

UNESCO RILA: The sounds of integration

Episode 63: Mukuka Kasonde and Brice Catherin's storytelling project in Zambia (25/01/2024)

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Dr Esa Aldegheri

هه آل ووس هه آل - أ، benvenuti, fàilte, titambire, welcome to the podcase series of the UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts at the University of Glasgow. We bring you sounds about integration, languages, culture, society and identity. with us.

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Olivia Ndoti

Welcome to the podcast for the University of Glasgow that's being done by UNESCO. My name is Olivia Dotty and I'm also a former current student of the University of Glasgow. I'm joined in with Mukuka Kasonde from Zambia and also Brice Catherin. Welcome to you both. Could you please introduce yourselves?

Mukuka Kasonde

Yes, my name is Mukuka. I'm a PhD candidate. I suppose I could say a critical management scholar and my research involves exploring cause to decolonize UK business schools.

Brice Catherin

I am Brice Catherin, I'm French, I have a background as a musician, I was trained as a classical musician, and I am now an artist, also a writer, while doing all sorts of artistic things, and a doctor in music compositions too.

Olivia

Thank you very much. Welcome both. Today we're here to listen to the project about storytelling, which has been done in Zambia. And right now, I'd like both of you to explain about your project that you've been doing in Zambia with the children.

Mukuka

It would be good to explain how this project came about. So it came about through conversations between Brice and I when I was talking about how there's limited local reading content in Zambia. I think partly this also came out of my own research, so even though it's not to do with education at primary level. But then when I went to the UK to do my PhD, in a sense, I understood a little bit more about how much of the content that I was exposed to in primary school for reading was UK content. There was a sense of yearning for me in something that would be a bit more local. And so we began talking about that and we

said, well, based on, I suppose, our interests and our skills, what if we did a project that brings out some more local stories from Zambian children, specifically?

Brice

Yes. And then we considered that the specialists of children literature were children. So rather than finding adult writers or writing ourselves, since we are both also writing fictions, we decided to go to said children and write stories with them. So it was a very spontaneous pilot project that we did last summer. So we have only four stories for now, but it's an ongoing project. And hopefully we have a bigger collection soon enough. And just to add to what Mukuka just said, so English is the national language in Zambia, but also the books that are published in local languages like Bemba and Nyanja. There are also British stories that are being translated into these languages. So the lack of local literature is very impressive and this literature exists, it's just not published.

Olivia

Since you're talking about language and this is about storytelling and sharing language as well, I'd like to know exactly what languages are you using to tell the stories with the children.

Mukuka

So the short answer I suppose when it comes to the language is that it's English, because that's the common language amongst all the people who were involved in the project. And also the official language of instruction and the level of the children who were working with.

Brice

So of course it's in English, but since most of the children speak two, three languages, whenever possible we added a bit of Bemba here and Nijanda there. So in the text there are a few words from local languages.

Child reading aloud

Alora Brown was a famous black teacher-scientist explorer. Her assistant was a white man named Franklin Albert. They were both from Unesia a country of great culture, variety and equality. The different provinces of Unesia were Friendshipland, Neverland and Adventureland. Unesia's neighbouring countries were Botswana, the UK, the US, Belgium, Mozambique, Congo, France, Nigeria, Egypt, Brazil, Morocco, South Africa, and Madagascar.

Mukuka

I think one of the things that we were aiming for was that the project would be as collaborative as possible, so everybody in the classroom at that time would be involved. Not only did we want to have maybe a story as a product, but we also wanted the process to be one that allows maybe cross-creativity between the students and also with ourselves, though mainly we were working as facilitators.

Brice

It's a collaborative project and it's a very important aspect of it. So it means that we have to find a way to get all the ideas of all the different children to fit together. There's a bit of negotiation, not much because the children are mostly accepting all the ideas that are

appearing. When there are contradictions, like we have in the last story, the fourth one, we wrote down the different versions explaining that we called the children the 12th, I mean, 12 wise children, and they have; its oral tradition, so they have different versions of the same story, which is perfectly normal. So we write in a different version. So we always find ways to put into light the value of these different opinions and consider them as a quality rather than an obstruction.

