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**From Screen to Soul:**  
**A study of digital tools connecting Hare Krishna youth**  
**with their cultural heritage.**

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

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at

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by

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## **Abstract**

As human society advances in modernity, cultural traditions that provide meaning and inner fulfillment can become obscured. This study explored the utilisation of digital technology in educational settings to enhance the engagement of Hare Krishna students with their cultural heritage. It focused on exploring the balance between structured learning and the freedom for students to explore their interests and discover new aspects about their culture. The study was qualitative in nature, involving six students and seven parents. The students created digital videos that illustrated their lifestyle and culture, presenting tradition through a contemporary medium. The videos were presented at an evening event to their parents and the topic of incorporating digital technology to explore and present the Hare Krishna culture was discussed. Findings indicated that the children demonstrated significant intrinsic motivation, and the purposeful use of technology combined with clear learning objectives, enabled them to deeply engage with both the process and the content. The study also revealed the importance of personal interactions in educational contexts, suggesting that while technology serves as a valuable tool, it should complement rather than replace traditional methods of cultural transmission. This research contributes to the broader discourse on educational technology by demonstrating how digital tools can be effectively utilised to support the sharing of cultural heritage and facilitate dynamic connections.

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## **Chapter One – Introduction**

While digital technology plays an increasingly prominent role in society from commerce to entertainment, it alone cannot solve the deeper problems we face. Traditional knowledge and cultural practices, however, present timeless solutions that guide human society towards the fulfillment of higher goals. Integrating digital technology into education has transformed traditional teaching methods, making learning more interactive and engaging (Buckingham, 2020; Balas, 2021). However, the application of digital presentations as a tool for Hare Krishna children to explore and share their traditions and culture remains underexplored. Focusing on school-aged children, who commonly have access to devices such as phones, iPads, and gaming consoles, the aim of this study is to explore the possibilities of using digital tools to connect children meaningfully with their cultural roots. This thesis examines how creating digital presentations, sharing their culture through video medium, might inspire Hare Krishna children to experience an authentic connection with themselves, their community, and their cultural heritage. It will also address the growing concern that excessive screen time may be diminishing the vitality of users. This study considers how to counter the negative impacts of pervasive digital engagement through using it to enhance the positive aspects of cultural engagement. Specifically, it addresses the following research questions:

How can digital video presentations be effectively utilized to engage Hare Krishna children in exploring, understanding, and sharing their cultural heritage?

What are the positive and negative impacts of using technology as a medium for cultural inquiry and expression among children?

## **Justification of the study.**

Recognizing how to motivate children to engage in enriching cultural events and projects is crucial for nurturing their sense of identity and preserving their heritage (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Within the Hare Krishna movement parents, teachers, and elders plan how to impart traditional knowledge to the next generation. The Hare Krishna culture, which includes singing, dancing, culinary arts, devotional service (bhakti-yoga), and philosophy, is independently dynamic. However, strategies are required to effectively transmit this cultural heritage in ways that resonate with today's youth. This study aims to provide insights into effective educational practices that dovetail digital technology with this traditional knowledge and culture. These insights could inform future educational programs, helping to integrate modern technological tools in ways that enhance and sustain cultural traditions, thereby ensuring that young learners remain connected to their heritage.

The rise of digital technology presents both a threat and an opportunity. For devotees of the Hare Krishna movement, Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (the founder) set a precedent by using typewriters, microphones, and airplanes to establish his movement in the West (Dasa, 1980). He encouraged the use of digital technology if it served a higher purpose. For him, this was to transmit the transcendental knowledge of the ancient Vedic scriptures from India. In the contemporary context, followers are utilising social media, online platforms, and digital content to reach a global audience, thereby continuing Prabhupada's mission of spreading spiritual wisdom and contributing to a sense of global cultural community.

Digital platforms facilitate access to cultural information, enable cross-cultural exchange, and help preserve tradition in a rapidly changing digital age. However, there is a growing concern among parents and educators worldwide, and within the Hare Krishna movement, that children are becoming addicted to their digital devices due to alluring social

media platforms. Research indicates that this addiction impacts their physical, emotional, and social development (Nilsen et al., 2023; Bekalu et al., 2019; Valkenberg et al., 2022).

Additionally, exposure to age-inappropriate content and the impersonal nature of digital interactions, which can be intensified by isolation, are significant concerns (Turkle, 2012).

Acquiring skills to utilise digital technology in culturally enriching ways may help mitigate the negative effects of excessive media consumption and promote a balanced, healthy lifestyle. As digital tools become an integral aspect of daily life, exploring their potential in facilitating cultural connections is essential. By exploring how to integrate traditional teachings with modern digital tools, insights may be gained into how to make traditional culture relevant and accessible to contemporary youth.

Over the last 150 years, influential educational theorists like Vygotsky, Dewey, and Bruner have advocated for children's freedom in learning. Prior to their theories, education was traditional and didactic, focusing on teacher-centered instruction and standardised curriculums designed to serve colonial interests (Bhatia & Priya, 2018; Barongo-Muweke, 2016). Vygotsky's (1929) constructivist and socio-cultural theories, along with Dewey's (1986) experiential learning, place students at the center, addressing individual needs and developmental stages through collaborative and creative techniques. These approaches aim to foster enthusiasm, autonomy, and creativity in learning. This study explores these theories to gain a deeper understanding of how to effectively engage Hare Krishna children in dynamic cultural education. The objective is to integrate digital tools with traditional techniques to enhance their learning experience.

### **Methodology Overview.**

Supported by the rigorous and revolutionary efforts of our eastern and western predecessors, my study aimed to investigate possibilities in bridging Hare Krishna children

with their cultural traditions. To achieve this objective, I employed a qualitative research methodology that involved a combination of observations, semi-structured interviews and a focus group interview. This allowed me to explore intricate dynamics, gain insights into participants' perspectives, thoughts and emotions and identify best practices for integrating digital tools effectively. The study was conducted at the Hare Krishna farm community in Eungella, New South Wales, Australia where is located a temple, community and school. My sample voluntary participants were a group of six children between the ages of ten and thirteen years old who attended the school and temple functions regularly and who were also familiar with using typical digital tools, such as a smartphone and basic editing software on a laptop. My study also involved a comprehensive literature review that explored pedagogical techniques proven to inspire children to engage with cultural knowledge and discovery.

### **Structure of the thesis and chapter summary.**

The thesis is structured as follows: Chapter One is the Introductory chapter. Chapter Two reviews the literature on purposeful use of digital technology and theoretical paradigms of cultural education. Chapter Three outlines the research methodology. Chapter Four presents the findings. Chapter Five discusses the implications of the findings and Chapter Six concludes the study with implications and recommendations for future research.

This study aims to explore the potential of dovetailing digital technology with traditional knowledge and culture to enhance cultural engagement and educational outcomes among Hare Krishna children. By integrating theoretical paradigms with qualitative analysis, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of digital technology in cultural education. This will provide a deeper understanding of the research from both theoretical and empirical aspects.

## **Chapter Two - Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

In contemporary educational discourse, the emphasis on creativity and freedom in learning environments has become increasingly pronounced (Hattie, 2013; Gardner; 1993; Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). This thesis explores how providing children with the freedom to explore their interests within culturally defined boundaries can foster a more engaging and meaningful learning experience. This chapter reviews and critiques literature on creating digital presentations for cultural engagement, focusing on children's interaction with cultural heritage, community collaboration for effective use of technology, and pedagogical techniques for teaching cultural topics with technology. Synthesizing the insights of educational theorists such as Vygotsky (1929) and Bruner (2006) will reveal the profound impact of cultural discovery, collaboration, and active engagement on learners' educational growth. By integrating Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theories with technology-based educational projects, this study aims to deeply understand the dual impact of technology on cultural inquiry. This exploration focuses on how digital tools can effectively engage Hare Krishna children in exploring and sharing their cultural heritage, establishing technology as a bridge between cultural and educational enrichment.

### **Reviving Cultural Heritage**

The importance of sharing cultural heritage is recognised by global leaders in society. A contemporary initiative aimed at reviving and sustaining cultural traditions and ancient systems of knowledge is the intangible cultural heritage initiative (ICH) formed by UNESCO in 2003. The relevance of local communities collaborating to revive and sustain cultural heritage can be appreciated through awareness of ICH (UNESCO, 2024). UNESCO adopted an international treaty, the 'Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage,'

aimed at preserving intangible cultural heritage by promoting education, research, and public awareness of traditional knowledge and practices. It is defined as the safeguarding of traditions and practices that are “transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity” (UNESCO, 2024, para 1).

According to Blake and Lixinski (2020), UNESCO's 2003 goals were primarily focused on integrating traditional knowledge and practices into educational systems to ensure that younger generations had awareness of, and appreciated, their own cultural heritage (Blake and Lixinski, 2020). Stefano (2021) acknowledges that to celebrate and preserve ICH requires a substantial global effort. Solutions to issues such as homogenisation, misappropriation, and diminishment can be sought when community-focused approaches are in place to reach the younger generation. Stefano (2021) also notes that some cultural traditions are thriving due to using new technologies. These researchers emphasise that local endeavours within educational environments can best support the revival of cultural heritage.

The ancient Vedic texts of India which outline the philosophy that substantiates the Hare Krishna movement, were inscribed in 2008 on UNESCO's representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Composed over 3500 years ago, the Vedas embody one of the oldest surviving cultural traditions. Originally transmitted orally in the Vedic language derived from classical Sanskrit, they have been translated into English by the founder of The Hare Krishna movement, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, and continue to play a key role in the revival of Indian culture and heritage (Dasa, 1980). In recent history, Muslim invasions and British encroachment have impacted the faith of Indians in their own ancient culture (Bhatiya and Priya, 2018). Prabhupada (1972) foresaw that India faced severe cultural erosion on account of imitating Western civilization. He therefore introduced the Vedic texts

to the western countries by establishing centres in most cities and countries of the world under the acronym ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness), known unofficially as the Hare Krishna Movement (Dasa,1980). Local people are attracted to affiliate with the movement by imbibing the spiritual knowledge of India to enhance their ways of life. Seeing westerners assimilating the Vedic culture has revived the faith of Indians in their ancient traditions (Prabhupada, 1972). This is an example of global cooperation to revive cultural heritage and ancient traditions.

Preserving and passing on this culture to the next generation are pivotal topics for community deliberation and action. Drawing upon Stefano's (2021) insights, the adoption of digital technologies emerge as an increasingly viable avenue as communities use digital innovations more and more. Alivizatou-Barakou et al. (2017) studied how technological methods could be employed for safeguarding and transmitting intangible cultural heritage. This community of scholars acknowledges that new technology can be used not only for the digitisation and archiving of cultural expressions but also in terms of cultural transmission, education and community development. For example, recent innovations show potential in sensory replication which captures dance performances digitally, allowing instructors to refine their students' cultural performances. They explain:

A [tangible] cultural heritage structure which is destroyed such as a temple can be reproduced as a replica, so that the audience can personally wander inside.

Intangible Cultural heritage [such as skills, crafts, music, song, and drama] is more restricted and harder to demonstrate in real life which is a real challenge to prevent it from disappearing. This is where 3D visualization and interaction technology comes into play (Alivizatou-Barakou et al. 2017, p. 19).

While such advanced methods of technological preservation may be utilised to preserve intangible cultural heritage within sophisticated educational or heritage institutions, a simplified approach to dovetailing digital technology can take place within schools and community projects. This allows young people to contribute to UNESCO's vision while also enhancing their knowledge and awareness of their own cultural heritage.

*Collaboration in global and local cultural initiatives.*

In today's digital age, where information is constantly shared and disseminated across various platforms, a collective understanding of how meaning adapts to change is essential. Piaget (1950) emphasises how collaborative understanding ensures cultural authenticity through a collective process involving multiple voices, perspectives and interactions. This ensures that knowledge that has been preserved over generations continues to exist and is practically applied amidst inevitable societal change. Similarly, Hare Krishna devotees believe that to thoroughly understand a subject, it must be discussed from various angles within a group of practitioners (Prabhupada, 1972). This principle is practiced in educational contexts within the movement's temples daily, with collaborative classes in small groups. The Vedic texts of India serve as the primary reference, providing structure and cultural content for discussions. The purpose of such collaboration aligns with UNESCO's 2003 Convention, seeking to ensure the transmission of cultural heritage to future generations through community involvement in preservation efforts (UNESCO, 2003). It also aligns with the principle behind this review, upheld by global academic institutions, by which a thorough, objective analysis of a topic clarifies understanding. Collaboration allows for the pooling of knowledge, skills, and perspectives, leading to more comprehensive and impactful outcomes (Vygotsky, 2020; James, 2008).

Global organisations that aim to preserve and celebrate local and national cultural heritage utilise these principles of collaboration. The European Heritage Hub (EHH) identifies exemplary local initiatives in the cultural heritage field that contribute to green, digital, and social transformation. An online seminar series, organised by EHH called "Sharing Local Stories" was held in May 2024, to respond to some of the pressing questions in the field, one of which was: How can cultural heritage use the potential of digital technologies in a human-centred, value-based and sustainable way? (European Heritage Hub, 2024, para. 1). One organisation that was involved in the seminar was the Nantes Patrimonia cultural heritage conservation project in France that involves a digital platform for discovery and expression of heritage (City of Nantes, 2024). The project aimed to foster citizen participation and access to culture by bringing citizens closer to their everyday heritage within the context of life in their city. The first version of the project enabled contributions to be sent to the Patrimonia team, but in September 2020 contributions could be uploaded onto the platform directly. The online Nantes Patrimonia platform provides digital tours, articles and interactive cartography, highlighting urban history, daily life, architecture, historical events, and the latest news on Nantes heritage. Both the European Heritage Hub and the Nantes Patrimonia cultural heritage are practical examples of collaboration in the service of cultural heritage. Scaling such initiatives to a classroom context encapsulates the core concept of my study.

Dr. Sarah Kenderdine, a pioneering figure in the field of digital cultural heritage, has extensively demonstrated the transformative potential of digital technology in cultural inquiry and preservation (Hou, Kenderdine, Picca, Egloff, & Adamou, 2022). Her work at the forefront of immersive and interactive technologies has opened new avenues for engaging with cultural heritage. Projects such as "Place-Hampi: Co-evolutionary Narrative and Augmented Stereographic Panoramas" (2007) explore the use of augmented reality and

panoramic imaging. Kenderdine's work sets the stage for an innovative future in exploring and preserving culture through digital technologies.

Beyond passive engagement, Kenderdine's digital platforms empower users to become active creators of their own digital cultural heritage. This is evident in her work "Pure Land: Inhabiting the Mogao Caves at Dunhuang" (2013), where virtual reality is applied to recreate the Mogao Caves, allowing users to contribute their stories and perspectives through digital media. Additionally, her publication "Embodied Museography: Cultural Change and Innovation in Digital Cultural Heritage" (2012) delves into the impact of digital technologies on museography and cultural heritage, highlighting the role of these tools in making cultural heritage accessible and relevant to younger generations. When children view these technologies in museums or observe Kenderdine's initiatives, they can envision not only the cultures on display but also foresee potential applications of such technologies in presenting their own cultural heritage.

According to Vygotsky (2020), such interactions as collaborative learning experiences, peer discussions, and cooperative activities provide opportunities for learners to internalise new knowledge, skills, and ways of thinking. Vygotsky's (2020) sociocultural theory places social interaction within a cultural context, highlighting the importance of cultural tools and practices in shaping cognitive processes and development. This review will now examine further the potential of digital technology within an educational context to facilitate collaborative cultural inquiry among contemporary youth.

### **Purposeful use of digital technology**

This section of the literature review will explore instructional techniques that ensure that using digital technology in the classroom or similar learning contexts is purposeful and how this is paramount in maintaining a harmonious balance between technological

advancements and cultural expression. This study reviews research on the purposeful structuring and integration of technology in educational settings, including schools, home learning, and spiritual practices for Hare Krishna devotees.

Balas (2021) states:

‘The goal should be to create teaching situations that are engaging and that allow us to help students acquire and show their own knowledge and reflections during their learning process...It has everything to do with the teachers’ framing of the learning process and rather little to do with the technology itself’ (p. 35).

Providing opportunities for exploration, inquiry, and meaningful interaction positions technology as a supportive tool rather than the focal point. Technology should be utilized to enhance and facilitate valuable experiences, rather than overshadowing them (Balas, 2021). By emphasizing exploration and meaningful exchanges, technology serves to complement and enrich these activities, ensuring that the primary focus remains on the learning and engagement process itself. This approach underscores the importance of integrating technology in a way that supports and amplifies authentic, meaningful experiences (Balas, 2021).

Digital technology now occupies a significant role in shaping the landscape of education and it is pertinent that using it with purpose shapes its continual evolution. Early initiatives like "One Laptop per Child," (Papert, 1980) sought to nurture learner autonomy through technological constructivism and active learning. Recent developments in distance learning were perpetuated due to circumstances following the outbreak of Covid 19 (Kundu and Bej, 2021). Papert (1980) explored ways in which computers can be used to enhance learning and creativity in children. He argued for a radical restructuring of the education system to take advantage of the opportunities presented by new technologies. Papert (1980)

believed that children learn best when they are actively engaged in creating and manipulating objects in the world. This process of construction allows them to develop a deep understanding of the concepts and ideas they are working with. He developed a variety of educational tools and technologies designed to support hands-on, project-based learning (Papert, 1980). With Covid 19, digital technology became used for much more than project-based units as it facilitated distance learning. As the Pandemic ended, the presence of digitised education remained (Kundu and Bej, 2021).

### **Connecting cultural meaning and purpose.**

A common theme of discussion amongst Hare Krishna devotees is how to use material resources for spiritual purposes. Purpose-driven decision-making is framed with utility as the principle. "Utility is the principle" refers to the concept that the usefulness or practicality of something is the most important consideration or guiding rule. Broom (1991) states "In Australia, a ute is a useful vehicle ... The "principle of utility" is the principle that actions are to be judged by their usefulness in this sense: their tendency to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness" (pg.6). This suggests that deciding how technology can best support Hare Krishna children in exploring, understanding, and sharing their cultural heritage should be based on its ability to provide the greatest benefit in a practical role (Broom, 1991).

Purposeful use of technology is also a well-researched aspect to digital education in the world, especially as government mandates are put in place to increase digital education in school curriculums, preparing young people for an increasingly digitised future. The question a student or a teacher may ask would be: "How can this tool facilitate the learning of or the presentation of this aspect of my/my student's culture?" This is a specific reframing of the research question underpinning this study.

## **Starting with the purpose.**

Finding a meaningful purpose can entail incorporating a child's greater life, or life beyond the learning objectives set by a government curriculum. Ideally, a government curriculum would facilitate this. Prensky (2012) stresses the significance of offering children meaningful learning experiences that resonate with their interests and activities beyond the classroom. He encourages educators to modernise learning methodologies to better match the activities connected with their cultural identity or activities they participate in within the local community that they, or their families, identify with (Prensky, 2012). Prensky also suggests that an understanding of students' digital literacy beyond the classroom enhances learning outcomes and inspires engagement in the learning process (Prensky, 2012). This implies that being aware of a child's community engagement, and their attitude towards digital technology, can assist the educator in dovetailing both to facilitate the student's learning.

Buckingham (2020) emphasizes the importance of having a clear purpose in media production, arguing that a well-defined intention can amplify the influence and audience engagement of digital content. By highlighting the significance of purpose, Buckingham (2020) underscores the need for creators to understand the desired outcomes of their media creations. This includes considerations such as the message they want to convey, the target audience they aim to reach, and the desired impact they seek to achieve. When creators have a strong sense of purpose, their digital content becomes more focused, meaningful, and resonant with their intended audience, leading to greater effectiveness and broader influence in the digital media landscape (Buckingham, 2020). With a vast online presence that is the internet, intended audience is a significant aspect of creating digital content for a cultural purpose.

