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The affordances of an arts-based approach for building opportunities for young people's learning

Abstract This chapter sets out from the empirical basis of data collected in a digital story-telling activity implemented as part of the IEP! project, in which different creative practices and methods come into play. Considering the complex codependence of elements – mediational tools and artefacts, roles and identities, language/s, histories, space, time, activities, etc. – that converge in and around a handicraft activity carried out in one session, we draw on the notion of ecology to consider the opportunities for young people's (language) learning that emerge therein. The analysis focuses on how: 1) life histories create a panoramic space for learning; 2) the youth develop self-knowledge in the ways they manage their activity and their relationships; and 3) the youth harness the affordances of the context for managing their engagement and alignment in the activity and with others.

Keywords: youth, ecology, arts-based approach, critical cosmopolitanism, digital storytelling

1. Introduction

One of the after-school opportunities implemented under the auspices of the IEP! project was a digital storytelling activity, part of the Global StoryBridges[1] initiative, in which a group of local youth produced and shared videos of their lives and communities with young people at other global sites (see Moore, this volume). This chapter sets out from the empirical basis of data collected during one session of this after-school activity. Creative practices, while being at the core of the production of the digital stories, were also used in local activity sessions to promote group cohesion, the youths' participation and their (language) learning.

Informing this chapter, on the one hand, is the increasing interest in creativity and the arts – in a broad sense – in language education (see the AILA ReN on Creative Inquiry in Applied Linguistics formed in 2018). While the affordances of the arts for understanding or promoting different types of

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1   See http://www.globalstorybridges.com/

learning is often an implicit focus of this emergent strand of research, the intersection between language, learning and the arts has so far been understudied and undertheorised (Bradley & Harvey, 2019). This chapter asks how the young people's involvement in a particular handicraft activity helped shape the interactional dynamics that emerged in the session and afforded potential for their learning.

On the other hand, the notion of ecology (e.g. Hawkins, 2004; Van Lier, 2004a, 2004b, 2008; see Section 2) is drawn on to consider the emerging educational affordances of the handicraft activity in more depth. The learning setting we study is oftentimes a challenging one, with complicated relationships, irregular attendance, floundering interest and heterogenous competences in English among the youth – English being the lingua franca of the digital stories made for their global peers and the language used by the activity facilitators. An ecological approach allows us to consider what is impacting the environment, interactions and relationships – young people's histories, their use of and proficiencies in different languages, embodied modes beyond spoken language (with a focus on gaze, facial expression, posture and gesture), artefacts (specifically, a mobile phone that is brought into the interaction), literacies, participants' roles, and so on.

The chapter is structured as follows. In Section 2, the ecology framework as a theory of learning is introduced. Our focus is on the potential for learning afforded by the ecology from a sociocultural perspective (Hawkins, 2004), rather than on cognitive development (Van Lier, 2004a, 2004b, 2008). The ethnographic and arts-based research methodology followed is then presented, before offering the analysis of a single sequence of interaction. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the specific empirical findings and of the more general implications of this research.

2. An ecological perspective on emerging opportunities for learning

The protagonists of this research are a group of young participants in the afterschool activity and the adult facilitators of the session, who are also university-based researchers. In the data studied in this chapter, the youth and adult participants are seated around a table crafting Christmas cards. The young people had suggested this activity as part of a process in which they would create cards and then hand them out to residents of their town. They would also film the making and delivery stages of the process in order to later edit and share a digital story representing how they celebrated Christmas as a group with members

of Global StoryBridges at other sites. The analysis in Section 4 focuses only on the card-making stage of the process. As participants make the cards – cutting, pasting and drawing – they ask and answer questions, manage roles and relationships, move between different languages, and so on. Throughout the talk, the participation of the young people varies as they choose to take part actively or not in the conversation – by looking up or down from their card-making, by speaking or by remaining silent. Somehow, in this often-challenging educational space, the activity seems to work. Learning, including learning of English, seems to be possible.

