How can Young People's Multilingual Digital Storytelling Foster Intercultural Responsibility and an Ethics of Care?

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Abstract *This chapter draws on a global research project, Critical Connections (2012-ongoing), to critically examine how young people use multilingual digital storytelling to develop as global ethical thinkers. I look at how digital storytelling allows young people to investigate the dilemma of sustainable futures in critical, speculative, and imaginative ways. Applying the theoretical lenses of intercultural responsibility and an ethics of care, this research moves beyond borders and adopts a decolonial critical stance towards entangled local and global partnerships. I demonstrate in this chapter how this focus on an ethics of care can be amplified in a digital story with its power to magnify what matters, paying attention to the particular and the importance of everyday experiences. I discuss the pedagogical approaches and challenges of implementing digital storytelling with young people (8–16 years old) in different educational contexts including a secondary school in India, a residential school trip in Malaysia, and a primary school in the UK. In the research presented in this chapter, I analyze particular moments from these digital stories created around intercultural responsibility and an ethics of care and listen carefully to the voices of these young filmmakers. To conclude, I reflect on whether young digital storytellers can create a community platform where their voices are heard, and they can call for action and seek solutions.*

Keywords *Multilingualism; Intercultural Responsibility; Ethics of Care; Transformative Pedagogy; Critical Ethnography*

Introduction

The Critical Connections Project has expanded its local and global networks in recent years with a strong focus on social justice, young people's agency, and activist citizenship (Chung and Macleroy). The project has also seen a critical turn towards environmental activism and looking carefully at how ecological challenges can be faced through "narratives of connection, community, and interdependence among humans, animals and the natural world" (Gaard 327). The overarching theme for the project and film festivals from 2020–2023 was *Our Planet* and our pedagogical approach encouraged young people to become responsive to local and planetary-scale ecological challenges. These ideas resonate with recent work in Canada and Australia looking at decolonizing pedagogies advocating "Common Worlding Pedagogies" that "strive to find ways of thinking and learning *with* the worlds around us" (Taylor et al. 75). In this chapter, I will be looking at three case studies from the Critical Connections Project in three countries (India, Malaysia, UK) to analyze how young people's multilingual digital storytelling can foster intercultural responsibility and an ethics of care. Our digital storytelling work draws on and adds to the notion of "Living Literacies" (Pahl & Rowsell) and a research approach toward literacies that recognizes a turn to activism, hopeful practice, creativity, and social change.

Activism, Intercultural Responsibility, and an Ethics of Care

In thinking about children's and youth activism within our Critical Connections project, it is vital to consider the tensions and commonalities between global calls for action and local realities. In discussing children's rights advocacy, researchers talk about a "continuum of citizenship practices in which global and local influences and forces enmesh" (Hàkli and Kallio 308). Building on this concept of citizenship on a local-global continuum, we recognize how language and culture affect children's activism. In our project, we argue that becoming a young multilingual activist is about "local languages and cultures and how to form lasting bonds across communities" (Anderson and Macleroy 183). This focus on capturing different voices within communities is key to our research and resonates with imagining a decolonial multilinguality that moves outside and is "part of a befriending, community practice, a purposeful consideration of how the world around us is shared in speech" (Phipps 92). Guilherme developed the concept of intercultural responsibility as a challenge

to citizenship education to move beyond borders and adopt a decolonial, critical stance towards "cooperation (entangled local and global partnerships)" (114) for the well-being of our planet.

Young activists in our project took up this idea of intercultural responsibility and moved outside to explore the precarious knowledge and lived experiences of local communities and began to understand at a deeper level the relationship between nature and culture. Storytelling and stories are seen as "valuable tools of ecological awareness and moral transformation" (Kerslake 440) that can stimulate "consideration of the non-human world and even induce action" (441). Stories are also seen as a way to develop a discourse of hope that inspires young people to imagine resilience and reflect on responsible ecocitizenship. Stories can challenge children and young adults to alter their perceptions and look more critically at the "entangled relationship between society, technology and the web of nature" (446). In reading children's and young adult literature and creating their own stories, young people can develop intercultural responsibility to face hard truths. Literature can also foster empathy and kinship and in researching Arabic Young Adult (YA) books after the Arab Spring, Anati reflects on how stories help adolescents to be resilient and all the books in her study "suggest, in their different ways, strategies to enable Arab young people to think positively and be optimistic for a better future" (228). Young activists can be viewed as "grieving eco-warriors" (Murphy 4) with feelings of pain, guilt, and sadness but also a strong sense of wonder in nature and the desire to become agents of change. The aim of climate activism in children's and YA literature is to "encourage the young to wonder, and through this wonder to question, the cause of environmental destruction and seek to do something about it" (6).