Teaching with intention is the key message in Balas 's (2021) study on what teachers need to do to effectively integrate digital technology into their planning. He found in his

Norwegian study, all students are explicitly expected through the national curriculum to develop digital competence through schooling, but that an analysis of curriculum documents in teacher education showed that technology use did not have a prominent position in those documents (Instefjord & Munthe, 2017, as cited in Balas, 2021). Balas, (2021) emphasizes that the purpose of using digital technology should always be clear when preparing to use it in the classroom. Teachers should be equipped to create engaging situations where digital tools support the acquisition of knowledge and reflection during the learning process (Balas, 2021). Applying this to using technology as a medium for cultural inquiry and expression means ensuring that educators are well-prepared and intentional about how they incorporate technology. In line with Balas' recommendations, this suggests that creating meaningful and engaging experiences not only facilitates cultural understanding but also enhances students' digital competence and critical thinking skills.

*Purposeful use of technology requires time and curriculum space.*

Research shows that sufficient time and space within the curriculum is required for effective, purposeful integration of digital technology (Mishra and Koehler, 2006; Pavić, Mijušković, & Žager, 2022). A study by Pavić, Mijušković, & Žager (2022) revealed how a teacher using technology to plan culturally enriching learning opportunities should have enough flexibility in the curriculum to use the technology effectively and with sufficient expertise. The main objective of their research was to identify the use of key digital tools used by educators and students in Croatia, Germany, Poland and Serbia. The study gathered responses from 423 educators and 2,474 students, mostly from Croatia, with the fewest from Germany. These researchers concluded that despite the fact that the surge of Covid 19 had accelerated digital transformation in education making a complete return to traditional teaching methods unlikely, teachers were not using digital tools in the classroom effectively

because they did not have enough time to adapt their lessons to the digital format or to learn how to use the programmes efficiently. Teachers in four European countries all shared the same difficulties. The primary obstacles to using digital tools in Croatia and Serbia was an overload of existing materials and no time to apply them to digital tools. In Germany and Poland there was also a lack of time for creating new materials compatible with the tools (Pavić, Mijušković and Žager, 2022). This research highlights a recurring problem and essential need for time and freedom within curriculums if technology is to be used effectively.

Research emphasises that the focus should not solely be on using digital tools but on creating engaging teaching situations that facilitate student learning and reflection (Balas, 2021). This echoes the theme of utility being the principle, where technology enhances the learning process rather than an end in itself. Balas (2021) points out that how a teacher frames the learning process determines the effectiveness of digital tools: "What you do as a teacher is far more important for the students' learning than what technologies you give them access to" (p. 114). Balas' most significant insight is that if using technology in the classroom is not enabling the learning process, it is likely hindering it. He found that teachers need advice on making informed choices about which digital technologies to use in their classrooms. Key considerations include having clear learning objectives, a solid educational rationale for using the tool, and providing feedback and support during the learning process (Balas, 2016).

From the above points made we can understand that despite children having ample exposure to digital technology in their personal lives, teachers are still expected to know how to integrate the technology into the learning paradigms (Balas, 2020). If teachers are not sufficiently capable of integrating digital use purposefully within the learning frameworks, the potential benefits of digital technology may not be fully realised in educational or cultural

settings. This gap can hinder students' progress, limit the development of crucial digital literacy skills needed for the future as well as missing meaningful cultural interactions (Pavić, Mijušković, & Žager, 2022) Therefore, it is essential that teachers have the necessary training and resources to effectively incorporate digital tools into their teaching practices.

*Uniting variations in abilities through purposeful use of technology.*

As digital technology becomes increasingly integral to everyday life, understanding the distinctions between generations in their interaction with this technology is crucial for effective education (Prensky, 2001; Lambert and Cuper, 2008) Prensky (2001) introduced the 'digital natives' metaphor to distinguish between the current generation who have been immersed in digital technology from birth, and 'digital migrants' who encountered digital technology later in life. Lambert and Cuper (2008) support Prensky, stating that digital natives have different learning patterns due to their exposure to fast-paced, interactive experiences. To effectively instruct these students, educators must adapt by incorporating reflection and critical thinking into their methods while using digital tools and language familiar to the students (Lambert and Cuper, 2008). Having a clear purpose in teaching is more important than debating or focusing on varying opinions about children's digital capabilities.

The challenge to Prensky's (2001) theory lies in its oversimplification (Gallardo-Echenique, Marqués-Molíás, Bullen, and Strijbos, 2016). It does not account for other notable variables, apart from age, such as socio-economic influences affecting accessibility to technology or digital education that can equip older learners. It also does not consider children who struggle with digital literacy (Echenique, Marqués-Molíás, Bullen, and Strijbos, 2016). An ability to navigate social media does not necessarily mean students can use technology effectively for academic purposes. Gallardo-Echenique et al., (2016) suggest we

need to look beyond age and consider other factors to understand how students use digital technology (Gallardo-Echenique, Marqués-Molíás, Bullen, and Strijbos, 2016). Returning to Balas 's (2021) conclusion, using digital technology purposefully depends on the teacher's framing of the lesson.

*Purposeful use of technology can support social engagement.*

There are many researchers and scholars who have engaged with and debated Papert's foundational work on constructionism and educational technology, raising concerns about the potential for technology to isolate individuals and disrupt social interaction (Turkle, 2012). Scholars like Turkle (2012) and Selwyn (2010) have expressed concerns regarding digital use isolating children, positing that it may negatively impact their formation of identity, interpersonal relationships, and overall well-being (Selwyn, 2010). Digital technologies offer many benefits to young people, including increased access to information and opportunities for creativity. However, case studies show that digital technologies are shaping young people's identities and relationships, affecting their mental health and well-being, and influencing their learning and educational experiences in different contexts such as home, school, and leisure (Turkle, 2012; Selwyn, 2010). In this regard, ensuring that the use of technology is not impacting the well-being of the students is a foremost consideration in practically applying technology when engaging Hare Krishna children in exploring, understanding, and sharing their cultural heritage. Using technology should enhance positive engagement and collaboration with others, rather than leading to isolation due to non-purposeful use.

### **Autonomy and Intrinsic Motivation.**

While structure and purpose are important for guiding efficient learning paradigms, there is also an inner aspect to learning that a teacher can nurture. This theme will focus on

fostering autonomy and intrinsic motivation in education, drawing insights from Vygotsky, Deci and Ryan, and Dewey. Creating an environment where students feel empowered, and are excited to explore their own interests, passions and cultural identity, results in an intrinsically motivated learning experience (Vygotsky, 1929; Deci and Ryan 1985; Prasad, Maag, Redestowicz, & Hoe, 2018).

*Exploring personal identity and interests enhances intrinsic motivation.*

Creating opportunities for personally relevant cultural exploration, meaningful discussions, and community connections aligns with Vygotsky's (1929) sociocultural theory. This theory posits that children's cognitive development is deeply influenced by their social and cultural contexts. When children are provided with meaningful cultural experiences and opportunities to explore and share their heritage, they are likely to develop a stronger intrinsic motivation and deeper engagement. These experiences help children connect with their cultural roots, foster a sense of belonging, and encourage active participation in their community (Vygotsky, 1929). Intrinsic motivation refers to the drive that originates within an individual, fueled by internal rewards such as personal satisfaction, curiosity, and the inherent enjoyment of an activity (Deci and Ryan, 1985). This contrasts with extrinsic motivation, which is driven by external factors such as rewards, recognition, or the avoidance of negative consequences. "The desire to explore, discover, understand and know is intrinsic to people's nature and is a potentially central motivator of the [authentic] educational process," (Deci and Ryan, 1985, p. 245). In one of their foundational experiments, Ryan and Deci (1971) examined the effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation. Participants were asked to solve puzzles during three sessions. In the second session, one group was given a monetary reward for each puzzle solved, while the other group received no reward. In the final session, neither group received any reward. The study found that the group which received monetary

rewards in the second session spent significantly less time solving puzzles in the third session compared to their initial engagement, indicating a decrease in intrinsic motivation.

Conversely, the group that did not receive rewards maintained or increased their engagement.

It was concluded from this study that play and exploration seemed to occur spontaneously, without external reinforcement. “For curiosity-based and exploratory behaviours the reinforcement appeared to be inherent to the behaviour itself” (Ryan & Deci, 1971, pg.1).

This experiment has been used to illustrate how external rewards could undermine intrinsic motivation. It could also show that extrinsic rewards distract from an engaging activity which was engaging due to a high level of autonomy that was required to solve the puzzle. When individuals engage in activities because they find them inherently interesting, fulfilling or challenging, they are more likely to experience a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are key components of intrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2017). This research is encouraging in that the initiative to facilitate the exploration of cultural heritage is likely to inspire intrinsic motivation and meaningful engagement.

Prasad, Maag, Redestowicz, & Hoe, (2018) conducted a study that observed how international students reacted to blended learning. Their study highlighted the importance of integrating digital tools with culturally relevant content suggesting that when technology is aligned with students' cultural contexts, it enhances engagement and learning outcomes. A significant finding in Prasad et al.'s (2018) study was the high level of intrinsic or self-motivation that students manifested in the blended learning environment. They connected their study with Deci and Ryan's (1971) research aligning the positive results in their study with the integration of digital technology and cultural relevance that manifested intrinsically motivated paradigms.

*Building autonomy creates vibrancy.*

Ryan and Deci (2017) define feeling autonomous as when one “experiences a sense of volition and choice” (p.150). Specific teacher practices and strategies are associated with promoting autonomy resulting in a positive climate conducive to vibrancy, reflection and creativity (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Hattie and Yates, 2013). “When the educational environment provides optimal challenges, rich sources of stimulation and a context of autonomy, this motivational wellspring of learning is likely to flourish” (Deci and Ryan, 1985, p. 245). Hattie and Yates (2013) emphasize the importance of promoting student agency and autonomy in the learning process arguing that when students are actively involved in their learning, set their own goals, and monitor their progress, they are more likely to experience meaningful learning outcomes. Bou-Habib and Osaretin (2015) assert that even young children possess the cognitive abilities to comprehend, embrace, and persist in projects and endeavors that hold significance to them. Granting children the freedom to nurture their own ideas not only respects their autonomy but also nurtures their cognitive and creative development.

Csikszentmihalyi (2014) examines the concept of "flow," a mental state of immersion and engagement in an activity that stems from the conscious self. This state is achievable only when goals are clear, replacing ambiguity and conflict with undivided focus. Once individuals experience the exhilaration of flow, they continue their involvement for intrinsic rewards, making the experience autotelic. The term autotelic describes an activity performed for the sense of fulfillment it brings or an individual fully immersed and focused on an activity, experiencing a sense of timelessness and deep engagement. This sense of effortless concentration leads to heightened productivity and personal fulfillment (Csikszentmihalyi,

2014). Csikszentmihalyi (2014) attributes a well-developed sense of autonomy to empowering the self and contributing to flow activities.

Cultivating flow activities involves a sense of mindfulness and deliberate practice, whereby the conscious self is actively engaged in the activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). This attribution to the conscious self is further substantiated by the ancient Vedic text, the Bhagavad-Gita, which places the self, or the living entity within the body, as the source of energy and vitality. In the context of purporting the Bhagavad-Gita, Prabhupada (1972) explains, “the working senses are superior to dull matter, mind is higher than the senses; intelligence is still higher than the mind and he [the soul] is even higher than the intelligence” (Prabhupada, 1972, p. 291). Utilizing intelligence, mind, senses, or any material resource is desirable if it serves the purpose of realizing the conscious self or soul (Prabhupada, 1972). The culture of engaging in devotional, service-orientated activities directly connects the soul, aligning internal resources, such as the mind and intelligence (Prabhupada, 1972). These spiritual principles translate into practical applications for children's development. Platforms that provide children with opportunities to preserve expressions of their individuality allow them to connect with their inner selves and their community. Intrinsic motivation thrives on a sense of independence and autonomy that matches personal interests, values, and objectives (Deci and Ryan, 1985). By aligning spiritual engagement with personal interests, children can experience a profound sense of purpose and belonging.

#### *Acknowledging Prior Knowledge.*

Intrinsic Motivation also manifests when a child's prior knowledge is acknowledged (Vygotsky, 1929; Bruner, 2006; Gardner, 1993). Vygotsky (1929) emphasizes the role of prior knowledge in learning, highlighting the importance of what learners already know and can do before scaffolding new learning. When integrating digital technology with culture in a

discovery project, children may have technological knowledge or cultural experience that can add to the project's dynamics. Acknowledging this can draw children into the project and empower them to engage intrinsically with it. Bruner's (2006) constructivist theory of learning emphasizes the active role of learners in constructing new knowledge based on their prior experiences while Gardner (1993), known for his theory of multiple intelligences, emphasises the importance of recognising and valuing the diverse prior knowledge and experiences that learners bring to the educational setting. While creating video presentations, children can draw on their prior knowledge from videos they have seen before, applying effective techniques and insights they have learned to enhance their own projects.

### **Sharing knowledge to affirm cultural identity.**

In the realm of technological tools, this section of the review will delve into the art of video-making and utilizing smartphones, evaluating their appropriateness, ease of use, and practicality within modern educational settings. Tools for making videos offer a means to preserve and share cultural heritage and cultural expression (Grandison, Flint & Jamieson, 2023). As noted by Grandison, Flint, and Jamieson (2023), when individuals and communities capture and document their unique traditions, stories, and cultural practices with digital media, cultural narratives can be recorded and disseminated widely, ensuring that valuable cultural knowledge is maintained and accessible to future generations. This not only helps in safeguarding cultural heritage but also promotes a deeper understanding and appreciation of one's own culture. According to Milano et al (2023), a readiness to exchange stories and experiences indicates a strong connection to one's cultural identity, contributing significantly to confidence and active participation in projects. If children are enthusiastic to exchange stories and create presentations about their culture, it is likely they have a well-developed sense of cultural identity, which can lead to greater self-awareness, community engagement, and a lifelong commitment to preserving and sharing their heritage.

India's centers of learning flourished before and during the initial period of British colonization, and although aided by learning tools such as manuscripts, writing instruments, and emerging printing technology (Blackburn, 2003) oral traditions of passing knowledge from one generation to the next was the traditional technique that strengthened memory and understanding. As technological industries developed, cultural practices such as these oral traditions of giving and receiving knowledge waned (Prabhupada, 1972). Despite these changes, oral tradition, and pedagogy, including storytelling and mantra recitation, remained vital for knowledge transmission and to preserve cultural and communal unity (Ramanujan, 1991). Scholars celebrate the diversity and richness of Indian oral narrative traditions, (Blackburn, 1998; Person, 2016) yet acknowledge the loss and challenges faced by these traditions today (Swain, 2022). In ancient universities, oral reception was considered the most important process for understanding transcendental knowledge (Prabhupada, 1972). Using digital technology such as smartphones and editing techniques to capture such practices and expose them to the vast online audience can help to revive these ancient traditions and practices.

### *The Utility of Smartphones in Knowledge Sharing Projects*

Smartphones have various potentialities to support dynamic presentations, especially while exploring and sharing cultural heritage. Firstly, they promote information consumption due to access to information anywhere and anytime and constitute a communication channel facilitating both accessibility to information received from other users and spreading information to others. The abundant means of communication, cameras for capturing footage and various applications for editing can be used to create narrative. Smartphones interact between users in many ways through speech, video conversations, instant texts, and

asynchronous communication which can be used to support the sharing and revival of cultural heritage (Meager, 2019).

Children in Belgium, who collaborated with filmmakers David MacDougall and Nigel Meager (2019) on observational filmmaking projects, created a range of diverse and unexpected films, each reflecting their unique personalities. Meager (2019) explains how the participants engaged in daily review sessions, learning from their mistakes, and enhancing their skills with the tools they used. Meager (2019) also noted that as the children filmed and edited, their exploration of various subjects deepened. They found that smartphones offer a powerful toolset that can amplify the themes of dedication, passion, and exploration seen in this collaboration between the children and the filmmakers. With video recording capabilities, individuals can capture their unique perspectives and delve into various subjects. The children's films reflected their personalities and deepened their exploration of different themes.

My study explores how to bridge technology with cultural discovery. I have noted that scholars do not specifically focus on smartphone functionality and video making as areas of research, as this area lies within the realm of technology reviewers and industry experts rather than academic researchers. Also, delving into such articles can result in a discussion around the multi-functional extras that children would not necessarily use in digital filmmaking. From my observation the smartphone is simply a convenient and practical camera and storage facility that can connect instantaneously to trouble-shooting networks should there be any technological glitches in the filming process.

## **East meets West - wisdom meets innovation**

*Experiential learning, oral reception and active participation.*

This review concludes with research that explores how Dewey's (1986) experiential and Bruner's (2006) discovery learning paradigms can integrate with traditional methods of passing knowledge from one generation to the next as established by Prabhupada (1972). Dewey (1986) emphasized the importance of experiential learning and the role of education in teaching children how to think critically and engage actively in their communities. He highlights the significance of active participation in the learning journey. Experiential learning involves engaging learners directly in hands-on experiences, fostering a deeper understanding and retention of knowledge (Dewey, 1986). This directly connects to the importance of oral reception as an initial function in understanding and retaining knowledge, to be followed by practical application; a principle outlined in the Vedas (Prabhupada, 1970). Oral reception assists deep understanding and improves retention of knowledge (Prabhupada, 1972). However, this initial aspect of hearing with the ears from elders, is often overlooked in modern Western education because in recent colonial history oral reception was didactic and not balanced with practical application (Prabhupada, 1972; Dewey, 1986). Dewey's (1986) emphasis on reflective thinking is integral with experiential learning and is foundational to his concepts of critical inquiry. Creating digital videos, therefore, offers children a tangible way to bring theoretical concepts to life by applying what they have heard and contemplated. By interviewing community members and compiling videos from the footage they collect, learners can actively create and shape content related to their culture and personal understanding. Dewey's (1986) intention was to encourage active participation and empower individuals to express themselves creatively, contributing to a more vibrant and engaging learning environment. In my study I explored how digital tools, such as video editing

software, have immense potential to make the learning and cultural sharing experience dynamic, interactive, and imaginative.

Bruner's (2006) constructivist views align with Dewey (1986) as he emphasizes the active role of the child in constructing knowledge rather than merely assimilating it from the environment or culture. Bruner asserts that knowledge cannot simply be communicated but "knowledge, if it is to be truly possessed by a learner ... must, in some sense, be discovered" (Bruner, 1960, as cited by Bakhurst & Shanker, 2001 pg.105). This aligns with the Vedic concepts of jnana (knowledge) and vijnana (realized knowledge or wisdom) as discussed in the Vedic text, the Bhagavad-Gita, which distinguishes between intellectual understanding and the deeper, experiential realization of that knowledge (Prabhupada,1972). The parallels between the theoretical paradigms of an established twentieth century American philosopher and a 3000-year-old text which has framed philosophical discussions of a nation of one and a half billion people, for over thirty centuries, lends weight to the profundity and applicability of both. Bruner (2006), Dewey (1986) and Prabhupada (1972) advocate for an educational approach that fosters a deeper and more personal understanding of knowledge.

#### *Cultural Authenticity and digital storytelling.*

Exploring the unique dynamics inherent in traditional settings, where knowledge was and is traditionally passed from mentors to learners, raises intriguing questions about the potential role of technology in facilitating and enhancing the transfer of knowledge within such communities. Cunsolo, Harper and Edge's (2013) research showed how digital storytelling can help preserve indigenous oral traditions, engage community members, build skills, and celebrate the diverse stories and experiences of the community. Whilst the work of Cunsolo et al. (2013) underscores the pivotal role of digital storytelling in preserving and transmitting traditional knowledge, Kong (2022) highlights the need for careful and

respectful utilization of digital narrative to ensure that the depth of purpose is not lost or rather is revived in its entirety, despite the modern delivery tools. This is important, for example, in acknowledging the overlap in story and history. Advocating digital tools to record and share content must not inadvertently minimise cultural perceptions of truth. For example, the term digital storytelling can conjure sensitive overlaps between history and mythology which may be disturbing to communities with rich cultural narrative within their epistemology. A more complex example is presented by Bhattia and Priya (2018) who shed light on psychological impacts Indian youth face when their ancient narratives are considered mythology, whilst reflecting in school history units on recent historical narratives they are familiar with in connection to brutal acts of political violence that were imposed on states such as West Bengal (Bhattia and Priya, 2018). These examples are reminders for educators to ensure that digital projects exploring culture are authentic and ethically conducted.

