

Youth Media Reporter

VOL

The Professional Journal of the Youth Media Field

2007

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Letter from the Editor

It is a pleasure to release the first annual print journal of Youth Media Reporter (YMR), the *only* professional journal that serves practitioners, educators and academics in the youth media field. This journal contains all the web-released articles from 2007 and an additional “special features” section—only available in print—that showcases complex and new challenges, tensions, and trends in the field.

As the editor of YMR, re-reading each of these pieces in the print journal made me re-live the process of working with over 40 practitioners in 2007 to develop high quality articles for YMR. Some pieces started with meeting and talking to practitioners from visits to organizations in New York, NY, San Francisco, CA, Portland, OR, Austin, TX or Chicago, IL in an attempt to learn about the field. Others derived from phone conversations or via email. Still others developed through conversations at conferences—sometimes not even about media—with practitioners who had opinions or work related to the field yet to be articulated or emphasized. Each article’s process helped YMR develop its *own* best practices while reflecting a community of passionate learners. As each article, question, and conversation took shape, so too did my own growth and connection to this field. I am honored to be a part of this community and am eager to continue highlighting this powerful, dynamic work in 2008.

The youth media field has long asked for a resource where educators/practitioners can share best practices and methodologies; review new research and documents; and have an opportunity to dialogue/respond with colleagues. Many educators, including pioneers in the field—Diane Coryat and Steven Goodman in their 2004 OSI white paper—have requested a thriving space to access the stories and experiences of fellow practitioners and educators. As young people learn to share, create, develop, and gain access to technology/media, so too must the field share, create, and develop best pedagogical approaches across the diverse and ever growing youth media community.

YMR answers the call of the field—to have a professional space to learn of each other’s work while inviting new audiences to join the dialogue. Much in this way, the journal acts as the field’s dynamic archive—documenting periods of growth and expansion from the viewpoints of usual and unusual suspects.

In the special features section you will see Anna Lefer, former program officer of Open Society Institute and champion of the youth media field, explain, “Being reflective and honing in on best practices that fit into the broader democracy is essential for educators in youth media to take leaps to use, build, and test new relationships and partnerships.” It is our hope that YMR meets this need; urging and supporting those in the youth media field to share tools, opinions, and innovations with far reaching and diverse partners. YMR digs deep and broad, expanding the audience and community of partners to the field’s scope of work and direction—including academics and a wider public. In professor Kathleen Tyner’s special features

article, she explains “the emergence of scholarly, field-specific, peer-reviewed journals, such as *Youth Media Reporter*, and heightened interest in the topic by established youth development and education journals provides incentive and dissemination outlets for academic publication on the subject and opens the dialogue about youth media to a wider public.”

However, YMR is not simply an outlet for new audiences to learn about and be involved with the youth media field. The journal itself is “owned” by its writers and readers, who represent a spectrum of individuals in the youth media and neighboring fields with varying approaches to this work. YMR staff and peer review board members work with each contributor, tailoring articles through a supportive editorial review process to produce high quality pieces that can be shared amongst educators *and* new audiences.. YMR’s writers work hard to identify and share their thoughts on best practices and tensions in the field—creating a community of reflective, engaged learners.

This journal is disseminated not only to the many youth media organizations that define this field, but also to hundreds of academic departments across the United States. We envision that the journal will spark new career pipelines for college students interested in this work. Youth media should not be a career left to happenstance of opportunity with few formal supports and resources, but rather a viable *choice* identified at the university. Young people need to be educated and supported not just as media makers/creators but also as young adults who will be the next generation of youth media educators, supporters, and practitioners.

In an effort to support the field, we are disseminating the first annual print journal at no cost. This important resource will be made available each year, with the help of your continued subscription, contributions, and ownership of the journal.

You are the face and future of this publication and of the youth media field. We hope YMR continues to serve your needs and capture the challenges, triumphs and surprises as you lead this field into the many possible, expansive spaces it is bound for.

Warmly,

Ingrid Hu Dahl
Editor, Youth Media Reporter
AED

MySpace & YouTube: Corporate-Owned Spaces for Youth Activism?

By: Ingrid Hu Dahl

It was my mother who always said “sometimes you have to work within a corporate giant to plant the seed for change.” So, how does an innovative and web based site *YouTube*, now owned by the corporate giant Google, warrant spaces for social change? How can *YouTube* continue to be a free expressive site for personal video if owned by a corporate giant expecting to make a profit?

Looking at *YouTube*'s fellow internet comrade *MySpace* might give us some insight. *MySpace* has been an extremely powerful tool to connect all kinds of people: bands, politicians, volunteers, and friends, but *especially* youth. It has become *the* place for creating a visual counterpart to on-line identities. On a daily basis, youth invest several hours creating and updating their profiles, adding technically advanced features to their accounts, and chatting with their virtual community of friends—all for free. Young people develop a sense of ownership of their *MySpace* world and it is powerful.

When in dialogue with youth about the fact that News Corporation, owner of Fox broadcasting channels and other major media outlets, owns and operates *MySpace*, many youth frown upon the news. Nevertheless, this does not stop them from using *MySpace* as an accessible tool of connecting, researching, and mobilizing their communities. There is reason to be critical and cautious about corporate owned operations. If *MySpace* (or *YouTube*) does not continue to demonstrate success through profit, its owners can shut it down or require a costly user fee. Furthermore, if material on these sites runs counter to some of the corporation's beliefs or philosophies, can these corporations start to censor or edit material? Possibly. But for now,

MySpace still facilitates radical activism and youth connectivity whether News Corporation wants it to or not.

The most recent social networking site bought by a corporation, *YouTube*, started as a resource for bands, record labels, and the music industry at large. Still operating as a free resource to this audience, *YouTube* has also attracted youth activists to use videos as sources of political irony, spread opinions, garner activism, and document injustice. For example, young people in attendance at a rock show in Houston, TX, where the band Two Gallants performed, used video features on their cell phones to document an account of police brutality. These clips were uploaded onto *YouTube*: some were viewed 658,090 times, which sparked a massive electronic discussion on issues raised by the incident, and proved the bands' innocence in a lawsuit.

YouTube, like *MySpace*, has the ability to connect ideas, opinions, and attitudes by offering users the ability to upload, share, and comment on videos from people all over the world. Much like a virus, the internet can be, in Karen Brooks' words from the *Dallas Morning News* “powerful when a video, a photograph, a slogan—or a spoof thereof—catches on and spreads to thousands or hundreds of thousands of home pages and profiles.”

Youth are using *YouTube* as a tool to create grassroots movements despite the potential downsides of corporate ownership. Though Google now owns and operates *YouTube*, youth have not stopped using the site's ability to bolster their activism in new and innovative ways. Until *YouTube* or *MySpace* start censoring, editing, or even co-opting the original material posted on these sites,

young people will continue using the resources these sites offer despite changes in ownership.

YouTube offers a new, paradoxical model for youth media activism; it is used as a resource for organizing and civic action, but viewed as a profit driver by its corporate owners. Ultimately, *YouTube* offers youth a powerful tool in planting the seeds of social change outside and within a corporate domain. As Rep. Rafael Anchia, D-Dallas states in *dallasnews.com*, “If we could just tap into the ingenuity of young people and the energy they bring to *MySpace* and translate that energy into civic involvement, then I think you’ve done something powerful.” It looks as though young people have

not only tapped, but propelled their ingenuity straight into *YouTube* and are going to continue to use it in powerful ways, despite recent corporate ownership. And, it is this youth-driven ingenuity that will determine whether Google reaps profit from its users or in fact, ends up supporting a new culture of youth activism that controls, harnesses, and uses *YouTube* as a device for social change.

Ingrid Hu Dahl is the editor of Youth Media Reporter and a founding member of the Willie Mae Rock Camp for Girls in Brooklyn, New York. She has an M.A. in Women’s & Gender Studies and is the guitarist in the band Boyskout.

Cultivating A Field

By: Steven Goodman

Rebecca Renard, former co-director of the Educational Video Center (EVC) documentary workshop, cues up a 10-minute tape of her class preparing to make a documentary. Then she presses “play.”

“Get into your group and brainstorm ideas,” Rebecca says onscreen. Aureliano, also on the tape, leans forward and says, “I think homelessness is definitely a problem for teenagers.” He adds, “But a lot of times they are homeless because they do not want to work.”

“But mostly they get caught up in a system where their family is thrown out of housing and there’s nothing they can do about it,” Shinnel counters. “We need to find out about groups that help build more housing. Maybe we can volunteer for them.”

Rebecca stops the tape and asks the EVC staff where they see the teaching of inquiry practice, a method of having students’ own questions drive learning.

“I think what happened would have been totally different if the young people weren’t in a group but were sitting by themselves,” one colleague says. “Getting the students to go to a deeper

level of questioning, to researching and reading is a real challenge,” says another.

“So, how do we get them to really research their issues? To get in the habit of asking questions and pursuing them further—even when there isn’t one clear answer?”

The Educational Video Center study group often spends mornings over coffee and bagels, reflecting on challenges and grappling with how to better teach their students to be critical thinkers. The staff also meets regularly with other New York-based video youth media groups to learn from other organizations and discuss the critical issues they face.

These forums for professional development were founded on the belief that practitioners most effectively improve their teaching when they have regular opportunities to learn from each other. By engaging one another in ongoing discussions about the theory and practice of their craft, staff develop a critical sensibility. EVC’s study group helps build and sustain a culture of a “learning organization” in the office—a place where staff learning is collaborative, public, non-threatening, and integral to the daily experience of both students and staff.

Virtually no colleges exist where one can earn a degree or certificate to be a media educator. Perhaps the most common way that media educators learn their craft is through trial and error, and they largely do so in isolation.

The challenge of having no formal training is compounded by comparatively low salaries and the lack of a secure career path, which leads to high rates of turnover and the necessity of training new staff. Groups like EVC go a long way toward helping youth media educators improve their teaching and feel supported in their learning. That, in turn, can encourage them to stay at an organization longer.

But many organizations do not have this kind of staff development, and of those that do, too often the lessons learned in individual sessions rarely find their way to the outside world, where others can benefit from them. As an emerging field, youth media work is not yet professionalized with a commonly accepted set of best practices and standards for teaching, media production, or organizational management.

Part of the challenge of professionalizing youth media is that the field encompasses such a broad range of organizational models as well as various forms of media. Some programs operate as part of larger community media arts institutions, youth organizing projects, or after-school centers. Others are stand-alone organizations operating independently. Some focus on media literacy or building youth skills in preparation for college or a career. Others focus on media education, the arts, recreation, or using the making of media as a therapeutic tool. Still others are driven by goals of civic engagement and social change.

While we have yet to agree on common standards for teaching, producing, and distributing youth media, progress has been made towards finding common ground. New York City's youth media film and video community, which meets regularly to discuss their work, is doing a particularly good job at forming opportunities for learning among the many local organizations.

Both EVC and the Global Action Project

publish curricula to disseminate their youth media practices and principles to teachers and community youth workers across the country. The Manhattan Neighborhood Network's Youth Channel offers training modules for local organizations wanting to replicate parts of their program.

Video groups have also collaborated to form the Urban Visionaries Festival in New York City, where local youth media groups put on a festival showcasing their work. And many New York-based organizations have formed networks connecting youth media groups and educators, especially those working in video. These include Listen Up! PSA network and MediaRight's youth media distribution project.

These are all positive steps that can and should be replicated by organizations working in various media—print, radio, film, and multimedia. However, individual collaborations aren't enough to truly professionalize the field and exploit to the fullest the creative ideas and energy produced by these and other initiatives.

Towards this end, we need to establish an effective network—on the local, regional, and national levels—that will move the field beyond simply information and resource-sharing to collective knowledge-building. Such a network would allow administrators and practitioners at the grassroots level to help each other apply and make sense of, new knowledge coming out of the field. In turn, they could contribute their own innovations and lessons learned back to the field.

In addition to professional development, networks can address issues that will help build the field, such as effective distribution of media and curriculum, and how to raise money.

Ultimately, if youth media groups formed a national network, we would most likely attract larger grants from private and federal funding agencies than we do as individual organizations. With support from funders who encourage a culture of cooperation rather than competition, a range of cross-organizational initiatives could emerge, such as institutes facilitating intervisitation of each other's programs, practitioners con-

ducting case studies of their own projects, a collaborative publication containing essays from the field on the theory and practice of youth media, and a traveling youth media festival.

The point is for us to create meaningful ways to share each of our organizations' accumulated wealth of knowledge and experience, and to build upon the new information and lessons learned.

EVC is laying the groundwork for such a network by working with the Education Development Center's Youth Learn. With seed funding from the Open Society Institute and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, we are launching the Youth Media Learning Network. It will engage teachers, youth workers, as well as emerging youth media practitioners in staff development institutes where they can learn teaching strategies from each other. These institutes will be sponsored in partnership with organizations from intersecting fields such as youth development, civic engagement, journalism, and the arts. The network will also invest in a se-

lect group of emerging and mid-career practitioners who will serve as youth media fellows, honing their leadership skills together as a cohort and engaging in intensive projects designed to capture and disseminate promising practices to other interested practitioners and institutions.

Through these various field-building initiatives, a base of shared language, practices, and goals can emerge. Each organization will then become not only a producing and teaching organization, but perhaps more importantly, a learning organization.

Steven Goodman is the founder and director of the Educational Video Center and author of Teaching Youth Media. "Cultivating a Field" was adapted and updated from a paper commissioned by OSI for a March 2004 convening on youth media. This updated article originally appeared on YMR as part of a series exploring a new phase of introspection in the youth media field, in which educators began placing a premium on reflecting on their work and thinking and planning on a macrolevel.

Rules of Attraction: Getting Teens to Your Website

By: Rebecca Staed

You can count on youth media websites to be packed with powerful, teen-produced content. But while a lot of time and effort goes into creating those radio snippets, videos, and articles, few youth media nonprofits have the budget to put as much energy into making their site's design appeal to teens. Others hire web specialists who may not be experts in teen design. As a result, some youth media groups' websites are more alluring to adults than to their target audience. This is a missed opportunity—no matter how strong the content, a website that is not designed with youth in mind will fail to attract teen visitors, according to a new study by the Nielsen Norman Group (NNG).

"Teens pay more attention to web design than do adults," NNG concludes in *Teenagers on the Web: 60 Usability Guidelines for Creating Compelling Websites for Teens*. Researchers studied 38 adolescents from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds (46 percent came from households with an income of less than \$30,000) as they performed tasks on the web (like trying to find information on Marie Curie).

Some of the findings may sound obvious to those working with teens, such as the "discovery" that young people crave venues to express themselves. Other conclusions challenge typical teen stereotypes, like the misconception that today's

youth are techno-geniuses in need of constant visual and aural stimulation. (Actually, teens prefer simple design schemes and may be less adept at finding information on the web than adults, the study found.)

Some of the report's conclusions challenge typical teen stereotypes, like the misconception that today's youth are techno-geniuses in need of constant visual and aural stimulation.

The NNG report translates these findings into clear guidelines for how to make a website work well for teens. For all who design, edit, or facilitate youth websites, NNG's tips on what attracts teen attention are worth heeding. After all, the web can be a powerful means of getting youth-produced work in the hands (or on the computers) of one of youth media's primary audiences—teens themselves. Here are some of the guide's highlights:

Let teens chat and talk. Make sure your site is interactive. Quizzes, polls, message boards, games, or questions asking for feedback allow teens to meet new friends, share ideas, and believe their ideas matter and can make a difference. Interactive websites send that message. (So does giving teens a platform to showcase their own media, come to think of it...)

Make the site easy to use and understand. NNG cites three factors for why young people may not be the techno whiz kids so many people assume they are—teens' still-developing reading skills, research abilities, and, uh, patience. Whether or not this sounds to you like more teen stereotyping, you'll probably agree with the study's resulting tips for web design. To create an effective teen site, NNG says, make everything clear. Provide lots of visible links that change color to show visited areas and clear cross-references with links to related material. Make the "search" box easy to find.

Keep it clean. A common misconception is that teens want loud, glitzy graphics, reports NNG. Actually, teens like a minimalist, clean layout. They prefer a large font (so they can lean back in their chairs while reading), tabulated borders, and need-to-know information only. Jumbled, verbose con-

tent is a major turnoff. Nor are teens fond of fancy animation schemes, pop-ups, or annoying sound effects.

Don't call it a "kids" or "youth" site. This may be bad news for organizations with the word "youth" in their names, but NNG's study found that the terms "can be completely misinterpreted by teens." While the report did not explain what beef, exactly, teens have with the word "youth," it did relay that teens avoid sites that appear too childlike, and "detest" being called "kids." The bottom line: teens like being called "teens."

Use classy colors and cutting-edge design. Think Macs. *Make it fast.* Not every teen has high-speed access or a top-notch computer. Slow-running sites and long download times can be annoying, to say the least. *Let teens click for information.* Teens prefer to click than to scroll, so *limit the scrolling*, please.

Intrigued? You can learn (much) more by buying *Teenagers on the Web* for, gulp, \$149. The price may be worth it. The easy-to-follow, 129-page report offers 60 detailed design guidelines along with pictures of exemplary sites and supporting research explaining how and why these tips work for teens. It also provides commonsense advice for how to get teens to articulate their thoughts during studies. (Assure young people that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers—and no intimidating white lab coats, please.) The report can be downloaded from the Nielsen Norman Group website.

As for the study's conclusion that adults may be able to out-websurf us youth, I have some difficulty believing it. It takes my mom an hour to type and send a paragraph-long email, and she still hasn't figured out that "Return" is the same as "Enter." So for NNG's next study, I propose a nationwide household challenge to determine web proficiency. Losers do the winner's homework for a week.

Rebecca Staed worked as an intern at Children's PressLine. This article originally appeared on YMR as "What Works on the Web for Teens."

Teaming Up

By: Kendra Hurley

Not long ago, many of us working in youth media did not consider ourselves part of a field. And, really, why would we? Opportunities to share practices and collaborate with others working on teen-produced media were few and far between. Conferences tended to lump us together based on our means of communication—print, radio, film, the web—not on how or with whom we worked.

Foundations did not earmark funding specifically for youth media, isolating organizations further. Competing for grants, many groups felt pressured to package themselves in the categories funders sought—as either activist-oriented or artistic, focused on product or process, or preoccupied with distribution or education reform.

But as foundations like the Open Society Institute and that of Time Warner recognized and funded youth media as a field, grantees at resulting conferences have begun to see far more similarities in our philosophies, missions, and approaches to our work than previously imagined.

Since then, youth media as a topic in and of itself began making the agenda at related conferences. These opportunities led to a new phase of reflection. Educators began thinking and planning on a macro level, placing a premium on not just continuing the work of helping teens make media, but reflecting on that work—on codifying practices and evaluating impacts, on determining where youth media fits and diverges from the many fields and movements it borrows from and builds upon—such as alternative education, narrative therapy, and independent media. “There is still an obvious thirst for dialogue, for tools, for sharing best practices among people working to support youth media,” said Rachel Alterman Wallack, executive director of the Atlanta-based youth publication VOX.

The premium on reflection is apparent in

the many conferences and collaborations that have emerged over the last several years, in new and unprecedented opportunities for practitioners to develop professionally, and in the increase in research and writing about the field. Conferences, collaborations, and venues for professional development in the past have included:

- A collaboration between the Educational Video Center and the Education Development Center’s YouthLearn Initiative to create new resources for the field, including a peer network linking youth media educators to each other.
- The National Alliance for Media Art’s and Culture’s Youth Media Leadership Institute, where 20 educators from around the country received fellowships to convene in Oregon where they set goals for leading and advancing the field.
- The formation of the New York City Learning Network, a group of film educators who meet monthly to discuss their work and topics such as critical literacy.

Research and writing about youth media include:

- The Education Development Center’s YouthLearn Initiative’s ongoing research into how youth media programs evaluate their impact.
- The much talked about film *Born into Brothels*, about a youth media project in India, won the Oscar for best documentary in 2005. The film continues to reflect a growing trend in media produced by youth media educators that explores their line of

work, often placing it in an academic context.

The intensified push by a number of individual organizations to better understand, evaluate, research, and codify their work. Berkeley-based Youth Radio has an in-house researcher who helps staff and youth develop, document, and evaluate learning at the program. L.A. Youth, Youth Radio, and Youth Communication have mental health professionals on-call for managing and understanding the emotional issues of the job. At Youth Communication, staff have undertaken an effort to define practice through documenting practices, strategies, philosophies and lessons in an ever-growing manual.

Most of a youth media professional's day is spent not in reflection, but raising funds, working with teens, and putting out a product. But it's the mo-

ments when we do get glimpses of the bigger picture—the conferences, collaborations, time to view the work of colleagues—which can sometimes be unexpectedly exhilarating, leading to new ways of thinking and planning for how this line of work can continue to grow and evolve. (In this sense, feeling part of something larger than one's own organization can help prevent burnout and quick turnover at nonprofits.)

The relaunched Youth Media Reporter is itself part of this new phase of introspection, and the comment page of some articles—like Ken Ikeda's review of *Born into Brothels*—make apparent how ready youth media educators are to engage in dialogue about their work. My hope is that all youth media educators can help make it the most useful tool possible for reflecting on their practice and sharing ideas and tools by sharing feedback and ideas.

Kendra Hurley is managing editor at Youth Communications in New York City.

Bridging the Gap: The University in the Youth Media Field

By: Ingrid Hu Dahl

Renee Hobbs is one of the nation's leading authorities on media literacy education. For more than 20 years, she has helped bring media literacy education to thousands of students in the United States through her collaborative work with school districts, state education agencies and media companies. She has authored a number of publications on media literacy, exploring how teachers integrate media into elementary and secondary classrooms. She has created numerous curriculum materials including My Pop Studio, an online creative play environment that introduces media literacy to girls ages 9 to 14. She is the director of Media Education Lab and an associate professor in the School of Communications and Theatre at Temple University where she teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses on media literacy, children and media, and research methods.

In this article, YMR features a field placement course developed by Hobbs that provides college students a hands-on approach to working with youth media and media literacy. The interview with Hobbs, included in this article, offers youth media professionals a unique insight in the development of university-community partnerships that benefit youth, staff, students and faculty members alike.

Experiencing the field in “field placement”

Renee Hobbs' personal website contains a wealth of work, publications, projects, and media activism that the acclaimed professor has accomplished in and outside both the university and the youth media field. Amidst the sea of content, a syllabus

for the course *Field Experience in Youth Media & Media Literacy* caught YMR's attention. What an interesting combination—a course that actually gets college students to work *specifically* in the youth media field.

The course, offered annually, provides students with a community learning experience while helping children and teens build their communication, media production and critical thinking skills. College students are expected to spend time each week in a school setting, assisting teachers or taking leadership on media analysis and production projects with children and youth. Back in the classroom at Temple University, college students reflect on the role of media, technology and education in the lives of the youth they work with and discuss the teaching and learning process. The goal of the course is to engage college students in experiential learning while strengthening their understanding of the role of media and technology in urban education through action, reflective writing and discussion.

The course uses the “empowerment spiral” of awareness, analysis, reflection and action to explore issues in media literacy and youth media production. Through the process of reading, writing and discussing how real-world field experiences relate to the required course readings, college students build an appreciation for the complexity of media literacy education in urban education. The main text used, in addition to several supplementary articles, is *Holler if you Hear Me: The Education of a Teacher and His Students* by Gregory Michie (Teachers College Press) about the life of a first-year teacher in Chicago.

Hobbs lists aims and goals for the course in the syllabus. They provide a window into an enlightened pedagogy that seeks to connect students with tangible media literacy skills outside university walls—specifically, within the youth media field. As a result of this course, students:

- become more reflective and aware of the role of mass media and technology in the lives of urban children and teens;
- strengthen their communication skills, including their use of email, interpersonal communication, writing, and public speaking;
- gain project management and career skills through field placement in a job setting;
- gain knowledge about the key concepts of media literacy and the development of the field in the United States and Britain;
- strengthen their ability to solve problems in school-based settings and actively contribute to a learning community as a member of a team;
- improve leadership and independent initiative by being responsible for their behavior in a field setting and acquiring specific expertise in a related special interest;
- gain sensitivity and understanding of the cultural backgrounds and life experiences of urban and privileged youth;
- reflect on the power of critical thinking about media and media production as a means of cognitive, emotional, personal and social growth.

Reading over such outcomes would make anyone desirous to go back to their undergraduate years and demand such a course was in place to immediately

sign up for. We need Renee Hobbs, and more of her kind.

On her website home page www.reneehobbs.org, an article authored by Hobbs entitled, “Teaching and Learning in the 21st Century University” proves to be important both for academic and media professional audiences. She concludes with the notion of creating a “community of learners” at the university, which youth media professionals can surely benefit from. She states:

We must focus our emphasis on teaching and learning not only on classroom techniques that make us better lecturers, but on building and nurturing respectful relationships that enable faculty colleagues to be “critical friends,” engaged in the process of reflecting upon, testing and continually enhancing the quality of what we offer, collectively, to our students. Providing incentives to departments that design and implement activities to promote this kind of ongoing, iterative curriculum reform could be a first step towards creating the “community of learners” among the faculty that is the hallmark of excellence in university education.

Both college students and youth media professionals can learn from the 21st century university. Using the same words from Hobbs’ article, in order to build and nurture relationships that enable *youth media professionals* to be critical friends with students and faculty, both media professionals and academics must engage and reflect upon the ways their work overlap and can benefit from collective purposes. Young college students in field work courses such as those offered by Hobbs have opportunities to test and enhance the quality of youth media, media literacy, and education in after-school programs.

The insight they gain offer both the academy and media professionals a bigger picture—and point to the need for media literacy and analysis skills for all. To academia’s benefit, youth media

professionals have the capability to design and implement media literacy in after-school youth media programs across the nation. By partnering with college students who enter after-school programs, a greater collaborative force can address the nation-wide need for media *literacy* to coincide with media *technology* in youth media programs.

If there is a willingness on both sides—who share common goals such as integrating critical thinking, exchanging insights and perspectives, educating youth, networking with professionals, and making a difference in communities, society, and/or in youth development—then there is great potential for the youth media field and academic professionals to partner, complimenting the specific goals both wish to achieve.

Working together, a pairing like this could be a match made in media-heaven. Media professors, such as Hobbs, have the power to link students to the field. Engaged students are active participants and leaders that report to youth media professionals and organizations on the needs of contemporary youth media education. Updates and ideas are exchanged; practice and research become actively interconnected, and youth media makers are equipped with instructors that mindfully connect media technology with media literacy and social analysis.

Inside the mind of a media literacy professional and academic: an interview with Renee Hobbs.

YMR: Can you discuss the importance of a “community of learners” pertaining to the connections within and outside the university?

Hobbs: Philosophically, that is a big part of why I created the Media Smart Seminars, a monthly program run for students and the media and education community in Philadelphia. It is an opportunity for networking and information sharing. Teachers, college faculty, media professionals, artists, community members, students, youth and after-school professionals have so much to offer each other yet there’s often

very few structured ways for them to interact and share ideas. [These seminars] give a space to share experiences and knowledge and reflect upon the challenges and complexities of the work. Here at Temple, students are hungry to test some of their ideas in the context of the ‘real world’ and the community.

YMR: Can you share more about this student hunger for “the real” or a “taste of the real world?” Where is that coming from and how do you focus on meeting that need?”

Hobbs: Media literacy draws its appeal from its perceived relevance to the mediated world, so that when we are analyzing and making media we are responding to the contemporary world as we experience it, find it, and want to change it. That’s exactly what’s going on with students, as they want to frame the knowledge they are gaining in the classroom by responding to and exploring new and unfamiliar cultural environments. Students are looking for opportunities to test their ideas in the field. There are several examples of this at Temple, such as when white suburban kids have their first experience in urban schools and African-American kids have their first experience with schools in suburban settings. It is fascinating to see how that learning works, when students apply course readings and discussions to new life experiences.

YMR: It seems that students really want different perspectives. Media, media literacy, seminars, and teaching about the media engage students with what is not often tangible. They can see they are affected by the media, but to be able to analyze, touch, and create media is empowering. What exactly happens at Media Smart Seminars?

Hobbs: Media Smart Seminars are informal sessions, held at Temple University campus in the late afternoon so people from the Philadelphia area (and beyond) can attend. We publicize them in the local community papers so people outside the University can learn about them. Everyone gets

a chance to introduce themselves—we encourage people to develop their professional network. Usually [the seminars] consist of 30 minutes of a presenter sharing (i.e. screening a student-produced video, sharing a lesson plan, a graduate student sharing preliminary research, or a media professional discussing new initiatives). In the discussion that follows, participants are active and thoughtful. At each Seminar, there are different participants and it is always a diverse group [where] many people can connect with others with similar interests. Topics have included: using hip-hop as a teaching tool, media literacy in middle-school, girls and online media, media literacy in higher education, and digital media production for urban teens.

We also use the Seminars to showcase our community-university partnerships. In the Fall of 2006, Temple graduate students worked at the Fairhill Community High School researching a media literacy initiative developed by a teacher who worked with me over the summer. Fairhill is a “second chance” high school for youth ages 16 to 21 who are returning to high school after having previously dropped out. For the culminating event, 40 teens (and several family members) from Fairhill came to Temple’s campus, toured the college radio station, and then attended a Media Smart Seminar. At that event, eight Fairhill students made multimedia presentations on different topics related to the five-year anniversary of the September 11 attacks. It was a remarkable event. Many Temple students and faculty attended and it was very inspiring—it’s important to provide opportunities that give youth a chance to show how talented they are.

YMR: Let’s talk about your course for Field Placement in Youth Media and Media Literacy. This is for undergraduates, correct?

Hobbs: Yes, the course is targeted for sophomores. It is an opportunity for experiential learning. Students spend 3-5 hours in a fieldwork setting where there is an interest in media analysis or

media production. They work in teams assigned to a specific site and negotiate with faculty and students on what kinds of projects they will undertake. They may support the work of teachers, teach classes themselves, or work with students in teams or individually. Students have helped make video projects and offered media literacy workshops.

[Accompanying the fieldwork,] students attend a two-hour seminar that meets once a week where they reflect on their experiences in light of the required readings. They compare what the literature says about youth media to their actual experience on site. We’ve had some fascinating insights. The student evaluations at the end of each semester state that the course exceeded their expectations, they had no idea they would learn so much, and that it was life-altering. Because the course enables students to contribute to educational change and to make a difference in a community setting, it influences their sense of themselves. Because of this, the course is never the same, it’s always changing; it is unpredictable because it is an adventure based on students’ complex experiences in the field.

YMR: What role do teachers and media professionals, who work with your students, experience? How do your students enhance media literacy knowledge for both instructors and the youth they serve?

Hobbs: I establish relationships with site supervisors, who in some cases, are on their own steep learning curve. Teachers may let us do this in order to piggy back their own learning curve—as they essentially let the students into their classroom in order to learn from them. For some teachers, their first media literacy exposure [comes from] our students. So, one model for the field placement course is “teacher as co-learner.” Another model is the site supervisor who adopts students as a “part-time teacher,” which is a more formal relationship and based on an employee/employer relationship [typical of after-school programs.] But in both models, everyone is a learner.

For example, one Temple student involved middle school students in a discussion of images of women in advertising. Afterwards, in discussion with the teacher, it was clear that the teacher hadn't thought in a systematic way about gender stereotyping via media representations.

The teacher had learned a lesson from the demonstration the student brought to the seventh graders. Of course, there are downsides to this model, since undergraduates are new to media literacy themselves and bring different levels of knowledge and skills with them to each site. I meet with supervisors four times throughout the semester and have discovered that's a *very* important part of my job.

YMR: How do you get media literacy spread out into those sites? How do you get teachers to become more aware of media literacy as co-learners?

Hobbs: Here in Pennsylvania, there is less understanding of media literacy than in some other states. People don't know to ask about it, and may not value it as the kind of knowledge and skills that are important for children and youth. We need to provide more explicit rationale for this type of work. One hypothesis I have about this is that, here in Pennsylvania, there is a strong tradition of vocational education. When teachers and school leaders think of media in schools they think of video production courses, equipment, learning to use equipment.

Critical thinking or reading, analyzing, discussing and challenging ideas do not get associated with the provision of "technical" skills. I get calls from individuals who say they want help providing students with technical skills. And I inform them that more will come than just that. There will be a lot of critical thinking, reasoning, analysis, writing, research and collaboration. One heartbreaking case is when I worked with a group of 13-14 year olds who were eager to discuss issues of representation in Latino communities. It was very clear that the [program] officer [who headed the after-school program] wanted technical

training and not a media literacy initiative.

Most youth media folks affiliated with YMR "get" the connection between media literacy and production. But I have found that a lot of folks aren't "there" yet. The word "skill" is important, but sometimes this word gets used as a code word for "manual labor" or not intellectually challenging work. When I describe media literacy to program officers [and supervisors], I have had responses [as shocking as] "our kids can't do that." These are crazy attitudes that we, as media literacy educators and youth media professionals must address.

For example, the Student Television Network (STN) is a group of teachers, many of whom just teach production with no critical perspective, no analysis or aesthetics, just how to make nice, tight edits. Youth media professionals can really contribute to the work of these types of educators.

YMR: How would you change the attitudes of these program officers and media teachers, whose gate keeping post can result in a lack of media analysis and critical perspective for youth?

Hobbs: The only way that happens if those educators themselves have had a learning experience where they discover the power of linking media analysis with media making. Leaders and teachers need to have the experiences that we offer students—to analyze media through the practice of close analysis and deconstruction and to work collaboratively to compose a meaningful message and present it to a real audience in a community setting.

In my experience, very techie individuals have taken a seminar of mine and have experienced a widening and deepening of perspective. It's not that they didn't care about analyzing media, they just didn't know how to do it or bring meta-cognition into production practices. It may take just one teacher education session. But in many after-school settings, there is no money for training. Staff turnover is phenomenal. Few programs have an opportunity to provide such training to staff. Institutions are operating on a shoe-string budget.

Right now, there is such phenomenal explosive growth in youth media programs that it's a situation where everyone is re-inventing the wheel. That's why what Tony Streit is doing at Youth Learn is fantastic.

YMR: In order for a community of learners in universities to work with media literacy field work, it seems that faculty need to say, "I really want my students to learn something and connect to the bigger picture of the real world."

Hobbs: We are building this at Temple University. But university-community partnerships take time, they take sensitivity, they take support and funding from university administrators, and they are challenging. Faculty can't always have the level of control they desire. The real world is messy—and it doesn't always conform to our expectations. With my PhD students, part of the opportunity is to examine the kinds of complexity that occurs in media literacy learning. We ask, "What's actually happening here?" and "how does that map onto the claims, the hopes, and the dreams people have for youth media and media literacy?"

YMR: How do you find those networks, bridges, and links especially as a busy faculty member?

Hobbs: There's never enough time for this. At any one of these schools or after school sites, there's so much I could do. I'd personally love to spend 20 hours a week at some of these sites. I learn so much from practitioners—and observing practitioners really inspires my research interests. But what's amazing to me is the way these community partners come into my life and how Temple students benefit from this. I meet many of them by hosting the Media Smart Seminars. When someone new attends a seminar, we often invite them to consider making a future presentation. These presentations are validating to the presenters and they also help Temple students get connected to youth media sites in schools and community organizations.

In one case, a director of the youth media

program for Project Home showed up at a Media Smart Seminar. One of my graduate students met with him, they chatted, and the student ended up researching Project Home and writing a paper on the program. The director is on his own intellectual journey as a youth media professional and strives to make his youth media program better. He benefited tremendously from a relationship with this 'critical friend.' He gets to learn about the field from the perspective of a student who is studying it formally, share his own experiences, respond to questions, and reflect on another's ideas about his own work. They may continue to collaborate. We'll invite him to make a presentation on Project Home at a future seminar. It will be a win-win for everyone.

YMR: Rutgers University, The College of New Jersey, and University of California-Los Angeles are working on community partnerships and community based research, but none of them focus specifically on a youth media or media literacy component, which you do at Temple University. I applaud your work, Renee. Thank you so much for your time.

Piecing it Together

As a leading figure in media literacy and education, Renee Hobbs provides key insights to linking the university classroom and students with youth media after-school programs and teachers. Youth media professionals, who stretch far and wide around the globe, can use Hobbs' experience to re-consider the depth to which media literacy and youth made programs collaborate and join forces. Combining a "community of learners" between college students who witness the needs of youth media after-school programs and the capability of youth media professionals to address these needs, a greater ability to expand, grow, and build the youth media field is in view. Just as academics can benefit from bridging faculty across disciplines to share their work, the youth media field can benefit from networking with students and faculty in colleges and universities who are interested in testing media theories in the "real world."

College students are hungry to experience the “real world,” to frame their knowledge gained from the classroom into the dynamic learning space of hands-on practice. This space proves to be life-altering, as shown in the course evaluations. Hobbs receives at the end of each semester. The youth media field can partner with faculty at universities to encourage such co-curricular experiences for their students. Youth media professionals ought to reach out to the university more, as faculty are interested in ways to engage students with practice and alternative, community-based, hands-on learning.

By using her dual resources as professor and media literacy educator, Hobbs has offered the youth media field an opportunity to interact with college students who have time, a vested interest, and desire to engage with media non-profits and offer students the contacts they need to connect theory with practice. She recommends that youth media professionals work with college students, attend and present at seminars and events on university campuses, and integrate media analysis and media production activities.

It is up to youth media professionals to extend themselves to faculty and college students who have opportunities to gather data, reflect upon

and analyze the lived experience of participants in youth media programs. In order to strengthen the awareness of how youth media can advance young people’s education and understanding of the world, such teachings must be executed from all angles. Hobbs makes a point that youth media literacy has not developed equally to that of media production technology—so there is a real need out there, in the “real world,” one that is perhaps beyond the current reach of the youth media field.

Bridges between media literacy academics and youth media professionals will require some of the same outcome as the results students can expect to achieve from taking Hobbs’ field placement course in media literacy: “to become more reflective and aware of the role of mass media and technology in the lives of urban children and teens...and strengthen [one’s] ability to solve problems in school-based settings [in order to] actively contribute to a learning community as a member of a team.”

To learn more about Hobbs, go to her site: <http://renehobbs.org>. To become involved with Media Smart Seminars at Temple University, go to: <http://mediaeducationlab.com>.

Reaching Out from the University Walls: The Power of Community Partnerships

By: Kathy O’Byrne

In Kathy O’Byrne’s words, “The world of non-profits is different from academic culture, from everything from timeframes and deadlines to the dissemination of findings or results...but the collaboration between students and professionals is powerful.” Through the development of course work that strives to link theory with practice, Kathy O’Byrne and her colleagues at

UCLA have addressed the needs of both non-profit organizations—who need program evaluation research and students who require hands on service-learning course experience. Based on a symbiotic partnership between student learners and community leadership, the model that O’Byrne and her fellow instructors provide can offer youth media professionals

opportunities to enter the classroom as co-learners and instructors, reaping shared benefits of engaged learning.

The following article provides an example of an alternative, inexpensive, and practical model of program evaluation that incorporates academia and community partnerships. Evaluation is a necessity for non-profit organizations for grants, program assessment, decision-making and policy work.

The recent investments of major funders exploring evaluation strategies demonstrates the importance of this work in strengthening the youth media field. To review such evaluation reports and toolkits created by Social Policy Research Associates supported by Open Society Institute and Surdna, go to www.scs.aed.org/projects/youth.html. To read a previous YMR article on non-profit program evaluation, read Jennifer Moore's, "Getting Evaluated—And Noticed: How to build evidence of impact on a tight budget."

Several years ago, many faculty members at UCLA and other universities realized non-profit agencies were making repeated requests for help with program evaluation. Funders were requiring more and more evaluation from non-profits, yet the organizations had no staff members with experience, expertise or time to meet those requirements. A series of casual conversations among faculty regarding this issue lead to a plan.

My colleagues and I began enrolling agency staff members from public health non-profits alongside UCLA undergraduates in an upper-division course. There would be three goals. First, we could provide community partners with a concrete piece of research and information by having students conduct a program evaluation study as part of the class. Second, we could provide training for staff members to continue their evaluation work for their organization, once the class was completed. And third, we could create new career paths for undergraduates interested in public service careers through their service-learning experience with these organizations.

With a small grant from our UCLA Center

for Community Partnerships, we launched the effort and recruited community partners from diverse organizations across L.A. County. For months before the class began, we met with community partners to discuss details of their program including what their research questions, and how the answers to these questions, would build their capacity to better serve their clients and/or constituencies.

Research questions created by the community partners framed the program evaluation studies for the class. In the first four weeks of the course, students read a series of required texts to learn the theory of program evaluation. These texts included seminal works in the field of program evaluation that teach basic methodologies and concepts students use in their work. In the next four weeks of the quarter, teams of students collect and analyze data at these organization sites instead of attending class. They learn to deal with ambiguity of data, the culture of non-profit agencies, the ethics of research, how to use technology in research, and the challenges of working in teams to create high quality program evaluation research. The course ends with a public event where the student teams report their findings to a campus and community wide audience.

This course is not a typical academic course. It includes the collaboration with leaders in the community who physically attend and become part of the class. Often, courses at the university do not offer this framework, (as it is a costly option) or have co-instructors outside academia (in this case, community partners or professionals in the non-profit sector). The work students' conduct outside of class not only offers an organization a program evaluation report, but training modules to incorporate for future evaluation research.

This alternative structure and method of teaching research skills has been so successful, the course has doubled in size over the last three years. The testimonials from UCLA undergraduates and community partners are moving and show that this approach is not only useful but highly desired. Key insights I learned from leading a community based research course have been to:

- Realize that the world of non-profits is different from academic culture, from everything from timeframes and deadlines to the dissemination of findings or results.
- Pick projects that “have legs.” A good program evaluation is one that will be used for some purpose. The findings should help with program planning or development, decision-making, advocacy or the next grant proposal.
- Involve community partners in the planning of evaluation and research questions from the very start.
- Understand that students, instructors and community partners are all more engaged, motivated and enthusiastic when the standard frameworks of an undergraduate course are altered to include active learning.
- Realize it is both possible and extremely rewarding to have community partners and undergraduates in class together.
- Include technology training (e.g. GIS mapping) as part of class projects.
- Frontload all the reading. Then leave at least four or five weeks for hands-on data collection and analysis.
- Have students write progress reports in teams during the data collection/analysis timeframe. Include the individual responsibilities or contributions of each team member so the workload is evenly and fairly distributed.
- Have an "evaluation of the evaluation" by community partners, to offer feedback on the quality and relevance of the study.
- Place web-based tutorials, design tips and completed projects on both university and the non-profit websites.
- Make sure to have a recognition or celebration event at the end to showcase findings, acknowledge the work and bring campus and community partners together. Have students bring friends and family members. Be sure to invite key faculty and administrators, who are interested in undergraduate research or engaged scholarship.

As an outcome of this course, students exhibit a high level of dedication and responsibility to a “real world” audience, especially when working to collect and analyze data that can be given back to the community partner at the end of the quarter. They learn to make decisions that are ethical and respectful of community partners. Similarly, community partners are transformed, not only through the creation of new knowledge, but also through gaining skills that can help build the capacity of their organizations.

Community partners see the joint research projects as working towards social justice, and organizing community residents oftentimes works to advocate for meaningful change around issues of access and equity. Students receive influential and high-level service-learning experience as non-profits receive evaluation reports of their own creation while integrating within the academy as co-learners and instructors.

These service-learning projects respond to an identified community need for assistance with program evaluation. I recommend other universities connect with community partners and professionals in the non-profit sector, including of course, the youth media field.

It is clear that bridging both the university and non-profit organizations (or professionals) with an alternative approach to collective learning and teaching is key to a future of community engagement, leadership and partnerships.

It is gratifying to see service-learning research products used in real-world situations with our community partners. At UCLA, we are determined to create additional courses that use “research as service” in the near future, to enrich the culture of our research university and make community learning a cornerstone of undergraduate education.

The collaboration between students and professionals is powerful, and often produces material and experiences that are beneficial to both parties. As a professor at UCLA who relies on community partnerships, I encourage professionals in the youth media field, as well as professors across the nation, to join forces in building alliances for students, youth, and the future. College students are hungry for field

work experience and can benefit from having the expertise of youth media professionals to contribute to, and even co-teach, college courses.

Youth media has a strong foundation around the globe that college students can engage with, examine, and document. If media professionals work with the university, additional exposure and research can only benefit their work and subsequent programs. Community partnerships is an excellent pathway to connect academia with youth media professionals – to share leadership, evaluation research, and expand the field in new, powerful domains.

Kathy O’Byrne is a professor and director of the Center for Community Learning at University of California–Los Angeles.

Teamwork, Leadership, and New(s) Coverage

By: Katina Paron

For seven fabulous weeks last summer, Children’s PressLine (CPL), the youth journalism organization that I run, moved into the New York *Daily News* building to produce two pages a week for the newspaper’s weekly borough supplements, *Brooklyn News* and *Queens News*. We had needed a new, temporary home for our summer program and through a mixture of perseverance, insider help, and good timing, *The Daily News* told us we could move in, as long as we produced work for two of their borough sections.

The Daily News is the most read daily paper in New York City and the opportunity for our youth journalists to get their work in front of 2.8 million people every week was thrilling. We have covered some amazing stories in the past five years—the 2004 Republican and Democratic National Conventions, 2002 United Nations Special Session on the Rights of the Children, juvenile offenders on death row in Texas. And, we have partnered with

some major news outlets—BBC World Service, CBS Radio, Boston Globe. However, I knew this project with *The Daily News* would be the apex of Children’s PressLine’s career to date.