Building on ideas of activism and intercultural responsibility, I turn to ecofeminism and an ethics of care to challenge the dualistic character of the human/nature relationship recognizing "nature has its own voice, which both needs to be heard and with which we encourage all to enter into conversation" (Cross 38). An ethics of care is about deep listening to bring about radical change. It is about listening to the voices of children and young people who are often excluded from decision-making processes and "to care with is to be open to other ways of thinking, being and knowing, and then act in ways that reflect these new knowledges" (Richardson and Langford 411). Enacting caring activism can spark passion and provide young people with new possibilities where "caring is activism" (Richardson et al. 6).

Critical Connections Pedagogy and Digital Storytelling

Fig. 13: Young Filmmakers on Location, 2022, K'sirs International School, India

Social justice (pluralist democracy and activist cosmopolitan citizenship) is a key principle in the design of the Critical Connections project with multilingual digital storytelling in the center (Macleroy et al.). Our view of activist citizenship is about children doing things, experimenting, and learning and thinking more deeply "about their actions and reactions" (Baker 1117). Over the years we have been investigating and researching what happens when young people begin to frame stories from their communities through the lens of a camera (figure 13). Digital storytelling comes out of a background of media justice and media activism and a strong belief in the power of shared stories. Lambert, one of the founders of the Digital Storytelling Movement in the 1990s, argues that digital storytelling is about agency in authorship, breaking down distinctions of privilege, and creating community. Digital storytelling is about finding ways to tell hard truths and "appreciate how much storytelling is also about mucking around in the seedbed, digging up the crap that holds us down, so that the biological process of story can flourish" (3). The shaping and sharing of digital stories that emerge from hard subjects can be viewed as a political act (Hill) and communities as a space for reciprocity "collective learning, action and change" (Packham 8).

Young digital storytellers in the Critical Connections project gain the courage to tell stories that matter to their local and global communities and confront taboo subjects. Over the years, we have been encouraged and emboldened by the stories young people decide to investigate and tell when their

interests frame the production of texts. Our Critical Connections pedagogy builds on and moves beyond ideas of critical literacy and "reading the word and the world" (Freire and Macedo) and recognizes how "children learn through pleasure and play; experimentation and creativity; and critical thinking and activism" (Macleroy and Chung 4). Janks argued that critical literacy needed to move to the territory beyond reason and explore the territory of "the taboo and transgressive" (212). Digital storytelling provides young people with the tools and power to expose hard truths and seek out solutions. These young filmmakers through desire and curiosity lead others to critical hope and imagining otherwise. In recent research on hopeful education, Schwittay talks about audacious hope when "educators stand in solidarity with students and defy dominant ideologies from positions of justice and care" (14). This view of hopeful education also moves away from asking young people endless questions and instead argues for spaces of possibility where young people can "re-imagine, re-create, re-construct in radically different ways" (13).

Transformative pedagogy (creative, critical, performative) is another key design principle in the Critical Connections Project (Macleroy et al.). We research and look critically and carefully at how and whether digital storytelling can transform language and literacy pedagogy in some of the following ways: shift ownership of learning to the students; engage students in grappling with multiple viewpoints; break down barriers of language and culture; change the way students perceive others; research and problem solve; value student-generated creative-critical-performative success criteria; promote multilingual literacy and multilingual activism. Adopting a transformative pedagogical approach involves creating a space for learner agency and enabling students "to relate curriculum content to their individual and collective experience and to analyze broader social issues relevant to their lives" (Cummins 246). It also takes courage to frame literacy through the lens of transformative pedagogies as this approach requires "a deep level of thinking, criticality and creativity and an openness to uncertainty and a willingness to change" (Stavrou et al. 4).

