

English Language Learning

Empowering ELLs through technology integration

Jui-Hsin Renee Hung & Ai-Chu Elisha Ding



Learning Objectives

- Understand the concept of learner empowerment;
- Identify resources that can help develop learner autonomy and multiliteracies.

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the notion of learner empowerment and provide available resources for empowering English language learners through integrating technology into your instruction. Under this broad concept of empowerment, in this chapter, we focus on two key aspects - developing learner autonomy and employing a multiliteracies perspective in the classroom. We further narrow the scope of each aspect by discussing what learning opportunities each of them affords. We follow this discussion with a list of technology tools that will assist with your incorporation of our suggestion, and provide a scenario-based example using some of the listed tools.

Key Terms

[English Language Learners \(ELL\)](#)

students who often come from families where languages other than English are spoken and whose English proficiency may be defined as limited at least at some point of formal schooling; often required to fulfill certain language requirements, such as language assessments or specialized language courses

[Learner Autonomy](#)

the ability to take charge of and responsibility for one's own learning in order to pursue topics that are relevant and interesting to the learner

[Learner Empowerment](#)

raising learners' awareness of the control they can have over their own learning process, which often goes hand in hand with the concept of learner autonomy (e.g., when language learners are empowered, they are given the power and ownership of their own learning and are allowed to negotiate identities in the learning process)

[Multiliteracies](#)

emphasizes that language use is context-specific and multimodal. It values the differences between different communication modes

[Ownership](#)

like learner autonomy, this concept hands more learning responsibility to students; moreover, it emphasizes on the importance of making connections between learners and the language they are learning at different levels as a way to strengthen the bond; promoting ownership is considered as a strategy to enhance learner autonomy

What do we mean by learner empowerment?

English language learners (ELLs), who often come from families where languages other than English are spoken, is a rapidly growing, but oftentimes underprivileged population of students in U.S. schools. These students sometimes have negative labels or stigmas attached to them because of language proficiency or cultural stereotypes. As a result of the negative labels and stigmas they are exposed to, ELL students may also hold negative beliefs about their own identities and competence.

In the classroom, too often these learners' voices go unheard and their diverse identities are underappreciated. ***A simple definition for empowering learners is to give them power and ownership of their own learning and allow students to negotiate their identities in the language learning process.*** Teachers have used various strategies to allow ELLs to

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voice their learning needs in the classroom. These includes incorporating students' home culture, home language, or prior experiences into the instruction, emphasizing diversity or multiliteracies, involving students in making learning-related decisions, or creating opportunities for students to express themselves in a multimodal manner.

To empower ELLs through technology integration into our instruction, in this chapter, we focus on two aspects under the broad concept: *learner autonomy* and *multiliteracies*. To promote learner autonomy in your classroom, you can start by creating collaboration and reflective opportunities for your students, and to raise the awareness of multiliteracies in your classroom by providing spaces for students to express their multiple identities in various forms. All of these have become much more accessible for both teachers and learners with the availability of new technologies.

Learner autonomy

Handing over responsibility to the students by encouraging their control of the learning process or allowing them the options to choose topics pertaining to their interest can promote their learner autonomy. The concept of learner autonomy has been closely associated with self-directed learning, and is seen as an important element that results in learner empowerment. Fortunately, with the emergence of new technologies, learners do not necessarily have to rely on teachers for accessing input and learning resources. They are now given more choices to make learning decisions for themselves as to how, what, and when they want to learn.

We know that there are different ways to define learner autonomy, but in general, it can be defined as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (Little, 2007, p. 15), and it concerns whether or not "learners are able to pursue topics and questions that are interesting and relevant to them" (Cennamo, Ross, & Ertmer, 2013, p. 58). In other words, through shifting responsibility from teachers to learners, we give learners the power to take charge of their own learning process.

Empowering ELLs through developing them into autonomous learners can happen within and outside the classroom. For example, in the classroom, as a teacher, we can include collaborative projects, review our assessment methods to ensure learner autonomy is considered, allow our students chance and time for reflection, or give them opportunities to monitor and assess their learning as well as opportunities to provide us feedback. On the other hand, outside the classroom, there are other methods we can encourage our students to take in promoting learner autonomy. For example, students can make use of digital learning technologies to pace their own learning, find support from distance learning, or seek other learning opportunities, such as language exchanges or study abroad experience. These approaches shift learning responsibility from teachers to learners and engage our students in a learning process where they possess more ownership.