While this was an exciting venture, it was not easy. In a new and temporary space with a high, weekly demand of articles, we had a few challenging hurdles to undergo as a group.

Redesigning the Content

Our first hurdle was figuring out what the pages would look like. Normally, we produce one or two articles that total 1,500 words for *New York Amsterdam News*, one of our regular outlets. The page is text-heavy but we like to be able to give the interviewee the space to tell his or her full story. We also generally submit an illustration produced by a freelance illustrator that works with us pro bono.

This would never work for *The Daily News*. First of all, we only had 850 words to work with

for the page and second, we needed photography not illustrations. *The Daily News*, after all, made its mark as “New York’s Picture Paper.”

We also needed a way to showcase our interviews with politicians. Understandably, 90% of CPL’s interviews are with kids, but 10% are with politicians. We wanted to make sure that politician interviews were part of the page every week.

So what did we do? First, we took on a new approach to our page layout and focused more on content than the word restrictions extended from *The Daily News*. As long as we could cover series topics, like education reform and homeless gay teens, we’d work with the word restrictions.

To manage the photography, we hired a photography intern. Aeden initially interviewed for an editorial position but as luck would have it she had photojournalism experience that we needed.

And to solve the politician question we invented a column called “BackTalk: kids speak, officials respond.” “BackTalk” is a Q-&-A style column, with the “Q” being a quality of life concern from a young person in the community and the “A” coming from a public policy official responsible for the issue. We planned to have each page to contain one or two stories and a “BackTalk” column.

Redesigning the Program

We had a very short time to prepare the youth journalists and staff for this new venture. We knew that youth from our current program would be working with us this summer but that we’d probably have another 20 who were new to journalism. We had to redesign our standard summer program material to design a training that would prepare all the youth involved, despite their experience level, for the huge responsibility ahead.

So what did we do? We created a workshop that teen editors conducted with youth in Brooklyn and Queens, which allowed us to collect several voices and “quality of life” concerns from local teens all at once for the pieces in “BackTalk.” The key to these pages was interviewing local kids and using local statistics. We provided a service to

the groups of young people by training them in advocacy journalism skills and providing contact information for their local politicians. An alumna of CPL had just graduated college and was available to coordinate the workshops and work with the teen editors that acted as facilitators. I would work together with the teen editors to schedule public official interviews integral to the column. We tested the workshop at our “New Members Training” in June and were able to iron out a lot of kinks early on.

Needing photography also meant doing off-site stories, which we often do more frequently in the summer. Unlike video or radio programs, we do our interviews over the phone and this is often necessary when we are working on national stories for *The Online News Hour* or *Scripps Howard News Service*. Because I’m a print girl by nature it was a constant struggle for me to remember that yes, we need pictures.

Staffing

Going into the summer, CPL had two full-time employees and two college interns. CPL has always worked with interns to act as interview schedulers, mentors and managers for the teams of youth journalists. We had to add staff for this project, but any extra money in our budget was being spent on the logistics of moving the computers and materials to the new space at the *Daily News* office.

So how did we get more staff with no money? We invested in more interns. Our two interns immediately got promotions. Chelsea (Brown University) became Brooklyn Bureau Chief and Megan (Pennsylvania State) was Queens Bureau Chief. They had the same page requirements but needed to come up with different stories.

I hired Lizette (Rutgers University) as the editorial assistant to both Bureau Chiefs. Now my interns had an intern. They were very excited. Collectively, these amazing interns were traveling nearly 5 hours each way to and from CPL and worked nearly 30 hours a week Monday through Thursday. Chelsea and Meghan were each responsible for scheduling interviews for 15 youth jour-

nalists who were on their teams. Another intern, Laura (New York University), worked with the youth on managing the editorial flow. Latesha, who was 8-months pregnant with her first child, was our transcriber thanks to an externship program at Inwood House, a social service organization that works with teen moms. Amanda (Wesleyan University) was the former CPL alumna who facilitated our Media and Community workshops. (Since then we've been able to hire Amanda as CPL's Youth Coordinator.)

Where did these amazing interns come from?

I distributed our internship positions far and wide. In April, I had conducted 20 phone interviews with potential interns and it was clear in my phone conversations with Chelsea and Megan that they had had extensive experience at their college newspapers and understood the mission of CPL. Laura had worked with us the previous spring and we invited her to stay once we got the *Daily News* deal. Lizette and Aeden's resumes came in at just the right time. Aeden had the photography experience we needed. And Lizette had time to give and an eagerness to learn—perfect skills for an editorial assistant. I sat down with every intern and walked them through all necessary steps and involved each as a fellow teammate. I took their questions as possible program flaws and we discussed as a group, paths to execution.

Learning Lessons

Together, by the end of the summer we produced 17 news pages, which involved more than 40 articles, conducted interviews with 220 kids and 22 public officials, and held 10 Media and Community workshops with 157 young people at community centers throughout Brooklyn and Queens. In seven weeks we had increased our regular summer workload by 300%.

I am extremely proud of the work we did last summer for *The Daily News*. Not only because the kids were smart, passionate, and excited about sinking their teeth into the project, but because as a team, the following key lessons were reinforced:

Do not hide youth from the assignment. Be-

cause CPL works with so many news outlets we often get assignments that we pass to youth journalists, versus having youth come up with a story idea that we pitch to editors. We learned from this experience that we need to expose youth more to the bosses that give us the assignments. The youth recognized and experienced high demands and expectations from the *Daily News* editors, which was empowering. The high level of responsibility was transformational to witness as teens, adults, and interns collaborated to achieve every goal and deadline.

Work as a team alongside youth. As a group, we were able to share the demands, the risks, and the hurdles, which made our collective experiences even more profound, rewarding, and powerful. As a bonus, we got journalists to step up to the plate when it came to post-production elements of stories, such as transcribing, editing, and writing introductions. As a result, we decided to incorporate these elements more strategically in our regular program.

The program is flexible if we let it be. For so long, CPL used the same methodology and training methods in its work. There were hitches but we found the combination of peer mentoring, leadership, and civic engagement successful in our journalism program. *The Daily News* project forced us to change and expand this. It highlighted many of our organization's strengths and complemented our current work.

Reaping Benefits

As an organization, CPL gained so much from our high-profile partnership. We went into the fall with a full bag of tricks to grab the attention of editors and empower local youth.

Speak truth to power using "BackTalk." I love "BackTalk" as a resource to make public officials accountable to youth concerns. Through the column we are able to share kids' quality of life problems to a wide audience that needs to know that kids are affected by the decisions that adults make. The best part of "BackTalk" is that we get to make politicians and public officials accountable to

their youngest constituents. This column embodies a guiding principle of CPL – bringing authentic youth voices to adults in power. We do this by using the power of the media to publicly question policy officials on their decisions or their avoidance of an issue that directly affects young people. For example: Why aren't there bike racks in Canarsie and teen community centers in Corona? Why are there so many sexual offenders in Fresh Meadows? Why can't kids learn about condoms in school? It is a perfect column and gratifying for youth to produce. "BackTalk" is now looking for a new home and those of us at CPL are excited by the thought of producing it once again.

Create enhanced workshops and trainings. In the past, whenever we had been asked to hold a workshop with youth at conferences or in classrooms, we conduct trainings on how to interview. Now, especially from "BackTalk," we have new Media and Community Workshops to offer. These workshops provide a space for youth to express their concerns and help our journalists become stronger at identifying story leads.

Street cred from the newspaper world. The day after our interview with NYC Schools Chancellor Joel Klein was published—it ran as a two-page spread that also featured local kids giving feedback about their school—we got an email from Arul Luis, the News Editor at *The Daily News*, which stated: "The Klein interview was coup, upstaging everyone else. My congratulations to your team." Being able to share that email with our youth journalists, their parents, and our interns was one of the most satisfying moments I have had in my 12 years spent in youth media.

Memories when time gets tough. Nearly every day at the *Daily News* offices, teen editor Jose from Bronx International High School would say to me: "Ms., you are in a good mood today, no?" "Ms., you smile a lot." "Ms., you really love your

job." And nearly every time I'd tell him. "Juan, I am happy because you are doing very important work and you are doing it well." Just like other youth media programs, my work at CPL does not always have this much fanfare so it is nice to have these amazing memories to keep me going.

The Daily News and CPL Today

Our agreement with *The Daily News* was for a summer project. We would have enjoyed another summer of collaboration, but we knew that the offices had been scheduled for other purposes. We were able to keep the door open wide enough to approach the paper about having us next summer. From the experience at *The Daily News*, our organization has certainly matured and grown exponentially in experience.

On our last day in *The Daily News* building, as I was packing up the newsroom, I received this note from one of our teen editors.

"Thank you for taking the time to make this one of the best summers I've had. You've taught me so much. Seeing my name in the newspaper has made me one of the happiest girls in the city. You make a difference in kids' lives everyday. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to take part in that." –Jasmin, 17

It doesn't get much better than that does it? From our experiences last summer, I feel a lot more confident about approaching other mainstream publications and websites with similar partnerships. Our ability to cover New York as a local community has grown and our ability to provide enriching experiences that empower young people has strengthened. The project may have only lasted seven weeks but it provided decades of lessons.

Katina Paron is the co-founder and editorial/program director of Children's PressLine in New York City. www.cplmedia.org

The Youth Media Nonprofit as Classroom

By: Kendra Hurley

Six years ago, Denise Gaberman took a graduate class at New York University on education and media. Associate professor of media ecology JoEllen Fisherkeller wanted her students not just to study the theory behind media education, but also to observe it. She sent them to community centers, schools, and nonprofits to see youth media making in action.

Under Fisherkeller's tutelage, Gaberman began circulating among the numerous organizations in New York City that worked with teens on video projects. She interviewed the founder of Global Action Project, Diana Coryat, and spent 10 months interning as a teacher's aid at Educational Video Center (EVC). She "journalled" about what she observed in the field, for school credit.

Gaberman enrolled in "Literacy Through Photography," a weeklong seminar for teachers held through Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies. There, Gaberman learned "to teach visual media in the classroom, specifically in a school—not an afterschool program," she says. And how to create curricula "in an interesting way where all the lessons build on each other."

After she left NYU, Gaberman brought what she'd learned to New York City schools. Working for a Board of Education program, she helped coordinate eighth graders at Middle School 80 in making a video about the cleanup of the nearby Bronx River. The project was ambitious. In science class, students tested the river's water. In social studies, they learned its history. For their 90-minute "literacy block," they interviewed and filmed local figures prominent in the river's history. Gaberman met weekly with teachers to keep everyone on track. It finished a success.

Having access to all the youth media groups she'd gotten to know while studying with

Fisherkeller, says Gaberman, "really helped me to understand how to do it." And having spent a number of years reflecting on her experiences in a university classroom taught Gaberman how to adapt lessons used at youth media nonprofits for schools. "Researching how to work between schools and nonprofits really helped me out there," says Gaberman.

Youth Media as a Subject of Study

Educators staffing youth media nonprofits have long understood their programs as potential "laboratories for schools"—sites that discover practices schools can use to get students making videos, podcasts, web pages, and other forms of multimedia. But figuring out how best to get their practices into schools, where they can reach more young people, has never been easy. School administrators are often wary of working with outside groups. Many require extensive convincing that media-making actually helps kids learn, or that it fits with the requisite "standards" that schools are scrambling to meet. Curricula used in afterschool programs—which often work with a handful of young people at a time and have the luxury of focusing nearly exclusively on media production—do not directly translate into a 50-minute classroom of 30-40 students, where media production is not the main subject. And extracurricular youth media programs don't have the layers of bureaucracy and censorship that limit student expression the way schools do.

But over the past few years, as media-making technology has become cheaper and more ubiquitous, educators nationwide are becoming increasingly aware of the need for all young people to know how to make and analyze media. JoEllen Fisherkeller, part of a pioneering movement in higher education that organizes curricula

around the theory and practice of youth media for media and education degree programs, is one of a small but growing number of professors who train current and future educators in media making. Schools across the country are turning to university programs like Fisherkeller's to train teachers to bring media programs into the classroom.

"There's a growing movement on the university level that youth media is a subject of study for people going into teaching," explains Steven Goodman, executive director of EVC. EVC, the youth media nonprofit where Gaberman interned, now co-teaches an NYU class with Fisherkeller. EVC staff demonstrate how to get teens creating documentary video, while Fisherkeller provides the theory behind EVC's methods.

Training Future and Current Teachers

Some of the university programs on youth media primarily train future teachers. Others, like the Duke University program Gaberman attended or Houston-based Southwest Alternate Media Project (SWAMP), largely help current teachers and school administrators bring media making and analysis into the classroom. Many do a combination of "in-service and pre-service" teacher training, says Kathleen Tyner, assistant professor in the University of Texas Department of Radio, Television, and Film. The Texas university, says Tyner, has the distinction of being the first school in the country to require all prospective teachers (except those in math and science) to take a media education course. Many expect other education schools to soon follow suit.

Because education-program professors confer regularly with schools, future teachers, and youth media organizations, they can smooth the barriers that typically exist between non-profits and classroom teachers. For instance, schools are often wary of partnering with outside groups, fearing they will "parachute" into the school for a short time and then disappear.

But universities already have relationships with schools as well as with instructors who need "professional development credits" to continue

teaching. "The partnership with a university program enables the youth media organization to share what it learned with the faculty and students at a university, who has those interests," and who can ultimately get their methods in classrooms, explains Renee Hobbs, associate professor at Temple University Department of Broadcasting Telecommunications and Mass Media.

Speaking the Language of Schools

David Considine, a professor at Appalachian State University Department of Media Studies and Instructional Technology, which offers a master's degree in media literacy, agrees. "If you're going to get to schools you need to speak the language of schools. You need to be aware how the state and national standards are already compatible with media production, and a lot of administrators aren't even aware of that," he says, noting that universities already speak the language of schools. Considine recommends that youth media groups wanting to partner with education schools present their curricula at education conferences where professors like himself can observe it.

But education professors warn that it is unrealistic for youth media groups to expect their curricula to be adopted as is. In her class at the University of Texas, Tyner chooses among various lessons and media from programs including EVC, the Portland Museum, Appalshop, and the Student Press Law Center, then fits them into curricula for "a 50-minute classroom with minimal equipment" and many students vying for attention, says Tyner. "I show [students] all the canned curriculum, but I want them to customize their curriculum to the needs of their students," says Tyner.

At Temple University in Philadelphia, Renee Hobbs teaches a class similar to Fisherkeller's that sends students into the community where they can intern at the local schools and programs involved with teaching young people media production. In class they explore the historical context of media education, race and class in media production, and how to evaluate youth media programs. Hobbs' students have brought the lessons

learned in her class and through their internships to other afterschool centers, community programs, as well as public and private schools.

Yes! (Youth Empowerment Services) has had several interns from Hobbs' class. Education director Michael Sacks views these interns as a much-needed resource to keep his program running smoothly, which is exactly what makes sending students into youth media organizations like his a "win-win" situation says Hobbs. These internships, says Hobbs, provide "a kind of cross-fertilization."

Denise Gaberman herself recently left the Board of Education to train teachers in technology through the New York Institute of Technology. She says she's convinced that educators who research the youth media field through university programs, may well be the answer for youth media groups wanting to spread their practices. "Ideas at educational schools are filtered into public schools" through graduating students, says Gaberman. "Those are the new leaders. Those are the new teachers."

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Being a Media Mediator: Preliminary Notes on Practice

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By: Allison Butler

I have an odd job. I work in a New York City public school, but I'm hired by a non profit organization, the offices of which I step foot in once or twice a month. Most people familiar with the non-profit world or public school world conclude I'm a consultant or teacher; I'm neither.

Officially, I am a partnership coordinator or 'media mediator.' I work at a small public school, founded under the umbrella of a non-profit organization that launches theme-based, partner focused college-preparatory schools for underserved New York City youth. The school currently serves 300 students in grades 9-11 and will grow to capacity next year with students in grades 9-12. The most unique element of this school is our focus on media. Media is a core part of our school in three ways: integration across curriculum, specific media studies classes, and community partnerships.

The school partners with corporate, non-profit, academic and government organizations focused on media and media production. Partnerships do not translate directly to financial gifts—our partners give time and energy. They open their doors for site visits and office tours so students can see the variety of work available in the media industries. In addition, our academic partners open their classrooms so students can be exposed to college and know that they can continue studying the media—or any other subject matter—after high school. Partners come into the school to speak with students about their jobs, career opportunities in media, and simultaneously offer mentoring. They help develop internships so students have real-world experiences, provide social justice documentaries from their private collections, invite special guests to our classrooms, and

offer broadcasting opportunities so student-made productions are aired on television. It is my job to cultivate the relationship and organize the activities, between students and partners. I am a media mediator—and I am new at it.

I know a lot about the media. I focused on media studies in college and graduate school, with a particular focus on young people, identity development and media education. I have conducted qualitative research with young people from a variety of social, geographic, economic and ethnic backgrounds.

I spent the past several years working on a Master's degree, then a PhD in media studies, all while teaching in a college classroom—a wildly different environment than public school. When I defended my dissertation, I realized I was tired of talking about media, young people and media education; I wanted to work directly *in* media education and *with* young people.

With this job I get to reach that goal I realized. Now my job lets me: manage a media team, schedule students in media classes, develop a 4-year media education curriculum and a research protocol that measures the long-term efficacy of our work, and create and disseminate public information to promote our school

These activities strengthen work with our partners and the culture of the school. I chase kids around to remind them of paperwork they owe me for partner activities, field trips, internships, and/or mentorships. I chase teachers around to provide them with updated schedules and plans. Students chase me down when they want Metrocards, binders, Band-aids, or passes to the nurse—none of which I possess. Admittedly, I have had a learn-

ing curve to figure out the New York City public school system (a quagmire, at best); the culture of working daily with young people (a very different task than conducting research with them); how to develop intellectually and academically rigorous partner activities; and how to bring structure and organization to a largely unstructured and disorganized environment.

In seven months of work on cultivating and organizing partner relations, juggling the development of a 4-year scope and sequence of media classes, dealing with the daily hectic life of a NYC public school, and learning everything I possibly can about our students, I have learned a few best practices.

Think Big, Plan Small

I started the year with a big picture in mind. By the time we reach capacity—a full 9th-12th grade student body—there will be a variety of internships and mentorships associated with partners who will actively involve our students in multiple tasks. In addition, all 11th and 12th graders will be regularly exposed to college and careers in media through regular site visits. In order to plan for this, I schedule discreet activities, such as monthly film screenings in classrooms to introduce students to social justice issues and experts in the field. In addition, a bi-monthly guest lecture series, where representatives from our partner organizations come speak to students is provided.

Once a month, I bring students to record an interview with each other for a *StoryCorps* project to encourage their own storytelling and provide a public outlet for their stories. Once a month, a crew of students produces a television show capturing a slice of life from our school community. These two activities are an invaluable asset to students' self-perception, self-confidence, and maturity. When they tell their stories at the *StoryCorps* booth, their voices and stories are acknowledged as important and they become part of the national record. When they produce the television show, their hard work has a visible and immediate reward.

These small activities open the door to plan larger activities. I am in development with several partners for after school and summer internships. I want students to have internships, mentorships, visit offices, watch movies, hear guest speakers, and be actively and regularly involved in media production, including photojournalism, video production, editing, web design, music production and writing. And they want it, too. But it takes *relationship building*. Partners and students need to know each other and there needs to be a routine and ascending contact so that the students, partners, teachers and staff are familiar with each other—including each other's contexts and needs—in order to deepen relationships.

I am developing a college shadow program where once a month I bring a small group of students to NYU to sit in on a freshman media lecture class and meet with media professors for lunch. Once a month for a more intensive experience, one student spends a full day with a college student and gets to sit in on advanced, discussion-based media classes to get a richer, more nuanced exposure to college and career options. Simultaneously, I develop intensive video production workshops for advanced students to give them additional experience.

Students at this school are underserved and uninformed on many things deemed valuable by mainstream society. Overall, they do not have regular exposure to college and for many students awareness of college comes through our program. These students need an edge in order to succeed at the university level. One of the ways to achieve this is to excite and involve youth to use media to express their perspective, teamwork, talent and creativity.

Strive for Structure

One thing I have learned from working with underserved youth is that their lives are anything but structured or consistent. As much as they resist the boundaries of school, it is sometimes the safest, most consistent place they are at throughout the day.

Regular media partner activities takes safety to the next level and brings structure and organization to students' daily schedules. Nevertheless, structure comes in baby steps: a regular film screening; a regular lecture series; a regular production deadline.

Striving for structure takes trial and error. For example, I have a group of bright students who produce a monthly television program. They come up with topics and then shoot and edit the corresponding video. Their drive impressed me so much that once I left them to their own devices and quickly learned that was not the best way to support them. While they were bright and self-motivated, they had not learned how to budget their time, to arrange and write for interviews, to put together a script, to shoot B-roll, or talk to people other than their friends. So I imposed regulations: outlines, deadlines, script checks, and footage checks to name a few. It worked for an episode. Then, I left them alone again, assuming the lessons had been learned. Two kids skipped class, skipped lunch, played on the computer, assured me everything was okay and got no show done. The other crew members struggled between violating their friends' confidence—as snitching is frowned upon—and wanting to produce work with quality and substance.

Now we have regular meetings where I leave them to their devices, but I monitor their progress. Now that they have a realistic grasp of their abilities and a better idea of the time frame required, they work on getting a show out every other month. These are bright students, after all: they are quick and dedicated learners.

Listen to Students

It is the students who do my job best: they tell me what they want to do. They tell me what's most interesting and most rewarding. They are right more often than I am.

I started the year with film screenings after school. I thought this was a brilliant idea as it served three purposes. First, it exposed students to partners. Second, it exposed students to vital social

justice issues. And third, it did not interrupt students' class schedules.

However, it was students' feedback that changed my approach. They informed me that after school, they were so tired, they could not focus on a film and those two hours in the dark was too tempting to sleep through. Based on their feedback, I decided that missing class once a month to watch a film and meet the filmmaker was incentive for both students who worked hard and students who wanted an out from the daily grind or a rigorous school schedule.

Another example of how students helped shape the media program is at the beginning of the year, I thought that watching movies—even social justice documentaries—would be fascinating. When I began implementing these documentaries, students reminded me that they watch movies a lot and documentaries are the film version of reading yet another book: interesting and valuable but the process is still school-related. To them, visiting offices was more intriguing: office buildings are deliciously unfamiliar, and therefore, instantly exciting. Offices typically have great conference rooms, giveaways, and compelling professionals. Office buildings—especially the offices of magazines and television shows—have the added bonus of a chance encounter with a celebrity. They are new, different and vibrant places. Therefore, I work on scheduling a lot of office visits these days as it gets them out of the classroom and into the 'real' world where they can observe different career options and adults in the field.

Talk to Teachers

Our teachers teach underserved youth for a variety of reasons and they care deeply for these students. That means they are swamped with work, they have great ideas and beautiful vision, but no time. Talking to teachers—half-started conversations in the hallways and spontaneous run-ins on the subway or at the photo copier—spark some of my best ideas and help them move their ideas to fruition.

When I first started graduate school, my dad laughed and told me I was on my way to be-

coming a snob because I used words like ‘dialectic’ in everyday conversation. Now that I work in public schools, I use words like ‘best practice’ in everyday conversation; and when I’m having a bad day, I borrow from the students and express how I’m ‘mad-tight’ because this job is ‘OD’. This essay is the first time in 6 months I’ve talked about the media, young people and media education. I’m generally too busy talking *with* students to think about talking *about* them.

My job as a media mediator is creative, open to possibilities, and links partners and media programs directly with youth in school. It is possible to implement media studies in high schools by partnering with non-profits. The atypical position I have needs to get duplicated in the youth media field. As a ‘media mediator’ I am the direct working link between developing youth media programs in schools and building partnerships so that youth develop their media expertise, their future careers, and the media field at large.

Eradicating Stereotypes: Initiatives for Culturally Aware Leaders

By: Beth Paul

As last month’s YMR articles suggest, Community-based Research (CBR) has become recognized as a powerful strategy to engage students in hands-on research projects in service of non-profit community agencies or community groups. However, under-addressed in the CBR literature is what students need for participation in productive, collaborative, and meaningful community-based research partnerships.

This article advocates for programs to assist college students, teens, community partners and adult allies to become active and informed citizens (in view of their career goals) by being more culturally aware of stereotypes and institutionalized racism. In addition, this article suggests ways media can inspire projects such as Professor Beth Paul’s. Musician Petula Clark’s song “Downtown” spurred

Paul’s desire for student civic development through a community-engaged learning initiative breaks down racial and class stereotypes, motivating activism for social justice.

Youth media professionals invested in work with an anti-oppression focus might consider ways to bridge with programs such as the Trenton Youth Community-based Research Corps at The College of New Jersey, which collaborates—side-by-side—with

community partners using anti-racist approaches for teen empowerment.

Petula Clark croons in her classic rendition of *Downtown*, “And you may find somebody kind to help and understand you. Someone who is just like you and needs a gentle hand to guide them along ... So go downtown, things’ll be great when you’re downtown—don’t wait a minute more, downtown—everything’s waiting for you.”

This classic sixties tune celebrates the wonders of urban life—in the face of the realities of urban economic decline and the societal disparagement of poor inner-city life. *Downtown* takes a wide-eyed look at the hard realities of inner-city poverty while appreciating the assets and strengths of its residents. We have so much to learn from this balanced perspective; indeed, the ability to appreciate strength while working to empower is critical to accomplish social change and social justice.

These powerful lyrics inspired a community-campus collaborative course entitled, *Downtown: Inner City Youth and Families* (Downtown) that serves as the foundation for a three-semester community-based research (CBR) program, The

Trenton Youth Community-based Research Corps (TYCRC) offered at The College of New Jersey. TYCRC developed out of my interest in engaging undergraduate students in research that would help non-profit community organizations make a difference in the lives of children—particularly those living in poverty—in Trenton, New Jersey, a neighboring city to our suburban campus.

CBR includes students and faculty collaborating with community organizations to address a specific problem identified by the community organization. In recent years, students have: designed primary research projects to provide information for decision-making, completed planning and implementation tasks necessary to develop programs, and conducted program evaluations. This work involves a powerful partnership between community and college where students work side-by-side with leaders of organizations to address community problems in a developmental learning process.

Leaders of these organizations participate in the classroom with students, creating a community unique to academia. These partners come from non-profit agencies that often lack resources to hire external researchers to conduct community needs and assessment (or to study the effectiveness of their programs). Such research is increasingly necessary for the economic survival of non-profit community-based organizations, not to mention for developing maximally-effective programs and services. All partners are both teachers and learners. Community partners (which may include youth media professionals) are respected as experts in working with the target community and the issues at the focus of both the community and the social service agency mission.

In creating the course *Downtown*, I sought to link students not only with community partners, but directly to the community itself. In doing so, students needed to think critically about identity, race, class, and sex while being exposed to inner city life. A reality at most universities, the majority of students involved in TYCRC have had little to no exposure to the realities of inner-city children and families living in poverty. While many have

had well-intentioned community service experiences, the students were frequently sheltered from up-close exposure to the hard realities of social injustice and rarely engaged in meaningful reflection to deepen their understanding. Thus, initial exposure to these realities and awareness of the mission and strategies of community organizations is necessary.

Indeed, the course *Downtown* has become a humbling experience for students, replacing their stereotypes of inner-city residents as dysfunctional and helpless with open-eyed awareness of these individuals' strengths and the formidable challenges with which they must cope minute-by-minute.

Learning across Difference

In the *Downtown* course, students learn *in situ* about pressing inner-city issues. In class sessions held in Trenton, they get to know many Trenton citizens; they learn through observation, interaction, and testimonials about Trenton youth and families; they learn about numerous social service agencies—including their economic pressures; and they develop familiarity with and comfort in traveling to Trenton.

Students discuss urban youth issues and the role of research and social service agencies with local professionals. Students meet weekly for team-building activities and interactive exercises that challenge stereotypes and build awareness of privilege and prejudice. Conversations evolve into discussions of dynamics of privilege and social status and ways in which stereotypes sometimes seem to hold a “kernel of truth” but can be challenged and eroded. Making an effort to get to know individuals by identifying common interests but also appreciating individuality is a powerful strategy for weakening the prejudicial power of stereotypes.

Partnership Goals

Overall, the mission of *Downtown* is to have college students and community partners work together on several goals. Specifically, students focus on:

- Analyzing factors that contribute to youth

issues in inner city communities such as child neglect and abuse, early substance use and abuse, gang involvement and violence and larger factors such as poverty, prejudice, privilege and power.

- Deconstructing simplistic ‘pat’ theories and homogenized beliefs by using different perspectives and sources of information in order to understand societal functions of simplistic, external stereotypes and assumptions.
- Creating supportive spaces to share observations, collaborate, and work with teens and community partners.
- Providing exposure to and stimulating awareness of the complex lives of inner-city youth and families, particularly those who live in poverty.
- Viewing real-life urban complexities (needs and assets) through multiple lenses, including disciplinary and community-based perspectives.
- Building cultural competency skills necessary for working with and on behalf of inner-city youth and families.
- Developing an understanding of social services, gaining comfort interacting with community professionals, and gaining familiarity with and comfort in traveling around Trenton.
- Engaging fully in a collaborative CBR partnership upon course completion.

In order to reach these objectives students complete several assignments during the course of their experience. The capstone assignment in the course is a community agency-sponsored “Issue Investigation” that includes: a study of hopelessness among

contemporary urban youth, curriculum development for a new life skills and mentoring program for urban teenage girls, and/or ways to stimulate healthy peer relationships among urban youth. We give students a taste for doing something “real”—with importance, relevance, and impact. For most of the students, this is the first time they will create something that is seen by eyes other than a teacher or professor for the sole purpose of assessment. As one student explains, “I feel like I’m part of something real, something meaningful.” The students surprise themselves with the quality and depth of their work and have a great sense of pride in their final product.

Youth to Youth Relationships

Some of the most powerful and insightful experiences are when college students interact personally with Trenton youth, as part of the course objective. Mid semester, students attend *Trenton Teens Talk*, which are youth forums on pressing youth issues (e.g., youth violence, challenges to healthy relationships, gang involvement) where nearly 100 Trenton youth from the local public high school, alternative high school, *YouthBuild* site, and youth detention center come together.

Each TYCRC student joins one of the small groups at the forum and gets to know the teens as real people (rather than as a stereotyped abstract *category*). The college students’ participation in youth forums, which coincides with the course as a result of collaboration between academia and community organizations, is a turning point in *Downtown*, stimulating movement from exposure to growing understanding. As one student remarked:

I think inner-city youth should be listened to more closely. They should have a seat at the table when parents and teachers are deciding what’s good for them. They need to be nurtured more. Trenton kids are a promising group of individuals that have a wealth of untapped potential. I want to be involved in healing their pain and mind so they can feel encouraged and hopeful

about their future.

Assessment and Reflections

From 2003–2005, 80 individuals participated in the TCOC; 57% were non-students and 43% were TCNJ TYCRC students. Half of the participants were non-Hispanic Caucasians (there were more Caucasian TCNJ students than non-student participants); 31% were African-American, 11% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 3% described themselves as multiethnic. Participating community partners ranged in age from 19 to 59 years.

All TYCRC students reflected on how wide their eyes had been opened in TCOC and *Downtown*. One student remarked:

Since I had never been exposed to the many issues facing children in inner cities before, it was a very eye-opening experience for me. The most positive result for me personally was that not only did I become aware of these issues, but I also came in contact with many people who made me feel that I could contribute significantly to these issues.

For many of the students, reflections on the new realities to which they were exposed led to a deepened understanding of life experiences and communities different from their own. One student observed, “It really has helped me to realize that there’s so much more to people than they might convey by their first appearance.” Another student realized:

I learned so much about the issues facing children in Trenton and inner cities. I value social context more than I have in the past and better understand the reasons that youth make some of the ‘decisions’ that they do. Many times, in order to survive, there aren’t many other options.

I have also come to appreciate the transformative power of *Downtown* for students who have grown up in urban environments and who are very familiar with the challenging realities of inner-city life.

Luis, a student who grew up in Trenton, described his experience in *Downtown*:

I joined TYCRC because someone has to help kids in Trenton! It is a tough place, you know. And kids, they just give up. I got out. But I can’t just walk away, but I don’t know what to do. I began to think maybe there really isn’t any hope. Being in the *Downtown* course opened my eyes. I started thinking about what is really going on in Trenton and what could actually make a difference. Talking with kids in the forums...I heard them in a different way. I guess even I was buying into the “loser theories” about us. I started thinking more about what is going on outside the kids and how kids took that in. But then I thought that maybe we need to reach inside and put that on the outside. What I saw is that even one person could make a difference. I could do that.

As result of this course, student’s change their perceptions of inner-city youth. Consider this pre- to post-course reflection:

Pre-Downtown:

I don’t really know enough about inner-city youth to even begin to answer this question. I know they usually end up in gangs, and get into drugs and violence. Most have no focus and no goals in mind.

Post-Downtown:

I think inner-city youth cannot control the environment they were born in and thus have to face many hardships that suburban youth never see. I think inner-city youth may need an extra push in the right direction sometimes because their environment is so harsh. I don’t think that all inner-city families are abusive or consist of one parent, however, there are definitely more problems in the inner city that could put stress on familial relations. I think most inner-city youth are talented and can con-

tribute greatly to society.

A key aim of our work is to stimulate advocacy efforts on behalf of children. A very broad sense of advocacy is promoted, including such actions as interacting one-on-one with youth, registering concern about a youth issue with a local leader or state politician, serving as a youth advocate, or committing to advance a cause through activism or community leadership. One student explained:

This course opened my eyes to the prevailing situations that affect today's youth. [It] helped me to see the many organizations that are in place and are out there fighting to save today's youth. It also opened my eyes to the limitations of such programs due to a lack of funding or people to join in on the work in progress. I've come to understand that every little bit helps. I can make a difference.

Another student's reflection at the end of her TY-CRC experience:

I shocked myself to the ultimate when I took control of things that I never thought I was good at. Being put under pressure, knowing that what I have done will help real people, made me work 1,000 times harder than I ever have. It made what I was doing worthwhile. When given a chance to do CBR and to work in the community, your whole world view is readjusted and renewed. It has impacted my future because now I know what I am capable of and what is important to me—to the world.

All community partner participants were asked four times during the program to respond to reflective prompts about "the experience of being in

a class that is a mix of college students and community members." Responses were overwhelmingly positive. One community participant commented:

I think that this is a great combination because you get to know all aspects and views of the community and create ties and relationships/friendships with many that you wouldn't otherwise communicate on any level. I have no problem working or being a part of a group that has students and community members. It makes me feel knowledgeable to the students.

Recommendations

This course has demonstrated the value of college students' collaboration with community partners to identify issues and needs of inner city communities. Building competency skills for working with, and behalf of, inner city youth and their families is the key to our approach. We have learned that this partnership is most effective when students are provided the resources and space to fully understand the cultural context(s) in which they are working. Adults, participants, and potential university partners supporting youth media should make time, resources and space to reflect on inner city and race-related issues to make their partnerships with youth that much stronger. Petula Clark foreshadowed this magic in her prescient *Downtown* lyrics: "Just listen to the music of the traffic in the city; Linger on the sidewalk where the neon signs are pretty. How can you lose? ... *Downtown—you're gonna be all right now.*"

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Girls Write Now: A Showcase of Intergenerational Learning

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By: Michele Thomas

At first glance, The Library of the General Society of Mechanics & Tradesmen of the City of New York looks like it sounds—old, austere, and a bit secret. It sits tucked away on New York City’s “literary row,” stomping grounds of *The New Yorker* magazine, *Harper’s* magazine, and the Algonquin Hotel during their heyday in the 1920s and 1930s. The stately exterior opens up into a graceful chamber of warmth, wood and learning. It does not look like it would be the setting for a vibrant display of intergenerational learning. Talented, fearless teen writers—whose thoughts are too often tucked away like volumes on the library’s shelves—and adult, professional women working in publishing, education, media and the arts would come together to share co-written stories. But, on the evening of January 24, 2007, the Library challenged more than one misconception by hosting the Second Annual Girls Write Now (GWN) Winter Pair Reading.

“We haven’t had this kind of energy here in a long time,” said Janet Wells Greene Ph.D, Director of The Library. “I love it...Part of our mission [here at The Library] is to promote an understanding of urban work, and we think this is a great opportunity to honor the craft of writing and the occupation of writer.” She concludes, “This event [was] an opportunity to see reinvention of apprenticeship in action.”

Maya Nussbaum, Executive Director of Girls Write Now comments:

[The reading is] a wonderful opportunity to see the Girls Write Now community in action...The spirit of our mission is perfectly encapsulated in the collaborative pieces written and read aloud by our mentor-mentee pairs.

Girls Write Now

Founded in 1998, Girls Write Now (GWN) is a New York City-based non-profit committed to helping New York City high school girls discover their voice and have the courage and confidence to share it with the community. Through one-on-one mentoring, workshops, readings, and events, Girls Write Now provides a safe and supportive environment where girls can expand their natural talents develop independent voices and build confidence in making healthy choices in school, career, and life. In today’s society, young women are often silenced by all consuming images and messages in the media that stereotype and objectify women. Women are a target group of consumerism, thus, most marketing strategically promotes women as objects to “appear” or “attract” rather than to act, build alliances with each other, or support and develop their talents and interests.

Research in adolescent development consistently shows that relationships with caring adults other than parents can make young girls significantly less likely to engage in drug use, underage drinking and sex, and more likely to succeed in school, peer, and family relationships. Mentors benefit from involvement with the program as well. Adult mentors report that their experience in the program increased their self-esteem, as well as their sense of responsibility and accomplishment. Additionally, studies indicate that mentoring improves morale at work and relationships with colleagues, friends and family.

GWN matches at-risk high school girls who have a love of writing with professional women writers. The goal: to help these girls develop their unique voices, their writing skills, and the confidence to tell their stories, as well as the

ability to make healthy life choices. GWN is the only youth program that combines a rigorous, but fun creative writing curriculum and girls-only programming within the context of mentoring that benefits mentees and mentors alike.

Mentors and Mentees

The Winter Pair Reading was designed to celebrate the collaborative creative work of GWN mentors and their teen-age mentees. GWN mentors and mentees presented only collaborative works for the event, specifically single pieces written by a mentor-mentee pair, or two complementary pieces written separately by the mentor and mentee but read together. Many of the night's poems, stories and essays were born in GWN workshops, which are followed by take-home exercises for pairs to do together.

Ebony McNeill, a Brooklyn teen attending an adolescent employment and educational program and her mentor, freelance editor Karen Schader developed their collaborative poems from a writing exercise in which they walked together through a neighborhood, observing it with all of their senses except sight. This exercise allowed both women, despite their differences in age and experience, to work as equals. By observing their surroundings with different senses, they view the world in new ways—a great leadership perspective.

Other mentor-mentee collaborative topics ranged from the sweet stuff of teenage dreams to memories of growing up and everything in between. Emceed by Penny Wrenn, Talent Director of GWN, the night kicked off with a pair of earthy and heart-wrenching poems about chances in love not taken by Anna Witiuk, a junior at New York City's Beacon High School and her mentor, teacher, author, and literary agent Caron K. Stengel. This is Anna and Caron's second year working together in GWN. Their pride in working together is easy to see during their performance and represents the power of linking women across generations.

Ebony, Mona, and each of the other 28 girls enrolled in GWN meet with their writing mentors

weekly for one school year to develop their skills and understanding of the writing process. Pairs are made by a "matchmaking committee" consisting of board members and veteran mentors who consider geography, genre interest, and the unscientific but no less meaningful "x-factor" (or chemistry) between a mentor and mentee (members are alerted to the presence of the matchmakers, encouraged to share their preferences, but warned there are no guarantees the matchmakers will grant them).

This simple, but unique approach has worked to build a strong community of writers to nurture one another and their creative freedom. "The relationship between girls and their mentors is symbiotic," said Nussbaum, "As pairs work together, they become apprentices of each other, learning the art and craft of writing through life experience." The workshops provide fertile ground for learning as the community of mentors and mentees collaborate under GWN's guiding principle of writing as a communal enterprise—to be created and shared.

Intergenerational Learning through Mentoring

The intergenerational learning fostered by this approach is built on multiple layers of commitment that mentees and mentors make to each other—and to GWN—each season. The *first* of these layers is between each pairing and the organization itself. Carefully screened candidates undergo a rigorous application process, which includes detailed applications, writing samples, and reference checks. GWN seeks mentors who have impressive academic and writing resumes, as well as a demonstrated commitment to teaching, tutoring, or mentoring girls, and the drive to contribute to the organization's growth. Mentees must demonstrate a commitment to growing as writers, regardless of their skill level upon entering the program. Upon acceptance into the program, each new member signs a series of forms confirming her commitment.

The *second* layer is a commitment between the mentors and the idea of teaching and learning through the mentoring process. Each mentor un-

dergoes an intensive full-day training conducted by the Girls Write Now program board in conjunction with experts from Columbia University, NYU, Community Word, Girls Scouts of America, Planned Parenthood NYC, and Urban Word, among other community institutions. This training serves as an introduction to adolescent development, diversity issues, mentoring tools, editing and revision for teens, and writing workshop facilitation.

The mentor-mentee pairs seal the *third* and final commitment shortly after they are matched at the start of the season's first workshop. Each mentor-mentee pair signs a mutual agreement explicitly outlining the responsibilities of their writing partnership and through it, their commitment to learning as a team. Mentees learn the nuts and bolts of writing, while their mentors are reintroduced to the magic and art of creative writing, free of the limitations often imposed by professional writing. Mentors are often surprised to find within their pair writing sessions a spark to ignite their own creative passion, and—through knowledge obtained by working with a teen girl—the tools to approach their work in new ways.

Workshops

Weekly pair writing sessions are punctuated and informed by monthly, genre-based full-group workshops, featuring whole-group, pair, and small-group activities. The workshops are carefully balanced between spirited fun and curriculum rigor. Each workshop begins with an icebreaker to warm members to each other as well as to the idea of writing for four hours on a Saturday afternoon. One recent prompt was “My character for the day is [insert lovely, fun, or energetic color + food you like the sound of].” No one wants to miss reinventing herself as “Rainbow Meatball” or the chance to be introduced to “Royal Blue Hot Dog.”

At the close of each workshop, we engage in “Warm Fuzzies,” which are constructive, anonymous comments shared by all mentors and mentees around the circle. “Warm Fuzzies” begin with a prompt, such as the following from the fiction workshop: “If you could fly off with any character from today, who would it be and where would you go?” The anonymous nature of this exercise helps to remove the mentor/mentee labels we initially assign, allowing for true reflection and intergenerational learning. It also fosters an environment wherein the relationships between mentors, mentees and the entire community transcend racial, ethnic, and religious boundaries in a city where many young people rarely leave their neighborhood.

In response to the fiction workshop prompt, one participant said: “I’d take off with black strawberry, the girl whose eyes change color. I would go to the park and watch people with her. I bet her eyes would show me great things.” Another member, prompted at GWN workshop to “name one thing in the world you would like to see change and how you would help make it happen,” put it this way: “I want people to stop being so skeptical and to not give up on their dreams just because their dreams are taking too long to get realized. How am I going to change this? By not giving up on mine.”

These statements echo GWN’s greatest achievement: mentors and mentees learning from one another as peers. Girl-only programming, with an intergenerational approach to mentoring, creates a space for communal voice, collaboration, and social, gendered change.

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Finding Youth Voice in Print Media: The Power of Zines in a Digital Age

By: Eleanor Whitney

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What is the value of teaching youth to create print media in an increasingly digital-based world? How can youth develop their written voices and develop strategies to creatively express their opinions and speak back to power? From 2002-2004 I was an educator at the *Independent Publishing Resource Center* (IPRC) in Portland, Oregon. There I ran a 4 week long *Zine Camp* for teenagers ages 12-18. Zines are small, self-published magazines that are accessible to youth in a do-it-yourself (DIY) fashion.

As a teenager growing up in a rural area, making zines enabled me to connect with other young people around the country. They provided a forum with which to express myself and discuss issues surrounding feminism, queer identity, mental health and political activism. From my own experience, I knew that making a zine and participating in zine communities could provide young people with important skill sets and opportunities to express themselves creatively. Thus, my envisioned goal of *Zine Camp* was to teach youth about the history and contemporary status of independent print publications and how to express themselves through making their own personal zine.

Zines are important in a digital age. They serve as creative spaces to share feelings, opinions, ideas, and artwork in a self-made booklet. For many youth, having physical documentation of their thoughts, feelings, and work is very important. Just as many people learn differently, are drawn to visual or spatial thinking versus written and coded understanding, zines provide hand-made alternatives to youth made technology. Whereas some young people may be drawn to video, film, radio, and music, there are many young people who may defer to a more introverted and reflective medium, which zines provide. The power of zine culture

provides zinesters a community, which acts as a vessel for idea exchange, collaboration, shared experience across difference and physical distance, and dialogue for introverts, extroverts, and creative types in between. Plus, anyone can make a zine with paper, glue, sharpies, and access to a photocopier (available in most public libraries, convenient stores, and office jobs).

Despite the affluence of computer and internet-based technology, not everyone has access to a computer or the Internet. In zine communities, youth who do not have access to technology, youth in marginalized or disparate communities, and youth who may have access to such privileges, are all a part of the greater zine culture. Zine communities provide zinesters (of all ages) despite differing levels of accessibility a medium to be part of youth voice and social change.