Considering the complex codependence of activities, mediational tools and artefacts, roles and identities, languages, histories, and so forth that converge in and around the interaction studied, the notion of ecology is drawn on, as it has been developed in sociocultural language education research, as an analytical frame for considering the affordances for young people's learning emerging in the data. From a sociocultural perspective, Hawkins (2004) describes learning spaces, including but not limited to classrooms, as:

> complex ecosystems, where all of the participants, the practices, the beliefs, the forms of language, the forms of literacies, the social, historical and institutional context(s), the identity and positioning work, the politics and power relations, the mediational tools and resources, the activity and task designs, and the influences of the multiple local and global communities within which they are situated come together in fluid, dynamic, and ever-changing constellations of interactions, each one impacting the other. This is not a static process, but one that shifts with each new move/interaction, and as new organisms enter the environment, as ecological systems do. It is a fragile balance, and in order for it to "work" – to have the inhabitant life forms survive and prosper – we need to understand not only the individual components, but also the ways in which the patterns and the ebb and flow of contacts and engagements result from and contribute to the whole. (p. 21)

In her presentation of an ecological approach, Hawkins (2004) builds on multiple notions, including communities of practice, identities, power and multiple literacies. Her focus is primarily on ecosystems – their flows and effects, and the potential for learning afforded by the ecology – rather than on cognitive development.

From a sociocognitivist perspective, van Lier (2004a, 2004b) explains that an ecological approach is not a particular theory or model of teaching, learning or researching, but rather a 'world view' that aims to give coherence to different ideas about language in education, and language education in particular. According to him, main theoretical concerns include perception as multimodal and multisensory; action and activity; self and identity in relation to the world;

and learning as adapting to one's environment in ways that are increasingly effective and successful. All of these concerns are interrelated and relevant for interpreting the data studied in this chapter. However, coherent with our understanding of cognition and learning "as a public, social process embedded within an historically shaped material world" (Goodwin, 2000, p. 1491), they need nuancing as phenomena that are necessarily social; thus, we take them into account only insofar as they are manifested in the situated interaction analysed.

As for the first two concerns – perception and action – drawing on Gibson (1979), van Lier (2008) discusses different ways of seeing: snapshot (immobile perception), ambient (looking around) and ambulatory or panoramic (moving around). Developing Forman's (2005) work, van Lier (2008) links ambulatory/panoramic perception to pedagogical approaches in which learners are more active; in which they physically move around and engage in joint action (for example in project-based learning), or in which language use itself constructs movement and panoramic spaces, through telling stories, sharing anecdotes, and so on. It will be argued in this chapter that the handicraft activity studied afforded opportunities for discussion and interaction to shape and be shaped by panoramic spaces – in this case the life trajectory of one youth participant – and this was manifested in their shared, public activities.

In terms of the third concern – self and identity in relation to the world – emerging in the data are participants' diverse and co-constructed understandings of place, their sociocultural histories and experiences, as well as different ways of participating and relating to others, to the emerging activity and to the setting. van Lier (2004a, 2004b, 2008) draws on Neisser's (1988) five types of self-knowledge. These are ecological (self in this place, this activity), interpersonal (self in this human interchange), extended (self as personal experiences, memories, routines), private (self as different and unique) and conceptual (self as self-concept, identity, roles, status). Of these, in analysing the data presented in this chapter, how the youth involve themselves in the activity and interactionally manage relationships with other project group members are main concerns. The other types of self-knowledge – extended, private and conceptual – are potentially also relevant, although similar to the ecological and interpersonal selves, they are only referred to in the analysis when evoked and made public by the participants.

Related, too, to self and identity in the world, is Hawkins' (2014) notion of critical cosmopolitanism. We draw on this to consider how learners co-construct their perceptions of their world, and the affordances of this emergent aspect of the ecosystem for their learning. Cosmopolitanism considers relations between

global citizens, and the attitudes and obligations we have toward one another (Appiah, 2006). Critical cosmopolitanism takes into account issues of equity, power and positioning, such that interactions among and between diverse learners does not foster discord and divisiveness, but rather leads to openness and caring. It is understood as "a way forward that considers how to promote and support global encounters and engagements in a way that expands affiliations, openness, creativity, and caring with an imperative to create and sustain just and equitable relations" (p. 90). In this instance, it is the impetus behind the video-making and sharing, but it also applies to the situated interactions among the diverse learners in this site in the extracts we analyse.

