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INTRODUCTION

City youth and the pedagogy of participatory media

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Recently, two different images of learning in schools today flooded through our various social networks. Logging on to *Facebook*, one high-school teacher bemoaned the fact that her students in a Los Angeles classroom were using their mobile devices to take pictures of the notes on the board: the teacher put in hard work preparing and sharing content and students, with a few button presses, captured hours of work effortlessly. Commenters shared that they banned mobile devices for similar reasons and the word ‘lazy’ was invoked by more than one participant in the socially networked discussion. Also shared on *Facebook* and other social networks like the educational community that relies on the *Twitter* hashtag #educhat, an article from the online site Mashable proclaimed, ‘Low Income Students’ Test Scores Leap 30% with Smartphone Use’ (Freeman 2012). Citing academic uses of mobile technology, the article concluded with a quote from FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski that ‘digital literacy’ is necessary for students and parents so they can use ‘the tools and know-how to use technology for education and job skills training’. In both of these stories, the fact that these contexts for learning and technology use took place in historically marginalized spaces was prominent. As educators and educational researchers continue to grapple with how uses of new communications technologies can increase educational equity, the challenges of adjusting pedagogy to meet these needs are often being disregarded. Throughout this issue, we seek to explore how the educational challenges that city youth face around the globe can be confronted with what we call a pedagogy of participatory media.

Why city youth?

We came to this special issue with an understanding that the world is changing in fundamental ways and, as it changes, our ideas about education and students

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need to change with it. One of the profound global changes at present concerns the rapid urbanization of the planet. In 1950, for example, 29% of the world's population was classified as urban. According to the 2007 revision of the United Nations' World Urbanization Prospects, 70% of the world's population will be classified as urban by 2050 and most of the people who will inhabit urban city centers globally will be economically disadvantaged. We also know that school systems in cities around the world are challenged to provide socially and culturally meaningful education to increasingly diverse populations and, because of their inability to meet these challenges, many city youth do not receive the formal education they need to participate meaningfully in the world of work or civil society in the twenty-first century.

Why participatory media?

At the same time, we see that city youth have increasing access to technology and many scholars (Norris 2001; Warschauer 2003; Ito, Matsuda, and Okabe 2010; Lievrouw 2011) have shown that youth are engaging technology outside of school in increasingly sophisticated ways. As Jenkins et al. (2009) write, 'Participatory culture is emerging as the culture absorbs and responds to the explosion of new media technologies that make it possible for average consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content in powerful new ways' (8). Though participatory culture reflects the way digital tools make media production and social interaction easier than ever before, the practices exhibited are not contingent upon digital devices; participatory culture can shift the relational interactions in offline settings. The practices and dispositions city youth have toward media today reflect a changing relationship that encourages manipulation, response, critique, and remix. Because of this, technology is being called upon as an antidote to education inequity globally. These tools are used not only to engage students in meaningful learning experiences, but also to shape ways people participate and interact with the world (Lievrouw 2011).

Teachers and pedagogy of participatory media

While students may be honing complex production skills outside of classrooms, the ways these practices inhabit in school learning varies. As mobile devices are becoming ubiquitous for teens globally, the possibilities for media production and consumption are often stifled by school policies and teacher rules. Participatory practices shift traditional learning structures in ways that encourage collaboration, interest-driven learning, and taking multimodal texts less as monolithic products for analysis than as tools for manipulation and remix. Further, 'Participatory culture shifts the focus of literacy from individual expression to community involvement' (Jenkins et al. 2009, 6).