The IPRC is a not-for-profit, membership organization in downtown Portland, Oregon that serves the needs of self-publishers with an extensive zine library, computers, workspace, photocopy machine and letterpress print shop. They offer low-cost workshops that cover a wide range of the independent publishing processes—from the basics of creating a zine to how to use an old-fashioned tabletop letterpress. Because of its central location and established educational partnerships with local schools and organizations that serve youth, *Zine Camp* was a natural evolution of the IPRC's many educational offerings. In contrast to daily workshops IPRC typically offers, *Zine Camp* enables young people to develop a long-term relationship with the center and a deeper understanding of the zine making process.

When I created *Zine Camp* in 2002 by proposing the idea to IPRC as a semi-professional zinester, teaching young people about the process

of creating their own self-published magazine served two main goals. The *first* goal was to recognize and value how voice and expression are forms of empowerment. The *second* goal was to encourage young people to become more media literate and analytical.

The five youth enrolled in *Zine Camp* in 2004, for example, were encouraged to express themselves, whether it was about skateboarding, the music they loved, or frustrations with school. One zine camper, a former homeless young woman and slam poet, used the zine format in a different way, to collect and publish her poems and photographs. In her zine, a natural outgrowth of the voice and empowerment that she normally felt from just writing and performing slam poetry was enhanced through a more tangible record of her work. Through the process of making her zine, her personal record was collected, shared, and documented.

Zine publishers often find zines as outlets not just for expression, but as a means of connecting with one another. As Collete Ryder-Hall stated in her zine *Looks Yellow, Tastes Red*, “I realized one of the most profound effects of publishing a zine...was that it showed me I wasn’t alone, that we have similar experiences.”

Built into *Zine Camp* were strong media literacy components; youth compared and contrasted zines at the beginning of *Zine Camp* each summer with glossy, mainstream magazines. Campers quickly learned that the format and content of zines gave the creator complete control (in design, timing, approach, and process). In contrast, glossy magazines were determined by market-driven decision makers and teams that worked to digitally manipulate images to appeal to consumers in the mass populous. Having to create their *own* zines, each summer camper became more aware of the decisions that go into making a publication including writing, editing and layout. This enabled them to better understand the power of their own artistic devices, the importance of skill-development, and how media can be used as an expressive tool.

During the camp, campers were encouraged

to review 3–5 zines, from the IPRC’s library, each week for ideas and inspiration. During each meeting they reported back on 1 or 2 of their favorites to all the campers. This turned campers into active readers and critics of media produced by other young people. By viewing zines as something they could draw inspiration from, campers were part of a burgeoning movement of other young people in youth media, beyond the zine community. If zines have such a powerful community and history, what other forms of media may be out there to collaborate or learn from? By informing zinesters to a long history of self publishing and involving them to participate in communities of like minded people, the horizons of ways to unite artistically expand. At *Zine Camp*, reading and reviewing zines helped campers see new ways of analyzing and understanding other forms of mainstream and independent media.

At the end of camp we hosted a public reading and culminating party at *Reading Frenzy*, a hip, local, independent bookstore. Campers shared their completed zines with each other and amongst the audience of friends, family, and community members, feeling proud of their accomplishments. Young people need to know that they matter. One major way youth media professionals can affirm youth is to recognize their accomplishments and expressive work in both private and public domains. By publicly recognizing youth for their zine-making, the Portland community became more informed of perspectives youth in their community experienced—which is part of involving youth voice to enter the concerns of community members. As well as being a celebration and method to connect youth with adult allies in the community, this public event gave zine campers a goal to reach for and served as a concrete incentive to finish their projects. By having the event outside of the IPRC, it further tied zine campers to a creative community and showed them there was a larger, potential audience for their work and expressive voice.

Part of the success of *Zine Camp* actually occurred at the beginning of the program. Young

zinesters were expected to create ‘mini zines’ on a single theme the first week. This enabled them to move away from the idea that a zine needs to be ‘perfect,’ and launch into the endless possibility of their creative ideas. It satiated young people’s desire for instant results—a feeling often encouraged by web sites and blogs. Making a mini zine presented to zine campers what was to come and enabled them to explore the creative possibilities of a zine without being *overwhelmed* by the process. For example, after making several more “basic” zines in camp, a former camper began including multiple colored spray paint stencil paintings in her zine, stretching the format farther than even I, a zine maker for 8 years, could imagine.

Having quick and successful projects at the beginning of programs, such as the mini zine approach at *Zine Camp*, is a method other youth media professionals ought to consider in their longer term youth media projects and programs. Short projects that coincide with larger programmatic pieces benefit both the level of creativity and productivity in young people as well as the general positive outcome of organizations which serve youth media makers.

Creating zines enable young people to emerge with finished “products” they can be proud of. A zine is a physical object that serves as a record of a moment in an individual’s life. Therefore,

completing a zine can give young people a concrete sense of accomplishment, the importance of documenting their own history and their social and political beliefs, provide a space to express their feelings and perspectives, and involve them in alternative and like-minded communities.

While zines are not the only form young peoples’ written self expression can take, they certainly merit an important place in the youth media landscape. When youth are encouraged and taught how to create print media that reflects their ideas and perspectives they are better equipped to understand how mainstream print media represents perspectives of those in power. Working on a zine builds youth confidence by using self-expression in written form. The process of making a zine creates new ways of media making that serves youth from a variety of personalities and identities, and encourages their involvement with both zine and local communities. A very accessible medium, zines provide an alternative space from blogs and websites for youth to document their thoughts, feelings, and creativity in empowering, media driven ways—even in a digital age.

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An Alliance for Young Women Who Rock

By: Ingrid Hu Dahl

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The Girls Rock Camp Alliance—comprised of representatives from across the globe who run rock n’ roll camps for girls—met for the first time last month to brainstorm ways to organize what has become a grassroots movement of burgeoning non-profits. The alliance is dedicated to empowering young girls through music-making and supporting an enhanced understanding of gender and political identity. It is a great example for youth media professionals to learn from, as many of these campsites across the nation, and now the world, work to maintain a collective mission that unites and supports young women in music.

The founding member camps of the Girls Rock Camp Alliance (GRCA) are from the U.S.—Portland, OR, New York, NY, San Francisco, CA, Philadelphia, PA, and Murfreesboro, TN—as well as from Sweden and the United Kingdom. The alliance met in Portland, Oregon—home base for the Rock n’ Roll Camp for Girls—the first rock camp founded in 2001. The non-profit was created in response to the social oppression female musician’s face, in which women are not encouraged to play instruments or have accessible female role models that share their same experiences. Unique to this non-profit are the hundreds of volunteers dedicated to the rock camp mission, who work for free during the summer (or throughout the year depending on whether or not local campsites have year round after-school programs like in Portland, OR), motivated by their deep desire and dedication to the cause of empowering young women.

I met with the GRCA in Portland, Oregon late February and had the opportunity to interview STS, a friend, colleague, and program officer at camp. She explains, “every decision [we make at rock camp] we put up next to our mission statement. We serve girls and follow an empowerment model that examines power. We are a community

and resource that builds self-esteem and empowerment for young women through media education.” She continues, “Girls need to have access to music education and female mentors who speak to them as peers. At rock camp, we provide great opportunities for young girls interested in music and allow them to lead in their own ways in a safe and empowering space.”

Many of the 8-18 year old girls who attend camp every summer say that the week-long experience changed their lives, opened their eyes, and encouraged them to better handle a sexist and “identity-boxing” world. These girls often sign up for the Girls Rock Institute, an after school version of camp that occurs year around, and often make up the camps’ youth advisory board, who form internship programs, teach skills, act as role models, and build upon the camp community.

Having volunteered at the rock camp in Portland, Oregon and being a founding member of the Willie Mae Rock Camp for Girls, I know first hand what STS means when she explains, “camp is powerful—it is all inclusive, embracing, and [evokes] positive energy. It’s a punk, anarchist organization that values music, esteem, and life skills.” Rock camp thrives on sharing, collaboration, and giving back along with a very attractive do-it-yourself (D-I-Y) approach and progressive model of leadership, key to current grassroots movement.

The energy and empowerment of rock camp in Portland has influenced the creation of several rock camps across the nation and over the world. Around 15-25 rock camps have existed to date—a number that is growing—which the Portland camp saw as an opportunity to create an alliance in order to support the rock camp movement.

At the first meeting of the GRCA, the

group wrote their mission statement, which defines the alliance as an “international coalition of organizations whose shared mission is to empower girls and women using the tools of music education to foster self-esteem and confidence.” To this end, the GRCA “promotes, strengthens, and expands services provided by its members.”

Overall, the alliance is a professional organization that provides accreditation, resources, and networking opportunities for its members, and promotes the establishment of like-minded institutions worldwide. The alliance works to provide support in the development and quality of programs, financial stability and transparency, and accountability to the rock camp mission.

Core values of the GRCA focus on the:

- power of music as a means to create personal and social change;
- efforts that actively expand opportunities for girls and women;
- positive approaches to fighting sexism;
- integrity, honesty and respect;
- appropriate sharing of resources, cooperation, and collaboration;
- using collective voice to further the mission of rock camp;
- importance of diversity and not tolerating racism, sexism, homophobia, or other discriminatory behavior or expression.

The alliance believes in creating a learning community that empowers young girls, builds strong relationship among women and a network of musicians, fosters an environment for gender and social change, and values collaborative learning. As STS explains:

We do not want to homogenize all rock camps for girls but collectively recognize

core values while valuing our differences. We do not want future rock camps to reinvent the wheel. We offer structure, curriculum, and ways to match the sparks and fire we’ve all experienced at rock camp.

Professionals interested in creating a rock camp for girls can join the alliance to share leadership models, register to become a non-profit, become a chapter, and/or support a movement of empowering girls through D-I-Y music education. The GRCA is a success model for professionals in the youth media field to engage with. The alliance freely supports and encourages the development of programs that value girls, confidence-raising, and music as a vital medium to empower young people.

The goals of the GRCA, such as sharing resources (material, knowledge, and skill) and providing a model for all burgeoning camps, are important ones for youth media organizations and professionals to pay attention to. GRCA has made its own niche directly *outside* the youth media field and ought to get incorporated and recognized as a part of the field. The field can learn a great deal from the progressive leadership model of the GRCA, which gives relevance to music in media, theorizing and practicing gendered and social change, and valuing youth voice, empowerment, and creative expression.

Learning how (and why) the Girls Rock Camp Alliance provides non-profit umbrella support for each chapter at the grassroots level is a case study with solutions youth media organizations may draw from—especially those that value centralizing a sharing of resources, collective identity, and the ‘spark’ that keeps movements and effective youth media programs alive.

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Youth Are the News

By: Katina Paron

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Last month 400 people from 74 countries gathered in Washington, D.C. for the 7th World Young Readers Conference (WYR). The attendees, mostly newspaper staff from either the business or editorial worlds, gathered to share ideas and gain inspiration about ways to expand their youth readership.

As a youth media practitioner, my reason for attending was two fold: I wanted to collect resources on the value of youth-produced content to newspaper readers young and old, and meet with “Youth Editors”—adult editors in charge of teen content—to discuss benefits of using youth-produced articles and how they incorporate youth voice in their newspapers.

At the conference, I discovered that some newspapers are making an effort to work with classrooms in journalism training—getting young people to understand how and why newspapers work and the ways in which newspapers are a viable resource for important information. Other newspapers, however, have different tactics and motivations which have little to do with incorporating youth media making. They are using gimmicks such as using a “Where’s Waldo” search feature as part of a concerted effort to capture the attention of youth and promote their products (in-print and on-line versions of the publication).

These efforts prioritize ‘brand loyalty’ and position youth solely as consumers, rather than as creative forces and thought leaders. News media ought to listen to youth voice and incorporate their creativity and leadership. The media should make space for youth viewpoints because not only are young people a future generation of mass readership, but are heavily covered in and depicted by the media.

Young people *want* to be creators and contributors to news media as a way to engage

with, and have voice in, their communities and world at large.

Newspapers in Education (NIE) and the World Association of Newspapers—sponsors of WYR—presented interesting reports at the conference on the state of young people and newspaper involvement. I talked to many NIE professionals about how they might use youth-produced content in their pages. Unfortunately for most papers, the NIE program is strictly a marketing venture. The focus is on readership numbers only, not content. Many NIE directors were not familiar or conversant with the relevance of recent research from the Newspaper Association of America, NIE’s parent group on young readers. Such research proves that teens who begin reading newspapers due to integrated youth content become lifelong readers—a fact that newspapers should not ignore. (To view the research, go to <http://www.naafoundation.org/pdf/Foundation/lifelongreaders.pdf>). NIE’s actions are short-sighted. They focus on short-term circulation increase rather than long-term readership potential.

Life-long readership of newspapers sustains the success of a news publication. To ensure that success, newspapers need youth to be involved as readers and active participants. The good news is there are ways for newspapers to involve young people in journalism news media. Several of these lessons and best practices surfaced at WYR.

Incorporate and Promote Youth Editorial Boards

A few newspaper representatives in attendance at the conference spoke proudly of their paper’s teen editorial boards. These boards have taken responsibility for producing a half-dozen signed editorials for the paper each year. In some cases,

the youth editorials were the only youth-produced content that the paper had published.

Present at the conference, for example, was a 21-member youth advisory board that provides feedback, insight, and expertise to a Canadian newspaper. The board of teens meets monthly to discuss advertising campaigns and solve marketing questions. The teens even use AOL instant messenger on a regular basis with the Editor-in-Chief to discuss editorial components.

This youth advisory board is a great example of ways in which newspapers can incorporate youth voice and leadership in an organized, productive, and mutually beneficial manner. From my experience, this approach to editorial writing and generational power sharing is rare, but important. Taking youth feedback seriously and promoting youth perspective impacts readers of newspapers, providing insightful points of view from a cohort of young members in the community.

Acknowledge Youth as Spokespeople

At the conference it became evident that very few panelists had tried attracting youth readers by *including* them as part of their regular news stories as interviewees, witnesses, or simply members of the newspaper community. My frustration with this issue was validated during the conference's Youth Ambassador session during which 12 youth journalists from newspapers in the United States, South Africa, Norway, Zambia, Hong Kong, Denmark, Sweden, and Dominican Republic gave a 60-minute presentation on how newspapers could engage young readers better. It was an excellent session presented by self-professed news geeks.

When Khothatso Mogwera from South Africa made the plea to the news executives in attendance to include youth as part of the paper's news and editorial teams, I had to stop myself from giving a standing ovation. "They forget that we were there when these events take place," he said. His colleagues echoed his sentiments that youth are affected by budget cuts, Social Security and political elections just as adults are, and youth viewpoints

therefore must not be silenced.

If newspapers have a responsibility to fully and fairly reflect society and they continue to *omit* youth experiences and opinions, then it says something drastically fatal about the lack of respect we give young people as valuable members of the community.

Incorporate Youth Voice in Teen Sections

The teen sections presented at the conference had the most variety. Some newspapers simply had one teen page while others had 16-page weekly supplements. Some were adult produced, yet many had teams of youth that worked together on their allocated pages. "Youth Editors" at the conference were often adults that worked on teen issues of their newspaper.

These editors experienced conflicts between what newspapers were told youth wanted and what newspapers ultimately ended up doing. Young teen editors expressed a common belief that overall, youth do not want to be 'ghettoized' into teen sections and they do not want to read adult writing that tries to speak for them. If this is not what young people want then why are so many papers doing it?

Partly, this issue is due to the fact that newspapers are so painfully slow at adapting their content to meet the needs of a transitioning community (i.e. youth and immigrants) that they solve the issue with supplements instead of a whole newspaper overhaul. By having a "youth" or "teen" section, the paper attempts to cover news specific to such a transitioning group. However, they must be relevant and resonant teen sections that incorporate youth content and opinions.

An NIE representative at "757," The *Virginian-Pilot's* teen section and winner of a "World Young Reader Award," was in tune with youth readers when she commented to a panel, "The kids who we want to read our work don't relate to the format or the style of writing." This is a valid concern for youth media practitioners who are trying to create an authentic adult-to-adult conversation. How do you prevent the

“adultification” of youth material but still have a product that can be valuable to adults? How do we get youth buy-in on adult-formatted and adult-led newspapers?

Youth Ambassadors, who provided youth perspective at the conference, explained that youth buy-in comes from having young people create both the rules for content as well as the content itself. The need for this dual level of involvement is an important lesson that youth media practitioners have learned and continue to advocate for. The key is to make sure young people feel that they are recognized as viable contributors and their thoughts and creative perspectives are important.

Even though Youth Ambassadors at the conference stressed the value of including youth in ‘regular’ parts of newspapers, they still see the value of a separate section for young people. In fact, the Ambassadors offered attendees a clear and compelling picture for the perfect ‘teen section.’

The Perfect Teen Section would:

- have its own identity, including its own website;
- allow readers to share photos through a gallery;
- contain Vox Pops or man-on-the street interviews;
- contain a mix of editorial/sports and entertainment;
- provide shout-outs so readers could feel part of a community;
- include a calendar section so readers could be aware of events;
- have news alternatives like podcasts and video casts;

- pay its writers, or if unpaid, provide in-house training, internships or scholarship opportunities;
- have a diverse staff;
- be advertised and have “teasers” in the “parent” paper;
- sponsor events like concerts and sports; and
- have monthly meetings and an opportunity for teen writers to interact with professional journalists.

According to the World Association of Newspapers, over one billion people read a newspaper every day. A goal for us in the youth media field should be to figure out what the newspaper industry’s emphasis on young readers *means* to young people. From the perspective of a youth media professional, incorporating youth voice and contribution to media is priority. Adult “Youth Editors” ought to support newspapers to incorporate youth boards, acknowledge youth as spokespeople, and youth voice in teen sections.

A newspapers’ attempt to integrate youth leadership and attract young readers means more room for youth media organizations to create authentic material and advocate for youth contribution. It just might make our jobs richer—increasing the diversity of our content, purpose, trainings, and approaches to youth media in the news.

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The Field is Bigger than We Think

By: Ingrid Hu Dahl

Albuquerque, New Mexico was a unique place to meet youth media and service-learning practitioners, amongst several other organizations at the 18th National Service-Learning Conference where 2,500 people attended on March 23-27th. With inspirational speakers such as Jane Goodall and spiritual blessings by insightful native elders, the energy of leadership, wisdom, and connectivity filled the convention center with youth and adult allies excited about engaging more deeply as active and effective citizens.

Why Albuquerque, New Mexico as a relevant conference setting? Albuquerque has made young people a top priority in its city where, among other attractions, is a teen artistic haven and entertainment center coined Warehouse 21 (W21). W21 provides young people to manage, produce, teach, design, and administer art, media, promotion classes and music performances in collaboration with MAP21, a local youth-operated magazine.

Interwoven at the 18th National Service-Learning Conference (NSLC) was a few youth media organizations and individuals who have made a direct link between youth media and service-learning. On behalf of YMR, I met with people from three specific organizations—New Foundation Charter Schools, *Native Youth Magazine*, and Stories for Service/Digital Storytelling—to learn how these connections are important for youth media professionals in the field and how *media* can serve youth and communities respectively.

Kevin Dobbins, a young man working with video, production, and editing who was filming the conference for the second time around with a team of youth, has first hand experience blending youth media work with service-learning. I met him on the opening day of the conference as he handed out flyers promoting their video production and storyboard workshops. Dobbins is an alumnus of

the New Foundation Charter School's (NFCS) in Philadelphia, PA—which serves kindergarten to 8th graders (but whose media program includes youth/alumnae up to grade 12). While at NFCS, Dobbins participated in a service-learning course in conjunction with an after-school media program. The two opportunities pushed him to portray issues in his community using “active video documentation”—Kevin’s term to describe service-learning documentaries. I asked Dobbins, who was first involved with the conference last year, what it has been like to be in New Mexico, film the conference, and be part of the youth-designed pre/post production and storyboard workshops. “I feel honored,” he said with a wide grin, leading me to the video production workshop headquarters where media instructors Shoshanna Hill and Geanie Meerbach are working.

Hill and Meerbach explain how NFCS has a service-learning component integrated into its academic curriculum, thanks to Amy O’Neil and Shira Cohen (Founders of i-Safe and i-Drive). The after-school video production program is youth-oriented, includes a wide scope of age groups (many high-school alumnae attend), and uses service-learning best practices to effectively align with a credit-bearing course at the school. Meerbach explains, “We integrate issues important to youth with service-learning.”

Youth create videos at NFCS as a way to uncover and comment on issues through active documentaries which are up to five minutes long. These documentaries are viewed internally by other students, and sometimes by parents, teachers, and community members. Many of the films bring attention to issues of particular relevance to young people, such as bullying, while providing a space for creative expression (where youth integrate thriller-esque styles and comedy).

Hill explains:

Internet safety and bullying, for example, are big deals to youth [right now at our school]. I don't think adults realize how important these issues are [to youth]. Often, youth are burdened with societal pressures with oppressive messages such as 'you shouldn't know how to use [video].' The issues youth in our program address are not [typically] known [to the community/audience]. Youth get everything from media. And bringing up the unknown and showcasing that on a screen, gets a certain issue attention, which youth learn to use strategically. Video has the power to communicate and get the word out about issues. Young people, by using this medium, learn not only how a video works, but what a camera *doesn't* see, which teaches youth to ask questions, think in a story, and creatively use alternative means of communication.

Meerbach, who has been working as a media instructor for the past year at NFCS, plans to archive all student videos and active documentaries in the school library. Meerbach believes that access to these video documentaries on youth issues and experiences will help support generations of youth to come at NFCS. She also believes that the ability and desire of NFCS students to take the lead on addressing issues important to the community, oneself, and one's peers is a direct result of merging service-learning with active documentaries. Both Meerbach and Hill are passionate and dedicated media practitioners who see a direct link between youth media making and service-learning—which has had profound effects on both students and the issues they tackle in school and their communities.

Down the hall, I step in Mary Kim Titla's workshop on native youth and storytelling. Titla has spent more than half of her life as a professional storyteller, including 20 years for NBC as a news reporter. She mentors young Native storytell-

ers through her website, www.nativeyouthmagazine.com. At her workshop, two young storytellers explained the importance of storytelling, writing, and how they entered the world of storytelling through pow-wows (a Native American cultural tradition).

Native Youth Magazine promotes youth initiatives, youth storytelling, website design, cultural presentations, media relations, video production/narration, and more. Founded by Titla, *Native Youth Magazine* offers youth a forum to view and upload video clips, audio, profiles, galleries and blogs. As explained in her workshop, the website "addresses real world issues through the ancient craft of storytelling." Adding storytelling to technology builds a sense of unity that is meaningful.

As a mother of teenagers, Titla realized that there were "not enough positive websites about Native American youth communities and activities that could connect [them] with one another." Titla explains that youth who have access to technology are part of a generation that is up to speed on the latest technology—they are invested in figuring out how things work and function, and what advanced features new technology offers.

Throughout Titla's work and life, she emphasizes the importance of language, signs, and symbols to one's history, personal transformations, and cultural knowledge. She believes that the importance of storytelling enhances one's identity and community—which are integral to learning how to serve and give back to where one's roots are laid. By creating an on-line magazine, Titla engages young people and helps connect them to their cultural identity, to their peers, and to the power of story telling in a digital age.

Storytelling fosters a sense of identity, lineage, and service in youth in many ways. Stories of Service (SOS), a program of Digital Clubhouse Network, mobilizes young people to interview and produce digital stories (multimedia videos) about the memories of women and men who serve the nation. SOS is dedicated to developing innovative ways of using technology to build stronger communities, with an emphasis on mobilizing youth

in service to their communities.

SOS was launched in 1998 and founded in 1996 in Silicon Valley, CA out of a NASA research project and currently partners with the History Channel, Youth Service America, and the National Youth Leadership Council. SOS engages youth with skills such as video production, interviewing, writing, visual arts, research, and intellectual property/copyrights. SOS provides an electronic toolkit of curriculum on their website www.stories-for-service.org, training workshops, and orientations.

SOS captures stories of those who serve the nation who:

- Are universally inclusive, reflecting the contributions of individuals of all backgrounds;
- Are ordinary individuals who have received little recognition for their extraordinary service;
- Provide youth with role models for ongoing service; and
- Engage youth with older generations by creating a “youth to youth” connection (storytellers share a time of their service in their youth similar in age to the young interviewees).

At the conference, youth from SOS conducted interviews with elders from the local Albuquerque community as well as other elders with strong backgrounds in service-learning to capture their digital stories. Teams of youth were paired with an elder storyteller to create an opportunity for intergeneration learning. Video is used as a tool to build community and document personal histories of older generations. Ryan Hegg, the Project Di-

rector of Stories of Service, explains that there is power when “young people volunteer to capture stories and share them—[that] media is a modality for preserving stories and history.”

Preserving stories, working with elders, and using media to highlight local issues are all elements of youth media directly related to service-learning. As Nelda Brown, the Director of the National Service-Learning Partnership explains, “The service-learning field is bigger than we think. Often our colleagues using youth media, youth organizing or other engagement strategies to pursue community change are in fact doing service-learning, often with even stronger social justice outcomes for participants and neighborhoods. We need to recognize, embrace and learn from their work to strengthen our mutual goals of community improvement, equity, and justice.”

Bridging service-learning and youth media has profound effects on youth and their communities. Both the service-learning and youth media fields must recognize and learn from one another’s work, especially on areas where they overlap. Whether documenting oral history through a generation of elders using video, sharing one’s cultural identity and experience through journalism and pow-wows, or actively documenting issues in one’s school—young people are taking on socially conscious, activist roles in using media to engage with their sense of self, service, community, and belonging.

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We are Your Audiences and Your Future: Youth Speak in Africa

By: Ingrid Hu Dahl

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“We are your audiences and your future. We have plenty to say, and plenty to give. In an interactive multi-media world, there is no excuse for excluding us.” This was the essence of the message that fired up young activists, presented to UN and government officials, senior TV executives, academics and development agencies at the 5th World Summit on Media for Children (5WSMC). This Summit, which gathers once every three years, occurred on March 24-28th in Johannesburg, South Africa, bringing over 1,000 producers, media regulators, researchers and youth media experts together. Over 300 young people (ages 13-16) from over 90 countries participated.

The vision of 5WSMC is to produce a global, interactive conference with discussion and debate on issues involving children and media leading to tangible, workable and sustainable outcomes. In Johannesburg, youth media professionals and organizations offered workshops to help young people acquire various media skills. These young people took on visible leadership roles in advocating for access to, and participation in, mainstream media outlets.

“Children should hear, see and express themselves, their culture, their language and their life experiences, through the electronic media which affirms their sense of self, community and place,” is a tenet from the African Charter, which sums up the synergy harnessed at 5WSMC between youth and youth media practitioners. The young people who attended made films, produced a daily newspaper, and demonstrated other media-related talents. The excitement and importance of this work was palpable. Clearly, the presence of youth eager to learn higher order media skills and develop an active voice in the mainstream media

should be captured, learned from, and followed in the future.

Youth media professionals and organizations used 5WSMC as an opportunity to teach local African young people media skills, emphasizing the importance of youth-led technology amongst a broader, more mainstream audience. In addition to advocating for electronic media to strengthen youth development and sense of self, 5WSMC provided a nexus for professionals in the youth media field to meet and discuss best practices. These practitioners worked to ensure that children’s voices were heard and provide young people learning opportunities using music, graphics, photos, animation, and video. By offering workshops and opportunities to learn media, these professionals amplified important messages that youth wanted to say about their involvement in mainstream media.

For example, DK (founder of MediaSnackers) and his team trained and prepared over 15 youth delegates to become digital journalists, documenting speakers and workshops, as well as interviewing conference delegates. MediaSnackers made vodcasts of the conference after the event. These vodcasts and insightful youth comments regarding the conference can be viewed at www.5wsmc.com/blog. TK—a 20-year-old South African girl who studies film and attended the conference—posted, “I find such initiatives [as 5WSMC] very profound especially because our country is crippled by so many atrocities. If the world can come together to talk and find solutions, [I am] cool and down with that.” It seems as though part of the ‘world of youth media’ came together to do just that at 5WSMC.

Organizers of 5WSMC were committed

to making certain that youth attendees would be recognized, have a leadership role, and be a focus at the gathering. Firdoze Bulbulia, Chairperson of 5WSMC, explained in a post-conference statement that the 5WSMC worked to incorporate youth in the conference by:

- including children as keynote presenters during each day's plenary, which were selected and empowered through a partnership with the organization Plan International;
- creating a space for youth delegates to interact and attend workshops about diverse media strategies;
- building an electric interactive exhibition space for daily school visitors to the 5WSMC, which was broadcast live in two-hour daily segments by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC);
- providing a platform for youth-participation, which began several months prior to the 5WSMC with pre-summit activities in all nine provinces in South Africa; and
- offering pre-summits to international partners four days prior to the opening of the 5WSMC.

Adding youth to 5WSMC was a new addition this year, a key ingredient to the success of the gathering. In keeping with the main goals of 5WSMC, the focus for youth media professionals, leaders, and media practitioners included:

- creating guidelines to formulate a global children's media rights policy;
- researching production projects designed to amplify children's voices and cultures through media created locally and shared globally;

- developing an African Media Centre for Children;
- analyzing types of training available to adults and young producers of children's media; and
- discussing ways children participate meaningfully in the creation of their own media, research, and comparative skills.

Many organizations at 5WSMC focused on advancing young people—in line with media practitioners in attendance—acknowledging the overall importance of listening and involving young people's voices and talents in mainstream media. For example, UNICEF joined with Oneminutesjr.org and the Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam to run a five-day video training session for 14 young people from South Africa, Burundi, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The young people who attended these trainings learned about camera techniques, props, and sound as well as how to edit, produce and direct their own stories in a one-minute format. As Guy Hubbard and Jabu Tugwana (co-writers of the article "Lights, camera, action! South Africa hosts 5th World Summit on Media for Children" for UNICEF) state, "the annual summit [celebrated] the power of youth and [emphasized] the role that media [plays] in shaping young minds." Media practitioners, youth media professionals, and their partnerships helped—and continue to help—young minds shape media using necessary skills and media-based road maps.

Overall, reflections by practitioners, herald 5WSMC for providing a space for young people to be heard in what is often experienced as a "closed world." Mike Jempson for example, Director of MediaWise and Visiting Professor in Media Ethics at Lincoln University, wrote a press release about 5WSMC entitled, "Children's media summit reveals fresh talents." He explains that the message young people put out to mainstream media professionals was clearly: "listen to

young people, and let [us] in on the closed world of mainstream media production.”

Young people are demanding a space to be recognized and included in the mainstream. Kanjanga Muwena, a young conference blogger, writes post-conference, “thanks to Firdoze [Bulbuilia, Chairperson of 5WSMC and CBFA], for organizing [an] event that has enabled to bring hundreds of children together for one purpose, to improve children’s media.” Media practitioners need to continue to partner with other professionals and young people to help get their voices represented in mainstream media.

If young people have had the power to hold a mainstream audience captive at the 5WSMC by clearly and thoughtfully expressing their needs and desires to be part of media, than adults in media must offer young media makers insight, skills, and

guidance in achieving their goals. Incorporating youth voice is already a focal point for the youth media field. It will be interesting to follow how the field, and the youth within it, work to enter and alter mainstream media locally and around the globe as a result of this conference.

The Summit website provides up to date information of all activities and papers presented including a 5WSMC blog with a picture documentary on YouTube. Go to: <http://www.5wsmc.com>. The next World Summit will be held in Karlstad, Sweden in 2010.

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Engaging Youth with a New Medium: The Potentials of Virtual Worlds

By: Rafi Santo

Part of what makes working in the field of youth media so interesting and engaging is the process of exploring different media. Observing how youth act and react in relation to different media and supporting their investigation into the possibilities of new expressive media forms has been a rewarding experience as a youth media professional at Global Kids. For the past five years, Global Kids (GK) has been exploring what it means to bring youth media projects into the online world—with fascinating finds.

GK began with online dialogues and helped produce and run a website where youth around the globe could dialogue and share opinions on current events. Soon after, GK began working on a serious gaming initiative, giving teens the opportunity to produce issue-based online video games. We soon discovered the virtual world of *Second Life*, which brought together the strengths of so many different online technologies impossible for us to ignore. *Second Life* is a 3-D virtual world entirely built and owned by its residents. Since opening to the public in 2003, it has grown explosively and today is inhabited by approximately 6,240,600 people from around the globe. *Second Life* provides a rich virtual environment for teens across the globe to commune (*Teen Second Life*), which rolls together 3-D object creation, programming, social networking, gaming, chat and multimedia. For educators and media practitioners, *Second Life* is a playground with limitless possibilities.

Looking to understand where these possibilities could lead, we launched *Camp GK*, our pilot program in *Teen Second Life*, in the summer of 2006. Over four weeks, 15 teens from around the world spent three hours a day, five days a week,

participating in interactive, experiential workshops about pressing global issues—all in a virtual space. Over the course of the program, the teens picked a topic of concern—in this case, child sex trafficking—and built a maze to educate their online community, inspiring them to take action on this issue. In its first eight weeks, the content-rich maze was visited by 2,500 teens, of which 450 donated money to an international organization committed to eradicating this global crime against children.

After *Camp GK's* success, we felt we had learned a good deal about virtual media as well as using *Second Life* and wanted to share this knowledge with other educators entering this space.

When wrapping up the project, we spent time documenting what we thought were best practices in various areas, from general program structure to workshop design and everything in between. We have since distributed these practices to those in the *Second Life* educational community and beyond, and continue to spread these practices to youth media professionals through publication and outreach opportunities (download a PDF at <http://www.holymeatballs.org/pdfs/GKguideto-SLpresenting.pdf>). The best practices that follow outlines some of the ways youth media professionals (especially those from a distance education perspective) can use virtual spaces such as *Second Life* in their work.

Best Practices for Working in Second Life

What happens in Second Life stays in Second Life

Especially in the non-profit arena, it is critical to show your work to other programs and funders. Unless you document your virtual work, no one outside of *Second Life* will ever know your program

even existed. However, *Second Life* offers a myriad of methods for digital documentation. You can capture chat logs, blog, take photos, and record video and audio. If you are working with teens, in *Teen Second Life* (the dedicated 13-17 year old space) other adults can not visit your online space because it is restricted to background checked adults and teens.

Create multiple places of meaning

In the real world, a Global Kids program always meets in the same classroom and the setting does not vary. *Second Life* if you have the space, allows you to create a myriad of locations each with their own purposes. A workshop in *Second Life* can start in the GK Clubhouse, move to the factory, shift to the cloud platform, transfer to the dance club, and conclude at the campfire. Each location can be associated with different types of activities, norms and behaviors. For example, in the Global Kids *Second Life* program, youth start at the GK Clubhouse. Teen visitors expect interactive activities in the factory section, fun and interaction in the dance club arena, and processing and closure around the campfire. Establishing an association between each modality and a specific location offers both structure and signs for work, activism, and play.

Best Practices for Bringing a Youth Development Model into Teen Second Life

Global Kids employs an asset based youth development model in the real world, and found that *Second Life* allow this kind of progressive pedagogy to manifest in new ways.

Build, build, build!

Create as many opportunities as possible for teens to express themselves through building. *Second Life* is all about building so it is almost hard not to do this. Encourage youth to “build” the facilities and material required for the program (for example, the meeting rooms, the workshop materials, and t-shirts for the program). Incorporate youth to build the activities (e.g. build and act out

a scene in a life-size diorama, create a billboard about injustice)—since forming items they can use creates a sense of ownership, which increases retention. Use these “builds” as a way for teens to centralize and demonstrate what they are learning, and as a way to share their knowledge and skills with the wider community around them.

Don't just build; design and manipulate avatars

Create opportunities for identity play and self-expression through avatar creation and manipulation. Avatars are an internet user's representation of oneself, whether in the form of a 3-D model (easily made in *Second Life*) or a 2-D picture used on internet forums and online communities. Explore existing avatar choices in *Second Life* to bring up issues of gender and racial representation, or use non-human avatars to address issues of discrimination.

Think globally, act locally

If you're structuring your program as a distance education model that draws from the larger *Teen Second Life* (TSL) community, the teens will be from diverse global locations. However, they experience TSL as their shared community. Strategizing approaches for effective education and advocacy will challenge teens to think creatively and critically. It will appeal to their desire to have their voices heard, make a difference, and develop their leadership abilities. Doing this also means the programmatic impact moves outside the scope of just the participants to a larger community.

Best Practices in Workshop Design and Facilitation in Second Life

No matter what kind of pedagogical approach you are taking, there are a number of things that can be done to strengthen session-based learning in the virtual environment.

Use real world content when addressing real world issues

Discussing substantive issues in a place that feels surreal can make these issues feel distant. Use pho-

tos or a guest speaker, anything “from the other side,” that feels real to give real-world issues weight in the virtual community.

Don't fear multiple communication channels

In a distance learning program structure, multiple channels can be used to add social nuance, organize various modes of communication in a more manageable form, and leverage teen abilities to multitask. Use a public instant-messenger (IM) chat for group conversation and private IMs to communicate one-on-one with participants in *Second Life*.

Make your space have its own culture

Just like the Web, *Second Life*—in both its teen and adult versions—tends to be shaped by a libertarian, anarchic culture which cuts against the grain of Global Kids' organized, substantive, and deliberative activities. In essence, we challenge this larger culture by creating a counter culture. We establish clear guidelines, boundaries and expectations in *Second Life*, which has led to a very high retention rate and a strong sense of ownership in the virtual community.

Be flexible!

Flexibility is the name of the game in the *Second Life* environment. Be prepared to change directions or adjust goals by paying attention to what works. As the tools, social practices and creative uses in a space like this rapidly evolves, it becomes more

critical to be reflective and realistic with goals.

The above list of best practices is a result of reflections from Global Kids' first extended project in *Second Life*. Since then, we had another year of holding two full scale in-person after-school programs that utilize *Second Life* to create *machinima* (animated film made using a video game engine) and other socially conscious games, as well as additional distance education programs and youth led workshops and events. All of these experiences are important learning processes and as youth media professionals, we must continue to share best practices as our project experiences grow and develop.

There's no doubt that the learning curve for working with *Second Life* is a steep one. But so much groundbreaking work is already being done, and there is a lot that can be learned from using virtual online communities such as *Second Life*.

I encourage anyone interested in experimenting with this new, exciting and powerful medium to sign up for a free *Second Life* account (<http://secondlife.com>), attend some of the educational and arts related events, and engage the incredibly dynamic individuals that work in the space.

Rafi Santo is the online leadership program associate for Global Kids. To lezrn more visit www.HolyMeatballs.org or contact info@globalkids.org.

Non-Profit Does Not Mean Non-Revenue

By: Sara Melillo

If only those compelling youth-produced documentaries and essays paid for themselves.

But, they do not—and are not likely to—unless youth media organizations articulate and execute a well-planned earned income strategy.

Earned income is defined generally as receiving money in exchange for a product or service that an organization provides. That includes any money a group generates from ticket sales, subscriptions, program service fees, advertising or contracts.

The focus on earned income within the nonprofit community continues to rise, fueled by boards, funders and stakeholders enamored with the idea of social entrepreneurship and diversified funding streams. The good news is that youth media groups are in an excellent position to capitalize on the trend, as they often produce a tangible product like videos, web sites and magazines, said Tony Ramsden, an earned income expert with the Stanford Business School's Alumni Consulting Team. Plus, youth media groups have access to a coveted young audience prized by many in the advertising and corporate worlds.

With proper planning, these powerful products can generate significant revenue for a nonprofit organization. One immediate bottom line benefit for youth media groups is generating flexible dollars for spur-of-the-moment needs or simply general operating costs.

"My philosophy is always: The more income you can make, the less strings that are attached," said Matthew Johnson, executive director of Strive Media Institute in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a group that generates 55 percent of its budget from its media products and services. "You're a lot freer to make quick decisions and, being in communications, you have to make those decisions."

Market Research is Youth Media's Friend

Before a nonprofit launches a dazzling new product or allots increased attention to boosting its earned income, the group should ask a few fundamental questions and create a comprehensive business plan so that the income strategy is organized, sustainable and relevant.

The first step is to conduct preliminary market research exploring who will pay (and how much they will pay) for the intended product or service that the organization could provide. For example, if a group is considering expanding its ad revenue, it could interview 10 businesses that might be willing to place ads and explore why they would or would not advertise, what barriers to advertising exist and what rates they would pay, Ramsden said.

The market research will also help an organization discover whether the earned income opportunity has the potential to create a profit. According to Cynthia Massarsky, a social enterprise consultant and president of SocialReturns, a nonprofit dedicated to growing social entrepreneurship, "You have to keep your eye on demand and continuously ensure that demand exists. Not say, 'If we make it, they will buy it,' but find out a way in advance to determine if there is a willingness to pay, not just a need."

Do Not Ignore the Business Plan

This market research should feed into a comprehensive business plan created by the group and its board that articulates an income-producing strategy. The plan should address market demand, management, human resources, operations and capitalization in a written document that describes the business, Massarsky advises.

While planning, nonprofit organizations should consider whether the organization has the right people and entrepreneurial culture in place to be successful at earned income. In practical terms, that means that the nonprofit organization's leadership and selected board members have applicable business expertise to complement programmatic expertise.

"Anyone in business will tell you management is key," Massarsky said. "If you don't have the right people in there who know how to do the job and do it well, it's kind of a recipe for failure."

Youth Radio in Oakland, California has found board members with experience in the business of media who have been instrumental in asking the right questions and designing the most beneficial deals and professional media partnerships," said Lissa Soep, senior producer and education director.

The vital entrepreneurial spirit that experts cite existed from the start at Youth Radio. The organization has examined the possibilities for earned income since its founding in 1992. Today, Youth Radio earns income from fees for its radio products, such as stories aired on NPR, and studio

rentals.

“It was kind of an entrepreneurial starting point, to say, ‘There’s a need for youth perspectives in every major story in the news, not here and there, but to really hear from young people,’ Soep said of Youth Radio’s founding.

Don’t Forget the Mission

Like all things related to fundraising, earned income can drain staff time in the endless pursuit of increasing revenue. It is important for organizations to continually examine whether or not the earned income strategy enriches an organization’s mission.

The effort and planning it takes to earn revenue often drains mission-driven work in organizations that don’t plan well, Ramsden said. “Once you start to earn a little revenue and it looks like it’s going well, sometimes the tail can start to wag the dog,” he said. “The message here is that you need to be prepared to spend more time on this than you wish you had to, both in the planning and execution phase.”

For former film and broadcast producer Jeff McCarter, founder and executive director of Free Spirit Media (FSM) in Chicago, Illinois, that has meant starting to formalize the organizational structure to support the contract production work that the video education and production organization conducts. FSM earns 40–45 percent of its revenue from contracts with schools and businesses to provide media education and video production, such as filming the concert festival Lollapalooza for the past two years.

“When I left doing professional production work, I had to say no to these kinds of projects a lot to get Free Spirit’s core educational mission off the ground,” he said. “I realized that this is an opportunity we have in a limited fashion to bring these on.”

That’s not to say that earned income cannot add to the youth development experience for youth media. In fact, young people at Youth Radio have embraced digital media culture and the creation and distribution of media online along with

an increasingly entrepreneurial culture.

“Our young people have a sense of passion and urgency to be in the game, and they really see Youth Radio as a way to do that and to see and think of themselves as media makers who are business-minded,” Soep said.

Tips from the Field

As a youth media group starts planning and refining its earned income strategy, here are a few selected tips from the field:

Make products and rates available to clients: When Puja Telikicherla joined Young DC newspaper as managing director this past summer, the organization didn’t have an organized rate card and advertising information available to potential advertisers. She immediately created an ad kit for the 10,000 circulation youth-written monthly newspaper, posted it online and started receiving ad requests.

Provide free “samples”: After she got the rates and kit established, Telikicherla began offering free and discounted sample ads to her friends and potential clients to illustrate sample work. It also helped increase the aesthetic look and variety for the newspaper. “Since I came on, I thought the only way to get ads, is to print ads.” She checked with professional newspapers that advised her that this was standard practice. Young DC has had paid ads every issue since and has a contracted commission advertising person who receives 15 percent commission from every ad he sells.

Make your business case to clients: Johnson of Strive Media Institute said it’s important to “put together a deal that allows the sponsor to see the value in the business and get value in what they’re spending.” Whether that’s emphasizing the reach of a TV show or publication or emphasizing the public relations angle or tax write-off, non profits need to demonstrate how this will benefit a corporate donor or client. “If you can do that, the money is released easily.” For example, Manpower Inc., a

global employment services firm, has sponsored Strive Media's Gumbo Teen Job Directory, a comprehensive guide to teen jobs in Milwaukee, a natural sponsorship connection.

Do not underbid the product/service: Make sure that the product or service that the organizations deliver makes money, Johnson said. Don't underbid the services or product and watch out for expense overruns. That goes back to knowing the business and doing research beforehand.

Explore new media and professional partnerships: Youth Radio is currently working with iTunes to distribute media content and is exploring other online revenue streams for digital content, Soep said. The Internet has made earned income more accessible. For example, Youth Radio is exploring premium subscriber content for its Teach Youth Radio Project, a free online curriculum for teachers that explains how to integrate youth-produced content into classrooms and other settings. This might mean having subscriptions for updated monthly lesson plans and new stories, Soep suggests.