We didn't want also to arrive in the classrooms with an agenda like being, are we going to talk about this? Are we going to talk about that? So what happened is that they talked about things that were totally unexpected for us, which was really great. The only thing that I ended up asking, because I thought it was nice and important, was to have at least one Zambian element to the story. So either a part of the story should happen in Zambia, or one of the characters at least should be Zambian. So each story has a Zambian element. Because the very first classroom we entered, they were aged six to nine. They had only American and British heroes, doing American and British things. So we asked them to bring these guys to Zambia and see what happens to them. (- Yeah.) Pop culture heroes.

Mukuka

Yes. Indeed, that was very interesting. And I think when we went into the project, we went in with a curiosity and openness. So our question was, what do Zambian children in this area and within this age, what do they want to talk about? What do they want within stories? And so indeed it was unexpected how much, at least definitely for me, how much pop culture there was within these stories. Yeah, I think for me also in my post-colonial interest, it just sort of solidified this, maybe when you come from the theory to the practice where you have this theory of distinctness in culture maybe. And so for me, it just blurred this image, I suppose, of what Zambian culture is for young people. And so that was something that was quite unexpected.

Brice

It also demonstrated how wide their culture is because they know of course the whole global North culture stuff that I was not aware of, but I'm not very good at pop culture in general, I confess. But also how aware they are of local politics issues. So there was constantly this going back and forth between the international or imperialist global North culture and very local matters that they master really well, to be honest.

Olivia

When the children are reading books, are these the books that are provided by you or is it this school that provides the books? And is it easy for the children to have access to the books to read to in those areas where you're working with them?

Mukuka

So for our projects, we didn't have any reading material sets. So what we did is we - maybe before I finished answering this, I might just touch on the idea of access. This was a pilot project because of course no one's just going to let you have access to their school children rightly so you know; there should be some sort of process before you get access to it. So we were lucky in that we do have contacts with the heads of the schools that we went into. And so we presented the projects to them and they accepted to allow us to do the pilot with them. So that's how we got access to these particular schools. So what we did then is that

we also spoke to the teachers beforehand, just explain to them what we're going to do, what the aim of the of the project is, how we're going to conduct it. And so when we walked into the classroom, we had mixed children in terms of age and gender. And we just basically said, 'Okay, we're going to write a story all of us together, how do you want us to begin the story?' And so it's very much a process that comes from receiving what the children have, and then also trying to encourage them to work with one another in terms of developing the ideas. And so our roles mainly are just sort of to be writing down what they're saying, and in a sense to be guiding the story, but not in a way where we're leading, we're sort of working off of their ideas. So there was no reading before.

Brice

Because the reading list is already an agenda. Like if you choose books that they should read beforehand, you're already hearing a lot.

Mukuka

Yeah, so it's, we tried. And I think that's something that worked really well to very much just have the children leading the story. And then we just acting as, as sort of writers and putting ideas together. At some point we had whiteboards and we had like you know 10-15 bullet points and then would take a picture, erase that and then write more bullet points just to see how the story sort of flowed.

Child 2 reading aloud

There once was a family of three which was a mum, dad and a girl whose name was Malaika. One day they went camping so they were preparing for camping. They set off at 9.14. It was a long way to the campsite. This camp was next to a nice fork at the Victoria Falls. So they arrived at 18:20. They set their tents and as they were sleeping, they hid a roar. Malaika's parents came out of the tent and saw a lion and the lion ate them. After the lion ate them, the lion heard a child cry and entered the tent and found a baby girl. Luckily for Malaika, she was five, so she knew some things. And she was old enough to know that her parents are dead. So the lion took her by the leg and took her to the lion's den. And the lion's left her alone. But she ran as fast as she could and found the village in the forest. And she was raised there only.