Taiwan has a complex history of colonialism that, like India, has significantly shaped its cultural, political, and social landscape. Current participatory design research in Taiwan delves into experiential learning projects that offer students opportunities to engage with culturally enriched community initiatives. These projects also provide evidence on how to integrate technology and tradition effectively. Li and Shein's (2022) study aimed to address how the life experiences of Indigenous students are often neglected in school learning, creating a disconnect in their education. They incorporated local and traditional ecological knowledge into a year-long course on place-based Indigenous education for sustainable development. The study engaged elders, community members, and indigenous teachers to ensure the self-determination of indigenous peoples in educational research. Data from student worksheets, interviews, classroom observations, and teacher feedback revealed that students began to consider their hometown and its sustainability issues from a broader perspective, enhancing their local knowledge and sense of place. An interesting anecdote

found that students began to develop broader perspectives as they enhanced their local knowledge (Li and Shein, 2022). This transformative effect on students as they deepened their understanding of the local context, leading to the development of broader perspectives aligns with findings of my study which will be discussed in a subsequent chapter.

### **Conclusion of literature review.**

The usefulness of this literature review will be determined by how effectively it will frame and support the research (Hart, 2018). To support investigating how digital technology can meaningfully engage Hare Krishna students with their culture, this literature review's key finding was the significance of balancing creativity and freedom within culturally defined boundaries (Vygotsky, 1929). Dewey (1986) highlights the importance of active engagement within a learning activity, while Papert (1980) brought these constructivist theories to the modern day, advocating computers as ideal tools for constructing, creating and experimenting to find meaning.

Structural considerations such as the importance of communicating clear and specific learning objectives to the children (Balas, 2021; Buckingham, 2020) as well as Deci and Ryan's (1985) robust theories of autonomy, competence, and relatedness as important elements in fostering intrinsic motivation, all give valuable frameworks to structure the study. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) also emphasizes the importance of autonomy to achieve flow within an activity while Bruner (2006) and Gardner (1993) consider the acknowledgement of students' prior knowledge as integral in fostering intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is itself a key element in creating a conducive environment for learning (Ryan and Deci, 2017). Integrating these frameworks for cultural enquiry through interactive and engaging digital platforms, should foster a sense of ownership, autonomy, and enthusiasm among learners.

Projects like UNESCO's (2003) initiatives and studies in Taiwan illustrate how collaborative efforts can lead to the revival of cultural traditions. For Hare Krishna children, Prabhupada provided a purpose by merging eastern wisdom with western innovation, using western technology to share India's wisdom in developed western countries (Dasa, 1980). Imbibing this mood on a local level can give children a sense of purpose, identity and feeling of place within the movement. Exploring culture in ways that are relevant and natural, such as utilizing digital technology to share their culture with others, provides a relevant framework for children to explore and discover new aspects of their culture.

## **Chapter Three - Methodology**

### **Introduction.**

The previous chapter reviewed the literature while this chapter outlines the methodological processes that structured my study, including the research design, participant selection criteria, and data collecting and analysis processes. The investigation was a qualitative study utilizing a constructive and student-led experiential learning approach. Through this research, I hoped to assess how digital technology could enhance cultural connectivity and deepen engagement for children in the Hare Krishna movement. I will describe how I employed purposive sampling to recruit six children who were actively involved in the community, ensuring that their experiences and insights would provide rich, relevant data for addressing the research question. Also, I will detail the specific data collection methods I used which were interviews, observations, and a focus group interview and present the data analysis techniques I used to interpret the findings. Because the Hare Krishna movement is an international society, the children in my sample group represented a variety of ethnic backgrounds and each child was raised from birth in the Hare Krishna movement.

### **Research Design and approach.**

To explore how integrating digital tools could provide innovative ways for Hare Krishna children to connect with their traditions and make cultural practices more accessible and engaging, a comprehensive research methodology was essential. I required a research approach that could facilitate and capture the richness of their experiences and interactions. Constructivist learning is an approach that emphasizes the active role of learners in constructing their own understanding and knowledge through experiences, reflection, and social interaction. It is grounded in the work of Piaget (1950), Vygotsky (1929) and Dewey,

(1986) and is applied in various educational practices that promote active, meaningful, and experiential learning. Student-led methods emphasise autonomy, personalised learning, and the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Piaget (1950) believed that children learn best when they are interacting with their environment. In my study, applying constructivist theory entailed creating active learning environments where participants constructed their own processes to explore their culture while using modern technology (Piaget, 1950; Vygotsky, (1929). Dewey (1986), in advocating experiential learning emphasized the balance between structure and student agency, which also aligns with my study. I employed both intentional teaching frameworks along with providing broad choices for the children to explore their personal interests (Fisher et al, 2016; Buckingham, 2020; Montessori, 2005).

The epistemological theory that underlined my learning and research is the interpretivist approach used to understand the subjective meaning of social phenomena (Geertz, 2008; Cowling, 2016). Interpretivism outlines the researcher's task to interpret the meanings that individuals or groups assign to their experiences and actions. Clifford Geertz, an anthropologist known for his interpretive approach to culture, particularly his concept of "thick description" in understanding cultural practices writes, "We must, in short, descend into detail, past the misleading tags, past the metaphysical types, past the empty similarities to grasp firmly the essential character of not only the various cultures but the various sorts of individuals within each culture, if we wish to encounter humanity face to face" (Geertz, 2008, p. 14). Interpretivist researchers use qualitative methods such as interviews and observations to understand subjective meanings and social constructions within their study (Geertz, 2008). I aimed to understand how effective digital technology is in connecting participants to their culture by analyzing my data and interpreting the meanings in my participants' stories and interactions with technology. Additionally, I wanted to identify factors that contributed to the

successful integration of technology and culture, as well as areas for improvement. Cowling (2016) emphasizes the importance of researchers being flexible in their approach, using different methods depending on the research questions. This flexibility allows researchers to bridge the gap between technology and education in the field of education technology research. “Each of us can ..[position].. ourselves to move around depending on the research questions we need to answer. It is through this that we can make the methodological maneuvers required to become diverse, well-balanced researchers.” (Cowling, 2016, p.57). By using a variety of qualitative data collecting methods within an interpretivist approach, this triangulation of data sources and perspectives enhanced my analysis's validity and reliability.

### *Qualitative Research.*

I wanted to understand what determinant factors might influence the children’s engagement and creativity. While quantitative research measures and analyses numerical data to identify patterns, relationships, and trends, qualitative research focuses on understanding human experiences and social phenomena through non-numerical data like interviews and observations (Becker and Keller, 2016). Qualitative methods provide rich, detailed descriptions and insights into participants' perspectives, emotions, and motivations, which quantitative data might miss (Delamont, 2012). Qualitative research is also adaptable, allowing for adjustments during the study as new insights emerge. Therefore, I employed a qualitative research design to gain in-depth insights into the subjective experiences of our children using technology, to gain perspectives on the attitudes of parents towards technology being used in this context, and to reflect on my own personal experience as facilitator in this context. There was little scope with quantitative methods like surveys and questionnaires to ask my participants about their technology experience as they explored their cultural

environment. The data-collecting methods I selected: semi-structured Interviews, observations, and a focus group interview, however, allows for the collection of rich, detailed data (Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton & Ormston, 2014). These attributes will be explored individually as I explain and justify the research design that I chose.

My research questions are exploratory, seeking to uncover new insights and understandings rather than testing specific hypotheses. Qualitative research is well-suited for exploratory studies because it is flexible and adaptive, allowing the researcher to follow emergent themes and directions that arise during data collection (Denzin & Giardina, 2019). The flexibility of the nature of this research design allowed me to adapt to the children's own inspiration at the beginning, giving me the chance to observe how they were thinking and responding to the opportunities they had.

As Geertz (2008) propounds, the qualitative collection of rich, thick data, is ideal for studying cultural engagement. However, recent scholars acknowledge that qualitative research has reached a crossroads due to contemporary researchers conducting qualitative research in unsystematic ways. Flick (2022) writes, "On the one hand, qualitative research has established itself in a wide range of disciplines...On the other hand, [it] is threatened by a backlash in appreciation, often being seen as systematically designed only if it is part of mixed methods approaches. [There is a need to] plan and design qualitative research more systematically to produce results that are perceived, received, and used by wider publics" (Flick, 2022, pg. 2). Denzin and Giardina (2019), also explain how qualitative research is being reexamined to justify its use as a valuable method of inquiry. "We use the metaphor of a crossroads to highlight that we are at a point in time when crucial questions about the work we do, the way in which we do it, and the conditions under which that work exists need to be revisited" (Denzin and Giardina, 2019, pg. 8). The key point in establishing and constructing

rigorous qualitative research is to ensure that it is systematic and reflective enough (Flick, 2022). Researchers need to set a clear and comprehensive agenda on how to plan and design qualitative research effectively (Denzin and Giardina, 2019).

*A systematic approach.* To ensure that my study reflected a commitment to systematic, rigorous qualitative analysis I employed Flick's list of considerations that assists the researcher in deciding what to study, how to study it, what data to use, and how to consider the outcomes and impacts (Flick, 2022). The exclusive use of qualitative methods was justified in my study by the need for in-depth, context-specific, and participant-centered data (Denzin and Giardina, 2019; Geertz, 2008). Overall, I aimed to establish a systematic methodology that clearly outlined my study's purpose.

This study involved a literature review on contemporary initiatives dedicated to the revival of cultural heritage and traditions, pedagogical considerations that nurture autonomy and freedom of the learner, relevant technologies and the importance of authentic cultural engagement. The theoretical framework integrated Vygotsky's constructivist theories with Dewey's experiential learning theory. The methodology included selecting a purposive sample of culturally aware children familiar with digital technology, observing their use of technology to explore culture, conducting semi-structured interviews with the children and a focus group interview with them and their parents. Data analysis involved transcribing interviews, identifying themes, and interpreting findings. All interviews were recorded and transcriptions were carefully analyzed to ensure accuracy and clarity.

### **Outline of Procedures.**

Flick (2022) suggests that a well-designed qualitative research study starts with a clear, manageable focus. The process to clarity took time. Desiring to connect our children with their culture in a way that was relevant to them, I considered how ancient Vedic culture

could be observed through a digital lens. As I considered the subject of my study and the scope of my research, I was able to break down procedures into manageable steps. By selecting only Hare Krishna children, I maintained a focused cultural sample and given time constraints and limitations in access to technology, I ensured that the planned tasks were realistic with the available resources. As I developed and refined my research questions throughout the study the clear focus that underpinned my inquiry was how to facilitate the children's learning as they explored a cultural theme that was their own, using a digital tool.

The study was conducted within the Hare Krishna community which hosts a diverse multi-ethnic population. I first contacted six parents of children in our community and explained that I was researching how children use digital technology to share their culture with others, and asked if their child would like to participate. With their permission I contacted the children, each of whom were enthusiastic about participating in the project. They were a diverse group, representing ethnic diversity, (Filipino, Swiss, Balinese, Fijian Indian and Australian) but who all shared a Hare Krishna upbringing from birth. Their parents all joined the movement in early adulthood from their respective countries and migrated to a Hare Krishna community in Australia to practice the teachings and raise their children in a like-minded community. This unity within diversity provided a relevant and rich context for examining the intersection of digital technology and cultural education.

#### *Purposive Sampling.*

I used purposive sampling which involved inviting children to participate who had the capacity to reflect and discuss topics related to the study's objectives (Patterson, 2016). Researchers use purposive sampling when they need participants who possess qualities, experiences, or knowledge that are essential for the study, making it possible to obtain rich, detailed, and meaningful data rather than generalized findings related to a larger population

(Patterson, 2016). I wanted students who would be responsive to the learning scenario, who were culturally active, could interact naturally with the technology and could construct and reflect on new understandings relating to the integration of culture and technology. Effective purposive sampling involves approaching potential participants willing to talk and reflect on matter from different viewpoints (Patterson, 2016). My participants were six students between the ages of ten and thirteen years of age from families affiliated with the Hare Krishna community (see Table 1). I also interviewed their parents and other members of the community in a focus group interview

*Ethical Issues - Access to participants and Informed Consent.*

Families were given a summary of my project and intention, which was to determine how useful digital tools might be effective in inspiring children to engage with Krishna Consciousness (see Appendix 1). Krishna Consciousness is the umbrella term defined by the founders of the Hare Krishna movement and includes the philosophy and practices that a devotee imbibes to become conscious of Krishna, as the overall objective. This letter also included an outline of the four sessions, which was the time predicted to complete the project. There was a separate explanation for the selected children for their understanding. These invitation letters were accompanied by two forms for the parents to sign; one to give consent for their children to participate and consent for their own participation in the interview night and one form for the children to give participation consent (see Appendix 1). There were no difficulties in accessing and recruiting my participants as I am a teacher at the school and a trusted member of the community. During the project, I was not teaching any of the children that participated and therefore their involvement was voluntary and free from any potential biases related to my teaching role. This separation ensured that the children felt comfortable

and uninfluenced, allowing them to participate genuinely and authentically in the project's activities.

All my participants were independently enthusiastic and committed for the project's duration. I reminded them at the beginning of the second session, after they had some time to consider the project and before we started filming, that they could withdraw at any time but none of them showed any reluctance to continue. I included this option on the consent form making it clear that involvement was voluntary and that there was no expectation that they would participate. All the participants and their families approved of being videoed, and although I had planned alternate ways to present their story, such as a voice recording with pictures, they were all happy to video themselves.

#### *Context and setting.*

Although I am a teacher at the school, I chose to conduct my research separately from the school for several reasons. Firstly, my own home provided a focused and intimate research environment and gave me flexibility to organise the sessions around the children's extra-curricular activities without also having to consider school or temple timings. Secondly, by keeping the project small and focused I was able to concentrate on a group of participants whose responses I believed would be sincere, contemplative, and enthusiastic.

A final reason for keeping my sample small and set at home rather than investigating within the context of a class project is that according to Judd and Davidson (2023), people are more likely to engage with the subject matter when working in small groups (up to six people) than large ones. When individuals work in small groups, their participation becomes more meaningful and individually relevant to the activity or conversation (Judd & Davidson, 2023).

Table 1 Description of Groups

<u>Group One</u>	<u>Group Two</u>	<u>Group Three</u>
Nandini (girl, aged twelve).	Ishaan (boy, aged eleven)	Govinda (boy, aged thirteen)
Susan (girl, aged eleven)	Bhanu (boy, aged eleven)	
Ganga (girl, aged ten)		

Table 2 – Detailed Description of Actions within the Study

	Group One (girls)	Group Two (boys)	<u>Govinda</u>
Session One	I presented the task. After some discussion, the girls decided to do a documentary and planned who they would interview.	I presented the task. The boys immediately decided to do a documentary and planned who they would interview.	I presented the task. <u>Govinda</u> wanted to tell a story, but didn't decide on a story.
Session Two	The girls conducted and filmed interviews at the temple.	The boys conducted and filmed interviews around the farm and at the temple.	<u>Govinda</u> selected a story and planned the storyboard.
Session three	The girls filmed the remainder of the interviews and planned the introduction drama to be filmed next session at my home.	The boys filmed the remainder of their interviews.	<u>Govinda</u> narrated the story while I filmed him and then he began searching for and saving images online.
Session Four	The girls filmed their drama and uploaded the footage ready for editing. We also uploaded footage from their home interviews, sent on email from their parent's phones.	The boys filmed their news item introduction and selected music.	<u>Govinda</u> refilmed the narrative on landscape, uploaded the footage and began editing the images and creating the soundtrack.
Session Five	Edited footage and selected the soundtrack.	Edited the footage.	Finished editing images and sound effects with narration and music.

Session Six	Focus Group Interview amalgamated with Video Presentation Evening
Session Seven	I interviewed Nandini, Susan, Ishaan and Govinda separately after the presentation evening.

*Overview of the Intervention and Data Gathering.*

The intervention in this study aimed to enhance students' engagement with their cultural heritage through digital presentation tools. The project was implemented in a private home, in a rural Hare Krishna community, over six weeks. The specific intervention steps included (see Tables 2 and 3):

*Table 3 Overview of the Intervention*

Initial session – Clarification of the Task.	An introductory session was held to explain the project's purpose and discuss the task.
A series of weekly sessions to collect footage.	Over three weeks the students filmed interviews of community members. Govinda filmed himself telling the story.
Editing.	The students edited the footage incorporating elements of their cultural heritage
Presentation Evening	The final digital stories were presented at a community evening, allowing students to share their work with peers, parents, and community members.

Data was collected using a qualitative approach to capture rich and detailed data. The data gathering methods included (see Table 4):

*Table 1 Data Collection Methods*

Observations.	Observations were conducted during the sessions to document student participation, engagement, and interaction with the task, the digital tools and each other.
Interviews.	Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants to gain deeper insights into their experiences and perceptions of the intervention. These were recorded.

Digital Artifacts.	The digital stories created by the students were collected and analyzed to assess the depth and authenticity of cultural content.
Focus Group.	A focus group interview was conducted with the participant's parents and some community members during the presentation evening to discuss the research topic and gather feedback on the project. This was recorded.
Post- Intervention Interviews	Post-intervention interviews were held with student participants to discuss their overall experiences and gather further feedback on the project.

*Task explanation for the children and sequence of events.*

In the first session the children were given the following task:

*Task – Create a digital presentation, (it could be a video, a power-point, an e-book, a digital magazine or a digital story combining multimedia elements like audio, video and images, or an animation), that presents something about the Hare Krishna culture, that you would share with others. You can collaborate as a group or individually. Prepare to present your project in four weeks during a presentation evening with your parents and family members.*

I met with the students separately because I had only two phones and one laptop with the editing suite uploaded. With the time we had, to regularly meet with three groups was practical. The three girls were friends, in the same class at school (Nandini, Susan and Ganga). The two boys, (Ishaan and Bhanu) were also in the same class at school and Govinda was a little older, at high school. Each group came to my house separately, and I explained

the task: to create a digital presentation that delves into some aspect of Hare Krishna culture, which they would subsequently share with others.

For the first session with Ishaan and Bhanu, my plan was to introduce the project, have a kirtan session (singing), discuss a familiar pastime, and explore how it could be retold using digital media. This plan was flexible, allowing for adjustments based on the boys' ideas. I also prepared examples of digital presentations for them to choose from. However, the boys came up with their own idea during the session. They wanted to interview community members and create a video news item. They quickly decided on questions and how to present the video, demonstrating their enthusiasm and creativity. Since the research focused on cultural engagement via digital technology and the boys were already engaged, I adapted to their idea instead of keeping to my original plan. Although the session unfolded differently, the purpose was fulfilled, and we were ready for the challenge ahead.

The girls, much like the boys, were actively involved in temple activities and had strong ties to the Hare Krishna culture. Learning from the boys' session, I adapted my plan and offered the girls various project options, such as storytelling, dance, interviews, and drama. Surprisingly, they also chose to conduct interviews with devotees, with Nandini suggesting focusing on how devotees came to Krishna consciousness. They quickly organized their ideas and discussed their feelings about their community and identity. We scheduled future sessions that accommodated their other activities. To streamline the process, each girl decided to interview their parents individually using their parents' phones, saving time and effort in coordinating interviews with other devotees.

Govinda was quiet, compared to the other groups, and took some time to decide on an idea. However, he expressed an interest in storytelling, after which I provided him with some story ideas. He chose one of the stories I suggested and began planning how to retell it. I wanted to be sure that the story he selected was what he wanted to do and encouraged him to

think about his options. However, he was determined to work on the one he selected. I printed out the story and he began planning the presentation, including narration, cutaways to pictures, sound effects, and music. Govinda's creativity and focus were evident throughout the project, as he was committed to making it as good as possible.

I had initially planned three sessions with each group, including Govinda. Both groups of students interviewed devotees in a range of contexts on the farm, which included the cowshed, the rose gardens, the temple room and the temple kitchen. Between the two groups, and aside from their parents, they interviewed two singers, a garland maker, three cowherds, a flower picker, a temple cook, a festival caterer, the person who buys the vegetables and one of the temple priests. Interestingly, both groups independently decided to incorporate drama into their videos, showing another synchronicity in their ideas. Flick (2022) cautions researchers about the importance of careful planning in educational technology research, considering time, resources, and capabilities. It took three weeks to complete the filming process, and we faced challenges, such as re-filming Govinda's story due to a technical issue. This delay meant that we couldn't start editing the footage until the fourth week.

