

# Introduction

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In the face of social inequalities, digital divides, hegemonic power relations, capitalist conflicts of interests, climate change, asymmetric gender relations and international border and migration regimes, educational and social actions are becoming more and more challenging. Mediating these social challenges demands new methods and approaches to address the complexities of the issues while at the same time acknowledging the individual dimensions of each of these challenges to be able to put them into context; historically, culturally, and socially. Art, storytelling and critical pedagogical practices may provide the necessary tools to follow what bell hooks already demanded in the 1990s: *teaching to transgress*. Cultural representations and storytelling may offer the possibilities to juxtapose the individual diverse livelihoods with the collective social understandings of our societal challenges and may thus be ideal terrains for educational considerations.

Hence, the Erasmus+ project “Lit. Up Your Phones: A Digital Toolkit for the ESL/EFL Classroom to Combat Social Inequalities of Times of Covid19 Crises (2021–2023) (DigLit)” under the lead of the University of Graz (Austria) with its coordinator Prof. Roberta Maierhofer, was inspired by these grand challenges which were furthered by the global pandemic during the time. Together with university and school partners in Austria, Hungary, and Italy, the two-year educational project developed a digital toolkit where contemporary Young Adult Literature and Digital Storytelling were combined to develop a new methodology to address issues of diversity and equality. The methodology relies on the use of smartphones as a more affordable and widely used information technology among secondary students to provide educators with useful materials that do not need sophisticated technological equipment. As a result, the project developed a number of open-access materials for the English classroom to work with contemporary Young Adult Literature and digital storytelling to negotiate an intersectional understanding of growing-up in our ever-changing world.

Hence, the project aligns with paradigms of *Global Citizenship Education* introduced by UNESCO in 2015 and relegates also with the *Global Educational Guidelines*, currently in its third edition by the Council of Europe. Both papers emphasize an interdisciplinary approach of addressing global issues such as migration, digitalization, climate change, social justice, and human rights across curricula within the classrooms. DigLit contributed to these developments by not only being based on approaches from critical pedagogies going back to Paulo Freire, bell hooks and Henry Giroux, but also by fostering multiliteracy skills to prepare educators and students how to mediate these issues in their classrooms.

Following the DigLit project, an international conference was organized in May 2023 at the University of Graz (Austria) as a final outcome of this two-year project where the scope was expanded to invite scholars, practitioners, and educators from various disciplines to have a fruitful dialogue on how to navigate and further contribute to the development of skills, materials, actions, and thoughts from an interdisciplinary perspective useful for educational practices. Within the three-day conference, education was negotiated as an intrinsic part of society which can be understood as an institution of power, which is permanently located on the nexus of reproduction and resistance. Tapping into these tensions of how to mediate social challenges within such institutions, the conference provided an array of approaches, theories, methods, and materials which are resulting in this edited volume. As the project as well as the conference aimed specifically at methods from the arts, literature, and storytelling as means of engaging with cultural representations to understand the individual lived realities in juxtaposition to collective and systemic structures, this publication focuses on reflecting on these specific terrains, where storytelling is viewed as the common thread throughout all chapters.

Well-aware of its tradition in Indigenous cultures and the colonial appropriation of such in many contexts, this publication does not intend to propose storytelling as a new or innovative method to transfer and create knowledge, but rather proposes to see it as an intrinsic human quality that can contribute significantly to educational practices relying on critical pedagogies to acknowledge its origin. Moreover, the developments due to capitalist and neoliberal interests on the individual as the center of production and progress may also provide the opportunity to critically reflect on the very method of storytelling and its individualism. Thus, placing these individual narratives within greater structures and systems is the goal of this publication. Showing how this can

be done effectively in education remains a process not yet finished, but where these texts aim to contribute on different levels and from different disciplines.

As a result, the publication critically reflects on art, literature, storytelling, and digital methods as means to mediate social challenges in teaching practices and to challenge normative perceptions of identity, while also promoting students' multiliteracy skills. Moving between conceptualizing critical pedagogies, addressing social inequalities along the popular matrix of race, class, and gender, and presenting studies of formal and informal education using storytelling practices, this edited volume combines an array of insights into how social challenges may be mediated and discussed within educational institutions. As an interdisciplinary project, this publication brings together scholars from the field of education with literary and cultural studies experts, applied linguists, sociologists, as well as translation studies scholars. Moreover, the publication incorporates insights from the European context but also extends its premises to the Americas and Asia, thus, contributing a global lens to navigating the similarities and differences of our current social challenges.

