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Digital Storytelling with Refugee Youth: A Tool for Promoting Literacy and Youth Empowerment And a Catalyst for Social Action

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Digital Storytelling with Refugee Youth:
A Tool for Promoting Literacy and Youth Empowerment
And a Catalyst for Social Action

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Master's Project

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Introduction

For my master's project in the International Education concentration, College of Education, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, I chose to conduct an action research project where I worked with refugee youth aged twelve to fourteen in Springfield, Massachusetts, to facilitate them in creating digital narratives about their lives and experiences coming to the United States. From November 2014 through March 2015, I recruited seven students to participate in a 22-hour workshop I facilitated over twelve weeks. During the workshop, they learned about digital storytelling, wrote their stories, and created multimedia videos of these narratives. They shared their digital stories with each other, as well as at an exhibit at their school in March 2015 that was attended by parents, teachers, and school staff. I also asked participants about their experiences coming to the workshop sessions and creating their digital stories. This paper is a record of both the process of developing and facilitating the DST workshop and of what I learned from the participants' experiences.

What Is Digital Storytelling?

Digital storytelling (DST) is becoming a popular form of outreach to populations that have traditionally been marginalized or targeted in society; it provides a channel for critical self-reflection, creative expression, and collaboration and dialogue on issues shared by DST workshop participants. It allows individuals to express themselves creatively through the combination of sound, video, and pictures in a digital format. The end product is usually a short film describing

their personal narrative. DST used as a tool to engage with refugees and immigrants is gaining popularity among activists and educators.

The Purpose of This Master's Project

Through this project, I hoped to engage refugee youth in a project that would provide their community with a narrative of their journey to the United States, as well as share perspectives of their lives in their new country. I wanted to help create a space that is often lacking in school environments that are inundated with high-stakes testing, have relatively low resources, and are located in gentrifying neighborhoods facing economic challenges. At the same time, I wanted to support the creation of counter-narratives that did not reproduce the stereotype of the impoverished, helpless, traumatized refugee living in urban America. My desire was to assist in providing refugee youth the tools to become change agents within their own communities. I wanted to challenge traditional models of research and community development that reassert white hegemony and power imbalances between service provider and aid recipient, student and teacher, academic and subject.

I became interested in DST through a former classmate who facilitated a workshop she had designed with adult Bhutanese refugees in Western Massachusetts. Although I didn't have any knowledge or skill in DST prior to this project, I felt that it would be a unique way to work with refugee youth that would promote participation. I decided to undertake the task of not only developing the project but facilitating it on my own. I hope to add to the small but growing body of literature by focusing on the voices and stories of refugee and immigrant youth in an urban context

in Massachusetts. Another aim of this project was to help teachers, students, and administrators at Forest Park Middle School, along with parents and community members who could then better understand the points of view of refugee students.

The Context of the Project

Springfield houses 1,500 refugees from many nations—such as Nepal, Burma, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Somalia—many of whom have fled violence due to ethnic, religious, or political persecution. I chose this area because it houses the largest percentage of all newly arrived refugees in the state of Massachusetts, as well as being geographically convenient for me to access (Goonan, 2013).

The 1951 U.N. Geneva Convention defines a refugee as someone who, "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (Weis, 1995, p.6). The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP)—a bureaucratic arm of the federal government—is responsible for determining and admitting “qualified” refugees to be resettled in the United States (“Refugees,” 2013). However, the binary between immigrant and refugee is nuanced, and is politically determined by a complex legal framework.

Many students’ families emigrate from their home countries due to economic and/or political pressures, and are not given the title of refugee or asylum seeker (Suarez-Orozco, 2001. Pg. 26-

27). In Springfield public schools refugees are placed into self-contained classrooms with other students who do not speak English as their native language. Little to no emphasis is placed on distinguishing between immigrant students and those who are asylum seekers in schools. Asylum seekers are by definition involuntary migrants, whereas immigrants come more or less by choice. One of the participants in the workshop who came to the United States from Guatemala claims to have left not by choice but due to the fear of being forced into prostitution by drug cartels operating in her community, limited future economic opportunities, and gang violence. She was criminalized after “illegally” crossing the Mexican-U.S. border and spent more than one month in detention centers for undocumented children after being caught by the border police.

Emma Lazarus’s sonnet "The New Colossus" published in 1883 is printed on a bronze plaque on the nation’s Statue of Liberty, and has long been recognized as an American credo. Its most famous excerpt reads:

Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses
yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your
teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to
me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

The poem misleads many who venture across the borders of the United States to set up a new life, as they slowly realize their idealistic vision of prosperity and fortune for all citizens is a fantasy. Without proper networks of support, the difficulties that naturally arise from moving to a foreign country are multiplied. Because digital storytelling allows agency to be placed back into the storytellers' own hands, and encourages them to be change agents within their respective communities, I felt implementing a DST project at Forest Park Middle School would be useful in promoting social justice and student empowerment.

Literature Review

Schools' Influence on Refugee Populations

The influx of refugees into American cities has put tremendous pressure on teachers in public schools. The resettlement agencies place refugees in communities that offer job opportunities, affordable housing, and linguistically and culturally supportive services (Zehr, 2008).

Unfortunately, jobs, housing and support are not as available as they sound. For example, “regardless of changes in immigration laws, most immigrants and refugees have encountered discrimination and oppression at some time; they have been historically denied opportunities because of the color of their skin, the accent with which they speak, or the clothing they wear” (Mayadas & Segal, 2005 p. 566-567).

According to State Department statistics, the largest number of refugees in Western Massachusetts were placed in Springfield and West Springfield. Since 2011, 1,216 refugees have been placed in West Springfield, and 725 in Springfield. The two cities account for 12 percent of all refugees resettled in Massachusetts (Goonan, 2013). The Springfield public school administrations view refugee children as a burden on their urban school system—already tight on resources—because of their need for special accommodations (Mosselson 2006). The city’s Mayor, Domenic Sarno, has voiced opposition toward massive resettlement of refugees in Springfield (Garno, 2013). In a letter addressed to the U.S. State Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration he notes the increased pressure on the already strained resources of Springfield schools, because schools

that are oversaturated with refugees are overwhelmed trying to provide qualified interpreters for students who have little to no English capability.

Due to the structure of the school system, refugee students are inappropriately placed into grade levels in which they are unprepared to perform academically. Springfield public schools also face the pressure of serving many native-born students living below the poverty line. According to a statement made by Superintendent Daniel J. Warwick, “those increases [in refugee population] place additional pressure and demands on resources that are already strained by issues that are inherent to a poor urban school district such as ours” (Garno, 2013). The number of refugee students admitted into Springfield public schools is rising. In 2013, 668 immigrant children entered Springfield school system, compared to 531 in 2012 and 435 in 2011 (Garno, 2013).

Unsafe environments in urban public schools are not only physical, but also psychological. This affects self-efficiency and attitudinal and behavioral investment, and eventually lowers academic achievement (Steinberg, Allensworth, & Johnson, 2011). A safe environment can be a crucial factor in order for refugee students to heal from war trauma. This concern for safety puts an additional burden on students who are also dealing with issues of identity. Since American culture threatens the minority culture, language and identity (Ogbu, 1990), refugee students struggle when navigating among various identities; a navigation that enables them to fit into their new context while remaining attuned to pressures from home to preserve traditional cultural values. "Identity crises occur where old identities which stabilized the social world for so long are in decline, giving rise to new identities and fragmenting the modern individual as a unified subject" (Hall et al. 1996).

The DiversityData project conducted by Harvard's School of Public Health has produced a compilation of indicators in metropolitan areas regarding population demographics and diversity, and quality of life according to race or ethnicity (DiversityData, 2014). The research provides quantitative data that support claims of inequity in access to housing, finance, healthcare, employment, and education among various racial and ethnic groups in Springfield; however, refugees are not counted as a category in and of themselves, but rather are subsumed under broader racial and ethnic categories, as well as under the label of "immigrant." The invisibility of refugees allows forms of structural inequality to take place, so that the failure to identify individuals facing social and economic exclusion allows for their continued marginalization.

