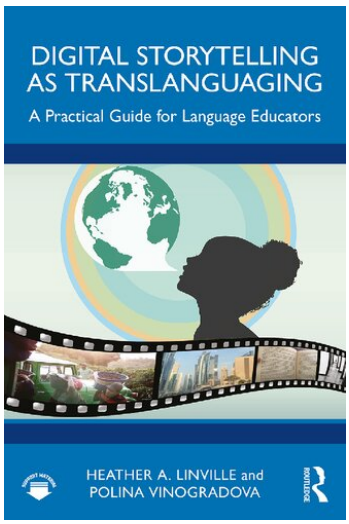
Book Review



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Book Review: Digital Storytelling as Translanguaging:
A Practical Guide for Language Educators

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BOOK DETAILS
Digital Storytelling as Translanguaging: A Practical Guide for Language Educators
Heather A. Linville and Polina Vinogradova (2024)
New York and London: Routledge
176 pp.
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£31.49, Paperback

In recent years, the chant 'multilingual turn' and the growing attention to multimodality in English Language Teaching have brought translanguaging to the forefront of pedagogical debate. While translanguaging, a term often understood as a strategic use of learners' full linguistic repertoires, has been widely theorised, its classroom implementation remains a challenge for many educators. In the book, *Digital Storytelling as Translanguaging: A Practical Guide for Language Educators*, Linville and Vinogradova (2024) provide a framework for using digital storytelling as multimodal tools to foster equity and learner agency in the increasingly diverse 21st Century classrooms. Through this book, the authors show how audio, visual, and students' dynamic language repertoire can be used as tools to reduce the impacts of passive banking model in education.

The book is divided into 12 chapters, and grouped into three parts. Part 1 is from Chapters 1 to 3. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the book's core premise. It describes storytelling as a fundamental human activity through which individuals make meaning of their lives and negotiate their identities. The authors define digital storytelling as an engaging multimodal

way to bring the personal experiences of multilingual learners (MLs) into the classrooms, especially through a translanguaging stance that values all languages in a student's repertoire. This chapter outlines the book's primary goal, which include providing a step-by-step guide for teachers to incorporate digital storytelling as a tool for linguistic justice and educational equity. Chapter 2 traces the history and practises of digital storytelling, identifying its roots in the work of Atchley and his StoryCentre model. The authors defined the genre as a short (2 to 5 minutes) personal narrative that combines a voiceover, images and music into a 'digital sonnet' or haiku. Crucially, the chapter outlines a 13-step collaborative production process tailored for the language classroom, ranging from pre-planning and story circles to video editing and final assessment. In Chapter 3, the authors bridge the theoretical perspectives in translanguaging and digital storytelling with classroom practices, moving away from monolingualism to multilingualism. The authors argue that teachers can foster critical language awareness and amplify marginalized voices in their classroom through this approach.

Part II is a collection of Chapters 4 to 10. Chapter 4 offers a pragmatic guide for teacher planning and preparation, urging educators to assess their own and their students' technological literacy before beginning a project. The chapter provides frameworks for mapping digital storytelling projects into existing course learning objectives and content standards, such as those for social studies or English language arts. The authors strongly recommend that teachers create their own digital stories first to understand the nuances of the process and to model vulnerability and creativity for their students. Chapter 5 focuses on preparing learners for digital storytelling and starts by addressing their motivation, language skills and technical needs. The authors suggest five ways to inspire MLs, including emphasising creativity, choice and personal storytelling. Practical activities include having students create language profiles to visualise their linguistic repertoires and teaching them about Creative Commons to ensure they have the necessary permissions for the multimodal elements they use. Chapter 6 details the initial production steps: the story circle and the writing of the narrative. The story circle is a collaborative space where students share ideas and receive peer feedback in the form of questions, which help them focus on their story while maintaining creative control. The chapter then guides MLs through the process of drafting a condensed, personal narrative using graphic organisers and peer review to ensure the story is engaging and manageable.