Digital storytelling is versatile and adaptable and with its rootedness in community has the "potential to illuminate the lifeways and lifeworlds of those telling the stories" (Willox et al.). These researchers argue that digital storytelling sits at "the nexus of research, community engagement, and narrative" (130) and engaging with research through digital storytelling enabled the indigenous community to share place-based wisdom and explore "impacts of climate change on health and well-being" (130). In this research context, digital stories were viewed as "rich, nuanced, culturally based, and locally appro-

priate narrative 'data'" (138). In our Critical Connections project, young people make these connections with their communities and cultures, and in the research context of Taiwan, children of aboriginal ethnicity created a digital story, *The Indestructible Belonging*, which "helped these children to understand what it means to be a citizen with rights" (Chung and Macleroy 272). In this chapter, I look carefully at how digital storytelling can connect young people in the digital age.

Critical Connections Global Project – Methodological Approach and Case Studies

The Critical Connections project was conceived and launched as a funded research project in 2012 to connect language and literacy across sites of learning and make creative and critical use of digital technology. The overarching research methodology that we adopted was critical ethnography as we were researching in and across communities and wanted to bring about change, "at its heart there should be a desire to 'make a difference', to expose injustice and to point to necessary action to combat it" (Anderson and Macleroy 135). While critical ethnography forms the core of our research approach, we also draw on ecological, collaborative, and multimodal perspectives in our research design. Our research design is responsive to the local and global contexts of teachers and children (Macleroy and Chung). This chapter focuses on three case studies of lead project schools in India, Malaysia, and the UK.

The first case study focuses on a lead project school in India situated in the region of Tamil Nadu in Southern India and part of the Critical Connections project since 2021. The school has a vision statement of "a sustainable education through responsible freedom, exploration and understanding for life and living" (K'sirs International School). The group of students (14–16-year-olds) in this case study created their digital story using Tamil, Malayalam, Telegu and English. The second case study focuses on a lead project school, SJK(T) Masai (Tamil School part of the project since 2021) in Malaysia situated in Johur a state in the south of the Malay Peninsula. The group of students (10–14-year-olds) in this case study went on a residential trip to the Cameron Highlands in Malaysia and created their digital story with a group of indigenous students using Bahasa Melayu, Semai, Tamil, and English. The third case study focuses on a lead project school in the UK (part of the project since 2015) where students follow a multilingual curriculum and there is a strong ethos of open minded-

ness. The school's mission statement is about a mutually respectful community, an enriched cultural life, and a "global perspective to help create a more peaceful world" (Europa School UK). The bilingual class (8-9-year-olds) in this case study learn for half the week in English and the other half in Spanish and created their digital story using Spanish and English and their home heritage languages.

The research methods for data collection included field notes, observations, conversations with lead project teachers and students, storyboards, creative work, and the digital stories. The research data was collected across key stages in the filmmaking process (pre-production; production; post-production and film festival) across two years (2021–2023). Researching and working with young people requires robust and sensitive ethical procedures and the project has full university ethical approval. The data was analyzed using narrative analysis. Narrative analysis together with relevant quotations from participants enables the researcher to focus on key decision points in the story or narrative, critical events, key places, and key experiences. A narrative analysis "keeps text and context together, retains the integrity of people rather than fragmenting bits of them into common themes and codes and enables evolving situations, causes and consequences to be charted" (Cohen et al. 665). This approach to analysis views "narratives as powerful, human and integrated; truly qualitative" (665).

In the next section, I will be using the main guiding research question to investigate how multilingual digital storytelling can foster intercultural responsibility and an ethics of care. I will be analyzing the following digital stories created within the project theme of "Our Planet" across the key filmmaking stages.

- Menstrual Cycle, 2022, K'sirs International School, India (Malayalam-Tamil-Telugo-English) – https://vimeo.com/742172357
- Warriors of Cameron, 2023, SJK (T) Masai, Malaysia (Bahasa Melayu-Semai-Tamil-English) – https://vimeo.com/853980527
- Nuestras Raíces, 2023 – Our Roots, Europa School, UK (Spanish-Russian-Slovak-Polish-Arabic- Italian-Portuguese-Japanese-English) – https://vimeo.com/853432337

Case Study 1 – Menstrual Cycle, India, Our Planet Festival 2022

Breaking the Stigma – Pre-Production Stage

> The short film that we are about to make strives to break the stereotypes and stigma that are heavily correlated with the talk of menstruation in general because periods should be normalized period (Pramitha, Student, K'sirs).