Great economic and educational resource disparities exist between Springfield and its neighboring suburbs (Northampton, Amherst, and South Hadley) only ten miles to the north. The demarcation between the high educational levels and relative affluence of the Northern Pioneer Valley and the urban decay that characterizes Springfield has been dubbed the "tofu curtain" ("Opening Meeting," 2015). One of the aims of this project was to bring awareness of the realities experienced by "marginalized" populations to outside audiences in more privileged positions, while at the same time steering away from reproducing the deficit model of viewing refugee and urban youth. DST gives these refugee youth a means to define themselves to a broader audience. It was essential for me to reflect on my position of privilege and power as a practitioner coming from a mostly white university, working with low-income refugee students of color in an urban school. I used this DST workshop as an opportunity to raise my own awareness of my position as an outsider, and of the power imbalance that this might create in my work with refugee youth in Springfield.

The Promise of DST

As technology continues to expand rapidly, digital devices are increasingly being utilized to facilitate learning in education. DST has been growing in informal educational settings as part of the current trend of integrating technology into educational practices (Yuksel 2011). Johnstone (2001) defines narrative as a retelling of past events, while story mean the retelling of a narrative with a point. I used the term story to reflect the term my participants used. DST is a process that allows participants to produce an electronic memoir, using a combination of traditional storytelling combined with digital media. The workshop allowed for a group of refugee students from diverse backgrounds to paint a collective picture of Springfield's complex identity. The combination of DST and oral history created a sense of community among the participants: By each constructing a personal sense of place and identity, their awareness of the connections between each other's experiences grew.

The power of DST is that it gives audiences a glimpse of the world through the eyes of the storyteller (Marcuss, 2003, p.9). Sharing their stories offers refugees an outlet for dealing with lost and painful memories or emotions. It can be used to foster understanding on the part of educators and others of refugees' experiences, and to empower refugees and non-refugees to act (Perry 2008).

Storytelling as Literacy Tool and Sociocultural Practice

People tell stories for several purposes. As Ochs and Capps (2001) state, “Human beings narrate to remember, instill cultural knowledge, grapple with a problem, rethink the status quo, soothe, empathize, inspire . . . justify a position . . . evaluate one’s and others’ identities (p. 60).

Storytelling is a sociocultural practice that helps shape a community's values and beliefs by passing down community histories, as well as the sharing of personal experiences (Heath, 1983, Johnstone 2001, Ochs & Capps, 2001). Telling stories allows refugees to negotiate and renegotiate their identities. This is important, particularly for the many who have suffered violent disruptions in their lives, being uprooted from one place and dropped in a new environment beyond their control. Storytelling can give them a means to reclaim their identities and take control of their own life narrative (Jackson, 2002, p.102).

Some storytelling practices do not involve print literacy at all (Perry), or they come from communities that value oral practices more highly than literate practices. In some cultures oral traditions such as storytelling or singing songs remain valid and important methods for educating younger generations (Arthur, 2003, Singleton, 2001). Some of the students in the DST workshop had weak or no literacy skills in their first language. Many immigrants and refugees have no opportunity to attend school, become literate in a language, or have any knowledge of English before moving the United States. DST may be a method for language and literacy learning for refugees, although more research needs to be done here (Dyson, 1993, 2003). DST is a way to bridge the literacy gap and validate the knowledge that refugee students do have by focusing away from written literacy—even as they are evaluated by strict standards set by the school district everywhere else.

Refugees develop digital technology skills in the DST workshop. This can assist them in their everyday social and academic functioning in the United States, as the technology is a valued medium of communication in Western society.

Storytelling for Negotiating Identity and Building Community

According to Holland Lachicotte, individuals and communities are caught between tensions of past histories and their present environment. Individual identities are social products (Cain, 1998). Stories therefore play an important role in shaping individual and collective identities. According to Johnstone (2001), "telling one's story facilitates a philosophy of life and a blueprint for living . . . because it reflects culture and shapes identity, storytelling embodies a powerful form of sense-making." By telling autobiographical stories we are able to construct images of ourselves for the outside world, as well as create a tool to help make sense of the outside world, whereby culture provides models of identity and agency to individuals (Bruner, Wortham, 2001). Therefore, because culture is dynamic and identity is linked to it, identities are not static (Perry). Rather, identity is malleable and is formed by historical, cultural, social, and political events (Holland et al, 1998). According to Salman Rushdie (2005), telling stories allows one to situate oneself in relation to one's family, community, and larger world; he claims that in order to become part of a family its necessary to learn that family's stories. In order to be a part of a community, listening to and sharing collective stories is essential (Perry, 2008).

Storytelling for Fostering Empathy

I hoped to engender more empathy for refugees and an understanding of their experiences from their peers and from the adults who interact with them. Empathy entails being in another's shoes and understanding their hopes and concerns, according to Inayatullah (2005). To Martin Buber empathy means viewing the "other" as subject (1958). Viewing the participants' short films may push teachers at Forest Park Middle School to move away from status quo treatment of refugee students. The deficit paradigm towards students of color in urban schools stems from many teachers' unwillingness to examine the root causes of underachievement of low-income and racially and ethnically diverse students—instead diverting blame to students, families, and communities (Garcia, S. B., & Guerra, P. L., 2004). Hearing the stories of refugees would encourage us to become more humane, as well as act as providing a path to higher levels of consciousness (Saniotis, 2008). Parker and Palmer suggest that the teacher's job is to create a place in which students are seen as guests and should be shown hospitality, which means creating a supportive presence and a space with safe boundaries.

The stories were a way for students who are usually silenced by the bureaucratic school system to have what Buber calls a "genuine dialogue," one in which participants (in this case students and teachers) see the other as fully human and have the intention of establishing a relationship with them (Buber, 1955, p. 19). Tolerance is not sufficient in imparting social change, as it calls for people simply to coexist without needing to engage fully or to understand each other. Empathy is a superior goal because it pushes one to take the vantage point of another human being. Storytelling has the power to do this (Buber, 1955, p. 97). It was important for me to take into consideration the possibility that the digital stories would categorize refugee students as martyrs dependent on the

kindness of others, which could lead to their disempowerment (Saniotis). This is why the gallery that occurred at the end of the project was critical. A dialogue among students, teachers, and parents had to be initiated so that emotional connections could be made; this would foster deeper empathy and a feeling of inclusion for refugee students (Buber, 1955, p. 97).

Methodology

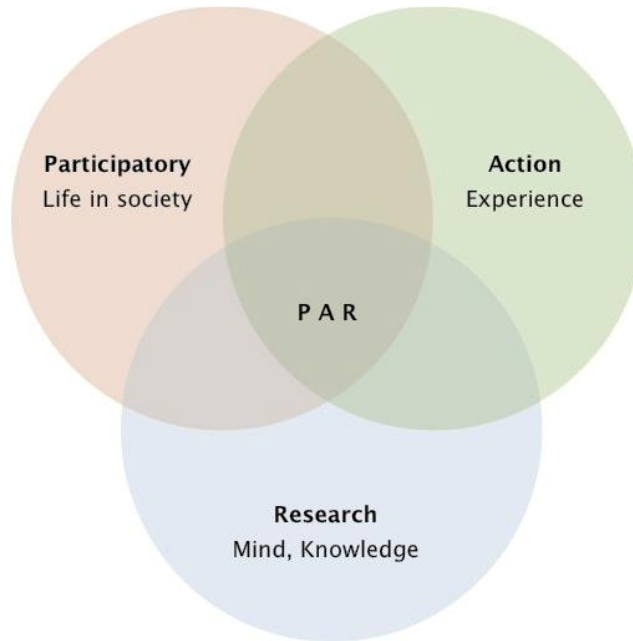
The purpose of the project was to seek an innovative strategy to engage refugee youth in telling their stories, giving them a channel to describe their needs, goals, and experiences, and to help others understand their perspectives through viewing their digital stories. Unlike traditional research, which is organized around preconceived questions by the researcher, I was more interested in allowing participants to voice their own opinions and ideas and steer the project in their own direction. I saw my role as simply the facilitator, providing participants tools to explore their own inquiries.

