Imagine

Crossing the Cultural Divide with Digital Story–Telling

Romani and Traveller pupils and students in Wales face some of the toughest educational challenges in the country, and across the U.K. Raising attainment and improving achievement has long been the goal of teachers, education support staff (such as the Traveller Education Support Services) and parents in the communities, yet curriculum materials supporting Romani and Traveller cultures are few and far between, these days.

Eighty-three percent of pupils from these communities in Wales 'drop–out' after primary school, not going on to secondary school; only four percent achieve the national Key Stage 1 and 2 outcomes at primary school. Few children have access to a computer, the internet, or the world-wide-web, and many have few books at home.

Yet positive improvements can be made through creating content, such as desktop movies and digital story–telling, that builds upon key skills, reflecting Romani and Traveller pupils' cultural heritage, whilst delivering educational outcomes that can change this picture.

> "Like all communities, there are shared memories amongst Romani and Traveller people; narratives of journey and settlement, love and loss…"
>
> *Dr Adrian Marsh, PhD*

From caravan to classroom

One of the strongest Romani and Traveller cultural aspects is story–telling; many of the stories that children in general grow–up with were



brought, centuries ago, from the East by the ancestors of Romani people. Migration of these mediaeval peoples took them from India, through Persia, the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman Empire, the Holy Roman Empire, and on into western Europe and the British Isles.

Families have their own stories of migration or tales of travel, handed down from generation to generation. Like all communities, there are shared memories amongst Romani and Traveller

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families, narratives of journey or settlement. Questions of 'who are we?' or 'how did we get here?' are common to all communities, answers to which can matter greatly in defining what communities have become and where they are going. Capturing this, through film, digital story–telling and interviews is one of the ways that connections between the home lives and school lives of Romani and Traveller pupils can be made.

Mapping migration



All populations are migrants originally; even the Celts came from central Europe millennia ago to settle in Wales, displacing or integrating with the ancient British population. Romans, Saxons, Angles, Danes, Irish and Normans have all followed, each group adding another layer to the complex ethnic and cultural mosaic of modern Wales. The late mediaeval 'Egyptians', as they were first called arrived at a time of change in the British Isles. Migration continued to bring different populations to Wales, from Malaysia, Indonesia, the Caribbean, Africa and the Indian sub–continent. Wales in the twenty–first century is a multi–ethnic, multi—religious nation.

From the page to the screen

This rich history can be turned into a grand narrative overall and a series of intimate, family stories in particular. Project–based, digital story–telling production can begin with the pupils planning their narratives, assembling their ideas and learning to order them into a logical sequence, a narrative.

Encouraging them to articulate their thinking through 'storyboards', mind–maps and outlines will help pupils get their ideas out of their heads and onto the page, telling their story over time.

> We're not connecting video cameras and computers; we're connecting children and communities…
>
> *Dr Adrian Marsh, PhD*

Research and planning are learning!

All of this happens on paper, reinforcing the connections between thinking, drawing, writing, research and planning. This will make for a much smoother production process in the long–run. Ensuring all this is prepared *before* children and young people get to hold a digital video camera or touch a computer keyboard, until this first stage is completed, helps pupils grasp the basics of any production process – something that they will benefit from in future as designers, video film–makers, artists, musicians or recording engineers, indeed any number of occupations in the future that rely upon research, practical planning and production of results. The more preparation that is done early on, the fewer mistakes that need rectifying at the end; always a good 'rule–of–thumb' in any endeavour.

Research: pupils first grasp their subjects, researching topics in the school or local library, or through using the internet and search tools.

Plan: using 'mind–maps', storyboards, shot–lists and scripts, pupils can begin to visualise their stories on paper; the more work done at this stage, the better will be the final result!

Film: pupils use digital cameras, digital video cameras, 'smart' phones and digital recorders to create the content for their stories. Interviews with parents and relatives, scanning old family photographs, acting out the stories of their journeys and events and recording these, together with background footage will all go towards their finished films!

ICT skills and knowledge

Once the teachers have given the pupils the 'go ahead', they can begin to gather their materials and resources, adding them to the research that they have done to provide the content for their project. Learning to use the cameras and editing software (such as iMovie, iDVD or their equivalent), will be a part of the learning outcomes, developing useful ICT skills and knowledge, video editing basics, experience of directing and filming; basic media and communications skills essential in so many of the 'new' occupations that will evolve from those currently emerging in our increasingly internet–based lives

(what Apple called 'iLife', back in 2001, with their iCal, iChat, iCloud, iPhoto, iMovie, iDVD, iTools and iWeb applications). The huge increase in internet–based learning and courses online, as a result of recent health measures, has highlighted the potential and applicability of all these skills, now and for the foreseeable future.