This was a brave and taboo subject for the young people in India to research and make a short film about. The school was slowly opening after pandemic restrictions were lifted and the digital storytelling project, with the theme of "Our Planet", was offered to these older students (first group to return), "when we put forward this opportunity to our children, the children were very excited about it" (Mrinalini, Teacher, K'sirs). The students were asked to put forward their ideas for the theme of "Our Planet" and think carefully about the ecological challenge they wanted to face. These ideas included researching renewable sources of energy and menstrual hygiene and the students were given a few days to present a small write-up about their idea. It was the student, Pramitha, who presented a clear idea of how she would like to take the whole project forward. The lead teacher reflected on how Pramitha was keen to talk about a topic that no-one tackles in India and see if they could bring about a positive change in this area through their digital story. Intercultural responsibility is a challenge to move beyond borders (Guilherme) and Pramitha drew on her lived experiences to bring about change. Pramitha, having grown up in America and now having come back to India, noticed a significant disparity in the attitudes towards menstrual hygiene. This prompted her to advocate for a different approach in addressing the issue, aiming to effectively combat the associated stigma. The young people (14–16-year-olds) came together across year groups to create their digital story.

> The children are looking to talk about a very taboo topic for us here in India. So, menstrual cycle: express yourself – and that's exactly what the children are coming up with (Mrinalini, Teacher, K'sirs).

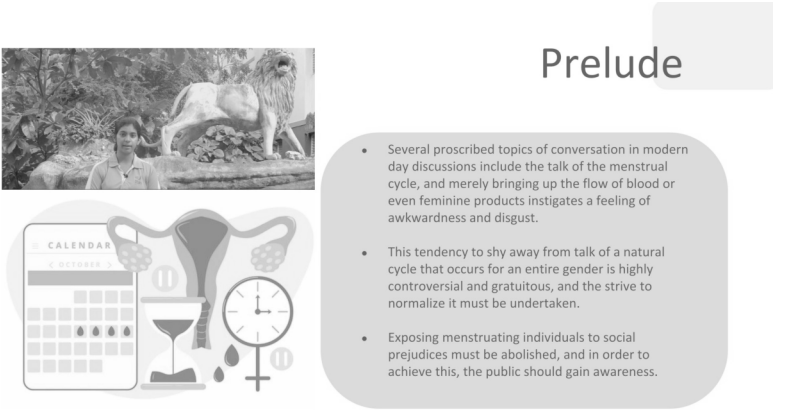
The young filmmakers were keen to raise awareness on a topic considered taboo in modern India and redefine preconceived notions on socially impermissible topics. These students felt strongly that they should talk about the stigma of menstruation and creating awareness would make a lot of difference

to the way children approach the menstrual cycle growing up. These young people were also developing an "ethics of care" (Richardson and Langford) as they planned to talk to people across the school community and outside the school gates and practice deep listening to bring about radical change. The students developed a conceptual outline of their short film on the menstrual cycle and presented this in three parts:

> Introduction: the social stigma surrounding menstruation; Issues at hand: specious stereotypes and presumed notions in terms of the menstrual cycle; Taking Initiative: Initiating a wide involvement in the public to raise awareness (Students, K'sirs).

Pramitha presented the prelude to creating their digital story on the menstrual cycle (figure 14) and boldly called for action to break the stigma.

Fig. 14: Breaking the Stigma



Revolutionizing Feminine Struggles – Production

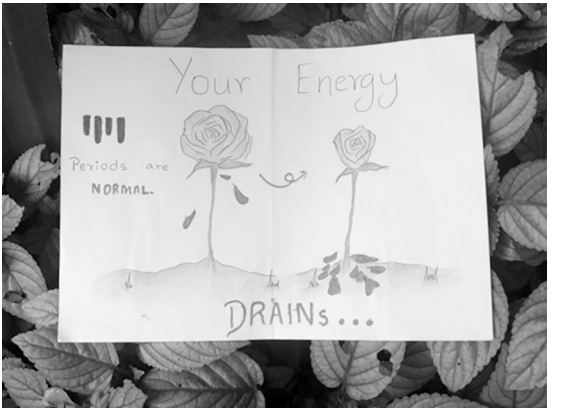
The young filmmakers researched the taboo topic and identified prevalent social stereotypes surrounding menstruation, "menstruation is considered dirty or shameful; women are presumed to have diminished emotional and physical capacities during this time of natural cleansing; inhibited from performing daily tasks; items that they may touch are considered 'impure'" (Students,