The methodology I used to answer my research question was participatory action research (PAR), using qualitative data collection. PAR attempts to break down the distinction between the research and those being studied, so that subjects are actively involved in the production and acquisition of knowledge. This process calls for researchers intentionally to step back and reflect on their role, as well as on their power within the relationship with their subjects (Bergold, 2012). The aims of PAR are focused on social change and transformation, grounded in an activist approach toward research.

In the beginning of the workshop, I asked participants to fill out questionnaires. I also distributed questionnaires to the thirty individuals who came to the gallery (teachers, parents, community members, and students), to get a sense of their thoughts and reactions to the short videos. After the workshop, I held a focus group with participants to understand their feelings and general thoughts towards the process of DST, workshop, and gallery. I wanted a better understanding of the uses of DST and to know to what extent their expectations were met during the experience.

Youth-based participatory action research (YPAR)—a process stemming from PAR—addresses the political difficulties and power imbalances when conducting research with youth (Cammorata, 2010). YPAR as a methodology requires researchers to engage in deeper self-reflection. I did not want to reproduce existing models of exploitive research on poor communities of color; my aims were centered more on practice. I was initially drawn to doing work with this community because I'm the daughter of a former refugee from Vietnam. My choice of YPAR to work with refugee youth stems from a personal interest in investigating questions of identity, belonging, and marginalization that arise in many refugees' experiences in the United States. It seemed natural to choose YPAR instead of other methodologies, as I saw my mother reflected in my participants. I rejected the concept of working under simply good intentions, or under the premise of false generosity (Freire, 1970, p. 2). As someone who has witnessed the harmful effects of white supremacy and racism in my own and my family's life, I wanted to create a space where these refugee youth could question the status quo and work toward social change. I wanted to place the participants in the role of protagonist so they would be able to project their own images to the world, using their own voices.

DST fits within the framework of YPAR because it is process driven. It requires students not only to be critically self-reflective, but to work collectively to correct any problems they experience as a group. The researcher has no directorship, and rather acts as a facilitator. DST, like YPAR, can encourage youth to resist the normalization of oppressive systems, calling into collective inquiry and collective action by “reading the world” to promote social justice (Freire, 1993, Cammorata, 2010, p.2).



From Chavalier and Buckles, 2013

The diagram above shows the link and importance that research, action, and participation in society play in producing successful PAR. This is true especially when working with youth, since they often aren't given space to voice their own thoughts, or much agency in creating models for social action. My aim was to encourage this group to identify a topic they would like to collaborate on collectively, in order to create positive change in their environment.

Action Research Process

To answer the research question, I designed and facilitated a twenty-hour workshop for seven recently immigrated refugee students aged twelve to fourteen in Springfield, Massachusetts. The workshop enabled them to produce digital stories, capturing their experiences and stories about their journey to the United States, as well as their individual goals and needs. The workshop took

place once or twice a week on Tuesdays and Fridays after school. It ran for three months, from the middle of November to the third week of February. This audio and video editing workshop introduced the student participants to new digital skills. I demonstrated DST by mapping my own family's migration story and sharing it with the group. During the workshop, students worked diligently on producing narratives, exchange stories, and learning to use music, words, pictures, video, and other media to create a digital story. I used free downloadable digital audio recording and video production software to conduct this workshop.

I conducted the workshop at Forest Park Middle School in Springfield, Massachusetts. I didn't receive any institutional recommendation or support, and I built my network through interpersonal relationships. The emphasis on interpersonal connections is a key component of DST, as it focuses on relationship building. This was crucial in my case. Because I had no funding, I could not offer a financial incentive for workshop participation. It was important that the participants realized for themselves the impact this project could play in their lives that was beyond the material. After the tedious bureaucratic process involving background criminal checks, I was given permission to volunteer at the school. I met the English for Speakers of different Languages (ESOL) teachers and was offered an unpaid position to work with Low English Proficiency (LEP) students—many of whom were refugees. I was able to gain trust over time with the students, traveling to Springfield on a weekly basis. Familiarity and trust are key aspects of facilitating a DST workshop, because participants risk being vulnerable when sharing intimate narratives.

I wanted to work with one ethnicity in a small, mixed-gender group of five to six participants. I've worked with Bhutanese refugees in the past and have some knowledge of the Nepali language. (Many Bhutanese refugees speak Nepali because they've lived years in Nepali camps and have

ancestral ties there). Word spread quickly, and other refugee and immigrant students became interested in joining the workshop. Because I was working with vulnerable (refugee) minors, I had to work through more bureaucratic red tape before beginning the project. I completed the Internal Review Board (IRB) process, required for any graduate research involving human subjects by the University. This process took two months to complete.

I also needed to receive support and permission from a number of individuals. The principal was the first person I asked because he was responsible for all activities taking place on school property. One of the ESL teachers gave me permission to use a classroom, as well as the laptops there. When I spoke with the librarian of the school about my project, he became interested and volunteered to install all the software on the eight laptops in the ESL class. Building relationships and being familiar with key people in the school facilitated the process of working with vulnerable students.

Participating Students

Students who showed the most enthusiasm about the project were selected to join. No one who wanted to participate was turned down. There were eight students who started the after-school DST project in November, and seven who were there at the end. I use pseudonyms to protect the identities of the students. All of the remaining students were female sixth or seventh graders who self-identified as refugee or immigrant, and were still enrolled in the ESL program. Here is a list and brief description of the participants of the workshop:

- **Keza** is a sixth grade female from Rwanda who arrived in the United States five years ago. **Aisha** is a sixth grade female from Sudan, whose native tongue is Arabic; she also spoke Tigrinya with Abrihet, because her grandmother is Eritrean.
- **Abrihet** is a seventh grade female originally from Eritrea who lived three years in a refugee camp in northern Ethiopia. Her native language is Tigrinya.
- **Uma** is a sixth grader, and **Parbati** and **Sita** are both in seventh grade. They were all born and raised in a refugee camp in Nepal, after their families escaped persecution in Bhutan.
- **Maria**, aged 12, is from a small town in northern Guatemala and is not officially here as a refugee, but her experiences of fleeing her home country due to issues related to gang and gender-based violence could categorize her as one. She spent time in detention centers near the U.S. border because of her status as undocumented. Her native language is Spanish. She arrived in the United States in the past year.

One of the students who arrived from Puerto Rico in the last year left after the second session of the workshop. She underwent a difficult surgery and spent time recovering at home. One student originally from Nepal left after the fourth workshop. He told me he was the only one at home after school and needed to watch after his younger siblings.

Maria joined after the sixth session. I had worked with her independently of the workshop as a personal tutor. When we had just met, she translated a line from Spanish to English on an online translator that read: “I don’t know whether my father is dead or alive.” I saw that she felt open and motivated to share with personal information me. Because she had only arrived in the United States a few months before she didn’t know enough English to communicate directly with me. I asked Maria’s classmate Josephine if she would assist us. Josephine came from Puerto Rico

recently and feels she is in a misplaced ESL level as she communicates easily in English. I didn't have the resources to have a multilingual workshop, and I spoke none of the student's native languages. Because Maria's English was at such low proficiency, I hadn't thought I would be able to include her. Josephine helped translate what I was saying to Maria and vice versa. I explained the nature of the project and why I thought of including Maria as I felt she had a compelling story, and asked whether she'd like to join the workshop. She nodded her head and started to tell her story to me in Spanish, which Josephine translated. After this discussion Josephine and Maria started spending time together after school, and Josephine started tutoring Maria in English after school and on weekends. Research shows that students learn more effectively with peers (Rosenfield et al, 1985). I was glad they could act as supports for one another.

Here is a table of information about the participants. I include their pseudonym, gender, grade level, national origin of their parents, national origin/where they were born, secondary country (or the country they fled to due to conflict), and whether they were able to produce a completed project.