As we began editing, I realised we would run out of time. The presentation night had been set, we were working with one computer and the children had extra-curricular commitments also. As our planned sessions concluded, the children still needed to complete the soundtracks. They selected the music, and I assisted with the remaining editing. However, Govinda was determined to complete his story independently. He attended additional sessions, and despite his video not being as perfect as he desired for the final viewing, it was a commendable effort and well-received during the final viewing.

### *Posting on Social Media – The Next Step.*

Although students posting their videos on social media platforms was not part of my study, I hoped that the participants would eventually upload them on the internet for public viewing. Some parents were concerned about their children's extensive engagement on social media and although the girls' prior engagement with social media had provided useful reference points as they considered how to make their presentations good, it was a topic to discuss at the group interview.

### *A chance for the children to construct their own learning.*

The task was intentionally broad to allow the children a sense of freedom in their choices. This concept of freedom within structured parameters emerged as a key aspect during the data analysis, aligning with constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1929). While my original plan included more brainstorming and cultural input at the first session, the children expressed clear ideas during the session. I facilitated their creativity and autonomy from the outset, and as Flick (2022) emphasises, a well-structured qualitative design “includes anticipating what will be important during the data collection, for example, how situations might develop differently and how to focus the research on the topic and research question of the study” (p10). As the aim of the research was to explore how video presentations can be effectively utilised to engage Hare Krishna children in exploring, understanding, and sharing their cultural heritage, it felt natural to follow the direction of their own ideas. This aligns with Vygotsky's (1929) emphasis on learner-centred, culturally relevant education.

### **Data collection methods.**

I used three data collection methods; I videoed the children discussing and planning their projects and made field notes as I later watched the recordings. I conducted semi-

structured one-to-one interviews with the children which revealed how they perceived and interacted with digital tools about cultural enquiry. I also facilitated a focus group interview with the students and their parents. One student, Bhanu, went on holiday just before the presentation evening. Altogether, there were five students, one member of the community, and seven parents who attended the focus group interview.

### *Observations*

After the children were given the task both groups engaged in rich discussion as they decided what to do. I captured their plans on video which I later watched and transcribed. Observations are fundamental in qualitative research as they offer direct insights into human behavior, attitudes, and interactions. By observing subjects in their natural environment or during specific activities, researchers can gather rich, detailed data that may not be easily captured through other methods (Becker, 1968; as cited by Ginor, 1970). This approach allowed for a holistic understanding of the children as they engaged with the task. I was able to consider the community context under study, the nonverbal cues as they planned as a group and real-time responses which gave me insights into how they were thinking, feeling, and behaving in the moment.

### *Semi-structured interviews and the probing method.*

I chose semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method to delve into the participants' reflections on the project and explore their ideas. These interviews, as noted by DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006), offer flexibility and depth, allowing for rich, content-specific data to emerge during dialogue. Unlike structured interviews, they enable the researcher to collect detailed descriptions and are common in qualitative research. For each interview, lasting around 30 minutes, I aimed to create a relaxed atmosphere for open

reflection, especially with shy participants like Govinda, and used probing techniques to stimulate deeper thinking and meaningful responses (Robinson, 2023). This approach, combined with open-ended questions and follow-up probes, facilitated the children to think critically and reflectively so that I could gather a clearer understanding of the participants' experiences within the study (See Appendix 2). I employed similar techniques during the focus group interview, to encourage the participants and the parents to share their thoughts enabling me to collect meaningful and rich data. (Robinson, 2023).

### *The Focus group interview*

A focus group interview is slightly different to a regular group interview in that it is designed to explore specific topics or issues in depth. It is more structured and the interaction between participants is often the primary focus (Kruger, 1988). The focus group interview was conducted between each viewing of the videos. I wanted to gather diverse perspectives which I felt would emerge as the parents listened to each other and reflected on their own views. Although some of my parents were shy, they were all intelligent, independent thinkers with many years of experience in practicing Krishna consciousness and studying the scriptures. The context of the interview aligned with the principles of the Hare Krishna movement that values a confidential disclosure of thoughts and a discussion of a point from different angles (Bhaktivedanta Swami, 1975). The parents contributed their views about the principles of using technology within the Hare Krishna movement which included challenges and concerns they had about their children engaging with social media (see Appendix 2).

Whatever the focus of a qualitative study, the basic research question needs to be sufficiently focused, although for interviewing purposes five to ten more specific questions are recommended to delve more deeply into various aspects of the research issue (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, (2006) describe the iterative nature of

the qualitative research process in which preliminary data analysis coincides with data collection which often results in altering questions as the investigators learn more about the subject. This happened in my study where informal discussions with parents during the study inspired me to adjust the questions, I had initially planned for the final focus group interview. Parents were concerned about the impact of social media exposure on their children, and this needed to be addressed. Initially, the projects would be prepared for sharing on social media, meaning perceived risks due to social media engagement might be an issue for parents. I wanted to understand what the group of parents felt about social media to determine where we might go with the projects the children created. The interviewer should be prepared to depart from the planned itinerary during the interview because digressions can be productive as they follow the participant's concerns and knowledge (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, (2006).

*Table 5 – Description of Participants in the Focus Group Interview.*

<u>Children</u>	<u>Parents</u>
Nandini	Damodar – Susan's father
Susan	Veda – Susan's mother
Ganga	Nitai – Ganga's father
Ishaan	Yaso – Ishaan's father
Govinda	Krishna – Ishaan's mother
Radha (Community member)	Gauranga – Govinda's Dad
	Yamuna – Gauranga's mother

The children's responses at the group interview were reserved and brief whereas at the individual interview they were more expressive and detailed. They tended to speak on their inspiration and freely describe what happened for them. DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006) note that group interviews don't necessarily allow for an effective collection of data from multiple individuals at one time. The group discussion was mainly led by Yaso and

Damodar, who contributed reflective insights without needing prompting. While other parents were reserved, they still offered valuable contributions. DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, (2006) encourage researchers to observe group dynamics and interactions to ensure that the richest and most valuable data has been retrieved. During the meal afterwards I circulated the guests and targeted those parents who were less forthcoming in their responses during the group discussion, but who had contributed valuable insights. This was to gain a clearer understanding of their individual views and experiences. (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

### **Data Analysis**

Once I had completed my interviews and transcribed the data, (including the data from the Focus Group Interview), the next step involved analyzing the gathered information to derive meaningful insights and findings. The data analysis process followed a structured approach to ensure accuracy and reliability in the interpretation of results. Firstly, I placed each piece of data under a heading or sub-heading to make groups of comments that related to each other. I then discarded points that were irrelevant to the study, using the research questions to guide and filter this process. I organised the remaining data into themes that seemed to group around categories and workable solutions to my research question. The themes were organized systematically based on key variables and categories relevant to the research objectives.

As my study employed qualitative data collecting techniques, such as interview transcripts and field notes (observations of each session which I recorded as sound files), the data then underwent thematic analysis. Thematic analysis (TA) is described by Terry, Hayfield, Clarke and Braun, (2017) as “suitable to analyse data from traditional face to face data collection methods such as interviews and focus groups ... rich and complex data on given topics are the crown jewels of qualitative research allowing for deep and nuanced insights” (p.22). These insights are gathered via a six-phase process of analysis, which

involved familiarizing and coding the data, developing themes, reviewing and defining the themes and then producing the report (Terry et al, 2017). I therefore identified recurring themes, patterns, and meaningful insights by working across a set of similar questions that I asked the participants, and then across the wider set of responses which included the responses from the focus group interview. These also involved participants responding from each other's responses. I analyzed these and grouped them together until I had six distinct thematic categories. I then compared and assessed the identified themes with the literature review. This iterative process enhanced the comprehensiveness and richness of my study's findings, enabling me to develop the exploration of the research questions and objectives.

The findings from the data analysis were then interpreted in relation to the research questions and objectives so that I could formulate meaningful conclusions. The interpretation phase involved synthesizing the qualitative findings, drawing connections, and generating insights that addressed the research aims. I then used the literature that I had reviewed to inform my conclusions. Although some of the data overlapped between themes and some themes had corresponding aspects, (for example attitudes towards technology both contributed to the 'intrinsic motivation' theme and the 'purposeful use of technology' theme), I was able to collect conclusive and dynamic findings that contributed to a rigorous discussion. Overall, the data analysis process was systematic, comprehensive, and aimed at uncovering meaningful insights that contributed to answering the research questions and achieving the study's objectives.

### **Ethical Practice.**

Working with digital technology amidst ethnic or cultural communities such as ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) necessitates addressing ethical considerations, such as informed consent, cultural sensitivity, and data sovereignty.

Addressing digital colonialism in contemporary society means exploring the implications of

digital dominance in the Global South, where US-owned tech giants wield considerable influence (Kwet, 2018). This domination brings forth potential consequences such as economic dependencies, resource extraction, and threats to local industries and governance. It is crucial to examine the ethical dimensions of using technology for education and cultural preservation, ensuring that vulnerable communities are not financially exploited and that their traditions retain their importance, rather than being subordinated to the economic interests of multinational corporations. This underscores the importance of respecting community protocols and knowledge systems. I gained ethical consent from the University of Waikato's Division of Education Research Ethics Committee (DEREC) (see Appendix 3). I outlined my procedures in the application including the time period and commitments required to ensure a respectful and transparent process for all participants involved in the study. I also used simple technology available to us.

#### *Access to Participants and informed consent.*

I informed the participants of their freedom to withdraw simply, briefly and clearly, both in the consent letters given at the beginning of the project and just before the second session (see Appendix 1). I also explained to them during the interviews that they did not have to answer any questions, neither did they have to contribute to the group discussion, which was important as two of my participants were shy. I interviewed them after the group discussion where they felt happy to share their reflections and thoughts on a one-to-one basis. Because of the nature of a group interview it is not possible for a group member to withdraw data after the interview occurs, given that comments build on each other. Participants were told this in the information sheet.

*Ethical principles considered during the focus group interview.*

During the viewing event of the children's movies, the focus group interview was conducted to discuss the integration of culture with digital technology. There were several ethical considerations pertinent in this scenario. Firstly, I needed to safeguard the privacy of participants by anonymizing their responses and ensuring that any shared information would not be traced back to them individually. I was attentive to cultural sensitivity, ensuring discussions were framed and conducted respectfully and without any form of coercion. Children are especially vulnerable when involved as research subjects due to their limited social power (Vaughn, 1996). Based on the ethical guidelines of various professional organizations such as the American Psychological Association and the Council for Exceptional Children, it is recommended that researchers treat children with the same level of respect and empathy afforded to adults, with the overarching principle being to avoid causing harm (Vaughn, 1996). This typically involves reducing stressful situations during research activities. Achieving this requires evaluating the research environment and procedures from the perspective of the child participant and acknowledging the significance of informed consent. The consent forms at the beginning of the project, informal discussions during the project and the focus group interview served as an opportunity for me to clarify concerns with parents as guardians of my participants and Hare Krishna practitioners on any cultural issues or concerns as well as observe that the children felt safe and secure.

*Security of Data.*

I recorded the interview night and transcribed the material. I understood that I was obliged to keep all material generated from the research for five years and created a folder in my documents to save the research for that period on my terabyte. I ensured that all non-

identifying material that was generated from this research such as the interview transcripts were stored safely in my password protected computer and that they would be available for academic examination, challenge, or peer review as per the University's Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations 2008. Identifying data such as consent forms and film footage were also securely stored in my password protected computer which is also consistent with agreements made under section 9(4)(a) of these regulations. The responsibility for data storage lies with the department or other equivalent academic unit for staff members.

#### *Anonymity/Confidentiality*

I ensured my research participants' identities were as protected as possible by using pseudonyms, adhering to best practices outlined by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) and Wiles (2012). However, because the project was conducted in a group context, I could not guarantee anonymity as participants knew each other. They were asked not to disclose the names of other participants to others, following ethical guidelines suggested by Punch (2013). When drafting the thesis, I used coded identities or pseudonyms for individuals to keep them as unidentifiable as possible.

I ensured that the data that people shared with me was not available to anyone else unless they were named as research participants or my research supervisors. I informed my participants that I would be using their data for authoring my thesis and that all data would be kept in my password protected computer. Although I would be using pseudonyms to protect the identity of my participants, any quotes that I included in my thesis would no longer be confidential once they were reported in the project. I ensured that each participant was informed about this on the consent form.

This study sought to construct a sturdy bridge between digital technology and the cultural heritage of Hare Krishna children. It aimed to explore how digital technology can enhance their cultural learning, and develop guidelines for its effective integration with cultural inquiry projects. My research questions revolved around how digital tools can aid in identifying and sharing cultural knowledge to fortify the children's sense of identity; to enable children to contribute to cultural heritage commemoration through making and sharing presentations and to bridge centuries-old knowledge and practices within a contemporary context.

## **Chapter Four – Findings.**

This chapter presents the findings of my project, highlighting key themes and patterns from observations, interviews, and the focus group interview. The data, provided by student participants, their parents, and other community members at the evening presentation, are supported by direct quotes to ensure clarity and depth. The findings are organized thematically into several sections:

Theme One: Children's enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation from the project's start.

Theme Two: Students' practical yet nonchalant attitudes towards technology.

Theme Three: Children's collaboration throughout the project.

Theme Four: Parents' perspectives and concerns about technology use, particularly smartphones and social media.

Theme Five: Hare Krishna community's views on presenting culture through digital technology.

### **Theme One: Intrinsic Motivation.**

Upon the project's start, the students were immediately and actively engaged with the task, displaying a readiness and enthusiasm that suggested they intuitively understood what they had been asked to do. I anticipated that the participants would be eager to use the phone and editing suite. However, they showed immediate enthusiasm for exploring an aspect of their culture instead. While I provided some initial ideas on how they might use the technology, their disinterest towards the presence of the phone and laptop indicated a notable level of intrinsic motivation.

*The children were easily inspired to participate.*

As the girls considered how to share insights about their culture, Nandini expressed a keen interest in learning about the diverse paths individuals take to join the Hare Krishna Movement. She states, "[Compared to] how I became a Hare Krishna, I was just born one, but I still love to hear how people went from having a normal material world life to going to that." She articulated her curiosity about others' journeys and received positive responses from the other girls, prompting discussions about their own experiences within the community. Nandini's curiosity to explore the stories of others is indicative of the general enthusiasm and readiness of the children to participate meaningfully in the project.

Two of the participants, Ishaan and Bhanu, demonstrated their enthusiasm and proactive approach to the project by immediately deciding on a clear plan. They chose to conduct interviews with various devotees residing on the farm, focusing on three specific questions: "What is your service?", "Why do you do that service?", and "How do you feel when you do that service?" They dedicated the rest of the first session to selecting their interviewees. Despite my suggestion to consider their options and brainstorm additional ideas, Ishaan insisted on finalizing the interviewees that day, stating, "No, we just want to decide today who we are going to interview." Bhanu agreed wholeheartedly. Both Ishaan and Bhanu were enthusiastic and motivated, showing a determination to take ownership of their project and connect with other community members. They showed no initial interest, however, in connecting with the technology. For the first session, Govinda was more reserved but contemplative, thinking about what he was going to do. Govinda is quiet by nature and did not speak much during the study. His participation was wholehearted, however, as he remained focused on the task, inspired to create something culturally meaningful.

As the girls were excited to begin the project, I sought to understand what was inspiring them. As Susan shared her connection to the Hare Krishna community, she revealed a deep sense of belonging and fulfillment. "I like to have a community around me because if I didn't have my culture, I would feel much more lost than I would now." She felt happy and supported by her friends and she knew they understood her. She liked being with them and felt like she belonged. She also highlighted the warmth and inclusivity within her community, stating, "I have all my friends and they know what I'm talking about 'cause they're also Hare Krishnas. I feel ... happy and loved in a culture where everyone's really nice." Susan's profound sense of security and self-satisfaction indicated an intrinsic motivation to embrace an investigative project centered on her own culture.

Ganga also emphasized the comfort and safety she experienced within her community, highlighting the reassurance derived from close acquaintances. Nandini echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the enduring friendships and shared experiences that enrich her life. She reflected, "There's people here at this temple that I have grown up with and been with my whole life ... We've watched each other grow up and our parents are all great friends." The girls were excited, and the energy they applied to the task indicated they were intrinsically motivated to create something interesting and meaningful. Allowing the girls time to express their emotions during the first brainstorming session seemed to give them a vision of their identity and a sense of confidence that I wanted them to explore and develop. Nandini, however, immediately engaged with the idea of sharing her culture with others. When I asked her what it was that connected her to the task, she replied, "Because it was about Hare Krishna and I'm a Hare Krishna, so it was pretty easy for me to understand [what we were doing.]" Her developed sense of identity within her Hare Krishna culture made it easy for her to understand and connect with the project. The children were each enthused and

motivated to begin. It wasn't the technology that was motivating them however, as they neither looked at nor discussed using the technology in the first session.

*The broadening of perspectives.*

The girls planned to interview various community members, including their parents, to find out what inspired them to join the Hare Krishna Movement. They were prompt to arrive at the sessions and were keen to get filming. They organised meeting the interviewees and enjoyed acting as young journalists out to get the best stories they could. As they began their interviews, they found themselves increasingly inspired by the diverse narratives they collected. The interviewees revealed a variety of reasons for joining the movement which included the delicious food, the singing and the clean environment in the temple (see Appendix 4).

The boys interviewed nine more devotees on the farm, in different settings which included the temple room, the temple kitchen, the flower gardens and one interview online. They asked the same questions in a simple, methodical and endearing way. They spent some time organising what order they would compile the interviews in, when they got to editing their footage, and were especially interested in choosing the right music for the soundtrack. As Susan observed, the boys' film was a creative inside view of what type of activities are performed in the movement and how the devotees felt about their devotional services.

This mutual exchange of perspectives and experiences that happened at the presentation evening, contributed to the overall learning process, giving the children further opportunities to deepen their connection to their cultural heritage. Susan's acknowledgement of how the other presentations broadened her perspectives suggests that she found the content meaningful, thought-provoking and was a source of inspiration for her. This is an example of

collaboration and sharing, that broadened perspectives. The girls exhibited a continuous and refreshing introspective mood that appeared to fuel their intrinsic motivation, surpassing the need for external incentives provided by the technology.

I observed in the videos how the girls listened to the stories, while they politely honoured and respected their interviewee's contributions. Following the project's completion, Nandini reflected on how it facilitated a deeper connection with her culture. "I think it helped to see other people's points of view and how they found Krishna consciousness, how they came and how they thought," she explained. Engaging with their narratives enriched her understanding of her cultural roots.

#### *An Indian Folktale*

Govinda selected and edited a story about a scholar and a boatman, emphasizing their contrasting knowledge. Govinda enjoyed telling the story and added interesting visuals and sound effects throughout the editing process. I asked him about the meaning of the story and he said, "I know what the meaning is." I asked him if he would like to add an explanation at the end of the narration, or leave it for the audience to come to. He said he would like to add an explanation and after some thought came up with a sentence. I suggested he could incorporate the east meets west idea which he did (see Appendix 5).

#### *A nonchalance towards technology.*

The students displayed focus and engagement throughout the project, without being distracted by other technological engagements, which I was expecting, as I knew them all to be technology enthusiasts at school. Govinda demonstrated unwavering commitment, persisting through multiple retakes while filming his story, encountering camera glitches, and needing a complete reshoot due to a phone orientation issue. The girls also worked

enthusiastically each time they came together, even creating and filming a drama to show how they developed the idea to interview their parents and other community members. Both Govinda and the girls displayed determination; Govinda in the face of frustrations and the girls in the face of fun. They remained committed to completing their presentations without major distractions.

After the project was completed, Nandini reflected on how the technology component was less intriguing to her because she was already familiar with it. She states, “The technology part ... but I’m pretty used to it, so it was more interesting to [find out] the answers to the questions we were asking people.” For Nandini, the technology aspect was almost incidental, and her enthusiasm for exploring cultural aspects was stronger. In relation to defining her culture, Nandini stated that the concept of sharing each other’s stories was “exactly” her culture. “It was really exciting to know [about their experiences] and to be with other devotees.” Nandini was excited and motivated by being connected with other members of her community, compared to an indifferent attitude towards technology.