K'sirs). These students wanted not only to gather statistical data and lay out known facts and stereotypes about menstruation, but also to listen to the different generational and cultural perspectives and views of people in their local communities. As part of the filming and production process, they went outside the classroom with a desire to educate open-minded individuals that talk of periods must be normalized. They called this part of the production process: Project Period. One of the male students in the group presented their desire for change.

> We must normalize this talk of periods … Let's be the start of a change in which we revolutionize feminine struggles and raise awareness to normalize menstruation (Nithilan, Student, K'sirs).

The production stage was a challenge for these young filmmakers to open up the talk around a taboo subject in India. Their first challenge was talking with the younger students (11–13-year-olds) in their school, and they set this up as a short competition to study how much the children were aware of the menstrual cycle. The filmmakers raised awareness with the younger children in interactive and creative ways by including artwork (figure 15).

Fig. 15: Artwork on the Menstrual Cycle



As part of the production process for Project Period, the young filmmakers conducted a comparative analysis across generations to listen deeply and

think about ways to foster an ethics of care. In capturing different voices within their communities these young filmmakers practiced a decolonial multilinguality (Phipps) using three different local languages to interview and talk to older community members. The filmmakers interviewed the caretakers in school and then went outside the school gates to talk to people at college, menial workers, people on daily wages, housewives, professionals in the IT and banking sectors as well as senior clinicians. This is an excerpt from one of the interviews.

> Young Filmmakers: Were you well-informed about menstrual cycle and what women go through during their periods?
> Female menial worker: We were isolated during our periods. We were not allowed inside the house and often made to sit near the door. We were given separate plates, tumblers etc. Instead of a mat or mattress we get jute gunny bag to sleep on. (Menstrual Cycle).

Women in the community talked about isolation, not being allowed to go anywhere, and not being allowed to touch people or plants. The young filmmakers wanted to use their digital story to revolutionize this feminine struggle and normalize periods.

Menstrual Cycle – Post-Production and Film Festival

In the post-production stage of editing their digital story on the menstrual cycle, the young filmmakers worked with the media team in the school and decided how to tell their story to a wider audience. Digital stories are like collages, thus the filmmakers included artwork, still images, and interview footage to represent ideas and attitudes towards menstrual hygiene. They explored the pain and struggles girls and women have to face through composing bilingual Tamil-English poetry as well as poetry about the pride of women. These young filmmakers desired change and they wanted to create a strong message in their digital story about intercultural responsibility and an ethics of care at both a local and global level.

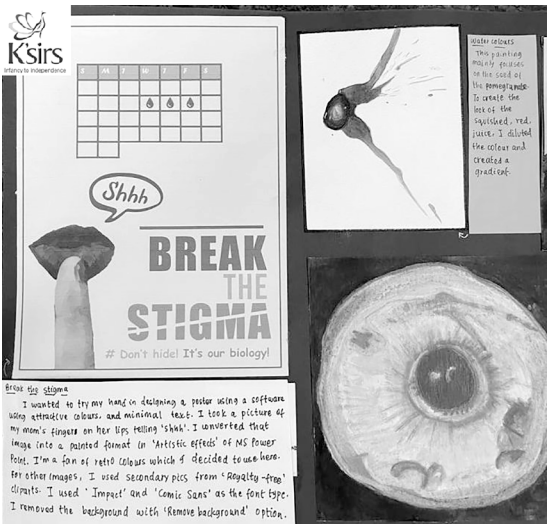
The filmmakers chose to open their digital story in a poetic visual way with emotive language and a photograph of an open flower with pink and red petals. They used the color red as a strong symbol of the menstrual cycle and implemented it in a way that the color seeped across the screen. The film then shifted to a photograph of children's outstretched hands, brought together in a circle

with palms uppermost and a large red dot painted in the center of each palm representing Project Period.