Multiliteracies

While the backgrounds and needs of English language learners may vary profoundly, one thing they share in common is that most of them come from homes where languages other than English are spoken. This leads to their multiliteracies and a sense of multiple identities and cultures, and potentially to their lack of English language competence and cultural understanding of the U.S. education system. As a teacher, recognizing their differences is an important first step, and to further empower them through embracing their differences and encouraging them to show their differences, new technologies can bring a wide range of possibilities for the acceptance and enactment of multiliteracies in your classroom.

To empower ELLs, one aspect is to challenge the dominance of English language and the cultural values owned and imposed by the mainstream groups. In other words, as English as a second language or content area teachers, we should celebrate and incorporate ELLs' home cultures and languages into our instruction. During the process, we help ELLs develop their bilingual and bicultural identities (or even multilingual and multicultural) instead of forcing them into the English-only mentality and being considered as "inferior" or "disabled" individuals.

The other method of empowering ELLs is to bestow them the opportunities for developing their competency as fluent and critical English speakers, readers, and writers. The notion of *multiliteracies or new literacies* further comes in as it recognizes that communications go beyond written or oral language. People communicate with one another through modes beyond language (e.g., gestures, interpersonal distance, sound, images). Therefore, aside from the traditional language competences (reading, writing, speaking, listening, grammar), a pedagogy of multiliteracies also emphasize cultivating multiliterate individuals who are "flexible and strategic and can understand and use literacy and literate practices with a range of texts and technologies; in socially responsible ways; in a socially, culturally, and linguistically diverse world; and to fully participate in life as an active and informed citizen" (Anstey & Bull, 2006, p. 55). Oftentimes, participating in such activities, ELLs are also given the space to reflect on their multiple identities more critically.

Enhancing learner autonomy and endorsing multiliteracies in the classroom are both important and neither should be overlooked. Therefore, to be a teacher who is committed to empowering ELLs means one will not only deliberately create opportunities for learners to take in charge of their learning, but also honor their home cultures and languages and strive to cultivate both the traditional and new literacy competences.

How can technology support learner empowerment?

Integrating technology into our ESL teaching can provide a good variety of ways to develop ELLs' autonomy and multiliteracies. With proper instructional design, technology can help teachers enrich the learning environments, differentiate the learning tasks, and give students the ownership of their learning. It also gives learners ways to express themselves

through different channels and modes of communications. For example, by using communication tools such as instant messaging, students who are less confident of speaking are offered an alternative way to express their thoughts in conversational contexts. Or, by using photo or video cameras, students are able to express themselves with both language and visual representations.

Furthermore, one of the biggest challenges in teaching a multilingual/multicultural classroom is that the teacher may not share the same home language as the students and their families. To that end, technology resources such as Internet search engines, online dictionaries or translation services all play a crucial role in understanding and incorporating students' home cultures and languages into our instruction. Thus, technology not only can potentially enhance the effectiveness of our ESL instruction, it is also the key to realizing a transformative educational experience for ELLs.

What technology tools are available?

Technology for autonomy

1. Collaborative learning tools: Students develop autonomy when they take responsibility of their own learning individually, or collaboratively with their peers. The use of collaborative learning tools strengthens learner autonomy because it creates authentic language activities that are engaging, involves learners in decision-making processes where they direct their own learning with their peers, and extends the learning experience outside of the classroom. These activities improve students' language and autonomous learning skills at the same time. For example, many online collaborative writing tools allow students to compose a story together. Students can use collaborative learning tools to write with their classmates for a course project, or to do creative storytelling online with other writers they have never met. Many of the websites also offer a space for writers to publish their work online, which gives students a real audience to write to. Or, if students are producing a digital project collaboratively, they can share and put together ideas and multimedia resources in a shared digital space, which not only stores the information but also helps them sort out the ideas by engaging in decision-making processes.
 - [Google Drive \[http://drive.google.com/\]](http://drive.google.com/): Google Drive may be seen as a cloud storage, but it is more than that and is very easy to use for collaboration and resource sharing. Plus, if you or your students are already using Microsoft Office, tools on Google Drive work very similar to Microsoft Office tools, making file exporting and importing between the two straightforward. For more information on how to use Google Drive in e-learning, this article provides some directions for you to go: [6 Effective Ways To Use Google Drive in eLearning \[https://edtechbooks.org/-Er\]](https://edtechbooks.org/-Er).
 - [Padlet \[https://padlet.com/\]](https://padlet.com/): Padlet enables students to organize and arrange ideas freely on a blank board. It makes sharing multimedia resources such as audio, video, images, and documents easy and fast. There is a lot of flexibility in

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terms of how to use this tool. You can create a shared board for your class, or your students can create one for their own group. The tool allows anonymous editing or sharing, so be mindful that if for your purposes you prefer to have identifiable contributions of the students, you will want to require student login. Otherwise, there will be no way to trace back who makes what changes.