Finally, van Lier's fourth concern – understanding learning in terms of adaptation to one's environment – is especially visible in the data in the ways that learners use the affordances of the art activity to manage these different selves and modes of identification. We conceive of learning as a process not only of building certain knowledge or skills in situated action and interaction, but also of socially constructing oneself and others as a certain person.

As a 'world view' of learning, an ecological approach also allows us to ask 'bigger' questions about what the 'quality' of educational experiences looks like and how it can be measured (Van Lier, 2004b). We will return to this more general concern in the concluding section of this text.

3. Methodology

As discussed in Moore (this volume), the IEP! project drew heavily on collaborative forms of ethnography (Lassiter, 2005). This chapter is an example of the collaborative work engaged in with the teenagers, with the design of the handicraft activity, the manipulation of the video recording equipment during the activity and the later editing of the video recordings being 'owned' by both the adult and the youth participants. The work is further guided by principles of reflective practice (e.g. Schön, 1983; Eraut, 1995); with the researchers simultaneously being educators in the project studied, they are able to reflect on emerging dynamics in order to develop deeper understandings of them, leading to improvement and innovation. Coherent with the underlying approach of the IEP! project, the researchers also take a transformative activist stance, as advocated by Vianna and Stetsenko (2014), in seeking to contribute to socially just educational opportunities and outcomes (Hawkins, 2011).

The research is further inspired by the emerging field of creative inquiry in language education research. Creative inquiry is often understood as "any social research or human inquiry that adapts the tenets of the creative arts as a part of

the methodology" (Leavy in Jones & Leavy, 2014, p. 1), although Bradley and
Harvey (2019) offer a broader definition, to include research that is conducted
through the arts, *with* the arts, and *into* the arts (see Moore, this volume). We
follow Eisner's (1985) definition of 'art' as spontaneous, aesthetic activity: "the
process in which skills are employed to discover ends through actions" (p. 154).
Arts-based methods – painting, drawing, photography, collage, drama, music,
creative writing, dance, video production, among others – have proved effective
in previous language education research for young people to explore their real-
ities and imaginations in ways that extend beyond written and spoken expres-
sion (Bradley et al., 2018; Moore & Bradley, 2020). At the Global StoryBridges
site where the data presented in this chapter was collected, creative practices
were inherent to the processes of digital storytelling. We also frequently em-
ployed arts-based activities including dance, drawing or handicraft to promote
the young people's participation and learning through and of English. Following
Piazzoli (2018), the educational context can be framed as an ecosystem in which
students are engaged "as co-artists in a process involving not only cognition,
but also affect, imagery, sensation, different forms of memory, emotion and
embodiment" (p. 8).

The relationship and complementarities between arts-based approaches and
ethnography, particularly in educational research, have also attracted scholarly
interest in recent times. As Ferro and Poveda (2019) explain, "educational eth-
nographic research has turned its attention to learning, teaching and educational
practices around art across a variety of institutional settings" (p. 2). For example,
in an illuminating ethnographic study in a rural school in Spain, Vigo-Arrazola
and Beach (2019) show how art is used by teachers to create a space where
the learning and participation of children with diverse linguistic and cultural
backgrounds and specific learning needs could be supported and researched.

The data we analyse in this chapter is a videorecorded interaction during the
aforementioned card-making activity. Decisions to film the activity and about
the position of the camera were shared by the adult facilitators – who were also
IEP! researchers – and the young people. The analysis began with the repeated
shared viewing of the data by the authors of this chapter, together with three of
the other adult facilitators/researchers involved at the site. This initial analysis
followed the ethnomethodological principle of unmotivated looking (Sacks,
1984), with viewers commenting on salient features of the observed activity
and jointly building an initial analysis. After each initial hypothesis, researchers
returned to the data to validate, discard, or extend it. In each iteration of
viewing/reading and discussing, insights and understandings were refined. The
data included in this chapter is a single stretch of interaction which stood out to

the researchers in terms of the emergent learning ecology following the shared analysis. This interaction has been transcribed using basic conversation analysis conventions (Jefferson, 2004), while also taking into account different embodied features of the interaction beyond talk – in particular gaze, facial expression, posture and gesture – which are essential to how participants build participation and meaning (e.g. Mondada, 2016; Norris, 2004). The role of a mobile phone in bringing written language into the interaction is also taken into account. While depending on the transcription to support the analysis in this chapter, during the analytical process the video data were constantly returned to as the first entextualisation of the phenomena under study (Haberland & Mortensen, 2016).