> Effortless days it might seem are hours of pain endured. Are we there for them? Period. When silence speaks volumes (Menstrual Cycle).

The young filmmakers used their digital story to initiate local action and educate children in their own school and across the globe. These filmmakers wanted to understand the perspectives of both males and females and include voices across the generations. Their film poster was brave and bold with the strong message to break the stigma (figure 16). Their digital story was screened at the international online film festival in June 2022.

Fig. 16: Film Poster for Menstrual Cycle, 2022



Case Study 2 – Warriors of Cameron, Malaysia, Our Planet Festival 2023

Eco Pahlawan – Pre-Production

> Our Eco Pahlawan is actually about eco. It means about the environment and pahlawan is actually a Malay word of our national language and means warriors, so indirectly it's eco warriors, environmental warriors who fight for the environment (Meghna, Student, Masai).

The young filmmakers (10–14-year-olds) in Malaysia were given one month to work on the digital storytelling project (April-May 2023). This small group of five students formed Eco Pahlawan and became eco-warriors with a desire to question environmental destruction and seek to do something about it (Murphy). The lead project teacher, Khasturi Ramalingam, had a research background in storytelling using mobile applications and she briefed the students on the project and helped them research a local environmental challenge in Malaysia.

> Our call for this project was we read an article about Cameron Highlands, Orang Asli settlement. Orang Asli settlement is known as the original people's native piece of land. So, we read an article on them, about their areas getting polluted day by day because of modern industry and waste. So, we loved the chapter especially because it was about the environment. So, we went for it (Meghna, Student, Masai).

Khasturi reflected on how the students wanted to raise ecological awareness about this group of indigenous people in Malaysia and their language and land. "Orang Asli" is Malay for original people or indigenous people. She commented on how the young filmmakers had to work very hard to think critically and creatively about how to create their short digital story. The students had three weeks for the pre-production stage of the filmmaking process and parents became actively involved in the planning and preparation. The students held fifteen meetings which included school parents and the digital story developed from discussions before developing the storyline and storyboard. These young filmmakers also had to prepare for travel and a week of filming in the Cameron Highlands with indigenous people in the tribal village.

> Another reason we are here is because of our parents. They gave us the major support especially when it comes to accommodation, traveling, and even mental support. Sometimes we were very stressed up … then they gave us the support, convincing words, and so on (Meghna, Student, Masai).

The Eco Pahlawan group set themselves tasks and roles to prepare for filming including gathering props and one student took on the role of treasurer responsible for the finances for the film shoot. These young eco-warriors found out more about the Cameron Highlands to make local and global audiences aware of the eco threat and need to foster an ethics of care and intercultural responsibility (Guilherme). The Cameron Highlands is known for its peaceful habitats, flowers, wildlife, rivers and waterfalls and the Orang Asli that live there have strong spiritual ties with their natural environment and interdependence with the natural world. The young filmmakers researched the environmental issues facing the Cameron Highlands in recent years which include mass tourism, land clearing and soil erosion, river water pollution, and garbage (particularly plastic). The Eco Pahlawan group decided to tell their digital story from the perspective of a plastic bottle discarded by a careless tourist.

Deep in the Forest – Production

> And then we started shooting. We had to go very deep into the forest because it's a native place, Orang Asli settlement. So, we went there, and it was one of the most fantastic adventures that you can never ever forget it in your whole lifetime. It is the best one (Meghna, Student, Masai).

The Eco Pahlawan group traveled to the Cameron Highlands to film their digital story and spent some time traveling around (some students for the first time) before going deep into the forest. The young filmmakers explained how it was initially hard to communicate with the Orang Asli people as they do not speak Bahasa Melayu, the national language of Malaysia. However, they found a few people in the tribal village who could speak Bahasa Melayu and translate between these students and the children in the village to create the digital story. Translating was time consuming, and the young filmmakers had to be very patient. The Eco Pahlawan group were in charge of the directing and filming of the digital story and worked closely with the Orang Asli children who were in the film.

