Voices of Youth: Podcasting as a Means for Inquiry-based Community Engagement

Authors
Bertram (Chip) Bruce, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA
Address: 501 E. Daniel St., Graduate School of Library & Information Science
University of Illinois, Champaign, IL 61820 USA
Email: chip@illinois.edu

Ching-Chiu Lin, The University of British Columbia, Canada
Address: 101-3641, W28th Ave. Vancouver, British Columbia, V6S 1S3, Canada
Email: jingchiu@gmail.com

Bertram (Chip) Bruce is a Professor in Library & Information Science, Curriculum & Instruction, Bioengineering, the Center for Writing Studies, and the Center for East Asian & Pacific Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Drawn from John Dewey's theory of inquiry and the broader pragmatist tradition, Bruce's research interests emphasize on explorations of a variety of questions regarding the nature of knowledge, democratic participation, community, technology, and literacy.

Ching-Chiu Lin is a faculty advisor at the University of British Columbia supervising student teaching in visual art. Lin holds a PhD in Art Education from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her research interests lie in issues of technology and community in art education.

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Abstract

A youth community informatics (YCI) research project intersected an inquiry learning model with the making of audiovisual podcasts to foster personal growth and community engagement in a group of Mexican American youth enrolled in an afterschool program. Specifically, the paper describes the cycle of inquiry together with the development of a project that embraced community inquiry as the core value for community building. Based on the project outcomes, it then recommends ways that community leaders could adopt a collaborative approach to creating spaces in which youth have fun learning new media, enjoy creative expression, take action for community needs, and develop potential for civic engagement by serving their family, friends, and communities.

Keywords: Community inquiry, inquiry learning, podcasting, digital media, youth

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Introduction

As the impact of digital media on both contemporary society and individual lives increases, so do the possibilities for accomplishing interwoven purposes of expression, communication, and meaning construction. In the North American context, youth from low-income, ethnic minority, and immigrant families are generally considered digitally disadvantaged owing to a lack of socioeconomic support and equitable access to technology (DiSalvo, Crowley, & Norwood, 2008; Everett, 2007). Hence, while considering approaches to bridging the digital divide among these youth, researchers have examined various implementations of digital media in both formal and informal learning settings (Kvasny & Keil, 2005; Warschauer, 2006). However, most such research on the intersections between digital media and youth from underserved families and communities has focused on either improving these youths' academic achievement or developing a set of literacy skills (Beilke, Stuve, & Williams-Hawkins, 2008; Warschauer, 2007). Little attention has been paid to a holistic learning model that connects underserved youths' lived experience with the world in which they live and provides instructors with tools that they can incorporate in their praxis to facilitate such learning.

To address this lack, this article approaches underserved youths' digital-mediated learning experience from the perspective of community informatics (CI), which conceives learning as embedded in a network of relationships between participants, content, and context in a situated environment. More specifically, CI refers to a research field that employs information and communication technology (ICT) as a means to achieve specific, community-determined goals.

One research direction in this field focuses on how technology-related and digital-mediated learning experiences can provide opportunities for youths to become active creators and sustainers of their own communities. Thus, even though this CI focus on youth groups is achievement driven, it moves beyond the pursuit of skill sets as a learning outcome to emphasize the learning experience as a whole. It views community as a curriculum in which the youth learn from and connect to their lived experience, recalling earlier ideas of community schools (Benedict, 1947; Clapp, 1939). As these youth navigate the process of learning, *community inquiry* represents inquiry into their experience of personal growth and community action that makes sense to them. Through such inquiry, the youths identify and investigate issues of interest, construct and discuss the resolution of related problems, and reflect upon their problem-solving experiences.

To illustrate this dynamic, this paper describes the implementation of a youth community informatics (YCI) research project that embraced community inquiry as its core value. It applied an inquiry-based learning model to foster self-understanding and community engagement in a group of Mexican American youth enrolled in an afterschool program. The discussion first articulates the theoretical framework sustaining this project by examining the respective relationships between art and experience and digital media and inquiry in the context of this specific group. It then presents an overview of the YCI project, particularly the application of the inquiry cycle to curriculum and instruction, and the ways in which the process and production of learning served as a means of youth empowerment. Finally, it offers several recommendations for further research and praxis that contributes to the preparation of civically engaged citizens and facilitates community building.