Number	Name of Participant	Gender	Grade	National Origin of Parents	National Origin	Secondary Country	Completed Project?
1	Keza	F	6	Rwanda	Central African Republic	Rwanda	Yes
2	Aisha	F	6	Eritrea/ Sudan	Sudan n/a	Yes	
3	Abrihet	F	7	Eritrea	Eritrea	Ethiopia	Yes

4	Uma	F	6	Bhutan	Nepal/n/a	Yes	
5	Parbati	F	7	Bhutan	Nepal/n/a	Yes	
6	Sita	F	7	Bhutan	Nepal n/a	Yes	
7	Rosa	F	7	Puerto Rico	Puerto Rico n/a	No	
8	Bhuwan	M	7	Bhutan	Nepal	n/a	No
9	Maria	F	6	Mexico/ Guatemala	Guatemala n/a	Yes	

All participants were ranked at ESL levels one or two or could be considered as having low-English proficiency, but were all conversational enough to articulate general thoughts in English (with the exception of Maria).

In the beginning, we collectively established ground rules we'd all abide by. I wanted the DST environment to be built on a spirit of camaraderie rather than control, out of genuine concern and care for one another versus obligated group work. Because their school day is so rigidly structured, I wanted to foster an atmosphere in my after-school program where students felt empowered to make their own choices and had space for creative freedom. Students had the option of coming to the workshop or not. They were never forced or obligated to complete tasks they may have been uncomfortable with. I was careful to check in with how students were feeling with any particular

task I would suggest during the workshop. If it were something that seemed inappropriate or unclear for that moment I would modify it or move onto the next activity. Having control of one's own choices can be incredibly empowering, especially in a school environment where students can't even go to the water fountain without raising their hand and getting a hall pass from the teacher. I explained to the participants if they wanted to go to the restroom or water fountain they needed to ask, only because of concern for their safety. I wanted students to feel that they could make their own decisions and maintain a sense of agency.

The Process of Developing and Facilitating the DST Workshop

I had no experience or background in designing or facilitating a DST workshop prior to starting this project. I wanted to create a project that would be useful for participants. "Useful" in this instance would mean it would be an initiative that leading to capacity building and the empowerment of individuals involved, while at the same time challenging power imbalances and pushing for positive social change. Because of my lack of funding, I relied on the school for resources such as equipment, space, and class materials. I learned more about DST through doing independent online research. I designed my workshops from examples of projects created with refugees and youth groups by refugee resettlement agencies. Being flexible and perceptive to the needs of individuals in the workshops—and to the context within which I was working—was important to mounting a successful project as DST had never been done before at the middle school, to my knowledge.

The project began in November 2014 and ended in February 2015, and consisted of twenty-two hours of workshops, and another two hours for the gallery at the end of the workshop. I took one month off from facilitating workshops from mid-December to mid-January. The workshops typically lasted 60 to 90 minutes after school on Tuesdays and/or Fridays. I kept it to that length because I knew the participants were tired from long days at school. It was also important that students head home during daylight hours for safety reasons, as all of them walk to and from school. (Springfield won't issue student bus passes unless they live over two miles from school or have special needs.) Classroom space and all the technology—SmartBoard, laptops, computers,

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and headsets with microphones—were provided by the ESL instructor who taught there during the school day. The school librarian installed all the DST software, as he had administrative access.

Workshop Design

I've organized the twenty-four hours of combined workshop and gallery into six different stages to describe the process of the project.

Stage One: Ice-breaker, Rapport Building

3 hours

Building trust between students and facilitator is a pivotal aspect of having a successful workshop. On the first day I set the precedent of arranging our desks in a circle. Some research shows that circular arrangements produce more on-task behavior, as well as out-of-task commenting. This suggests that there is more active participation of students and that developmental learning is affected more positively by circular than by row seating. The architecture of the circular arrangement of desks also placed me as the facilitator in a more equal position, and gave students the opportunity to see “eye to eye” with one another (Rosenfield et al, 1985). During the first phase I did small ice-breaker activities because not all the students knew each other. It was also important to introduce the idea of self-care. Because of the nature of the project, I encouraged students to identify and reflect on their needs at any time. We spent time generating the guidelines we would all agree to. Participants chose their themes and stated their reasons for being in the workshop, as

well as what they hoped to get out of it and what their expectations from each other and from me were.

Stage Two: Brainstorming Elements of a Good Story

3 hours

As we moved into the second phase of the workshop I wanted participants to identify the elements of what they thought were good digital stories. They learned the steps to developing an effective script. We went over the importance of choosing appropriate images, and about the variety of images they could use. We also discussed the challenges of producing images that would be able to represent the complex emotions of fear, loss, invisibility, hope, and safety that they wished to convey through their digital stories. We discussed the option of using online stock images versus personal photographs, because some students didn't have personal photos.

We brainstormed themes what they would want to communicate in their stories. This workshop was not about collecting stories that would shock the audience; it was about creating a process of healing where it was needed, and cultivating individual empowerment. I aimed to accomplish this by asking students to focus on positive life events and future goals, while at the same time emphasizing to students the importance of creating a special space so that students could feel comfortable receiving support for sharing stories that might make them feel vulnerable. Students drew or wrote one happy memory along with one difficult or sad one, as well as a list of things they wanted their teachers and parents to know about them. I was surprised to learn that so many identified bullying as one of the main issues they struggled with.

Stage Three: Script Writing

5 hours

In this portion of the workshop series I wanted to work on building English literacy skills, especially since participants had identified this as one of their greatest interest for joining the DST after-school program. I started off by giving them an example of a storyboard that I had created for myself. I added elements that I would want others to know of me, such as my family, my personal identity, as well as struggles I later overcame, and how I overcame them, along with as my current situation and my future goals and dreams. I told participants that my storyboard is just an example, and they had complete flexibility in how they wanted to structure theirs. This was just a way to help structure their spoken narratives.

We used storyboards as a framework for writing their stories. All participants were at different levels and had different attitudes towards written English. I offered the option of simply writing down main themes and recording by memory, but also encouraged them to write as much as they could in order to work together on improving their written skills. Every one of the participants chose to provide a written draft. Some wrote their first draft by hand, others started on the computers. They wrote a rough draft, then looked over their own writing and wrote a second. Then students paired up and gave each other feedback. Lastly, I looked at the final drafts and evaluated their work. I sat each of them down and pointed out patterns of grammatical mistakes they'd made, and also gave them positive feedback.

Stage Four: Recording Audio Narration

2 hours

The participants learned to record audio narration using a digital device (such as an iPhone, iPad, or microphone on a laptop) so that their voices could narrate their digital stories. First they broke into groups of three to practice their scripts and provide constructive feedback to each other.

We learned how to use Audacity to edit out background noise and any errors in narration. They explored methods to improve their audio recording with other editing tools, as well as ways to upload music and video. Many of the participants were nervous because of their level of English proficiency, so we broke off into pairs and they read their scripts. I circulated around the classroom and assisted them with pacing and pronunciation.

All the stories were recorded in English except one. Maria told her story in Spanish as that was more comfortable for her.

Stage Five: Video Creation

6 hours

We learned how to use Windows Movie Maker, a free video-editing application, to piece together texts, narration, music, and images to create complete digital stories.

Participants revised their final versions and added their finishing touches. At the end of this phase individuals were selected to view participants' final stories. They were given opportunities to reflect on the DST process and the challenges and significance of creating and sharing their stories. Committed to both critical and participatory teaching methods, I recognized the potential conflict between what I wanted from each participant and what they themselves envisioned as their final product. I realized early on in my interaction with the participants that there was a large power imbalance between me as a facilitator and them as participants. I was older, had more years of education, was born in the United States, spoke English fluently, belonged to a different social class, and more familiar with the concept and uses of DST. I needed to be conscientious of my level of power in influencing what participants created because of my various identities and how it differed from theirs. Allowing participants full creative freedom to produce a digital story on their own was very difficult since many of the participants started using computers only after they moved to the U.S, many did not have regular access to computers at home, and for all this was the first time they attempted making a digital story. I needed to provide technological support and storytelling “advice” to some extent since participants expressed feeling lost and without much instruction at some points of the workshop. Ideally the DST project would have been made entirely by the participants without much input from me, but practically this was too difficult to do since there were time and capacity constraints.