These are disruptive practices in both senses of the word: as a behavioral disturbance and as innovative. Educational discourse today tends to falter in debates of embracing the disruptive nature of participatory media or stifling its use (Collins and Halverson 2009). However, we argue that a critical approach to understanding a pedagogy of participatory media is necessary. While interest-driven principles for learning are necessary for democratizing classrooms globally, we argue that the role of the teacher cannot be lost, particularly in the age of participatory culture (Morrell et al. 2013). While there is burgeoning research around the role that participatory media play in improving learning, educators are identifying challenges toward implementation. As the title of this special issue suggests, we are particularly interested in how educators and teacher education programs can build on the possibilities of participatory media and integrate these cultural shifts into one's pedagogy. Specifically, 'research on teaching in city schools suggests that teachers' limited skills and limiting beliefs about their students lead to a steady diet of low-level material coupled with unstimulating, rote-oriented teaching' (Darling-Hammond 2010). The role of teachers in an era of participatory culture and connected learning is one that is at the heart of this special issue's focus. Though digital tools may augment the ways youth and teachers interact, it cannot replace this interaction.

The recent emphasis on connected learning resonates with several of the articles in this issue and with our own vision of a participatory pedagogy. Connected learning researchers 'advocated for broadened access to learning that is *socially embedded, interest-driven, and oriented toward educational, economic, or political opportunity*' (Ito et al. 2013, 4, emphasis in original). In most equitable terms, the tenets of connected learning should further promote existing critical literacies practices in which 'people are empowered to encounter and subsequently produce and distribute texts on their own terms' (Morrell 2008, 208). Without guided reflexivity, the principles of youth-driven learning in a participatory culture can simply reify what Freire termed a banking model of education which simply reinforces dominant ideologies.

Building and wielding participatory tools

Thinking about the possibilities of participation for the city youth that this issue focuses on reaching, the principles of connected learning are, again, a useful starting place for this work; in theory it 'centers on an equity agenda of deploying new media to read and enable youth who otherwise lack access to opportunity' (8). In moving a pedagogy of participatory culture forward, it will be necessary to challenge a near-universal implicit sense of trust on the new media tools made available and used by city youth today. Though the varied practices described throughout this special issue exemplify the powerful ways technology can help instigate powerful

learning, it is important to recognize that a pedagogy of participatory media is not about the latest and greatest of digital tools. Though helpful, smartboards, tablets, and digital wizardry should simply augment the powerful lessons that teachers and peer mentors can instill in today's classrooms around the world.

As educators and education researchers, it is imperative that we acknowledge that valid resources such as *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *YouTube* or *Google Maps* or blogging platforms are not culturally or politically neutral, part of a pedagogy of participatory media must recognize how these tools are engendered within larger cultural systems of meaning and power. A pedagogy of participatory media is one that does not discount such underlying cultural meaning of tools and apps; it builds toward a critical reflexivity that allows youth to construct and wield tools of participation beyond those offered to them (Garcia 2012). This will mean illustrating the 'coded world' that surrounds student and giving them agency within it (Williamson 2012).

When applied to historically marginalized communities, participatory media acts as a powerful tool for amplification of voice and as a means to personalize content and assessments for the specific needs of marginalized youth. Part of the challenge that educators face is in looking at the ways youth come together and communicate to refine/establish new technologies. As we better understand how culture happens among young people, an understanding of how to develop new technologies emerges.

The contributors highlighted throughout this issue signal the varied ways digital tools may afford equity in the world of public education for city youth. However, even these examples reflect, often, the challenges of policies, social barriers, and access that plague school environments despite assumptions of an always connected society. These narratives offer us insight, analysis, and critique. Most importantly, though, they offer us hope of creating powerful pedagogies of participatory media that help inspire youth and reshape social thought and educational practice.

Notes on Contributors

Antero Garcia is an assistant professor in the Department of English Colorado State University in Fort Collins, CO. Antero's research focuses on developing critical literacies and civic identity through the use of mobile media and game play in formal learning environments. Prior to moving to Colorado, Antero was a teacher at a public high school in South Central Los Angeles for seven years. Antero received his PhD in the Urban Schooling division of the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Ernest Morrell is a professor of English Education and Director of the Institute for Urban and Minority Education (IUME) at Teachers College, Columbia University. He has interests in youth popular culture, literacy education, participatory action research, teacher development, and the transformation of city schools. Morrell received his doctorate from UC Berkeley and began his career teaching and coaching in Oakland Public Schools.

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