Ten young people were registered for the Global StoryBridges activity at our site at the time the data was collected. They were approximately 14 years-old and had a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, relevant aspects of which are introduced in Section 4 of this chapter to sustain our interpretations of the data. Informed consent was gathered from all of the young participants' parents or legal guardians prior to the start of this research, and pseudonyms are used for them throughout the analysis. In the extracts, activity facilitators (including Emilee Moore, one of the authors of this chapter) are referred to using their real names, with their permission. The second author of this chapter (Maggie Hawkins) is the developer and principal researcher of the Global StoryBridges project and was involved in all processes of data analysis, as well as having visited and being familiar with the site and its participants.

The digital storytelling activity ran once a week for two hours at a youth centre. The Global StoryBridges project works as an extracurricular programme in which children and youth at different global sites meet locally and collectively – per site – produce video stories representing different aspects of their lives, for audiences of children or youth – depending on the age cluster they are part of – at the other sites. These videos are shared on the project's web-based platform, which also includes an asynchronous chat facility used to post and respond to comments and questions about the video productions. The children and youth are supported by adult facilitators, who are usually volunteers, but the idea is that the project is youth-led, so the child and teenage participants make decisions about what to film, the stories to tell, and so on.

In a typical session at our site, different overlapping activities took place. Some of these activities were directly related to the Global StoryBridges project's main tasks of producing, sharing and commenting on digital stories. Other activities, including playing games, sharing music, dancing, drawing, handicraft and chatting, were also included in the sessions to promote positive relationships among participants and to create a relaxed learning space that the young people

would want to attend. Disruptive behaviour by some of the participants and in-group tensions were also quite common, and interaction in English was often difficult to initiate and sustain.

4. Analysis: Affordances of an art-based approach for building opportunities for learning

As we have alluded to already, the educational setting we study was oftentimes a challenging one and the opportunities for learning that were co-constructed, both in terms of the young people's English skills and more generally, were often difficult to gauge. The interaction presented in this section is embedded in activity – card-making and conversing while card-making – that allowed different modes of engagement. Some students joined in the conversation in English, others listened in and contributed quietly to the card-making, turns at talk were respected and disruptions were minimal. In that sense, the activity supported an ecosystem that was potentially generative of opportunities for the youths' learning.

The participants named in the transcription analysed and who are visible in the screenshot from the video recording (Image 1) are: NAN: Nanyamka (pseudonym, youth participant); NAI: Naiara (pseudonym, youth participant); ANA: Ana Li (pseudonym, youth participant); DAN: Daniel (pseudonym, youth participant); MIA: Miaomiao (a facilitator/PhD student from China); and IGN: Ignasi (pseudonym, youth participant). EMI: Emilee (a facilitator/researcher; first author here) and CLA: Claudia (a facilitator/researcher) also participate in the interaction but are not in the view of the camera (they are seated on the same side of the table as the camera).
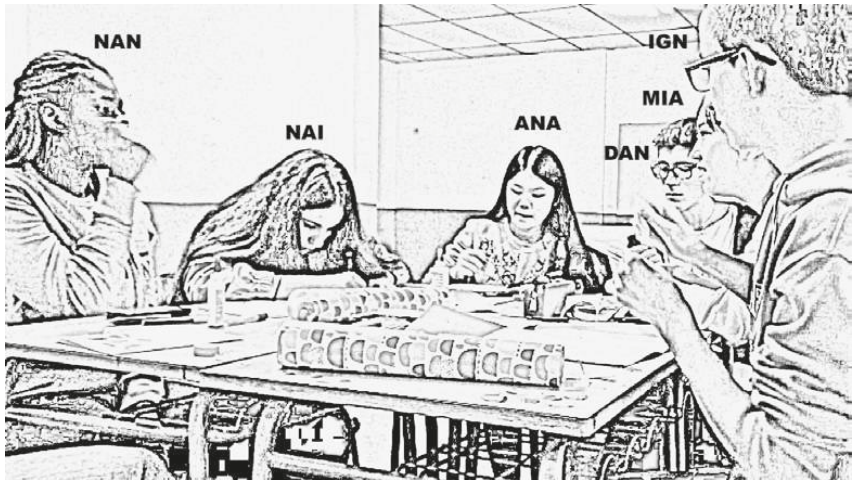
Image 1. Screenshot from the video recording