Learn to say no: Don't get drawn astray from the mission by promises of large sums. At Strive Media, Johnson was forced to turn down a contract of more than \$180,000 from the city of Milwaukee for his participants to conduct undercover compliance checks to purchase cigarettes. Though the money was tempting, it did not enrich the students' media education or communication skills. At Youth Radio, the leadership ensures its youth participants have a voice in which projects the organization undertakes and that its youth editorial advisory board has full control. This has meant turning down a number of offers to conduct youth focus groups, as that doesn't contribute to the groups' mission, Soep noted.

Find the right partners: For Free Spirit Media, a sizable portion of its budget comes from working with schools that donate space, equipment

and dollars for the organization's services. It was not always that way though. "Not every school sees value and some schools either have budgets that are not flexible or have administrations that are not imaginative enough to pull off this kind of relationship," McCarter said. For him, that means finding schools willing to provide financial support to FSM and schools that appreciate its work. McCarter suggests youth media groups working in schools explore the school's arts or youth development budget categories, as school discretionary funding is also spoken for.

Encourage an entrepreneurial culture: Strive Media uses different techniques to encourage an entrepreneurial culture, one of which is assigning business titles to youth working on Gumbo products. The participants also receive business cards so when they are meeting with clients and potential funders, they feel more confident about making a pitch.

These are only a few helpful tips for youth organizations wishing to begin or refine earned income opportunities. Experts suggest tapping into the numerous articles and books that tackle social entrepreneurship and earned income which are available online. Organizations should also work with board and staff members to begin examining an organization's potential for earned income and to draft a comprehensive business plan. The process usually takes about six months to 1 year.

For more tips, articles and resource libraries on earned income, check out:

- *Social Enterprise Alliance:* The membership organization for stakeholders interested in building sustainable nonprofits through earned income strategies. www.se-alliance.org
- *SocialReturns.org:* A nonprofit organization dedicated to growing social entrepreneurship. www.socialreturns.org

- *Community Wealth Ventures*: A social enterprise consulting firm with a great resource list. www.communitywealth.org
- *The Stanford Social Innovation Review*: A magazine dedicated to providing research and practice-based knowledge for social innovation projects. www.ssireview.org
- *Aspen Institute's Nonprofit Sector and Philanthropy Program (NSPP)*: www.aspeninstitute.org
- *Ashoka*: Dedicated to recognizing and supporting global social entrepreneurship. www.ashoka.org

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Youth, Professionals, and the Blog-o-sphere

By: Patti Binder

A few years ago I realized that girls were making headlines in the news that were predominantly negative—such as rises in girls' violence and teen pregnancy, or the continued Mean Girl phenomena—as if girls are only important when they are bullying each other or in some kind of trouble. From *Newsweek* to the *New York Times*, the headlines kept focusing on what's *wrong* with girls instead of the positive, newsworthy accounts of young women's action. As a program director for a girls' program, I heard girls' ideas and thoughts for projects and social change regularly, yet I rarely saw their stories reflected in the media. Where were the headlines of girls who are breaking barriers and leading projects in the world? Where were the sassy, smart, and creative girls with something to say?

Entering the Blog-o-sphere

It occurred to me that a blog would be the perfect place to highlight girls' achievements that weren't making it into the headlines of mainstream media. A blog could give me a place to write about the

trends that I witnessed in girls' programs—where funding comes from, what types of programs are offered, and how to identify young girls' needs. Ultimately, my vision was to create a medium that would inspire professionals to learn best practices on girls programming, to create dialogue, promote positive work done by young girls, and serve as a place to share information and dialogue. Much of what I have learned as a professional that runs a blog can be useful to professionals and practitioners in the youth media field.

I entered the blog-o-sphere—a space for alternative news, dialogue, and forums—and started *What's Good for Girls* in September 2006. *Whats Good for Girls* (WGFG) is a blog that serves as a place where people who work with, and care about, girls' development can get information and read commentary regarding issues facing girls' organizations. As a blog, WGFG provides a forum for smaller organizations, without PR firms and fancy advertising campaigns, to be highlighted for their approaches to working with girls every day. Similarly, blogs can be used by professionals in the

youth media field to share approaches, get information on youth media programs, and highlight their work amongst local and global audiences. For example, WGFG is a blog that centers on small NYC based organizations, but has global readership that includes Australia, India, and various readers throughout Europe.

Why Blogs?

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Blogs, in the tradition of zines and personal websites, are portals to a world where individuals are the authors of their own experience; offering their own analysis and providing a glimpse into how big ideas translate into everyday lives. Where *ypulse.com* provides me with daily updates on youth culture, *feministing.com* gives me information and insights into current events with a feminist viewpoint. The blog-o-sphere put me in touch with what other people are thinking and doing across the world in youth programming, in non-profits and in the feminist world. And blogs function in the same way for individuals in the youth media and neighboring fields that want to connect with others in regards to youth programming. For example, WGFG has a built in bulletin board feature with daily updates on where to go to see girls in media, social change, or arts-based action, with provisional links for readers to traverse. For the youth media field, this type of professional-led forum and information hub can be extremely useful to others in the field.

Blogs can be a powerful way for youth media professionals to share information and experiences by building an on-line community that can sustain our work. Blogs are a space to explore questions and receive answers from professionals and individuals across the globe. For the youth media field, blogs in particular can act as a forum to share best practices and dialogue on current topics right from our desktops (without waiting for a conference to attend in order to reach similar outcomes). The possibility and far reaching scope of blogs makes future partnerships, collaborations, and activism much more surmountable.

Role of a Professional Blogger

My role as a blogger is to be discerning, to actively choose which programs to highlight and to make sure they fit criteria I value. In the case for WGFG, my specific role is to focus on girls as powerful and capable people in the world who need to be *valued*. If a professional chooses to blog, one must be clear about their goals and criteria. WGFG strives to be a place where people who care about young people to get fresh information on progressive *girls'* programming. Thus, the programs I highlight place girls in the center of their work and support their development into successful, independent adults that use skills—like blogs and alternative media—to come to voice, build community, and exchange resources.

As a blogger, I translate my reality and observations to other professional and media practitioners on the web. I provide a space for people to see into the world of the small girl-serving community based organizations. For example, while everyone knows about the Girl Scouts, only a few people know about Girls Write Now or the Willie Mae Rock Camp for Girls—two small organizations that make a huge impact on young women by helping them develop new skills while creatively expressing themselves. I'd love for one person reading the blog who currently works with girls, whether as a staff person or as a volunteer, to pick up an idea from a program I highlight in WGFG and implement it with girls they know.

Blogs are a tool for professionals who want an alternative media source to positively represent young people and dialogue with other media professionals and practitioners on the best ways to accomplish this. Blogs are immediate; therefore, professionals receive up-to-date and current news about issues, trends, and challenges in their field—which I have found extends into readership from other neighboring and related fields. The opportunity to read up on the work of various organizations and the visions of professionals is powerful—something professionals in the youth media field ought to foster in order to build on a sense of community and ownership in the field. Used in

this way, blogs offer an opportunity to engage with professionals and share best practices in real time. As a professional that blogs, I document and share practices through WGFG, sharing ways adult allies can support girls in all fields related to youth.

Advice to Future Bloggers

As a successful youth worker or media professional, you can't just tell young people to try new things or take a risk without doing so yourself. By engaging with your own media voice and technology, working with and for young people is that much more fruitful. Blogs create community and alternative views in the media. WGFG is my adventure in taking an alternative, media-based, public and internet action on what I believe, living the advice I give young people daily and providing a forum for adult allies. As a professional working with youth, I have become a media savvy girl—a role model for both professionals and the youth I represent.

I got tired of seeing “bad girls” in the

news—when the girls I worked with were doing such positive, world-changing activism. What are you tired of? Think about it. Make a blog. Make your voice heard. Share dialogue with other professionals in the field. As a result, you can make change daily, like tipping negative perceptions by highlighting positive insights of youth in mainstream media, and engaging with youth media professionals across the globe that support your cause.

Patti Binder works to promote girls, young women's leadership, and gender equity through her blog, What's Good For Girls. When she isn't blogging, she fights against commercial sexual exploitation as the senior director of planning and operations at GEMS, Girls Educational and Mentoring Services, and volunteers (and fundraises) for NYC girls serving non profits including Girls Write Now and the Willie Mae Rock Camp for Girls. <http://whatsgoodforgirls.blogspot.com>.

The Mind of BLOC

Interview: Ibrahim Abdul-Matin

Building Leadership Organizational Communities (BLOC)—whose membership is primarily made up of young activists of color in social justice organizations across the country—has been run solely by Movement Strategy Center in Oakland, California since 2005. For the last two years, BLOC's central project has been the www.mybloc.net website, the online social networking site for organizers to share tools, strategies and curriculum nationally. MyBloc.net uses web 2.0 tools and the skills of emerging people of color organizer-technologists to increase the effectiveness and impacts of base-building organizations while laying the foundation for the progressive youth leadership pipeline.

Developed with Tumis Design in Oak-

land, CA, the BLOC site is currently being tested by BLOC members (active BLOC members are based in organizations such as Inner City Struggle, Make the Road by Walking, Elementz, Sista to Sista, and YO! The Movement) and will publicly launch by summer 2007. YMR interviewed Ibrahim Abdul-Matin—a founding member of BLOC—to learn more about the project and MyBloc.net for the youth media field before its' upcoming launch.

YMR: How is current youth media relevant to supporting social movements, social change?

Matin: Youth media is the front, the face, and the lasting images of the change youth want to see en-

acted. We have to learn to be as forward thinking about issues such as race, gender, and class as we are about technology's influence on our culture—and how it can be used in the world of youth development and the political implications that directly affect young people.

Youth media is uniquely poised to amplify youth stories in supporting these alternatives and visions. As Steve Goodman, director of Educational Video Center in NYC has stated, “youth media is similar to Highlander Center literacy training in the 1950's.”

It was that literacy work of Highlander in that era, led by youth, to develop their literacy in all areas. Not just to read and write but also to read and understand the way society was changing around them—and how they could affect that change.

In that way, youth media is a new vanguard of sorts, bringing a whole new literacy of the political context into sharper focus through all forms of media and providing a megaphone for youth transforming their own realities.

YMR: From your point of view, why do we need a national youth movement?

Matin: I was recently at a national gathering of BLOC, which is a national network of youth organizers and a political community of young progressives of color, and posed that same question to ourselves.

The timing and desperate need for a national youth movement stems from the role that youth have traditionally played in the social and political landscape of our country. Young people, particularly those who emerge from the nation's most disenfranchised communities, have created vibrant movements that have changed this nation and pushed the social justice agenda forward. For example, look at recent history and see evidence of this from cultural revolutions in music to the tumultuous time of the SNCC and the students for a democratic society. It is young people who charge forward and lead.

At the convening, one of the BLOC network members, Azuscena Olaguez from Chicago, Illinois asked: “How did the civil rights movement pass on leadership to other folks emerging? How can BLOC play that role? If BLOC had been connected and united there could have been a large response to the gulf coast disaster.”

Azuscena spoke to the need for generational learning transfer. Our political moment is one where young people are in dire need of support, development, and protection from the forces of war. Take the struggle of queer and transgender youth for example, or the rapid prison expansion taking place that makes it appear that there is a pipeline for youth to go from school to jail, instead of investing in alternatives and opportunities our society is making, which negatively affects a young persons prospect.

The need for a national youth movement is clear: young people need to be networked and strategically organized in order to develop their own alternatives and articulate their own visions and dreams.

YMR: In regards to social networking, how do you take advantage of web 2.0 and how does it function to develop a peer network?

Matin: Web 2.0 refers to the current trend that we are in with the internet. The motto being: “I can participate.”

The user controls and feeds content. Some examples of web 2.0 applications are: *YouTube, MySpace, Ebay, Wikipedia, Flickr, Imeem, Facebook*, and others. There are many other uses of the internet to form values and culture-based communities that either mimic and amplify face-to-face connections or create spaces online for disconnected folks to find one another.

MyBLOC.net for example, is set up to host self-selecting groups, create alumni circles to provide long-term connection between participants at a training or conference and individually tailor learning circles to strategize on particular issues (or campaign)s on your block or globally. The

site connects individuals to organizations, and to each other.

It is poised to take on the web 2.0 applications mentioned above; however, such social networking spaces are critical to any organization to identity itself in a new media landscape. Youth media organizations and collectives should incorporate all of these avenues in their outreach, marketing, and messaging plans.

YMR: How is the Internet similar and different to other means of communication and media?

Matin: Speech, language, writing, drums, fire and smoke, religion, and the written word, are elements that accelerate and amplify messages of cultural, social, and political identity. The internet reflects these forms of communication but to an entirely different degree. The internet is a vast and expansive innovation in human communication history with bells and whistles and constant acceleration. What makes it different is the speed, range, and scope.

If you look, for example, at the way list serves are used today, they can be compared to newsletters, and before that to pamphlets—the internet delivers targeted content to people who understand the value of that content, only now it is done instantly.

In addition, nearly every form of media can be “held” on the internet; from video, print, cartoons, and radio. It is the catch-all platform that is flattening communication structures and allowing for multitudes of messages to be out there and reachable from just about anywhere an internet connection is live.

YMR: How might youth media professionals learn from MyBloc as a social networking (internet-based) plateau to collaborate, build/retain community, and network/share resources?

Matin: Well, youth media professionals need to know that MyBloc.net does not come out of a vacuum and it was not conceived as an online space.

Actually, it came as a result of 10 years of trying to network progressive youth workers.

The first BLOC discussion took place at Vasser College in 1998. From there chapters developed in the Bay Area of California, in the District of Columbia and northeast. Over that time it has mainly been a face-to-face people-to-people network of practitioners dedicated to youth work regardless of what they do for money. BLOC convened national gatherings in 1999, 2001, 2003, and 2004.

MyBloc comes out of an understanding of our solidarity internationally with other youth of color dealing with the effects of colonialism and imperialist oppression. In 2005, BLOC assembled the North American Action in Solidarity (NAS), which sent a delegation of over 30 youth organizers and activists of color to the World Social Forum in Brazil and four years earlier, a delegation went to South Africa to see how the local society was transforming.

BLOC has prioritized deep relationship building in the real world using technology as a tool to keep those connections tight on a global scale.

YMR: How might youth media professionals begin to build their own version of MyBloc for the field (and/or how might they join)?

Matin: Youth media professionals can take their peer support circles that perhaps are already informal or formal, local, regional, or national, and capture that on MyBloc. They can self-select and start local or regional ‘bloc’ circles. BLOC is about agreeing to stay committed to developing youth leadership, transforming our communities so they are free from *all* forms of oppression and implies a movement building ethic—BLOC’ers connect their work to others doing similar work. They are focused on developing through organizational networking and leadership.

MyBloc is a progressive political community, which started face-to-face and decided to move online. Progressive media professionals can

take the BLOC banner, logo and principles and adopt it as their own. Anyone can initiate learning, support, strategy, action and change circles. They can release curriculums on MyBloc.net—making them available to peers and youth to download—or use MyBloc.net as a means for organizing an event or convening, develop a plan for action, coordinate campaigns across borders and be creative in discovering new ways to use technology.

In addition, the Future5000.com—a searchable online database of hundreds of progressive youth organizations—is available as a resource on MyBloc.net and was built intentionally to show the interdependence of campus, community, culture, and electoral youth work.

If folks are building something similar, here are some ideas: it should be user-centric, filled with the tools and content visitors want; the software itself should be open-source to encourage cross-platform work across the globe; and it should be developed by people who know and understand the particular issues that youth media professionals deal with in their important work.

Ibrahim Abdul-Matin was the organizer technologist at Movement Strategy Center where he guided the development of Future5000.com and MyBloc.net since 2004. He was awarded a National Urban Fellowship and is currently pursuing an MPA at CUNY Baruch in New York City. A freelance journalist, and a Brooklyn native, Ibrahim is working on a novel and book of poetry.

Suggested Resources:

www.MyBloc.net, www.Future5000.com
www.Youthmediacouncil.org
www.echoditto.com, www.onenw.org
www.webofchange.com, www.dotorganize.net

Social Networking Sites:

www.imeem.com, rapspace.tv
www.takingitglobal.org

Special Features

In Summer 2007, a small cohort of key figures were identified and invited to write the following special feature articles only available in the print version of YMR. Each author tailored their article through a 5-month extensive editorial and peer review process. These articles dig deep and expand the scope of the youth media field.

The First Amendment and Youth Media: How Free Should Young People Be?

By Sam Chaltain

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

—The First Amendment to the United States Constitution

No one in Utica, Michigan, would have ever guessed school buses and the First Amendment were so closely linked. But Katy Dean made them see otherwise.

A junior at the local high school, Dean read a news story in 2002 about two residents who claimed the diesel fumes from school buses were endangering their health. Intrigued, she researched and wrote an article about the lawsuit for her high school newspaper. “Basically,” Dean explained, “the story was about a man who had throat and lung cancer, and he lived a street away from the bus garage, so he was suing the school district, alleging that the fumes from the diesel buses had contributed to his cancer.”¹

When the principal heard about Dean’s story, he prohibited its publication and charged the young reporter with producing an inappropriate and unbalanced piece. “I interviewed the man and his wife, [and I also] tried to interview the school district officials, but they wouldn’t comment,” she said.

Just like that, Dean had a lawsuit of her own. And in November 2003, District Judge Arthur Tarnow ruled in her favor. “If the role of the press in a democratic society is to have any value,” he wrote, “all journalists—including student journalists—must be allowed to publish viewpoints contrary to those of state authorities without intervention or censorship.”

Dean’s courage, as well as her principal’s reaction, should remind us that in our schools, our organizations, our communities, and our country, American democracy needs individuals with more than just a vague awareness of the First Amendment’s five freedoms (religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition); it needs a new generation of citizens who put those rights into practice to follow their consciences, to speak out for justice, and to organize for change.

The Biological “Urge to Speak”

More so than any other part of our social compact, the First Amendment’s guarantee to protect our fundamental rights of expression—from the religions we practice to the news we cover to the ideas we support—is America’s most vital contribution to the world.

Biology professor James Zull, the director of Case Western University’s Center for Innovation in Teaching and Education and the author of *The Art of Changing the Brain*, speaks of this impulse to participate in

¹ Sampson, 2005.

biological terms, describing it as the irrepressible “urge to speak. Certainly,” he says, “part of the control we believe we have in our lives comes through our belief in the power of speech.”² And Myles Horton, the founder of the Highlander adult education schools that helped prepare activists like Rosa Parks, believes an unwavering commitment to these freedoms should impact every aspect of American society:

I think it’s important to understand that the quality of the process you use to get to a place determines the ends, so when you want to build a democratic society, you have to act democratically in every way. . . . When you believe in a democratic society, you provide a setting for education that is democratic.³

Of course, as every youth media practitioner already knows, there’s more to it than that. There’s a reason people mistrust and misunderstand the First Amendment and the role freedom plays in American public life. Think of any major cultural divide today. Competing interpretations of the First Amendment—and what it means to be free—are at the center of the conflict. But the First Amendment is not the primary cause of this conflict. Instead, the problem is that too many of us have come to share an overdeveloped sense of “rights” and an underdeveloped sense of “responsibilities.”⁴

This is where the readers of *Youth Media Reporter* come in. Whether our work involves radio, the Internet, or old-fashioned print, it’s important that our training extend beyond just journalistic skills, codes of ethics, and methods of critical inquiry. We all need to be reminded of a simple truth about American society: although each of us (in theory at least) is free to exercise our First Amendment rights, none of us—from the oldest to the youngest—is born with the wisdom to exercise those rights responsibly. That takes a lifetime of practice. And youth media programs provide one of the best places for such practice to occur.

Still, it’s one thing to recognize that the First Amendment matters and we should pay more attention to it. How does one teach effectively about the First Amendment and its proper role in contemporary American society? In what ways does the First Amendment directly impact the work of youth media practitioners?

² Zull, 2002, p. 63.

³ Horton, 1997, p. 68, 227.

⁴ This national inattention to understanding what it means to be free has left its mark. In January of 2005, researchers from the University of Connecticut, funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, released the results of over two years of interviews with over 100,000 students, 8,000 teachers and 500 administrators at 544 high schools. Their purpose? “To determine whether relationships exist—and, if so, the nature of those relationships—between what teachers and administrators think, and what students . . . know about the First Amendment.” Overall, the news is discouraging—and not surprising. In fact, as the study’s investigators write, “it appears that our nation’s high schools are failing their students when it comes to instilling in them an appreciation for the First Amendment.” Among their findings:

- students lack knowledge and understanding about key aspects of the First Amendment. Seventy-three percent say they don’t know how they feel about it or that they take it for granted;
- students are less likely than teachers or principals to think that people should be allowed to express unpopular opinions;
- perhaps most disturbing, more than a third of students think the First Amendment goes too far in the rights it guarantees.

For more information about the Knight survey, visit <http://firstamendment.jideas.org>.

And what *does* it mean to be free?

Although this article can only begin to address those questions, it's important to begin with some foundational information—what the First Amendment does and doesn't protect under current law.

How Does the First Amendment's Free-Press Clause Apply to Journalists?

Technically, the First Amendment is a limitation on what *government* may or may not do (“Congress shall make no law . . .”), not on the private speech of individuals. As lawyer Lee Levine explains, “in the United States the government may not prevent the publication of a newspaper, even when there is reason to believe that it is about to reveal information that will endanger our national security.” By the same token, the government cannot:

- pass a law that requires newspapers to publish information against their will;
- impose criminal penalties, or civil damages, on the publication of truthful information about a matter of public concern or even on the dissemination of false and damaging information about a public person except in rare instances;
- impose taxes on the press that it does not levy on other businesses;
- compel journalists to reveal, in most circumstances, the identities of their sources;
- prohibit the press from attending judicial proceedings and thereafter informing the public about them.

Levine continues:

Collectively, this bundle of rights, largely developed by U.S. Supreme Court decisions, defines the ‘freedom of the press’ guaranteed by the First Amendment. What we mean by the freedom of the press is, in fact, an evolving concept. The concept is informed by the perceptions of those who crafted the press clause in an era of pamphlets, political tracts and periodical newspapers, and by the views of Supreme Court justices who have interpreted that clause over the past two centuries in a world of daily newspapers, books, magazines, motion pictures, radio and television broadcasts, and now Web sites and Internet postings.⁵

Who Is “The Press”? Does it Include Youth Media?

For much of our history, American courts have struggled with this ostensibly basic question. Although it has become clear that mainstream media (broadcast stations, newspapers, and magazines, etc.) enjoy the freedom of the press, the line gets blurrier in cases involving nonschool-based student journalists, underground newspapers, freelance writers and pamphleteers, and bloggers.

In general, however, courts have defined “the press” to include *all* publishers—from the biggest to the smallest. This extends to young people participating in youth media programs—as long as they are “news-gatherers” or performing in a newsgathering function.⁶ As the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals wrote in 1987, First Amendment protections extend to “every sort of publication which affords a vehicle of information and opinion.”

⁵ Levine, 2008.

⁶ Despite this protection, the First Amendment Center's David Hudson urges youth media program coordinators “to refer to the specific state statute and look at the definition of ‘reporter.’ Some state laws are written more restrictively than others.” See <http://www.rcfp.org/privilege/> for more information.

What Limitations May Realistically Be Placed on the Media?

Unless restricted by a valid *prior restraint* (a legal restraint placed on material before publication), members of the media—including youth journalists—are generally free to publish whatever information or ideas they wish.

This freedom does not immunize journalists from liability for what they publish. As the First Amendment Center explains, “a newspaper that publishes false information about a person can be sued for libel. A television station similarly can be sued if it broadcasts a story that unlawfully invades a person’s privacy.” Because such liability can be staggering, youth media practitioners must ensure that their journalists exercise the freedom to publish in a responsible and ethical manner.

What Is the Difference, for Legal Purposes, Between Public and Private Figures, and How Does That Impact Press Coverage?

If a journalist’s work is alleged to be defamatory or false, the status of the plaintiff, the person bringing the lawsuit, is extremely important. In fact, different legal standards exist depending upon whether the plaintiff is a private or public figure.

In short, private figures, the majority of us, must merely show a defendant was negligent, or at fault, in order to prevail. By contrast, so-called public figures (President Bush, Britney Spears, etc.) must meet a higher legal standard and prove that a defendant acted with actual malice—meaning s/he either knew the statement was false or acted in reckless disregard as to whether it was true or false. This distinction helps explain why so much defamation litigation focuses on whether the plaintiff is a private or public figure.

May a School Legally Censor an Off-Campus, Underground Youth Media Publication?

Partly because of the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1988 ruling in *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier*, which allows administrators to censor school-sponsored publications as long as the decision is “reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns,” a greater number of students have resorted to their own independent newspapers, or to youth media programs that take place entirely out of school. Since these publications are not school sponsored, they receive the same level of protection any other newspaper receives, and they are not bound by the *Hazelwood* standard of expression.

If, therefore, students elect *not* to distribute their work on school grounds, a school is extremely limited in its ability to censor privately produced student publications.⁷ If they do distribute on school grounds, most courts will apply the *Tinker* standard, which states that school officials may not censor student speech unless they can reasonably forecast, based on evidence and not on an “undifferentiated fear or apprehension of disturbance,” that the student expression would lead to either (a) a substantial disruption of the school environment, or (b) an invasion of the rights of others.⁸

Administrators may also place reasonable restrictions on the time, place, and manner of youth media distribution.⁹ Courts have been divided on this issue, however, partly because there are differences of

⁷ See *Thomas v. Board of Education*, 607 F.2d 1043, 1051 (2nd Cir. 1979), cert. denied, 444 U.S. 1081 (1980).

⁸ Some courts, however, have granted school officials greater authority to regulate the distribution of underground newspapers that are pervasively vulgar. See *Bystrom v. Fridley High Sch.*, 822 F.2d 747 (8th Cir. 1987).

⁹ The key word here is reasonable. School officials may not place restrictions on the distribution of materials

opinion when applying the public forum analysis, a legal method for determining to what extent someone should be protected by the First Amendment on government-owned property. Some courts have claimed that the hallways of schools are closed public forums, and therefore students' rights to distribute material should be limited. Others have been more receptive to the rights of students, so, as always, the interpretation of the law depends largely on the judge reviewing the case.

Aside from a Basic Understanding of the Law, What Should Youth Media Programs Be Teaching About the First Amendment?

Allowing all people to air their ideas in the spirit of creating civil friction is the core idea behind the First Amendment. Charles Haynes, the First Amendment Center's senior scholar and a national authority on religious liberty issues, believes it can even help communities find common ground on the issues that most deeply divide them:

We have found that where communities are committed to coming together in the spirit of the First Amendment, consensus is reached, new policies are drafted, and significant changes take place in the classroom.¹⁰

At the heart of that spirit of the First Amendment is a framework for civil friction that youth media programs should consider emphasizing as part of their ongoing work. Haynes calls this framework the Three Rs:

- **Rights:** The First Amendment's guarantee to protect freedom of conscience is a precious, fundamental, and inalienable right for all. Every effort should be made in public schools to protect the consciences of all people.
- **Responsibilities:** Central to the notion of the common good is the recognition that the First Amendment's five freedoms are universal rights joined to a universal duty to respect the rights of others. Rights are best guarded and responsibilities best exercised when people guard for all others those rights they wish guarded for themselves.
- **Respect:** Conflict and debate are vital to democracy. Yet if controversies about freedom and different ideas are to reflect the highest wisdom of the First Amendment and advance the best interest of the nation, then *how* we debate, and not only *what* we debate, is critical.¹¹

This spirit of the First Amendment, and of the Three Rs, is what guided Katy Dean in her investigative journalism. It's what undergirds the best work in youth media today. And it's what reminds us who, on our best days, we strive to be.

In 1944, in Central Park, while addressing a group of people who had just taken the oath of citizenship, the great judge Learned Hand outlined the spirit of the First Amendment—and a definition of liberty—we would do well to remember today:

What do we mean when we say that first of all we seek liberty? I often wonder whether we do not rest our hopes too much upon constitutions, upon laws and upon courts. These are false hopes; believe me, these are false hopes. Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can even do much to help it. While it lies there it needs no

that are intended to stifle the dissemination of viewpoints the school may dislike.

¹⁰ Haynes, 2007 p. 6.

¹¹ Haynes, 2007, p. 62.

constitution, no law, no court to save it.¹²

* * *

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¹² Selected Gems, n.d.

What We Talk About: Youth Media as a Community of Reflection

By Timothy Dorsey

“What do any of us really know...? It seems to me we’re just beginners....”
—Raymond Carver¹

The Questions We Ask Ourselves

When we talk about youth media as professional practitioners engaged in the work, it can be challenging to identify or name precisely what we’re talking about. We tend to agree that what we do in youth media is uniquely interdisciplinary and that our practice represents a point of intersection and overlap for many critical concerns related to education, youth development, media arts, and social change. Our further tendency then is to approach conversations about our work somewhat expansively, talking big and broad.

We talk about justice and about working to right imbalances in a world where the weight of rights and concerns so often tips around race and class, and around gender, nationality, ethnicity, and sex. We talk about inquiry-based learning, about prioritizing questions over answers. We talk about progressive education and the concept of critical literacy, through which young people develop skills not as passive consumers but as active producers. We talk about reforming schools and about bringing this reform to scale.

We discuss youth voice, creative expression, media artistry, and the ‘Next Generation’; technology and funding, access and gaps; and what these things mean in young people’s lives, in our lives, and in Second Life. We address youth leadership and talk about how to teach meaningful skills in ways that nurture collaboration, engage emerging citizens, and effect change both for individuals and communities.

We speak matter-of-factly about economic issues, particularly about jobs and wages. Like us, young people depend upon income, and many of our young people would like to earn a living by making media. With these young people as well as with colleagues, we share concerns about the world and the issues that define our historical moment: immigration, occupation, incarceration, torture, war.

And of course our conversations often move toward the most immediate concerns: Where will the money come from this year? Who will see the work? Where are our young people going from here? Are we making a difference?

Youth media as a field is, at many levels and by its very nature, a community of reflection and inquiry. As practitioners, we are forever posing critical questions to ourselves and to each other about our work, just as the young people in our programs pose questions to be explored through media production. But there is so much to say when we talk about the field—its principles, boundaries, capacities—that at times we begin to sound like the characters in a Raymond Carver story who, weathered and worn, try to talk about love: at a table where we’ve sat for so long that the light from the window has changed direction and we’re on

¹ Carver, 1989, p. 176.

the verge of seeing double.

So what might happen, we begin to wonder, if we were to hone our occasional and expansive conversations about youth media into a more intentional and critically reflective examination of our work? Specifically, what might we discover by moving into the very core of this work to examine our *teaching and learning practices as youth media educators*? And what value might we add to the work by taking the time to do this?

Fostering a Community of Practice

The Youth Media Learning Network is a national initiative intended to promote the close examination of youth media teaching practice, or pedagogy, by practitioners themselves. We support professional development for educators who teach youth media in a variety of formal and informal settings as we engage them in structured, sustained, and facilitated opportunities to come together as peer practitioners—not to talk about the work of the field in broad and expansive terms, but rather to reflect critically and intentionally upon issues of pedagogy and methodology.

In developing the core concept of the Learning Network, we've begun with a set of key assumptions generated from our participation in the kinds of field-building conversations referenced above. We acknowledge, first, that there are many talented youth media educators working across a range of age groups, media forms, and teaching settings throughout the United States and internationally. We've observed that youth media educators often work in isolation from one another, with limited access to opportunities for engagement beyond their local communities or even beyond their home organizations or schools. Despite differences in approach and setting, these educators share critical similarities in their teaching practices, such as an emphasis on hands-on, experiential learning; cultivation of youth voice; presentation of work to public audiences; the critical value of community-based learning; and engagement of young people in youth-centered dialogue around the most pressing social issues of the day.

We've further observed that many youth media educators emerge from professional backgrounds as media producers or artists rather than as formally trained teachers, and that professional development for youth media educators within their home organizations or schools is generally limited or of secondary concern. Resisting these limitations, youth media educators have demonstrated—through their participation in conferences, inter-organizational collaborations, and various field-building initiatives over the last several years—that they are eager to build upon their respective and common strengths, to further develop their teaching and learning practices, and to take home professional development experiences to their schools and organizations.

Practically speaking, the Learning Network supports a two-track activity model: the Youth Media Fellowship for established youth media educators who commit to participating in a facilitated seminar over the course of a program year and to conducting practice-based action research, and Youth Media Institutes for educators from in-school and after-school settings who are newcomers to youth media and who wish to incorporate youth media practices into their work. Along these dual pathways, the Learning Network seeks to support the development of the field both in breadth and in depth—or, as Educational Video Center (EVC) Founder and Executive Director Steven Goodman has described it, by scaling up and scaling down. Goodman explains:

The rigor and self-reflective sensibility produced through cross-organizational learning networks will improve our pedagogy, increase the impact we have on each individual youth we teach, *scale down* our focus and give us *depth*. The greater numbers of youth producers and public audiences we reach through cross-field collaborations will *scale up* the reach of our work, and give us *breadth*.²

The Learning Network in Context

The Learning Network’s activity model has been informed by a number of prior and current professional development initiatives, including the National Writing Project and the Prospect Center. But the model draws most heavily upon the very specific work of youth media educators from EVC and other programs and organizations across the United States and internationally—which is to say, upon a tradition of youth media practice that stretches back more than three decades. It is useful—crucial, even—to acknowledge this tradition, which has contributed so critically to setting the conditions in which youth media educators are now working.

A series of white papers—authored by the directors of four long-running youth media organizations for a 2004 convening of youth media grantees by the Open Society Institute (OSI)—provides a critical framework for understanding the social and historical contexts that have supported the development of youth media as a field connected to, yet also distinct from, the overlapping fields of formal education and youth development. “While it is only in the past five years or so that some of us speak of a ‘youth media field,’” write Diana Coryat (Global Action Project) and Goodman in their joint white paper:

Young people have been making media for almost forty years—since the mid-1960s, when portable, lightweight video and film cameras became available in the U.S. and in other parts of the world. Indeed, the youth media field stands on the shoulders of, and has been supported, influenced, and fueled by many artistic, social, political, cultural and educational movements.³

Keith Hefner of Youth Communication writes in his white paper that youth media work has been largely defined by how *not* like school it is and by how otherwise underrepresented are the young people it seeks to engage. Hefner highlights the youth media field’s emphasis on “serving the most marginalized, most voiceless youth in the society—and making those voices heard by their peers and by significant adults.”⁴ He explains:

By focusing on the most marginalized youth, by organizing our efforts to reach them in settings where they will actually read our publications, and by making their stories accessible on the Web, we can help teens learn new skills, provide an accurate, affirming reflection of their lives, and promote justice.⁵

As Hefner makes clear, youth media as we understand it today has developed largely in reaction to our failing schools and in response to the need for young people to be recognized, understood and valued. Youth media creates a space where this can and does happen—often outside of “school time” and thus

² Coryat & Goodman, 2004, p. 9.

³ Coryat & Goodman, 2004, p. 3.

⁴ Hefner, 2004, p. 5.

⁵ Hefner, 2004, p. 5.

removed to varying degrees from an educational system where the school has been institutionally severed from the community by dysfunctional bureaucracies and punitive standards. Ellin O’Leary of Youth Radio likewise contextualizes the rise of youth-produced media within a social system that has, for purposes related to public education, stopped working:

Urban youth of the late ’80s and early ’90s were bored out of their minds in failing schools watching their communities be ravaged by post-Reagan poverty, the invasion of crack cocaine and gang violence in inner-city neighborhoods. Like any self-respecting younger generation, they found expression in words and music. [They] were tech savvy and resourceful.⁶

O’Leary’s remarks about decaying schools and besieged communities merit particular attention from those of us who seek to understand, in rich and meaningful ways, what precisely we’re doing when we *do* youth media. In building our programs and organizations, youth media educators have in many ways relinquished the old models of schooling and shifted our focus to a pedagogical approach that is youth-centered and, often, community-based. This is not to say that youth media educators have forsaken schools, but rather that we seek to inform what happens within them.

Detroit social activist Grace Lee Boggs is one longtime proponent of an approach to radical education reform that expands the very notion of what schools ought to be. As founder of the Detroit Summer program for young people, which has developed a youth media arts track that is authentically youth-centered and community-based, Boggs has called on citizens, policymakers, and community members to do what so many of our colleagues—including Coryat, Goodman, Hefner, O’Leary, and others—have done in building their youth media organizations: that is, to reform education by seeking to transform the learning experience for all young people. Writing in her weekly column in the *Michigan Citizen*, Boggs invites us to imagine a classroom where:

- the students learn by solving real problems;
- instead of being taught “subjects,” students are actively involved in creating the curriculum and programs to help them solve every level of personal/social problem;
- students are guaranteed rights of free expression, privacy, due process, and movement;
- the teacher is a facilitator rather than an authority figure.⁷

In the programs coordinated by Detroit Summer, as Boggs described in her keynote address at the 2007 Allied Media Conference in Detroit, young people engage in real-life activities that have purpose and consequence: “They do things like clearing away the brush near the river.” Here are young people working actively to sustain and grow their community.

The practice of youth media—as fostered by Boggs and by so many other visionary adult media artists and educators working alongside and in support of youth producers—imagines and indeed realizes a landscape in which young people are engaged with urgency in the real-life work of addressing social problems by creating authentic products for audiences (live and, increasingly, virtual) of peers and adults—work that is as hands-on as clearing brush. At the core of its tradition, youth media promotes the critical pedagogical

⁶ O’Leary, 2004, p. 2.

⁷ Boggs, 2003.

concept of writing—or in the case of video, audio, and other digital media forms, *producing*—with purpose. When we talk about youth media, we’re talking then about a practice of teaching and learning that engages young people in forms and processes of media production that are themselves grounded in inquiry and intentionality. Authentic professional development for youth media educators must mirror, draw deeply from, and build upon this tradition of inquiry.

Walking the Walk as Youth Media Educators

Just as youth media as a movement has sought to foster reform-minded and community-based learning for young people, the Youth Media Learning Network seeks to foster practitioner-driven and practice-based reflection for educators across a diverse and complex field. Youth media educators invite young people every day to develop critical questions about themselves, their communities, and the world, and to explore these questions through the process of media production. In the Learning Network, we attempt to offer this experience of critical inquiry back to educators themselves.

We believe that youth media educators need peer-to-peer conversations in order to engage in critical reflection upon their work with the same level of actively focused intention that they require of the young people they serve. Our work is about transforming the learning experience for each participant—promoting a collaborative, inquiry-based approach to professional development that mirrors and builds upon the collaborative, inquiry-based work we foster as educators. Rather than promoting a particular set of standards, we support educators as they themselves look closely at *how* they teach. We invite them to gather evidence from their teaching practice, to convene with a diverse array of colleagues from both in-school and out-of-school settings, and to examine their work together in community.

We likewise believe that youth media educators have much to offer colleagues in other fields, and that our work can continue to inform the best of in-school and out-of-school education. But certainly, we must first know ourselves. By coming together and sharing self-identified “best practices” from their work, Learning Network participants create real opportunities to transform their own work and to transform teaching and learning both within and well beyond their home programs, organizations, and schools.

The Youth Media Fellowship track of the Learning Network—which kicked off in New York City in September 2007 with nine stipended fellows, and which plans to support two additional cohorts in other cities or regions in 2008—has been designed specifically to offer established youth media educators an environment in which they are engaged as experts from the field. The 2007 cohort represents a range of professionals teaching in different contexts—public school classrooms, community-based organizations, youth media centers, and after-school programs—thus bridging the gap between in-school and out-of-school education. Meeting in biweekly seminar sessions over a nine-month period, the fellows examine closely their teaching and learning practices as related to youth media, each developing an individual research project that focuses on pedagogy, that draws directly upon one’s teaching experience in her/his home site, and that allows for deep and sustained study over time. Collectively in the seminar sessions, the fellows raise and respond to critical questions from and about their work. By pulling out one central question to explore in the research project, the individual fellow creates an opportunity to focus her or his lens, mouse, pen, or recorder on one point of practice: Is my practice building literacy skills for my students? Why is this student not as engaged in the project as I’d like her to be? How do I document a program methodology that I understand but have trouble articulating?

The fellowship model builds upon more than 20 years of experience by youth media educators at EVC, where (since its founding in 1984) members of the teaching staff have convened on a regular basis in a study group that invites them to reflect upon their work. Neither the fellowship nor the Learning Network initiative overall is intended to provide *the* answer to professional development for the field of youth media, nor to develop itself as the place where all the answers to all the questions we've ever asked can be deposited or withdrawn. This is not the kind of learning we're talking about. Rather, we are asking educators to slow down with us and to take time to observe and consider the questions, answers, challenges, and successes they encounter in any moment, hour, or year of their work in youth media—to participate in a community of reflection.

As Margaret Himley of the Prospect Center has written (on the value of oral inquiry and on Prospect processes), "*Time* is the key word here."⁸ These processes, she reminds us, "require and reward time: time set aside to do collective work, time taken to prepare carefully, time offered to listen and be listened to."⁹

It is certainly too soon to measure the success of the Learning Network's model, as the inaugural group of Youth Media Fellows has met only a handful of times to date, and as the Youth Media Institutes are still largely in the design phase. But we can begin to hear how the endeavor is taking shape as we listen to the voices of the Youth Media Fellows themselves—transcribed here from individual, self-recorded video reflections collected at the end of one of their first seminar sessions:

"We shared critical incidents that we'd observed in our work with young people, and it brought up questions for me, particularly about the importance of facilitators being aware of much larger systemic inequities and how they might play into the work that's done in our programs."

"We were able to really delve into some of the toughest kind of core issues that a lot of us struggle with. Of course we had a lot more questions than answers—but I think just having the time to step away from what we're doing every day and [to] actually talk about these things sheds some light for me."

"Keeping a journal this week really made me think a lot about what's been going on and ask, *Is this what I want to be doing? Is this the way I want to be doing it?*"

"I'm enjoying the time and space to think about practice and reflect, and I'm realizing more and more that I don't take enough opportunities for this."

The Youth Media Learning Network is, again, just one initiative. In the next year it will serve perhaps a few dozen educators. But over many years, in a diverse range of communities, and in partnership with colleague initiatives, it is possible that this endeavor will have an evident and lasting effect on professional development for the youth media field. At the very least, for now, it is supporting a community of reflection that we know—as we consider the field of youth media nationally and internationally, and the many committed youth media educators working in all manner of classrooms and centers—ranges far beyond the seminar room where the nine Youth Media Fellows are meeting twice a month.

⁸ Himley, 2000, p. 206.

⁹ Himley, 2000, p. 207.

Producing media with purpose. Teaching and learning intentionally. Documenting our practice. These endeavors are perhaps akin to determining—against all the odds, at Sisyphean peril, and not unlike the characters in a Raymond Carver story—to talk about love. But by committing our attention as educators to such a community of reflection, by acknowledging the rich diversity of the wide and evolving field that is youth media, and by engaging actively in the very process of inquiry that informs the work of our young people, we might begin to see that the answers won't likely be waiting for us at the *end*— and rather that the *process itself* is worthy of our attention for what might certainly be discovered within it.

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EVC Goes to Soweto: Youth Video as a Tool for Building Participatory Democracy in South Africa

By Steve Goodman, Rebecca Renard, and Christine Mendoza

Pearl looks directly into the camera, squinting slightly in the bright sun. She is standing on the grounds of the Hector Pieterse Memorial & Museum. Behind her is the stone monument commemorating 12-year-old Hector Pieterse and all those who died in the Soweto uprising of 1976. Pearl speaks with the clear and measured voice of a seasoned reporter. “Welcome to the cradle and birthplace of student and youth activism that lighted the spark of the youth contribution and liberation of South Africa during apartheid with its dark, murky period.” The camera pans to another young member of her documentary crew who continues the narration: “Today we dig deeper into the minds of our youth, finding out how the torch of our heritage has been preserved for future generations.”

For three days in March 2007, the Educational Video Center (EVC) taught a documentary workshop for 30 teenagers and unemployed young adults from the Soweto township in South Africa. We (three New York City-based media educators from EVC) had been invited by the fifth World Summit on Media for Children to present hands-on workshops for youth delegates at the conference in Johannesburg. The United States Consulate General sponsored us to come to Johannesburg a few days early and lead a documentary workshop at the Hector Pieterse Museum before the conference began.

The workshop was an overwhelming success. The youth participants learned to create social issue documentaries that moved the intergenerational community audiences who viewed them to engage in thoughtful and spirited dialogue. Our museum partners and the youth producers eagerly sought to build on this success and requested further support to establish an ongoing youth video program for the Soweto community. They convinced us that community-based youth video production can have a deep and lasting impact as a tool for building democracy in underdeveloped countries and in countries with unequal development, such as South Africa, where the poorest communities live with limited or no access to the Internet, telephone landlines, or even electric power lines. Within this context, non-networked and often battery-operated modes of communication, such as community radio and public screenings of youth videos, have great importance and resonance.

The growing popularity of community radio programming in post-apartheid South Africa points to the potential impact of youth video. There already exists a rich array of youth organizations for collaboration. With a more widespread investment of training and resources, one can envision brigades of young videographers staging mobile video screenings for school and community gatherings across South Africa. These community screenings will give local residents a voice and access to a direct in-person dialogue that would otherwise not be possible. Such a youth media generated popular education campaign waged through grassroots dialogue is urgently needed given the HIV/AIDS crisis, high crime and unemployment, and other critical social and public health problems. Youth video is a vital tool to help build democracy in South Africa, and now is an opportune time to promote increased youth engagement in media.