### **Theme Two: The children’s perspectives on technology**

My findings revealed that the children perceived digital technology as an integral and normative aspect of contemporary life, recognizing its ubiquitous presence and inherent practicality. They demonstrated a clear understanding of how digital tools can facilitate interesting presentations, acknowledging both its benefits and potential drawbacks. Their commitment to quality and understanding of audience preferences highlighted a balanced approach to using technology as a practical and impactful tool for communication.

*Digital technology is normal and practical.*

In their interactions with technology, Nandini and Susan offered contrasting yet complementary perspectives. Nandini, with a sense of familiarity and ease, viewed technology as a universally used tool in contemporary society. She remarked, "It felt pretty normal because everybody uses technology and it's something everybody knows about ... so it was pretty easy." Susan adopted a balanced perspective acknowledging both the benefits and potential drawbacks of digital technology. Despite recognizing concerns such as addiction and "negative effects on the brain" she emphasized its practicality and convenience in facilitating communication and outreach within their community. "I like it because it's really easy to get things around when you have technology," she said, highlighting the efficiency of instant communication in today's age. "If you were to text someone you can just text them or call them, otherwise if you didn't have technology, you'd have to wait to see them or drive to their house or whatever." She pointed out the immediacy of using technology in sharing information with others, particularly through online platforms. "... you can post things and people can see it immediately."

Govinda emphasized the pervasive influence of technology in modern life, observing, "Almost everything we make up is technology." Fifteen-year-old Radha, a community member who contributed to the group interview on the night of the presentations and was also a member of the Hare Krishna movement since birth, affirmed the effectiveness of technology as a means of disseminating cultural information to a broad audience. "This generation is into technology and everything so it's an efficient way to get a message across to everyone." Radha considered technology to be a resource that is practical and can be utilised.

*Aesthetics and quality is important when making videos.*

The children demonstrated a discerning approach in utilizing digital technology to achieve their project objectives. In reflecting on what makes a good video Nandini shared her preferences for good makeup tutorial videos, discussing key elements such as good camera angles and lighting, “Like the camera angles are not blurry [and] when it’s lighter and brighter it's better because when you’re in a dark place it's just not very entertaining ... when it's light, it makes it more aesthetic.” Nandini also identified the importance of video titles to communicate the purpose of the video. “Videos start with a writing like ‘My everyday make-up’ or ‘Today we’re going to ...’ that’s what you read and that’s what this video is going to be about.” All participants were eager to incorporate these elements to improve the quality of their interviews. Govinda also mentioned that three important things to consider in making good videos are aesthetics, information, and entertainment value.

The participants' focus remained on exploring and sharing the information they collected, prioritizing their connection with interviewees and in presenting how the interviewees responded to their questions, authentically. I observed that their engagement centred on connecting with and representing their community well, rather than being captivated by the technology itself. When I interviewed Govinda after he completed his presentation, his main reflection was that he wanted the outcome to be “flawless.” This drew me to reflect on how focused he had been to ensure there were no glitches when applying soundtracks to his storytelling.

*Making videos that appeal to the audience.*

Susan was concerned that their presentation was dynamic and interesting to attract people on the internet. “You wanna take videos of more interesting things so people who are

on the internet watching whatever they are watching, they see this, they come across it and they want to see something more about it.” She also emphasized the importance of making content that stands out and grabs attention. “They [should] think ‘this is interesting, I want to look more into it’ instead of something boring that they wouldn’t really care about.”

Susan’s concern that their presentation should reach a broad audience by way of dynamic content points to her commitment to quality.

Nandini also emphasized the need for quick and entertaining content to keep people engaged. “It’s important to make things quicker because people get bored easily when things are too long.” She discussed factors that keep attention on TikTok videos till the end, including intriguing content, appealing visuals, and catchy phrases. “It’s what they say, in the video, so say you’re scrolling and you see something like, ‘how I created a million dollars’ ...it doesn’t even have to be something you like, but just that it catches your attention.”

Nandini highlighted strategies to maintain audience interest and retention, focusing on content relevance and presentation style. This would ensure they had done their presentation to the best of their ability.

Each group carefully chose suitable music tracks to complement their presentations. Nandini articulates the importance of selecting the right music. “There are the trending sounds and the not so trending sounds. So, when you watch a video that has all the trending sounds, that actually catches your attention and, just say you like that song, you’re going to like the video.” Considering the taste of her audience, Nandini demonstrated discernment to select the most suitable soundtrack. The other groups selected music that matched the mood and message of their presentations.

The children's interaction with technology reflects a balanced perspective, recognizing both its practical utility and its potential impact. They perceived technology as a

facilitator or a tool that should be used well and with good discretion. By observing how Nandini had emphasized the importance of making short, entertaining content to keep people's attention, considering how to appeal to her intended audience, I realised how naturally she considered her audience's preferences. Her determination to appeal to her audience demonstrates a clear understanding of the potential of the technology and what are the necessary elements to create impactful content.

### **Theme Three: Exploring Challenges and Dynamics in Student-Led Digital Projects.**

In exploring the dynamics of the students' interaction with technology, it became evident that using digital tools have both enabling and constraining aspects in the creative process. The students displayed a strong cultural identity and a developed understanding of creating quality content. While they were satisfied with the project outcome, they identified the need for more time and better editing skills to enhance their work. Differences in collaboration preferences emerged, highlighting the varied dynamics in student engagement and collaboration.

#### *Navigating Time Constraints*

This sample group of students noted that quality content involves not only essential components such as camera angles, lighting, and music selection but also that effective presentation and editing requires sufficient time to refine their work and pay attention to detail. While the students expressed overall satisfaction with the project outcome, time limitations emerged as a significant challenge. Nandini identified time management and editing proficiency as areas that would have improved the quality of their work. She expressed, "I think having more time and knowing a bit more about editing [would have helped]." In terms of improvement, Susan also identified the need for more time, particularly

in the editing process. "If we had more time we could have put more detail into it." This indicates an enthusiasm to utilise technology to the best of her ability and a recognition of the potential for enhancing the project with additional details and increasing her understanding of the editing phase. Overall, time constraints emerged as a key challenge in ensuring the children's videos were the best they could be.

Govinda's emphasis on making his presentation flawless was evident when he expressed dissatisfaction with the editing of his story due to sound gaps with some visuals. The incident highlighted the necessity of allocating sufficient time for children to be able to complete a digital project to their satisfaction. Because of factors outside of the control of the students, the editing process was rushed with some aspects unfinished, leading to the project's slightly premature conclusion.

#### *Understanding student dynamics and digital collaboration*

The student participants quickly recognized the potential of technology within their project framework. Susan's positive response to her peers' presentations during the evening gathering indicated a willingness to learn from others' creative efforts and emphasized the value of peer inspiration in their creative process. She found the other group's work interesting and believed that exposure to it during the production process could have enhanced her group's project. Susan expressed, "I thought they had some pretty good ideas, and if I had seen that before I started, we could probably have made ours better. I thought theirs was really good."

However, not all participants shared the same sentiment. At a certain point, during the filming, the community leader was available to be interviewed, but Ishaan and Bhanu were absent. With only the girls present, I suggested they conduct the interview on behalf of the boys, which they did. Ishaan, however, expressed reluctance towards using the footage

because he or Bhanu did not conduct the interview themselves. I suggested it could be edited but they resisted it completely. This was a key point to consider; the significance of honoring ownership and autonomy as individuals contribute to a team project. Ishaan and Bhanu's resistance to editing the footage indicates a desire to maintain authenticity and integrity in their work. Notably, they later crafted an impressive introduction for their video, naming it their own production, which also indicated a sense of autonomy and ownership that contributed to the spirit behind their participation.

Govinda also preferred to work independently and showed no inclination towards collaborating with others. This suggests that the factors motivating student engagement and collaboration vary among individuals. While Govinda, Ishaan, and Bhanu exhibited a preference for working independently, the girls demonstrated a propensity for sharing creative input and drawing inspiration from other groups. Despite the understanding that diverse dynamics between students are not related to digital technology or cultural exploration and sharing, they remain crucial considerations in the teaching and learning process. In this research, sensitivity to these issues seemed to be paramount to the children remaining enthusiastic to engage positively.

### **Exploring and engaging with their culture.**

The girls were curious about why people chose to join the path they were born into. After they had conducted the interviews, they asked if they could act out a drama of them as working journalists, discussing around a table what would be their next story. They wrote their own script which provided more evidence as to what inspired them to choose this aspect of their culture to present to others.

Nandini: hey guys! Isn't it really interesting how people found Krishna consciousness? I love to hear how Krishna consciousness advances their lives?

Susan: We could interview devotees and ask them about how they came to be a Hare Krishna! A documentary would be really good.

Ganga: Great idea!

Similarly, when the boys wanted to introduce their presentation as news readers they wanted to tell their viewers what the questions they will be asking the devotees.

Bhanu: Welcome to Balindra Studios. Today we are going to interview some devotees on the farm called New Govardhan at Eungella. What are some of the questions that we are going to be asking them Ishaan?

Ishaan: Today we will be asking them three questions. What is their service on the farm? Why do they do this service and how do they feel when they do this service?

These inquiries originated from the children themselves, reflecting their genuine curiosity and interest in the responses. Both groups showed initiative to conduct interviews and a high level of engagement and participation as they created their drama scripts. This also highlighted their creativity and abilities to collaborate together.

The children's questions and the themes they chose to explore—such as why individuals joined the Hare Krishna movement and how they felt about their service—indicate a deep interest in understanding both the personal and communal aspects of their cultural heritage. The children independently chose the aspects of their culture to investigate and how to present their findings. The girls' focus on the spiritual journey of devotees and the boys' interest in the practical aspects of service on the farm demonstrate different dimensions of their cultural identity and how they relate to their community. Both the girls and boys developed scripts that required them to articulate their thoughts clearly and consider how to effectively communicate their findings to others. The fact that these inquiries and

dramatizations were initiated by the children themselves suggests a personal connection to the subject matter.

#### **Theme Four: Parent’s view of technology - Utility is the principle**

During the discussion evening with parents, various perspectives were expressed regarding the role of technology in exploring and sharing culture within the Hare Krishna Movement. The viewpoints acknowledged both the importance and the doubts or skepticism surrounding the use of technology for these purposes. Historically, leaders of the movement utilized modern inventions for spiritual service. At least two parents discussed this point in depth, while mindfulness, discernment, and moderation were also emphasized.

*Technology should be used purposefully.*

Yaso, Ishaan’s father, initiated the discussion by introducing the concept of 'yukta vairagya,' a principle from ancient Sanskrit teachings that integrates spiritual and material energies through a balanced use of resources, including technology, for spiritual purposes. He pointed out how previous leaders of the Hare Krishna movement utilized modern inventions such as cars and typewriters to disseminate ancient teachings and practices. Yaso provided examples of individuals who had found spiritual insights through digital platforms like YouTube, highlighting technology's potential as a means for deeper understanding. “I heard about an initiated devotee that came to KC [Krishna Consciousness] because of a kirtan [singing Hare Krishna mantras] on YouTube. ... Printing presses and books are technology as well.” He argued that tools like printing presses and books, although technological, have played integral roles in sharing spiritual knowledge in the past. If it serves a higher purpose, Yaso saw no issue with utilizing digital technology also. Nevertheless, he emphasized that the movement's founder, Srila Prabhupada, advocated for a simple lifestyle, emphasizing agrarian principles, and cautioning against excessive dependence on technology. Yaso's

ability to recognize both sides of the issue highlighted his thoughtful approach to the discussion. Overall, Yaso believed that technology should be used purposefully to facilitate spiritual realization.

Damodar echoed Yaso's perspective, acknowledging how technology was utilized by members during the movement's establishment in the West. "In the seventies, they used slideshows to present philosophy, which was considered new technology at the time." Damodar also explored the potential for technology to be misused, likening it to a surgeon's knife. "An example is the surgeon's knife in the surgeon's hand. He can save a life with it, but in the wrong hands it can be misused. That's an issue that's always there. How it's been used and misused. [It] depends on the hands who hold it." He emphasized that effective utilization of technology depended on the qualifications and intentions of the user. Damodar aligned with Srila Prabhupada's guidance to maintain purposefulness and keep the greater mission in focus while employing technology. He concluded by referring to another Sanskrit principle: "life comes from life, 'Aham sarvasya prabhavaḥ,' not from a machine."

*Technology should be used productively.*

Yaso shared his personal experience of using technology for studying, emphasizing the convenience of hyperlinks and multimedia capabilities. "I know for myself I learned Srila Prabhupada's books best using my phone because it hyperlinks between the different sastras, [Vedic texts]. If it's according to a Upanisad you can jump straight to it, memorise it, save it into your notes, make a slideshow, do everything on the spot, record a thought." Yaso is the father of Ishaan, and it is interesting to observe how industrious Yaso's approach to using technology is when engaging with cultural activities. Ishaan was also decisive and technologically innovative which may have come either from an inherited nature or through observing his own father utilizing digital apps and programs.

Yamuna, Govinda's mother, acknowledged the dual nature of technology, recognizing its usefulness in connecting with family overseas but also acknowledging the risk of time-wasting, particularly among children. Yamuna stated, "Technology is good and bad. I come from another country far away from my family. So, without this technology I cannot contact them. So good and bad there." Commenting on potential benefits of technology in inspiring and engaging children in cultural pursuits, Yamuna remarked that her son enjoyed the project. She expressed satisfaction in Govinda's exploration of his culture, noting his enthusiasm. When asked if she would share his project with relatives overseas, she responded affirmatively, stating, 'Definitely!'"

#### *Parental Concerns about Smartphones*

The study used smartphones for capturing and storing footage, leading to discussions about children's engagement with social media and its captivating, often addictive nature. I decided to probe further into the concerns being raised since I envisioned that the presentations the children made would eventually be posted onto one or more social media platforms. I wanted to know whether the concerns the parents had might be mitigated or bypassed by a project that involved participatory contributions to the online environment.

Nitai, Ganga's dad elaborated on the issue of excessive screentime. "With children, if left unchecked, they can spend the entire day just watching, they don't care. But if they are given time limits and taught how to use technology responsibly, it's not 100 percent good, it's both." Nitai's comment points to the importance of education surrounding how to use technology, to ensure the children do not waste valuable time. He expanded on the necessity of active engagement with technology rather than passive consumption through social media. "If you don't know how to use it then you are just wasting your time. Time is very valuable. This technology takes time and merely sitting idle with technology is unproductive. You're

just sitting there. You need to know how to use it.” Nitai stressed the issue of time wastage among children, highlighting the importance of educating them to use technology productively.

Damodar, Susan’s father, shared concerns regarding the prevalent use of smartphones, noting how social media platforms captivate minds and influence behaviour. “They’re designed in such a way ... so their minds get captured and they’re scrolling.” Radha and Nitai both agreed with Damodar, acknowledging the gratifying effects of smartphones that keep individuals engrossed in watching digital content for extended periods. Nitai expressed a concern about his eldest son's screen habits, noting, “The next thing you know they’re screen addicts... When it comes to children’s brains, [they] are not mature enough, not strong enough to control themselves, to not waste time and do the right thing.” Radha, a fifteen-year-old community member, elaborated on this by describing the cycle of seeking entertaining content, leading to prolonged screen time. “In my case you see a funny video that will make you laugh and then you’re looking for another video that will make you laugh,” to which Nitai added “and then you end up sitting there for three hours.”

Susan, one of my student participants, responded to these comments by suggesting that technology can become addictive for children who experience boredom. She remarked, “It gets addicting [because] kids are bored and it’s something fun to do.” Susan’s perception that technology can become a captivating escape for bored children indicates the need to maintain a balance between its use for recreational purposes and other engaging activities. When I asked Susan what she thought of the project she said it was interesting and fun. “Especially hearing how people came and were attracted to the things that I’ve known all my life.” Susan’s insight points to the foundation of my research project; to explore how the captivating allure of digital technology could be channeled to inspire children to engage with

and share their own culture with others. The parents were undoubtedly concerned about how smartphones were intensifying the desire for instant gratification among the youth, whilst Susan inferred that this could be solved by other engaging activities. This was also my idea.

*Concerns about inappropriate content and other influences.*

Damodar brought attention to the critical issue of children being exposed to inappropriate online content. He emphasized the need for age-appropriate filtering and parental control, stating, "[Children] get subject to content which is not appropriate and you're not seeing what they're seeing and what they are being exposed to." Veda, Damodar's wife and Susan's mother echoed similar concerns, emphasizing the potential psychological harm caused by exposure to inappropriate content: "Children are naturally curious so then they may see things that aren't appropriate for their age psychologically." These concerns underline the challenges faced by parents and caregivers in safeguarding children's digital experiences within the Hare Krishna culture

*Technology Versus Personal Interaction.*

Gauranga, Govinda's father, held a view that digital technology was incongruent with Krishna Consciousness, deeming it impersonal and highlighting the irreplaceable value of personal connections in nurturing spiritual growth. He was skeptical about technology's role in cultural development, stating, "I use technology in my workplace, and I don't think it develops culture. It takes people away. I feel technology can be used... but not so much in [our]daily [spiritual] practices, and not everyone [responds without] personal contact." Gauranga acknowledged technology's utility but emphasized that it could not replace the significance of human interactions.

I asked Ishaan what he thought about Gauranga's point as he was nodding his head while Gauranga was talking. Ishaan agreed with Gauranga, stating that the project could have been done without technology, emphasizing the importance of personal interactions over virtual communication. "I think we can be a bit more personal in real life.... We could have done all this in real life without the technology." This was an interesting reflection coming from a 12-year-old who typically spends a lot of time immersed in gaming. I reflected, however, on his enthusiasm for interviewing and connecting with the devotees during the project which painted a vivid picture of personal interaction surpassing digital engagement. It is interesting however that, after the presentation night, Ishaan expressed to me a desire to set up his own website to present some of the digital animations he has been working on. Ishaan is Yaso's son and seems to have inherited the ability to see something from a variety of angles. Gauranga and Ishaan both represent the view that personal interactions hold greater value and significance than digital or impersonal forms of communication or engagement.

#### **Theme Five: The sharing of knowledge**

I asked the parents, in facilitating projects for the children to inspire them culturally, what did they feel was the essence, or essential aspects of our culture. Parents emphasized that the essence of their culture is sharing knowledge that leads to the natural activities of the soul; singing, dancing and other activities performed within the movement. The children, deeply immersed in the Hare Krishna culture from birth, sought personal connections by interviewing and learning from community members about their motivations and experiences, reflecting a desire for authentic, lived narratives that resonate with their own lives and values. The children's projects showcased a keen awareness of the potential in integrating technology with spiritual knowledge on a person to person level.

## *Personal Connections*

The children's lives have been filled with singing, dancing, feasting, drama, temple worship, pilgrimage and other temple and travelling festivals from birth. The books that substantiate the Hare Krishna movement are filled with philosophy and stories that the children would have heard and reheard many times, during festivals, at school and at home programmes. What the children had to do was to 'present something about the Hare Krishna culture, that you would share with others.' While Govinda did select a story to adapt to a digital platform, the other five participants wanted to hear from members of the community whom they liked or revered. The boys wanted to interview devotees engaged in various areas around the farm and temple. They selected older youth who led the kirtans, (congregational singing) at festivals, an older devotee who milked and looked after the cows; a flower garland maker; a flower picker, a temple cook, (Bhanu's mother), the temple president, the leaders of both the single girl's and boy's asrams, the person who buys the vegetables and another devotee who organises the food tents at music festivals. It was exciting for them, and they were interested to hear what service they did, why they did it and how they felt when they were doing their service. The girls interviewed family members and other devotees inquiring as to why they joined the movement. The children wanted to get into the hearts of the community members they had selected to interview. It was also interesting that the main questions they crafted for the interviews started with, 'why?' The children's curiosity and eagerness to understand the deeper motivations and feelings of their community members reflect a preference for personal stories and interviews over traditional narratives. This indicates a desire for authentic, lived experiences that resonate with their own lives. This highlights how personal and practical aspects to their culture were valued by these participants.

