what they had seen, asking them further about their experiences. Observing the process, gave us insight into how important it was for each child to experience first-hand being listened to, both through their story and directly face to face.

We will be using the ongoing partnership to further explore this methodology of story dissemination.

A third key activity was around the development of ongoing volunteer opportunities for School of Education and School of Humanities students as described above in the identified needs. To this end we had meetings with SoE colleagues who identified two B.Ed third year students who were interested in issues of minority ethnicity and children with EAL needs. These students started their involvement with the project through helping out with the December 2015 workshop and then with tutors and the project leads, developing suitable research questions and approaches which would benefit both the project and their own education. The second area of volunteer opportunities was with School of Humanities students who had already gained DST expertise through their own undergraduate course work. The aim here was for two or three of these students in their second year, to use the Moving Stories partnership as the basis for their community engagement module 'Media in Practice'. The proposal to the school was to run a one hour weekly after school digital storytelling club for up to 5 Blatchington Mill children. The club would be set up and run by the university students and run from mid February to the Easter Break. The students would be expected to devise appropriate workshop activities and assist the children in creating their own digital stories along the lines of our developing workshop model. However, due to time restrictions these students would not have extended DBS checks in place and therefore the EAL coordinator would need to accompany them at all times as they work with the children in 'The Pier'. In discussion with the 'Media in Practice' coordinator however it was decided shortly before the module started not to offer 'Moving Stories' as a community placement because of the difficulties of balancing child safety requirements with the requirements of the module for those students without DBS checks. We comment below on how we will need to plan for this for future volunteer opportunities.

The fourth area of activity was in developing dissemination avenues for the outcomes of the project. We identified three broad areas of activity: 1) Within the partner institutions, school and university 2) Local events including local authority and voluntary organisation events 3) Digital dissemination.

In terms of the first, the project took part in National Storytelling Week - 1st - 7th February through an activity in the Resource and Information Centre within the school. Approximately 20 students studying English Language and Literature attended a one hour session where the children on the project showed their films and then got into groups to discuss their films with their peers. An event is currently being planned as an end of year celebration in the school's Windmill Theatre for invited families, friends and teachers to view the films and meet the filmmakers. Dissemination within the university has taken place through the inclusion conference discussed above and during the University's Research festival in November 2015.

Several local public engagement activities have taken place with children attending each time. Christine attended the Schools of Sanctuary event on 17th March 2016 with three of the children and showed several stories. More than 50 people representing 22 schools attended the launch. The school won a Schools of Sanctuary award based on



the work of the project with the Head Teacher acknowledging the work of the project in raising awareness and empathy from both staff and students and giving a confidence boost to the storytellers. Christine also attended the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS) training event in February 2016 on being a Muslim in a British school and multiple identities. Several of the children's stories were shown as part of the training event. The project was also discussed at two international conferences, one in Brighton at the 'Visual Methods' conference and the second in Northampton, Massachusetts as part of the 6th International Digital Storytelling conference.

Finally, the project is currently exploring the use of Edublogs as a site for dissemination of the stories and as a digital storytelling resource. The site is currently up and running but due to reasons of privacy and as robust approach to ethics procedures, it is maintained as a private site for use by the project coordinators at present. We discuss developments below.

Evaluation

Evaluation has taken place through three methods: 1) reflections on the project by the project coordinators, 2) interviews with the 7 children who took part in the project 3) research outcomes from the two B.Ed students.

REFLECTIONS ON THE PROJECT

The project has achieved its aims in setting up a working sustainable partnership between the school and university in carrying out digital storytelling with migrant children. A further workshop is planned for July 2016, just before the end of the school term, and a regular commitment to two workshops per academic year, one at the end of the Autumn term and one at the end of the Summer term. These are the only times that students can attend a project for three days out of their regular curriculum time and the timing also suits university staff as it falls outside of timetabled teaching weeks. Whilst the timing and methodology for the workshops has been established, certain practical aspects need clarifying. It can be costly and timely from the school's perspective for the workshops to always take place off site at the university. Some children need 1:1 care because of their physical or educational needs and teaching assistant (TA) time is not always available. We are therefore looking into running workshops at the school. However hardware and software issues still need to be resolved as it is still unclear what technical provision there is at the school for video editing. To this end, the project coordinators purchased two small tablet computers for trialing with the online video editing system 'WEvideo'. A second issue is that we continually need to 'train up' DST facilitators so that the school if it wishes can run some of the workshops autonomously.