This can be an especially powerful education and development strategy given the historic, social, economic, and cultural context of South Africa today with its inherited problems of high adult non-literacy and

inequitable distributions of telecommunications and electric power. This paper will briefly discuss this context and the impact of EVC's youth documentary workshop in Soweto, and propose strategies for using youth video to meaningfully engage black youth and other marginalized voices in the building of a more participatory democracy in South Africa. Indeed, these strategies bring great promise for youth-led civic engagement and social change on a global scale.

EVC's Workshop in Soweto

We designed the workshop to be an intensive and hands-on experience for the participants to collaboratively plan, shoot, and edit their own short documentaries. Through consensus decision making, the participants chose the three issues they agreed were of critical importance to black South African youth and to the broader project of overcoming the legacy of apartheid and building a free and democratic South Africa:

- the public's understanding of human rights as protected by the new South African constitution;
- the low rate of youth learning about their history and culture through visiting post-apartheid museums and other heritage sites; and
- the high rate of teen pregnancy and unprotected sex.

The participants then divided into three groups corresponding with these issues. Each team crafted a documentary that spoke to public audiences with creativity, power, passion, and a sense of urgency by combining street interviews, poetry, photography, and video imagery, as well as popular commercial music.

After the workshop concluded, the Hector Pieterse Museum organized screenings for youth producers to present their work in schools, churches, youth organizations, and clubs. The documentaries were also screened at the museum for 15 schools that participated in International Museum Day. The museum education officer reported, "The responses were awesome and all inspiring as the documentaries became a vehicle and catalyst for youth empowerment.... They raised awareness of community and societal problems and how they can become community activists and ultimately part of the solution."¹

Taking the means of public communication and cultural expression into their hands for the first time, youth producers skillfully blended the genres of community affairs documentary, public service announcement, and video artwork. Empowered as civic journalists, popular educators, and video activist pamphleteers, the youth producers presented rich examples for how EVC's model of community-based youth media production can be particularly effective in giving a voice to youth while fostering informed dialogue and problem solving among communities in the marginalized townships and remote rural areas.

Student Media Production Under Apartheid

It is no surprise that EVC's community-based, social justice approach to youth documentary making fit so well in the context of South Africa. In fact, South Africa has a rich history of youth-produced media that is rooted in youth organizations formed in the pre-1994 struggle against apartheid. Particularly in the 1970s and '80s, there were scores of youth and student organizations with regional and national membership.² Many organizations had their own publications, such as the South African Students' Organisation's *SASO Newsletter*, The South African Students Press Union's *SASPU National* and the *SASPU Focus*,

¹ Chetty, K. (personal communication, September 5, 2007)

² See <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/governance-projects/june16/organisation-list.htm> for listing.

and *Grassroots*, which reported on news from over 60 democratic organizations, including Cape Youth Congress (CYCO).³

The alternative and underground student press (there is little evidence of South African student video at that time) was an especially important tool in the hands of university anti-apartheid activists despite the fact it operated under the Nationalist party's harsh climate of repression and censorship with the constant possibility of fines, closure, banning, and imprisonment. This was particularly the case in the 1970s with the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) and the uprising in Soweto, and into the 1980s as international boycotts and the movement to free Mandela grew. Students depended on underground newsletters to stay informed and connected to others in the freedom movement, and they often burned the newsletters as soon as they finished reading them.

In addition to curbing the flow of information through censorship and banning, the racist government waged a campaign of disinformation. School curricula taught history that was rewritten from the white government's perspective. The Nationalist party outlawed television for fear that, according to Dr. Albert Hertzog, minister for posts and telegraphs at the time, "South Africa would have to import films showing race mixing; and advertising would make [non-white] Africans dissatisfied with their lot."⁴ When the apartheid regime finally allowed television into the country in 1976, only one station was established: the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), often used by the government for propaganda and disinformation. This made it all the more important that the student activist, and often underground, press gave its readers access to alternative sources of news, information, and opinion.

The legacy of these youth organizations lives on in contemporary South Africa. Today, many of the more than 300 youth-based organizations in Johannesburg trace their origins to the anti-apartheid struggles for democracy. Now, many of these organizations that have taken up the challenges of public health education in the face of the devastating HIV/AIDS crisis still largely rely on community newspapers to disseminate information. Some use community radio to advance their work.

While the legal system that restricted freedom of the press has been abolished and youth enjoy the freedom to speak, write, report, photograph, and film without fear of censorship or imprisonment, the free exchange of information and ideas today still remains largely out of reach for the poorest sectors of the population. The history and ideology of apartheid has stunted the development of media and communication as a means for the free dissemination of ideas and information. Apartheid era government planning and investment still leave the majority of township and rural area residents impoverished with little or no access to the Internet; telephone landlines are rare, and even electricity is unavailable to those living in makeshift shanties. A woefully inadequate education system has left up to 30 percent of adults functionally non-literate, particularly in the poorest rural areas of South Africa. Many students find no point in continuing in school, and over 50% drop out.⁵

While these are formidable challenges, we believe that they need not prevent the most underserved

³ These anti-apartheid periodicals from 1950 through 1994 can be accessed in the online scholarly library of resources from and about Africa at www.aluka.org.

⁴ Hertzog, 1967, p. 4.

⁵ Yeh, 2004.

populations from gaining access to information and having their voices heard as part of a national dialogue. In the absence of Internet connections and television, community-based youth video and radio production can in fact be used to overcome these obstacles and to promote a more informed and participatory democracy.

EVC's Pedagogy

For EVC's workshop in Soweto, we brought the tools of community-based youth video—a suitcase crammed with video cameras, microphones, headphones, and laptops for editing—to amplify the voices of 30 young participants. We also brought an educational philosophy of practice that had been developed and refined at EVC over the past 23 years. Since 1984, EVC has evolved from a single video class into an internationally acclaimed nonprofit organization with four main programs: a semester-long High School Documentary Workshop; a pre-professional paid internship program called YO-TV (Youth Organizers Television); a Community Engagement program that screens EVC documentaries in local neighborhoods to organize for social change; and an External Education Program that provides training institutes, coaching, and curricula for K–12 educators as they learn to integrate media analysis and production into their classes.⁶

Our approach in South Africa was based on the model of EVC's 15-week-long Documentary Workshop but in a very condensed and intensive form. On its most basic level, the mission was to place cameras into the hands of young people and to have them explore the surrounding community to ask questions about urgent issues in their lives. In fact, the deeper philosophy of practice that grounds this methodology providing a theory and structure can be described as *critical literacy*. Drawing upon the works of educators Paulo Freire, Myles Horton, and John Dewey,⁷ among others, this approach “provides students not merely with functional skills, but with conceptual tools necessary to critique and engage society along with its inequalities and injustices.”⁸ Learning about the world is directly linked to the possibility of changing it.⁹ Developing critical literacy skills enables students to investigate power relations within the social and historical context of their lived experience and within the broader frame of their mediated culture. In this way, students build their capacity to understand how media is made to convey particular messages as well as how to use electronic and print technologies to creatively express themselves and how to document and publicly voice their ideas and concerns regarding the most important issues in their lives.

EVC embeds the teaching of critical literacy throughout the process of video documentary production: research, camerawork, interviewing, editing, and public screening. EVC's critical literacy pedagogy is composed of three key practices and principles:

- 1) *Teaching multiple literacies*: Students learn to analyze, evaluate, and produce texts through speaking and listening, visualizing and observing, and reading and writing. Media production (writing) and analysis (reading) are linked. Students learn to use multiple literacies to tell their own stories and, through their video production, produce themselves as new storytellers.
- 2) *Teaching continuous inquiry*: The students' learning is driven by their own questions about their lived experiences; the social, cultural, and historical conditions that shape those experiences; and the media's representations of those conditions and experiences. The learner-centeredness

⁶ For more information on EVC programs see www.evc.org.

⁷ Dewey, 1997; Freire, 1970; Horton, 1997.

⁸ Goodman, 2006, p. 208.

⁹ Goodman, 2003, p. 3.

of this approach develops the students' agency as social, political, and cultural actors in their community.

- 3) *Teaching reflection*: Students are given multiple opportunities to reflect on their learning and development over time throughout the production process in journals, regular critique sessions, and in end-of-semester portfolio roundtables where they present drafts of their video and written work as evidence of their intellectual and artistic development. There is a creative tension between action and reflection to ensure that the students experience a rich and sustained learning process while they also produce a high-quality media product.¹⁰

These practices and principles were infused throughout the three-day Soweto workshop. Participants in each of the three groups were conscious that as they picked up the video camera, they were doing so within a specific social and historical context. They were consciously crafting their message—whether with prose, poetry, or images—to critique and engage society, and to carry on the legacy of the South African freedom struggle post-apartheid.

Indigenous Language and the Spoken Word

While youth documentary teams initially conducted their interviews in English, this quickly changed. For example, in the heritage sites group, the second person chosen had problems understanding the questions. His responses were stilted, and his answers didn't exactly speak to the question. Without skipping a beat, Thando, the interviewer, began again. This time in isiZulu (also called Zulu)—the most common African language in Johannesburg—and the interview flowed effortlessly from there. The other groups shared similar experiences. Clearly, the interviewees and often the interviewers were more comfortable and better able to express themselves in their own languages. After that, the group made an unannounced decision to conduct all remaining interviews in their own languages, whether they be isiZulu, Xhosa, Tswana, or in their own urban blend of English, Afrikaans, and indigenous African languages.

This switch in language use was an extremely important act for youth producers to take. Thinking, learning, asking questions, and telling stories in their own language validated the richness, knowledge, and power of their own culture, community, and family history. It also led to a more generative and creative documentary process. Denying and attempting to erase their language and heritage was historically used by the apartheid government as a tool of oppression and subjugation. After all, the Soweto uprising began as a protest against the imposition of the Afrikaans Medium Decree, which forced all schools for blacks to use the Afrikaans language as the medium for instruction in the core curriculum. The youth movement of the time virtually brought formal education in schools to a complete standstill in protest over the issue of language usage. In place of government-sponsored schools, youth organizations operated informally in communities to provide young people with outlets for continued education and also to mobilize them around youth issues.

Not only did the process of documentary production give young people the opportunity to record and report information and opinions in their own indigenous language, but it also opened up possibilities for them to use spoken poetry as a form of expression. In fact, two of the three production teams created, performed, and recorded their own poems. It is interesting to note that the performance of poetry played a historic role in the underground meetings for students involved in the BCM, where the cryptic language

¹⁰
Goodman, 2006, pp. 208–209.

of poetry had a better chance of bypassing government censors. As Nadine Gordimer wrote “a poem can be both hiding-place and megaphone.”¹¹

The following illustrates how the Soweto youth carried on the oral tradition of performing political spoken word poetry as part of their documentary on human rights:

Grabbing hold of the microphone, Mbuso (he goes by the nickname Ice) performs a poem he wrote. It is the third take:

*“In the streets, dead bodies bleeding,
A sister and a brother carrying a corpse of a dead friend, crying,
Fumes and bullets all over the road.
The road to freedom is over. I thought
1994, the dream that was long awaited before.”*

His voice is urgent. The rhythm builds. His head moves back and forth in the low angle close-up frame.

*“Let us share our human rights.
Obundu pambi.”*

*Then he pauses and, almost with a loving caress, he says:
“My Africa.”*

Knowing Ice got it right that time, his fellow youth video crew member shooting the camera says, “Yeah,” forgetting that the camera is still recording. Ice bows his head slightly and smiles.

A public screening of the three documentaries was held at the museum two days later. Team by team the youth producers introduced their tapes, screened them, and answered questions from the audience concerning both the creative process and the subject matter. The energy in the room was palpable. The young people made grand statements that they were going to take their work to churches, schools, and community centers. People *needed* to see their videos, they said. They had an undeniable sense of urgency to share their work.

This urgency spoke to their pride, sense of empowerment, and frustration at not knowing quite how to continue to get their work to the public and when a similar opportunity would present itself. When would they be able to make more videos and develop their skills as journalists, storytellers, camera operators, and computer editors, when even the state-funded museum lacked technical equipment comparable to what we had packed in our carry-on luggage?

Moving Forward: Youth Video Teams Building Democracy

In the end, the youth from Soweto taught us, their teachers, as much as we taught them. We were moved by their overwhelming passion to preserve and honor their heritage, to put into practice the ideals and human rights laws of their new constitution, to make a difference and a lasting contribution to the building

¹¹ Ede, 2002.

of a new nation. They used video to report on public opinion, to show diverse—and sometimes opposing—perspectives, and to promote discussion. Young people used video to critique their peers’ behavior, whether in their sexual relationships, or as consumers of museum culture. And they used video as a teaching tool to raise consciousness, moving them to action. They integrated poetry, music, and imagery to create an art form that informed, engaged, and inspired their audiences to see and reflect on the world from a new vantage point.

Observing how quickly the Soweto youth teams learned to operate video equipment and create their documentaries, it is easy to imagine an entire network of trained community youth reporting teams who can shoot and screen short videos documenting the conditions, events, ideas, and opinions from and for the community. Mobile video screenings followed by discussions in school and community gatherings that are in turn videotaped, offer a voice to those voiceless residents, promoting a direct people-to-people dialogue that would otherwise not be possible. As community journalists and activist educators, youth media producers can play a dynamic and vital role in this democracy-building project.

Youth produced video can have a successful impact because:

- video is a primarily visual and spoken form of communication that can be understood by non-literate members of the community when newspapers cannot;
- South Africa has a rich history of youth activism and a broad array of youth organizations currently engaged in community education and development that can produce and serve as sources of information and audiences for youth media;
- South Africa has 11 official languages, and many people speak several of them, but to ensure that a language barrier doesn’t prevent the flow of information, dialogue in the videos can be translated and dubbed over to reach language-specific audiences;
- such face-to-face neighborhood and school screenings and conversations run on social networks. While they would require a video camera, television, electric generator, and a van to drive to different communities, they don’t require a vast infrastructure of telecommunications and electric wiring.

Massive infrastructure investments are certainly needed and should move forward when the capital to do so is available. But the democratic inclusion of breaking the silence of young and marginalized voices should not have to wait until then.

Today’s generation of young South Africans stand on the shoulders of the generation that preceded them. They are now free to share their perspectives, bear witness to the conditions of life, history, and society, to create solutions to the problems they encounter. Inspired by the legendary struggles and accomplishments of their historic counterparts, access to video technology will enable South African youth producers today to build on that legacy and to promote active dialogue with young and non-literate, non-university audiences in ways that the anti-apartheid era student press never could. We are convinced that, in their hands, youth video will make a critical contribution to building participatory democracy in South Africa. The spirited and determined voices of the youth from our Soweto workshop continue to resonate with us, challenging and inspiring us to use youth media as a powerful tool to renew and revitalize democratic engagement on a global scale, as well as back home here in the United States.

* * *

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Interview: Anna Lefer

In September 2007, YMR interviewed Anna Lefer, program officer at Open Society Institute (OSI) who spearheaded funding to the youth media field from 1999 to 2005. The Youth Media Program at OSI made 209 grants to 83 organizations during this time and, upon its close, published “Investing in Youth Media: A Guide for Grantmakers.” In this interview, YMR asks Lefer to reflect on the six years of funding the youth media field, where the field will go, and what suggestions she can offer organizations at present.

YMR: What highlights would you like to reflect upon in the six years of funding the youth media field? And why media?

Lefer: The Youth Media Program at OSI recognized a moment of opportunity and invested in programs that enabled young people to develop and critically analyze their ideas and articulate them in a compelling way. Outside of digital media, young peoples’ stories, perspectives, and points of view were completely shut out of the dialogue. By developing the youth media sector, we sought to enable young people to impact the public debate on issues that were central to their lives. The influence media has on people’s values, their choices, and their behaviors are powerful. Media is a tremendous tool for young people to make change and participate in our democracy.

In the late ’90s, the media portrayed young people as super predators, and there were increases in strike laws, punitive policies in schools, and the failure of institutions that young people were connected to. At the same time we saw a proliferation of digital media, and an emergence of organizations that used communication tools to highlight and showcase voices of young people in the public discourse. We learned so much by supporting the youth media sector, and we believe that whether or not OSI funded the field, something would have emerged and developed. As a funder, we valued supporting intermediaries, field-building initiatives, and ways to enhance the field’s structure—which is critical to moving the field forward.

YMR: The program goals of Youth Initiatives were to provide ways for young people to support the development of alternative media or a new segment of mainstream media; to influence how mainstream media covers youth-related issues; to affect public debate and become more civically engaged; and to expand freedom of expression, countering censorship in and out of schools. How have these goals been successful and/or challenging during the six years of its relationship with youth media organizations?

Lefer: We were successful in the fact that youth media programs, organizations, youth producers...are now part of the media landscape in a way that it wasn’t 10 years ago. Our funding helped to achieve this by building the capacity of organizations to train young people to produce journalistic-based media. To involve young people’s voices we helped with the founding of WireTap, Youth Radio, and Radio Rookies, to get young people’s perspectives on channels of distribution. As a result, this encouraged certain segments of mainstream media to include youth-produced media that they didn’t have access to before. We helped shift certain outlets and elements of the media landscape.

The problem with mainstream media is that it is corporate, competitive, consumer-based, and revolves around advertising. What youth media has on its side is free expression and its impact on youth. The

purpose of education is to educate people to be effective citizens in the world we live in now. The challenge lies in the ways schools are structured and how they focus on standards of base education, short classroom time, and limited resources, such as punitive policies in schools and the No Child Left Behind Act. Ideally it would have been great to figure out ways to make media literacy and youth media *central* to education. However, the U.S. education system is a mess. And the challenge of reaching young people—including those of color, who are poor, and may lack education—is that we live in a society that punishes them. It is structural racism—we fight a big beast.

YMR: The OSI publication *Investing in Youth Media: A Guide for Grantmakers*, was an initiative to support the youth media field upon the end of OSI's tenure. Many youth media professionals are thankful for the support that OSI provided during its funding period for youth media. How might other funders learn from the experience and the relationship between OSI and youth media organizations?

Lefer: We were careful not to ghettoize youth media. We were intentional about connecting youth media content, youth media producers, and youth media organizations in the field to broader social change movements. We attempted to situate youth media as a critical part of something bigger and encouraged our grantees to see themselves as part of a broader movement, while introducing youth media to a broader audience.

From the get-go OSI invested many resources towards increasing the visibility of the field and encouraging the fields that it intersects with—whether it's arts or media or youth development or civic engagement—to put youth media in the conversation. At the time, there was ample funding in youth development and [mainstream] media and community arts began to support youth media, seeing it as a valid sub-category of those sectors. By raising the visibility, new funders from youth development, youth organizing, and corporations are continuing to support youth media.

Specifically funding the development of the field—which we see as critical for the vision of what the field should be—is for movement leaders to shape conversation, debate, and dialogue. During the funding of youth media we were advocates for our grantees and put them front and center as much as possible to get their voices and work out there, aggressively advocating on their behalf and on the field's.

YMR: How do you envision funding for the next two to six years to be provided to the field?

Lefer: So far, no one foundation has stepped in to take the place of the youth media funder, but clearly there's a robust network of organizations out there. The youth development field has moved alongside youth media, affecting the field as it supports the development of young people to make an impact and empowering youth to value their political power to make social change. Next generations of young people will continue to benefit from the growth of the youth media field.

I can't imagine funders that support youth development *not* funding youth media, because we live in an age where Web 2.0 and do-it-yourself media is the dominant way young people are connecting and communicating, so you are behind the times if you are not supporting that. And if you're funding media, how could you not recognize youth development, because this generation is the largest and most diverse that communicates by using, incorporating and relying upon media.

YMR: What are some ways youth media practitioners can partner and share discourse more readily with other fields?

Lefer: Start by asking young people. Then find allies at organizations where there is intercultural dialogue—many exist whose mission relies on such an exchange, such as the Global Youth Action Network. But with Web 2.0 tools, young people who want to have global exchange can easily participate in this dialogue, and organizations can challenge young people to think about how to have these conversations more broadly and locally.

Many young people who participate in these organizations are cross-border people and have relationships with communities back in their home countries. Instilling such global dialogue and exchange in young people is important. There are models that exist to make global understanding and connection a priority for an organization or group. If you see youth media as a tool for social change, there are so many lessons we can learn from organizations and educators in other countries who have used media as both a social change tool and as a tool for learning.

Young people who are in youth media organizations need to understand that we live in a global society where everyone's self-interest is connected. Part of being an engaged citizen is seeing how immigration in the United States connects to labor practices and corporate entities abroad. Issues like climate and the different ways we do things in the United States affect issues around the globe in a very micro, day-to-day way. These more global conversations—on an abstract, theoretical, societal, and personal level—are important as we move forward.

YMR: How do you envision the youth media field—which is at present between 20 and 30 years old—evolving in the next one to two decades?

Lefer: Currently we are living in a time where our society is becoming increasingly closed. The current administration, post 9/11, shows how our civil liberties are eroding, including people's expression. We live in a culture of fear that makes our work challenging (but very necessary). In the next one to two decades, the field will be completely different. It will have become more global and more open-sourced. Perhaps organizations will be obsolete, and if not, they will at least *look* very different.

The youth media field must continue to think more about the *way* media is used and, therefore, use content to involve young people in social change efforts. Global Action Project (G.A.P.) is moving more in this direction, which other educators ought to follow. Narrative storytelling is critical; it animates social change movements and culture.

Youth media needs to dig deep and build broad. At this point, it is deep but must connect with other sectors, share best practices, and learn from practices in other sectors, whether it is youth organizing or other innovative arenas and fields. Being reflective and honing in on best practices that fit into the broader democracy is essential for educators in youth media to take leaps to use, build, and test new relationships and partnerships. Right now, the youth media field needs to wake up—become more open source, respond to other fields, and not just look *in* but look *out*. A different set of experts and stakeholders must be invited to discuss the changing socio-political climate around the globe, learn how technology is changing, and see how the structure and content of education can and must shift.

Youth Media and Social Change: One Perspective from the Field

By Meghan McDermott, Dare Dukes, Sumitra Rajkumar, and Dan O'Reilly-Rowe of Global Action Project

Youth Voice as Participation: Making it Matter

Youth media is often described by its practitioners and advocates as a way to give voice to young people. Ongoing discussions in the field about the potential of youth-made media for both personal and social transformation offer up a range of ideas about youth voice as a form of civic engagement.¹ Underlying some of these debates among media educators, people working directly with youth, and others is the logical expectation that putting a camera, for example, in the hands of a young person, showing her how to use it, and helping her project her story into the world is enough for that voice to emerge and be of consequence.

At Global Action Project (G.A.P.), we have been wrestling with this idea for some time and have come to a critical juncture in our own efforts to make the impact of youth voice more concrete and defined. In this open letter to the field, we want to share some of the lessons we have learned and decisions we have made about what youth voice means to us, the young people in our programs, and to our practice as a youth media arts organization with a social justice mission. We hope our experiences and choices will add to current discussions about the relationship between youth media and social change, as well as help the field consider new opportunities for bridging the power of justice-orientated youth media with established youth organizing, youth development, and education reform efforts.

Overview of G.A.P.: A Social Justice Mission

Since G.A.P. was founded in 1991, we have worked with hundreds of young people who have made media about their lives to inform and inspire dialogue and positive social change. Shaped by the multiculturalism, conflict resolution, and youth development discourses of the time, G.A.P.'s programs were originally designed to engage young people in an inquiry process that explored their daily lives with the intention of connecting those experiences through media arts to other youth globally. Youth media was just beginning to surface as a powerful method for young people's development, and G.A.P. was deeply invested in it as a way for young people—specifically young working class and working poor, youth of color, and immigrant and refugee youth—to represent themselves in the public sphere and make global connections to their local community conditions.

While the sum total of our activities and the way we think about them are complex, our practical and philosophical trajectories have, for the most part, paralleled those of the field as a whole. One distinction, however, is that social justice values are at the heart of our mission. Because of that, we have worked over the years to develop an approach to media production and analysis that cultivates young people's critical literacy—their relationship as learners to the world—by engaging them in a process of analysis,

¹ Soep, 2006.

interpretation, reflection, and a “rewriting of what is read.”² Our purpose is to, as G.A.P. staff have described, use “the power of storytelling to challenge dominant narratives and write new histories.” The purpose of critical literacy goes beyond simply comprehending the world to participating actively in making it better. In this way, youth media for social change is about *participation*, as Mullahey et al. describe:

Young people’s work that focuses on individual learning and development, rather than on changing their surrounding, is not real participation—participation should not only give young people more control over their own lives and experiences but should also grant them real influence over issues that are crucial to the quality of life and justice in their communities.³

While this statement resonates with our intentions, the young people of a 2005 G.A.P. summer program made it clear to us that having a voice was only part of the equation. Unlike other G.A.P. programs, the summer intensive had three distinct qualities: an application process was required, the topic was pre-selected, and a stipend was offered to participants. Working collaboratively to produce a short documentary video about gentrification called *Razing New York*, youth noticed that mainstream media had a tendency to describe gentrification from the developers’ perspective—a positive force that brings services, lowers crime, and increases return on investment. But for these young people, many of whom didn’t know the word before they began research in preproduction, gentrification in practice and in their own experience meant something very different: stories of long-time communities torn apart and working people displaced. They spent the summer documenting several of New York City’s neighborhoods, scouting the streets, interviewing residents and community activists, and debating the pros and cons of the city’s rapidly changing landscape.

The program culminated with a screening for 75 people packed into G.A.P.’s small space—community members, activists, family, and peers. The response was electric as the youth took the floor and guided discussion. Activists spoke passionately about the dearth of such perspectives in the public and the need for educational media tools while others offered ways to distribute, screen, and use the video to galvanize support for local anti-gentrification community work.

Many of G.A.P.’s screenings are dynamic like this, but there was something special about this one. The video resonated with the community to which it was addressed in a way that was palpable to the youth and the audience. While the youth producers and staff members agreed the video was not perfect, the community immediately saw its potential as something much more than a compelling work to be passively viewed. It was a *tool*, with a timely topic and a practical use for communities in real need of such things. It was everything we strive for in our process, and it pushed us to rethink how this moment—the expression of youth voice—could be not just the apex of a program, but its foundation. It pushed us to take a step back and ask, beyond sparking dialogue or offering an alternative view, what the purpose, value, and impact of youth media should be. We asked ourselves: How can youth media best support young people’s own development and capacity for engaging in social justice efforts? How can youth media foster agency, knowledge, and transformation for young people that is visible and linked to concrete systemic outcomes? And given our social justice mission, is voice without direct, purposeful action *enough*?

² Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 36.

³ Mullahey et al., 1999, p. 4.

Taking Two Steps Forward and One Reflective Step Back: Revisiting Our Mission

In the spring of that same year, G.A.P. received a grant to initiate an intergenerational media arts training series for youth, community artists, organizers, and social justice organizations across the country seeking to incorporate media making into their arts and social-change activities with young people. Our intent was to share the best of our practices with others and to disseminate our curriculum within a unique training context. Although this project came about in part as a response to constant calls from people wanting to engage youth in communicating about their social issues to targeted audiences, we saw a chance to engage in field building for youth media by linking to national youth-based endeavors.

Recognizing that communities need more than simple access to a generalized curriculum, we created a multi-day institute that offered training, capacity-building support, networking, and specific tools to engage young people in media analysis and production for organizing work. To ensure that we were developing a sustainable training model that was reflective of our social justice mission and not simply a “cookie-cutter,” we dove into an intensive planning and design process that allowed us to experiment, discuss, and conduct a targeted needs assessment with prospective participants. What we learned from these efforts shaped every step we took in tailoring our media trainings to support community advocacy efforts in becoming more vibrant and visible. The result was Media in Action, G.A.P.’s social justice youth media training institute that engaged intergenerational teams (over 42 individuals from 22 organizations in its first year) in strengthening their creative capacity to produce messages for broader audiences through documentary and narrative video making, aesthetic appreciation, critical media analysis, and collective strategizing for impact.

Media in Action became much more than an externally focused initiative. By the force of its design, and the ongoing capacity challenges that youth organizers and social justice advocates faced, we were compelled to examine our purpose as a youth media arts organization and to assess our own capacities, practices, expertise, and limits. As Media in Action furthered our links to social justice organizations and campaigns, we had to carefully build trust and a reputation for understanding the needs of youth and organizers engaged in social movements. Specifically, our goal was to demonstrate that we were committed to the artistic production of high-quality media, had created a central role for youth in making that media, offered a compatible framework for analyzing and critiquing social injustice, and could impart both creative techniques and outreach strategies for getting that informed youth perspective to the right audience. We had to be clear about what youth voice meant to us because fostering these partnerships would be of consequence to the young people in our own programs, offering them a direct way to witness and participate in social change as collaborators and media makers.

We also wanted to make sure that our core strengths of supporting young people’s positive development through media making was not lost in the process of stepping up our efforts to connect more directly with youth organizing and social justice work. So with all of this in mind, we headed into an intensive, and at times exhausting, process of reflecting on our mission and challenging our practices to deepen the individual and collective development of youth as leaders and producers who can be actively linked to grassroots organizing and social justice movements nationally.

Making the Connections Concrete: Defining Social Justice Impacts

We began the process of reviewing and renewing our mission by asking ourselves why young people should make media and what the role of media is in social justice movements. We defined social change for ourselves

at both the personal and systemic levels and identified our core values as a staff and as an organization. We also questioned how media can be transformational across different kinds of engagements—from screenings to dialogue to action—and affirmed that media must be aesthetically powerful if it is going to matter. We envisioned steps to move our work beyond a typical process-versus-product framework to one of scale and impact; at G.A.P., we believe that to be effective, youth media must directly support concrete, specific social-change outcomes. With facilitated support from the Movement Strategy Center, which we chose to work with in part because it was outside the youth media field, we articulated this new vision further, defining our desired social justice impacts, that:

- through G.A.P.’s process of making socially conscious media, young people—specifically those adversely affected by social injustice—develop their capacity for individual agency and civic engagement; and
- social justice movements and diverse communities use G.A.P.’s media to bring about cultural and policy change.

The perspective we can clearly articulate is that, for G.A.P., youth development and social justice are both critical elements that must support each other if impact is to be real for young media makers and their communities. Neither is an option alone if we seek to “open people to the power of possibility...to move them to perceive alternatives, to look at things as if they could be otherwise.”⁴ It also means that when a young person tells us that she makes media “because it’s important to me...not everyone gets the chance to voice their opinion through media. Just because we’re teenagers doesn’t mean that we don’t care about social issues. Many of us do care and it’s time for the world to hear our voice,” we can ensure that voice is deliberately applied to making a difference. Now, our long-term goal reflects this organizational evolution and commitment to becoming a creative ally and resource for a generation of social justice leaders who will apply innovative youth media tools to their work.

A New Curriculum: Getting to the Roots

The immediate result of this visioning and planning is the creation of a new curriculum that tackles the root causes of social injustice through media production, aesthetics and messaging, political education, media analysis, organizing strategy, as well as essential historical links between media and social movements. The purpose of the core curriculum is literally to get to the roots—to engage youth in media production, analysis and inquiry that builds community power by linking social struggles to their persistent systemic and institutional causes. In this way, young people knowledgeably produce artistic media that is not simply about an issue but is instrumental in addressing it.

Working intensively through this past summer, a select committee of G.A.P. staff created a core set of 12 workshops, some of which were adopted and adapted from *Media in Action*. If we were going to creatively model how to use media as an artistic component of social change to people outside the organization and the youth media field, then we’d better have it solidly structured in-house, too. This meant creating a new series of targeted professional development trainings in the curriculum prior to programs starting, and committing weekly staff time to its implementation throughout the year. Workshops cover a range of critical topics, including an introduction to popular education and concepts such as force and consent (i.e., the role of media in promoting ideologies), as well as cinematography and the power of montage to

⁴
Greene, 1988, p. 55.

convey a message. The purposes of this core set of workshops are to put our youth media arts framework into practice in relation to the work of others and to create an awareness of social justice movements and media's role in them. It is also to generate knowledge, inspiration, and momentum for youth leadership within G.A.P. as well as to offer something that is innovative in the way it brings together the best of youth media and youth development practices with a critical lens on historical and social contexts.

Taken together, we hope, these workshops will enable young people to move beyond a simple analysis of social issues, beyond the identification of symptoms, to a deeper inquiry into why things are the way they are, and to make media that addresses the underlying conditions that communities face—asthma is not just the result of living near an incinerator but also due to a historical indifference for the well-being of people living in poor neighborhoods who are often collateral damage for a city's economic priorities. A rigorous review of root causes offers youth a broader context for their own inquiry, messaging, debate, and production. It can also galvanize young people's creative and collective energy toward becoming effective and informed social actors who have the ability to inquire, tell powerful stories, and put their perspectives into action.

For us, another distinctive aspect of the new curriculum is the approach to production. While the youth media field seems to generally favor individual over collaborative efforts and content that tends to be driven by personal identity rather than larger social issues, we are invested in developing production techniques that allow for not just collective media making (it's no easy feat to have 12 youth edit a piece), but also topic selection and decision making. For those of us who make social justice a priority in our purpose for youth media, it is crucial that our process be reflective of the outcome we aspire to and that youth identify both issues and solutions to the problem they want their media to address. In this way we have come to embrace Bertolt Brecht's famous insight, "Art is not a mirror to reflect reality, but a hammer with which to shape it," and are striving for programmatic structures, process, and partnerships with organizers and others to help realize that potential.

Enhancing Our Impact and Media Justice: What is the Opportunity?

The challenge of engaging young people in a process of making media for change brings us back to the question of youth voice. At the heart of that idea is the struggle for representation and self-determination—for who, by who, and for what interests are young people making media? This is as much about recognizing the need for a diversity of views across and within the critical inquiry youth conduct as it is about creating a safe yet challenging space for them to truly investigate root causes.

Representation is also the core element driving the emerging media justice movement, which began as a counter to the media reform landscape in 2002, and "places media activism in the service of broader social change goals, and specifically in the service of oppressed and marginalized communities."⁵ Although some argue that media justice has been in effect since the 1960s, when communities of color and organizers sought specific policy changes, media justice is formally defining itself now as a movement founded on the belief that an equitable distribution of media and communication technologies is critical to social and economic justice.⁶ The growing media justice network Media Action Grassroots Network (MAG-Net)

⁵ Lawson, 2007, p. 17.

⁶ See www.FEX.org for an overview of national media justice efforts.

defines it as “the radical democratization of all systems of communication and culture, whereas all members of society have the power and access to information and ideas to participate effectively in governance and the economy.”⁷

In short, media justice is an effort to bridge media policy, community representation, and social justice efforts—from encouraging station ownership by women and people of color (which is dismally low) to developing strategies that support a communications rights movement, from resisting media consolidation as a civil rights issue to sustaining access to micro-watt radio. More radically, media justice fights for “access to and power over culture and information,” and seeks both media accountability to communities and assurance that “cultural and political participation is promoted and sustained by media systems.”⁸ Currently, there is growing activity by organizations nationally to gather momentum and energy toward making policy changes. Leading efforts include:

- The Funding Exchange’s Media Justice Fund: In 2007, they provided 11 grants totaling \$240,000 to organizations in the Southwest and the Gulf region that are engaged in long-term capacity-building activities that both use and challenge media systems. The fund also published “Imagining the (UN)thinkable: Community Media Over the Next Five Years,” which provides critical insight on the power of the Internet, radio, and community-access TV to enhance social justice movements.
- MAG-Net: With a vision, a framework, and a 10-point platform for change, this group is a growing national alliance of media activists and social justice groups seeking to increase the capacity, coordination, and impact of the media justice movement.
- The Center for Media Justice (formerly the Youth Media Council): CMJ has been active since 2002 as a “media strategy and action center” that builds “the power of grassroots movements and disenfranchised communities to transform public debate and media policy in the service of justice.”⁹ The center has just released *Communicate Justice 101*, a comprehensive how-to toolkit for conducting communications for grassroots organizing campaigns, and is focusing efforts on developing the media justice sector more broadly.

Potential connections between media justice and youth media efforts that have a social justice and/or civic engagement purpose should be fostered, but the looming question is how, and maybe even why. Currently, the focus of media justice is squarely on policy change, not unlike media reform. But media justice seeks out systemic change by those most directly and detrimentally effected, and maybe that is where we can return to the idea that youth voice is very much about a larger level of participation in the world. If participation can be exemplified in young people’s active and effective use of media in support of justice movements and others’ efforts to change policy to that end, then youth voice is as much “access to positions of power for setting agendas, taking actions, and making decisions” as it is about creating expressive, artistic content.¹⁰ In this light, youth voice lines up with Third World Majority’s account of media justice as “our people fighting for and reclaiming our basic right to communicate our stories with, by and for each other.”¹¹

⁷ Cyril et al., 2007, 1.

⁸ Cyril et al., 2007, 1.

⁹ See www.youthmediacouncil.org.

¹⁰ Goldman et al., 2007, p. 187.

¹¹ See www.cultureisaweapon.org.

One certain struggle for any media change effort is how to engage young people in campaigns, especially as youth—even the broadest demographic of youth—are both the inheritors of a dysfunctional media system as well as “digital natives” and shapers of its cultural, social, and political applications. Conversely, youth media is nurturing a generation of savvy media producers. The question to tackle now, in light of both threat and opportunity, is whether there is truly space in the future for youth media producers to actively be involved in media justice efforts, and what its impact will be beyond media policy to social justice. What should it look like? What does it mean for youth media more broadly? While we don’t have answers to these questions yet, the opportunities we hope to have in aligning with media justice include: 1) providing new leadership pathways for youth producers as they grow out of the current youth media community, 2) fostering youth media’s relevance to fields beyond our own, and 3) supporting social justice movements with media expertise.

Our New Direction: Some Concrete Steps

There could be no creativity without the curiosity that moves us and sets us patiently impatient before a world that we did not make, to add to it something of our own making.

—Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*¹²

Talking and thinking about change is one thing; practice is something else. So with a vision and new curriculum in place, we are taking steps to address the change we want to see with youth in our programs and through cultivating partnerships with like-minded, allied organizations (both in and beyond youth media) by:

- offering Media in Action, our national, multi-day training institute for social justice and community arts groups;
- creating a program designed for youth organizers to produce content in support of their home organizations’ advocacy campaigns; and
- participating as media support for social justice efforts such as the Coalition of Immokalee Workers’ campaign against unfair labor practices, sub-poverty wages, and denial of rights for immigrant workers.

To come full circle, there is one story of collaboration with Radio Rootz that we want to share as it reflects our new approach as distinctive from the youth screening described at the beginning of our journey; distinctive because rather than a simple screening with a Q&A, it was youth-generated, youth- and adult-facilitated, explicit in its social justice framework, and an intentional cross-media community effort.

A project of the People’s Production House, Radio Rootz is a well-established youth media and social justice organization based in New York City that works in public schools to train teens in media literacy and radio production. Recently, we partnered with them to run a two-day media literacy workshop that would kick off the summer-long Summer Media Organizing Project. The young people in the room—28 youth organizers from a variety of different community-based organizations around the city—such as South Asian Youth Action (SAYA), Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM), Adelante Alliance, and the Urban Youth Collaborative—were committed to political development and working in their communities for change. They were eager to produce media that would counter pervasive, negative messages about their

¹² Freire, 1998.

communities and were open to learning new video-making and messaging skills.

To do this, five youth from G.A.P. together with five staff tailored and facilitated two days of workshops that focused on video production and framing/messaging to new audiences. Prior to the institute, G.A.P. provided Radio Rootz with a menu of curriculum options from which the organizers chose six activities that best suited the groups in the room, after which we began an intensive curriculum-building process that involved test-running workshops for G.A.P. staff and alumni. The result included icebreakers and warm ups facilitated by G.A.P. youth to support team building, and new curriculum activities like the Media History Timeline (participants co-construct a media timeline of dominant and grassroots media that triggered social responses) and a Media Ownership Relay Race, and workshops such as Youth & Media in Social Movements, Framing & Messaging to explore ideology and audience, as well as Decolonizing the Documentary: Research and Representation, and, of course, Basic Video Production.

Importantly, G.A.P. youth and staff facilitators drew lines between media ownership and messages about communities. For example, one young man in the workshop did not know much about who the Black Panthers were. When pressed, he described the organization in wholly negative terms garnered from mainstream accounts of the group's history. A G.A.P. youth facilitator offered an unofficial account of the organization, describing its community-building activities, the use of media to counter negative messages about them, and the calculated destruction by the FBI's COINTELPRO initiative. As a learning moment, it was a reflection of how important it is for communities to take charge of their histories by telling their own stories to the audiences who need to hear them.

The Radio Rootz collaboration was a great learning moment for us too. A full two years after our community screening of *Razing New York*—in which we recognized our limitations connecting communities to our young people's media—we were now training committed community organizers in media literacy, messaging, and production. The difference between the two events could be likened to two different methodologies for supporting young people's development—individually, creatively, socially, and politically. This new approach meant we were concretely linking with social justice efforts to offer youth a greater, more tangible sense of the power and value of their creative act. It also meant we were ensuring that the youth development outcomes we are committed to would be further formed by witnessing positive change as a result of their agency.

In Sum

Only by engaging in society—and working to make it better—can youth come to terms with who they are, what they believe, and how they relate to others and to society as a whole.

—Nicholas Winter¹³

While we have come much closer to solidifying the practices we need to support the full realization of our mission, some of our choices will certainly stir disagreement and debate. The role and definition of youth voice within youth media reflects many different ideas about authenticity, inquiry, and intent. What we have already found is that the more explicitly critical the work is in a reactionary environment (e.g., addressing immigrant rights, racial justice, or anti-militarism), the more an active youth voice is likely to

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Winter, 2003.

be vilified as ideological.¹⁴ This stance grossly underestimates young people’s capacity and desire to think critically, and to be exposed to new ideas and efforts that challenge them to expand their world views—all the elements that enable them to be civically engaged and effective not just at stating an ideal but realizing it. But it underscores for us at G.A.P. that youth media is an inter-generational endeavor that requires educators and youth to be in constant dialogue and negotiation with each other as producers of a vision or a message. At the end of the day, we are not invested in creating a cadre of youth perspectives that revere one political viewpoint—but we are committed to challenging, engaging, and pushing youth to make the most aesthetically beautiful media they can to support a concrete change in the world.

G.A.P. wants to do more than encourage a new set of thinking strategies. We want to make young adults aware of their own agency in the world. When youth discover the power of their voices through making media, they find themselves, as Maxine Greene says, “able to ‘name’ and imagine how they might change their worlds.”¹⁵ Critical literacy, then, emerges as young people inquire into their lives and environment, produce a story that explores that life, reflect on the social and historical context of their experiences to understand root causes of inequities, and then become agents of positive change.

In sum, what we have learned along the way and can share are some fundamental steps toward evolving the depth and impact of youth media that has social justice as a priority:

1. Take time—a lot of it—to review core values. Be prepared to wrestle with *and answer* the question: “Youth media for what end?”;
2. Seek partners, allies, and critical friends in fields beyond youth media to gain perspective, and to see where possible threats and opportunities are;
3. With youth input, create and pilot curriculum and trainings that reflect your organization’s social justice framework or lens. Evaluate it and act.

We hope our story of transition can offer one approach to the field for defining connections between youth voice, participation, and social change.

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¹⁴ For a general critique of radical pedagogies, see Buckingham, 1998.

¹⁵ Greene, 2003, p. X.

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Extending Media Literacy: How Young People Remix and Transform Media to Serve Their Own Interests

By Erin B. Reilly, MFA, & Alice Robison, Ph.D.

A teen listens to her music on her iPod when her friend sends her an instant message with a link to a recently uploaded dance video on YouTube. She stops working on her Yankee/Red Sox rivalry mash-up video for history class to check it out. Her friend knows how much she loves to dance and how she's always looking for the next new moves to try. The next day, the teen and her friends watch the downloaded video on her iPod and try to copy the routine. She quickly masters it and adds a few steps to make it her own. Her friends contribute more steps until together they have created a new dance routine. Between classes, they videotape each other doing the new dance and load it back on YouTube. When the teen gets home from school, she logs online and tags her YouTube video. She comments on the video that influenced her new moves and links her video to her MySpace page to share with her friends. By the end of the evening, over 10,000 people have viewed her video, including the guy with the original moves. Lucky for her, he thinks they're awesome and can't wait to spin her moves into something new.

New Media's Participatory Culture

The above scenario is one example of what Henry Jenkins and his MIT research team at Comparative Media Studies' Project New Media Literacies (NML) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, call "participatory culture," stressing the role of teens as creators, connectors, communicators, and collaborators—rather than simply *consumers*—of media. Young people participate in the creation and circulation of media content within social networks that extend from their circle of face-to-face friends to a larger virtual community around the world.

NML is part of a larger network of media scholars, educators, librarians, lawyers, public policy advocates, and others who have been brought together by the MacArthur Foundation to create a field of research focused on youth and digital learning.¹ In "Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century," NML researchers offer a conceptual framework for thinking about the social skills and cultural competencies young people need to acquire in order to fully participate in this emerging cultural realm and to provide suggestions for ways these skills might be incorporated into classroom and after-school activities.²²

NML's primary goal is to develop a theoretical framework and curriculum for K–12 learners that integrate new media tools into broader educational, expressive, and ethical contexts. We partner with schools to help young people both make and reflect upon media and, in the process, acquire important skills in teamwork, leadership, problem solving, collaboration, brainstorming, communications, and project completion, which will prepare them for a broad range of academic and professional careers.

The future of technology-savvy students needs new media literacies in education. Media literacy is a social skill that links education with interactive information sharing. Integrating these skills has the potential

¹ MacArthur Foundation, 2006.