Theoretical Framework

Community Inquiry

In an age of ever-evolving electronic technologies, *literacy* has become a popular term in academic discourse to identify new skills to be learned. However, even though terms like *visual literacy*, *media literacy*, or *digital literacy* have proliferated within scholarship under the assumption that they are socially necessary, isolating such concepts from actual learning contexts makes little sense to practitioners and learners. Yet in the current culture of standardization and accountability, the educational system is dominated by a national discourse on ways to improve learning using standardized criteria. Hence, today's students are evaluated through nationally standardized assessments for their purported mastery of systematically predetermined sets of skills and abilities. Such assessment provides a simplified checklist for examining learning outcomes based on an underlying assumption, shared by both formal and informal learning sectors, that developing assorted individual literacy skills signals preparation for a bright future. However, in attaining these goals, we, as both instructors and learners, may be neglecting the process of learning and forgetting that learning is more than simply a set of procedures leading to particular end results. That is, when literacy (visual or otherwise) is seen as a convenient expression or assembled term to describe concrete skill sets, standardized learning criteria, and prescribed expectations, the experience of learning may become divorced from its human context and disconnected from both self and world.

Attention to community in learning provides an alternative approach to making sense of the learning experience contextually and supports the need to shift from a transmission-based to an inquiry-based pedagogical orientation. That is, because it examines the relationship between the self and its situated surroundings, this approach recognizes the strength of engaging a holistic

learning model that represents "a coevolution of individual, society, literacy, and technology, given coherence by the processes of construction" (Bruce, 2003, p. 337).

Constructs of community are quite varied (Cohen, 1985). For example, Gusfield (1975) identified two major connotations of the concept: the territorial coverage of a geographic location and the relational cohesion of human relationships that move beyond the location's limits. Community as defined in this paper intersects these two interpretations to refer to a network of people with common lived experiences and values within a shared geographical location. Hence, the term *community* emphasizes participatory capacities in line with Dewey's (1927) assertion that "[a] Great Community can only occur with free and full intercommunication" (p. 211). Such a notion of community aims to create a dialogic space in which community members can contribute to public concerns and implies that learning is shaped by a sense of community building and occurs over a continuum of problem-solving processes. Accordingly, Gurstein (2000) proposed that, given the contextual support of the community locality, community in the field of community informatics is concerned with "how communities, community affairs, and 'civil society' in general are interpenetrated, enhanced, and enabled through the use of ICTs" (p. 3).

Other researchers have also pointed out that "[community inquiry] emphasizes the need for people to come together to develop shared capacity and work on common problems in an experimental and critical manner" (Bruce & Bishop, 2008, p. 714). Doing so responds to the practice of participatory citizenship and recognizes communities as learning curricula that contain resources and potentials for empowering learners as community members. Indeed, as Short et al. (1996) contended in their adaptation of Freire's views on education, because inquiry involves "problem-posing and problem-solving processes" (p. 7), community inquiry provides an

opportunity for young people to construct their knowledge from personal or collective issues they care about. From this perspective,

> inquiry is not simply a process of accumulation of knowledge, but rather, a process, that is, a story involving recognition of a problem, physical and mental actions to address it, and a repeated cycle of evaluating and further transforming a situation. (Bruce, 2007, p. 6)

Besides, it should be noted that inquiry into authentic questions evoked from the learners' experiences situates learners at the center of the learning experience in which individuals take the initiative and responsibility for learning. Inspired by Dewey's definition of inquiry, Bruce and Bishop (2008) asserted that "inquiry-based learning is not a method or an option to consider for teaching and learning; instead, it is what happens when people do learn" (p. 709). Such an assertion responds to the significance of inquiry-based learning in community inquiry because it contributes to the social dimension of sustainable community development in which community members solve problems of community interest in a self-guided, intuitive fashion and then engage in a continual process of democratic participation.

Currently, although the value of inquiry-based learning is widely recognized, instructional models of inquiry-based learning are diverse (Jarrett, 1997; Moyer, Hackett, & Everett, 2006; Short et al., 1996). For example, the inquiry cycle developed by Bruce and colleagues (Benson & Bruce, 2001; Bruce & Bishop, 2002; Bruce & Davidson, 1996) views inquiry as a continual cycle containing five aspects: asking, investigating, creating, discussing, and reflecting (see Figure 1). Each aspect in this inquiry cycle—seen as a process that provides learners with context-situated and content-specified learning experiences that help them explore the world in a connected fashion—can be embedded, interrelated, or independent depending on the situated learning needs. Hence, this cycle (described in more detail in the section on project

implementation) embraces an exploratory approach that motivates learners who have problems to be solved; engages learners through investigation, hands-on practice, collaboration, and dialogues; and stimulates learners' construction of meaning through the process of solving problems and then posing emergent questions.