Stage Six: Revising and Sharing Digital Stories

3 hours

We started this phase by previewing each other’s movies as a group and writing constructive criticism and positive feedback for each participant. We talked about what images, sounds, and

video they would like to change or move around in the film. As a group we determined what would be said to the audience by workshop participants during the gallery, and the order in which students would present their stories. We also talked about food that they wanted to serve during the gallery. Part of presenting these digital stories was also about sharing and honoring the cultures where the participants come from. I raised funds for the event from friends, family, and classmates. I purchased food from the Nepali translator who recently opened a South Asian store in Forest Park, as well as from local grocery store. Others volunteered to bake sweets. Participants identified and invited others they wanted to come and watch their final project. I wanted students to feel that they were being honored, as well as see this as an opportunity to share their backgrounds with others.

The Gallery

2 hours

The DST gallery took place after school on Friday, February 27, 2015. There were thirty people at the event, including teachers, administrators, Springfield Public School's Nepali language translator, classmates of the participants, the participant's families, and the participants. For the first half hour people mixed and mingled and ate before the presentation began. I thought it was important that the spotlight was on the participants and not myself, so after I made a short announcement, the students came to the front and spoke from a script they had written, explaining the purpose of the workshops, what was done during the workshops, and concepts they thought were important such as immigration and refugees. All seven of the participants who created a short film played their videos. After the viewing, more participants came to the stage and thanked the

audience for participating. Aisha spoke about bullying, as she had identified this as a problem, and she wanted teachers to intervene and help with. I had printed certificates of participation for students and had them signed by the principal and myself. A brief question and answer period took place afterwards. Then I distributed the short reflection questionnaire to everyone.

Feedback from Gallery Attendees

The gallery pulled together all of the hard work and personal transformation that occurred during the workshops, and responses from everyone at the gallery validated the powerful impact that DST could have—not only in the community, but on the individuals who create them. Teachers stated how impressed and grateful they were that students had shared their projects. Maria's mother expressed how emotional her daughter's film had made her, but also glad because she was sharing it with her teachers so that they could understand their family's struggle coming to the United States. Maria then spoke shortly about her journey and cried and hugged her mother who was also crying. This set off a chain of emotion throughout the room from teachers to students. Building community involves being able to understand another person's journey and how that is tied to one's own experiences. One teacher expressed his interest in doing a similar project for his father's involvement in the civil rights movement. Another teacher had a conversation about how the project made her reflect on her own family's journey to the United States and the amount of struggle they may have experienced upon arrival.

Some of the questions and responses from the gallery questionnaire follow.

What were some things you've learned from the presentation about refugee/ immigrant students at our school, in our community?

I learned that no single story is the same and that we should take time to learn them and appreciate them.

—PhD student, UMASS Amherst

How difficult it is to get to the USA (e.g. traveling, police, etc.)

—Teacher

It made the things we hear on the news more real.

—Teacher

How large and diverse [Forest Park Middle School] is.

—Teacher

This teacher learned that Forest Park Middle has some of the most beautiful kids from around the world. Intelligent, bright and wonderful.

—Teacher

Did anything surprise you? And if so, what?

Their stories and their bravery to tell it to some of their teachers.

—Teacher

How poorly people can be treated by other people.

—Teacher

I was a little surprised at how polished the presentations were. The quality was quite high for middle school students.

—Teacher

I thought they all did a wonderful job. I have a whole list of things I will research online now.

—Teacher

Did you know about digital storytelling before today? What questions do you have about the digital storytelling workshop process?

Yes. Good job. I'm sure kids enjoyed it a lot, especially if they stayed at school on Fridays.

—Teacher

I have never seen a digital story before. I would like to know some of the creative process differences between this and traditional storytelling.

—Teacher

Unlike a video documentary, I find this media to be a very powerful way to tell a story. It creates as powerful of an effect as a video if not more because of the variations of photos. I would love to participate in learning how to do one.

—Teacher

Yes, as a librarian I have learned a thing or two about digital storytelling.

—Librarian

I learned that you can make a movie on the computer.

—Student

No. I liked the pictures and watched to see which were personal and which were from the internet.

—Teacher

What ways do you think Forest Park Middle School could promote the well-being of refugee and immigrant youth?

After school programs. School, health, community services for parents and families. Learn about their stories, the conflict in their countries. Inform the teachers.

—Teacher

Make the population of immigrant students larger so they can learn together and face challenges together

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—Teacher

More activist programs and community outreach.

—Teacher

Please continue this program and invite others, such as teachers, administration, and even their classmates from school.

—Teacher

I think we need more of this. A student telling their stories is incredibly powerful. If people will have access to these stories and really listen and understand it can make a huge difference in our community.

—Teacher

We could have a club to learn more English.

—Student

Teachers [should be made] more aware of the experiences of these children. I have had four of these students in the past and I did not know their stories.

—Teacher

What do you think would be helpful for further developing resources, activities, and curriculum for teachers and community members about refugee and immigrant youth at Forest Park Middle School?

Collect info on the population and their involvement at the school community. The kids can tell us a lot on how to improve their school experience. Bring more people to get involved. People who can teach both students and teachers about refugee issues.

—Teacher

Clubs presentations (it would have been nice to know who was presenting. Also, I didn't know this was invite only)

—Teacher

Continuing to do this year after year to strengthen ties to the immigrant communities.

—Teacher

Money! I love the presentation thank you.

—Teacher

I think again sharing stories in the library and as well as having a facilitation guide for working with students to help them tell stories. There is no better way to learn of these stories than really listening to them telling their stories digitally, in print, orally, or even using music or dance.

—Librarian

Resources in the library with people letting us know it's there. Highlight a different area of the world with the history of what has happened/is currently happening.

—Teacher

The audience reactions to the digital stories were overwhelmingly positive. They made remarks after seeing the films about being interested in integrating DST in their classrooms, despite all of the restrictions in place. Parents also thanked me for helping to facilitate the workshop, and one of them remarked feeling glad to see how successful the end product of all of their hard work after school was.

Findings

In the following sections I describe the findings and outcomes of participants' digital stories. However, it is important to note that the most difficult discussions and their feelings of personal transformation came out of the workshops; although this process is not seen by the public. The outcome of this DST workshop is social action and is an *ongoing* process. I describe the students' digital stories and the common themes I identified as emerging from the videos, and the final discussion I had with students related to bullying (a key concern).

Themes From Students' Digital Stories

I was impressed at the variety of topics the participants conveyed in their digital stories and the creative ways in which they depicted them. I also found that commonalities existed among their stories despite coming from diverse backgrounds. Some major themes I found in the participant's stories once they completed them were: struggle and loss, journey, identity and belonging, hope, and identification of individual and community needs. Many of these themes intersect one another. Throughout the workshop participants would share information and stories that were "off the record," which showed the deep level of trust we built together. Respecting that, I am not disclosing any stories shared in confidence here.

Journey

Each of the participants talked about how they moved from another country to the United States, discussing the various challenges they experienced during the voyage, along with the attendant emotions (fear, anxiety, etc.). The term "journey" refers not only to physical movement from one space to another, but the emotional and psychological transition each participant experienced. All of them decided to map out their stories chronologically, with the exception of Abrihet, who first describes her schooling in a refugee camp before the description of her flight from her country to the refugee camp.

Maria gives a detailed description of her journey to the United States down to the exact time and date of her departure from Guatemala, journey through Mexico, arrival at the U.S. border, and her time spent in detention centers in the United States. Her story was unlike others as it was recorded in Spanish rather than English, allowing her narrative to be particularly emotionally moving since she could express herself fluently in her mother tongue.

Modes of transportation are found throughout the digital stories. Images of planes, trains, cars, inflatable boats, and people walking by foot were incorporated in each of their videos. Many of them remarked during the workshop that it was their first time traveling by plane. Aisha remarks in her film how scary the airplane ride was.