We provide here some background details about the participants that are important for the interpretation of the data analysed. Firstly, Nanyamka is quite fluent in English as she was schooled in Ghana in that language before moving to Catalonia. She also speaks Fante. Ana Li also has a good level of English as she attends an after-school language college to learn it, unlike the other participants. She also studies Chinese at a complementary school on Saturdays. The other young people's English language skills are less developed. All of the young people speak Spanish and Catalan, although Spanish is dominant among them. Miaomiao speaks English but knows very little Spanish and no Catalan. Claudia and Emilee are both fluent in English, Spanish and Catalan.

All of the youth participants go to school together and although they come together for the project, they are not part of the same friendship groups. Indeed, throughout the year different tensions between them were brought to the adult facilitators' attention, both explicitly and through observation. Nanyamka and Naiara, on the one hand, and Ana Li, Daniel and Ignasi, on the other, were close friends, while there was tension between these two groups, and between Nanyamka and Ana Li in particular. The relationships between the youth often created obstacles for working collaboratively and also affected attendance; groups of friends tended to attend or skip sessions in block.

Both Claudia and Emilee were aware from a conversation before the project session studied that Miaomiao was curious about Ana Li's connections to

China, as part of her ethnographic research in the site. The fact that Ana Li was of Chinese descent and was adopted by her Spanish parents was common knowledge in the group, as was her learning of Chinese. Indeed, Miaomiao's presence in the different project sessions meant that China, and Asia in general, were main topics of discussion throughout the year, with the young people – Nanyamka and Naiara in particular – often asking Miaomiao about her country, Asian pop culture, food, etc. (see Zhang & Llompart, this volume). The interaction studied in this section took place at the end of the Christmas card-making session and Miaomiao had not yet asked Ana Li about her connections to China. Thus, Emilee and Claudia raise the topic in order to help Miaomiao find out more about Ana Li's relationship with her country of origin, balancing their joint roles as facilitators and researchers. Miaomiao's attention had mostly been consumed until this point by Nanyamka and throughout the extract analysed, in which Ana Li becomes the protagonist, Nanyamka closely monitors the conversation, shifting her gaze from speaker to speaker, without paying much attention to the card she is making.

Drawing on the ecology framework introduced earlier, the main foci of the analysis are: 1) how Ana Li's – and to a lesser extent Miaomiao's – life histories are co-constructed as a panoramic space affording potential for learning; 2) how the young people mobilise self-knowledge in the ways they manage their activity and their relationships; and 3) how the youth harness the emergent affordances of the handicraft for interactionally managing their engagement and alignment in the activity and with others. The data is presented as four different extracts to facilitate the analytical narrative, although they are all part of a continuous stretch of interaction.

The first extract begins with Emilee asking Ana Li if she has ever been to China.

Extract 1

```
01   EMI    ehm ana li did you ever go to china?
02   ANA    ((making eye contact with EMI, eye contact sustained)) ah?
03   EMI    have you ever been to China?
04   ANA    que si he ido?
            whether i have been?
05   EMI    yeah with your parents?
06   ANA    ((shakes head, looks down at card-making)) no.
07   EMI    no? (.) would you like to go?
08   ANA    ((looks up from card-making, smiles politely)) yes. ((looks
09          down at card-making))
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10   MIA    nanjing eh you were born in nanjing?
11   ANA    ((looking up from card-making)) yes. ((looks down at card
12          making))
13   MIA    nanjing is a big city.
14   ANA    ((looks up from card-making briefly to MIA, nodding head))
```

After several lines in which Emilee and Ana Li make eye contact and clarify what Emilee is asking, Ana Li responds in line 6 that she has not been to China, both nonverbally by shaking her head and with a single "no". As Ana Li answers, she looks back down at the card she is making. She looks up briefly in line 8 to respond with a single "yes" to Emilee's next question about whether she would like to visit China, smiling politely, and again returns her gaze promptly to her handicraft. In line 10, Miaomiao asks Ana Li a third question, confirming the city Ana Li was born in (which had been mentioned in a previous session), and she receives a similar one-word response ("yes") with brief eye contact in line 11. Miaomiao comments that Ana Li's city of birth is a large one in line 13, receiving only a nonverbal response – eye-contact and nodding – from Ana Li in this case (line 14).