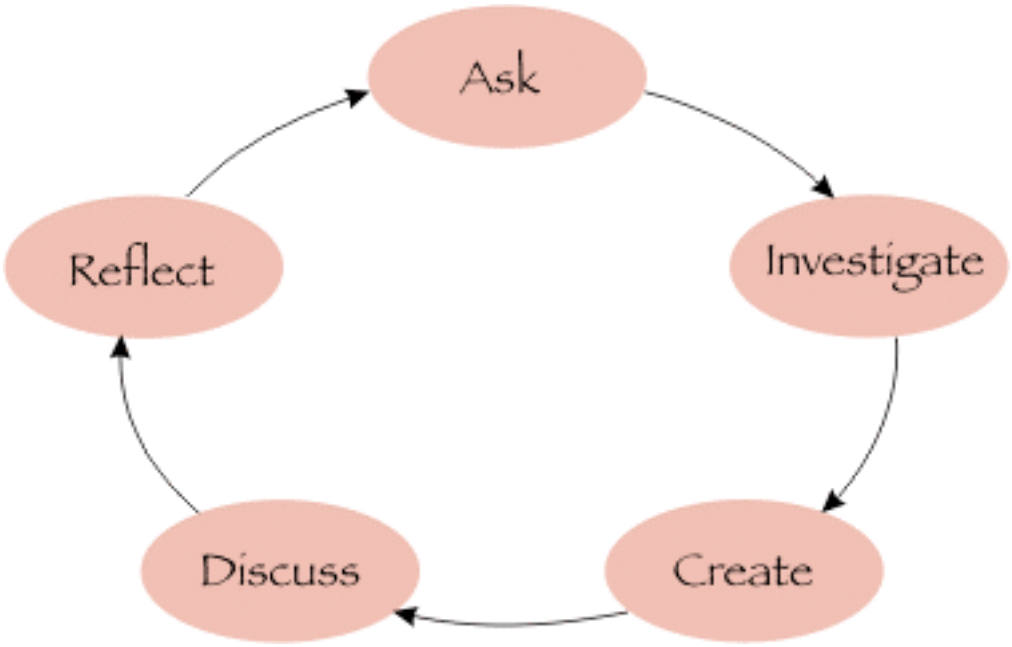

Fig. 1 The inquiry cycle.

How Does Art Help Learners Make Sense of Experience?

Experiences that make sense are those that humans construct in relation to the world in which they live. As Dewey (1916/1997) suggested in *Democracy and Education*,

> the difference between an adjustment to a physical stimulus and a mental act is that the latter involves response to a thing in its meaning; the former does not…When things have a meaning for us, we mean (intend, propose) what we do: when they do not, we act blindly, unconsciously, unintelligently. (p. 35)

Such meaning construction has been imperative to both formal and informal educational praxis. However, from the perspective of community inquiry, while meaning is constructed through collective concerns, the learning experience is fulfilled not only individually but also socially, which highlights the significant relation between art and experience. That is, the social aspect of artistic experience implies that art is a powerful means for making sense of experience. As Dewey (1934/2005) explained it,

> in art as an experience, actuality and possibility or ideality, the new and the old, objective material and personal response, the individual and the universal, surface and depth, sense and meaning are integrated in an experience in which they are all transfigured from the significance that belongs to them when isolated in reflection. (p. 309)

Having so defined art as experience, Dewey opposed the separation of art from everyday life and viewed art as a relational experience of body and mind, a viewpoint echoed by Chapman's (1978) assertion that "art makes sense to children when they experience it as a basic form of expression and as a response to life" (p. 118). Indeed, recognizing art's potential for expressing personal feelings, Dewey even proposed that art's social quality is vital to human experience because "art was created from human desire and embodie[s] the realization of the interaction between people and their environment" (as quoted in Freedman, 2003, p. 39). Hence, in contrast to the dominant art education paradigm's view of art as self-expression—a perspective that for most of the twentieth century emphasized the individual development of creativity and mental growth—Dewey's interpretation moves from the private to the public aspect to perceive art forms as means of social expression. That is, for Dewey, artistic expression manifests through the relationships among materials and/or media, process, and communication

in which acts of expression and response are interrelated and dialogue is generated between artist and spectator.