Many of the participants mentioned feelings of relief, happiness, and optimism after coming to the United States. Aisha mentions in her film, "When we came to America we have a better life." Keza states at the end of her video, "Me and my family have a better life coming to the United States.

We all be safe here because in my old country there is a lot of fighting and lots of wars.” Abrihet declares in her story, “Now my family has a better life and more money.”

Struggle

Despite the optimistic feelings that participants felt on their arrival in the United States, they discussed with me the everyday struggles they still face. I found the theme of struggle to be pervasive throughout the digital stories. Each one of the participants discussed various hardships faced by their families or themselves. Most of the participants had lived in refugee camps, and they discussed difficulties they experienced before reaching the camps or during the time they spent living there. They also described their challenges adapting to a new culture and language.

This difficulty in learning English was mentioned in most of the digital stories. Sita mentions in her video, “My first day of school was so boring because I didn’t know how to speak English well.” Parbati says, “When we came to America we felt sad. In our family no one spoke English.” Aisha relates that, “It was not easy to learn English.” Many of the participants' main goals for joining the digital workshop, according to answers they provided in the pre-evaluation, were to learn English. A few participants had also mentioned a desire to learn Spanish. This is no surprise, given the high percentage of heritage speakers of Spanish at Forest Park Middle School. Understanding Spanish would assist in gaining acceptance into the majority group and would further situate participants as "belonging" in their new environment.

Identity and Belonging

Obstacles existed in communicating with participants, especially because I was working with them as an outsider. There were times that we all became frustrated because of linguistic barriers. I am only able to provide an interpretation based on the information and images they shared in the videos, along with data collected during the workshop, in order to build an understanding of their individual identities. However, I don't feel much need to provide interpretation because of the unique opportunity DST provides to people speak for themselves.

DST participants were able to assert their identities with their own voices. The music videos they chose not only indicated their musical preference, but were a show of pride in their cultural background, as well as their love of music as a form of creative expression. Some participants chose to include both music from their home countries and American pop music in their films. Keza chose a clip by Zendaya—an American teenage pop star—for the opening of her video, and Knowless—a famous Rwandan singer—at the end. Parbati included the Nepali national anthem. She, as well as the other participants who lived in refugee camps in Nepal, saw themselves as Nepali rather than Bhutanese—even though their parents all fled from Bhutan and were refused citizenship in Nepal. The images participants chose gave clues to how they wanted to represent themselves to others. Most of them saw their national identity as tied to the country they spent the longest time in, despite perhaps having a parent who came from another country (for instance, Aisha, who had one parent originally from Ethiopia and another from Sudan). They still see living in the United States as a challenge and do not see themselves as fully integrated yet.

High Aspirations

At the end of their films most of them mentioned what they would like to be when they “grow up.” Included in this list are: doctor, engineer, and nurse. All participants except for Maria ended their digital story by mentioning their future goals. Having high expectations for oneself is an indicator of an optimistic view of one's capabilities. For many of the participants, they view living in the United States as a positive transition from their lives in their previous countries. Two ESL teachers who currently have these participants in their classes remarked on what high achievers they are and on their drive to succeed compared to other students. Despite the marginalization many refugees experience, they tend to be high achievers (Garbarino et al. 1991).

Individual and Community Needs

Participants reflected on their own current needs as well as the needs of their communities. In one of the workshops we discussed the definition of community, and students identified with being part of several communities. The communities that they brainstormed and wrote on the whiteboard were: refugee, Bhutanese, African, Latino, Forest Park, Springfield, and immigrant communities. Through generating a list of various communities they belonged to they began to realize that they were part of some of the same communities (refugee, immigrant, and Forest Park). It was essential that participants see their individual struggles as issues they actually faced collectively.

Although they all remarked on how much English they've learned since their arrival in the United States, they still feel a great need for improvement. In fact, after the gallery Maria's mother remarked to another teacher in the audience how difficult it was for her to obtain ESL classes—

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despite living in the United States for ten years—due to constraints in time and money. The teacher is now working to find appropriate ESL services for her.

One of the most pressing problems identified by participants at the end of their workshop was the issue of bullying they face in school. Aisha stated forthrightly in her introduction statement to the audience during the gallery that, “Bullying is an issue at Forest Park Middle School. Teachers should help students and students should learn that it is wrong.” The issue of bullying became the topic for the final discussion after the gallery.

Themes From the Final Discussion

I didn’t want the gallery to be the end of the project. Instead, I saw it as an opportunity to continue building on what had already been created; so I asked the participants to meet me the following week after school. Two other ESL students joined us: a sixth grade girl from Nepal, and a sixth grade boy from Burma.

At the beginning of the meeting after the gallery, I thanked all the participants for their hard work and dedication. I also remarked on how much I felt each individual had grown since the beginning of the after-school DST project. Growth was personal to each individual. Each of them came to a renewed or altered perception of themselves and their environment. They all felt they had improved in their knowledge of English and had gained valuable skills in technology. Some soft skills that they commented on having built were the ability to work in a group, critical thinking, organizing data, public speaking, and problem identification and generating solutions.

Bullying emerged as stronger than others, and so I spent time during the final meeting discussing this with the students. I knew Aisha was under a tremendous psychological burden because of the times she stayed after school and talked about other students who were bullying her, and the fear and anxiety it caused her. During school days she seemed distant and aloof, as if her mind was occupied with something outside of school. When I inquired about this and asked her if it was due to bullying, her eyes would well with tears. What she said during our workshops made me realize she was asking for help.

I asked the participants what they thought the definition of bullying was and some of their responses were:

- *Someone who make fun of your language and culture, about your skin color, body size, uses bad words, and nasty*
- *Someone who makes fun about your skin color, language, culture, clothes, face, size.*
- *Talking about color, language, face, body, clothes*
- *Fighting with people*

I then asked them to write how it made them feel when people bullied them. Here is what they wrote:

- *Bullying make me sad when people make fun of me.*
- *Sad*
- *Mad*

- *Angry*

What are some things people say to bully others or you? They wrote:

- *Ugly, stupid, black*
- *Dumb, stupid*
- *Black, dark, nose*
- *Call me that am not rich and am poor*
- *The bad word like bitch ass n-. F- you, ugly and stupid*

These were powerful responses that contained blatant racism. They remarked on how hurt they were to hear these things, especially the participants from Africa. I told them that they didn't need to censure themselves because no one was under attack; this was an exercise in reporting and acknowledging realities that they experienced, and could help them move on to brainstorm how to change the environment of bullying at their school. They are currently collaborating together to create a digital story that addresses the issue of bullying, which they hope to show their classmates and teachers. I am involved in helping them frame their digital story; however, I am also distancing myself somewhat—confident in their abilities to work without my support, and to take independent ownership of their project.

Conclusion

DST pushed me to be more critically self-aware. Working with refugee female youth forced me to think about the power imbalance that existed between me and the students—and even among the students themselves—and about ways to mitigate that imbalance. In order to create an atmosphere of trust and equality, I needed to employ an attitude of openness and a willingness to learn from others. Cultural humility in contrast to cultural competence is a lifelong process of self-evaluation and self-critique (Tervalon, 1998). Cultural humility is a process rather than an end product. Keeping this stance in YPAR is critical, as it focuses on experience and on recognizing and addressing power imbalances.

One of my practices of cultural humility was to engage in active listening, not just to *hear* what participants were saying, but to internalize it and ask questions. For example, Uma and Parbati declared many times how proud and dedicated to their Christian beliefs they were. The majority of Bhutanese refugees I have met to date are practicing Hindus, so I was a bit surprised. Later I met a Bhutanese man who works as the education coordinator for Jewish Family Services (one of the main refugee resettlement agencies in Springfield) and asked him if there are many Christians within the Bhutanese refugee community. He told me they were a minority, and were part of a lower caste in Nepal. Transitioning to a different country and adopting Christianity gives them an opportunity to break out of the caste system that marginalized them. It made me wonder what kinds of transitions, sacrifices, and adaptations the other participants' families went through after coming to the United States.