Extract 2 begins with Emilee asking Ana Li a fourth question, this time enquiring whether Ana Li has any memories of her birth country.

Extract 2

```
15   EMI    do you have memories in china?
16   ANA    ((looks up from at card-making at EMI, question face, sustains
17          eye contact))
18   NAN    ((to MIA)) can you write the [city that she come?
19   EMI    [((to ANA)) do you have any memories of china?
20   ANA    ((shaking head)) no. ((looks down at card-making))
21   MIA    ((to NAN)) in chinese character?
22   NAN    no in the alphabetical manner. ((to ANA, making eye contact))
23          cómo se- com- la ciudad cómo se llama?
             how is- how- the city what's it called?
24   ANA    ((making eye contact with NAN)) qué ciudad?
             which city?
25   NAN    de que la ciudad que naciste.
             of which the city where you were born.
26   ANA    nanjing. ((maintains gaze on NAN))
27   NAN    vale.
             ok.
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```
28   MIA   nan- i write it on my phone?
29   NAN   oh yeah.
30   ANA   pero para qué?
           but what for?
31   NAN   ((not looking at ANA)) (    )
32   ANA   ((looks back to card-making))
```

Ana Li appears not to understand Emilee's question from line 15, as she looks up from her card-making with a questioning face in line 16. She sustains eye contact with Emilee in lines 16–20 as the question is repeated (line 19), and then she responds with a single "no" and a head shake, before looking back down to her card (line 20).

In line 18, a different conversational sequence is opened up by Nanyamka, who, as mentioned previously, had dominated the talk, with Miaomiao in particular, until the adults' attention turned to Ana Li. Typical of her interest in China (see Zhang & Llompart, this volume), but also possibly as a way of directing Miaomiao's attention back to herself, Nanyamka asks Miaomiao to write down the name of the city that Ana Li comes from. Miaomiao clarifies whether Nanyamka wants to see the city written in Chinese characters (line 21), to which Nanyamka responds in line 22 that she means using the (Romanised) alphabetical system (i.e. Pinyin). In this same line, Nanyamka asks Ana Li to repeat the name of the city where she was born, opening up an exchange in Spanish that lasts until line 30. Ana Li repeats the name of the city for Nanyamka (line 26), while she also enquires with certain suspicion as to why Nanyamka wants this information (line 30). Nanyamka gives her a reason, which is not understandable in the recording (line 31), but which seems to satisfy Ana Li as nonintrusive, as Ana Li returns her gaze to her card-making in line 32.

Meanwhile, Miaomiao, who speaks little Spanish and likely does not understand the conversation that has emerged between Ana Li and Nanyamka, asks Nanyamka if she would like her to write down the name of the Chinese city by typing it on her phone (line 28), which Nanyamka agrees to (line 29).

Extract 3 begins with another one of the adults, Claudia, asking Ana Li a fifth question about her age when she was brought to Spain.

Extract 3

```
33   CLA   ana li did you come as a baby?
34   ANA   ((looks up from card-making)) yes. (.) one year.
35   CLA   wow
36   ANA   ((smiles politely, looks back down at card-making))
37   NAN   ((looking across the table, at nobody in particular)) pero
38         cuando vas a adoptar una persona tienes que ir a ese país para
39         buscar el bebé?
           but when you are going to adopt a person do you have to go to
           that country to collect the baby?
40   MIA   ((shows phone to NAN)) [nanjing
41   IGN   [depende. (.) depende.
           [it depends. (.) it depends.
42   ANA   [((laughing)) no (.) van volando solos
           no (.) they go flying alone
43   NAN   [((to MIA, looking at phone)) ah ok.
44   IGN   no pero-
           no but-
45   ANA   con una cigüeña que los va a buscar.
           with a stork that goes to get them.
46   ((laughter from ANA, MIA, IGN, DAN, EMI and CLA))
47   NAI   pero te pueden traer al bebé.
           but they could bring you the baby.
48   NAN   sí pueden ir a un centro y los traen directamente.
           yes you could go to a centre and they bring them directly.
49   ANA   pero a ver. (.) es que allí los centros están en china por eso.
           but let's see. (.) the thing is that there the centres are in
           china that's why.
50   NAN   pero es que hua
           but it's that hua
51   ((overlapping talk))
```

