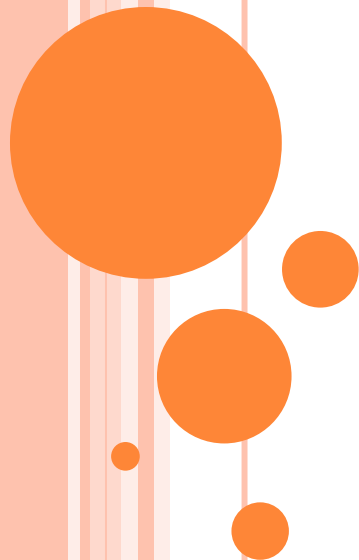# Illuminate Student Researchers

Pupil Voice and Co-Researching on the Critical Connections Multilingual Digital Storytelling Project

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Pupil Voice and Co-researching: Aims

- Ownership
- Engagement
- An insider view
- Unique insights we may not have considered
- Questions we may not be asking
- Transferable skills for pupils and teachers
- crossing boundaries between learning in home, school and community contexts
- Getting everyone talking about it
- Engaging schools and teachers: a set of materials; an immediate involvement; a true collaboration

'Voice': A legal, practical and moral mandate?

1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12:
"… the child who is capable of forming his or her own views (shall be assured of) **the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child**,"... (para. 1)

Rudduck and Flutter:
"**The insights from their world can help us to 'see' things that we do not normally pay attention to but that matter to them**"

Cummins *et al* (2011): 'Identity texts':
student-created texts which hold up '…a mirror to students in which their identities are reflected back in a positive light' (3).

Freire: Dialogic

Illuminate Researchers
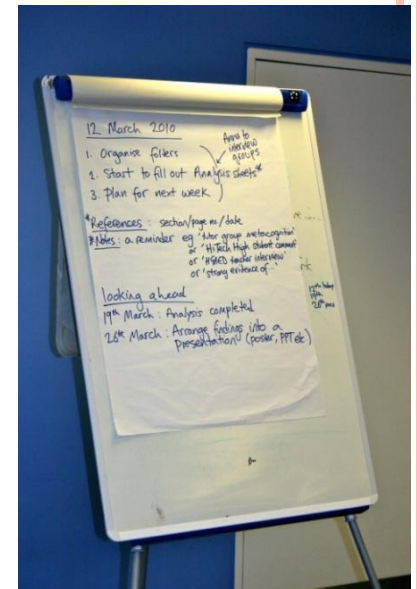
Research brief

Pupils ask their own questions

Train pupils in research methods/ research plan

Forms and training sessions plans provided-sustainability

Research supervision/listening sessions

Report findings

Request a response with recommendations for change

Research skills*

Interviewing
Running a focus group
Visual methods: video diaries, photo journals
Journaling
Participant observation
Ethics and consent

*Transferrable skills for study; work; cultural, social and linguistic capital

Illuminate and MDST: The brief*

Links and barriers between language learning in mainstream and complementary schools

Language learning, school, home, community

Digital literacy and language learning

*Pupils ask their own questions

Next...some findings

What makes language learning through digital storytelling enjoyable? (Aoife, St Michael's)

- link between enjoyment and learning

- 'does it affect your participation [in making a film] if you can't cooperate with someone else?'

- 'the bad points of digital storytelling and how you could improve it'

- whether watching other people's films will help with language learning

Analysis

· An assumption that young people like and are comfortable with the use of technology

· ...that schools and teachers are a long way behind them in terms of digital literacy

· ...that students like learning through making things with their friends.

However, Aoife has pointed out that in both cases there are young people who do not feel this way.

Key findings:
* The project developed learner autonomy, critical thinking and student voice

* the project stimulated creative and dialogic thinking (questioning,
* hypothesising, experimenting, critiquing)

How do students feel about learning a language in a supplementary school and going to school more?(Ahmad, Peace School)

- would like to know 'more about how people think of learning languages-for example, people who know more than four languages'.