It was promising to see students motivated and willing to come after school to work. I realized the danger that students can encounter—especially female students—when one of the participants told me she'd been stalked and harassed one time on her way home. Me recognizing my moral obligation as the adult given responsible over these youth made me appreciate their dedication the project even more. Because shoveling sidewalks is the responsibility of home and business owners in Springfield due to the city's budget constraints, walking home from school became a dangerous trek over high piles of snow. Many students had to cross intersections with no pedestrian right-of-way, sometimes dangerously jay-walking across streets.

Many of the participants shared deeply personal information with me about their backgrounds—things they haven't told to most of their peers, or any of their teachers. They didn't want or feel it necessary to share these deeply painful and traumatic stories, in their digital projects. That's when I realized the true power that DST had as a mechanism for empowerment. Participants were given the option to share only what they felt comfortable with others knowing about them, as well as paint the picture they chose for others to see. They were able to gauge the level of trust they felt with me and were given the agency to disclose information only when they felt safe to do so. I then also discovered that they felt uncomfortable talking to the professional school counselor responsible for any psychological distress that may have been triggered during the workshop.

Barriers existed that prevented these students from approaching their grade counselor. They remarked that they were not able to relate to her, nor did they feel listened to or respected by her. After encouraging Aisha and Keza to talk to their grade counselor about the instances of bullying that they each experienced, Aisha told me she didn't want to approach her, but that I could speak on her behalf, and Keza only wanted to go if I was present in the room. Trust is a key component

to building community. The community that was built during the workshop continues to exist as the participants have recruited two new members (both ESL classmates) and are working collaboratively to address the issue of bullying in their school.

The most successful ingredient in DST is authenticity: authenticity in participant's relationships and genuine concern for each other, authenticity in the facilitator's care and involvement in the program, and the authenticity of the audience's responses to the digital stories. Authenticity is the product a successful DST workshop.

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APPENDIX

Consent/ Assent Forms

Consent Form for Parents- Deadline November 15

Research Title: Digital Storytelling with Refugee and Immigrant Students from Forest Park Middle School Springfield, MA
Principal Investigator: Christina Chen

What is a study?

A study is a way to find out new information about something. It is completely up to you to decide if you want your child to participate. Your child does not need to be part of the study if you do not wish him or her to participate.

Why is your child being asked to be part of this study?

- He/she is being asked to take part in this research study because I am trying to learn more about the lived experiences of refugee youth in Springfield, MA. I am inviting him/her to be in the project because of their current experience living in the U.S. and experiences prior to coming to the U.S. About eight participants will be in this study.

If your child joins the study, what will your child be asked to do?

- Share about their life prior to coming to the U.S, life after arriving, and hopes for the future. Work with other students participating in the project.
- Be willing to come to the 1.5-hour workshops on five Fridays after school between November and January to learn how to create and edit digital media to tell their story of immigrating to the U.S. This digital media will not include showing their face. They may be asked to do audio recordings of their voice.

How will being in this study affect your child?

- I will ask them questions about moving to the U.S. and coming to school here, and some of those questions may remind them of the past; however they do not have to answer any question that they do not want to answer.
- They will not show their face on the digital media and use pseudonyms (fake names) to insure confidentiality
- They will learn a new skill, digital storytelling, that they may like using in the future.

Does your child know about this study?

- This study will be explained to you by your child. This study was explained to your child already and they must also sign a form after you sign this form to be part of it by the 15th of November. If you have more questions you can contact me. My contact information is at the bottom of this form.

Who will see the information collected about your child?

- The information collected about him/her during this project will be shown to others unless he/she does not agree for it to be shared.
- The study information about him/her will not be given to others unless he/she permits.

What do you get for being in the study?

- He/she will be able to express their opinions freely, make new friends, learn new technological skills, and creatively use interactive digital media.
- He/she will get to keep their final product.

Does he/she have to be in the study?

- No, he/she doesn't have to be part of the study. If you do not want him/her to be part of this study, you can just decline to sign the form. It's up to you.
- Your child can also drop out of the study at any time that you or your child wishes to drop out.

- You can also take until the 15th of November to think whether he/she will be part of the study.

What if you have any questions?

- You can ask any questions that you may have about the study. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, you can call Christina Chen at (763) 670-9020.
- You can also take until November 15 think about permitting your child to be part of the study.
- If you have any concerns about your child's rights as a research subject, you may contact the University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) at (413) 545-3428 or humansubjects@ora.umass.edu.

Other information about the study:

- If you permit your child can be part of the study, please write your name below.
- You can change your mind about allowing your child to be part of the study. All you have to do is tell the person in charge. It's okay.
- You will be given a copy of this paper to keep.

If you are ok with your child to participate in this study, please sign your name below.

Signature _____ Date _____

Print name _____ Date _____

Name of Person obtaining consent ____Christina Chen____ Date _____

Assent Form for Students- Deadline November 15

Research Title: Digital Storytelling with Refugee Students from Forest Park Middle School- Springfield, MA

Principal Investigator: Christina Chen

What is a study?

A study is a way to find out new information about something. You do not need to be part of the study if you do not wish to.

Why are you being asked to be part of this study?

- You are being asked to take part in this research study because I am trying to learn more about the lived experiences of refugee youth in Springfield, MA. I am inviting you to be in the project because of your current experience living in the U.S. and experiences prior to coming to the U.S. About eight participants will be in this study.

If you join the study, what will you be asked to do?

- Share about your life prior to coming to the U.S, life after arriving, and hopes for the future. Work with other students participating in the project.
- Be willing to come to the 1.5-hour workshops on five Fridays after school between November and January to learn how to create and edit digital media to tell your story of immigrating to the U.S. This digital media will not include showing your face. You may be asked to do audio recordings of your voice.
- Display your digital story at school at a one-time event in February or March 2015, attended by people that *you* select. Also, you **do not** have to attend the event or have your digital story displayed. You will be asked to work well with other students in the study

How will being in this study affect me?

- I will ask you questions about moving to the U.S. and coming to school here, and some of those questions may remind you of the past; however you do not have to answer any question that you do not want to answer.
- You will not show your face on the digital media and use pseudonyms (fake names) to insure confidentiality. . You will learn a new skill, digital storytelling, that you may like using in the future.

Do your parents know about this study?

- You will explain this study to at least one of your guardians, after I have talked to you about the study, and get their signature for the consent form if they are ok with you participating in this study. After discussing it with your parents and getting the consent form signed by them, you can sign this assent form and turn in the two forms to me (assent from you and consent from one of your guardians) by the 15th of November. If your guardian has questions they can contact me. My contact information is at the bottom of this form.

Who will see the information collected about you?

- Your digital stories, which do not show your face, will be shown to other people participating outside of the study, unless you do not agree for it to be shared.
- I may use quotes from your interviews in the report I write for my master's project. I won't use your real name with the quote unless you tell me it is OK for me do that that.
- The study information about you will not be given to your parents and teachers unless you indicate that you want them to have it. The researcher will not tell your friends who are not in the study.

What do you get for being in the study?

- You will be able to express your opinions freely in making your digital story, make new friends, learn new technological skills, and creatively use interactive digital media.
- You will get to keep the digital story you create.

Do you have to be in the study?

- You do not have to be in the study. No one will be upset if you don't want to participate in this study. If you don't want to be in this study, you do not have to sign this form. It's up to you.
- You can also drop out of this study any time you want.
- You can take until the 15th of November to turn in this form (assent) and the consent form signed by a guardian to think about whether or not you want to be the study.

What if you have any questions?

- You can ask any questions that you may have about the study. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, you can call me, Christina Chen, at (763) 670-9020.
- You can also take until the 15th of November to think about being in the study and also talk some more with your parents about being in the study.
- If you have any concerns about your rights as a someone participating in this study, you may contact the University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) at (413) 545-3428 or humansubjects@ora.umass.edu.