From this perspective, even though ways of experiencing art, expression, and response extend into the social realm, art serves as a means for individual to articulate their understanding of and relationship to the world, to express socially important concerns, to respond to the ways that the media represent social values, and to react to the ways that visual experience can inform social actions. These latter particularly result in the experience that Dewey (1934/2005) described as the "interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication" (p. 22). Thus, Dewey's notion of art as experience resonates with the community inquiry belief that learning involves a cycle of contextualized exploration through questioning, making, and communicating.

Although general education, arts integration, and interdisciplinary learning have all recognized the value of art (Chapman, 1978; Dewey, 1934/2005; Eisner, 1998; Krug & Cohen-Evron, 2000), our YCI project employs art because we see the art-making process and its products as "carriers of meaning" (Jackson, 1998, p. 111), a term that Jackson drew from his interpretation of Dewey's notion of art as experience. Thus, although we infused the project implementation with diverse approaches to art education, we used little formal art terminology with the students. That is, based on our understanding of inquiry learning as an interdisciplinary crossing of subject boundaries, we neither highlighted the visual quality of student productions nor imbued the students with the idea of being artists. Rather, we used professional art examples as instructional resources, organizing the curriculum around the arts and describing and interpreting concepts and issues through them. Most particularly, in our dialogue with students about imagery, we attempted to encourage students not only to discuss the content and context of

media text or artworks but also to question and reflect on the underlying power relations embedded in the social systems that produce these visual forms. Such a focus responds to the previously discussed social engagement of artistic experience, which sees the construction of meaning as embodied in individual responsibility for social conditions.

How Do Digital Media Help Learners Make Sense of Inquiry?

In the face of the growing development of electronic technologies, digital media are now considered educational tools. Hence, this paper addresses those media that deliver various digital representations created and carried by electronic communicative devices, primarily computers, video cameras, digital cameras, and handheld electronic devices. In education, however, these emerging forms of digital media are not limited to production and instruction: they also act as vehicles that facilitate learner exploration of technology's impacts on and relationship to their cultural and lived experience and society. More important, the potential of such digital media, rather than being self-generated from each medium's isolated elements, is transformed through the linkages among the implementations of technology, content, and pedagogy. This latter assumption responds to the view shared by some scholars that learning technology in a social institution can be metaphorically expressed as an ecological system (Bruce, 2007; Nardi & O'Day, 1999; Zhao & Frank, 2003) in which the key to successful technology implementation is the interrelated cooperation between all roles in the situated setting. As Nardi and O'Day (1999) explained, "information ecology is a system of people, practice, values, and technologies in a particular local environment. The spotlight is not technology; it is on human activities that are served by technology" (p. 49).

Accordingly, our proposed project spotlights the underserved youths' inquiry learning process intersected with their experiments with and practice of digital media. In other words, the

project adopts Dewey and other pragmatists' view that inquiry is more than just a means of learning; it is "the action of purposive organisms engaged in both understanding and changing the world around them" (Bruce, 2007, p. 218). Because, in a technological society, such action through the exploration of digital media transforms the role of learners from passive receivers to active creators and advocates, digital media can serve to reach and engage learners, particularly youth and children, in civic activities as one way to participate in democracy. Therefore, in our situation, building the students' participatory capabilities through digital media was the first step to developing their sense of involvement in community inquiry. Consequently, because our students had had little exposure to participation as a way of learning, we engaged digital storytelling to encourage them to express and form personal opinions. To this end, we also introduced the use of digital cameras, digital recorders, and computers to document students' voices as "auditory and audiovisual media [that] increasingly offer young people opportunities to communicate their ideas and feelings using nonverbal and nonprint forms" (Niesyto, Buckingham, & Fisherkeller, 2003, pp. 461–462).