As a continuation from the previous chapter, Chapter 7 explains the process of mapping the multimodal narrative through storyboarding, which allows students to plan how their audio and visual images will interact over time. To this end, the authors use easily accessible tools, such as PowerPoint or Google Slides, as versatile digital storyboards where students can arrange their images, texts and sounds. The following chapter, Chapter 8, is a chapter where the authors show examples of how video editing apps, such as iMovie, PowerDirector and ClipChamp, were used in the digital storytelling project. With the advancement of technology nowadays, compared to when the book was written, this chapter still serves its purpose by guiding those who are keen on this topic, while using the latest app, such as Canva. After the practical parts, the book goes back into a theoretical discussion, where readers are introduced to the concept of Community of Practice in Chapter 9. Through this chapter, Linville and Vinogradova remind us that digital storytelling is fundamentally collaborative and facilitates legitimate peripheral participation from other members in the school community. At the end of this Part II, Chapter 10 addresses the public phase of the project. One of the issues highlighted by the authors here, which merits our attention, is the importance of creating a

safe environment for students to present their work, where students should be trained to be a respectful and supportive audience to other storytellers.

Finally, Part III, which consists of Chapters 11 and 12, explains the outcome expected of the project. Chapter 11 tackles the challenging topic of assessment, an evaluation of digital storytelling against principles like validity and reliability. This chapter is interesting as it probes readers into questioning whether or not the product should be evaluated, and if yes, how it should be evaluated. Chapter 12 is the closing chapter and serves to synthesise the book's core theme, revisiting how digital storytelling fosters language acquisition, how it develops students' identity and equity in the classrooms. The book ends with the final call for educators to embrace the messy but rewarding process of raising multilingual voices in the 21st century classroom.

Within the complex sociolinguistics fabric of Malaysia where it is often characterized by the dynamic interplay between Bahasa Melayu, English, Mandarin, Tamil and various indigenous languages, the traditional English-only classroom policy presents a pedagogical challenge. Linville and Vinogradova's work is particularly timely as Malaysian English Language Teaching (ELT) practitioners seek to align their practices with the 21st century frameworks that prioritise both digital literacy and learner agency. While some may say that Malaysian classrooms are mostly monoculture and not a suitable fit for translanguaging, I urge our community to also see translanguaging in Malaysia from another standpoint, that is as a tool for unity where the monoculture classrooms can create stories in other Malaysian languages.

As an ELT teacher in Malaysia, the book possesses three apparent strengths. First, its translanguaging stance is highly applicable to the Malaysian vernacular and national school systems, as it empowers students to use their native tongues to bridge gaps in English expression or perhaps in associating the words with other Malaysian languages, thereby fostering linguistic justice, equity and community bonding at the same time (Mihat 2016; Rajendram, 2021). Second, the book's emphasis on multimodality aligns perfectly with the Malaysian digital education policy, providing teachers with a structured way to integrate technology into accessible tools like Google Slides, Canva or smartphone apps, which are available on the DELIMA (Digital Education Learning Initiative Malaysia) site (Jaafar et al. 2022). Third, the inclusion of 'Featured Projects' from diverse global contacts, such as South Korea and Serbia, offers Malaysian teachers a global classroom perspective demonstrating that digital storytelling is a flexible pedagogy that can be adapted to various institutional constraints.

However, the book is not without its limitations. One notable downside is the technological assumption that everyone will have access to technology and the internet. While the authors provide suggestions for resource-constrained environments, some of the more sophisticated processes may still be out of reach for rural Malaysian schools with unstable Internet connectivity or limited hardware access (Mihat, 2015). Similarly, the book did not, perhaps, discuss matters related to the use of Artificial Intelligence in digital storytelling, making this area unexamined. Additionally, the 'ungrading' approach suggested in Chapter 11 may face resistance within an assessment-oriented education culture, be it in summative or formative assessments, since Malaysian teachers are often required to provide performance data for every student activity. Nevertheless, the book remains an essential read as its core message of empowering multilingual voices provides a much-needed counter-narrative to traditional methods, ensuring that even within a rigid curriculum, the human element of storytelling remains central.

To conclude, this magnum opus by Linville and Vinogradova (2024) is a comprehensive guide that effectively marries technology with language justice, equity and bonding. The book is highly recommended for all levels of the ELT community, pre-service, in-service, trainers and researchers. As it stands now, the book has paved the route for ELT practitioners in Malaysia for future direction.

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