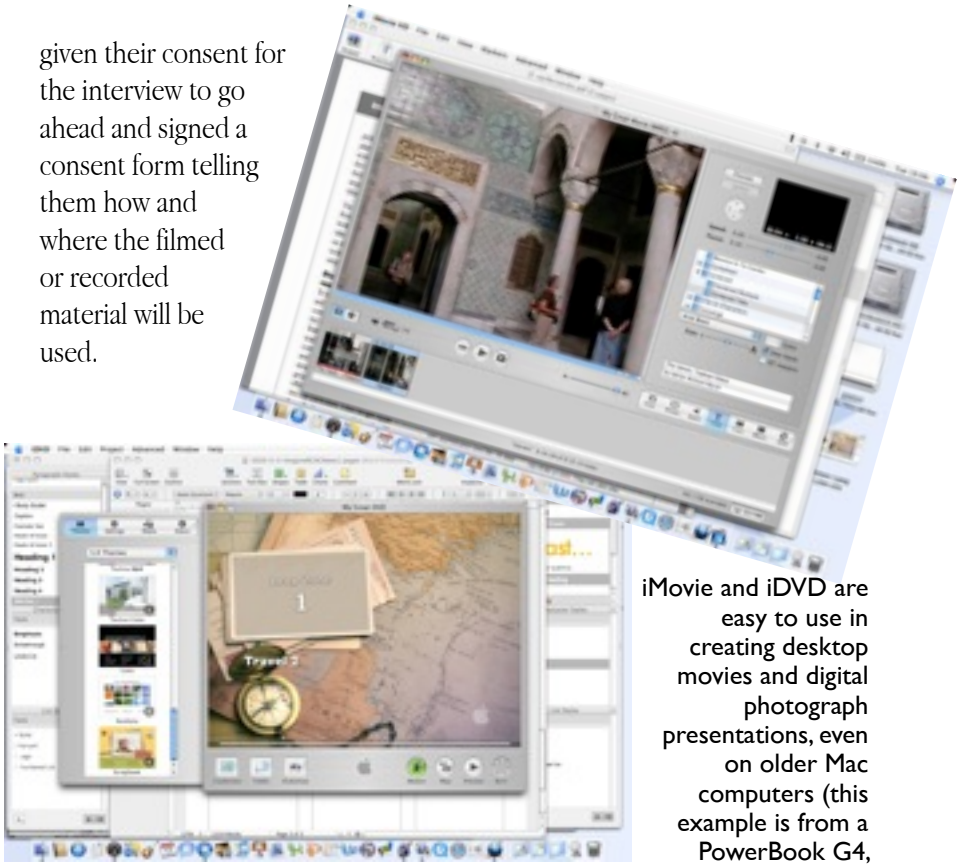
Grandparents, parents and dialogue

Interviewing their parents, grandparents and relatives opens up a dialogue between the generations, not only preserving their family and community heritage but placing that within the wider picture of where they have come from and what their expectations might be of where they are going in life. It is not about connecting video cameras and computers; it's about connecting children and young people, and communities.

Interviews on camera or recording device need to be planned carefully and practised beforehand to avoid



interviewees stammering or becoming tongue–tied during their speech, especially if they are not used to being recorded (which can make people a little nervous). Make sure the questions are known to the interviewee and that they are aware of the topics that you (the interviewers) would like to cover with them. Most importantly, make sure they have given their consent for the interview to go ahead and signed a consent form telling them how and where the filmed or recorded material will be used.



iMovie and iDVD are easy to use in creating desktop movies and digital photograph presentations, even on older Mac computers (this example is from a PowerBook G4, running Mac OS X 10.4.11), minimising expenditure for primary, secondary schools and colleges.

The final 'product'

When all the editing has been done, titles (and possibly subtitles) added, and a soundtrack included, it's time to show the film or photographic slideshow. Invite the interviewees, the local community and the Romani and Traveller parents to join the children and young people in celebrating the vibrancy, culture and history of the people s documented in the project.

This project can be an opportunity to demonstrate the schools' work with *all* pupils, to promote the teacher's commitment to diversity, to develop closer links between hard–to–reach communities and schools, and to build trust and confidence in relationships between teachers and parents.

Assessment and examination

The process of creating a digital movie is no less demanding or rigorous than producing written work, term papers, school papers, homework assignments and SAT's, and desktop movie–making offers an opportunity to allow Romani and Traveller children and young people to explore their creative and constructive abilities, and develop skills in a context that is culturally relevant. As part of a pupil portfolio, such a project can become part of the assessment that goes towards improving outcomes, raising attainment and aiming for better achievement…

For more details, contact RCAC, info@romaniarts.co.uk