- [FoldingStory \[http://foldingstory.com/\]](http://foldingstory.com/): This is a great tool to motivate students to write creatively together and to turn writing into a game. Your students can do collaborative storytelling with others. What makes this more exciting is each writer only gets to contribute 120 words or less within 3 minutes to a open story. When a line gets more likes from the readers, the writer will get on the leaderboard. If your students don't feel motivated to write, FoldingStory may bring some change. The site also keeps all stories that are finished for future readers.
 - [Piazza \[https://piazza.com/\]](https://piazza.com/): This tool helps you build an online learning community for your course and has features that can encourage extended discussion outside of class. It differs from many other learning management systems in that anonymous postings are allowed, which may be especially beneficial to encouraging different forms of participation from ELLs. The website also provides subject-specific features so that you and your students can expand the discussion with the availability of specific textual and multimedia editing tools. According to their user testimonials, students tended to feel more comfortable discussing and asking questions on this platform.
 - Audio recording and editing tools: No matter where your students share their work or collaborate, if they want to create an audio recording and embed it into their project, these free tools are great to use:
 - Audacity (<https://edtechbooks.org/-Tj>): To watch tutorials for how to record with Audacity, you can check out Lynda.com, or read this blog article from [Jake Ludington's Digital Lifestyle \[https://edtechbooks.org/-xTF\]](https://edtechbooks.org/-xTF).
 - GarageBand for Mac - <https://edtechbooks.org/-jdT>
 - [VoiceThread \[https://voicethread.com/\]](https://voicethread.com/)
2. Self-directed learning tools: As mentioned above, students develop autonomy when they are in charge of their own learning, and self-learning has been considered as a critical process in developing autonomy. When students are involved in self-directed learning, they are usually engaged in activities including diagnosing learning needs, setting learning goals, implementing learning strategies, evaluating their own learning, or searching for different approaches or resources to support and pace their learning more effectively. In addition, particularly for those ELLs who are struggling or unmotivated, creating learning experience they can relate to may help turn around the learning outcomes.
- Self-paced learning tools:
 - [Duolingo \[https://www.duolingo.com/\]](https://www.duolingo.com/): A favorite of many language learners. Learners can set daily goals for themselves and use different features to motivate them.

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- [CourseWorld \[http://www.courseworld.org/\]](http://www.courseworld.org/): A huge collection of online talks and classes can be found on this site, making the search of resources much easier.
- [Khan Academy \[https://www.khanacademy.org/\]](https://www.khanacademy.org/): The site is very well-designed and offers a lot of amazing courses for learning subject areas, and by far an English grammar section.
- [NoRedInk \[https://www.noredink.com/\]](https://www.noredink.com/): A great site designed for teaching and learning grammar and writing skills. It not only saves you a lot of time creating quizzes and assignments, but better than that, aligns with the Common Core Standards.
- Reflective learning tools:
 - Formative assessment/feedback tools: As mentioned earlier, allowing student to reflect on what you teach and to give you feedback is a great way to empower them. These great tools will help you collect student response in an efficient way:
 - [Google Forms \[http://forms.google.com/\]](http://forms.google.com/)
 - [Socrative \[https://www.socrative.com/\]](https://www.socrative.com/)
 - [GoSoapBox \[http://www.gosoapbox.com/\]](http://www.gosoapbox.com/)
 - [SurveyMonkey \[https://www.surveymonkey.com/\]](https://www.surveymonkey.com/)
 - [Recap \[https://letsrecap.com/\]](https://letsrecap.com/)
 - [TodaysMeet \[https://todaysmeet.com/\]](https://todaysmeet.com/)
 - Student self-reflection tools: Not just reflecting on what you teach, students surely need to reflect on their own learning process. With these following tools, students can record and capture a moment in their learning, add reflection to the image or video of that moment, and even share that with others:
 - [Fotobabble \[http://www.fotobabble.com/\]](http://www.fotobabble.com/)
 - [Nutshell \[http://nutshell.prezi.com/\]](http://nutshell.prezi.com/)
 - [Evernote \[https://evernote.com/\]](https://evernote.com/)
 - [Video Notes \[http://www.videonot.es/\]](http://www.videonot.es/)
 - E-portfolios: The following are tools that are safe for your students to create e-portfolios to record, share, and reflect on their learning, while you (and their parents) monitor their progress and online activities.
 - [Kidblog \[https://kidblog.org/home/\]](https://kidblog.org/home/)
 - [Edublogs \[https://edublogs.org/\]](https://edublogs.org/)
 - [Weebly \[https://www.weebly.com/\]](https://www.weebly.com/)
 - [Wix \[https://www.wix.com/\]](https://www.wix.com/)
 - [WordPress \[https://wordpress.com/\]](https://wordpress.com/)
- Audio publishing tools: When your students create a digital project or an e-portfolio using the sites above, they can upload a podcast or an audio show they make to those sites. To give them another option, these sites are made for publishing audio shows:
 - [Podbean \[https://podbean.com/\]](https://podbean.com/): This site also has a section for publishing education podcasts (<https://edtechbooks.org/-bft>), where you will find