*Integrating technology and culture for satisfaction of the soul.*

Yaso reflected on the technological advancements used by the parivrajakacarya, [a Sanskrit term meaning someone who is experienced to act as an example for others.] “In terms of technology...the parivrajakacarya used airplanes, typewriters, cars and microphones.” Yaso then reiterated his initial opinion that he offered at the beginning of the discussion. “My understanding is yukta vairagya. What is brahminical culture? It’s passing on divya jnana [transcendental knowledge] isn’t it? It's not about wearing unsewn cloth or wooden shoes.” His point was that if technology was assisting in the transmission of knowledge and enlightening others, then using technology for that ends, rather than sticking fast to traditional ways, is appropriate.

Gauranga highlighted Srila Prabhupada's (the movement’s founder) intention to impart spiritual knowledge, emphasising that while digital means could be employed, they should be used with discretion. He remarked on the pervasive online marketing focused on material knowledge, which is primarily about acquiring more possessions. “There is a strong influence there. They spend a lot of money researching how to captivate people for material knowledge...which is about accumulating more and more. [Our] brahminical culture is about simplifying life and temporary bodily needs so that we can learn about the eternal soul. Cultivating spiritual knowledge gives happiness and satisfaction to the soul. Information about the soul is what’s missing in society. If technology can simplify things, then great, but I don’t think it does.”

This view underscores the importance of discerning between spiritual and material knowledge when sharing information. The children demonstrated a keen awareness of this distinction through their thoughtful interview questions, such as, "Why do you do that

service?" and "How do you feel when you are doing that service?" Their inquiries reflected a deep curiosity and capacity for reflection, aiming to understand motivation and experience. Both the interviews conducted by the boys' and girls' groups, and Govinda's storytelling, centered on the transmission of spiritual knowledge, indicating the children's sensitivity to a higher purpose. Gauranga later acknowledged that the children's projects effectively shared spiritual knowledge, which he found inspiring. Gauranga appreciated how the devotees that the children interviewed all seemed to love what they were doing (see Appendix 4). When Bhanu asked a temple priest why he did his service, the devotee elaborated on why he loves his service at the temple. "Well it says within the vedic scriptures, our vaisnava tradition, that when one engages in transcendental loving service to Krishna one awakens their love for Godhead within ones heart and feels blissful, happy, joyful, yeah, it's amazing."

### **The Presentation Night – Sharing our Culture using Digital Technology.**

The children were excited to present their projects at the presentation evening. "It will be interesting to see what the others have done" commented Susan. After the viewing, the parents responded positively, saying that they loved the videos, that their children had 'engaged positively,' and 'had fun.' Veda, Susan's mum, remarked that the project displayed a constructive use of technology and helped the children gain a better understanding of their community.

Nandini spontaneously concluded the evening discussion by sharing her positive experience as a participant throughout the project, expressing that she had learned a lot and was intrigued by the different stories shared by participants that evening. She remarked, "It was fun, and many of them had unique stories." In a later, one-to-one interview, Nandini was grateful for the insights gained through the project and shared how the experience deepened

her understanding of the diverse paths that led members of her community to embrace the Hare Krishna lifestyle, stating, "It helped me understand the different ways people take to become a part of the Hare Krishna community." Nandini's comments reflect how she felt her mind had been broadened by the experience.

The children presented their interpretations of what it means to integrate technology with cultural exploration to connect with and share their unique Hare Krishna culture. They revealed a desire or a need to connect personally with others and were attuned to their own curiosity about the motivations and experiences of community members. My participants unveiled an important aspect to their enquiry, uncovering the 'why' behind cultural life. An outcome that would align with the Hare Krishna culture is that creating and contributing an offering like their videos should have provided an inner satisfaction to the soul. The children all commented that they felt happy doing the project. The digital sharing of their culture proved to be an enriching experience, highlighting the potential of technology to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of their spiritual and cultural heritage.

## **Chapter Five – Discussion.**

The key finding from the previous chapter is that during the initial session, the children immediately engaged with the cultural aspects of the project without acknowledging the technology. Their apparent disregard for the extrinsic motivator I had established suggests that they were already intrinsically motivated to explore and share their cultural heritage. This chapter explores why this happened along with other relevant findings, such as, the children's desire to connect with their community; their understanding of effective presentation techniques and how this facilitated their engagement with the task; instructional strategies that can enhance children's engagement with both cultural and technological elements; and finally how purposeful use of technology can enable digital innovations to facilitate the upliftment of children and connect them to their culture. Before we discuss these findings, however, we will discuss how the children's efforts could potentially contribute to global change.

### **Intangible Cultural Heritage: The Sharing of Knowledge.**

The children created drama, collected stories, edited footage and selected music, to make their presentations informative and lively. They contemplated their identity within their community and enjoyed social collaboration to present their realisations and creativity to others. An outcome that fulfills the ideals of constructivist learning (Vygotsky, 1929), these are also ingredients for contributing to global cultural richness (Stefano, 2021; Orr, 2023). Stefano's examination of sustainable practices for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage according to UNESCO's 2003 goals include transmitting and celebrating language, stories, music, and other cultural expressions in digital spaces highlighting the dynamic interaction between tradition and technology in preserving culture. The children working together to

celebrate their community in this way, reflects Stefano's (2021) emphasis that celebrating cultural diversity is most effective when communities are engaged in the process.

Nandini expressed how, by the process of interviewing members and hearing how they had been attracted to the movement, provided her with a deeper understanding of how and why individuals in her community embrace the Hare Krishna lifestyle. At the project's completion, she reflected on how it facilitated a deeper connection with her culture. "It helped to see other people's points of view and how they found Krishna consciousness, how they came and how they thought," she explained. This aligns with Vygotsky's (1929) insights that socio-cultural environments lend meaning to discovery learning. Filming these stories, editing the footage and watching the final product gave the girls more opportunity to reflect on what had been shared with them. This positive experience highlights the potential of digital technology broadening children's understanding of their cultural heritage.

India's texts were systematically undermined during the Mogul and British invasions, leading many Indians to devalue their own cultural knowledge (Dasa, 1980). By recognizing the cultural depth and significance of these heritage texts, educators and parents of Hare Krishna children can appreciate the value of incorporating such teachings into modern educational frameworks. My study suggests that children themselves are responsive to such adaptations and are willing to use modern technology within this traditional context. Prabhupada had established several schools to fulfil the purpose of disseminating this knowledge to the children of his movement. A similar pattern has evolved, however, as to what was documented by Pavić, Mijušković, & Žager (2022), whereby national government curriculums impact on delivering the original knowledge given by Prabhupada. An observation with my study was that there was space for the children to find what was significant for them within the context of traditional stories and practices. It was mentioned at

my interview night how technological apps had assisted one of the parents in studying Prabhupada's books. My participants used smartphone cameras and editing apps to create multimedia presentations; another option to engage children in a dynamic and meaningful way, ensuring that their own ancient wisdom is not lost again.

### **Intrinsic Motivation is key to successful integration.**

While digital technology served as an initial hook or motivator for the children to participate in my research project, their prompt engagement and enthusiasm indicated an intrinsic motivation to inquire about, explore and share aspects of their cultural heritage. Deci and Ryan's (1985) theory of self-determination define intrinsic motivation as that which arises from within an individual, driven by internal rewards and personal satisfaction rather than external factors. While the children demonstrated readiness and confidence in utilising technology as a tool to record and share their experiences, they were more focused on discussing or connecting with their community. This implies that the children were naturally motivated by a desire to connect with their community or that they had a pre-existing deeper sense of belonging or identity connected to their culture that drove their engagement. Prasad et al.'s (2018) study to determine how to effectively integrate digital technology into a learning environment found that cultural relevance created an intrinsic motivation to engage with the technology. Creating opportunities for cultural exploration, meaningful discussions, and community connections aligns with Vygotsky's (1929) sociocultural theory that when children are provided with meaningful cultural experiences and opportunities to explore and share their heritage, they are likely to exhibit intrinsic motivation and deep engagement. My findings indicated that internal factors such as curiosity, personal interest, and a desire to connect with others outweighed the incentives to engage with the project on the merits and opportunities provided by the technology alone.

### *Cultural belonging*

Susan's statement about feeling lost without her culture and how having a community around her makes her feel supported and understood points to a deep sense of belonging, fulfillment, and security within her Hare Krishna community. An intrinsic motivation to participate in a project that explored her culture may have arisen because her connection to the community was robust, and she felt understood, happy, and supported by her friends. According to Deci and Ryan (1985) this sense of feeling supported and connected to others, is one of the major factors that creates intrinsic motivation. The characteristic of relatedness as was evident at the project's beginning, highlights the deep impact of cultural belonging on children's well-being and confidence, which may play a crucial role in an inner motivation for students to engage in projects centred on exploring cultural heritage (Deci and Ryan, 1985).

When Nandini expressed her interest in exploring the experiences of others, stating, "Compared to how I became a Hare Krishna, I was just born one, but I still love to hear how people went from having a normal material world life to going to that," her curiosity and readiness to engage meaningfully in hearing other's stories highlights a mature intrinsic desire that motivated her throughout the project. According to Milano et al (2023), this readiness to exchange stories and experiences indicate a strong connection to one's cultural identity, contributing significantly to confidence and active participation in projects related to one's own culture (Milano et al, 2023). Although this was primarily a digital technology project the girls were not motivated by working with the technology. It was possibly due to a mature sense of identity within the movement and their curiosity to know more about what inspired devotees who were not devotees from birth like them, to become Hare Krishna devotees.

Nandini's nonchalance toward technology supports the premise that the enthusiasm exhibited by the students was primarily intrinsic rather than technology induced. When I asked Nandini what she thought the role of technology could be in connecting her with her culture she manifested an indifference by saying "everybody uses technology and it's something everybody knows about." Observing Susan and Nandini's deeper interest in hearing others' narratives, regarding their journey to Krishna consciousness, substantiate Bruner's (2006) insights that learning, centred on cultural relevance, and which facilitates personal connections with others is meaningful and conducive to children's learning. Nandini and Susan's neutral attitudes towards technology reflects Balas' (2021) view that technology is a tool to be engaged in supporting higher principles of learning.

*Autonomy, Personal Interest and Narrative.*

Ishaan and Bhanu's enthusiasm to conduct interviews demonstrated their intrinsic motivation and individuality. Their decision to hear from community members about their services at the temple and on the farm, reveals a personal interest to interact with others and find new knowledge that fulfills their interest in their community (Vygotsky, 1929). Aspects of Vygotsky's theory posits that knowledge is constructed through social interaction and collaboration. Meaningful learning was viewed by Vygotsky (1929) as a collaborative process where individuals co-construct knowledge within their cultural contexts. The boy's interest in retelling other's stories, how others within their community feel about what they do connects with Bruner (2006), who explicitly discussed the role of narrative in constructing reality and fostering cultural connections. Bruner argued that creating narrative helps individuals make sense of their experiences and that it is fundamental in the development of human cognition and cultural understanding (Bruner, 2006).

I suggested to the boys they might like to explore various options, but they remained steadfast in their idea, exhibiting a determination to bring their vision to life. Intrinsic motivation thrives on a sense of independence and autonomy that matches personal interests, values, and objectives (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Bhanu's eagerness to interview festival singers and Ishaan's enthusiasm to interview devotees working on the farm reveals their personal interests which was captured on video and shared with others via a documentary. Digital narrative platforms, such as documentaries, offer a means to preserve and share cultural heritage and cultural expression (Grierson, 1971; Nicholls, 1991). These platforms provided the children with an opportunity to share a cultural collection of perspectives based on their own interests. It seemed that by allowing them to follow their personal interest, an intrinsic motivation to engage deeply with the project arose. This aligns with Deci and Ryan's (1985) statement, "When the educational environment provides optimal challenges, rich sources of stimulation and a context of autonomy this motivational wellspring of learning is likely to flourish" (Deci and Ryan, 1985, pg. 245). Bou-Habib and Osaretin's (2015) also assert that granting children the freedom to nurture their own ideas in discovery projects not only respects their autonomy but also nurtures their cultural and creative development. Furthermore, the documentary medium gave them a vehicle to collect and represent the information they collected on film. Grierson (1970) described the genre as a "creative treatment of actuality," emphasizing its role in depicting real-life cultural contexts.

*The teacher's role in facilitating connection with the community.*

As my participants spoke affectionately about their community in the first session and then chose to interview members about their cultural activities, lifestyle, and services within the movement, I observed how the children were enthused to connect with and learn from their community members. Montessori (2005) emphasizes free choice in learning, allowing

children more autonomy in decision-making, including what to work on, how long to work, and with whom to collaborate. This approach empowers children to explore their autonomy and pursue their genuine interests within the broad boundaries set by the task (Montessori, 2005; Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Ishaan and Bhanu were fixed on what they wanted to do and who they wanted to interview, and they responded with commitment when given the freedom to explore these avenues. Balas (2021) acknowledges the role of the teacher as a guide and mentor, emphasizing that the teacher's framing of a project must include a clear and purposeful intention (Balas, 2021). Other theorists maintain that the structure of the lesson or unit should be communicated within an atmosphere of freedom and spontaneity, maintaining the students' intrinsic motivation. (Montessori, 2005; Zajda, Davidovitch, and Majhanovich, 2023; Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

#### *Autonomy and Competence.*

Govinda's aspiration to work independently demonstrated both his autonomy and his inner motivation to produce a high-quality video. After recording the story he had selected, he insisted on editing independently to ensure the final product would be both 'entertaining' and 'flawless.' This aligns with Grandison, Flint's and Jamison's (2023) research that sharing knowledge can affirm one's cultural identity. Through Govinda's commitment to the task this study highlighted how in making videos there is much scope for children to express individuality and share their commitment to their culture. Creating digital videos can motivate individuals to express their creativity uniquely, facilitating self-discovery and personal expression (Grandison et al., 2023). Govinda's determination to work independently and to the best of his ability was an expression of his individuality that was integral to his motivation to produce an excellent quality project.

Govinda's sense of autonomy illustrates how digital mediums can facilitate students to take control of their learning, fostering ownership and pride in their work. Govinda's experience highlights the potential of digital storytelling as a teaching tool. By letting students engage deeply with content and present it creatively, digital storytelling can enhance engagement, critical thinking, and communication skills (Jenkins, 2006; Rheingold, 2005). The implications for educational practice are significant. Encouraging students to undertake independent projects can promote higher levels of engagement and motivation. Providing access to digital tools and platforms, along with guidance and support, can facilitate this process, enabling students to explore and express their individuality in meaningful ways. Govinda's commitment suggests that integrating digital storytelling into the curriculum can enrich learning experiences and foster a deeper connection to cultural and personal identity.

In conclusion, the children's enthusiasm for using technology was secondary to their desire for community connection and discovery, indicating a pre-existing sense of belonging and cultural appreciation. The children's nonchalant attitude to using technology in the project and enthusiasm to interview devotees about why they joined the movement and what their services were on the farm and in the temple, highlighted their motivation as intrinsically connected to the culture and community they belong to, rather than induced by using the technology. This aligns with Vygotsky's (1929) sociocultural theory, which suggests that providing meaningful opportunities for cultural exploration fosters intrinsic motivation. My findings show that internal factors such as curiosity, personal interest, and autonomy created a sense of connection that outweighed the appeal of technology alone, and that the teacher has an important role in facilitating freedom within structure (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Balas, 2021). Although these theories are significant in understanding how teachers can effectively guide meaningful cultural connections, the scope of technology to provide a dynamic medium for such connections to be made, must be acknowledged.

### **What children already know about technology is key.**

In exploring the children's perceptions of using technologies as part of their learning, several factors addressed by prominent research emerged from my findings. It was interesting to observe that children considered technology normal and not threatening to their wellbeing. Each child was also proficient in working with digital tools and had a developed level of competence. This will be discussed in the following section underpinned by Prensky's (2001) research.

*Technology is normal and easy to use.*

When questioning the students about the prevailing presence of technology in today's world Nandini viewed technology as commonplace and easy to use while Susan appreciated its convenience in communication and outreach within their community. Their attitude that technology is unproblematic, and a part of daily life reflects the principles behind Prensky's (2001) 'digital natives' metaphor. I observed how Govinda adapted easily to the editing programme, despite it being new technology for him and how all the participants used the cameras on the phones with second-nature ease and familiarity. It did seem that digital natives possess an intuitive understanding and proficiency with digital tools due to early exposure (Prensky's (2001)). The children effortlessly assumed the role of experts, often resolving any technological challenges we faced with accuracy and precision.

After determining what they wanted to do the children were excited to discuss how they were going to reach a broad and diverse audience. This was when they drew on prior knowledge, taking elements of online presentations that they considered attractive and effective, considering how to utilise such elements to create dynamic content and appeal to a wide-ranging audience. How my participants drew on their prior knowledge also aligned with

Meager and Macormack's (2019) film making project with the children in Belgium. Just as they reflected on the observational film's they made; how to improve and extract lessons from their films, my participant's abilities to discuss the attributes of good quality video editing was not only palpable and vibrant but also showcased their collaboration skills and prior knowledge as they envisioned how their creations would appeal to the vast online audience.

The children's interaction with technology reflects a balanced perspective, recognizing its practical utility while also acknowledging its potential impact. They perceived technology as a facilitator or a tool that should be used well and with good discretion. Guiding children to apply what they know to maximise their creative and learning potential aligns with the constructivist theories of Piaget (1950) and Vygotsky, (1929) who advocate for facilitating the prior knowledge of children to enhance learning outcomes. Drawing from their prior knowledge, the children took elements from online platforms they were familiar with, such as TikTok, to make attractive videos. Encouraging children to demonstrate their ability to leverage existing knowledge and skills in new contexts is a concept supported by Piaget's (1950) emphasis on cognitive development through schema building and Vygotsky's (2020) sociocultural/constructivist theory of learning through interaction. Integrating these scholars' perspectives, the children's creative use of technology highlights the effectiveness of acknowledging and actualizing prior knowledge in engaging technology within culturally explorative projects.

*Considering variables.*

Although all my participants found digital technology natural and usable, because my sample was small it does not necessarily represent the attitude or competency of children in general. Although it suggests that the current generation accepts technology as easy and

usable, there are likely to be many children who do not find technology easy to work with. I note this in consideration of Gallardo-Echenique et al.'s (2016) challenge to Prensky's digital native/migrant theory. While my findings support Prensky's (2001) view that digital natives have such profound exposure to digitalization that engaging with it has become second-hand, variables such as less accessibility or exposure to technology or just a general lack of digital skills must be acknowledged (Gallardo-Echenique, Marqués-Molíás, Bullen, and Strijbos, 2016). These variables suggest that not all children experience the same ease or confidence with digital tools, which may affect their ability to engage effectively in technology-integrated projects. This would be a necessary consideration in determining the effectiveness of using digital technology in cultural exploration, but it is an issue that I personally did not face in my study. If one or more of my participants had struggled with using technology, then this would impact on this discussion. However, my findings align with Prensky's (2001) perspective and metaphor that the current generation's (digital natives) interactions with technology are likely to be instinctive due to exposure to digital environments from an early age.

*Empowering creativity: What makes a good video.*

The students demonstrated a keen awareness of what dynamic aspects of video editing would appeal to their potential audience. This aligns with Buckingham's (2020) research on details to consider when contemplating audience and purpose in creating effective digital content. Susan highlighted the importance of making videos concise to maintain viewer interest. Nandini also pointed out factors that keep attention on TikTok videos till the end, including intriguing content, appealing visuals, and catchy phrases. Govinda emphasised the importance of aesthetics and Nandini detailed the importance of good camera angles, proper lighting, and overall visual appeal, as well as the role of video titles in clearly communicating

the video's purpose. Ishaan and Bhanu were particular in choosing the right music tracks to complement their video, considering what their intended audience would love. Jenkins (2006) highlights the necessity for media creators to understand their audience to craft compelling narratives that will resonate with their audience. Additionally, Buckingham (2020) underscores the critical role of purpose in media production, suggesting that clarity of intent can significantly enhance the impact and reach of digital content. I encouraged the students to be as creative as they liked as they considered how each technique might enhance their interviewees' stories. However, they did not need much encouragement. The children were very much in their element, enthused and knowledgeable of the aspects of good videos. This implies that the selected medium was effective in connecting the children with the task's purpose.