Volunteering activities have been successfully set up during the project for School of Education (SoE) students but not so for the School of Humanities 'Media in Practice' module. Our current strategy to resolve this is to identify earlier (in semester 1) which

student are choosing the Media in Practice module, which are interested in a placement in a school and which in particular would like to work with digital storytelling and migrant children. In this way, we can apply for DBS clearance earlier so that once the second semester starts these students can set up the after school club and instigate the DST activities. Needless to say we will be repeating annually the opportunities for SoE students, through involving those interested (as above) with the December workshop, to meet the children and the methodology for them then to undertake their research projects during semester 2.

Dissemination activities have been a success for the project as described above. In particular we were impressed with the way the children interacted with the PGCE students in sharing and discussing their stories. Initial embarrassment at the beginning of the event quickly gave way to very mature conversations about their experiences which were facilitated it appears by running the discussions in small groups and allowing the children to approach the students with their story in their hands.

One area which needs significant development is in the online environment- at this stage (April 2016) it is only just being trialed. One hurdle to overcome is to develop a more robust ethics procedure so that the children and their parents have a more informed consent approach not only to taking part in the workshops but in giving consent to the forms of dissemination of their stories for various audiences. So far we have obtained consent from children and parents to take part in the workshops and on a case by case basis for the dissemination events. But with the development of a comprehensive standard information and consent form is important both to protect the children and their families but also to allow the project to take more advantage of the public engagement activities which there clearly are. For example one area that we would like to explore is in asking the children to provide 'stories about their story' on the Edublogs site such that they are able to provide further context for their stories in order to help understanding. However this raises further questions about anonymity and protecting privacy. For example, should it be the case that all stories have a relatively short public 'shelf life'? Views on experiences change over time and so we need to ensure that children have opportunities to have control over when, where and for how long their stories appear in public.

INTERVIEWS WITH THE CHILDREN

We carried out 1:1 audio recorded interviews with the children shortly after the workshop finished asking them about what it was like to make their story, reflections on their finished story and what they liked about the experience of making stories together. One child said for example how it created an air of trust between the students because these were real life stories that they were sharing and that it seems to lift a weight off her shoulders in being able to make her film. One common theme that the children talked about was how great it was to be off the school site and to be taking part in the project at the university. This is something to bear in mind when we consider the sites in which the DST takes place.

We would like to develop feedback/evaluation methods with the children as the 1:1 audio interviews appeared somewhat daunting for some of the children. To this end

we will be researching appropriate methods for working with children in future workshops in order to gain an understanding of the meanings that they attach to these kinds of social and storytelling processes.

RESEARCH PROJECT FEEDBACK

The final evaluation approach we've taken is to draw upon the research that the two School of Education B.Ed students are undertaking. Their research projects are covering to key areas in working with DST in a school setting, 'impact on the child's engagement with school', and 'impact of the stories in the school'. These reports are due in May 2016 and will feed into ongoing project findings at that point.

The Future

Future plans are to develop a network with other schools and agencies. For example we have already made contact with TAs at Dorothy Stringer school. We aim to have a screening for staff and children there in order to build collaboration for DST. Through the School of Sanctuary event, Christine networked with 'Migrant Help' leader, Alex Ntung, and as a result of seeing the films, has offered to be a mentor for some students at the school. In addition, a St Lukes Primary school teacher who was also at the Schools of Sanctuary event invited one of the students to share her film with a group of her younger pupils who also have cerebral palsy.

The project is feeding into a DST research strand at the University. Other projects are developing separately with, for example, MacMillan Cancer Support, and a families of prisoners organisation. Four broad research areas have been identified focusing on 1) workshop and storytelling process 2) the meanings that participants ascribe to their stories 3) the ways in which digital storytelling may contribute to reflection on life events and 4) the ways in which stories can have impact. A combination of qualitative ethnographic and narrative interview based research will be employed to suggest answers to a range of research questions addressing these avenues of exploration.