> Our film is actually about tourists polluting Orang Asli origin settlement by throwing rubbish and at the end of the day this rubbish is being collected in the river (Meghna, Student, Masai)

The young filmmakers asked hard questions about where the indigenous people were going to find clean water. Their digital story opened with a shot of a plastic bottle in a local river and the line spoken in the Semai language, "I am a bottle. This is my story". Telling the story from the perspective of the plastic bottle enabled the young filmmakers to enter into the community and shifted the focus to the Orang Asli children and how their lives are being directly affected by garbage and plastic waste that ends up on their land and in their rivers. The young filmmakers also captured the fun, laughter, and community spirit of the children as they ran through the forest, played games in the village, and sat together with the Eco Pahlawan group to discuss ideas (figure 17).

Fig. 17: Screenshot of Location in the Indigenous Village

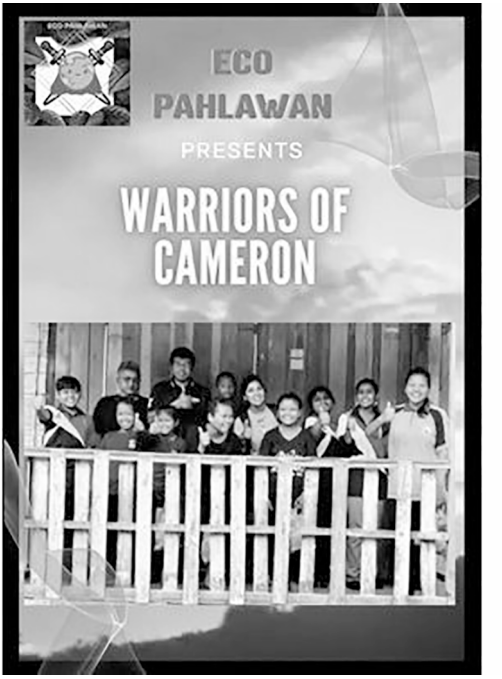
The Eco Pahlawan group talked about the knowledge they learnt from filming with the Orang Asli children and their interdependence with the natural world (Gaard).

> Actually, we got a lot of knowledge. We saw that they were ready for anything; they weren't very hesitant because they are living with the nature; they live with nature so much; they are already mixed with the nature. They are having a brilliant mind even though they do not know how to expose it to the outside world. If you go and research one by one, wow, they will be the best of the best (Meghna, Student, Masai).

Warriors of Cameron – Post-Production and Film Festival

In the post-production stage of editing their digital story, *Warriors of Cameron*, the young filmmakers thought carefully about the mood and tone of their story and how they wanted to convey their message about the ecological damage of careless tourism. Having gone deep into the forest and worked alongside the Orang Asli children to come up with ideas of how to clean up the village, they were able to capture a vibrant lived experience with a clear message for change and an ethics of care. They practiced intercultural responsibility in their film-making and learnt with and from the indigenous children they were filming adopting a common worlding approach (Taylor et al.).

Fig. 18: Film Poster for Warriors of Cameron, 2023



The Eco Pahlawan group were thanked by the Head of the Village for working with the Orang Asli children to collect the bottles and waste items. He commented that the housing area of native people always had to be clean. The Eco Pahlawan group also thought about creative recycling to deal with waste and worked with the Orang Ashli children to create handmade crafts out of waste items. The plastic bottle was recycled to look beautiful and attractive. The Eco Pahlawan group demonstrated how caring is activism (Richardson et al.) and their image for the film poster and festival demonstrates how they worked with the indigenous children to all become Warriors of Cameron (figure 18).

Case Study 3 – Nuestras Raíces – Our Roots, UK, Our Planet Festival 2023

Interconnectedness – Pre-Production

> Roots winding through connecting us,
> Through our stories (Nuestras Raíces,
> Our Roots)

Improving child and adolescent wellbeing is an urgent global priority, and connectedness is viewed as the cornerstone for healthy development as well as fostering agency and resilience (BMJ). Climate activism is also about encouraging children and young people to wonder and to connect closely with ancient rhythms of the natural world. The thirty young filmmakers (8-9-year-olds) created their digital story about roots of trees and their own heritage roots. This exploration of roots helped these young children to reach deeper into their pasts and challenge the dualistic character of the human/nature relationship (Cross).