Although the major scholarly discussion on digital media's participatory potential focuses primarily on Web-based applications like social networking, collaborative communication, and video-sharing in the networked communication environment (Benkler, 2006; Jenkins, et al., 2006; Montgomery, 2008), our approach to inquiry learning was necessarily based on available resources and media accessible to the community. For example, we employed activities such as face-to-face discussion about being media consumers and hands-on practice in finding resources from the library and the Internet, together with the creation and exchange of student media productions. At the same time, because most of the students had heard about Web sites like Facebook, YouTube, and Wikipedia but had little access to computers and limited knowledge of

these terms, the continuing teacher-student dialogue simultaneously discussed online participatory culture. In this case, part of the process of inquiry stemmed from the students' curiosity about the media culture surrounding their lived experience. In fact, even though the curriculum content had to be limited and could not include actual student participation in online communities, the students' self-motivation for technology helped them gain a better understanding of this emerging digital-mediated youth culture. As a result, they were able to show and discuss their media products through a public showcase and expressed interest in using their own media products to participate further in virtual communities and inspire their friends in the geographic community.

In this manner, digital media can help individuals make sense of inquiry learning by providing collaborative, interactive, and integrative characteristics through which they can connect holistically with the world. Thus, participation in the new media "cuts across educational practices, creative processes, community life, and democratic citizenship (Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, & Weigel, 2006, p. 8) and manifests in both physical and virtual environments. Such understanding responds to the community inquiry goals of civic engagement embedded in community participation and knowledge shaped through community members' active participation as creators, consumers, and collaborators. Hence, when inquiry learning serves as a process of problem-solving, the participatory capacities of digital media stimulate learners to look into their relationships with others, consider their responsibilities in both private and public sectors, and recognize the power they may have to transform social life.

Overview of the Project

Background

Under a partnership between a public middle school, an educational youth organization, and a Midwest university, this project took place at the middle school as a semester-long course within its afterschool program. Specifically, the project aimed to expose underserved youth to digital media and create spaces in which these young people could have fun with technology, explore issues in their lives, and develop academic potential through self-expression and understanding.

Because of the interest expressed by the Latino/a family liaison at the school for project participation and its active involvement in recruitment, the student participants targeted were primarily youth from low-income Mexican immigrant and second generation Mexican-American families, The final sample consisted of eight Latino/a youth, who met once a week for two hours with the project instructors (faculty and students of the partner university) in their school's computer lab. In addition to this afterschool time, the students participated in three full Saturday field trips to the university campus so they could use university lab equipment to finish their media products. The course ended with an evening screening in the school's conference room at which parents, friends, schoolteachers, and community members were invited to view the students' work and celebrate their accomplishments.

Media

Given the limited access to technological equipment and the paucity of student knowledge of and experience with such technology, we set an ambitious but manageable goal to produce audiovisual podcasts, mini-video productions that students could take away from the course. Podcasting, a portmanteau term from iPod and broadcasting, produces digital audio or

audiovisual files that can be distributed over the Internet and transferred to and played on personal computers and portable media devices, including iPods, MP3 players, and some mobile phones. As a result, podcasts can be listened to and watched asynchronously without the limitation of time and space. We deemed this technology particularly suitable for this project's ICT application because (a) podcasting, despite its great potential for expansion, is easily learnable even by participants' with minimal prior knowledge; (b) podcasting can serve as a storytelling medium through which youth can articulate their ideas and feelings using various modes of communication; and (c) podcasting can also act as a research tool that guides learning activities and represents community inquiry throughout the project. As Niesyto et al. (2003) pointed out, "the expressive, emotional, and ambiguous nature of a great deal of media material expands the norms and repertoires of representation expected by society, which are largely oriented around rationality and effectiveness" (pp. 461–462). This dynamic manifested in the youths' excitement about how technology could represent their stories and the motivation that resulted from the unfolding of their peers' media productions. In fact, a major incentive for many students to participate in the class was the ability to share their podcasts with friends through portable digital devices or with community members through a public screening.

Curriculum

This podcasting project implemented an inquiry-based, cyclical learning model of asking, investigating, creating, discussing, and reflecting designed to show students the capacity of digital media to represent the stories that interest them and help them develop a sense of community engagement. The curriculum design very purposefully took into account the students' prior knowledge, social and cultural background, and group dynamics. As an element of curriculum organization and learning facilitation, it also incorporated a visual art component

as a means of making meaning: instructors used the artworks of Hispanic artists like Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera to explain how artists inquire into their concerns and communicate their thoughts. It is also worth mentioning that rather than following a rigid formula or prescription, this inquiry-learning model offered only suggested directions for exploring the intersections between learners' lived experiences and community engagement. That is, the cycle of inquiry was a spiral in which learners revisited aspects of inquiry repeatedly with increasing levels of sophistication throughout the project.