Olivia

I just want to go back with you, Mukuka. You mentioned something to do with post-colonial lands. When the children are reading their books – it's from one of the stories that I've listened to- that you guys have done with the children, talks about the Victoria Falls. How much aware the children? How much are they aware about the Victoria Falls? And looking at the post-colonial lanes whereby David Livingstone story is more like very familiar in the Zambian education. Do you change to retell that story when you think about the post-colonial layers? Or do you tell like a natural story of what is happening today? Because I believe the story was not taught correctly, which in Zambia was known that David Livingstone was the founder of the Victoria Falls. But there were indigenous people before David Livingstone arrived to that area. So how are the children learning about that? Indeed.

Mukuka

That's a great question because I think from a post-colonial scholar perspective, there were lots of things that were coming out during the conversations that sort of made me go, "Oh no." But then I think what I had to remember was that I wasn't there as a post-colonial scholar. That's something that is there in my mind and something that I'm quite regularly thinking about. But having said that, we did have a discussion about Victoria Falls and Mosi-oa-Tunya and which words to use and which language to use in reference to that. I think for me, even some of the gendered aspects of what was coming out in the conversations was something that made me pause and reflect, especially on our roles as facilitators of these workshops. And I think what we did is that, of course we couldn't not make certain comments. So we did, like I said, have a discussion on Victoria Falls and Mosi-oa-Tunya, and at one point, we were discussing the race of some of the characters. So, you know, we're discussing should this character be black and female, or should they be white and male? And what are some of the characteristics? I think at some point, one of the students said or were discussing the idea that, you know, white people are generally explorers because Black people don't. And so we had those, we had those conversations

Brice

I'm thinking of my year. She said something like Black people stay at home and, and white people are adventurers.

Mukuka

Yes, and adventurers. Yes. So from a post-colonial perspective, it was quite difficult to, to sort of have these encounters. Of course, they don't make it into the book because that's not the purpose of the, of the book. But what we did do, which I think was really, was really meaningful for me, and hopefully for the students, is that after we were done with the workshops, you know, during lunch, we did have conversations about these things. And we tried to, we tried to have the conversations in a way that opened up their minds to, to other ways of thinking about things. So like you said, you know, it's Victoria Falls, but then why do we not call it Mosi-oa-Tunya; what does Mosi-oa-Tunya mean? So maybe to cut along answer short, I think what it sort of suggested to us is that there's a lot of re-education that has to happen, even at primary level, because from these conversations, you can sort of see how the, I suppose, colonial ideas, you know, the gendered ideas already set in there. And I think without some sort of strong intervention, they kind of continue, you know, through the education system.

Brice

But we're able to challenge that very playfully. I mean, when we're starting every session, we would like just ask 'what is the story? Okay, we need characters, who are the characters?' and it was really easy to say like, 'oh, should we not have a young girl as a hero', for instance, and they'd be like 'good idea let's do that!'. And then we had younger girls as heroes. So when I was saying we didn't have an agenda - okay, it's true, but we didn't want to end up with only a male - we didn't want to end up with Captain America in each story. So we did push for a few things like a Zambian aspect, young girls as heroes, these kinds of things. And there's an interesting conversation about racial biases in the last story. A lot of questions about race have been mentioned in the story. Like the heroes all come from different, - Well, the main hero is a black woman scientist and her assistant is a white man. And this we didn't come up with it. I think that they had the idea. So already here there's a stronger difference

with the usual biases. And there are all these like, yeah, racial discussions. There's even this mysterious white tribe near Mosi-oo-Tunya, where are they from? You know, a tribe of white men in, well near Mosi-oo-Tunya, it's very mysterious.

Child 3 reading aloud

Just after he committed this crime, Franklin got bitten by a snake. Tamiko explains to us that it attacked him because of Malaika's bracelet. If anyone ever tried to harm Malaika, the bracelet would tell all the animals, and the animals would charge at the person; in this case Franklin Albert. In fact, thanks to her bracelet, the animal friend would also come to rescue her. And indeed, as she was falling from a fragile tree branch, cropping out of the force, where Franklin, who thought he had left her dead, the eagle friend carefully picked her up and said to her: "Now, there are different opinions regarding the type of snake that bit Franklin and its motivations. Let us hear the wise children.