*Social media may have a positive role to play.*

During the interview night, parents expressed concerns that overuse of digital technology can deprive children of natural life experiences such as outdoor activities, encounters with nature, or face-to-face interactions. While Turkle's (2005) studies discuss the impact of technology on children's social, emotional, and physical wellbeing, Twenge's (2019) research suggests that moderate social media use, between one and two hours per day, is associated with positive well-being outcomes. Ten-year-old Susan quietly responded to the parent's concerns, saying "It gets addicting because kids are bored, and it's something fun to do." Low levels of well-being associated with limited social media use may stem from a lack of alternative engagement, and encouraging children to actively contribute to social media platforms could potentially improve their well-being (Twenge, 2019; Jenkins, 2006). This research is significant in reassuring parents or educators that social media may have a meaningful place in engaging children with sharing their culture. If the time, structure and freedom has been given for children to explore their culture, they may have something

substantial to add to the social media environment. The role social media may have in using digital technology to share cultural heritage will be discussed further in a later section.

### **The Role of the Teacher**

Key insights surfaced from this study, while considering the pivotal role of the teacher. Educators assigning ample time for children to complete their projects is essential to ensure students engage with the technology and attain their learning objectives (Hattie, 2013; Pavić, Mijušković, & Žag, 2022). Prioritizing group collaboration and respecting children's autonomy, also surfaced as critical aspects (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Montessori, 1905). These factors are integral to a teacher's competence and experience as a facilitator of a child's learning journey and, in this context, a child's cultural enrichment.

#### *Managing time with digital learning tools.*

Educators allocating sufficient time for children to complete their projects enables students to immerse themselves fully in the digital tools available to them, exploring their functionalities, experimenting with creative ideas, and focusing on the details of the project (Pavić, Mijušković, & Žag, 2022). When questioned about what they felt could have been better in the project, three participants said they wished they had more time to improve the editing. Susan commented, "If we had more time, we could have put more detail into it." Dewey's (1986) theory of active engagement points to where true learning and growth occur. Allowing ample time for students to refine their work, pay attention to detail, and strive for excellence contributes to their sense of fulfillment and accomplishment (Dewey, 1986). Papert's vision of using technology in a constructive experiential way was that they not just passively use the technology but actively engage with it, improve their skills, and develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Hattie (2013) writes that just as expert chess

players who can make fast moves still tend to take time to ensure good moves, an expert teacher takes careful time to maintain a constructive focus on learning through monitoring and feedback, including sensible and concise explanations about how to proceed. Because digital tasks involve that extra hardware element, teachers need to ensure that there is sufficient time to navigate the digital tools and still achieve these learning outcomes.

By expressing a wish for more time, the students displayed a desire to perform as digital contributors, to the best of their ability. Govinda had also expressed that his editing should have been “flawless.” Hattie (2013) outlines a teacher’s responsibility to acknowledge their student’s commitment to learning. He states, “Students value being helped to achieve independence and autonomy and appreciate teachers who can connect the new with the familiar” (p 31). Research discusses the importance of having sufficient education in using digital tools (Pavić, Mijušković, & Žag, 2022). Scholars point out that while knowledge about how to use a digital tool is readily available online, the space for both the teachers and the students to access that knowledge is limited (Prensky, 2012, Greenhow et al, 2016). Prensky (2012) and Greenhow et al. (2016) discuss the importance of a digital education teacher acting as a facilitator and instructor. Allowing young people time to access technical knowledge in a supervised classroom setting, while aligning the subject matter with educational or cultural objectives, appears to be a balanced solution. Csikszentmihalyi (2014) also attributes the concept of flow to having a clear objective.

Technology should ideally simplify life, save time, and solve problems (Pavić, Mijušković, & Žager, 2022). I taught the children basic commands and assisted with advanced editing tasks. Sharing cultural stories or making an interview presentation to share with the community should be a seamless process with surmountable challenges from conception to completion. If the technology is complicated, it can discourage students and detract from the

project's purpose (Colognesi & Hanin, 2024). When a parent in my focus group interview likened technology to a knife, he meant that in the wrong hands, it can lead to harm. "Wrong hands" could also mean inexperienced hands. Teachers need to learn how to use the programmes efficiently and adapt their lessons to the digital format. Teachers do not want to place technology in the hands of children who are not knowledgeable enough to utilize the tools efficiently and purposefully (Pavić, Mijušković, & Žag, 2022). The primary obstacles in Pavić, Mijušković, & Žager's (2022) study of European teachers' difficulties in utilising digital tools, was an overload of existing materials and no time to apply them to digital tasks. Time was also needed for creating new materials compatible with the tools. Ideally, a teacher using technology to plan culturally enriching learning opportunities should have enough flexibility and time frames in the curriculum to use the technology effectively and with sufficient expertise.

#### *Respecting Autonomy.*

Unlike a typical classroom setting where groups interact regularly, the groups in my study met separately throughout the project. The only exception was during the viewing night. The fact that Bhanu, Ishaan, and Govinda were all guarded about their ideas can ensure that concepts are fully developed before seeking input or feedback from others. Sharing ideas prematurely may lead to misinterpretation or the dilution of ideas whereas maintaining control over the creative process can result in a more satisfying outcome. Bou-Habib and Olsaretti (2015) argue for greater recognition and respect for the distinctive autonomy of children, asserting that even young children possess sufficient cognitive capacities to understand, adopt, and remain committed to projects and activities they value. By allowing children the space to independently develop their ideas, we honor their autonomy and support their cognitive and creative growth (Bou-Habib and Olsaretti, 2015).

Giving the children a clear task at the beginning of the project was paramount to developing a sense of autonomy and flow (Csikszentmihalyi (2014). Csikszentmihalyi (2014) outlines how absorbed engagement, which he describes as flow activities begins with a clear goal so that ambiguity and conflict are replaced with undivided focus. My participants were undividedly focused and appeared to be experiencing the exhilaration of flow, that Csikszentmihalyi (2014) attributes to a well-developed sense of autonomy that empowers the self and contributes to flow activities.

### **Purposeful Use of Technology**

The Hare Krishna tradition encourages the purposeful use of material resources in the service of spiritual goals, fostering a balanced integration of material and spiritual life. Yaso highlighted this twice during the interview night, by supporting the use of digital technology for cultural exploration but stressing the higher principle of self-sufficiency and agrarian values. His son Ishaan and Ishaan's friend Bhanu utilized a smartphone to capture engaging and informative interviews about farm activities, including cow protection, milk production, gardening, cooking with farm produce, and temple life. While my participants made simple videos using smartphones to share recollections and stories, Kenderdine's projects and research study also involved the use of technology to capture and present immersive and interactive experiences of cultural heritage sites. As Kenderdine states, "Digital technology offers unprecedented opportunities to engage with cultural heritage in dynamic and transformative ways" (Kenderdine, 2016).

The boys' film vividly illustrated the simple yet fulfilling community life, highlighting the natural gifts available to humanity. The children's purposeful use of digital tools to present a traditional lifestyle was a vibrant blend of rural culture and modern technology that created an engaging east meets west dynamic. Although my study used

simple digital tools, the project increased the participants' awareness of cultural life, enhancing knowledge and interest in cultural heritage, even with minimal resources and basic techniques. The potential of digital storytelling and mobile technologies as powerful educational tools was found to significantly enhance learning experiences by providing methods of capturing and sharing information. Kenderdine's innovative use of digital tools extends beyond basic video creation, as she creates immersive experiences to profoundly engage participants with cultural heritage (Kenderdine, 2013). Her studies exemplify the potential pathways for future applications, but highlight how the participatory methods employed in my study could serve as foundational steps toward empowering children to explore more sophisticated forms of cultural expression and preservation through digital mediums.

The children's videos were vivid accounts of cultural activities that can be considered local initiatives contributing to the revival of intangible cultural heritage. As the children document what they would like to share with others, they are also safeguarding traditions and practices transmitted from generation to generation (UNESCO, 2003). Although this was not emphasised to the children over the course of the project, this study shows how younger generations can potentially contribute to the revival of intangible cultural heritage (Blake and Lixinski, 2020). The smartphone was the instrument they used to promote and express their cultural awareness and sharing their cultural heritage was the purpose.

Furthermore, as they collaborated with each other and interviewed others to learn more, they pooled knowledge, skills, and perspectives, presenting it colorfully through the digital medium. This aligns with Piaget's (1950) focus on the significance of collaborative understanding to ensure cultural authenticity, achieved through a collective approach involving multiple voices, perspectives, and interactions. Acting as journalists, their

innocence and simplicity were endearing and impactful. Vygotsky (1929) highlights collaboration as crucial for combining knowledge, skills, and perspectives, leading to more comprehensive and impactful outcomes. Susan and Nandini reflected on what they learned from seeing others' projects, showing how project-based learning gave them an opportunity to internalize new knowledge, skills, and ways of thinking (Papert, 1980). This will be elaborated on in the next section.

### **Using Digital Technology and exploring their culture**

Observing the children working on their projects—interviewing, discussing, and planning their documentaries and stories with vitality, pointed to a purposeful use of digital tools which facilitated a holistic connection nourishing the children on multiple levels. By learning why people embraced the Hare Krishna path, the girls gained insights into the cultural and spiritual motivations that shape their community. For the boys, understanding the personal experiences and emotions associated with various services on the farm offered a practical and emotional connection to their heritage (Bruner, 2006; Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Through these interviews, the children not only explored the diverse ways people come to and engage with their faith, but they also deepened their own cultural and spiritual connections by seeing how others live out the principles and practices they have grown up with.

Furthermore, choosing to conduct interviews and dramatize their process of coming to that decision, demonstrates a high level of engagement and active participation (Dewey, 1986). The creative collaboration that happened as they acted out their dramas as journalists and news readers made the learning process more enjoyable and also reinforced their understanding through role-playing and scriptwriting (Vygotsky, 1929). It also highlights their genuine curiosity and investment in understanding their culture (Montessori, 1905). This

was facilitated through the video medium showing how digital technology facilitated the exploration of their culture in a dynamic way (Papert, 1980). The children's questions showed a mature approach to cultural inquiry, going beyond surface-level facts to explore motivations and emotional connections (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Their independence in choosing these questions reflected principles of Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-directed learning theories. The autonomy that was reflected in their decisions and their active and dramatic ideas to present the answers to those questions highlights the effectiveness of experiential and inquiry-based learning methods in fostering a deeper connection to their heritage (Dewey, 1986).

Making a documentary and a news show not only enhanced the children's communication skills but also helped them to process and internalize the information they gathered (Nicholls, 1991; Grierson, 1971). Nicolls (1991) explains how various styles of documentaries can capture and represent cultural realities. The children explored why Hare Krishna devotees sing, cook, take care of the cows, pick flowers and make garlands. They learned about what is required to keep cows healthy to provide milk for the temple and the community, how the consciousness of the cook goes into the food and the various aspects of catering at festivals. The children chose dynamic members of the community engaged in services that they were interested in. Grierson (1971) emphasised the role of documentary as a creative genre to depict real-life cultural contexts. It was Susan who explained in their drama "a documentary would be a good idea," and it was through their documentary that they learned how the food, the incense, the singing and the cleanliness of the temple had all contributed to attracting devotees to join the movement. Nandini commented on how the project had broadened her perspectives, which Li and Shein (2022) attribute to the purpose of engaging digital technology in educational contexts, for cultural revival. My observation was

that these new realities had been obtained through a creative genre alongside a structured, flexible learning opportunity.

The digital video medium gave a place for them to think critically as they planned and actualised their project and cultivated a deeper appreciation for the cultural diversity within their Hare Krishna community. Therefore, these findings highlight how digital technology via the medium of making videos, facilitate the children's active engagement, creativity, and deepening connection to their cultural heritage. Their self-directed and collaborative efforts as they utilised the tools, not only enhanced their understanding of their culture but also developed essential skills that will benefit them in various aspects of their lives.

### **Smartphones, Social Media and Personal Relationships.**

The several concerns expressed by the parents on the interview night regarding the impact of smartphone use were specifically around engagement with social media. Some parents were apprehensive that their children were addicted to browsing social media platforms while others were concerned about the psychological impact of exposure to age-inappropriate content. It is important to discuss these concerns since posting the student's work on social media was a follow-up step to this study. Also, these are current global concerns concerning children and digital technology in education, acknowledged by researchers around the world (Boyd 2014; Gells-Watnick, 2022). In 2022, a poll conducted by the Pew Research centre showed that half of parents of teens (46%) say they are extremely or very worried that their teen's use of social media could lead to them being exposed to explicit content (Gells-Watnick, 2022).

Susan contributed her view that although social media may be addictive, overuse is due to boredom. One study by Boyd (2014) examined why youth engage with social media. Her findings suggest that young people use social media to create social spaces that may not

be available to them in the physical world. Due to various circumstances, children often lack real-world social avenues, which drives them to seek connections online (Boyd, 2014).

Boyd's research struck me as most interesting in connection to the findings of my study as her studies indicate that teens and tweens (children between the ages of nine to twelve years old), are drawn to technology not for its own sake, but because it allows them to create a social life for themselves. She found that their interest in gadgets stems not from a rapport with technology but from their desire for friendship and social interaction. This misconception leads educators to overestimate students' abilities with technology, assuming their proficiency in social media translates to abilities to navigate technology seamlessly in the classroom (Boyd, 2014). Boyd's research substantiates earlier points made in this chapter concerning the importance of purposeful and rigorous planning when using digital technology in educational or cultural contexts, to ensure its use helps not hinders the learning process.

One underscoring concept in my study was that the dangers of digital isolation could be addressed by purposefully using the technology to engage children with their own culture, so they may collaborate, create content, and share relevant aspects of their culture with others. Both Papert (1980), and Alivizatou-Barakou, et al. (2017) advocate for the constructive integration of technology into project-based educational curricula, allowing children access to the digital world from an early age to nurture and develop their capabilities, enabling them to achieve remarkable feats in the future (Papert, 1980, Alivizatou-Barakou et al, 2017). Although my participants acknowledged the advantages of technology, studies indicate that concerned observers fear that the younger generation is losing touch with a more organic or analog way of life (Turkle, 2005). This potential tension between the perceived benefits of technological advancements and potential drawbacks

related to an increasingly digitized lifestyle, highlights the need to utilise digital technology in a purposeful way.

Addressing some of the potential harms is a necessary consideration when planning digital projects with children. Students' adept at social media may lack the ability to use technology for non-social purposes and will struggle with filtering inappropriate content (Boyd, 2014). Boyd (2014) challenges the digital native concept discussed earlier, instead referring to children as digital “naives” who mostly have little idea how to navigate the internet safely on their own. Buckingham (2020) stresses the need for critical discernment to guide children towards appropriate content while other researchers warn about the negative health effects of overuse, advocating the need for balance and mindful engagement (Carrier, 2018; Turkle, 2012). Education and awareness campaigns on cyber abuse, media literacy, and responsible online behavior are useful for both parents and children (Turkle, 2012). Educators should consider how to support children and parents with these concerns.

In my study, Yaso recalled a story from the 1980s where a community advisor told a concerned parent, "Don't worry, your children will turn out exactly like you," underscoring the powerful role of parental influence. Parents who express concern about their children being on social media but are avid users themselves, communicate mixed messages to their children. In the group interview Gauranga pointed out that the anonymity of online content creators makes digital engagements feel impersonal compared to face-to-face interactions. Ishaan agreed with Gauranga, stating that their project could have been done without technology, emphasizing the importance of personal interactions over virtual communication. Turkle (2012) emphasizes that digital use should be approached mindfully to preserve genuine human connections.

My study showed that children thrive in a supervised but creatively free setting where they have the opportunity to discuss and actualise their ideas. This approach allows children to explore and share their cultural heritage in a social environment that encourages creativity and engagement. This aligns with Meager's 'Film in Schools' project (2019) which showed how guiding children to create their own media based on what they observed in their surroundings resulted in active participation within their cultural and social environments. It can be concluded from their study, and mine, that integrating technology in a balanced, mindful, and critically guided manner can foster cultural engagement and creativity in children while mitigating potential harms.

### **Telling Their Stories.**

While transferring the interviews and stories into digital presentations, my participants easily adapted the usual aspects of storytelling to a digital context. Buckingham's (2020) writings offer guidelines on how to effectively integrate digital tools into sharing cultural stories. His conclusion that even young children can edit, write and videotape their own news productions thinking about language, sequencing, imagery, and audience aligns with my findings and supports the idea that the scope for children to share traditional knowledge in a digital format is broad and doable. The children interviewed parents and other active members of the community to understand what inspired them to be in the Hare Krishna movement, providing rich content for the children to process and present in their unique ways. Govinda's individuality emerged during the editing as he selected images and other elements according to his vision of the story he was presenting. Turkle's (2005) work on the impact of digital technology on self and identity explores how interactions in digital spaces can lead to a deeper understanding of oneself and others. Dewey's (1986) theories on experiential learning emphasize the importance of active involvement in the learning process.

The scope for presenting through editing video shows the potential for digital technology to make the process of learning and sharing culture dynamic, active and creative.

Each of my participants had a clear vision of what they needed to do to create engaging and dynamic videos, with specific ideas and plans to make their content interesting, compelling, and impactful. In Meager's study, participants learned from their mistakes through daily review sessions, and demonstrated how digital technology can facilitate individuals to authentically express their perspectives, explore cultural themes and develop skills with the tools they are using (Meager, 2019). My participants exhibited a similar level of focus and determination, driven by a desire to produce dynamic and engaging content. The boys remained attentive throughout the project, with Govinda persisting through multiple retakes, while the girls displayed enthusiasm in creating and filming interviews and drama scenes.

Susan's approach went beyond acknowledging the varied preferences and expectations of online viewers. She also delved into crafting content that resonates with their interests, thus encouraging continued engagement. In pursuit of reaching a diverse online audience, Susan poses, 'You wanna take videos of more interesting things so people who are on the internet watching whatever they are watching, they see this, they come across it and they want to see something more about it.' Contemplating the potential of a vast outreach spectrum and considering how to reach such an audience reflects a developed understanding of the power of technology in communicating and disseminating information. Greenhow et al (2016), emphasize the importance of tailoring communication to the audience, highlighting how humans naturally adjust various aspects of speech, including accent, pitch, syntax, and vocabulary, to better connect with others. Expanding this ability to new norms, such as social media, and considering how to arouse interest in one's subject matter means understanding

the full scope of one's audience and captivating their attention effectively. Susan was not only recognizing the diverse preferences and expectations of online viewers but was also exhibiting a great awareness of their potential online audience, expressing excitement to reach as many people as they can with their message. By recognizing the nuances of audience engagement, such as what content they find compelling and how they prefer to interact, Susan aimed to create a more immersive and rewarding experience for her audience. The research by Greenhow et al. (2016) underscores the importance of tailoring communication strategies to effectively connect with diverse audiences across different platforms, while Susan's approach serves as an example of how understanding audience preferences and crafting engaging content can lead to meaningful and sustained engagement.

During the focus group interview the parents expressed how the essence of the Hare Krishna culture revolves around receiving and sharing traditional knowledge that leads to natural expressions of the soul, such as singing, dancing, compassionate acts, and other cultural values and practices (Dasa, 1980). One parent expressed skepticism about technology's role in creating such tangible interactions which support daily spiritual practice. However, he later noted that the children's projects, that included interviews, drama, and digital storytelling, effectively demonstrated cultural awareness and highlighted the positive use of technology in sharing spiritual knowledge (Grandison, Flint, & Jamieson, 2023). During my observations of children engrossed in their projects—engaging in interviews, discussions, and planning—I could not help but notice the active engagement of their intelligence and the palpable vibrancy surrounding them. This experience affirmed the notion that when individuals are aligned with their purpose, their cognitive faculties operate at their fullest potential, fostering a dynamic and enriched environment (Prabhupada, 1972).