Asking

Initially, this group of students was excited about making a podcast but confused by its appropriate content. Asking students to think about and share interesting questions or merit-worthy problems from their lived experiences motivates student learning. That is, this problem-based approach encouraged students to ask themselves about issues they find important and engage in conversation about those issues with their peers. Because this group of students shares a similar ethnic, cultural, and social background, group members asked questions about identity, Mexican culture, family, and the experience of living in the United States as immigrants. Based mainly on their relationships with their cultural heritage, seven students then narrowed down their podcast topics to family, friends, and self; while the eighth decided to explore his interest in Roman numerals.

During the first two weeks of the project, dialogue played a large part in instruction as instructors used both English and Spanish to help students articulate their ideas, identify a topic for their audiovisual productions, and brainstorm how their questions could be represented through their podcasts. To facilitate this dialogue, the students were shown works by Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo, with whom they shared cultural and social similarities. Most particularly, the

students responded actively to her 1932 *Self-portrait on the borderline between Mexico and the United States*, asking questions about the artistic intent, the use of symbols, and the artwork's connotations. As Chapman (1978) observed, "when children's lives and artistic efforts are related to the artistic heritage, the entire experience is personalized, and children are helped to value the work of others" (p. 20). Therefore, students who would otherwise have had difficulty expressing their ideas and feelings found Kahlo's work to be a catalyst that helped and inspired them to reflect upon their own inquiry.

In conjunction with digital media implementation, the asking aspect of inquiry not only encourages students to contemplate questions they find meaningful, but more important, it stimulates them to think more deeply about the representation and communication of these questions. This thought process in turn leads students to the next investigative stage in which they transform introspection into action.

Investigating

Investigating encourages students to examine their topics using various sources and then plan out their creation. It therefore offers them an opportunity to navigate their inquiry. That is, our students deconstructed their chosen topic by breaking its complexity down into several aspects, researched their ethnic background and cultural heritage, gathered information from library and home resources, and refined their topic focus.

One very important concept introduced together with investigation was *preproduction preparation*, which helped students investigate both their topics and the ways in which these topics could be represented through the available resources and accessible media. Inspired by Kahlo's work, the students searched digital images of visual symbols that represented their ethnicity, interests, and cultural heritage. As they did so, they learnt storyboarding as a planning

tool for organizing and composing images, sound, and narrative. Admittedly, being eager to jump into the creation of their podcasts, they were initially somewhat resistant to storyboarding. However, they later showed their appreciation of its great value by constantly referring back to their storyboards as a production guideline during inquiry process. As a result, the investigation into selected topics helped the students understand the notions of preparation, organization, and management, which set the groundwork for their creation. Hence, through investigation, inquiry reflects the process of negotiation in learning whereby learners learn to search, select, manipulate, and manage information.

Creating

Creating allows students to construct meaning by engaging in hands-on learning activities. In other words, students learn to transform the thoughts developed earlier through asking and investigating into substantive creation of meaning. In this project, the process of meaning construction occurred through the making of podcasts, which served both as a means and an end in the participants' learning. After compiling their storyboards, the students learned such skills as scanning their family photographs, making slide presentations, recording voiceovers, and manipulating sounds and images. All these activities contributed to the assembly of their final podcasts. During this process, we as instructors paid more attention to the clear delivery of personal and community inquiries than to the technical understanding and mastery of software programs and digital equipment. Rather, we valued the students' experience of collaboration and experiment, encouraging them to play with the software programs, including PowerPoint, Audacity, and iMovie.

The time spent on this creative stage was much longer than had been anticipated for two primary reasons. First, although willing to learn the software programs selected, the students

were inexperienced in their use. Second, as they repeatedly watched and listened to their podcasts, they kept polishing their work. In fact, at this point, one student brought up the concern of effective communication before the instructors had even addressed it, asking whether her narration delivered her message strongly enough. Likewise, while finalizing their podcasts, students were interested in how their choice of music soundtracks and voice tones might affect the presentation of their image composition. This awareness seemingly developed over the trial-and-error process in which new knowledge was formed over time through the enhancement of students' prior knowledge.