online lessons, student projects, etc.

- [Podomatic \[https://www.podomatic.com/\]](https://www.podomatic.com/)
- [BuzzSprout \[https://www.buzzsprout.com/\]](https://www.buzzsprout.com/)
- [Blubrry \[https://www.blubrry.com/\]](https://www.blubrry.com/)
- [Spreaker \[https://www.spreaker.com/\]](https://www.spreaker.com/)
- [YouTube \[https://www.youtube.com/\]](https://www.youtube.com/)
- [iTunes \[https://www.apple.com/itunes/\]](https://www.apple.com/itunes/)

Technology for multiliteracies

1. Multimedia ESL lessons: ELL teachers are blessed with a great variety of resources available online for enhancing and enriching our instructions. In particular, the following websites offer great multimedia materials for developing language lessons that would help students improve their traditional literacy skills (speaking, listening, reading, writing and grammar) in an integrative way. These multimedia lessons offer visuals, audios, and hand-on activities recommendations that could meet learners' various learning styles. They incorporate authentic materials (e.g., TED talks, movies, online Youtube videos) that introduce a wide range of knowledge to empower the ELLs with the cultural capitals they need. Some of the websites also allow the teachers to adjust the language difficulty level to fit their ELL's needs. In addition, teachers can also use these multimedia materials to introduce students to the multiliteracies (new literacies) skills, getting students to start paying attention to the meanings conveyed through modes other than written and oral language (visual representations, ambient sounds, music, accents etc.). These multimedia materials could also serve as examples for students to consider how they could communicate in a multimodal way.

- **BBC Learning English** (<https://edtechbooks.org/-zA>): BBC offers free language lessons and listening practices based on current news reports. Their archived site also has a lot of great multimedia materials (<https://edtechbooks.org/-gq>) .
- **Breaking News English** (<https://edtechbooks.org/-cY>): it's free and it's amazing. As simple as that.
- **TEDxESL** [<http://tedxesl.com/>]: It really is a pity that this site is no longer updated, but all the available TED-talks-based lessons on this site are well-designed and engaging.
- **ESLnotes** (<https://edtechbooks.org/-SB>): Who doesn't like watching movies? ESL notes offer movie watching guide and discussion questions for some classic American movies.
- **Viralelt** (<https://edtechbooks.org/-qN>): The author of this blog, Ian, developed ESL lessons for intermediate to advanced adult ESL learners based on youtube videos that had gone viral on the internet.
- **ESL Pod** (<https://edtechbooks.org/-Pi>): ESL Pod does not only offer podcast lessons for ESL learners, they also have online blog posts, videos and also kinds of resources for ESL learners and teachers.
- **BrainPOP ESL** [<https://esl.brainpop.com/>]: BrainPOP ESL offer lessons

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specifically designed for ESL learning. With all the animations and games, this is a great resource for younger ELLs. In addition, with captions for all the videos, lessons hosted on [BrainPOP junior \[https://jr.brainpop.com/\]](https://jr.brainpop.com/) are great resources for elementary ESL teachers, too.