## **Summary of Discussion.**

The discussion of socio-cultural theory was brought to life as the children collaborated with others, constructed meaning and reflected on what they had learned, bringing the knowledge of these great thinkers to a practical reality (Vygotsky, 1929; Bruner, 2006). The children showed a developed understanding of the importance of sharing their culture and recognised that technology could be utilised as an effective tool to achieve that objective. (Papert, 1980; Buckingham, 2020). The role of the teacher is important in ensuring that utilising digital technology in educational contexts remains meaningful through intentional structuring of the curriculum (Hattie, 2013; Balas, 2021). Freedom within the structure is also important as it fosters intrinsic motivation, creativity, engagement, and optimal learning experiences. (Dewey, 1986; Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). As the children explored why people join the Hare Krishna movement, and what inspired devotees to do activities such as singing, cooking, and taking care of the cows they also explored the creative aspects of digital media.

This chapter explored how my findings align with pedagogical theories of cultural discovery learning as well as current discussions among scholars regarding effective use of digital technology in educational contexts. I discussed how dovetailing digital technology with cultural exploration may offer opportunities for children to contribute meaningfully in an increasingly, and sometimes alarmingly, digital world. The final chapter will synthesize the research findings, highlighting implications, recommendations and acknowledging limitations, and will conclude with personal reflections.

## **Chapter Six – Conclusion**

This thesis explored the use of digital technology to support Hare Krishna children in engaging with a cultural exploration project of their choice. As the children participated with enthusiasm; conducting interviews, creating documentaries and sharing insights into their Hare Krishna life, it was demonstrated that digital technology effectively served as a bridge connecting the children to their culture. Furthermore, this research revealed that the children themselves have inner resources that they brought to the project that calls for further investigation.

### **Summary of findings.**

As the participants reflected on their digital and cultural experiences, they engaged in constructive, experiential learning (Vygotsky, 1929; Dewey, 1986). This research allowed children to explore their personal interests facilitating their individuality, competence, and intrinsic motivation (Vygotsky, 1929; Deci & Ryan, 2017). The study showed that the students were engaged and motivated when given a clear and purposeful task and when needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness were met (Deci & Ryan, 2017). These results suggest that structure, clarity, and a conducive environment enable children to experience a sense of flow, leading to effective digital engagement and new understandings of their cultural heritage (Balas, 2021; Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). The initial discussions around the task helped children access their autonomy, leading to effective cultural exploration. Later discussions enabled them to access prior knowledge of the digital tools, implying that freedom within a discovery project allowed the children to use the technology effectively while connecting with, exploring and sharing their culture.

Despite concerns from parents about excessive screen time and potential exposure to inappropriate content online, the structured and purposeful engagement in this study

mitigated these negative impacts. The literature review highlighted risks of isolation associated with technology use (Selwyn, 2010; Turkle, 2012), but this study did not find such issues, suggesting that isolation may stem from unstructured or unsupervised use of technology.

This research demonstrated the effective integration of digital technology with cultural discovery as children filmed interviews in rural settings, blending rural culture with modern tools. The "east meets west" paradigm was evident as they used smartphones and editing suites to celebrate Indian traditions like kirtan (singing), cooking, cow reverence, and temple worship. The digital formats used to present traditional stories and compile personal and historical accounts, provided practical evidence of how digital technology connected children with their Hare Krishna culture. The potential to share their discoveries through digital media may not only enhance global cultural richness (Stefano, 2021; Orr, 2023) but, as this study showed, will allow children to express themselves and connect with their community through a familiar, contemporary medium.

## **Implications**

Digital technology has immense potential to facilitate cultural discovery through exploratory learning (Papert, 1980). However, this potential must be developed through a clear process and purpose guided by the teacher (Balas, 2021; Buckingham, 2020). This project offers guidance for educators planning to use digital technology for cultural inquiry and expression. Children were able to explore their personal interests in the context of their Hare Krishna culture and used technology creatively, to express what they discovered. Insights from this research can inspire educators to encourage children to contribute to global initiatives, highlighting the potential of digital education to foster enhanced engagement with cultural heritage through experiential processes (Stefano, 2021; Kenderdine, 2013; Hou et al., 2022). It can also be expected that children will access their own internal vision and

perspective to a project. This research supports the use of digital tools to facilitate broad cultural exploration but the project's structure, guided by the teacher, plays a crucial role.

### **Recommendations.**

Based on the findings of this study a number of recommendations can be made:

- Facilitating discussion in the first session of a project enables a clear connection with the task, establishes its boundaries and facilitates autonomy within the project.
- Considering the usual time constraints in most educational settings, using digital tools that the children are familiar with is recommended to ensure children can complete their projects to their satisfaction.
- Quality student-led time spent with children may also help address concerns about their exposure to the digital realm.
- Schools could reassure parents, when implementing technology-rich tasks, by communicating the value in using digital technology.

### **Limitations.**

A small sample size meant I was not able to generalise the findings, but left interpretations to the readers themselves. Also, educators within the movement often have students who are not from Hare Krishna devotee families, suggesting that elements of the study, such as communicating cultural parameters, may require further understanding and research involving a broader sample. Time constraints within a Masters study meant I had to compromise the time children needed to complete their projects to the standard they desired.

## **Personal Reflections**

In this study, structure, freedom, purpose, and autonomy contributed to the effective use of digital tools for cultural inquiry. However, there was another aspect of this study that must be highlighted: a unique and tangible aspect that the children brought to the project. It may have been connected to their immediate and intuitive understanding of what to do, but it was a palpable vibrancy and focus which, although I could not see, it was perceivable and the life of the project.

The interpretivist approach employed in this study has enabled understanding to be developed primarily from the perspective of the children. Information has been constructed based on their experiences, interactions and reflections which helped me gain an empathetic understanding of digital technology and culture in their lives. The study provided an opportunity to infuse western theories and innovation with eastern wisdom and practices. The positive impact of enhanced engagement, intrinsic motivation, and a powerful sense of purpose among the children may have been influenced by clear, structural elements but it was certainly an aspect of the children's own inner resources. I hope that future research in this area will explore traditional knowledge, to enhance this robust field of educational discourse.

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## Appendices.

### Appendix 1 – Information Documents and Consent Forms for Participants.

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Eungella, New South Wales

18<sup>th</sup> September, 2023

Dear Parents,

I hope this letter finds you well. As part of my Master's Degree in Education, I am conducting a research project to explore how digital technology can be used to promote traditional knowledge and culture. Specifically, I am focusing on introducing and inspiring children to utilize digital tools to explore and share knowledge relevant to their cultural traditions.

As a member of the ISKCON community in Eungella, I invite you and your child to participate in this project. The study will involve a small group of six children aged 10 to 13 years old. We will craft a lesson based on Vaisnava cultural traditions, including singing, reciting a mantra, and sharing familiar stories from the Sanskrit texts studied at the temple and school.

The children will be asked to retell the selected stories using digital mediums, such as video recordings or podcasts. I will compile these recordings and invite you, your child, and the other participants, along with their parents, to an evening gathering. During this gathering, we will view or listen to the recordings and engage in an informal group interview, discussing the significance of digitally sharing cultural knowledge.

The research will be conducted in four sessions:

- Session One: Hearing the Story (approximately 30 minutes). An elder from the ISKCON community will tell three or four stories, and each child will choose one to retell.
- Session Two: Becoming Familiar with the Story and Deciding How to Retell it (approximately 45 minutes) The children will watch the recordings and read the transcripts to become familiar with the chosen story and decide on their retelling approach.
- Session Three: Retelling the Stories (approximately one hour). The children will individually retell the stories while I record their performances.
- Session Four: Group Viewing and Interview (approximately 2 hours). We will gather with family members and community elders to watch the recorded retellings. Following this, I will conduct the interview.

I assure you that I will take all necessary steps to maintain your and your children's anonymity. However, since the project involves a group setting, complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed. Nevertheless, I will use coded identities or pseudonyms in my thesis to protect everyone's identity.

Rest assured that any data shared with me will remain confidential and will only be accessible to research participants and supervisors. All raw data will be stored securely in my password-protected computer. Although quotes from the study may be included in my thesis, your identity will remain protected through the use of pseudonyms.

Please be aware that the children can withdraw from the project at any time.

After the interview, you will have the opportunity to review, amend, and approve the transcripts. If you wish, you can receive a copy of the completed thesis to access the study's outcomes.

Regarding copyright, you will retain ownership of your raw data. However, I will hold copyright of the thesis, which may be transferred to publishers before publication.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to my supervisors using their contact details below:

Frances Edwards  
frances.edwards@waikato.ac.nz

or

Hazel Woodhouse  
hazel.woodhouse@waikato.ac.nz

Thank you for considering participating in this research project. Your involvement will contribute significantly to our understanding of preserving and sharing cultural knowledge through digital technology.

Sincerely,

Charlotte Sinclair

Master's Degree Candidate in Education

[charlotte.a.sinclair@gmail.com](mailto:charlotte.a.sinclair@gmail.com)

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*"This research has been approved by the University of Waikato Division of Education Ethics Committee on [date]. Approval number: FEDUxxx/xx"*

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THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
Te Wāhau Wānanga o Waikato

18<sup>th</sup> September, 2023

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ (name of child),

I'm doing a special project for my Master's Degree in Education, and I think it would be awesome if you could join me! I'm trying to learn how old traditions and new technology can work together. It's like combining fun old things with awesome new stuff! I want to explore how digital tools can help us to learn more about our amazing Vaisnava culture and traditions and how we can use digital technology to share it with others!

A small group of four students, will be in the group. We'll start by hearing some interesting stories and cool mantras from an elder in our community. Now, here's the adventurous part - we'll use digital tools like videos or podcasts to retell those stories in a creative style!

Later on, we'll all get together with our families to watch or listen to the stories we made. It'll be like a fun hangout where we talk about what we learned and how we can best use this technology to share our culture.

If you're interested in joining, that would be fantastic! It's important that you talk to your parents or guardian about it first as they have to give their approval for you to be part of the project.

I promise to keep everything we do private. Some things might not be totally confidential as we're in a group, but I'll make sure to protect your privacy as much as possible!

If you ever feel like you want to step back from the project, that's totally okay. You can leave the project at anytime!

If you have any questions, just ask your mom or dad, and they can reach out to my teachers.

Thanks for being part of this journey with me! Together, we'll show how amazing our culture is using digital magic!

Best wishes,

Charlotte

Master's Degree Student in Education

[charlotte.a.sinclair@gmail.com](mailto:charlotte.a.sinclair@gmail.com)

mob: 0493231682

*"This research has been approved by the University of Waikato Division of Education Ethics Committee on [date]. Approval number: FEDUxxx/xx".*

Consent form for Charlotte Sinclair's Master's Thesis Project. -  
Bridging Tradition With Technology.

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Thank you for allowing your child to participate in my research project. Please read the following information and tick the appropriate boxes before signing this consent form.

My child and our family have been invited to participate in Charlotte Sinclair's research project that she is conducting for her Master's Thesis, and I consent for my child to participate in the project.

- I have been given an explanation of this research and I understand it. I had the opportunity to ask questions and they have been answered to my satisfaction \_\_\_\_\_
- I understand that we can choose to withdraw from the project at any time. I will inform Charlotte by email if we decide to withdraw \_\_\_\_\_
- I give permission for Charlotte to use the information I provide, for the study's intentions, in her thesis. \_\_\_\_\_
- I understand that the published results will not use my or my child's real name. However, any quotes included in the thesis will no longer be confidential once they are reported in the project. \_\_\_\_\_

I consent to having my child videoed during the research. If my child feels uncomfortable being videoed, Charlotte will explore other recording options.

My level of English comprehension will/will not require the arrangement of an independent person to assist me.

Signature:

---

Thank you for your cooperation and support in this project. Your involvement will contribute to the exploration of bridging tradition with technology, and I am grateful for your participation.

Please return this signed consent form to Charlotte Sinclair before the project begins.

Sincerely,

Charlotte Sinclair

Master's Degree Candidate in Education

Email: charlotte.a.sinclair@gmail.com

Phone: 0493231682

*"This research has been approved by the University of Waikato Division of Education Ethics Committee on [date]. Approval number: FEDUxxx/xx".*



Consent form for Helpers participating in Charlotte Sinclair's Thesis Project.  
- Bridging Tradition With Technology. -

**Dear [Child's name],**

**Thank you for agreeing to help me with my Research project! Please read this form, with your parent or guardian, and tick the boxes if you agree with everything. Don't forget to sign at the bottom of the page! Thank you.**

**Agreements:**

- **Charlotte has explained to me about her project and I understand it. I had the opportunity to ask her questions and they have been answered to my satisfaction\_**
- **I understand that I can change my mind at any time and leave the project if I want. If I decide later that I don't want to be part of the project, I just have to let Charlotte or my parent know as soon as I decid,e and they will send Charlotte an email\_\_\_\_\_**
- **I give permission for Charlotte to use the information I tell her for her project. She has assured me that she won't mention my real name in her work and if she uses any quotes from me, she will keep them private and safe\_\_\_\_\_**
- **I understand that the project may involve videoing me. If I don't feel comfortable with being on video, that's perfectly fine. We can find other ways to retell the stories that I will be more comfortable with.**
- **If I ever find something confusing or need help understanding anything, I understand that I can always ask. Charlotte will find someone to explain things in a way that's easy for me to understand.**

**Your Signature (if you want to join):**

---

**If you or your parent have any questions, you can contact me here:**

***Email: charlotte.a.sinclair@gmail.com***

***Phone: 0493231682***

***Have a fantastic day!***

***Charlotte***

*"This research has been approved by the University of Waikato Division of Education Ethics Committee on [date]. Approval number: FEDUxxx/xx".*

## **Appendix 2 – Focus Group Questions and Interview Questions.**

### **Focus Group Questions for the parents, and the children**

Question One: Did you enjoy the digital presentations? Which parts of the presentation did you think were particularly effective?

Question two: What do you think are the principles behind using technology in sharing Vaisnava culture?

Question three: What was your feeling about using digital technology to share Vaisnava culture, before we embarked on this project?

Question Four: Has that changed, seeing what the children have done?

Question: four: - Do you feel that we honoured the mood of our acarya, Srila Prabhupada, in using digital technology in sharing culture? Do you think we should have done anything differently? What would you say an educator should consider when planning a project like this?

### **Interview Questions**

Question One: How do you feel now that the project is over?

Question Two: From the range of one to ten, where one is terrible and ten is fantastic, what would you rate your experience in using digital technology in telling your stories. What part of the project did you enjoy the most? The least?

Question Three: What could have made the project better? Do you have any suggestions how we could use digital technology more effectively than we did?

Question Four: What do you think are the important aspects in using digital technology in sharing culture?

Question Five: Were there any new understandings that you gained from this project, from your interviews; from telling your story the way you did?

## Appendix 3 – Ethics Approval

*Te Wānanga Toi Tangata*  
**Division of Education**  
The University of Waikato  
Private Bag 3105  
Hamilton,  
New Zealand, 3240

Division of Education Research  
Ethics Committee (DEREC)  
fedu.ethics@waikato.ac.nz  
www.waikato.ac.nz



13/10/2023

Dear Charlotte Sinclair

**Division of Education Research Ethics Committee Application Approved  
FEDU033/23**

I am pleased to advise you that your ethics application for the project entitled “Bridging Tradition with Technology.” was approved by Te Wānanga Toi Tangata Division of Education Research Ethics Committee on October 13th, 2023.

Please be aware that the Te Wānanga Toi Tangata Division of Education Research Ethics Committee must be advised (by memo) of any changes to the details recorded in your ethics application. Please send any such advice to fedu.ethics@waikato.ac.nz. You will receive a memo of approval once the change(s) has been considered.

Kind regards



Chair

Te Wānanga Toi Tangata Division of Education Research Ethics Committee (DEREC)

#### **Appendix 4 - Relevant Transcriptions from the Children's Documentaries**

Nandini [interviewing her Mum]: How did you become a Hare Krishna?

Nandini's mother: I became a Hare Krishna in Stockholme, Sweden, when I was 18 years old. A friend of mine told me about this ice-cream that he had found which was fabulous, so I went to have a look at it myself, it was the Govinda's restaurant. When I was there, I tasted the icecream, then I had a look at the buffet, and I tasted some of the prasadam [Hare Krishna food offered to Krishna] and I thought it was the yummiest food I had ever had in my whole life.

A community member interviewed by Susan: Eight years ago, I was studying in Sydney and I used to walk past Govinda's asram on the way to my university and I always used to smell this amazing incense and hear this amazing singing going on and see these people with long hair at the back and I was super intrigued, so my friend and I started going to the asram and doing kirtan [Hare Krishna singing in groups].

Ganga's Mother: My father was a principal of a local high school and he got some local Hare Krishna devotees from the temple in Latauka [Fiji] to come and give some religion classes at his school, and then he became very attracted with the philosophy; then one day he and my Mum visited the temple and they came home with high praise for how clean it was, how beautiful the deities were.

While Nandini expressed how listening to the different stories from a range of people in her community broadened her perspectives, Susan had a similar experience by seeing the other groups presentation on the viewing night. "It was good to hear, in the other projects, what people had to say ... It was easier to see how they felt about being a Hare Krishna," she expressed. Susan was referring here to the boys' video. Excerpts from the boys' film called "Loving it at New Govardhan [the name of the Hare Krishna Community at Eungella] are as follows:

Bhanu: This is my Mum, Sunanda, and I am going to be interviewing her today. What service do you do at the temple?

Sunanda: I cook for the Lord

Bhanu: How do you feel about it?

Sunanda: I love it because at the same time I can meditate on Krishna, thinking about what Krishna would like, what I cook. He is pleased with whatever we do!

Bhanu: Why do you love cooking at the temple?

Sunanda: Why do I love cooking? It's hard to say, I just love it! As I said before, It's a meditation, not thinking about something else. Just thinking I have to do something better for Krishna, cook something better for Krishna.

Bhanu interviewing Suratath, the temple music teacher and one of the lead singers.

Bhanu: Haribol Suratath, today I'm going to ask you a few questions about what your service is at the temple?

Suneel: Sure

Bhanu: So what services do you do at the temple?

Suneel: I do a lot of different services, and one of them is that I like to do kirtan, singing and playing instruments,

Bhanu: Why do you do this service?

Suneel: I love sankirtan, I like sharing the experience of kirtan with people, especially the people in the village who are visiting and learning about Krishna Consciousness.

Bhanu: How do you feel about doing your service?

Suneel: Yeah really excited, I like practicing the drum, learning and teaching the drum, singing in the morning, every morning at the temple, quite often we hold programmes in the Krishna Village and also in Byron Bay, we hold kirtan programmes so yeah, really excited.

Bhanu: Thank you

Ishaan interviewing Mahamantra who looks after the cow herd on the farm.

Ishaan: Haribol, so today we have Mahamantra who works at the goshalla [cowshed] and we will be interviewing him and asking him a few questions. So, what is your service here at the temple?

Mantra: so my service here is looking after the cows, so that involves milking the cows, breeding the cows, and then part of that is looking after the paddocks, the fences, making sure the water is all good and just caring for them, and getting any parasites or ticks, like you saw this morning, we take them off.

Ishaan: Why do you do this service?

Mantra: Well, it's a service I love, actually.

Ishaan: And how do you feel about your service, when you're doing it?

Mantra: I love it, I love it! Actually, one thing is that all cows, it doesn't matter whether they're here or anywhere, they're all Krishna's cows, but luckily here they are Radha-Govardhani's [deities at the temple, who are the proprietors of the farm] special herd so then we get this opportunity to look after them, so it's a very nice service to do.

Ishaan: Ok, thank you for the interview today

Mantra: Thank you Ishaan.

## **Appendix 5. An Indian Folktale**

Govinda selected a story about a scholar who needed to cross a river. The boatman who agreed to take him was not educated but listened to the scholar's scientific analysis of the cloud formations as they crossed the river. When the scholar realised that the boatman had no idea what he was talking about, he pronounced that the boatman had wasted his life. However, when the clouds turned into a storm that capsized the boat, and the boatman realized the scholar couldn't swim, he told the scholar that he had certainly wasted his life.

Govinda: The message behind this story is that besides everything we learn in life, we also need to know how to get to the spiritual world when our physical body capsizes. While technology from the west can make our lives easier, we need the east's spiritual knowledge to make our journey successful.