² National Media Literacies Project, 2005.

to enable a shift in the scale and speed with which information circulates and cultural innovation occurs. New media literacies are participatory, collaborative, and distributive. The teen girl and her friends collaboratively shared their different dance moves to create something new. In a low-tech environment, these girls could have developed new dance moves by watching and imitating others' dance steps at a club outside of school.

Traditional media literacy is important. It urges young people to ask hard questions about the media that enters their homes, but that is where it stops. As a result, we can't assume that young people know how to respond and interact by creating their own media and sharing their creations beyond the borders of their own neighborhoods. A new media literacy framework is necessary to examine how best to teach and guide young people through the process of learning and become versed in interpreting, using, and sharing the media in their lives.

Current Traditional Media Literacies

There has long been grassroots and collaborative media production, as represented through homemade zines, fan fiction, sound tapes, and other forms of do-it-yourself culture. Since Marshall McLuhan's popular theory that "the medium is the message," a host of approaches toward the legitimization of media studies have made their way into schools. For example, in the mid-1990s, About-Face used this now-standard format for teaching young people to critically review media and, in this case specifically, the influence of media's perceptions of women and their bodies (which affects young people immensely as they grow and form their identities).³³ What resulted was a framework for questioning the rhetorical assumptions that media makers and media consumers employ:

- Who created the message?
- What techniques were used to deliver the message?
- What values are represented by the media presentation?
- How might different people understand the message?
- Why is this message being sent?

These questions made girls more aware that media retouching in magazines had an impact on the ways they perceived women's bodies and thus helped to shape their sense of themselves. What's more is that these study questions focused attention on the *contexts* within which these messages were created, the goals that they served and agendas they promoted, and their impact on receivers. This tradition understands that different people might understand the message in different terms but there was no assumption that these young people might be able to remix and transform the content to serve their own interests.

While traditional models saw literacy through a lens of personal expression, the new media literacies emphasize the social and cultural dimensions of media production as young people exchange content within and beyond larger communities of practice. Knowing how and what it means to create, connect, communicate, and collaborate is part of the new media literacy education.

Toward New Media Literacy Practices

With the Nintendo and millennial generations, new technologies enable teenagers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content on a previously unanticipated scale; the lowering costs of these

³³ About-Face, 2006.

new media tools puts them in the reach of a growing number of young people who are often generating and sharing content.

New media literacy skills include:

- Play*—experimenting with one’s surroundings as a form of problem solving
- Performance*—adopting alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery
- Simulation*—interpreting and constructing dynamic models of real-world processes
- Appropriation*—sampling and remixing media content in a meaningful way
- Multitasking*—scanning one’s environment and shifting focus as needed to salient details.
- Distributed Cognition*—interacting meaningfully with tools that expand mental capacities
- Collective Intelligence*—pooling knowledge and comparing notes with others toward a common goal
- Judgment*—evaluating the reliability and credibility of different information sources
- Transmedia Navigation*—following the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities
- Networking*—searching for, synthesizing, and disseminating information
- Negotiation*—traveling across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative norms.

Each of these skills represents a principle or approach to learning. The concepts of judgment, multitasking, performance, and networking are not necessarily tied to high-tech, high-cost technologies. But digital technologies make those activities and skills more salient and, in some ways, more transparent. NML plans to highlight these emerging skills and practices and to make their use and value more accessible and transparent in a variety of learning settings.

Yet in many of those settings, access to technologies is limited. For some, everyday social networks and production and circulation skills are already familiar, enabling those who use them to play a much more visible and active role in the civic sphere. For example, in 2005 when Abercrombie & Fitch released T-shirts that said, “Who needs brains when you have these?” (referring to women’s breasts), teens formed a “girlcott” by organizing a campaign that circulated their protest to 21 cable news segments, 312 local TV news markets, 6 national and international radio spots, 67 regional newspapers, 4 national newspapers, 8 international newspapers, and 23,000 stories on the Web, plus hundreds of e-mails in support. The “girlcott” urged teen girls to connect with their local news shows to broadcast their concerns, which in turn influenced the company to remove the offensive T-shirts from store shelves. And then after Abercrombie & Fitch didn’t go with the girls’ suggested new t-shirt line, they created their own line and used Café Press to distribute it.⁴ Here, teens applied new media literacy skills—judgment, distributed cognition, networking, and negotiation—in ways which were socially empowering. At the same time, they were able to show how their access to and familiarities with the influence and usefulness of media can enable them to participate as citizens within their own communities and contexts.

The Participation Gap

Some have argued that young people are acquiring these skills outside of adult supervision, talking about a growing divide between those who are born into a world in which media tools and ethics are already a part of their lives (so-called “digital natives”) and those for whom uses and interpretations of digital

⁴ See www.cafepress.com/girlcott.

technologies is a foreign or even misunderstood concept and practice (so-called “digital immigrants”). Yet, such rhetoric ignores the very real participation gap, which separates teens who have had extensive access to new media resources and experiences outside of school from those wholly dependent on schools and libraries for access.

Early research suggests that those with extensive access may have a much greater understanding of how information gets produced and circulated within digital networks. Those with limited access remain passive consumers. They get online, get the information they need, and get offline again without really developing a critical understanding of where the information comes from, how to evaluate it, or most importantly how to change it. These youth may lack the ability to express their own ideas or create their own content.

New media literacy skills are central to the lives of *all* young people, who will increasingly communicate and rely upon technology into their adult lives. These skill sets, however, are not just about high-tech activities and we cannot assume that access to technologies enable thoughtful participation. This participation gap, as we call it, reflects the assumption that access equals meaningful participation. Any librarian staring at a room full of computers with few people using them will tell you that access is only one factor in the role that media literacy plays in our lives. Without focused, explicit instruction and experience with these skills, students miss out on participatory practices made more explicitly significant by newer technologies. New media literacies provide opportunities to help young people acquire skills on how they process knowledge so they can participate in new ways.

Purposeful Integration of New Media Literacy

Young people need resources and learning principles to acquire new skills and to think critically about their own relationships to the media. Intentional learning and practice of these skills will enable all young people to analyze and create media rather than just consume. Though young people do create media, it is often outside the fabric of schools and education. It is in the best interest of schools world-wide to take on a new media literacy approach to teaching a fast-paced, technology-based generation.

Take for instance, the new media literacy skill appropriation. Appropriation involves a complex negotiation between the self and the larger culture—an absorption and transformation of shared resources into the raw materials of one’s own (collective and personal) expression. The digital remixing of media content makes visible the degree to which all cultural expression builds upon what has come before. Appropriation may be understood as a process that involves both analysis and commentary. Sampling intelligently from the existing cultural reservoir requires a close analysis of existing structures and uses of this material; remixing requires an appreciation of emerging structures and latent potential meanings.

Many of the forms of expression that are most important to American youth accent this sampling and remixing process, in part because digitization makes it much easier to combine and repurpose media content than ever before. Jazz, for example, evolved through improvisation around familiar themes and standard songs, yet the digital remixing of actual sounds which occurs in techno or hip-hop music has raised much greater alarm among those who would insist on strong protections of copyright. Fan fiction clearly involves the transformative use of existing media content, yet it is often treated as if it were simply a new form of piracy. Collage has been a central artistic practice running across the 20th century, one closely associated with the kinds of new creative works that young people are generating and manipulating through Photoshop.

Despite the pervasiveness of these cultural practices, school arts and creative writing programs remain hostile to overt signs of repurposed content, emphasizing the ideal of the autonomous artist. Yet, in doing so, they sacrifice the opportunity to help young people think more deeply about the ethical and legal implications of repurposing existing media content; they often do not provide them with the conceptual tools students need to analyze and interpret works produced in this appropriative process. In fact, most of the classics taught in schools are the product of appropriation and transformation—or what we would now call sampling and remixing.

Like many media literacy projects, NML encourages opportunities for young people to acquire new skills and to think critically about their own relationships to new media. At the same time, NML works hard to show how those opportunities and experiences of making and using new media should be grounded in the concepts of good literacy learning, concepts that include learning as it happens within the community contexts. Take, for instance, hip-hop culture. For the most part, hip-hop has four main aspects: rapping, DJing, tagging, and break-dancing. Though born in the United States (by way of Jamaica), hip-hop is “now the center of a mega music and fashion industry around the world,” crossing social barriers and cutting across racial lines.⁵ Students might learn that *National Geographic* magazine recognizes hip-hop as “the world’s favorite youth culture” and “just about every country on the planet seems to have developed its own local rap scene.”⁶

Therefore, this summer the ProjectNML team worked with 10 teens from the Boston-based video production program Facing History and Ourselves: Digital Legacies.⁷ During the workshop, teens learned how to remix content using a cut-up method. First, they listened to remixes and mash-ups of original music and discussed whether the resulting music was less original than the borrowed tracks and, if so, why. This discussion led to a second activity: *Cut-ups—Method one*. The NML team chose “Neon,” a slam poem by Michael Salinger, for the cut-ups activity. A cut-up is created by taking a finished text (printed on paper) and cutting it into pieces, each containing several or single words. The resulting pieces are rearranged into a new text with the teens compensating for the haphazard word breaks by adding their own words.

In the third activity: *Cut-ups—Method two*, teens again used the poem “Neon” by Michael Salinger and mixed it with an early 20th-century poem, “Strings in the Earth and Air,” by James Joyce. The cut-ups become mash-ups when two different texts are cut up with a few or single words on each piece of paper. The resulting pieces are *rearranged* into a new text but no new words are added. During the workshop, the teens appropriated, transformed, and remixed poetry using cut-up methods. Through discussion, they learned how these remixing and editing practices relate to other media editing techniques, such as those used in video and music. These activities present new experiences and opportunities for young people to use and learn new media skills, to take ownership of the media, and to use it as a means to be active participants in both creating and using media for civic and ethical purposes.

The goal of MIT’s Project New Media Literacies is to create not only informal learning tools but also concepts and principles for teens and youth-serving professionals (whether in after-school programs or in the classroom) that exemplify these new ways of thinking about the potentials of technology and media.

5 Walker, 2006.

6 Pryor, 2008.

7 Facing History and Ourselves, 2008.

They include videos and both high- and low-tech activities centered on youth participation. The new media literacy experiences offer teens the opportunities not only to experiment with new media technologies but also to understand what it means to participate successfully from within media-making communities in and out of school.

If we return to our opening story about the teenage girl and her dance video, most of our core media literacy competencies are applied. For example, the teen *multitasks* moving between different activities and thoughts, focusing her attention and energy as appropriate. She shares and *negotiates* knowledge with her friends as they *collectively* work both synchronously with those in their own community and asynchronously with others in the YouTube audience. Both teens *appropriate, simulate*, and transform the content of the original dance video, and when they *perform* the dance, they see it less as an artifact to be consumed and more as an activity that invites their participation (as well as others). Together, they show an understanding of effective strategies for navigating and *networking* across online communities, attracting interest in their work, and *distributing* their work widely online. These teens have remixed and transformed media to find their own meaning, matching their interests with content that is self-produced and easily distributed. Implementing new media literacy practices can be fun. For educational purposes, these models can be successfully applied in working *with* young people to enhance their collective intelligence and knowledge production within a technology-advanced world.

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Jumping for Joy, Wracking our Brains, Searching our Souls: Youth Media and its Digital Contradictions

By Elisabeth Soep

In the old days of a few years ago, youth media organizations were among the sole gatekeepers connecting young people to production tools, distribution outlets, and mass audiences. The world doesn't work that way anymore. Now, teen producers can pick up \$10 digital cameras at the local corner store or use their cell phones to upload clips for free to massively trafficked Web sites. It's never been easier for young people to contribute to the endless flow of content circulating among media makers, users, and audiences—categories that are themselves rapidly losing clear distinctions.

These developments have brought about a contradictory moment in the youth media movement marked by a mix of exuberance and angst. The excitement stems from the proliferation of cheap equipment, user-generated outlets, and growing public appetite for youth-made content. These innovations are cause for celebration for young producers and their adult mentors in youth media organizations around the country. One of our main goals is to tear down the obstacles that block young people from participating *as producers* in personal expression and public discourse. Our jobs just got a whole lot easier.

Or did they? If young people today can find their own affordable tools and distribution outlets, and if the current aesthetic seems to favor raw production values over highly polished pieces, we've got to ask ourselves—what's the point of what we do? Hence the angst.

Compounding that angsty feeling is an education system obsessed with standardized measurement; a re-regulated mainstream media¹; disparities in digital participation that map to class, race, geography, and family educational background²; and significant obstacles that can prevent young producers from converting media savvy and even momentary notoriety into concrete opportunities in education or living wage employment. While the free access, feedback loops, and community ratings systems that mark so many social media sites offer amazing opportunities for young people to post and share their stories, lots of good stuff on these sites gets buried. It needs to compete with the sensational, the silly, and the not always transparently sponsored.

In this essay, I draw insight from a single organization, Youth Radio, where I serve as a senior producer and research director, against the backdrop of research I've carried out over 10 years, in the spirit of a new mandate: to sharpen our understanding of how our field's "signature pedagogies" can work in tandem with emerging technologies and media innovations to better serve young people.³ Youth media organizations remain crucial for a number of reasons, including:

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¹ Klinenberg, 2007.

² DeBell & Chapman, 2006.

³ Faber, M., personal communication, November 1, 2006.

- They organize youth-adult collaboration linking young people to networks of opportunity for advanced skill building, policy impact, jobs, and higher education. I discuss this function here as a property of *collegial pedagogy*.⁴
- They provide a platform for collective activity that builds and broadcasts a critical mass of youth voices strategically reaching a range of audiences. This function leverages the youth media field's access to *multiple outlets*.
- They engage young people who are otherwise marginalized from digital privilege—those on the wrong side of what Henry Jenkins calls media literacy's “participation gap.”⁵ This function enables young people to exercise *applied agency* and to build citizenship in our connected, divided world.

Youth Radio: Context and Methods

A pioneer in the youth media field and now in its 16th year of operation, Youth Radio is an after-school, nonprofit organization where young people produce stories for local and national broadcasts on radio, television, and online outlets. The organization is located in Oakland, with bureaus in Los Angeles; Washington, D.C.; and Atlanta, and partnerships with other youth media groups around the country and internationally. Youth Radio students, predominantly working-class youth and young people of color, are recruited from schools in poor urban districts, as well as through outreach to students within heavily tracked public schools, which feature striking differences in educational opportunities and outcomes for students in accelerated versus remedial courses.⁶ In the past several years, the organization has won Alfred I. duPont, Edward R. Murrow, and George Foster Peabody awards for excellence in broadcast journalism.

Young people in the on-site programs complete applications and are then interviewed for inclusion within introductory classes lasting 11 weeks, offered four times per year. Within this initial class session, students come to Youth Radio twice a week in the after-school hours to learn basic media skills in radio, Web, video, music production, while producing and hosting a weekly live show airing every Friday night, from 7 to 9 p.m., called *Youth in Control*. The majority of students graduating from introductory classes return for a second, more advanced, level of training, which takes place two afternoons per week, from 4 to 6 p.m., for an additional 11 weeks. In this phase, students specialize in a particular area of expertise—for example, music production or journalism.

Youth Radio also runs an extended program for Oakland youth supported by the city's violence-prevention initiative, as well as outreach programs through local public schools, community-based organizations, and juvenile detention facilities, essentially replicating key dimensions of the on-site classes, including on-air and online broadcast opportunities. Throughout all learning experiences at Youth Radio, there is a dual focus on professional media standards and youth development opportunities, the latter supported through a comprehensive program carving out pathways into higher education and meaningful work, as well as promoting a continued emphasis on building critical media literacy.

After completing introductory and advanced courses, students are eligible to become interns at Youth Radio in paid positions across every department. This transition from student to intern status is an important precursor and training ground for the kinds of expectations young people face when they build

⁴ Chávez & Soep, 2005

⁵ Jenkins, 2006, p. 3.

⁶ Oakes, 1986.

on their involvement within Youth Radio to do work in the outside world—at their schools, communities, workplaces, and broader public spheres.

Interns who serve as peer teachers essentially run the organization's classes, teaching newcomers. Youth Radio students routinely report that a highlight of their experience, and something that draws their continued commitment, is the fact that they learn from other young people. Youth Radio peer teachers take workshops and attend meetings around lesson plan development, pedagogy, and classroom management. Their students see that they, too, can move into peer teaching roles, if they stay involved and build up their own skills as producers and community-based educators.

Students who take internships in the newsroom cover stories for outlets including local stations; Youth Radio's own site⁷ as well as social media sites across the Web; and massive broadcasters like National Public Radio, which serves more than 26 million weekly listeners on the air and is among the biggest podcast portals on iTunes. Every step in the media production process is highly collaborative. Adult producers, as well as peer teachers, work with young people to prepare interview questions, outlines, and eventually scripts and audio mixes. In some cases adult producers accompany the young reporters in the field, where students might interview a school superintendent, record the scene outside a juvenile courtroom, or tape a frank conversation with a young soldier moving back in with his mom after serving in Iraq.

Youth Radio is both a youth development agency and a professional production company. In pursuing this dual mission, the organization is hardly alone. A hallmark of the youth media field is a commitment to support individual and community-based vitality for youth participants while at the same time generating top-quality media products. Through youth media organizations, young people create music, spoken word poetry, documentary films, public service announcements, blogs, games, virtual worlds, fiction, and on and on. Young people also create all these forms on their own, outside the auspices of any face-to-face affiliation, and the work they make can be excellent. But in particular for young people who've been marginalized from digital privilege, a supportive network of peers and adult colleagues who balance media goals with larger personal, social, and professional investments in the young person's well-being can make the difference between a single media accomplishment and a transformed pathway into opportunities for continued work, learning, connection, and impact.

In many cases at youth media organizations, youth development and professional media goals fall into alignment: what's best for the young person is best for the story. There are times, though, when these two priorities raise tensions. In these situations, Youth Radio has a strong policy that youth development principles trump broadcast pressures. In the end, young people have the final editorial say over the content and distribution of their work.

Reflections on Return: Military Stories

Negotiating our policy on a day-to-day basis is not always easy. Recently, we worked with a young soldier who had just returned from serving in the Iraq war. He kept a journal throughout the months he had spent on the front lines, which we together edited into a five-minute radio piece. Embedded within his writing were criticisms of daily military practices on the ground, and he described interactions with Iraqi citizens in troubling terms. It was provocative material. This young man was a vivid writer, and the immediacy of

⁷ See www.youthradio.org.

his stories seemed an important antidote to sanitized war coverage.

The challenge, in this case, was to figure out this young soldier's relationship to Youth Radio's youth development mission. Had we been a "regular" newsroom, we perhaps would not have given much thought to the potential consequences and even dangers this young man might face for sharing his story. He was not a Youth Radio student who had gone through the program, and yet he was a young person sharing a story through Youth Radio. Broadcasting the story without naming the soldier was not an option in this case, given the outlet's guidelines prohibiting the use of unnamed sources under these conditions. Early in the process, we discussed the probable risks with the young enlistee in what he was doing—revealing himself as a soldier who was serving as witness and storyteller. In a sense, initiating this conversation about risk jeopardized the story; he could have decided to pull out. But he did not. That said, in the end, an officer in his division killed the story upon receiving word of the soldier's intent to broadcast the diary.

This editorial process raised issues that go far beyond word choice and story structure; at stake were fundamental rights surrounding freedom of expression, the role of the press, as well as government and military policy. Despite no longer having access to this particular young man's journal, Youth Radio set out to explore the limits—external and self-imposed—placed on young soldiers' free speech, and to examine the impact of those limits on public information about the war.

Related issues arose through the editorial process in a different story that was part of Youth Radio's war coverage. In the wake of the Abu Ghraib scandal, I accompanied a Youth Radio reporter as she interviewed some young Marines who had returned to college in California after taking part in the U.S. invasion. One of these young men opened a Web site he had created that contained captions to digital photographs he had taken in Iraq. He described one snapshot of a burned Iraqi man he called Mr. Crispy and another showing Americans in camouflage giving candy to Iraqi children; the caption read, "Hey, kids, here's some candy. Now make sure you don't sneak up on me tonight or I'll have to shoot you." The other young Marine talked on tape about one particular corporal who had invited him to abuse an Iraqi prisoner. We included these moments in the story, but not the name of the officer.⁸

Youth media producers typically take some measure of responsibility for the impact of any given story on the young people involved in making it, whether as subject, character, reporter, or commentator. That said, as with all of our coverage, we are deeply committed to rigorous reporting that offers a counter-narrative to the messages about youth put forth in the mainstream press, and messages about youth involvement in the war are no exception. Perhaps when the content of the story itself raises questions *about* democracy, the process of creating the story also seems to challenge easy formulas that romanticize the idea of youth voice as always and automatically a site of freedom.

These two examples are not the kinds of incidents that occur every day at any given youth organization. Certainly challenges like these are, to a certain extent, specific to a youth development program aiming to broadcast high-impact stories on volatile topics in difficult times. And yet every community-based organization in which young people explore issues fundamental to their lives and critical of the conditions that surround them faces its own challenges when it comes to reconciling youth development goals with

⁸ For a much more detailed discussion of the making of this series and some of the key themes raised in this essay overall, see Soep & Chávez, under contract; and Soep, Mayeno & Kurwa, forthcoming.

professional principles and social justice work.⁹

Youth Media Practice: Features and Tensions

It is within this tension, and to support these efforts, that youth media organizations as *intentional collectives* have the potential to play a crucial role in an era that allows for unprecedented and independent citizen media production. Three “signature pedagogies” are especially important in fulfilling that role.

Collegial Pedagogy

The learning environment at Youth Radio is guided by a process we call “collegial pedagogy,” in which young people and adults jointly frame and carry out projects in a relationship marked by interdependence and mutual accountability.¹⁰ In collegial pedagogy, young people make the key substantive contribution: they possess something the adults don’t have—a certain kind of access, understanding, experience, or analysis directly relevant to the project at hand.

In the Abu Ghraib story described above, the Youth Radio reporter and the Marines she interviewed shared popular culture references, styles of speech, and other generational markers, all of which seemed to set a tone for the interviews that was quite different from a typical exchange between an adult reporter asking young respondents questions. That said, the Youth Radio reporter came to this investigative project with serious training from adult professional journalists and media artists. There was nothing automatic (or easy) about reporting on this highly charged and still unfolding geopolitical situation. She carried out the project with near-constant feedback and contribution from adult collaborators, drawing upon their mentorship on matters creative, technical, and conceptual, even as she challenged her editors’ assumptions on all of these fronts. In this sense, youth media organizations perform a crucial function. They set up frequent and high-stakes occasions where young people can rely on adult support and collaboration, whether the mentor is physically present during an interview or edit, or on-call after the fact to debrief and help identify next steps. This process aims to generate a high-quality product and, equally if not more importantly, to promote the young person’s positive development.

Multiple Outlets

Beginning their very first week in the program, Youth Radio students broadcast to a real audience. But that audience is quite small, and the show is therefore a relatively protected outlet for young people new to media. This space to experiment, fumble, and find one’s comfort zone on the microphone is crucial—particularly in light of the permanent, searchable digital archive that now captures young people’s every expression and follows them into perpetuity for better or worse. Youth media organizations can provide a crucial function here by preparing young people to understand and navigate a digital media world where they need to project possible consequences for their sentiments expressed on blogs, social networking pages, and video upload sites well into their futures. New digital outlets bring more complicated choices and demand a strategy to balance an immediate desire to get a story out with an ongoing process of deciding how to do so in the most powerful, strategic, and enduring way.

As young people accumulate experience at Youth Radio, they have opportunities to produce stories for expanding outlets, ranging from commercial stations to highly trafficked Web sites to major shows like

⁹ Fleetwood, 2005.

¹⁰ Soep & Chávez, under contract.

Morning Edition and *All Things Considered* on National Public Radio, where the Abu Ghraib story aired. Clearly, the standards and production values associated with broadcasts on these shows are very specific. Not every story is a viable candidate for these programs. Critical, then, to the capacity for Youth Radio students to express a full range of perspectives and aesthetics, and to reach audiences of peers as well as adults, is the range of outlets they can target as they develop their stories.

Today's youth producers can post their projects through a whole range of Web-based outlets with no barrier to entry—and every once in a while, these projects strike a cultural chord and rise through the rankings to national prominence. But that is an exception. Youth media organizations can leverage broadcast relationships that enable a story like the Abu Ghraib feature to reach an audience of 10 million listeners on a single morning. Granted, not all youth media organizations have or even want access to audiences at that scale. Increasingly, youth media sites that do have production relationships with the big outlets work through partnerships and collaborations with smaller groups to help broker broadcast opportunities to reach mass audiences. But even programs that operate outside national mainstream media channels altogether make a crucial contribution by bringing the perspectives of highly trained and supported young producers to local outlets that would not otherwise include those voices—filling an increasingly urgent need, as mass media consolidation inhibits original local production. Moreover, the field provides a platform for collective activity that builds and broadcasts a critical mass of youth voices strategically representing a range of perspectives, reaching a range of audiences, and transforming the way the nation sees and hears its young citizens.

The Abu Ghraib story and the soldier's diary were not produced in isolation. They were both part of a larger Youth Radio series, *Reflections on Return from Iraq*, that contained voices from soldiers protesting the war, those coming home with the heavy weight of post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as those who missed their time in battle and couldn't wait for redeployment. For youth contributors to this series as well as their adult collaborators, *Reflections on Return* was an opportunity to extend and challenge their own views, and to work across outlets and audiences to frame a body of work aimed to illuminate one of the most pressing and contested issues of the day.

Applied Agency

Youth Radio foregrounds youth agency without underestimating the power and persistence of inequalities imposed within youth communities and surrounding young people's position within the wider society.¹¹ This focus on supporting youth agency entails going beyond the goal of getting a young person's story on the air. Youth media organizations like Youth Radio can only make a lasting impact on young individuals and their communities when programs support young people's educational and professional opportunities, their sense of social responsibility, and their participation in efforts to unsettle ideologies and institutions that reproduce the uneven distribution of power. Supporting youth agency, then, does not mean giving youth voice. Rather, it means working on a systemic level to help open concrete opportunities and expose erasures and injustices where they exist.

It is by supporting young people's sense of agency and citizenship that youth media organizations perform perhaps their most important function. The exuberance of the moment can lead us to over-celebrate what it means for young people who've been marginalized from digital privilege to have access to cheap recording

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¹¹ Ladson-Billings, 1997.

equipment and free outlets. There is no doubt much to get excited about in these new opportunities. Youth media organizations that are tapped into the everyday digital lives of their students have been quick to exploit emerging sites through which young people can reach ever-expanding niche and mass audiences. The phenomenon of user-generated content and the social media explosion are bringing new vitality to our field. Now, the most challenging voices and provocative perspectives can gain access to audiences, even if they would never get (or necessarily want) mainstream broadcast airtime. That said, access does not automatically translate into enduring roles as full participants in digital culture—any more than text messaging a vote for an *American idol* favorite exemplifies “actualized” youth citizenship¹². Civic engagement in today’s world entails the material and imaginative resources that enable young people to tell their own stories and shape as well as transform larger narratives, policies, and institutions. For this to work, young people need to know they matter, and that they are known, in ways that transcend isolated media projects. They need resources to transform those projects into tangible opportunities, meaningful relationships, and sustainable work. By working within and beyond young media organizations, young producers are building a field—a movement—through which they can find those resources and pursue all means necessary, on- and offline, to frame and spread important untold truths.

* * *

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Lissa holds a PhD in education from Stanford University, with research support from the Spencer Foundation. She has published widely about youth, media culture, and education, including articles in the *Harvard Educational Review*, *Phi Delta Kappan*, and *National Civic Review*; a coedited volume, *Youthscapes: The Popular, the National, the Global* (University of Pennsylvania Press, with Sunaina Maira), and a forthcoming book, *Drop that Knowledge: Youth Radio Stories* (University of California Press, with Vivian Chavez). Lissa just finished teaching a course on ethnography at UC Berkeley’s Graduate School of Education.

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¹² Bennett, 2007, p. 3; see also Jenkins, 2006; Klinenberg, 2007.

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Youth Media at the Threshold: A Research-Based Field-Building Agenda

by Kathleen Tyner, The University of Texas at Austin

Field-building is often overlooked as an important, capacity-building strategy. When disparate activities are perceived as a field, the necessary financial, social, and political capital needed to target and address community need is more likely to follow. As youth media coalesces into a field, the resulting collective capacity bolsters sustainability and quality across programs as organizations carry out their missions.¹

At minimum, field-building efforts require expanding collective planning and leadership to a larger scale. These efforts assume that a diverse and divergent set of interests can find common ground, professionalize, legitimize, and characterize their efforts to outsiders. Although youth media advocates have worked in loose coalitions since at least the 1960s, efforts to gather and share evidence of successful practice and lessons learned in the field are nascent.

Veteran New York practitioners Diana Coryat from Global Action Project (G.A.P.) and Steve Goodman from Educational Video Center (EVC) identified four capacity-building strategies that are essential to field-building: a) peer-to-peer professional development; b) venues for sharing ideas and resources, such as conferences, clearinghouses, and publications; c) university collaborations; and d) internal and peer-to-peer systems of accountability.²

An important addition to Coryat and Goodman's list is a research strategy for data collection and analysis. Since field-building depends on compelling arguments to move the field forward, the disconnect between evidence and argument is currently a barrier to successful advocacy, sustainability, and growth of youth media programs and projects. Although individual organizations rely on persuasive cases, a strategic research agenda is needed to reconcile and advance the whole field.

At this stage, many grassroots youth media practitioners argue pragmatically that they need immediate help with capacity issues related to their own pressing client service commitments. While eager to connect with wider networks of practitioners outside their communities, many community-based media groups question the benefit of intensive field-building efforts over time. For these organizations, stretched to the limit, the connection between field-building and capacity building is tenuous. As a result, most capacity-building efforts for youth media organizations remain narrowly focused on competitive fund-raising and donor-driven accountability measure.

New visions and a widening base of advocacy indicate that youth media is a resilient and expansive concept with broad appeal. In spite of trepidation and ambivalence about the dividends accrued from field-building activities, the broadly diverse field of youth media is beginning to come together within the context of widespread digital literacy, low-cost new media tools, and global distribution outlets. The time is right to

¹ Blumenthal, 2003; De Vita & Fleming, 2001.

² Coryat & Goodman, 2004.

leverage support and partnerships to advance the field on a sound foundation of research evidence.

What the Research Says About Youth Media

Although anecdotal evidence of impact within specific contexts is useful, field-building depends on a big picture of the impact of youth media programs and projects. This kind of aggregated, cross-program data helps to define, legitimize, sustain, and grow the field of youth media. To date, two U.S. studies have attempted to collect data of this type. A study by the Open Society Institute (OSI) and Surdna Foundation,³ and a survey conducted by the National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture (NAMAC) establish some quantitative baseline information and indicators that can be used to guide data collection in future studies.⁴ These include youth media capacity and impact indicators related to organizational resources, staff expertise, funding sources, partnerships, client size and demographics, geographic location, aims and purposes, media forms and genre, content, audience, distribution outlets, and reach. Both studies reveal the emerging field of youth media as made up of committed organizations that struggle with the capacity to implement broad missions for a burgeoning client base with the potential for huge impact.

In their mixed methods study, OSI and Surdna Foundation used online survey methods and telephone interviews to collect data related to the measurement of youth media's impact on audiences and channels of distribution.⁵ In an extensive review of the literature, the researchers note that:

In the end, what we found was very scant research on youth media generally, on youth media impact specifically, and on how related fields might be of significant use in attempting to measure the impact of youth media. The nascency and sheer diversity of the youth media field contribute to this shortage, as do the key differences between (1) youth media and other youth-oriented fields, and (2) youth media and other media fields in the way they target and measure impact. These fundamental differences discouraged us from conducting a more exhaustive literature review of related fields for specific and transferable impact-measurement tools.

By all accounts, the majority of youth media studies do not yet reach the rigorous standards set by social science research, e.g., large sample sizes, random samples, control groups, longitudinal data collection, and sophisticated statistical analysis techniques. Even the definition of *youth media* is highly debatable, usually characterized around activities suggested by educational researcher Patricia Campbell as “media conceived, developed, and produced by youth and disseminated to others.”⁶ At present, the scope and range of youth media research done to date can be best characterized as mapping strategies and includes research studies and evaluations from individual programs as well as cross-program data.

Because it is difficult to generalize their findings broadly, these studies are primarily intended for use by youth media advocates and funders. However, the emergence of scholarly, field-specific, peer-reviewed journals, such as *Youth Media Reporter*, and heightened interest in the topic by established youth development and education journals provides incentive and dissemination outlets for academic publication on the subject and opens the dialogue about youth media to a wider public.

³ Inouye et al., 2004.

⁴ Tyner & Mokund, 2004.

⁵ Inouye et al., 2004, p. I-12, 13.

⁶ Campbell et al., 2001.

A number of qualitative case studies also contribute rich detail and substance to the research base.⁷ In addition, evaluation studies of individual programs contribute evidence and indicators related to youth media and learning, stakeholder attitudes, and youth development.⁸

Capacity Strain and the Uses of Research

Undoubtedly, youth media programs have uneven capacity to mount evaluation activities and almost no expertise or resources to collect internal, rigorous data based on large samples and established social science methods that make up the gold standard for research. And once organizations overcome the obstacles to research and evaluation, issues arise about the data that is collected. The most obvious is that the field is built on advocacy, yet rigorous research depends on some semblance of objectivity. In addition, the survival of programs in the field depends on short-term impact and pragmatic problem solving. In contrast, researchers have the luxury of theoretical, long-term models that can point to flaws—as well as successes—in program implementation and results.

Existing evaluations are often prompted by funder directive, especially for government grant programs and increasingly for foundation support. Although grant-driven data collection provides important evidence across programs, some practitioners resist research and evaluation as punitive accountability burdens imposed on practitioners from outsiders. In these cases, the researcher negotiates diplomatically between funder and grantee.

This is especially true for government-funded efforts. Cash-strapped nonprofit organizations realize that they can stabilize their efforts with the larger, multiyear funding provided by government programs. Most of these require an evaluation component as part of the proposal. Government agencies then aggregate the program data to ensure accountability and to prioritize their future funding efforts. However, it is important to note that federal research initiatives also support networking and program improvement efforts that are value-added for individual organizations. In evaluation studies, there is no penalty for reporting lessons learned that are sincerely executed, but are less than successful. Instead, government reporting of both successful practices and lessons learned is considered an important contribution to the research base.

When supported with technical assistance and networks, the uses of youth media evaluation studies demonstrate pragmatic value for visibility, program improvement, fund-raising, and community involvement. Two prominent examples, seeded by the National Science Foundation and assisted by the Educational Development Center (EDC) in New York City, are: a) the Learning Resource Center, a network created through the Innovative Technology Experiences for Students and Teachers (ITEST) program to support, synthesize, and disseminate program learning to a wider audience⁹; and b) the Community Technology Centers' Network (CTCNet), a grassroots organization that expanded its network in 1990.¹⁰ Both networks were sustained in partnership with the EDC.

Foundation funders also provide leadership and support for ongoing data collection. Philanthropic

⁷ Asthana, 2006; Kinkade, 2003; Sefton-Green & Sinker, 2000; Tyner, 2004.

⁸ Michael Cohen Group, 2007.

⁹ See www2.edc.org/itestlrc.

¹⁰ See www.ctcnet.org.

programs at corporate and private foundations such as Adobe's OSI, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, Surdna Foundation, Time Warner, and others have a history of support for cross-program data collection, technical assistance, and reporting about youth media efforts.

With the support of foundations, a few core organizations can provide professional networks, technical assistance, examples, and toolkits to support youth media data collection, reporting, and dissemination as a strategy for capacity building. These include an evaluation program by YouthLearn and the EDC.¹¹ In addition, the Youth Media Initiative of NAMAC provides publications, training, a toolkit, and regional evaluation bureaus for practitioners. The Youth Media Learning Network (YMLN) in New York City also provides a research network for evidence related to professional development and impact.

Due to the high cost of rigorous social science research and capacity issues on the ground, it may be more realistic to initially promote and mentor organizations in low-cost, efficient data collection methods that can be used for program improvement and sharing. These may include internal, participatory, and third-party evaluations conducted through volunteers or university partners. For example, graduate students in the Radio-Television-Film Department at the University of Texas at Austin partnered with community-based youth media organizations to design and implement evaluation as part of a service-learning course on media research methods. A number of nonprofits and universities are turning to service-learning strategies of this type as a mutually beneficial strategy. In the words of UCLA Professor Kathy O'Bryne, "The world of non-profits is different from academic culture, from everything from timeframes and deadlines to the dissemination of findings or results...but the collaboration between students and professionals is powerful."¹²

Fortunately, additional large-scale efforts to study youth media are on the horizon. These include the digital media and learning initiative launched in 2006 by the Chicago-based MacArthur Foundation and, internationally, the ongoing work of UNESCO.¹³ These efforts bridge formal and informal education, study a wide range of aims and purposes, aggregate research evidence, and provide leadership to bolster the field.

Research Design Challenges

In order to aggregate evidence across these programs, researchers must reconcile the focus, scope, and values that underlie the decision to promote new media literacies with youth. For example, a sample of stated aims and purposes for youth media programs demonstrate vague, broad, and competing missions. These range from giving youth a voice to creative self-expression, social activism, learning, vocational training, youth development, public health, and life skill training.¹⁴

Although these factors can coexist in the same program, they can also challenge the underlying goals and values of an organization, strain capacity, and create tensions around competing assumptions. For example, a social activist mission to distribute pro-social messages may have divergent priorities from those of a media arts program that strives to support personal self-expression through the aesthetic, rather than the

¹¹ Educational Development Center, 2007; YouthLearn & Educational Development Center, 2006.

¹² O'Bryne, 2007.

¹³ Buckingham, 2001; Domaille & Buckingham, 2001; UNESCO, 1982.

¹⁴ Inouye et al., 2004; Tyner & Mokund, 2004.

narrative, quality of the product. Or, a vocational training program may have more pragmatic goals than one that incorporates media activities to recruit youth into a nurturing and protective environment for general youth development. Tension around competing visions for youth media extends into organizational visions for outreach and community involvement as well.

In discussions about challenges at the implementation level, decisions about the autonomy of youth- versus adult-direction are a recurring theme. Although author Marc Prensky's idea that baby boomers are digital immigrants and young people are digital natives has been overstated, the idea does resonate with youth media providers, especially in formal education environments.¹⁵ The commonplace uses of digital media by young people and the assumption that youth media is a student-directed endeavor calls into question the role of youths as decision makers at every stage.

Many youth media organizations already struggle with the balance between adult- and youth-direction. In a digital world, the lessons learned from their efforts can be used to advance programs in any field. An example of the way researchers might handle this consideration can be found in a study of international, community-based initiatives for UNESCO conducted by researcher Sanjay Asthana:

The focus was on initiatives that considered youth as active agents, rather than “persons in the making.”...The primary focus of the initiatives centered on how young people understand and interpret their own lifeworlds and the social world that they inhabit.¹⁶

Even with widespread support, a number of complex, multi-variant factors can confound the goal of efficient data collection for the field of youth media. Its sheer diversity of purposes, theories, practices, audiences, and technologies are both a blessing and a curse for field-building efforts. These challenges can be negotiated for small-scale evaluation projects, but become increasingly problematic for larger-scale samples and longitudinal research. At the least, some consensus around the operational definitions of youth media concepts, theories, practices, and outcomes are useful as researchers work with practitioners to form coherent research questions. The good news is that researchers relish the opportunity to enter new domains to observe and record the boundaries of an emerging field.

As practitioners move to more uses of a wider range of media, the task becomes more interesting. In the 2004 NAMAC survey, respondents were asked to prioritize their uses of various media. Forty-one percent of the sample (n=59) reported that they were most likely to use computer-based multimedia, followed by 37% who reported using a combination of analog and digital. Organizations that used radio, analog, and photography were also represented in the survey.¹⁷ Two years later, in an unpublished follow-up of 49 organizations, 54% of the respondents reported that they were most likely to use computer-based multimedia, followed by 20% who reported a combination of analog and digital.¹⁸ Although not a representative sample for comparison, the survey data provides intriguing indications that a shift from analog to digital is taking place in youth media organizations and provides grounds for future research.

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¹⁵ Prensky, 2001.

¹⁶ Asthana, 2006, p. 10.

¹⁷ Tyner & Mokund, 2004.

¹⁸ Tyner, 2006.

While it is true that technology tools do not determine the program, it would be naïve to completely dismiss the logistics and influence that tools have on both content and the learning environment. While tools can be used for both good and bad purposes, they are far from invisible in the communication process. More research must be done to identify the relationship between the medium used and successful program designs. For example, does youth radio in a vocational setting benefit from more apprentice-type tasks and deadline-driven work than does video documentary production in an after-school setting? What is the added value of upgrading a Web site with social networking capability? What is considered acceptable quality for each medium, and who decides? What gaming software best fits the prior learning styles of girls in an underperforming school? Answers to questions about the way specific communication tools interact with learning environments contribute to successful implementation on a global level and help to define and refine program decisions at the grassroots level.

Obviously, more opportunities for networking, dialogue, and examples of successful practice would help to reconcile differences in definitions, aims, theories, practices, and outcomes in the field of youth media. However, with a field in flux, underlying assumptions about the value of youth media provide interesting challenges to researchers as they work with practitioners to design projects for data collection.

Suggestions for a Research-Based Field-Building Agenda

With so much to do, it is useful to outline some broad priorities to research in the field. One suggestion is to draw from research conducted in related fields, such as media education, educational technology, and new media literacy. Focused efforts that could be used to support and build the field of youth media may include:

Statewide inventories of existing media education. Most state educational agencies would be challenged to present hard data on the number and kind of media production tasks and programs taking place in their states. What is needed is a large sample survey to map the level of commitment and advocacy to youth media in public schools and after-school programs. Partnerships with professional organizations for teachers, school boards, and administrators would strengthen the effort. In addition to qualitative information that can be used to argue for need and impact, quantitative data of this type helps to lay out parameters to define and shape the field.

Tracking changes in teacher preparation. In order to assess new media literacy trends in credentialing programs for prospective teachers, it is useful to identify and describe existing efforts by adding tags and indicators to central state and federal databases. As a crosscutting activity, media studies of this type would undoubtedly be a multidisciplinary effort. The data could be used to track changes in policy, state standards, and related university requirements over time. Data of this type helps to professionalize the field.

Strategic partnerships to share expertise, data, and cross-training. Research and evaluation undoubtedly stretch the capacity of youth media organizations. However, successful partnerships with universities and research and development firms provide affordable expertise that can be used to plan and implement ongoing data collection. In many cases, tenure-track researchers and graduate students will be happy to work with nonprofits pro bono in order to collect and publish the results. In the process, researchers and practitioners can cross-train as they become stakeholders and advocates for the field. Strategic partnerships build organizational capacity and contribute to the sustainability of community-based organizations by enhancing program quality and increasing a broader spectrum of community involvement. In the process,

successful partnerships also attract the interest of donors and volunteers.

Collective data collection. Peer-to-peer networks provide unique opportunities to collect and share data. Ideally, a peer network would come up with common measurement indicators and then aggregate and compare results. Over time, it is useful to establish a cross-program archive for storage and retrieval of evaluation studies related to best practices and lessons learned in the field. Larger, coherent samples of this type are easier to generalize and use to support program improvement, as well as larger policy decisions.

Innovative test beds and pilot. The field has no shortage of innovative programs. Some of these could be used to study experimental ideas related to the design of successful youth media programs. Theories related to pedagogy, medium, audience, and distribution could be built into the research design, isolated, and tested in small pilot programs before opening them up to the field. In other words, this is an opportunity to test the viability of a number of field-building strategies before rolling them out to a larger network of practitioners. For example, the uses of authentic assessment strategies could be demonstrated and studied as an alternative approach for formal educators. When shared with practitioners, promising practices can reverberate throughout the field, resulting in widespread program improvement and innovation.

Innovative funding strategies. Most youth media organizations depend on philanthropy to accomplish their missions. Innovative funding strategies such as tax incentives for media corporations, paid work for young people, and royalties and fees for student-produced work are on the horizon. Implementing new strategies of this type requires evidence of cost benefit that can be used by businesses, policymakers, and legislators to refine, shape, and drive funding priorities over time.

As interest builds around the potential for media produced by youth, it becomes all the more critical that advocates have the evidence they need to argue for its continued success. In a rapidly changing media environment, strategies to track, record, and reflect on youth media practices are all the more critical to student-centered program implementation. As Professor of Education David Buckingham notes, “Media education practice should obviously reflect current theoretical advances in our understanding of young people’s relationships with media.”¹⁹

With the burgeoning adoption of digital literacy practices in a flat world, the field of youth media will undoubtedly build on its own momentum. An embedded strategy for ongoing research, dissemination, and development at both the grassroots and global levels will ensure that the emerging field of youth media moves forward on an authentic, rewarding, and sustainable foundation.

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¹⁹ Buckingham, 2006, p. 14.

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Photo courtesy of Global Action Project, NYC



Photo courtesy of Educational Video Center, NYC

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Real Girls Media

Interview: Monique Peterson

Real Girls Media (RGM) is a media network that provides a new way for women—young and older—to reach out, connect, and share their experiences in a vibrant web community that enables women to publish their stories.

RGM seeks to connect the real voices of women from often marginalized demographics through an online community. “DivineCaroline,” the first of several websites within the network, currently has thousands of stories posted from women across the US and globe. The site officially launched in February 2007. RGM will soon offer multiple sites and resources serving different age groups—including young girls.