- **Starfall** [<http://more.starfall.com/>]: Starfall has interactive games and lessons for emerging readers. Preschool and kindergarten teachers as well as elementary ESL teachers have been using this site to engage young kids.
 - **Storyline Online** (<https://edtechbooks.org/-YF>): Elementary teachers, if you have never visited this website before, you have to visit it. This is one of the best websites for children's literacy and storytelling. The storytelling videos are all captioned, so they are appropriate for ESL learning as well. In addition to the videos, the website also provides activity guides for teachers.
2. Multimodal composing and digital storytelling: From the multiliteracies perspective, we need to give students opportunities to learn and practice using different modes and technologies. ESL teachers have been engaging ELLs' in multimodal composing and digital storytelling to empower them with the symbolic competence. Through multimodal composing or digital storytelling, ELLs relies on different modes of communication to express themselves. ESL teachers would further encourage ELLs to tell their own stories, express their emotions or introduce their home cultures and languages through digital storytelling.
- The following sites offer tips for using digital storytelling in teaching and also examples of digital storytelling videos:
 - **Story Center** - <https://edtechbooks.org/-nC>
 - **Story Circle** - <https://edtechbooks.org/-uk>
 - **Story Corps** [<https://storycorps.org/>]
 - **Video in the classroom** - <https://edtechbooks.org/-so>
 - **Lang Witches- Digital storytelling** (<https://edtechbooks.org/-mx>): **what it is and what it is not**
 - **Larry Ferlazzo's blog post on digital storytelling** - <https://edtechbooks.org/-Ya>
 - **U of Houston's Educational Uses of Digital Storytelling** - <https://edtechbooks.org/-uf>
 - **Kevin Hodgson's blog post on digital storytelling** - <https://edtechbooks.org/-wu>
 - **Kathy Schrock's post on digital storytelling** - <https://edtechbooks.org/-Vm>
 - The following websites or apps are excellent tools for multimodal composing or digital storytelling:
 - **Storybird** [<https://storybird.com/>]
 - **My Storybook** [<https://www.mystorybook.com/>]
 - **Storify** [<https://storify.com/>]
 - **Toondoo** [<http://www.toondoo.com/>]
 - **Pixton** [<https://www.pixton.com/>]
 - **Make Belief Comix** - <https://edtechbooks.org/-rNh>

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- **Storyboard That** [<http://www.storyboardthat.com/>]
- **VoiceThread** [<https://voicethread.com/>]
- **Tika Tok** [<https://www.tikatok.com/>]
- **Zimmer Twins** [<http://www.zimmertwins.com/>]
- **Toontastic 3D** - <https://edtechbooks.org/-ri>
- **Green Screen** [<https://edtechbooks.org/-JCd>]
- **Stop Motion Studio** [<https://edtechbooks.org/-YP>]
- **Powtoon** [<https://www.powtoon.com/>]
- **WeVideo** [<https://www.wevideo.com/>]
- **Shadow Puppet** [<http://get-puppet.co/>]
- **Haiku Deck** [<https://www.haikudeck.com/>]
- **Trading Cards Creator1** - <https://edtechbooks.org/-Bf>
- **Trading Cards Creator 2** [<https://edtechbooks.org/-gV>]

Example of using technology to empower ELLs

Miss Caroline is an ESL teacher at the Flower Elementary School. One third of the student population at this school are ELLs whose home language includes Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Arabic, Turkish and Swahili. Also, one third of the student population are enrolled in free or reduced price meal plans. Miss Caroline speaks English as first language and can speak a little Spanish. Each ESL class Miss Caroline teaches has around 18-20 students. She has a teaching assistant, and there are community volunteers coming into her classes to help her on a regular basis, too. The Flower Elementary School has 1:1 technology access where kindergarten to 3rd grade have access to iPads and 4th grade or higher has Chromebooks.

In this lesson unit, Miss Caroline engaged the 4-5th grade ESL students to learn about their home cultures and introduce their home cultures to one another through storytelling. The lesson started with Miss Caroline leading the students to discuss what culture means and why cultural understandings are important. Miss Caroline asked the students which culture(s) they felt they were affiliated with and what they know about those cultures.