Olivia

I think from one of the stories that you've already done, I picked up, I think, one of the boys was talking about this scientist being greedy, discovered the mineral resources, the stones. The stones were precious, it made me laugh. And I was just like, okay, I think, like you said, there's a lot of re-education also being done through the stories you guys are sharing with the children. But I was laughing because how the boy said it like one of the scientists became very greedy and found the precious stones that was like stealing those precious stones. And that's amazing. I think it's raising awareness that actually within Africa we've got precious stones and the children are aware of that. And this is something I think going forward that the education carries on. So when you hear things like that, or when you come up with the scientists being greedy, stealing the stones: how would you reverse it and make it more understanding to the children for them to understand why the scientists who steal the stones? Would you tell them because there's no stones in Europe or they don't have the precious - Africa's got a precious stones? Wow would you re-educate that for them to appreciate how much Africa has got as well as a continent?

Mukuka

I think I would say that this is, I think there's another thing which comes back, like the idea of curiosity of what are children thinking about, because I think most of the time we as adults, we don't really ask them what they're thinking and we don't allow them to expand their ideas. And so there's, I shouldn't even say this, because why would I think otherwise? But there is a remarkable level of awareness that children have. And I think the reason why we don't realize it might be because of the way that we have conversations, because everything that's coming out in the stories, it wasn't from the two of us, it was very much from them. So every single - it was put together by Brice, but every single idea that comes out is coming from them. And so from these ideas and the conversations in between the sessions and the conversations after the sessions with them, for me, it demonstrates an awareness that I assumed wasn't there. And that's shameful on my part.

Brice

We have a few answers in this last story again, because indeed, the scientists are greedy and trying to work for their own benefit. And at some point, the children said, 'okay, we have to solve that and make them change their behavior. They have to become good people'. So we

asked them 'how do they become good people?'. The children first said, 'well, we tell them to stop being bad'. Okay, and then, then we went into details of how to do that. And there's this recipe at the end of the book and, and these greedy scientists, they understand that it's better to work for the common and local good than for their own interests. So I think the children are very aware of these things. What is more puzzling for them, I guess, is why do we not do that all the time, right? Stop being bad.

Mukuka

Stop being bad. Stop it. Yeah. Yeah, no, I think our aim was not to teach them, if that makes any sense. We didn't go in normal classroom style where we're like, okay, if you have this, here's a solution for you. I think we very much went in having them come forward. So like Brice said, they would present solutions to some of the problems that they've observed within society. I think a good example is the question about the president. So during one of the stories, I think this is the President Katy Perry story.

Brice

Same name, different person.

Mukuka

Same name, different person, yes. One of the pupils stood up and said, 'well, I have a question for the president' - because it was meant to be a press conference in the story - And he says, 'well, my question is, Mr. President will you -'

Brice

Mrs President

Mukuka

Mrs. President, my bad! 'Mrs. President, will you rule on popularity or principle?' Exact words. And I have to admit, I was struck, and I didn't have an answer. And so we cleverly, but also cowardly, sort of pushed the class and said, 'okay, class, what do you think? If you were the president, would you rule on popularity or principle?' And then the conversation sort of went with them giving us responses. That was another very interesting situation that just demonstrated how much knowledge they have.

Brice

It was a seven-year-old, yes. And he was really shocked that the president would rule on popularity because it was unacceptable, rightly unacceptable for him.

Olivia

That's very interesting to hear that.

Child 4 reading aloud

After the snake bit Franklin, Malaika took them back to the area where they were all living and then she made the remedy stroke moisture made of mango leaves, caterpillar, the bits of monkey droppings, and the venom of the snake. She put the moisture into the wound and it healed in three days. After this rather extreme jealous crisis, Franklin came back to his senses. He and Alora lived among Mosi-oa-Tunya while still figuring out ways to repair the

hymn of Gupta. But in Lula's own words, "The child had their secrets. They were hiding something from the entire forest and no one knew anything about the millions. The scientists, Alora and Franklin, figured out about the millions and gemstones, and they became greedy. They slyly convinced Malaika to show them where to find the millions and gemstones. After she had showed them the place, they tried to kill her again. This time, she was saved by the monkey. Meanwhile, the tribe had heard on the radio that the lower and front end were actually pumas on the run. Their guests were to find them, and they arrested them. Now that they had their mission, they needed to make them better people. Humans eventually opened up a jewellery business to help to try and spread out new technologies for schools. But the first day of over them showed good food, world-worthy music and a decadent specialties.