YMR caught up with Editor-in-Chief Monique Peterson, who travels between Brooklyn, New York and San Francisco, California, to discuss RGM’s network in its initial stages and how the youth media field can learn from their first giant steps.

YMR: How did Real Girls Media (RGM) come about?

Peterson: Our CEO, Kate Thorp had a vision for a way to meet the needs of the largest and fastest growing online demographic: women. The core mission of RGM is to provide a platform for women to have their voices heard. Women have been grossly underserved in the marketplace and we lead complex lives.

We did massive research on women’s needs, the way women communicate, the way women spend money, the way women gather and share information, and ultimately, what women wish they could experience on the internet if given the opportunity. The first of our Web sites, www.DivineCaroline.com, is dedicated to adult women. Two

new sites are in the pipeline that will be dedicated to younger women and girls.

We have an interest in how women use the internet, communicate with one another, and have a vocal platform. Check out www.realgirlsmedia.com to read about our founders who are Web 1.0 veterans and quickly raising the bar for Web 2.0.

YMR: RGM connects young women to share their experiences and publish “like real pros.” How do you reach these goals? What methods do you use?

Peterson: Contributing a story to the Web site is simple. It takes a moment to register, and upon doing so, members get a private “Studio” where they can manage information about themselves, collect favorite authors or articles, publish stories, post comments, and keep track of forums they are participating in.

To publish a story, you can click a “Contribute” button, which will open a story editor page. From there, you can add a title, write in a text box or copy and paste a document into the text box, select a picture, determine where you would like the story to appear on the Web site, and then click a “Submit” button for publication.

From there, the stories get uploaded onto the site and the author is notified by email when the story is published. These steps are all made possible by our amazing engineering team. Our technology allows us to make major changes to our site every 2-3 weeks.

Women can publish their stories on DivineCaroline where their voices are as equally accessible as professional editorial writers. Like YMR, readers can post comments and responses—building community.

YMR: In what news ways are Real Girls Media helping young women (and teenage girls) reach out, find out, and express themselves?

Peterson: Our site allows anyone to publish stories, articles, fiction, poetry, or musings. Readers generally will be able to see their stories appear on the site within a day of submitting for publication. Any woman can write a review of a product, place, or service, and post them instantly on the site. It is about getting your voice heard.

Everyone is welcome to comment on stories and participate in forums. Additionally, every registered member (registration is free) gets a personal profile page where she can save her favorite stories, tell readers about herself, and also collect her own published articles (with a feature called “My Publicist”) and send them out as a calling card to others who might be interested in seeing writing clips. We also have a “Message Center” that allows readers on the site to contact other members and drop them a note in a private mail box. And this is just the beginning.

YMR: Does RGM connect young teenage girls with women from DivineCaroline? How does RGM benefit teen girls and young women?

Peterson: DivineCaroline has several partners and organizations whose mission is symbiotic with ours. Many of the articles we have on the site promote awareness of mentoring opportunities. When we launch our sites for younger women and girls, we will have more cross connections and opportunities with women and organizations that can support mentoring and career opportunities, as well as role models.

The platform for the younger demographic will be similarly structured to DivineCaroline. Young girls will have contacts through various partnerships represented on the site. Since young people can contact other members through the network via comments on articles or personal messages, they will become an important part of the online community.

Reaching out to youth interested in careers in technology or journalism (having a voice on the web) takes participation. There are different ways to participate in the RGM environment—one way is to become a user. A lot of writers have become prolific authors on DivineCaroline—and now they have a platform to do it. Youth can participate to get a sense of what it takes and what it is like to be a writer and be aware of media in this environment.

Youth media can help address these issues by becoming part of our online community, becoming familiar with programs that empower girls, and teaching young women how to use the web to express themselves.

By participating, young women can make inroads toward jobs in technology or journalism. By using DivineCaroline’s “My Publicist” feature, youth can send a portfolio of their published stories to editors or youth media professionals in order to get an internship or showcase their expertise through their writing.

It has been interesting to see what women are sending to be published in DivineCaroline. They are writing about abuse, mental illness, eating disorders—topics that have often been silent, rendered stigma and taboo. This is similar to young people, who document these experiences in writing, radio, music and video. A community is ready to receive this information—and provide an important platform for youth to benefit from.

YMR: What can RGM offer to youth media professionals as a best practice/lesson learned?

Peterson: With the dawn of a new era in technology and communication, we are seeing a major shift in the way people get, share, and communicate information. Specifically, we are seeing newspaper and magazine circulations drop, more people relying on the Web for news and information, and a surge of social networking sites. Anyone interested in the history and future of communications would benefit by seeing how technology is playing a role in the way news, information, and entertainment is

gathered and reported. The rise of blogs and subjective reporting raises new questions about ethics and objectivity in traditional journalism. In many ways we are seeing a democratization of information. There are positives and negatives with every paradigm shift, and I think it is important to be continually aware of how the medium affects the message.

We are providing a new way to bridge marginalized communities to share perspective and promote change. We have an ever increasing ability to have a collective and vibrant voice and dialogue. It will be interesting to see how this grows. As we are in a vastly different place now than we were five years ago, we will be in a radically different place five years from now. As media professionals, we must be constantly aware of how media represents messages and how we interpret those messages, how we process that information as individuals and as a society—and as *youth* media professionals. Everyone has a different goal in mind, which affects how that information is processed.

YMR: How can youth media professionals assist RGM, be involved, and what else can they gain from RGM?

Peterson: We envision many inroads and bridges for mentoring, partnerships, and sharing resources among many communities that join our network. I suggest that youth media professionals join us, contribute, and participate. What's to gain? Community, having your voice heard, reaching a wide audience, strengthening your professional experience, and tapping into a growing network of amazing women—young and old.

Monique Peterson is the editor-in-chief of DivineCaroline at Real Girls Media. She has written and edited books on film, television, animation, pop culture, art, sports, health, medicine, cooking, crafts, architecture, celebrity, science, sexuality, education, parenting, gardening, and history. Monique has been a lecturer at universities including Stanford and has been a broadcast journalist for Napa Valley's KVON radio station.

Beyond Luck: Youth Media Careers for Alumni

By: Ingrid Hu Dahl

Kellon Innocent is a youth media educator at Educational Video Center (EVC) who learned first hand the impact youth media organizations can have on young people. Kellon came to work for EVC by what he views as 'chance'—when his skills as a teen participating in EVC's documentary workshop were identified by a media practitioner.

Kellon knew he wanted to have a career in film, video, and technology. When introduced to EVC, his vision shifted to becoming a youth media educator. His experiences showed him the ways video can affect community, one's peers, and confront social issues head on.

Growing up in the Bronx, Kellon noticed

crack cocaine getting sold openly in the streets and that many people kept within the confines of their comfort zones within each neighborhood. He explains, "[There were issues that] always bothered me [growing up] but I didn't know how to express that. And video was a way for me to express it."

At the age of 19, Kellon took a three-credit internship at EVC to participate in EVC's Documentary Workshop. Having been interested in film and the technical end of filmmaking, it made sense to him and his school counselor to connect his interest with video by interning at EVC.

He explains, "I interned without the intention of returning—and then I fell in love with it.

Having a finished product was an accomplishment. This was very different from what I experienced in school. Maybe I am still awe-struck.”

However, at EVC, Kellon learned much beyond the technical side of video. He learned to encourage his peers to become civically engaged as they explored questions such as: What are the issues that affect young people's daily lives? How can young people become involved in their community? What are some of the many different ways youth are expressing their socio-political beliefs and making change?

That year, Kellon was one among 60 NYC students that learned to shoot and edit documentaries on issues that impacted their lives as urban teens. And he is the only one among those who soon after, landed a paid position at EVC.

First, EVC offered Kellon the same number of school credits as the documentary workshop if he returned to assist instructors the following semester. Since he had skills in technology, he also helped out as an equipment technician. And then, one day the equipment manager position opened and Kellon was in a perfect place to fill it. Shortly thereafter, Kellon became a teaching assistant, educating youth the way he once was.

He explains, “Opportunities were given to me and I kept saying *yes*. I was riding the opportunities. I was lucky; things just fell into place for me.”

Kellon explains that when he became a staff person at EVC as a teaching assistant:

I [realized I wanted] this career but I [just] didn't know [that it was a possibility]. And all of the sudden, it became what I wanted to do. I can't see myself doing anything else now. I like going to work. Despite the long hours—at the end of the day, I still want to return. And it's not just about the video [or teaching young people to] become professionals in the medium—it's a lot more. Before, I was making student filmmakers. But, I realized that wasn't the thing to do. It [is] about making concerned and aware citizens [that can] express and analyze [the

issues they see].

One of Kellon's goals is to start his own youth media organization. Like Steven Goodman—the founder and executive director of EVC—Kellon hopes to take his insights and skills and use them to improve the communities that do not have the tools to produce media that can “speak” on behalf of their experiences, issues, and perspectives. He explains, “I want to go back into my community and offer tools like cameras, editing, and start a production bus that goes into different neighborhoods in NYC. I owe it to people to go back and show them how to do this—[through] the vehicle I know—which is video.”

Kellon was drawn to each opportunity to be more involved with EVC as a result of the people and environment at the organization. However, he cautions, “It shouldn't have just been chance that I got into this position in the field. There needs to be more of these opportunities [for young people and alumni].”

Kellon suggests the youth media field might encourage and create careers in youth media. To professionals and other youth media educators, Kellon states:

Keep alumni close and involved after programs complete. Create opportunities after programs end to keep alums within the profession and involved in the program. [In addition, youth want to] learn about fund development. As students, we don't know that end of youth media organizations—it's assumed that the organization just has a lot of money. I myself don't know how much money it takes to run a program.

To young people involved in youth media organizations, Kellon suggests, “get in, start from the bottom, and jump at opportunities. Stay in touch with the organization and get involved. People recommend you. Once you are in the field, everyone knows you. Do your work.”

Kellon Innocent is one of few youth media alumni that find career paths at the same organiza-

tions that inspired them as teens. In his case, both sides relied on individual pro-activity. Had it not been for a practitioner at EVC to recommend a position to Kellon and for Kellon to be open to the opportunity, such a career path may not have existed. Similar opportunities have occurred for other young people to become youth media educators like Kellon. However, young people are often unaware of careers in youth media—even when they work closely with educators, mentors, instructors, professionals, and staff.

Structurally integrating career development and youth media vocation within organizations would be an asset to sustaining, expanding, and growing the field. Some youth media programs have developed career pathways, such as Global Action Project, DCTV, and Ghetto Film School. But why hasn't the entire field developed concrete career pathways for the young people they serve?

Meghan McDermott, the executive director of Global Action Project explains:

The trick is the mission and approach of the organization. Is it structured to be a pipeline to the industry or is the focus on creative exploration? Or both? For many, it's hard to add a career development component because it can require specialized capacity on the part of staff, but some organizations have taken manageable steps such as allocating general operating funds to youth scholarships or seeking grants to stipend intern and fellowship positions. At G.A.P., we hire program alum as staff. This next step within the organization reflects their leadership as well as offers a concrete way to reach future goals.

Not all organizations can build extensive, holistic career development programs. "The nice thing is people are doing many different things—hiring young people as interns, creating scholarships and fellowships, partnering with college prep organizations, and linking to outside resources," explains McDermott.

Some organizations might not have any

career development opportunities. For some, the capacity is not there. Others do not have significant funding. Still others, would be moving away from the mission and vision of their organization if they did this programming. Youth media professionals are focused on making good youth media programs—spending funding on training young people, providing media technology, and maintaining the capacity to keep excellent instructors and staff on board. It takes additional resources, funding, and organizational capacity to launch major career development programs in youth media.

However, figuring out how to support those organizations which want to and should incorporate career planning and development programming is critical to the success of the field. Organizations and allies can start by opening dialogue about the issue and by making the case to funders and partners. It is clearly a valuable, and often life changing experience, when a young person experiences their first step in building a youth media career, but these experiences should not just be reserved for the few.

It makes sense that opportunities (such as Kellon's) come off as chance partly because young people and positions in the field are transient. Teens are in programs for a short duration of time, such as a semester-long workshop, and upon completion, disperse. During these programs, work is rigorous amongst peers working to get the final product done. As a result, the chances for proactive exchanges between teens and practitioners that lead to career opportunities are rare and easy to let pass. Organizations must find creative ways to make such opportunities sustainable for young people and the field—taking luck out of the equation.

Ingrid Hu Dahl is the editor of Youth Media Reporter and a founding member of the Willie Mae Rock Camp for Girls in Brooklyn, New York. She has an M.A. in Women's & Gender Studies and is the guitarist in the band Boyskout.

The Reel Spotlight: What Oprah Missed in Praising Teen Filmmaker

By: Ingrid Hu Dahl

You know you have made it if Oprah is booking you on her show. With last week's Oprah spotlighting Kiri Davis' film *A Girl Like Me*, the value of youth media must finally be recognized by mainstream America. Or has it?

At the age of 17, Kiri's representation of current issues on race and beauty has garnered major media attention, from *Cosmo Girl Magazine*, *Ebony*, *CNN*, *GMA* to National Public Radio, and even influencing the recent launch of Oprah's "O girl, O beautiful" campaign.

Kiri's success and talent is undeniable, however, it is a bit disconcerting when the only mention of the context and support for her film production on last week's Oprah was a brief flash of "Reel Works Teen Filmmaking" across Kiri's piece. This silent mention barely paid homage to the youth media organization where the film was incubated, and given life. No where in the discussion of Davis' film was mention of *how* the film took shape at Reel Works. Somehow, the fact that Reel Works provides a professional filmmaker to mentor young filmmakers (like Kiri Davis) was left unmentioned. Quickly disappearing on the screen, Reel Works and its vital role in *A Girl Like Me*, as well as an opportunity for the process and value of youth media to be recognized by viewers, was lost.

Youth need and deserve recognition and a platform for voice in mainstream media—but so do youth media organizations.

Having visited the small house above the YMCA in Brooklyn, New York where Reel Works Teen Filmmaking thrives, I wonder if Oprah and crew would have taken time to visit the nesting ground of where *A Girl Like Me* took shape. After contacting *Harpo Productions* to see if in fact, Oprah's crew did visit Reel Works the calls and

emails still remain unanswered.

Upon speaking with Reel Works Teen Filmmaking executive director John Williams about the Oprah piece, he informed me that it was quite difficult to request that "Reel Works Teen Filmmaking" appear on the Oprah segment of Davis' film.

Why would Oprah have a hard time representing Reel Works? This question led to others, such as, how can youth media organizations survive, if they are not recognized for supporting an environment fostering youth voice? If youth media organizations do the work of financially supporting and developing youth to identify and express societal problems through media, why are they not represented in mainstream media?

As John Williams explains in a recent interview with YMR:

It is natural when a film like *A Girl Like Me* is written about [and given public attention] that the focus is on the [issue represented] and the unique perspective that a young filmmaker brings to a topic like race. What is lost, often, is the context within which the film is made: a youth media program like Reel Works.

Williams continues:

So much is written about the democratization of media through digital technology and internet distribution like *YouTube*. But, of course, it's very rare to find youth media—or any user-created media—on these portals that tell us something important, that contribute to the public dialogue on issues that are important for our society, our

democracy. But at Reel Works—and other youth media organizations such as DCTV, GAP, and EVC—young people are telling vital, important stories every day. We do it 30 times a year.

He states, “Kiri, for all her brilliance as a serious, talented young woman, would not have made *A Girl Like Me* on her own (as it is sometimes suggested in the recent press written about her). Only within the context of the Lab, could this movie have been made.”

The Lab is a course at Reel Works Teen Filmmaking where teens become active creators of media. The Lab offers an opportunity for young people to re-create themselves and transcend the labels that others, or society, have placed on them. In telling their stories, young people are able to bring order and meaning to the central questions of their lives and experience, where, according to Williams, “their creative energy can be a greater force than their problems.”

Kiri Davis participated in The Lab course and Filmmaker Mentorship program at Reel Works. The Filmmaker Mentorship program offers students individualized attention where they learn career options available in the film and television industry but more importantly, leave the class with a real product encompassing what they have learned.

Williams explains, “At Reel Works, [providing opportunities to work with] mentors like Shola Lynch—who suggested that Kiri reproduce the doll test [in *A Girl Like Me*—helped Kiri shape her story, her questions, and edit her film into the final form that has been seen by over a million viewers in the past year.”

Upon interviewing filmmaker Shola Lynch about her experience mentoring Kiri Davis, she states, “What I liked about *A Girl Like Me*—the film was an expression of Kiri’s mind and where she was at the time. My job was to facilitate her work—she was the director. We met once a week to talk about film, outlines, the concept of audience (all of which filmmakers think about). Ultimately,

she pulled everything together.”

Even though ultimately, young people write, shoot, and edit films through Reel Works, the organization provides a very unique opportunity for one-on-one dialogue and mentoring with professional filmmakers. These professionals support young people and provide guidance as teens take leadership on making their own films.

These filmmakers make a big commitment and as a result, often have a major impact on young people. Each filmmaker volunteers their time and meets with teens once a week for five months. This year, Reel Works for the first time will be able to offer small stipends for these dedicated mentors to continue to serve at-risk youth filmmakers. Shola Lynch explains:

[When I applied to be a mentor at Reel Works] I had just finished a film and wanted to work with a young person that didn’t have an ulterior motive. At Reel Works Teen Filmmaking, everything is structured and set in motion for young people. The program provides discipline and knowledge—something that not all filmmakers have. At Reel Works, teens can really focus on the joy, art and expression [of making a film].

It is clear that at Reel Works, adult allies in youth media and mentors pave the way for teen filmmakers such as Kiri Davis to make a film like *A Girl Like Me*. Mainstream media spokespeople, such as Oprah, should recognize their efforts and spotlight youth media organizations and the context supporting the creation of such powerful youth produced films.

As John Williams explains:

It is important to acknowledge that these youth films that rise above the youth media ghetto and get real national attention are produced within a specific context, and that youth media educators have a role in challenging young people to tell stories that are important to them, to channel their tal-

ents into the service of narratives that have value for the broader community.

It is natural for tensions such as these to arise. Youth media organizations work to support the success of teens and their own expressive media—to have a voice in society—but in order to sustain and amplify this type of work, these organizations must be recognized. Even larger numbers of smart, focused teen filmmakers will surface in the mainstream as a result.

When young people's media becomes powerful—when it raises issues, re-visits stereo-

types on beauty and race, and has the power to influence popular icons like Oprah—the “reel” spotlight must also showcase youth media organizations. Undoubtedly, these organizations—comprised of dedicated professionals and mentors in the field—are what will make more pivotal teen films like Davis' *A Girl Like Me* come to life.

Ingrid Hu Dahl is the editor of Youth Media Reporter and a founding member of the Willie Mae Rock Camp for Girls in Brooklyn, New York. She has an M.A. in Women's & Gender Studies and is the guitarist in the band Boyskout.

Incorporating Youth in Fundraising

By: Zoë Hayes

As a volunteer with a youth media nonprofit organization, I have witnessed the capacity of people to give—both of time and money.

Most kids have had some experience fundraising, whether it is going door to door to sell Girl Scout cookies or calling up relatives to sell magazine subscriptions.

But when faced with trying to raise over \$20,000 to report on issues of young people in a foreign country, fundraising takes on a whole new dimension. It becomes less of a chore, more urgent and, at the same time, more challenging.

Early last summer, the 120 members of Y-Press, a youth journalism nonprofit organization located in *The Indianapolis* (Ind.) Star building, approved an in-depth reporting trip to learn firsthand from young people about life in West Africa.

The six-member team's proposal goal was to travel to Benin, a small democratic nation between Togo and Nigeria. Benin was of interest for several reasons. It is poor, numbering 163 out of 177 countries in the 2006 United Nation's Human Development Index; it has had peaceful transitions when changing from a socialist to democratic government in the late 1980s; and 46 percent of its

population is under the age of 15. It is the stories of these youth, and the future of their country that we wanted to share.

This wasn't the nonprofit organization's first time traveling overseas for a story. Since the first report in 1991 about Kuwait's youth, a process has been crafted which includes submitting proposals and defending the ideas with peers and the board.

Proposal teams with at least two members submit an idea before November's storyboard, a monthly gathering at which Y-Press members consider possible stories and vote to determine coverage. If the proposal is approved, the team crafts a three-page document outlining its reporting goals, which is due before the first of the year. Each team presents a lengthy packet, which includes preliminary questions, background on the geographic area, and logistics such as destination cities they would visit, possible fundraising sources, sources for interviews and travel expenses.

Once completed, bureau members vote for the idea that they believe is most akin to Y-Press story criteria and is relevant to readers.

Last year, Benin was chosen after staff

and Y-Press board of directors' members cast a tie-breaking vote. The story we wanted to report wasn't about AIDS or poverty. We wanted to focus on Beninese youth and their determination to improve their country; we wanted to talk about citizenship and issues that they faced.

Once approved, the team realized it had to involve a much larger community in order to raise, in a fairly short window of time, the amount of money required to travel. While every story that Y-Press covers isn't in its own backyard, the cost of travel to Africa is inordinately expensive. We had to find people who understood the significance of the report and its importance to paint a clear picture of our perceived work in Africa. These would be unique funders with a passion for the story, who had confidence in youth to tell it.

In today's fundraising environment, travel dollars are hard to find and secure and many foundations do not allocate funds for travel.

In the search for sponsorship of our coverage, we contacted everyone who we thought would have the passion for the story, for youth journalism, or those with the simple desire to hear the voices we knew we'd find.

In the course of fundraising for this trip, we spent hours on the phone with men and women from various organizations who could not give us money, but who were willing to help us look further for contributions. This was, in itself, a form of giving.

When we did finally raise the money, however, it was a great lesson about the power of networking. Many of our contacts were given to us by others and people who couldn't donate themselves, but wanted to see us cover this issue.

It is important to note that youth who volunteer for Y-Press are giving their time. In 2006, for example, the 120 Y-Press members contributed nearly 6,000 hours. As a teen featured in a Y-Press story on youth philanthropy said, "I don't believe a philanthropist necessarily has to be wealthy. You can be poor. You can be middle class. I'm learning about how you can invest time; there's such a thing called 'time dollars.'"

Much of our success is due to youth willing to donate these "time dollars" at every level of the organization. For example, the majority of our story ideas come from members. Bureau members understand that youth involvement at many levels is a key to youth-media organization's continued success. Y-Pressers helped write funding proposals and gave presentations about the organization to current and potential sponsors.

Four youth represent Y-Press members on the Y-Press board, shadowing and assisting the executive committee and attending dozens of meetings to discuss the bureau's future plans. We believe that student involvement is itself philanthropy—a donation of time, talent, and treasures.

In Benin, we were able to record more than 100 interviews with youth in cities and villages in Benin, write five stories, record video pieces (accessible at *The Indianapolis Star's* Web site: www.indystar.com/yppress) and produce radio commentaries (www.wfyi.org/podcasts/default.asp) for our local National Public Radio station—in addition to travel blogs and photographs.

We didn't just raise money for our trip to Benin—we raised awareness for Y-Press, and the power of youth journalism, on a national and global scale.

* * *

For young media makers like Zoë, journalism activities are often sandwiched between school responsibilities and life as a teenager. Adding fundraising to this packed schedule is challenging at best.

So why then did these Y-Pressers take on raising \$25,000?

One of Y-Press's tenets is pride of ownership. Like a professional news organization, its youth members conceive story ideas, answer phones, arrange interviews, write and ask effective questions and produce articles. Members learn how to run meetings and how to make connections with people their own ages and older. They also learn that as

youth they can make a difference and take responsibility for decisions. Maintaining this youth-driven model is essential to the organization's integrity and viability.

Fundraising is an extension of this core belief. The key to the Benin team's success was their passion and desire to tell a compelling story—a story of the country's young people who are civically engaged, value education, and are involved in their fledgling democracy.

Like all other Y-Press projects, fundraising is a collaborative effort and needs to be youth-driven. We have learned over 18 years that if young people are not invested in Y-Press projects, they will have limited responsibility to see them through.

Sean Hankerson, Y-Press alumnus explains:

[Y-Press] staff [was careful not to] step in and tell us what to do. This is a really important quality. When you are working with young people it is easy to go in and want to take over. But they helped us to learn [to lead] ourselves.

From writing letters to solicit funds, brainstorming sources with parents, networking with professionals, and identifying potential funding sources, these young people know that they were the key to Benin's success.

Keisha Mitchell, another Benin team alum, explains:

So much of the time as a young person, you are being dictated to... You're told what you can't do and how things are supposed to be done. So it's really important for youth at Y-Press—or any organization—to feel like

they have a voice and control over things that are important to them.

At Y-Press, youth go beyond in-depth reporting. When Y-Press makes a presentation to a program officer or potential funder, young people are at the table. It is important that funders see the commitment of young journalists' and make a direct, personal connection with them. Young people write proposals, defend their ideas and invest themselves in connecting with in-depth journalistic issues they cover.

Not every youth media organization will take on a youth-driven fundraising component. Many young people, because of their busy lives or the lack of knowledge regarding fund development, are not always invested in raising funds for their own projects. However, by involving teen voice, leadership, and their insights on program decisions, proposal writing, and review, young people develop a deeper ownership of their work, while marketing their organization.

At Y-Press, a small team wanting to go to Benin was able to raise \$25,000 to get the stories and voices of young people in West Africa—stories they identified as important. It is possible to integrate youth in fundraising. From our experience, young people are eager to take on leadership roles and ownership of tasks, such as fundraising, in order for their projects to go live.

Lynn Sygiel is the Y-Press bureau director. In 1990, she opened the Y-Press bureau, located in Indianapolis, Indiana, which until 1999 was Children's Express bureau. In one of her past careers, she worked for The Salem Evening News in Massachusetts.

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The National Media Education Conference Helps Strengthen the Field

By: Renee Hobbs and Michael Robb Grieco

What happens when over 300 classroom teachers, college and university faculty, youth media professionals and community leaders gather for several days and nights of stimulating presentations, screenings, discussions, workshops and keynote speeches? None other than the 2007 National Media Education Conference, held in late June this year in St. Louis, Missouri, a bi-annual event brimming with research and reflections on the theory and practice of media education in a variety of school and community settings.

The theme of the four-day series of workshops and screenings was "iPods, Blogs and Beyond: Evolving Media Literacy for the 21st Century." For one of us (Robb Grieco), it was our first experience at a national gathering of media literacy educators; for another (Hobbs), it was one of perhaps a dozen such events attended over the past twenty years. We share here, briefly, our reflections on the conference, with particular focus on its relevance to readers of Youth Media Reporter.

As described in Hobbs' keynote address, there are many factors now in place that are enabling the development of media literacy in the United States and around the world. These include:

- the increasing diversity of media content, formats and genres (new genres create new opportunities for critical analysis and production)
- access to digital tools for authorship and new forms of distribution and exhibition
- widespread public awareness of need for critical thinking about new forms of online media
- state curriculum standards (now in almost every state)
- new stakeholders—nearly 1/3 of the NMEC conference registrants were first-time attendees
- recognized instructional practices, implementation processes and models for teacher education and staff development
- case studies of practice in school and after-school
- graduate programs and coursework at universities around the country.

However, media literacy educators gather at this conference every two years not only to celebrate accomplishments, but also to challenge each other, to provoke each other, and push at each other's assumptions. After all, the definition of media literacy is still contested, and it will be for quite a few years to come. Is it a skill? A competency? A set of tools? A knowledge base? Does media literacy have a particular perspective or point of view on media culture? Is media literacy a lifestyle? All these different perspectives were presented—and argued about—at the conference.

And what about the uses and purposes of media literacy? These are also still contested. At

the conference, participants viewed media literacy as a new type of literacy, as an educational approach to promote critical thinking, as a means to support the development of health and lifestyle decisions, and as an advocacy tool to push for social and political change. These different perspectives contributed to the fresh, dynamic mix of engaging ideas from people with a wide range of backgrounds and perspectives, leading to an exhilarating sense of possibility for the future of the field.

Research Expands Our Understanding of the Impact of Youth Media

One highlight of the conference was the two-day Research Summit held in conjunction with the conference, where nearly 100 scholars and graduate students gathered to share research on media literacy. Organized by Marilyn Cohen (University of Washington) and Renee Cherow-O'Leary (Teachers College, Columbia University), the research summit was the first of its kind, the result of a growing number of researchers who are exploring the impact of media literacy on children, youth, and adults.

Some of this work maps nicely onto what youth media practitioners have discovered from their own practice. For example, in her work with native American youth, Karon Sherarts has shown how, when students create media, the production process brings together the intersecting skills of writing, problem-solving, social skills, and creative/aesthetic development. In measuring learning outcomes, she showed that, with guidance from skilled adults, these programs can also generate leaps in students' self-understanding. This is a key point because, although youth media programs can be positioned to emphasize skill-building and workforce development outcomes, the key benefits may be in supporting a healthy process of identity development, socio-emotional and personal growth, particularly among minority youth.

Other research sessions also focused on youth media, including the work of Korina Jocson, an expert in adolescent literacy who is currently a postdoctoral fellow at Stanford University. Her

work examined how adolescent literacy practices are enacted in video production activities. At the Research Summit, she presented a model for examining the developmental trajectory of student learning. Technical skills, conceptual understanding and aesthetic abilities simultaneously develop during the course of a media production experience. Models like this contribute to the process of understanding how youth media production experiences can be best designed and implemented to meet clearly articulated objectives.

Another fascinating presentation was shared by Just Think, a San Francisco-based media literacy organization, who with an evaluation team from the Michael Cohen Group, developed an approach to evaluate the impact of a media arts program implemented with 16 teachers in two low-income California middle schools. This school-based program involved children in critical analysis and media production activities using digital cameras and graphic design software. In this program, media literacy was explored through an approach that was inquiry-based, using the critical questions now codified by the AMLA's Core Principles of Media Literacy Education.

Teachers participated in staff development programs that helped them practice media analysis that emphasized open-ended questioning. There was an emphasis on the development of "strong-sense critical thinking," in which critical thinking skills are applied to all texts. Based on the work of Richard Paul, strong-sense critical thinking encourages students to question even the ideas and opinions that they support. Critical thinking in the strong sense emphasizes the metacognitive and reflective processes that enable a person to have insight into his or her own cognitive and emotional responses. Throughout the four days, it was easy to see how this passion for strong-sense critical thinking is deeply shared among conference participants.

Exploring Popular Music and Personal and Social Identity

As expected, there was plenty of focus on news

media/citizenship, advertising/consumerism, media ownership/economics, and stereotypes/issues of representation. These four topics are sometimes called the “bread and butter” of media literacy education. But this year’s NMEC participants were treated to a deeper focus on issues including popular music, film, videogames, and the Internet by the many presentations and workshops offered by media literacy educators. For example, Mike Robb Grieco presented a workshop on using music for critical inquiry. He developed a high school English unit that enables students to question, explore and communicate the different ways that popular music holds power in their lives, using carefully selected clips from the popular film *High Fidelity* (2000) to promote rich discussion. In the workshop, he modeled a lesson from the curriculum where students choose the top five songs that they would want played at their funeral.

As participants enacted and then discussed the activity, it became clear our rationale for most of our choices clearly connected to the core questions of media literacy inquiry: Who is telling the story? Who is the target audience? How might different people interpret the message differently? What values are embedded in the message? What is omitted from the message? Although this particular unit did not involve youth as music producers, it did focus on students as producers of the *meanings* and power that music holds for them. Such lessons help students take greater responsibility for communicating their understanding of the meaning-making process with expressive media like popular music. Activities like this strengthen students’ ability to reflect on how music contributes to the development of a sense of personal, social and cultural identity.

New Media Literacy: Skills for Thriving in Participatory Culture

The theme of the conference was well-articulated by Henry Jenkins, director of MIT’s New Media Literacy (NML) project, who piqued attendees’ interest with his keynote speech, “What Wikipedia Can Teach Us about New Media Literacies.”

Jenkins explained how the user-generated, collaborative nature of knowledge (such as that gathered and created in the ever-growing, openly-updated sites like Wikipedia) challenges and changes traditional notions of knowledge and expertise. We are seeing a shift in the role of the expert: instead of the expert being seen as one who creates, holds and distributes knowledge, the expert is one who can navigate resources and connect areas of knowledge for collaborative problem solving. As media literacy guru Marshall McLuhan pointed out more than forty years ago, we are living at a time when the concepts of knowledge, authority and credibility are all in flux. As a result, there is new demand for expanded types of critical thinking and literacy skills, which in turn may need new pedagogical approaches. According to Jenkins, four of these new media literacy skills include:

- Collective Intelligence—the ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others towards a common goal.
- Judgment—the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information source.
- Networking—the ability to search for, synthesize and disseminate information.
- Negotiation—the ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative sets of norms.

While acknowledging debates over the credibility of user-generated knowledge in sites such as Wikipedia, Jenkins emphasized the advantages of participatory cultures in developing collective knowledge. For example, the lack of authoritative credentials in wikis often creates a greater impetus for both the author to explain how she knows what she knows and for the reader to scrutinize the basis for credibility of any given entry than most traditionally authoritative sources of knowledge offer.

According to Jenkins, collaborative, participatory sites like Wikipedia help overcome a “transparency gap” by calling attention to the *constructedness* of the media and information that they offer.

As echoed by many conference participants at this year’s NMEC, new media are changing the nature of writing and knowledge production towards becoming increasingly public and collaborative endeavors. This keynote address invited media educators to address the participation gap by providing all youth the opportunities to participate in such knowledge production and to develop new instructional approaches to examine the ethical issues such participation raises.

Media Literacy and Global Initiatives

As the largest regular gathering of media literacy educators, the National Media Education Conference drew participants and presenters from England, Canada, New Zealand, South Korea, China, Argentina and many other nations. Paul Mihailidis, director of Media Literacy Initiatives at the International Center for Media and the Public Agenda (University of Maryland) described a new program set to begin this summer in Salzburg, Austria. It brings together faculty and undergraduate students from six continents for a three-week media literacy course with an emphasis on global media and change.

One of the goals of the institute is for students and faculty to collaborate on the development of a media literacy curriculum for undergraduate students which they will bring back and implement at their respective universities. When asked by an attendee at his workshop, “How will students from such different cultural backgrounds and media landscapes share understandings of the media literacy skills needed for change?” Mihailidis responded optimistically, “That’s what we will find out!”

In a sense, Mihailidis’s goal to explore the implications of media literacy on a global scale is similar to the goal of the conference organizers of the National Media Education Conference. By sharing our experiences and questioning our assumptions, we can grow and learn from one another, finding opportunities to strengthen our own practice and develop the capacity to bring media literacy to people in our own families, our neighborhoods and communities, and around the world.

Renee Hobbs is a professor at the Media Education Lab, Temple University School of Communications and Theater. Michael Robb Grieco is a student in the Mass Media and Communication Ph.D. program at Temple University. Contact: <http://mediaeducation-lab.com>.

Building Digital Distribution for Public Access Youth Channels

By: Andrew Lynn

These days posting video content to the internet has never been easier. Independent producers, known as videobloggers, or vodcasters, operate their own internet TV stations, syndicating regularly produced segments and shows across the web with the click of a few buttons. It would seem like practically anyone (with a camera, a computer, and

an internet connection) can get his/her voice out. However, long before there was Blip.tv, Revver, or *YouTube*, there was public access TV—local community-based cable stations.

Public access TV is a non-commercial community alternative to the mainstream media. Nationwide there are over 1,200 Public Access

television centers which provide ordinary people with the equipment and training needed to make their own television programs, and to have these programs shown on cable television. Public access TV is based on the principle that everyone has a right to freedom of expression. In a world where the media plays such an important role, public access TV allows citizens to express their First Amendment right of free speech through television.

In 1972, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for the first time described cable television as an “electronic soapbox” and guaranteed the right of communities to have access to equipment and airtime. Under this FCC decision all cable television companies must put time aside for educational and Public Access TV. This decision was based on the recognition that cable television companies use “public-rights-of-way;” cables run under public streets, on highways and on other city property. Therefore, using these public places, cable television companies must compensate the public by allowing the public to have television “access.”

Cable access is still an amazing resource for local non-commercial distribution and here in New York City, more and more youth media organizations are getting their media out over the channels of Manhattan Neighborhood Network (MNN), specifically during the block of programming on Monday evenings, Saturdays, and Sundays programmed by the Youth Channel.

Since 2000, MNN Youth Channel has been the youth-serving arm of Manhattan's public access TV center, Manhattan Neighborhood Network. We partner with schools, libraries, and community organizations to provide media production trainings and media literacy workshops to organizations in need throughout NYC. We provide an accessible non-commercial distribution outlet for New York's thriving youth media scene by showcasing a block of 20 (and growing) hours of media *by youth, for youth* every week on one of MNN's public access cable channels. On channel #34 in Manhattan or streaming live at www.mnn.org on

Monday evenings or during the days on Saturdays and Sundays, viewers can tune into the freshest productions that have been submitted by organizations around the city and across the country.

The natural extension of creating such a non-commercial distribution outlet is to develop a network of like-minded stations in local communities around the country and to begin to articulate a model of how existing access centers can begin to open their doors to those under the age of 18. MNN, being one of the first (and largest) centers to experiment with youth services, bore some of the responsibility to visualize such a network. In 2002, a collaborative project called NYMAP (the National Youth Media Access Project) was born as a partnership between MNN Youth Channel and stations in several other cities, including Atlanta, Geo, Denver, CO, Seattle, WA, St. Paul, MN, Grand Rapids, MI, and Lowell, MA.

National Youth Media Access Project

The newfound NYMAP partners developed personal relationships with one another, modeled services and programs after each other, shared resources, and began bicycling tapes from one 'youth channel' to the other (“bicycling” is when master tapes are sent via postal service from site to site, dubbed, and put on the air). NYMAP sought to nurture the right of free speech, to strengthen the much-needed presence of alternative and youth voices, and to connect young mediamakers from diverse backgrounds.

Beyond increasing the exposure of media produced was the idea that a collective national voice promoting youth media is louder than one local voice. NYMAP partners were in agreement that there was tremendous value for local non-commercial television outlets to devote programming hours to youth-produced video—a growing trend in cable access.

However, the volume of material to be bicycled became overwhelming from 2002 and beyond. Due to the lack of an existing archive or catalogue listing of what tapes were in stock, the bicycling of these tapes started to falter. As staff members

changed and internal priorities and funding scenarios shifted at the various partner sites (MNN being no exception), the sustainability of NYMAP became questionable. Though there was still sporadic tape bicycling, it had significantly declined as a result. Indeed, NYMAP was a living network of passionate individuals and cooperative organizations with great potential for collaboration, but it lacked the infrastructure to support its mission, let alone the ability to expand.

Youth Video Exchange Network

The building of the Youth Video Exchange Network (YVXN) was the answer to solve this problem. YVXN began as an examination and analysis of the needs of the existing NYMAP network. We found that, in addition to sharing programming content, there is a real interest in archiving content, sharing resources—such as curricula and administrative materials—and facilitating collaborative productions. So, in the fall of 2006, with grant support from the Ford Foundation, Manhattan Neighborhood Network's Youth Channel took a leadership role in developing the participatory web portal that would become YVXN: www.nymapexchange.net. The web portal was set to provide the bicycling of videos needed across the partnership.

The project's primary technical focus was to find a way to share high-quality videos that could be easily turned around and re-aired at an access center 1,000 miles away, without increasing a need for already-overextended staff resources. However, we wanted to create a model network that was more than a technology tool. By utilizing web 2.0 and social networking tools that would ensure (in fact, *require*) participation and content creation from its constituency, we reached our goal.

So, in mid-2006 a core group of NYMAP partners—Manhattan Neighborhood Network, St. Paul Neighborhood Network, Portland Community Media, Grand Rapids Community Media, and Atlanta's People TV—was established to create an advisory board of leading cable access partners, using the web portal as our main interface for interaction, discussion, and sharing.

Our five core NYMAP partners were brought together by a year of successful testing and troubleshooting. This test phase has seen the transfer of over 20 hours of hi-resolution youth-produced video content over the internet. Much of this programming has been played back on local channels during blocks of programming dedicated to youth-produced work. By syndicating youth-produced work from other parts of the country, creating a virtual space for cataloging work that has been produced, and providing a space for new collaborative productions, YVXN is fulfilling its mission—to support the continued exchange of youth-produced broadcast-quality video among public access centers across the country and world.

Next Steps, New Technology

This type of networking (sharing resources and content) is valuable for access organizations and viewers alike. As internal operations at Public, Educational, and Governmental (PEG) stations around the country have begun to go digital, a major identified need has been to solve problems inherent in bicycling analog programs between stations. The costs, staff demands, and timeliness of sharing programs have always limited the ability of producers to efficiently distribute programming. In the case of MNN Youth Channel, access to media shared over YVXN is a bank of material which enables us to enrich our programming block with videos from youth around the country. As a result of this exchange, young people can more accessibly represent themselves and view the perspective of teens outside their local network.

Over the next year, our focus will be on establishing a National Youth Committee, consisting of young people who will be paid a stipend to participate in and promote the YVXN website, as well as a YVXN Steering Group made up of member organizations and representatives to forge future direction of the project. The Youth Video Exchange Network will grow to be a network that not only includes Youth Access administrators, but youth producers, teachers, and community video

programmers, who can utilize hi-resolution video for non-commercial purposes.

We are currently utilizing a variety of free and open source tools for compression of shared videos, in the form of MPEG-4 files. These files are of substantially higher quality than video typically distributed and viewed on the web. As more members download the file, a peer-to-peer network is formed, allowing users to subscribe to auto-downloads, receive an email notification when a download is complete, and easily return the files to whatever format is appropriate for playback on the local public access station.

It is no surprise to media educators, administrators, and producers that emerging technologies and digital tools are changing the media landscape. Indeed, the field of youth media is on the forefront of developing a critical literacy and awareness of new media. Amidst these changes, the Youth Video Exchange Network wants to create new models of sharing our resources and media based on the values of non-commercialism and

participation. Using new technology to continue and strengthen the “public” in cable public access is spreading youth made video from a variety of demographics across the nation. Through a network of public access channels that now easily share high quality (and broadcast worthy) video amongst one another, youth voice can be shared, disseminated, and distributed as quickly as *YouTube*, but on a non-commercial community alternative to the mainstream media.

We want to explore this terrain with you. If you are a youth-producer, educator, or administrator interested in learning more about joining the network, email nymap@youthchannel.org.

Andrew Lynn lives is a media worker living in New York State. He is the technical coordinator of the Youth Video Exchange Network, and has been the education coordinator with the MNN Youth Channel for the past 3 years.

136 Creating Conversation: Baltimore Youth Explore Audience in the City

By: Grace Smith

It is critical for young people not only to produce their own media segments, but also innovatively bring the issues they raise to a broader and engaged audience. BeMore TV, a student-run media project dedicated to showcasing young people’s ideas through public access in Baltimore, MD, works to entertain, empower, and enlighten the public about issues important to youth. Realizing that television brought limitations to public discourse, young people at BeMore TV find that public access is not always the most accessible medium to reach a local community. Thus, young people at BeMore TV have sought innovative ways to distribute their episodes to a variety of audiences through the in-

ternet and grassroots distribution strategies.

BeMore TV is a project of Wide Angle Youth Media, an organization founded in 2000 by Gin Ferrara, who recognized that Baltimore “needed an organization that would do youth media in an ongoing, sustainable way.” Young people need to *use* media on a larger scale to address issues within their local community. She explains, “Often young people are the target market for what they are seeing on television. [They] need to be able to respond to that.”

Two interns from Wide Angle—Lendl Tellington and Kyle Halle-Erby—conceived BeMore TV after successfully producing a documen-

tary on student-led activism as a response to the education crisis in Baltimore in 2006.

Their documentary, “Schooling Baltimore Street,” made students realize they needed to use media to educate the public on issues that affect Baltimore from a youth perspective. Tellington, now coordinator for the BeMore TV program explains, “We wanted to find a way to develop critical work that talked about youth issues, but at a faster rate because ‘Schooling Baltimore Street’ took us almost a year to produce.”

With the guidance of mentors such as Ferrara, students researched and developed a plan for a television show. They traveled to New York City to consult other youth media organizations such as the Global Action Project, Listen Up! and the Manhattan Neighborhood Network.

After much discussion with these organizations, BeMore TV decided to air half hour episodes that would feature segments about a specific theme by youth across Baltimore. Submissions for the show—solicited across the city—would provide a platform for many young voices and give BeMore TV a finger on the pulse of issues affecting Baltimore youth.

Youth Issues, Public Access

Tellington and Halle-Erby decided to use public access television—a medium regularly viewed by many Baltimore teens—as a means to generate discussion in the local community. Airing the show on Baltimore’s Public Access would make these voices available to a wide range of people on a recurring basis. As a result, a diverse audience in the city would be exposed to the opinions and perspectives of young people, particularly on issues the young people themselves deemed of significant importance.

Co-founder Tellington describes his vision for the show’s role in the city: “Baltimore is probably one of the most geographically segregated cities, as far as having communities primarily black, and then primarily white. There are so many different communities, and they really don’t talk to each other. BeMore TV is trying to produce work

about youth, and motivate communities to talk about issues affecting youth, because most times in the news, [youth are portrayed] in a negative light.”