- 'How is it, going to school on Saturday when your friends are at home?'

- 'How do you think supplementary school would help you in the future?'

- Rim felt that going to supplementary school was 'good because you are not wasting your time'

- when Ahmad asked about when she was at school on a Saturday and her friends were 'sitting at home relaxing', Rim said that she 'feels jealous' but also that 'it can be boring at home'

.. language learning for economic capital?

an extra language would help Rim in the future because it would be 'easier to find a job'.

'How does learning languages help you in the future and why?'

It 'would help' if Rim was 'going to travel to another country because she would be able to talk their language'- and if she wants to be a language teacher.

Analysis

Ahmad identifies strongly as a person who speaks four languages.

He enjoys going to supplementary school and feels that other young people should see the benefit of it, too.

Ahmad recently made a film about Palestine.

When I asked the young people to introduce themselves, most of them mentioned their school. Ahmad had also done this at the last session in October, but this time, said, instead, and with some force, 'Palestine'.

Key finding- the project:
provided an authentic context for language learning where students have been able to personalise their work and gain a sense of ownership

- language learning was a key element of Ahmad's attempts to make sense of the various journeys he has made from country to country and the feelings he has experienced during these journeys and his time in each country

- Ahmad is seeking security and may be why he feels that language learning will be useful for future paid employment.

- It may be less about getting a job and more about feeling safe in new countries

Key findings-the project:
- enabled students to explore culture and identity in their own terms in flexible, critical and non-essentialised ways
- enabled students from bilingual backgrounds to deepen their understanding of the heritage culture
- built students' confidence in expressing their perspectives through their stories

Illuminate and long lasting effects on teachers and teaching practice

Illuminate opens up:

- what might be pedagogically possible
- what students were capable of
- greater potential for 'student voice' work.

Freire's (2005) plea for a teacher who '… is no longer merely the one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach' (80).

One Arabic complementary school teacher wrote ...

I was always taking the lead and doing the work and researching and writing, so although the students did learn, I was the one doing all the work.

Letting students choose their project has motivated them and made them want to research and find out more and more.

I am so proud of them.

I must give you some examples as I am bursting with pride …

The most interesting … is the decision of three teenage girls; a Palestinian Muslim, an Egyptian Copt and a Lebanese Christian discussing the Hijab.

I did not help.

I just listened and offered resources and answered their questions.

...all three girls were part of MDST last year and two of them were … (Illuminate) researchers

Other Illuminate researchers' questions and findings...

☐Learning outside school
Students identify this with 'lessons' taught by 'teachers' out
of school, although there is a slowly growing awareness of
the implications of using family and the Internet for research
 and storytelling inspiration.

☐Developing confidence; being creative
Having space to design and conduct research and to imagine an
digital stories seems to have an impact on students' confidence,
 have identified themselves.

Youth 'voice'
Peer researchers understand that their findings are important to us
 stories is also an opportunity, which they appreciate, for getting th
voices heard. Again, this is something which seems unfamiliar in t
the schooling experiences they are used to.

Key findings – the project:
•   demonstrated the value of involving students as
co-researchers and how, with appropriate training, they can contrib
in ways which are thoughtful and critical

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Questions/comments

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Bruner (1962): '(i)f man's intellectual excellence is the most his own among his perfections, it is also the case that the most personal of all that he learns is that which he has discovered for himself'(82).

Illuminate projects have looked at…

Getting more BTEC art students into high profile art degree programmes (Lewisham College)

Stereotypes relating to ethnicity in premier league football- dealing with racist language in classrooms

Evaluating a new tutor group system- improving curriculum to make it more relevant and engaging; investigating the discipline policy to make it more responsive

Community cohesion in a school in a school combining the children of BNP supporters and Muslim pupils- starting with familiarisation of out-of-school literacy

How to spend the funding for a new Health Hut in a girls' school- addressing sexual harassment in the co-ed 6th form