Olivia

When you're doing the workshops with children, how many workshops do you usually do with them? Is it only literature or is other workshops maybe using us?

Brice

So for these workshops, we had the first two groups, we had them for hardly more than an hour and two other groups for two hours. But in this very short time, we managed to write the stories and have them illustrate them because we also - it's going really fast because I take the notes, you take the notes: we both take the notes on the board. So it goes really, really fast. When the board is full, we take a picture, we erase. So the process is very quick. And of course, after 30, 45 minutes, we are exhausted. The kids are alright. So to pretend that they should take a break, we're like, okay, now you should maybe draw something. And they draw something for 15, 20 minutes, we recover, and at the end they have all these great illustrations that go with the story.

Mukuka

This happened quite spontaneously I think because we weren't really- it being a pilot, we've never done this before. We had a general framework based on the work that has been done in Switzerland.

Brice

Here in Switzerland, but with older people.

Mukuka

Yes, with older people. So we had a general idea of how we're going to do it but we didn't really know what was going to happen when we're on the ground. And we were also, again, conscious of the fact that we're working with younger children and giving them sort of a break, even though as we said, we were the ones who needed the break. And we didn't know what we were going to incorporate, what we're not going to incorporate. And so I think the - I don't know how the idea to draw came up, but it just came up and it worked really well because I think one thing that we saw through the workshops was that children sometimes lack confidence in speaking and also in presenting ideas because they feel their ideas might not be so welcome. And so for some who are a bit more shy, we try to bring them into the conversation, they found drawing to be helpful. And so I really can't

remember how it happened. It was one of those spontaneous things, but then it worked so well that we incorporated drawing into, I think, two more of the workshop.

Brice

You came up with the idea and I thought you were a genius.

Mukuka

Did I really? (Laughs) I will claim that yes, I came up with the idea.

Child 5 reading aloud

My earliest memory of my parents is being killed by humans called Precious and the Liars. My parents were warming themselves up on a rock by the water when these filthy humans spotted and hit them with stones. They agonized for days in excruciating pain. I could not help them, I just stared at them dying slowly. Their breathing became faster and faster, louder and louder, and stopping suddenly. They died at the exact same second. They had always done everything together, even that. Since then I've always hated humans except Malaika and the Tekkatsunya tribe. Who respect me? Malaika fed me when I was an orphan. I gave her the snake bracelet meaning that when anyone or any human or animal hurts her, I will punish the culprit with a deadly vice. I know Malaika will heal them because she is so good. I think my writing and how healing teach them a valuable lesson.

Olivia

That's just about confidence because usually I think looking at cultural norms the children are basically taught to sometimes wait for the grown-up to speak before they can speak.

Brice

It could be a whole article because we had small groups and there were between 12 and 15 pupils. These kind of groups are alright because even if someone doesn't speak, you manage after a while to get them to say something and to participate and to be smart like all the other kids. So we could tell at the end that everyone had ideas, it was about sharing them. We also saw a difference if I may say between the two schools because in the second school, the pupils were were coming from like, let's say,

Mukuka

- Slightly better social economic background.