To do so, the volume is divided into five sections: (1) Critical Pedagogies; (2) Higher Education; (3) Art, Museum, and Storytelling; (4) Digital Storytelling, and (5) Reading Practices.

The edited volume begins with an engagement of critical feminist pedagogies, where Adelina Sánchez Espinosa showcases results from distinct international gender projects that use feminist pedagogies to unravel gender inequalities. Drawing on film and cultural studies, the chapter engages with a critical investigation of gendered representation in films and how these can function as fruitful tools for a feminist classroom practice to discuss power dynamics.

Engaging with dynamic socio-political landscapes, Jorge Chaparro examines the 2021 protests in Colombia and their broader implications within Latin America's widespread social unrest. Highlighting the protestors' use of non-academic educational practices to disseminate political knowledge and resistance narratives within urban contexts, the emergence of "urban pedagogy" as a glocal strategy is emphasized.

Shifting attention to the complex dynamic of class and classism in higher education, Iris Mendel and Lisa Scheer bring in autobiographical, autoethnographic and psychoanalytic narratives to advocate storytelling as a means to reflect on class privileges, disadvantages, and social inequalities in the educational context, drawing from their research project "Habitus.Macht.Bildung".

Yasemin Besen-Cassino, Nina Cheung, Matthew Murray, Elizabeth Emery, Brian Johnson, Nina M. Goodey, and Amy R. Tuininga examine the impact of

gender inequality on sustainability internships within STEM fields, revealing differing effects on women and men, and the potential of internships to mitigate systemic gender disparities. Providing a specific US-American perspective, their case study amplifies the persistent gendered dimension of educational practices resulting in career discrepancies.

Moving from the higher educational context to informal educational settings, Claudia Meneghetti and Fabiana Fazzi's exploration of plurilingual podcasting underscores its transformative potential in promoting linguistic diversity and social inclusion, particularly within the context of classroom and museum settings, enhancing critical language awareness and agency among participants.

Adding to the section on art pedagogies, Vanessa S. Troiano expands on John Dewey's idea that democracy requires continual renewal, emphasizing the pivotal role of innovative art and collaborative pedagogies in shaping general education to foster diversity. By challenging stereotypes and promoting accessibility and inclusivity, art education is highlighted as a holistic experience and approach for democratic functioning.

Evolving the discussion on digital storytelling, Vicky MacLeroy draws from the Critical Connections global research project to investigate the use of multilingual digital storytelling by young people as a means to develop as global ethical thinkers. Through the lens of intercultural responsibility and an ethics of care within three different educational contexts (India, Malaysia, UK), the research transcends borders and embraces a decolonial critical stance toward local and global partnerships.

Stefan Baumgarten and Claus Michael Hutterer examine the intersection of translation pedagogy and digital storytelling, emphasizing its alignment with liberationist transgressive pedagogies. By exploring the challenges in training intercultural and transcultural communication experts and considering the role of digital storytelling in developing multiliterate skills, the experiential learning provided by digital stories in today's educational landscape is emphasized.

Julia Baier highlights the evolving role of museums to move beyond monocultural narratives by integrating diverse digital storytelling approaches and thereby overcoming the historical tendency to silence marginalized voices. Drawing on the power of digital storytelling, the chapter lays a foundation for understanding the potential of digital stories in reshaping the narratives and experiences offered by history museums.

Shifting the focus to reading practices in English as a Foreign Language education, Sofia Guzzon engages in her chapter with the integration of Digital Social Reading as a prevalent practice, advocating for the incorporation of digital literacy into the EFL teaching environment by highlighting the potential benefits of Digital Social Reading, such as its flexibility, cost-effectiveness, and facilitation of structured interactions.

Finally, Gabriella Daróczzi and Emőke Varga bring in an exploration of the integration of interactive books in classroom settings as an innovative opportunity to foster literary interests of young learners, cultivate their digital literacy, and enhance their reading comprehension skills.

## References

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