These young filmmakers went outside and clambered over the roots of trees in their school grounds, feeling the texture of the roots, running slowly around the trees, and imagining the roots as living creatures. The lead project teacher, Liz Cook, supported these children to research the concept of roots through artwork, poetry, drama, and community storytelling. The children used a variety of art forms to experiment with the texture of roots and created sculptured roots out of plasticine as well as artwork using pencils, charcoal, watercolors, printing, and collage (figure 19).

Fig. 19: Artwork on Roots

The children developed words and language to express concepts related to roots and, with the support of poetry, were encouraged to explore the idea of roots from speculative and imaginative perspectives. They were introduced to the Japanese haiku form and its conventions (5-7-5 syllable patterns, need not rhyme, focus on emotion, colorful images, and the natural world) and crafted their own root poetry.

Our Roots – Production

Our roots are strong.
Our roots twisting like magic,
Through our languages (Nuestras
Raíces – Our Roots)

Drama and community storytelling were used in the production stage to support the children moving from artwork and poetry to performance and filming about roots in nature and their roots. Digital storytelling has its roots in folk culture, experimental theatre and cultural activism and the strong belief that a healthy community is grounded in plurality, understanding, and belonging (Lambert). These young filmmakers captured stories from their home communities and delved deeper into family histories. They uncovered a Japanese story

of water magic, a Slovakian folk tale about a fox, and a Russian folk story. Collaborative drama performances were used to bring elements of these stories together and shared with parents and relatives online to create a deeper sense of a connected intergenerational community. These children had to face hard and challenging questions about historic tensions between their heritage communities and think deeply about how to foster intercultural responsibility and an ethics of care (Richardson and Langford).

In the drama and filmmaking process, these young filmmakers discovered interconnections between their heritage languages which became like roots in their digital story. These connections became very tangible and visible when the children created tree roots out of paper and wrote the names of twenty-six countries they were directly connected with along with their home heritage languages.

Nuestras Raíces – Our Roots – Post-Production and Film Festival

> Our roots deep in this planet of yours
> Like the trees (Nuestras Raíces – Our Roots)

In the post-production stage of, *Nuestras Raíces – Our Roots*, these young filmmakers thought carefully about the key message they wanted to express in their digital story. They felt strongly that roots, both human and nature, need to be protected and that roots matter. These children felt a deep sense of their roots through creating the digital story and developed strong intertwining connections with their class community. One student reflecting on the filmmaking process commented, "I love the photo that we did with the whole entire class", and this image was used to represent their film in the festival (figure 20).

The young filmmakers in this classroom were learning how roots, stories and languages connect communities and stories are valuable tools for ecological activism (Kerslake).

> You showed us the world could be a better place with just a film (Student, Europa).

Fig. 20: Film Poster Image for Nuestras Raíces – Our Roots, 2023

Conclusion

The young filmmakers in the Critical Connections project were brave and radical in using their multilingual digital stories to foster intercultural responsibility and an ethics of care. These young people researched and sought critical and imaginative solutions to social and ecological challenges facing their local and global communities. They came to view storytelling and their digital stories as valuable tools for ecological activism and moral transformation (Kerslake). In India, the film group (14–16-year-olds) tackled the taboo and transgressive and talked about menstruation across local cultures, generations, and communities. These young people practiced deep listening. They set up a playful competition to find out what younger children (11–13-year-olds) knew and used artwork and knowledge to break the stigma. They were open to other ways of thinking, being and knowing (Richardson and Langford) and listened carefully to the lived experiences of different members of their school and local communities to raise awareness and actively seek change.

In Malaysia, the Eco Pahlawan group (10–14-year-olds) were bold and adventurous in reading about a local ecological threat and seeking to do something about it (Murphy). These eco-warriors had a desire to become agents of change and sought to find ways of thinking and learning with the worlds

around them (Taylor et al.). These young people practiced deep listening in filming and working alongside the indigenous children in their community to bring about change and demonstrate how caring is activism (Richardson et al.). In the UK, the class of filmmakers (8-9-year-olds) became deeply connected through roots in nature and their own roots. They created a multilingual digital story about connection, community and interdependence among humans and the natural world (Gaard). These children practiced deep listening with the natural world and uncovered deep connections with their home and heritage languages (Anderson and Macleroy). Finally, these young filmmakers used digital storytelling in creative and courageous ways to break silence.

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