Brice

- Yeah, so there were a lot more confidence speaking and sharing their ideas. I remember in the second school, the girls were very confident, but again, because of this different social background, maybe in Lusaka. How was it, the gender difference, I remember? I think the girls were a bit shy at the beginning, but then it was just a question of warming up and putting them at ease because acting in the end, like everyone was—

Mukuka

- Yeah, we did manage to get the children to speak. I think one of the ways- we did think about that when we were trying to develop the project because we're thinking, you know, if you go into a classroom with two strangers and then the stranger say to you, talk, you know,

how would children feel about that? That might be very, you know, uncomfortable. So what we had requested was that the teachers should be there in the room with us just to signal that these are adults, but then that this familiar face, who they can sort of refer to in case they need that extra comfort. And so that worked really well because I think at one point, one of the teachers actually encouraged the children to sing. At one point in the workshops, we were singing. So we would never have done that because, well, I definitely am not a singer! So I would never have done but because there was this presence of somebody who's familiar and who knows them, I think then that helped even some of the ones who were a bit shy to come out a bit more because there was that safety.

Brice

Well and also we used the famous 'yes, and' method so nothing is wrong. Whatever they say, it's written on the board. I think we found solutions to incorporate everything in 99% of the cases. I cannot remember if a case that probably must have been one or two where we didn't know what to do with this material, but mostly it all fits. It's like making our own puzzle. I love working like this for my own work, having many different parts and thinking, 'okay, how will I put them together?'. So I just work the way I usually work with their ideas.

Mukuka

And I think maybe this is one of the things which was a setback in terms of the time that we had, because though we did get each child to say something, sometimes it involved me going and saying, "You can whisper into my ear," and then they would whisper into my ear and I would sort of say it out louder because some of the children just aren't confident speaking out loud in class. But then I could tell towards the end of the session that they were a bit more comfortable. But it was unfortunate because that was indeed the end of the session. So ideally, maybe we would be having these workshops over the period of a month or maybe a whole term. So, you know, three months.

Brice

I don't know because we were thinking of the Flusica and we had only one hour with them.

Mukuka

Mm hmm. Yes-

Brice

So there was already a big difference between the one hour and the two hour ones.

Mukuka

Yes. One thing that we did take away is that more time is needed because you need to build that you need to have children even get comfortable with this way of working. Because like you had said, Olivia, normally when you're in a classroom, you know, you go, you sit, you're quiet. The teacher tells you things, you listen, you write, and then that's it. But our workshop is completely different.

Brice

The two hour version was a very good formula. They were at ease after an hour, even less.

Mukuka

Yes.

Brice

So I think writing a full story in two hours is, we might say, success.

Child 6 reading aloud

The technology that developed for schools can be something like projector to like project water. The learners are learning so that it can save teachers a lot of work, even security cameras around the school to avoid thieves. The technology helps develop the schools in many ways like with reading and you don't need to write in books. You can just say what you want and it will type the words into the computer.

Olivia

Brice, I'm hearing you picking up something from your, you're talking, you've mentioned Lusaka about three times, I think. I know it's at the capital city of Lusaka, so have you guys done any workshop with the schools within Lusaka? And how many have you done outside Lusaka? I'm aware that it's hard to support children because of lack of resources in their rural areas. How do you compare the two between Lusaka and working outside Lusaka, which is the rural areas? Reaching out those places which are really difficult to reach.

Mukuka

Again, because of access, we had some time constraints were only there for a month. So in order for us to meet the school heads, you know, get their approval, meet the teachers and then have the workshops, we could only do two schools. It's a private school and they exist there in two sites. So one in Lusaka, one in Ndola. We do hope that we can develop the project in such a way that it's rolled out even in rural areas so more schools of course more pupils and more of a geography but at this particular point this pilot we just did one school in Lusaka and one school in Dola.

In a way I think it might be better if we have some sort of track record to then show to say you know this is what can be done. I think I would understand any school's hesitance to let us into a classroom with no track record whatsoever, you know, in a sense. I mean, we really appreciate the schools that trusted us and allowed us into the classroom. But yes, we do understand that it's a bit difficult. It's different between public schools, or shall I say, between government schools and private schools. And also, I think you touched on something really interesting, Olivia, in terms of resources, because we did think about that. And we tried to make the workshops, I suppose, as simple as possible in terms of resources. So all we need really is a blackboard or whiteboard and then we had the internet connection even though it's not necessary and the pupils. But then because indeed the aim is to develop a method that can be used widely.