In responding to the question, Ana Li again looks up from her card-making, although this time offering a longer response than to previous interrogations ("yes, one year", line 34). She sustains eye contact with Claudia during Claudia's next turn, in which Claudia shows her amazement at Ana Li's young age of arrival in Spain (line 35). In line 36, Ana Li smiles politely and looks back down to her card-making.

In lines 37–39, Nanyamka again proposes a topic for discussion linked to Ana Li's life history, asking a question related to the theme of adoption (i.e. whether

you need to collect adopted babies in their countries of birth). The fact that she uses Spanish suggests her question is directed at her peers (she usually uses English with the adults), although not to any particular one. Ignasi responds in line 41 that "it depends" ("depende"), also using Spanish. Ana Li, who is arguably the expert on the topic through her unique experience, responds in Spanish to Nanyamka's question with sarcasm in lines 42 and 45, prompting laughter from all the young people except for Nanyamka and Naiara, as well as from the adults, in line 46. Naiara steps in at this point (line 47), also using Spanish, to defend Nanyamka against this potentially face-threatening situation, and Nanyamka offers her own self-defence for her question in line 48. In line 49, Ana Li mobilises her expertise on the matter of adoption to explain why Nanyamka and Naiara are mistaken, to which Nanyamka responds with dismissive frustration in line 50 ("hua").

At the end of Extract 3 the youth talk in overlap, leading to Ignasi's next turn at the beginning of Extract 4, in which he uses an imperative in Spanish ("escúchame", translated as "listen to me") to claim attention.

Extract 4

```
52  IGN   a ver escúchame.
          let's see listen to me.
53  NAN   [((looking at IGN, exaggerated laughing))
54  IGN   [a ver escúchame porque no me acuerdo si cuando lo hacíamos
55        en el cole si esto se doblaba así.
          [let's see listen to me because i don't remember if when we did
          it at school this was folded like this.
56  MIA   [((asks ANA a question but can't be heard over NAN's laughing))
57  ANA:  ((to NAN, raising arm to get her attention, laughs slightly))
58        es que no la escucho.
          it's that i can't hear her.
59  MIA   do you want your parents take you back to china?
60  ANA   yes.
```

Although his face is offscreen at the beginning of the extract, Ignasi's use of the second person singular (tú) form of the verb 'escuchar' (listen) rather than the second person plural (vosotros) suggests he is addressing one person in particular, possibly Nanyamka. Looking at him, in line 53 Nanyamka laughs in an exaggerated way. In overlap, Ignasi repeats the 'tú' form of 'listen', before changing the topic. He refers to the technique he has been using to make a pop-up Christmas tree on his card, which the youth had apparently learned at school

(lines 54–55). Also in overlap, Miaomiao asks Ana Li another question, in English, which cannot be heard over Nanyamka's loud laughing (line 56). In lines 57–58, Ana Li raises her hand towards Nanyamka and tells her she cannot hear Miaomiao. She laughs slightly as she does so, possibly seeking solidarity from other participants. The move is effective, as Nanyamka stops laughing and Miaomiao and Ana Li are able to ask (line 59) and answer (line 60) the question in English about Ana Li's desire to visit China in the future.

5. Discussion and conclusions

We first return to the three main foci set out above, in order to summarise the main analytical findings: 1) how Ana Li's – and to a lesser extent Miaomiao's – life histories are co-constructed as a panoramic space affording potential for learning; 2) how the young people mobilise self-knowledge in the ways they manage their activity and their relationships; and 3) how the youth harness the emergent affordances of the handicraft for interactionally managing their engagement and alignment in the activity and with others.

