



REFLECTIONS, RELATED PROJECTS /// FRIDAY 1 JUNE 2018

Storytelling to help develop creativity amongst young people in Kenya

Written by [Paul Cooke \(University of Leeds\)](#)

Supported by the University of Leeds' Global Challenges Research Fund allocation, in March 2018, Changing the Story PI, Paul Cooke, took part in a capacity-building project with school teachers in Kenya. The project is led by [Professor Jane Plastow](#), supported by [Dr Kimingichi Wabende](#) and [Dr Simon Peter Otieno](#) (University of Nairobi Dept of Literature) in collaboration with [the Kenyan Ministry of Education](#).



The aim of this project is to give school teachers practical, hands on, training in storytelling, drama and filmmaking. This was designed, on the one hand, to respond to the aspirations of the new national curriculum in Kenya, which is looking to 'make education and training count by responding to labour market needs, equipping youth with competencies in critical thinking and creativity, creating and expanding opportunities for youth re-skilling, and enhancing skills mobility.' Here the country is seeking to align with a pan-African vision of education that 'reach[es] beyond traditional academics', to 'establish holistic, inclusive, and equitable education as a core for sustainable development, the establishment of scientific and technological innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship' ([Darius Mogaka Ogotu](#), Director Policy, Partnerships and East African Community Affairs – Ministry of Education, Kenya).

On the other, it builds on Professor Plastow's long-term commitment to supporting excellence in theatre practice in East Africa, the participatory ethos of the whole Changing the Story project, as well as the ground-breaking work carried out by Leeds PhD Dr Otieno, enabling children to make video films that critically engage with the issues they face in their everyday lives. Dr Otieno is a pioneer of participatory video in Kenya and has years of experience supporting young people to use audio-visual culture as a way of advocating for change in their lives, as well as learning new skills. Here the project also supports Dr Otieno's work with the [The Kenya Schools and Colleges Drama Festival](#). This is a hugely significant festival which involves schools from across the country. In recent years, the festival has developed a film strand. While there is a great appetite to submit work to this strand, due to a lack of training and



resources, it has been difficult for schools to explore the potential of film as a form of creative expression for young people. So, along with providing training, the project was also able to provide some equipment to help teachers try out filmmaking with their students without immediately having to have to convince their school principals to invest in lots of expensive equipment.

Over the course of a week at the [Tom Mboya Labour College](#), Kisumu, the team worked with small groups of teachers from a wide range of schools, introducing them to the principles of story development, how to conceptualise and shoot a film and finally how to edit their work. The teachers covered a huge amount, making a wide variety of films, from pop videos, to documentaries to dramas.

As can be seen from [the short film](#) we made about our time with the teachers, as well as the [press interest](#) we generated, the most important aspect of the course was the fact that it was entirely focussed on practical engagement. Participants were surprised that we didn't seem to want them to take any notes, and that we wanted them to figure out how to use the equipment themselves, focussing on 'learning by doing'. This is a key element in all participatory video practice. It works very effectively with young people, but can be quite challenging for teachers who are used to a very different way of learning. It was great to see how the participants on the course really embraced this approach, while also acknowledging that this was, in some cases, very new for them and far outside their comfort zone.

The main challenge we faced, though, was a lack of time. We packed in a huge amount during the week. But it was difficult to finish off all the projects we started. This is something that we want to look at during our next iteration of the project.



It really felt like we were part of a new chapter in the story of film and theatre pedagogy in Kenya. While we were in Kisumu everyone was talking about the Kenyan film industry, the global success of Marvel's *The Black Panther*, starring [Lupita Nyong'o from Kisumu](#), as well as the nomination of [Watu Wote](#), the true story of an al-Shabab terrorist attack, for Best Live Action Short Film Oscar provided a very exciting context for the course. This is an good time for Kenyan film, and many of the teachers we worked with during the week saw themselves contributing to the future of the industry, helping to produce the next generation of international Kenyan actors, directors and directors of photography. It was awe inspiring to see the commitment of the teachers to their students and to developing their film and theatre practice. Their enthusiasm was very infectious, and the whole team is looking forward to working with a new group of teachers in June.

To find out more about projects working in a similar vein to Changing the Story, see our [Related Projects](#) page or contact us at changingthestory@leeds.ac.uk

TAGS: EDUCATION FILM KENYA TEAM POST THEATRE