Next, Miss Caroline mentioned how holidays have significant cultural and historical meanings behind. She used Thanksgiving in the US as example. By introducing Thanksgiving, Miss Caroline taught students vocabulary words related to Thanksgiving such as parade, pilgrim, gravy, mashed potato, turkey, harvest. She also used a [BrainPOP lesson](https://edtechbooks.org/-Fy) [<https://edtechbooks.org/-Fy>] to teach students past simple tense, which is an important grammatical knowledge for telling stories. She showed a [cartoon that tells the story of Thanksgiving](https://youtu.be/Yh_0t4EcsjE) [https://youtu.be/Yh_0t4EcsjE], and asked students to retell the story of Thanksgiving.



Watch on YouTube <https://edtechbooks.org/-uRk>

She then introduced some Thanksgiving traditions in the US such as the Thanksgiving dinner or the Macy's parade in New York. Miss Caroline also brought photos of her family celebrating Thanksgiving together and shared her thanksgiving stories.

Afterwards, Miss Caroline announced the digital storytelling project. She told students they were to pick an important holiday in their home cultures and create a digital story about how their family celebrated the holiday. Prior to making the digital story, Miss Caroline assigned three mini tasks to the students:

1. Conduct online research on the holiday you are going to introduce (in either English or your home language); write a brief introduction of the holiday in English.
2. Interview your parents or grandparents to learn about how they celebrated this holiday; take notes on the stories they shared and collect photos if possible.
3. Choose three words relevant to the holiday in your home language, create [trading cards](https://edtechbooks.org/-Bf) [https://edtechbooks.org/-Bf] to introduce them to the class.

(<https://edtechbooks.org/-SP>)

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Then, Miss Caroline taught the elements of good stories and how to write personal narratives. She also introduced action words and adjectives that are useful for writing stories. She then engaged students in creative story writing by randomly picking 3 trading cards other students created to make a story.

Next, Miss Caroline asked students to write the script for the story about how their family celebrated a holiday in their home culture. She prompted the students to think about whose point of view they are going to write for, what events occurred, how they would sequence the events, what problems, dramas or emotions were involved. After the story has been structured, she also guided the students to pay attention to the grammars and word choices.

Miss Caroline then provided various activities to teach students how to create a good digital story. She told students a digital story utilizes things beyond language to convey meaning to the audience. This includes images, sounds, music and even a dramatic tone. She showed to students a few digital story examples she found on [Story Center \[https://youtu.be/GZ0ouK6xBBA\]](https://youtu.be/GZ0ouK6xBBA) and the [Storyline Online \[https://edtechbooks.org/-frq\]](https://edtechbooks.org/-frq).

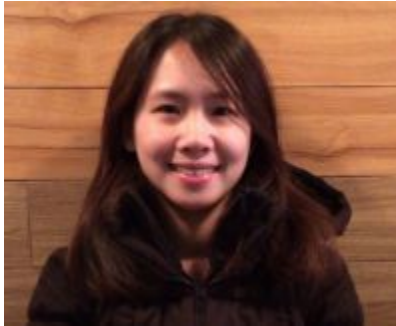
She also adopted a [storyboard template \[https://edtechbooks.org/-rN\]](https://edtechbooks.org/-rN) she found online to guide students to create different scenes for their digital story. Meanwhile, students went online to search for royalty free music and images they need for their digital stories, and included that information in the [storyboard \[https://edtechbooks.org/-rN\]](https://edtechbooks.org/-rN).

Finally, Miss Caroline instructed students how to use [WeVideo \[https://www.wevideo.com/\]](https://www.wevideo.com/) to build and edit their digital story videos. Students worked on creating videos to tell the stories of their families. When they were done, they published the videos and shared the videos with their families.

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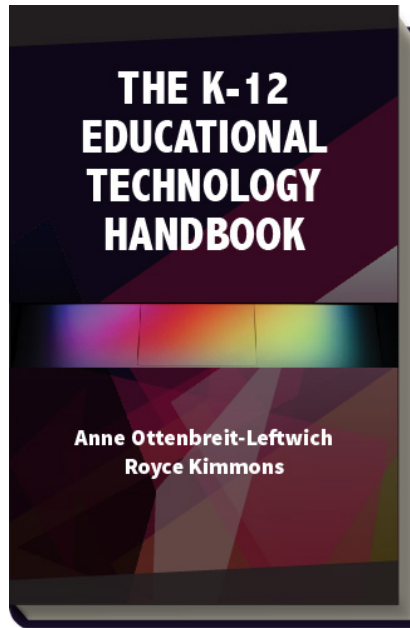


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