Discussing

Discussing provides an opportunity for active dialogue that shifts inquiry from the level of personal engagement to collective commitment. Through sharing and listening, members of the community bind together and inspire each other to take participatory community action. In our project, we allotted 30 minutes per week immediately following the creative session to such discussion. During this time, the students shared their thought processes, exchanged production ideas, identified the similarities and differences in their work, and then discussed how their podcasts could be distributed to inspire other students in their school with similar lived experiences. Such dialogue constituted an intellectual layer of meaning making, one that inspired the students to think seriously about effective communication and to care about the quality of their podcasts.

Such high student dedication to their media practice made it easy for the instructors to introduce into the discussion relevant communication policy issues like intellectual property law, Internet safety, and open source licenses. Because not all students had been exposed to these constructs before, they were surprised at the amount of Internet fraud in cyberspace and came to

value the need to protect and respect intellectual property. In fact, after having experienced the making of their own media productions, the students actively responded to issues of media awareness and were able to form opinions and express concerns based on this learning experience. As a result, during this discussion stage, the students developed the confidence to articulate and share their thoughts. More significantly, they expressed a similar interest in reaching out to the youth in their community with their podcasts in an attempt to take collaborative actions for improving community quality through their personal endeavors.

Reflecting

Reflecting may occur simultaneously with the inquiry aspects of creating and discussing or may happen near the closure stage of a learning cycle. Such reflection encourages students to look back at what they have done during the learning process, rethink the initial questions, and then invoke further questions derived from the reflection of the current experience. As new questions are asked, a new cycle of inquiry begins and learning continues.

Whereas the students' learning actions stimulated them to absorb and contemplate their experience, their reflection and the public showcasing of their podcasts resulted in an accumulated sense of belonging and reward. During these showcases, the students spoke to the audience about their work either in English or Spanish. Some parents were so proud of their children's accomplishments that they became emotional, while other attendees, both parents and schoolteachers, valued this show-and-tell as a first opportunity for most students in the group. After the event, one student remarked that he had held everyone's attention when standing on the stage and felt his voice has been heard and recognized.

Further inquiry generated from student reflection included but was not limited to the following: How can we encourage other friends to learn about computers? Where can we find

resources to learn more about making videos? How can we be proud of who we are, where we are? How can we enjoy learning through school subjects in the same way we enjoy making podcasts? As is apparent, these queries relate mostly to the issues of access to technology, cultural pride, academic achievement, and a sense of belonging, issues that differ little from those that interested students at the beginning of the learning cycle. However, by the end of the project such issues were seemingly better understood because the students had developed more advanced questions.

In sum, the closure of this inquiry learning cycle is only a starting point, one that inspired this group of students' understanding of personal growth and consideration of community action. The students then expressed interest in taking advanced video production courses and finding information on entry-level technology-relevant courses for their friends. They also helped to recruit friends to attend a summer camp that combines soccer playing and learning with technology and then acted as leaders and helpers at the camp. Thus, these students began with minimal experience in organizing and reflecting on their thoughts, but by the end of the project had learned to explore who they are, make connections between self and the world around, and take actions to help the community. Most important, students took away from this course not only their media products but also a way of inquiring into personal experience and public engagement that they can implement on many occasions.

Recommendations

Based on the observations reported here, scholars and practitioners interested in the intersection of pedagogy, community inquiry, and new media could benefit from the following recommendations for operation, instruction, and further research.

A Collaborative Approach to Community Inquiry

For community leaders who intend to initiate a YCI project, the first step might be to identify institutional resources in the neighborhood that offer opportunities for assistance and collaboration. For example, libraries, universities, and non-profit organizations may serve as gateways through which community leaders can access financial, instructional, and operational resources. Additionally, based on our experience, a collaborative approach to carrying out a project is the most effective because each party contributes unique expertise to diverse project dimensions. For instance, in our project, instructors from the local university were able to provide a situated curriculum framework and instruction for this specific group of students; the Latino/a family liaison played a significant role in tracking student attendance and involvement; and the youth educator from the educational organization communicated needs among the university, school, and community. In such a collaborative approach, community leaders act as coordinators that oversee the linkages among stakeholders, including project partners, instructors, parents, schoolteachers, and students. Thus, partnership for community action shares both profession and commitment: it ensures the quality of community projects, establishes supportive community network, and opens up further learning opportunities for community members.