Olivia

I know it's a place that I'm a resident of: I've done my education in Zambia and I know what we had in class and what we didn't have so my mind is going back to also how my teachers have to struggle to sometimes just give us something to use to learn or keep us out in the fields a lot. But what you guys are doing is also bringing the literature into the classes at a very young age with stories telling as well. But I'd like to know like where do you go from

here? Are you going to cover up more schools within Lusaka or are you going to branch out to very difficult rural areas where children are born with no resources or maybe cannot even speak English?

Brice

Our dream now is of course to reach more schools in as many different provinces as possible. As for pupils who don't speak English, I'm not very helpful except if we go to Congo and do it in French but I don't know. But yeah, I still don't speak Nynja or Bemba. It will happen at some point.

Olivia

With Zambia what I'm aware of is previously everything was done in English but I think right now they're introducing back the vernacular languages back into the schools. But before from where I come from we're not allowed to use any other language apart from English. And I understand now that the languages are being thrown back into the schools which is an amazing opportunity because I think I'm also a bit lost with my Zambian and Bemba language. It's quicker for me to say "Moli Shani" which means "how are you?" So that's the Bemba and I think understands that very well.

Mukuka

No, I definitely understand it very well, especially what you're saying, Olivia, about losing your language because you're sort of forced into one other language. And so it's a great thing what they've done in terms of incorporating local languages back into the curriculum. And I think this is where, not to speak too highly of this project, but this is where projects such as this one, I think, can become quite valuable. Because if you are doing a workshop like this in a local language, what comes out then is a local language book. And so in a sense, the possibilities are quite wide and speaking to where we see this project going, our conversations with the teachers were really encouraging because they felt that this method of story writing is a value for the children. And so ideally, I think if we could roll out this method a bit more widely, then maybe that becomes a source in which to gather stories that children have and then to build some of these texts that then they use. So if you were to ask me what my, you know, my dream is for a project like this, it's that it could be developed in such a way that it can be replicated in different schools, different settings, different languages, and that we begin to build this, you know, rich resource, this rich curriculum that I think we really need especially if we're going to be using local languages in schools.

Olivia

That sounds great. And also just what is your big impact on what you want to see from this project as you go along with it?

Brice

The big impact, back to what we were saying at the beginning, is considering that the children are the specialists of what they want to say, what they want to hear, what they know, what they want to see happening, and that if we want children to be part of, you know, social dialogue, we need to find ways to hand them the microphone. And through fiction, we discover many, many things about what they think, what they believe, what they

think doesn't work. And through collaborative projects, we could see also that conversations were happening on many different levels.

I can give you just one very practical example. In Ndola, of course, you know, there are many foreigners in the classroom. We had kids from different nationalities. And one of the Zambian girls said, "Ah yeah, in Congo, you eat humans, right?" And there was a Congolese boy in the classroom who was flabbergasted, he was like, "what? No, no, we don't eat humans!". And then the girls like, "no, no, but my uncle told me, if my uncle told me, it's true, right?". So we turned it into this discussion appears in the story. And then we find out that uncles, as wise as they are, sometimes said things that are wrong. So they go to Congo, they investigate, they find out that it's not real. So all these dialogues, they can happen only because, well, not only, but the tool of using fiction has an impact, a real life impact on these children who participate.

Mukuka

And I have to say, Brice handled the situation very well, because when it occurred to me, I was a bit - or when the statement was made, I was stuck. I was like, I don't know how to handle this situation. And so Brice quickly stepped in and he said, you know, "let's see where this statement leads the story to go". And indeed, the result was amazing, both in terms of the story and in terms of how that changed the dialogue between, you know, children and their understanding of the world.

Brice

I think the biggest stroke for this girl is that her uncle had said something wrong. That was an epiphany for her that it was possible.