Other information about the study:

- If you decide to be in the study, please write your name below.
- You can change your mind and stop being part of it at any time. All you have to do is tell me, Christina Chen. It's okay.
- You will be given a copy of this paper to keep.

If you want to be in this study, please sign your name below.

Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____ Date _____

Name of Person obtaining consent ____Christina Chen_____ Date _____

If you want your digital story to be shown at the end of workshop, please sign your name below and check off all the boxes of groups of people you wouldn't mind to show it to.

Signature _____ Date _____

Administrators

Parents

Teachers

Classmates at Forest Park Middle School

Others

Memorandum of understanding for teachers and parents

Digital Storytelling with Refugee and Immigrant Students Project Explanation

This document is meant to inform about the Digital Storytelling with Refugee and Immigrant Students from Forest Park Middle School Springfield, MA project.

It is important for student participants to come to all five of the workshops, so that their final projects are done well. The goal of this project done by me is for learn more about the lived experiences of refugee youth in Springfield, MA.. Students will be asked to share, through a story, about his/her life prior to coming to the U.S, life after arriving, and hopes for the future, work with other students participating in the project.

He or she is willing to come to the 1.5-hour workshops on five Fridays after school between November and January to learn how to create and edit digital media to tell his/her story of immigrating to the U.S. This digital story will not include showing his/her face. The student may choose to do audio recordings of his/her voice as part of the digital story, but is not required to do so.

The dates for the workshop are:

1. **November 21, 2014**
2. **November 28, 2014**
3. **December 5, 2014**
4. **December 12, 2014**
5. **January 8, 2014**
6. **January 15, 2014**

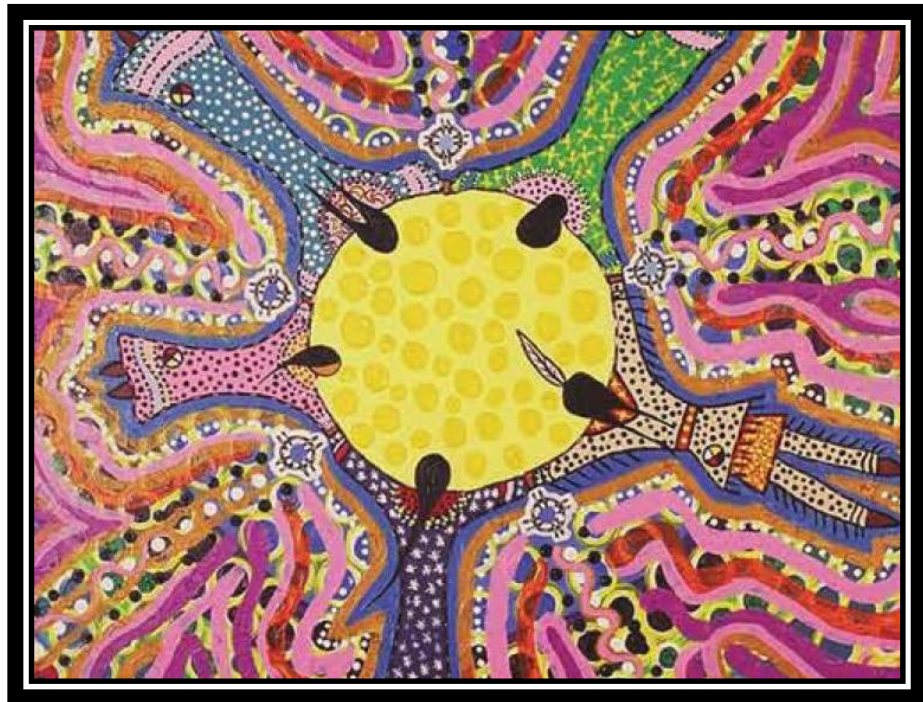
The first five workshops will last for 1.5 hours and the last date listed (January 15, 2014) is the date for the gallery in which student's work will be exhibited for people of *their* choosing. Participants agree to come to all six dates for the digital storytelling workshop. However they are not obligated to come to all of the workshops if they choose not to.

I will bring digital equipment each week, such as camcorders and sound recorders to help facilitate the workshop. A room with computers within the school will be available for participants. All equipment will be treated with respect and nothing is to be removed or taken without permission of the researcher.

Regards,

Christina

Presentation of Digital Stories: told by Refugee and Immigrant Students Themselves



Place: Forest Park Middle School

46 Oakland Street, Springfield, MA 01108

Date: February 27, 2015

Time: 3:30 p.m. –5:30 p.m.

Location: Media Center

Post-Gallery Questionnaire

Digital Storytelling by refugee and immigrant students at Forest Park Middle School: Reactions/ Reflections/Questions

Name: _____

Position (parent, teacher, admin, NGO, etc): _____

Contact (Phone number, email): _____

1. What were some things you've learned from the presentation about refugee/ immigrant students at our school, in our community?
2. Did anything surprise you? And if yes, what?
3. Did you know about digital storytelling before today? What questions do you have about the digital storytelling workshop process?
4. What ways do you think Forest Park Middle School could promote the well-being of refugee and immigrant youth?
5. What do you think would be helpful for further developing resources, activities, and curriculum for teachers and community members about refugee and immigrant youth at Forest Park Middle School?

My Journal Entries

Excerpt from journal entry November 7, 2014:

“[my friend, the science teacher] asked me to take down one of her students to the grade counselor since she was said she was feeling in emotional distress. The counselor was gone from the room and as I was waiting with this seventh grader I inquired what was wrong? I was surprised that she opened up to me immediately, especially being a complete stranger. She went into details of her father’s passing away and her familial problems and how switching school districts was difficult for her, especially since she feels constantly bullied. She poured into tears as she went on with her story. When the actual counselor came back to her office she looked at me and asked if I was looking for her. When I answered yes she asked if I needed assistance. I asked the female student and she shook her head. The counselor shrugged and went back into her office.

Two things came to mind: the seemingly apathetic attitude from the counselor as well as the level of intensity that some students may be experiencing but not heard or recognized by the adults in the building. I wondered how I could help, and then I realized that the only thing I could do was to listen. And at that time it seemed like enough.

. . . (later that day) I was with a few ESL level 1’s in the media center. I left my things on the counter right behind the computers we were working at and after some minutes I turned around and slightly panicked when I couldn’t find my phone where I left it. Realizing that there were video surveillance cameras all over the school I went to consult the school police officer with the librarian. After going over surveillance footage the last twenty minutes he was able to pause at the frame where a young man swiped the phone and placed it in his pocket. He went down to confront the student who stole the phone. After retrieving me the phone the police officer said to me that I

shouldn't leave my things around. It's like candy for these kids. They are poor and when they see an opportunity they'll take it. This seemed unnecessary for him to say, because even though he was siding with the student it was still a deficit way of thinking of students. It made me wonder if the student was a white female and affluent whether the attitude of the police would have been the same or not. Also, what about agency? I wasn't upset at what had happened, I tried to understand it from the cop's perspective, but I suppose I never will because people can still make choices. They aren't destined to act in a certain way just because of labels placed on them by society."

Excerpt From Journal Entry November 18, 2014:

I called for a parent meeting, their children were there too. The Nepali translator Rabin Adhikari was there to help translate for the parents who do not speak much English or read or write Nepali. Three languages were being translated from English: Spanish, Tingrya, and Nepali. The parents seemed appreciative that someone was interested in recording their stories and willing to pay special attention to the needs of their children. Also they asked me if I could help them with their homework. I told them only during school hours since I also help tutor. It seemed like there was a huge interest from parents for their kids to succeed academically, despite what the teachers may think of these parents (having spent hours in the teacher's lounge has afforded me the opportunity to overhear lots of gossip. Perhaps they see it as an opportunity for their children to achieve what wasn't possible in their own countries, to achieve the so-called "American Dream." It made me think of the amount of sacrifices that my parents made for me, and how much they invested in my education despite not knowing the culture or language that well, or not having gone to college. I somehow felt myself reflected in this group of individuals. This is further motivation for me to be here and do this kind of work."