Tailoring Curricula and Resources to the Situation

In pursuing an authentic form of practice, YCI projects that adapt an inquiry-based learning approach should seek for instructional resources that are consonant with the community situation, which, as Bruce's (2007) interpretation of Dewey suggests, "is an interconnected functional relation involving the inquirer and the environment" (p. 207). Because the learning draws from and represents the community situation, its interconnected components—which are

embedded in inquiry and form such relations as the cultural, aesthetic, political, and emotional—should be integrated into the project instruction and tie in with learners' lived experience. Again taking our project as an example, our instructors constantly communicated with the Latino/a family liaison and schoolteachers prior to class to gain "a sense of what knowledge is most worth aiming at and also an awareness of how children's interpretative abilities develop" (Parsons, 1990, p. 146). Having background knowledge of the student group, we were able to use Mexican artist Frida Kahlo's work to inspire students to reflect on their interaction with their surroundings.

In addition, we used Latino/a soccer players as role models to encourage students to articulate their interests and dream careers. As a result, some students later asked about ways to search Latin music and relevant soundtracks so that they could implement Latin music and Latino/a cultural images into their podcasts to express their cultural pride, nostalgia for their homeland, and acclimatization to a new life in the United States. Therefore, students as inquirers were part of the situation. Through the provision of contextual learning resources and a customized curriculum, they learnt to transform their personal experience into powerful messages containing collective concerns and meanings.

Expanding the Scope of Inquiry

The significance of this research project lies in its authentic scenarios, which illustrate how community inquiry manifests through the application of digital media and how an inquiry-based learning model can be implemented in a situational learning setting. Yet the student questions engendered mostly circulated around personal feelings and interests, suggesting that the next inquiry cycle might encourage students to broaden the scope of their concerns beyond the personal level. Evidently, for a group of students with little exposure to learning with new

media, the inquiry into self is an easier starting point for envisioning what they can do with technology, and of course developing learners' public engagement and participatory citizenship cannot be separated from personal attachments. However, as students gain more exposure to technology, they need to develop awareness of how media culture shapes their lived experience in a digital media-saturated society. Thus, further research investigation might begin with the questions evoked by public concerns and global communication networks. For example, it might examine the democratic capacities of digital media in relation to community building, how the global network shapes social relations around the world and within local communities, and how inquiry may facilitate community members' understanding of and participation in the correlation of new media practice, social responsibilities, and emerging technological issues. In particular, because "technological changes invoke issues such as empowerment, equality, access, speed, efficiency, liberation, and the development of a global community in support of a pro-technology agenda" (Bruce, 1998, p. 269), research should look into how such issues are presented and advocated in communities through youths' engagement of new media, and how these youths as community members respond to such issues in their situational context.

Conclusion

The learning experience that took place in this group of students indicates that youths from an underserved community have the potential to use digital media to construct meaning about issues that matter to them and the community. Moreover, whereas inquiry can naturally be viewed as the occurrence of learning, it is community instructors or leaders that must act as facilitators to spark learners' motivation in seeking connections between their lived experience and that of others. For this underserved group of students, the completion of this inquiry cycle motivated an understanding of themselves and their cultural heritage, one that inspired their

consideration of collective feelings and a sense of commitment to community. Such groundwork may carry into a second future cycle to stimulate students' active participation toward the goal of community building and personal fulfillment.

In addition, as digitalized global communication networks continue to grow and develop, the notion of community is expanding to encompass both geographic and cyber environments. For underserved youth, who may be considered digitally disadvantaged, community as curriculum should take into account the full coverage of local, global, and virtual communities. That is, because technology has now become part of a lived experience shared by diverse groups of people, the reality is that individuals are members of multiple communities and reside in their intersection. Hence, a further educational challenge for promoting community inquiry with underserved youth lies in how such youth can participate more fully in democracy, both independently and collaboratively, in different aspects of community. Their full participation is necessary not only for their individual development, but also for the development of healthy communities. Because cycles of inquiry are spiral and enhanced by increasing levels of sophistication, this challenge may serve as the basis for questions in the advanced cycles. From this perspective, inquiry is a continuing learning process, one that strengthens community sustainability and civic engagement.

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