Olivia

I'm pleased to hear that Ndola actually has got quite a lot of people from different countries living there because it was mostly the Bemba - and that northern part of Zambia is the Bemba tribe. There's a place in Zambia which - I just found out about the refugee camp as well. So which is because I met someone who came to work in Scotland, who was speaking at the refugee camp in Zambia. And she's English, she was speaking Zambian. And she came actually when she was here in Glasgow, she greeted me in my language 'cause I was at the time I was talking to her, I mentioned I was from Zambia. And she just came straight to me, she was speaking pure Zambian to me. And I was like, "you have lived in Zambia for many years to speak like that". And then she told me about the refugee camp in Zambia, which I was not aware of. And it was amazing to hear that actually some refugees that were coming here in the early years who are being taken from this refugee camp into Scotland, but I think that now based in Motherwell. There's quite a lot of refugees from Congo that are in Motherwell here in Scotland. And they all speak Zambian language, very fluent Bemba, then they speak even more than me. So that's the Northern part of Zambia. that it's good that people learn to adapt in these languages.

Mukuka

In a way that's sort of encouraging, especially like you said, Olivia, given this background where for us language was, or local languages were suppressed. So in a way it's kind of encouraging to see that whether it's an undoing or whatever has happened, that there's still this language that is held within students. Yeah, I think it is something that's quite amazing.

I think this project has little sub-aims. And one of the aims was this collaborating between students and conversations between the pupils and adults. Yeah, in a different way between pupils and adults. But then even just going back to this Congo example, 'my uncle told me', hopefully it kind of creates, I don't know, a way where students can talk to each other about some of these bigger issues, like nationality, myths and things of that nature and so on. But yeah, I think there's a lot of potential if I do say.

Olivia

Yeah, it's great to hear that 'cause I think places like Zambia think nationality doesn't matter that much. It's like everybody just lives in peace. You don't even ask where you from 'cause I think it's a place that doesn't touch much on migration and there's no mentioning of people being deported from different places, or people above us staying in the country. So I think there's that beauty of people being seen as just more like one community. And the majority we have in Zambia is, I think, is people from Congo fleeing war from a long time ago. And they just can speak the Zambian language, which is Bemba, and they speak it very well more than most of the Bembas and things like that.

So as we are wrapping up, I just wanted to get a few ways from each of you how you'd like the listeners to basically maybe support your projects. And also through what you guys are doing, it could be a child that will be telling a sad story and you'll be able to identify how you can support that child. So just a few ways from each of you just going forward. And I hope I can meet you in Zambia and take part in the story. I think.

Brice

Well, I mean, the best way to support the project is to read the stories or share them or talk about them and publish them. The publishing situation in Zambia is not too good. The local publishers don't have really any money to publish anything. So having the stories, publishing them and distributing them is, let's say, the next major issue we have to work on.

Mukuka

I definitely would say just reading the stories, enjoying the stories, taking the stories for what they are, which is children expressing themselves. And then especially like I can say this from my perspective, putting aside some of these ideas that we have about children through reading what they've created.

Child 7 reading aloud

That feels like a rather happy end. Alora and Franklin are now good people. The tribe's secret is safe and Malaika has reunited with her mother. What happens next? Well, the records stop there, so we can only speculate. Did Alora and Franklin stay with the tribe? Did they go back to Unesia and open the ethical jewelery business? Did Malaika and her parents and mother stay with the tribe? The only way to find out now for you to go to Premier Learning Centre in Ndola, meet the 12 wise children and ask them if they know more.

Olivia

I really appreciate what you guys are doing, it's amazing because I think this is a wonderful project and the stories you're not only sharing stories or listening to the children share story, you are actually building that education for the children to learn to read as well. And, you know, just really love literature throughout - maybe also maybe all the way up to university.

You are actually encouraging them to focus going forward with what they do after school. And I hope that there's a government to be able to support the project, if not international donors around the world. It's an important project and I'm really happy to hear that you guys are doing this one. So thank you so much.

[JINGLE]

Dr Esa Aldegheri

شكراً, grazie, tapadh leibh, totenda, thank you for listening to this episode. For the full show notes and for شكراً, more information about our work, please visit bit.ly/UNESCO_RILA.

[JINGLE]