In terms of the first, the analysis suggests that despite not being a topic proposed by the youth themselves, the conversation around Ana Li's adoption from China offers potential for learning. We observe, for example, how Nanyamka seeks clarification of, and then asks for the name of Ana Li's city of birth to be written out for her, as a way of showing her interest in and building her knowledge of China. In this exchange, her plurilingual literacy knowledge is also mobilised, as two different writing systems are offered to her as possibilities from which to select. Perhaps more importantly, Nanymaka's question about adoption procedures leads to a debate in which all of the youth, with the exception of Daniel, voice their ideas, with Nanyamka and Naiara defending one position, Ignasi another, and Ana Li a third. Ana Li, the only participant with firsthand experience of the procedure, is ultimately able to exert her co-constructed position of expertise in claiming authority, and in resolving the debate. Linking with the second analytical focus, she is able to mobilise her extended self-knowledge, her personal experience, to position herself, and be accepted as, the more knowledgeable participant.

Continuing to consider the second analytical focus, the mobilisation of self-knowledge, we observe how social relations and tensions among the youth preexisting the particular interaction studied are oriented to by them in the conversation and affect their engagements and alignments. Ana Li displays suspicion as to Nanyamka's reasons for wanting to know the name of her city of birth. Naiara, who otherwise does not participate verbally in the conversation, speaks

up only to show support for Nanyamka's position in the debate about adoption processes. We further observe how Ignasi steps in when tensions arise to change the topic. Both in the case of Naiara's non-participation in the conversation other than to momentarily defend Nanyamka, and in Ignasi's change of topic to card-folding techniques, the youths' concentration – as evidenced by their shifting gaze and posture – on the handicraft activity is central, offering them a way to not get involved in the conversation, in Naiara's case, and to prompt a refocus of attention, in Ignasi's.

These latter two observations are examples of how the youth are able to harness the affordances of the arts-based activity to manage their activity and their relationships, as part of an ecosystem from which learning, including learning English, may emerge. The activity allows the young people to use an array of multimodal resources to enact engagement/alignment and interpersonal relations, and in the process they have the opportunity to use English and to build their knowledge of one another and the world. The affordances of the art activity are also used by Ana Li to only minimally participate in the conversation by giving just token answers to the adults' questions. Indeed, Ana Li only seems to actively engage in the talk in responding sarcastically to Nanyamka's enquiries. Both the preexisting relationships between the youth and the topic of conversation no doubt contribute to creating an ecology which could be uncomfortable for some of the participants. However, the handicraft activity affords opportunities for engaging differently with numerous unfolding activities and for aligning or avoiding/resisting alignment with other participants.

van Lier (2008) writes: "activity […] guides the perception of affordances, and the affordances themselves guide further activity" (p. 61). Indeed, the analysis reveals how, in the after-school digital storytelling project, one activity (card making) affords another (questions/answers about Ana Li's life history) and another (relationship management) and another (learning about China, mobilising literacy knowledge, learning about adoption processes), as well as different forms of engagement and alignment by the youth.

In this chapter, the out-of-school digital storytelling activity was presented as one of several initiatives being collaboratively implemented as part of the IEP! project, aimed at offering equitable and quality out-of-school educational opportunities for developing youths' English language competences. The specific affordances of the activity analysed have already been discussed. In responding to the question about the young people's learning in a more general sense, we return to van Lier (2004b), who argues that 'quality' of educational experience cannot be measured against standards or test scores, and that some

of the most significant indicators of quality cannot be measured quantitatively. He writes:

> in education there are activities that reap and others that sow. The reaping type of activities tend to be those that are immediately demonstrable and perhaps testable, such as clearly defined skills (the ability to use *ser* and *estar* correctly in a Spanish exercise), but the sowing activities tend to bear fruit much later, possibly in ways that can no longer be traced back to the original sowing event. In the latter case there is of course no way of quantifying the effect of these sowing events. (van Lier, 2004b, p. 98)

Indeed, the data presented in this chapter do not allow any precise claims about how the youths' English skills progressed, or about how they developed other competences, including critical cosmopolitanism, to be made. Rather, the instance of interaction studied, as well as the many other interactions documented through our research at the site, may have sown seeds – including cultivating interest in other people and places, promoting convivial relationships with peers and encouraging multiple forms of engagement and participation – which will hopefully bear fruit in the youths' futures as lifelong (language) learners. No doubt there remains work to be done on behalf of the project facilitators in picking up on the ecological affordances identified and maximising their potential for young people's critical cosmopolitanism and language learning.

Acknowledgments

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