After successfully producing two episodes since 2006, students at BeMore TV found that Baltimore’s Public Access was not particularly public or accessible. Explains April Montebon, a MVP intern, “BeMore TV is only on Baltimore’s Public Access, and that’s only for people who have cable and who live in the city, so we had a very limited audience.” The lack of a permanent schedule provided further complications to reaching an audience. Though BeMore TV’s purpose was using television to increase access, it would have to explore other vehicles to distribute their work and increase its viewer base.

Outside the City

The youth and practitioners at BeMore TV and Wide Angle confronted these challenges through innovative dissemination techniques on-line, on paper, and in the community.

First, the youth at BeMore TV took advantage of the nationwide popularity and user-based ranking systems of sites such as *MySpace* and *YouTube*. Douglas, a student who has been working with Wide Angle Media for three years, currently working on a marketing campaign explains, “We post our videos online, so people can view and rate them. [As a result], we get more viewers; have film makers across the country and across the world as *MySpace* friends, increasing access to our videos.” For young people, networking on-line to showcase these episodes increased their ability to market media to a variety of demographics across the World Wide Web.

Though networking and marketing videos on-line taught youth at BeMore TV important skills, the internet did not lead to enough local dialogue with community members in the city of Baltimore.

As a result, in conjunction with using *MySpace* and *YouTube*, youth researched local trends in media distribution specifically for the city of Bal-

timore. Using a do-it-yourself distribution guide (www.creativealliance.org/camm/distro_guide.pdf) put together by four Baltimore youth media organizations—Wide Angle Youth Media, Creative Alliance, Kids on the Hill, and Megaphone Project—youth at BeMore TV learned that they had to have more face-to-face contact with the local community. Ferrara at Wide Angle explains:

We found that the Internet is a really great way to get outside the city, but inside the city, you have to go to people's homes. You have to go to the neighborhoods and do events either at a school or at a church or an after school site... for people to really see things.

Such findings inspired a student-written grant for a new community outreach plan, which April Montebon helped to write and obtain. In order to reach a wider audience the students came up with a yearly plan: they would make two episodes each year, which would be aired at public screenings, and help teach three workshops each year, using a peer-to-peer model. In this model, students assist the Mentoring Video Project at Wide Angle to teach youth about technology. At public screenings, youth present each episode, lead discussion on the topics they raise, and use the time to get a sense of possible future themes.

Inside the City

Montebon explains the importance of community screenings in this new approach: "The reason for a screening is, you can [sit at home and] watch something on TV... but it takes another step to have a type of forum. I think what the community screenings are supposed to serve, is a platform where people can start a sort of discourse." Airing a youth-made TV episode in a community context, such as a public park, museum, or neighborhood event, creates a potential for dialogue. It is easier for people to talk to one another about youth-led issues in a group setting, as well as engage with youth media makers on the issues they raise.

The screenings provided a context for

learning more about the local audience of Baltimore, which as times, was challenging. The youth at BeMore TV believe in the issues represented in each episode. In a youth media organization, young people are supported for such ideas, but in the community at large young people often face challenges of stereotypes and condescension.

Two types of community reactions posed challenges to the success of the screenings. Recounts Tellington, "When people hear about youth media, it's like 'Aw, the kids [are] telling stories with cameras,'" which does not take the issues young people represent within their video seriously. On the flip side, Tellington explains, "Last year there was an individual who came to the screening, which was presented as a community screening, not as youth-made work. This person got there and said, 'I thought this was a community meeting,' and broke out and left." Convincing the community that youth perspective is as valuable as any other to community success is often difficult.

BeMore TV believes young people often have more of an understanding of local city issues before these issues become part of mainstream news coverage. For example, Ferrara states, "We were talking with students about issues in schools way before it became a city-wide discussion."

Since most Baltimore residents do not realize youth are often the first to recognize real issues, BeMore TV is working on its audience to embrace young people as informers and influencers of important issues within the city of Baltimore. While Ferrara openly admits, "I'm really grateful to have some idea of what's going on for young people in Baltimore," the rest of Baltimore still needs to listen to what youth have to say.

Entertainment

The latest episode on hip-hop, the trailer for which students have already shown at two city-wide events, marks a transition in BeMore TV's approach to representing and distributing issues raised by young people.

The episode uses hip hop to both entertain and talk critically about issues. Using hip hop

draws the local Baltimore audience to learn about critical issues while having fun, which aligns with the mission of BeMore TV that values entertaining and enlightening the public about issues important to youth. “We’re trying to make a transition,” says Tellington. “We found a component in hip hop that is very entertaining, that people can relate to. We are trying to use that as a vehicle to talk to more communities. [It is about] finding that [arena] where you can talk critically, and use entertainment to get your message across.”

While results of adding entertainment to BeMore TV’s episodes has yet to be assessed, BeMore TV’s multi-faceted approach to disseminating media products is an example of how youth media organizations might distribute media *and* affect a local audience.

The young people of BeMore TV show how sometimes it is not only about making a media product—such as airing episodes on local television—but also working to realize the goal of community dialogue. In Baltimore, MD young people find that distributing their episodes on the

internet, on television, and in local screenings increases access and distribution of the issues raised in their videos.

Learning from challenges of these different approaches, young people continue to find ways to get their voices heard—helping to bring vision and perspective to the local community in Baltimore. Youth media practitioners can support young media makers by offering insight, sharing research and findings on channels of distribution and audience, as well as advocating for youth media at public and community-based screenings locally. Young people of BeMore TV are not simply representing issues in the local community; they are finding inventive ways to inspire conversation while using multiple distribution strategies to increase the range and impact of their media—with a twist of entertainment.

Grace Smith is the assistant editor at Youth Media Reporter. Born and raised in Baltimore, Smith lives in Brooklyn where she makes queer performance art and tends chickens.

An Ally for Youth When it Counts

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By: Pete Corson

Every summer since 1999, I have volunteered my services to a local youth media organization called VOX Teen Communications (VOX). My “day job” is as a news designer for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution’s* (AJC) editorial pages. I once believed that getting more youth voices on our opinion pages was a good way to grow a younger readership. However, after years of working with teens through VOX, I find myself less concerned with my employer’s circulation and more dedicated to giving young writers the best publishing experience I can.

In the summer of 2005, I had the opportunity to mentor a 16-year-old Somali girl named

Ayan Hussein get a very difficult, personal story published in our paper. The experience tested the resolve of all involved and forced some lessons on us before it was over. These lessons included how to be an advocate for young writers, how to negotiate cultural differences, how to support a teen facing outside pressures and most of all, how to guide a young writer through a large bureaucratic process with her voice intact and her spirit empowered.

Ayan and I first met as part of the Raise Your Voice Summer Program sponsored by VOX (www.voxrox.org/program/summer.html). Each summer, VOX teaches 16 teenage writers and journalists journalism fundamentals and community

leadership. One of the most popular attractions of the program is the one-on-one mentorship with news-industry professionals. As mentors, our immediate goal is to help each teen get an article published in the AJC. We coach our teens to select a topic that the paper might want to publish, give advice on how to cover the topic, and help pitch the finished article to one of our paper's section editors.

First Impressions

The subject matter Ayan wished to write about was challenging. During our initial meeting, she told me she wanted her article to be a personalized introduction to the Somali practice of female circumcision (also called female genital mutilation, or FGM). In her words, "I wanted to educate myself on what happened to me when I was 7 years old through the research that I would be doing. The article would also benefit other victims of the ritual."

Ayan took this opportunity very seriously. She explains:

[When I gave Pete my first draft], I was sure that he was going to judge me when he was done reading it. I was wrong. He said that it looked good and the only thing missing was the reliable resources and interviews from people in the community. [Female circumcision] has always been in my mind but never talked about because it is taboo. [Yet] I had stories of my personal struggle that I went through since coming to America...this was a chance to share my stories with [a wider audience].

Soon Ayan was telling me how her family was scattered between the U.S. and Kenya; how her first years in the United States were lonely and difficult; how she lived with her father and younger sister in a tiny apartment; and how her educational ambitions were at odds with her family's plans for her.

No one in her family had more than a fifth-grade education. Joining the VOX summer program made Ayan's father fearful that such ac-

tivities would westernize her beyond his recognition. Ayan explained that most young Somali women were expected to drop out of school and go to work, or marry young and start families.

I quickly realized that there was more at stake here than a writer getting something off her chest. I knew I would need a plan for how to support her without being a disrupting force on her relationships with her family, culture and community.

To that end, I decided that I would do my best to create options for her and leave as many choices as possible up to her. It was my hope that giving her options would increase her confidence and leadership as we progressed toward publication.

Choices, Choices

I explained to Ayan that we had several choices where her article could be published. If she kept a detached voice, her article could run as an explanatory news story in our weekly international section called "Atlanta & the World." This would require more research and reporting. The advantage of doing a detached, reported-news article would be to expand the scope of her writing from a first-person piece to one that would allow her to explore the context of her experience.

On the other hand, there were advantages to keeping her subjective voice too. By running her article as a first-person piece on our daily op-ed page, she would have more opportunity to reflect on her experience. We already had a daily op-ed venue for young writers called "New Attitudes" that was tried and true, but I felt that Ayan's story deserved a bigger treatment.

The third option was creating a longer piece intended for the Sunday opinion section, *@issue*. Publishing a teen writer in the *@issue* section would be new territory for the AJC, and I warned Ayan that the experience of dealing with several layers of editors could be frustrating for her. In response, Ayan only asked which venue had the largest readership. Getting her message out was paramount. As our "primetime" space, the *@issue*

section would be a gamble—we would get a larger readership, but also more scrutiny from the paper’s editors. More editors always means more changes, and I worried that we might change or even lose Ayan’s voice.

Over the next several days, I checked on Ayan as she progressed on her research. I made some suggestions on where to look for materials and asked if there was any way I could help. At times, her research was emotionally difficult. Ayan explains:

To my surprise, I realized [during my research] that there were three types of female circumcision. At one point I came across a picture taken after the procedure and I almost vomited—I could not hold back tears. I phoned Pete and I will never forget what he said. Instead of telling me to be strong or just move on and not to visit the website again, he said that I was a good writer and I have plenty of stories to work on—that female circumcision was not the only option we had.

It was still early in the process, and I reminded Ayan that we could go to Plan B if necessary. Ayan reflects, “As a result of Pete giving me options, I chose to stick with the topic. I realized that I didn’t *have* to continue [with the topic] but that I *wanted* to.”

Working with the Editor

After a round of editing, I arranged a pitch meeting between Ayan and the *@issue* editor Richard Halicks. Pitch meetings are crucial to a teen writer’s ultimate experience in the VOX summer program. Pitch meetings allow both the teen writer and editor to get to know each other—even before the article is discussed. Doing so creates a partnership, rather than introducing another authority figure for the teen to deal with. It is also a great time to discuss expectations.

Richard—a very nurturing editor—was enthusiastic about getting Ayan’s article into his section. However, he wanted to know whether her

parents knew what she was writing. Although he would not ask for their permission, he wanted to make sure that Ayan understood the consequences of making them part of her story. Ayan replied that she had discussed her article with her father, who was cool to the idea, but did not forbid it.

With that, Richard and Ayan created their own working dynamic. Richard wanted more reporting on the practice of FGM, and sent Ayan for quotes from the Somali community. Ayan seemed to enjoy working with Richard. They haggled over word choices and traded ideas over how to begin and end the piece. You would have thought she was a regular staff reporter.

Over the next two weeks, my role would be to talk to each of them separately to make sure Ayan was meeting Richard’s expectations, and that Richard’s changes were not diluting Ayan’s voice. I further mediated by touching base with staff at VOX to deliver progress reports and ensure that Ayan was not overwhelmed.

A Major Roadblock

With all parties happy with the article, and with three days before publication, Richard took the piece to his editors. The intent of this meeting was to inform the editors what was going in the *@issue* section, and also to run interference on Ayan’s behalf if those editors had any concerns. Unfortunately, they had a big one.

The editors wanted some kind of signed note—either from a doctor or parent—verifying that Ayan had the FGM procedure. In the summer of 2005, the journalism scandals involving Jayson Blair and Jack Kelley were still fresh, and for some editors, having a “good feeling” about a writer wasn’t enough (especially a young freelancer we hadn’t worked with before).

Richard and I were crestfallen. We discussed ways to change Ayan’s piece so that we would not have to ask for such verification. For instance, we could pitch it as a news story, without the personal angle. Or give the story over to VOX, which would be happy to publish it as-is in their monthly newspaper. Whatever the answer, we

would be going to press in three days regardless.

I contacted the VOX office for advice. Program director Meredith Tetloff said that she would explain the situation to Ayan, and stress that the choice was still hers. I was very thankful that VOX was there as a safety net. I knew that the concerns at VOX would be unclouded by the production concerns at my office.

A Difficult Choice

Ayan's first reaction to the news was disbelief. She explains, "At first I thought that it was a joke. But then it sunk in slowly. I understood where they were coming from. The worst part was [asking] my father to write the letter and then sign it."

Ayan became more determined to get her father's signature and I could tell she was looking for encouragement from me. I reminded her that she had choices, that the article would be published and that people would be moved wherever they read it.

Later that evening, Ayan called me. She sounded like she had just run a race. I could hear raised voices in the background. The talk had been difficult, but productive. She later told me, "It took hours of talking to [my father]. He finally signed it. I believe that he did it because deep inside he agreed with what I was doing." Though far from enthusiastic, her father had contributed his signature to a scrawled note saying that Ayan had indeed had the FGM procedure.

With that behind us, we were back on track. Ayan explains, "The next day, [I] spoke to Meredith at VOX about what had happened with my dad and she was comforting." Meredith and I paid close attention to Ayan's mood over the next week. She seemed exhausted, and as she says, "I almost changed my mind about the article but thank God I had a good support group at VOX."

A few days later, Ayan's article was published on the cover of our "primetime" *@issue* section and her mood was lifted considerably. In fact, the article led to many great things for Ayan as she entered her senior year of high school. Ayan says that although many in her community were angry

about the article, others were now coming to her to share their experiences. She explains:

I have also had open conversations about this ritual with friends, something that I could not do before. I had friends, victims of the ritual who admire me for writing the article but [whose] parents hate me for publishing the piece. I also [received] letters from people who read the article and congratulated me for my bravery. All I care about was that my message was loud and clear to both victims and strangers of female circumcision.

In the published version of Ayan's article, she writes:

I wish I had the power to prevent any other 7-year-old girl from getting circumcised. My privacy was invaded that afternoon, and it still haunts me to this day. Sharing my story is difficult, but it is an important step toward my healing.

My work with Ayan continued after the success of her article. Over the next year, she emerged as a campus leader and a hero to local Somali women. NPR (partnered with Youth Radio) broadcast a first-person segment on her story. She became involved with international and refugee groups. And she continued to write for VOX. Last fall, I began helping her copy edit college and scholarship applications. Ten months later, she is a Gates Millennial Scholar bound for the University of Georgia with a shiny new laptop.

Lessons Learned

Getting more youth writers involved in mainstream media outlets can be a challenge, but a very rewarding one. The VOX Raise Your Voice Summer Program is an excellent model in youth media/mainstream media partnership. Even with my long involvement with the program, my experience as Ayan's mentor taught me to completely rethink the value of the publishing experience and how to improve upon it for teen's benefit.

For instance, it is not enough to treat young writers with patience and “kid gloves.” Teens are up to any challenge if the right rapport is struck upfront. As with our productive pitch meeting, having teens meet with their editor(s) face-to-face creates a partnership.

Furnish teens with choices throughout the process. Put as many decisions in the teen’s hands as possible. Be clear on your expectations and what they can expect from you.

Be prepared to support teens in ways that are outside the sphere of typical journalism and editing. Also, be mindful of outside pressures affecting the teen. Tread very lightly when dealing with cultural and family connections.

Be an advocate for teens. Ask them how you can help. Run interference on their behalf when the bureaucracy threatens to swallow their voice. Give them a chance to challenge decisions. As with our productive pitch meeting, having teens meet with their editor(s) face-to-face creates a partnership.

Remember that bigger venues bring more scrutiny, more editors, more verification and more headaches. Leave yourself time to address the unexpected. And always have a Plan B at hand if it all goes south.

Along with that, tell the teen (and your superiors) what’s ahead. Despite our best efforts, this is unfortunately where Richard and I failed Ayan. Her biggest hurdle came at the very end of the process and was unduly stressful. It possibly could have been avoided had we involved our own editors earlier on.

And finally, encourage strong cooperation between the youth organization and the professional newsroom. The dual goals of teen-building and voice-raising demand it.

My experience with Ayan reminded me that youth media is a means to an end, but not the end itself. As valuable as the published artifact is, what makes the experience a lasting one for the teen is the ownership and realization of their ambitions. By providing choices, a mentor helps the teen chart their own path. Do this, and you’ll be amazed where they lead.

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More Than Ethnicity: Teaching Diverse Youth Radio in Latina/o Communities

By: Irene Tostado

“Wanted: A patient and charismatic instructor with experience in teaching journalism, media theory, and practicum to a group of 20 to 30 diverse students.” Sounds like an ideal job opportunity for an aspiring teacher, media professional or youth practitioner. So what’s the catch?

A youth media professional is not just a teacher but a combination of a technical educator, youth development expert, engineer, writer, counselor, youth advocate, and whatever else the demands of the day require. The responsibilities encountered by youth media instructors, independent of the medium taught, are complex and require the development of a culturally conscious curriculum. Teaching youth the skills necessary to work in media such as radio, requires the creation of teaching models that are sensitive and respectful of a diverse student body. Do youth media practitioners really come equipped to teach ethnically diverse classrooms?

Youth media classrooms are a combination of beliefs, attitudes, and values, which makes it challenging for instructors that create curriculum solely based on dominant American cultural patterns. A youth media program curriculum needs to be transformative, and allot for change and alteration throughout the extent of the course. Teachers must recognize that some students process information faster than others and learn differently from one another.

The catch to being a youth media instructor of a diverse classroom is that one must create their *own* model to teach and get to know students coming from multi-cultural, rich, poor, bilingual, mono-lingual, first generation, second generation, or recent immigrant backgrounds.

As a youth media producer, I have learned that the teacher, producer, practitioner or provider—however you refer to yourself in this growing field—has one main responsibility: to make sure young people learn beyond what he or she previously knew before enrolling in the program.

Youth programs are much more than instructional facilities; they are social hubs. At Radio Arte in Chicago, IL, recent immigrants learn from their native Chicagoan classmates and vice versa about American customs, mannerisms, pop-culture, sayings, history, geography, and even street grid patterns.

Teaching a diverse group of students is a major undertaking for youth media practitioners that are not fully aware of their student’s cultural practices, beliefs, and patterns, and how these influence their ability to learn and produce. In this article, language, diversity and curriculum will be explored using Radio Arte as a case study in order to understand how youth media practitioners can effectively reach differences across youth in Latino/a communities.

Radio Arte

Urban settings are cross-generational and a wide range of students at Radio Arte come from grammar school, high school, college, trade school, an alternative school or in some cases, have never even attended school. However, cultural differences between the Mexican born Spanish speaking students and the English/Spanglish speaking 2nd/3rd generation youth hinder the interaction that exists between both groups and ultimately makes the learning process slower. After only a week of class, most students separate themselves according to where they were raised, their shared

experiences, and the language they speak most fluently. Consequently, the teacher is forced not only to teach a profession, but also to encourage interaction among his/her students.

Imagine yourself, on the first day of class, in front of a roomful of Latino/a students between the ages of 15 and 21, where Spanish is a predominant language for some, while others only understand Spanish as a second language. And before your eyes, differences surface that divide the classroom. For example, at Radio Arte educators have observed and witnessed segregation amongst Latino youth. However, unlike divisions because of skin color or different interests, Latino youth in Chicago self-segregate based on where they were raised (Mexico or America), the language they prefer to use (English or Spanish), and their age group.

Students at Radio Arte are predominantly Latino, a reflection of the community where the public station is located, but ethnicity is only one factor in a demographic with many differences. We can count on enrolling a roomful of socially, ethnically, and economically diverse students with varied levels of educational proficiency that all want to learn radio, but have to be taught the same concepts differently for them to understand.

In order to address the cultural context students bring to their work at Radio Arte, producers have identified various patterns among their Spanish-speaking, recent immigrant students, which have helped them in structuring and planning their three month training course. Radio Arte offers two courses simultaneously, one in Spanish and one in English. Every year, 15 students are recruited for the Spanish class and 15 for the English course. The overall concept and information provided is the same for the English and Spanish class, but the class exercises, supplemental handouts, emphasized topic areas vary from one class to the other depending on the students' interests and knowledge of community issues.

Cultural Approaches

Radio Arte is unique in that it is a bilingual radio

station and the majority of the people within the reach of the station's frequency are recent immigrants, familiar with a Spanish journalistic style. In most Latin-American countries, group activities are encouraged, classroom discussions are vital for topic development, and contact with the facilitator outside of the classroom is commonplace. These values have been evident in Radio Arte's current Spanish speaking class. When given the choice of working in groups or individually, students prefer to work on group projects and suggest combining their productions into one larger documentary.

The English classes, which are mostly composed of first and second generation Mexican-American students who have attended school in the United States for the extent of their educational careers, tend to be more independent, working on commentaries and opinion pieces that express their individualism. As opposed to their Spanish speaking counterparts, the students in the English class emphasize competition and are more conscious of time restraints. Students in the Spanish class are more likely to continue the discussion after class is over, produce audio presentations that tell stories, and rarely argue.

Additional differences are for example, when producing a commentary; English speaking students are very direct, blunt, and frank when structuring their scripts. Each paragraph includes a premise, examples, and a concluding argument. Spanish speaking students often engage in conversation, opposed to a brief recap, as a means of discussing the content in an audio production. The choice of words, language, writing techniques and delivery styles of each student are also a reflection of their diverse backgrounds. Spanish speaking students will tend to depend on detailed observations when telling a story as opposed to English-speaking students who are more likely to include interviews and testimonies in their productions to describe what took place.

Overall, in Latin-American classrooms students use cultural filters to interpret information and assignments. For example, an American student might take the topic of freedom of expression

and produce a piece about early hip-hop, while a recent Spanish speaking student might take this opportunity to write a commentary about women workers in Mexico protesting against police corruption. Classrooms become communities where language, customs and life experiences shape student produced radio pieces.

As a result, instructors for both classes not only have to teach journalism but be open to the different styles and backgrounds of their students. Spanish speaking students born in Mexico will need to learn *about* American media while English speaking students engage with their Latin American culture and peers. An instructor must be sensitive to these differences and be approachable, open to suggestions, and extremely receptive.

By considering the differences that exist between both groups, Radio Arte's course facilitators have been able to improve student retention and promote participation. Whether it is teaching students how to perform interviews, edit audio or write commentaries, developing a curriculum for a changing society requires that the instructor assess the different ways that students capture and interpret information. Promoting open dialogue allows the practitioner to become aware of the habits, customs, and personal styles of young people.

Advising Colleagues on Diversity

Recently, I received an email from a producer at a youth-driven news organization. The message read, "Our city has a growing Hispanic population, and several immigrant populations including Burmese, Islamic and Somalian. Would you be willing to advise us on developing a curriculum that would help us teach youth of all cultures?"

My immediate response was three-fold:

Outline exactly what information you want your students to know, be patient and open-minded, and recognize, respect, and accept the different methods that students are accustomed to being taught in their native countries or homes.

By devising a curriculum that is elastic to culture, customs, and language, instructors have the advantage of being able to adjust many sets of norms and values of their diverse student body.

According to Larry Samovar and Richard Porter, authors of *Communication between Cultures*, "Learning styles and language diversity affect how students learn and participate in the educational process." Therefore, the methodology instructors partake in a diverse classroom will play a large role in determining what a student learns and if he/she learns anything at all.

Youth media producer checklist. Additional observations to consider when developing your multi-functional curriculum:

- *Understand your vocabulary and remain neutral:* This doesn't mean that you have to limit your word usage, but eliminating catch-phrases or clichés will help students of varied educational levels and language preferences understand the message that is being conveyed.
- *Provide students with supplemental handouts, pictures and bullet-point descriptions that describe the different equipment being used and common terminology.* Some students are visual learners and others are more hands-on. Students in the English class at Radio Arte learn by making mistakes. They prefer to perform a live intervention on the radio without watching a disk jockey do it first, while recent immigrants usually ask the instructor to demonstrate the process and show them how to go "live" on the air a couple of times before trying on their own. In American schools, students are taught that "Practice makes perfect," and therefore the English class students, expect to make mistakes a couple of times before being able to read a commentary flawlessly live.

- *Use different points of reference for different audiences.* Recent immigrants prefer to visit businesses and organizations, perform interviews, and use local Spanish newspapers to do research, while the English class resorts to television websites, books, professional journals, blogs and online newspapers for their information.
- *Pay attention to the diverse spectrum of knowledge in computer access and technology terminology.* By now, most people who use computers on a daily basis know how to burn an MP3 file or a WAV file onto a simple CD-R, using Windows Media Player or iTunes. Not true for some students. To make matters more complicated, some students only have access to computers once a month and knowledge of terminology is extremely limited. One possible solution is for youth radio programs to encourage students to teach young people in their community the skills gained in radio training courses.
- *Develop exercises that can involve both English and Spanish speaking students, by using audio without words, such as gathering sounds to represent words.* In radio, sound is crucial for the development of a story, independent of the language being used.
- In a diverse classroom setting where the student must report and discuss topics that involve people of all types, *be aware and knowledgeable about human traits and customs.* Therefore, the objective of any curriculum developed for the ever-changing media classroom should be to teach students not only about production techniques and best practices, but also life-skills and intercultural communication.

Before walking into a diverse media-oriented classroom, youth media instructors need to in-

clude four essential items in their backpacks and/or portfolios, including a *flexible curriculum*, a *list of possible exercises* that encourage interaction between diverse students, a *good dictionary*, and of course a *notepad* to write down *observations*.

Diversity is inevitable, and should be fostered, but just as the last names on a class roster change, the meaning of the word *diversity* is subject to interpretation. In community radio, it is not just the sound of the announcer's voice and the language that he or she speaks that is important, but the context, sources, production and delivery that reflects the *culture* of each story.

Training a diverse group of youth in an adult-oriented medium is an ambitious task that requires an instructor to be open-minded, patient and appreciative of individuality. Above all, the instructor must remain objective, promote uniqueness, and acknowledge the interconnection that exists between people of different cultures. Youth programs and media practitioners must mirror the needs and interests of the community they intend to serve. From observing the radio courses taught at Radio Arte, diversity is undoubtedly an asset that adds to the classroom dynamic if cultivated and harvested by the instructor's exercises and ability to adapt to a culturally diverse audience. Diversity within a youth media classroom inspires an exchange of ideas and experiences, which contributes to and influences the content and creativity of media products. To ensure that the messages being delivered are understood, instructors must consider the differences in perception, world views, values, and the verbal and non-verbal practices of each student when working with a diverse group.

Irene is the training program director for Radio Arte 90.5fm Chicago and is a DJ for La Kalle 103.1 and 93.5fm, a Spanish language commercial radio station. She produces two live radio programs at both stations and "La Femme" for young girls between the ages of 15 and 21. She also educates undocumented immigrants of all ethnicities through a monthly print column for "Extra Newspaper."

Generation PRX: Creating a Youth Radio Network

By: Johanna (Jones) Franzel

Above the sound of running water and dishes being cleaned, Elizabeth Pliego explains the plight of her Tia Ophelia. “I can’t imagine the pain of a mother who has left her kids to work in another country,” she says, describing Ophelia’s difficult border crossing. Elizabeth’s voice is soft but clear, and the piece, “To My Aunt, Who Crossed the Border,” (www.prx.org/pieces/19064) is part letter, part wish, part documentary. This is a different kind of radio. Instead of reporting or debating immigration, Elizabeth speaks from her personal experience. The work is honest, touching and deeply compelling. And it is unique in another way: it wasn’t commissioned by a station, but produced in a high school English class on Chicago’s South-west side.

Without the Public Radio Exchange (PRX), you might never hear Elizabeth’s voice on your local station. With the help of Generation PRX, however, (www.generation.prx.org), hundreds of youth producers are reaching new listeners around the country. Through the network Generation PRX (GPRX) provides, the impact of youth radio stories is multiplied: young producers are showing how local issues resonate nationally while connecting with other producers. Radio teachers are sharing resources and developing training together, and stations are airing more youth work.

The story of how GPRX grew from a concept to a network of over 50 youth radio groups (www.generation.prx.org/tools.php#connect) is a study in collaboration and connection with roots in radio, youth media and new technologies.

Why Youth-Made Radio?

As a medium, radio presents unique tools. Radio is cheap, accessible, mobile and entertaining. Because it relies on how listeners imagine what they

hear, sound is visual without being image-based; a nice break from the extreme image saturation and dependency across mainstream consumer-based media. Good radio is deeply compelling. For all these reasons, radio has emerged as a powerful tool for both social justice and digital literacy.

Pioneers like Blunt Youth Radio (www.bluntradio.org) in Portland, Maine and Youth Radio (www.youthradio.org) in Oakland, California first cropped up some ten years ago. Today you can find youth-produced radio all over the country; at places like The Appalachian Media Institute (www.appalshop.org) in Kentucky, Radio Rookies (www.radiorookies.org) in New York and KBOO Youth Collective (www.kbooyouth.org) in Oregon, youth have been discovering the power of their voices to entertain, inform, and mobilize.

Youth producers are brave with their questions and keen with observations. They also better represent this country than conventional “adult” public radio producers. As the field has grown, youth radio has emerged as a truly diverse collection of voices: geographically, economically, ethnically and racially. As their stories reach the airwaves, youth producers are changing the face of conventional media.

For the youth radio movement, the question of *how* to harness the power of youth-produced radio to reach a larger audience while maintaining the integrity of each individual group was central. GPRX was created to fill this need by amplifying youth voices and, ultimately, support youth to enter into public radio—radically changing the way public broadcasting looks and sounds.

Generation PRX

Generation PRX (GPRX) is a website for youth radio producers to share their work, write reviews

and get licensed by non-commercial stations across the country. Through GPRX, visitors can listen to work produced by youth from Anchorage, Alaska (www.alaskateenmedia.org) to Baltimore, Maryland (www.uniquelyspoken.org). They can hear stories about dating, racism, families, and the current status of the war. The website provides a space for visitors to hear what youth are talking about, find out how to get involved in radio, support others, or start their own youth radio group.

GPRX leverages the technology of PRX to distribute youth-made radio. But because PRX's model for distribution is new, explaining the project usually elicits some puzzled expressions:

"So you're a station?"

"No, but we work with several hundred stations."

"So you're a producer?"

"Well, we connect producers with those stations."

"Okay, so you're helping listeners."

"Yes! But we're helping listeners by supporting stations and producers..."

Short of pointing to the PRX video (www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZnRbVU-iHk), the basic model works like this: individual producers upload their work to PRX, where it sits in an ever-ready catalogue of digital audio. Listeners can hear the pieces through the PRX website and write reviews of the work and stations can download this work to broadcast on their own airwaves. Take the example above: Elizabeth's piece about her Tia Ophelia was produced in a classroom and uploaded to PRX. In the month since it was posted, it has been played by stations in Pennsylvania and California, reviewed by a youth producer in New Mexico, an adult producer in Ohio, and a station program director in Seattle, Washington.

The Role of Mediator

Although GPRX differs from most youth media organizations in its role as a mediator rather than a direct service trainer, its evolution can provide some helpful best practices for others looking to

collaborate meaningfully with a network of producers and groups.

When the project launched in the fall of 2004, it was challenged to both explain its services—a new way to distribute digital radio—and gain the trust of youth radio groups. From the start, GPRX—a project that would be led by youth—needed to confront issues of style, ownership, vulnerability and power.

To launch GPRX, we invited 15 youth radio leaders, professional journalists and youth producers from around the country to an initial convening meeting at PRX headquarters in Cambridge, Massachusetts. We chose participants carefully to represent the breadth and experience of the youth radio field and include youth that would lead the project, including practitioners from Blunt Radio, Radio Rookies, Youth Radio, Appalachian Media Institute, Radio Arte, Atlantic Public Media, and funders (OSI and Surdna). Several topics arose during the meeting that helped guide how GPRX could best serve the youth radio field such as:

- What would be the consequences of sharing youth audio on a public, professional site?
- How would the project ensure that youth were well represented and supported?
- How could GPRX address and encourage the diversity of youth radio?
- How could GPRX ensure that youth themselves were engaged as leaders of the project? How could we foster youth participation and investment?

While these topics came up during the convening, others emerged soon afterward. As with all youth media, the familiar tension between a product-versus process-based approach to production came up in the stylistic differences between groups. In addition, the dubious "youth" designation provided special attention that could cut both ways—

sometimes sought out as representative of a young perspective, other times denigrated as amateur or cutesy. How would listeners know that a piece of work was youth-produced? And should they?

Important Cornerstones

With the help of an engaged advisory board of youth radio leaders and producers, we found helpful solutions.

The Youth Editorial Board: To address the dual concerns that youth work shared on PRX would be either harshly reviewed or ignored, we established a Youth Editorial Board (Youth EB) (www.generation.prx.org/yeb.php) tasked with reviewing radio produced by peers. For the most part, individual youth radio groups identified members that were interested in taking part in the Youth EB, and these members then contacted GPRX for follow up. Each Youth EB member sits on the board for three months, receives training on reviewing, writing and providing feedback, and is paid a small stipend in gratitude for her work. In addition, Youth EB members choose pieces that they would like highlighted on the GPRX homepage and podcast, acting as curators of site content. Because it creates new connections between youth producers and meaningful conversations around work, the Youth EB has been one of the most singularly satisfying aspects of GPRX. It has also been a terrific tool for recruiting new youth radio groups to join PRX, with youth themselves at the helm of PRX immersion and participation.

New Channels for Sharing Work: YouthCast (www.youthcast.org), the GPRX podcast through alt. NPR, helped launch a whole new way for listeners to find youth content. With the introduction of a fantastic host—Kiera Feldman, herself a youth producer at Brown Student Radio—YouthCast presents a new youth-produced piece every other week, and a blog full of interviews, audio news and interesting radio bits. YouthCast has helped focus the public face of GPRX where it belongs—on youth producers and their work. In addition, plac-

ing YouthCast on MySpace (myspace.com/youthcast) has created a sounding post within a popular website, and helped specialize GPRX as a destination for those in the youth radio field.

Resources to connect and support youth radio: Signal, our email-newsletter, comes out every other month with updates from the field (subscribe and see past issues of Signal (www.generation.prx.org/signal.php) and a host of teaching/listening resources are available on the site (www.generation.prx.org/tools.php#teach). GPRX also runs an email list exclusively for youth radio leaders. All of these elements help foster a sense of community within the field by making spaces to share ideas, ask questions, find resources and get recognized.

Leveraging the power of PRX: In order to put youth work on the radar of stations and producers, the GPRX project and individual youth pieces are prominent on the PRX site, in the PRX podcast and in emails to stations. To address the issue of recognizing, but not tokenizing, youth work, youth producers can elect to designate their pieces as “youth-produced,” but they will appear on the site like all other work.

Youth radio features: GPRX joined forces with KUOW in Seattle, Washington to create two youth-produced radio specials, “Getting Raised” (www.prx.org/pieces/15983), on parenting and “The Migration Project,” (www.prx.org/pieces/19391), on immigration. Both shows were hosted by a teen and included stories from GPRX members around the country. To date, The Migration Project has been licensed over 12 times, and the listener response has been vocal and enthusiastic. When you consider that each license reaches thousands of listeners, the timeliness of the topic, and the need for youth perspectives—like Elizabeth’s—on these topics, these pieces are making a significant impact not only on radio, but on public debate as a whole.

These specials are an entirely new model for hearing youth producers on the radio. Rather than

limiting youth voices to token 4-6 minute slots, the specials demonstrate the breadth and depth of youth experience and knowledge. The specials include not only youth voices from a vast array of perspectives and places, but an experienced youth host. In this way, youth are publicly engaged as directors of the debate, rather than actors being spoken for. The fact that stations are licensing these specials in such high numbers (The Migration Project is breaking all previous records for licenses of a youth-produced piece) shows the promise of this model moving forward.

Moving Forward

Several key elements emerged out of the GPRX model that may help others hoping to establish youth media networks.

- From the outset, *we addressed issues head on and asked participants to help problem solve.* We take feedback as our directives—always returning to members for their ideas—and follow through on concerns and ideas.
- *Youth serve as active leaders in the ongoing evolution of the project.* Their contributions shape the content, and their ideas lead development.
- *We work with industry professionals and stations* to serve as third party curators and provide exposure to youth radio work—allowing GPRX to focus entirely on providing support to the field without favoring any single group.
- *We do not over extend ourselves.* Our mandate is to support, connect and distribute youth-made radio, and we remember that youth radio groups themselves are the primary providers of direct training.
- *We are in a constant state of evolution.* Each year, convening meetings and regular conference calls with youth and adult advisors

address the issue of “what next?” We look outwards to hear from members and look for new channels—podcasts, *MySpace*, *LiveJournal*, and email lists—to amplify youth voices.

Since the project began, youth work has been licensed through PRX over 700 times, and the online catalogue has grown to include nearly 550 youth pieces. Several dozen youth have come through the Youth Editorial Board, and many more have gone on to impact local stations and local communities. We have come a long way in the last three years, and see great possibility ahead.

In regards to next steps, Generation PRX will expand the resources and support it provides to youth radio groups, and create new channels to reach more listeners. We hope to find ways to build a site that is increasingly multi-lingual, with expanded online training resources, and more opportunities for young people to get involved. Although multi-linguality is a ways down the road technologically speaking, it is a crucial step in creating a democratic space that truly supports a diversity of voices. At the moment, a few groups are uploading Spanish-language pieces, and we are in contact with a handful of international youth radio groups to provide support and resources. GPRX aims to support youth radio and transform the look and sound of “adult” radio. With such powerful and accessible technology, the site has the capacity to transform public media into a much more expansive and inclusive forum.

As more youth producers age out of the “youth” category, we need to find ways to keep them connected to public radio and supported in their work. What kinds of training, opportunities and peer networks would provide the most powerful support? Partnerships with college radio groups, meetings with youth advisors and interviews with youth producers who became radio leaders are helping GPRX develop strategies. Public radio needs the experience, honesty and diversity of youth-produced radio. We have much work to do, but our vital network engaged in finding solutions

is adding to the success, sustainability, and widespread distribution of youth-made radio.

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for Documentary Studies where she co-founded Youth Noise Network. She holds a Masters in Education from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and has been teaching for 10 years.

My Trajectory through Youth Radio

By: Patrick Johnson

Since I was about seven years old I dreamed of being a sports broadcaster. While I played sports in high school, I realized early on that I had a much better shot *talking* about the games professionally than *playing* them. I would mute the volume on the television and do play-by-play of the basketball and football games. I wrote complete news stories based on the events from my sports video and board games. Oftentimes I would argue with gentlemen three and four times my age about the merits of Southeastern Conference football and the intricacies of Temple's match-up zone. Despite my desire to be on the radio, before I walked into Youth Radio my broadcasting experience was limited to ramblings recorded on cassettes using my mother's boom box.

Youth Radio gave me a place to hone in on the aspects of media that interested me most. Based in Oakland, CA and founded in 1990, Youth Radio is an after-school media education program and independent production company. Young people at Youth Radio file stories regularly for outlets ranging from National Public Radio, serving 26 million weekly listeners, to social media sites like *MySpace* and *YouTube*, including our website, www.youthradio.org. We have bureaus that serve youth in Atlanta, GA Washington, DC, and Los Angeles, CA as well as production partnerships with correspondents and youth media organizations around the globe. Youth Radio has won major broadcast journalism honors, including the George Foster Peabody, Alfred I. duPont,

Edward R. Murrow, and most recently a United Nations Department of Public Information medal.

From my perspective, three important aspects of Youth Radio have led the organization to much success. First, we provide a visible line of leadership for youth; second, we lead with inquiry and use media literacy in teaching video, print, music *and* radio production; and third, we have a strong peer teaching model. This perspective comes from my ten-year trajectory at Youth Radio—starting as a teen and ending as the director of communications.

My Own Trajectory

I entered Youth Radio as an 18-year-old high school senior. At the time, I was required to have an off campus internship to graduate and since I had spent the majority of my high school career writing for our campus newspaper, my career counselor suggested I give Youth Radio a shot.

At Youth Radio, I learned how to write radio commentaries, edit audio, and produce a radio show—where I could share my opinions and musical tastes widely. Controlling the airwaves a few hours each week was a powerful experience; almost as powerful as hearing one's voice on air for the first time. As a teenager, the idea of being able to express oneself (uninterrupted) was appealing since often there are so many adults bombarding you with information that you welcome any space where *your* thoughts come first.

My experience at Youth Radio solidified my decision to major in broadcast journalism at Howard University in Washington, DC. During my time at Howard, I hosted and produced a music television show, wrote for various local newspapers, and did on-air work for our campus radio station. The skills I acquired at Youth Radio helped me make a near seamless transition into my college media work.

While I was in college, I regularly received emails from then deputy director Beverly Mire checking in on how I was doing. Those emails made an incredible impression on me and made me feel that I was a part of a larger network. Even today, I often hear students at Youth Radio use the term “family” when referring to the organization—in a lot of ways it is.

Once I returned to the bay area, Bev and I remained in contact even after she left the organization. She put me in touch with people at Youth Radio and I was eventually hired as an executive assistant to the executive director—a testament to Youth Radio’s focus on the educational, personal, and professional development of young people. As Youth Radio grew so did the need for publicity and strengthening internal organizational communications. In a response to this demand, the director of communications position was developed and I was hired for the position.

The opportunity to work at Youth Radio came at a crossroads in my life. At the same time I was interviewing with Youth Radio, I was also offered an opportunity to interview for a position at a large cable sports network. There I sat with what I thought was my dream job a flight away yet there was this draw to the position at Youth Radio. I saw Youth Radio as an opportunity to change the voices being heard in mainstream media. I was also drawn to the organization because it values the contributions of young people who have gone through the program.

A Visible Line to Leadership

I look around at my colleagues and notice the sheer number of former Youth Radio students who are

now in key leadership positions at the organization. Some have grown up through the organization, while others like me, went to college and returned as graduates-turned-employees. Youth Radio’s managing director, news director and recruiting coordinators—just to name a few—are *all* former students. Seeing former students steering the organization reminds me that Youth Radio is a place that values young people—their ideas as well as their personal and professional development.

Youth develop their skill sets at Youth Radio because they understand from the moment they walk through our doors that what they have to say is *valued*. As fellow program graduate Pendarvis Harshaw explains:

Youth Radio teaches us the process of broadcasting, the mechanics of production, and the influence of media [from] young people who have also gone through the program. [At Youth Radio] young people are literate in the power of media and the power we have in producing media.

These graduates return based on the organization’s success in taking an active interest in young people’s thoughts and ideas throughout the program and actively placing them in leadership positions.

The leadership of these graduates-turned-employees provides innovative ideas to enhance Youth Radio’s programming. For example, Youth Radio’s music production department was the brainchild of a former student who went off to college, learned to make beats and wanted to bring his expertise back to the organization. As a result of his experience at Youth Radio, he shared his curriculum back to the organization confident that this skill would benefit youth producers and strengthen the program. Once you have contributed to the development of any entity, its success becomes of personal value to the creator.

Innovative ideas that improve the organization arise as a result of Youth Radio providing a supportive knowledge base to prepare students for work outside of Youth Radio’s walls. As an organization, Youth Radio purposefully

offers access to college and career opportunities.

The Peer Teaching Model

The mechanics of Youth Radio's peer teaching model are as follows: After completing introductory and advanced training cycles—about 22 weeks—students are eligible to apply for paid teaching internships or become peer teachers. Students receive specific professional development to help them make the transition from students to teachers, through mandatory workshops on topics ranging from how to facilitate on-air roundtable discussions, develop lesson plans, mediate conflict resolution, and work with current technology.

The peer teaching model is a vital part of how Youth Radio operates. Graduates—who are acutely experienced in how information is obtained and taught at the organization—are able to teach their peers in a way that may be challenging for instructors that have not been through the program. Peer teachers are a living example for the next generation of students to see how skills being taught can be mastered. The concept of co-creation in the peer teaching model is pervasive throughout the organization and is crucial to our survival.

Our peer teaching model would not work if there were mostly adults projecting what they feel young people *want* to learn. In many ways, that would be no different than the overall media landscape, where power brokers in suits armed with Ivy League educations are telling young people what they should be listening to, wearing and watching.

Peer teachers specialize in particular areas of production. Some peer teachers will focus on teaching incoming students to produce Public Service Announcements, while others will train students to craft instrumentals, write commentaries, or learn to blog. While building on their particular journalistic and musical areas of expertise, all peer teachers—who are students that completed advanced courses eligible for paid positions—are expected to facilitate student learning, focus, and overall personal and skill development. This dual learning dynamic enhances the area of expertise

for peer teachers to “try out” their skills sets and simultaneously, engages new students with skills and a visible line of leadership. In addition, this structure creates a true sense of ownership in the work we do and a vested interest in making sure that current and future students have a quality learning experience.

Conclusion

While we proudly claim our radio roots and peer teaching model, the alumni and students at Youth Radio are a tribute to the organizations' success. Our unique approach to train students in a variety of different mediums allows for their innovative ideas in program development and has encouraged graduates to return to work for the organization. Giving young people choices and a variety of media to learn from in order to tell their stories is the foundation to Youth Radio's success as a youth media organization. The strength of our organization lies in the students who have gone through the program and have helped push it in new directions.

Key elements to take away from Youth Radio's model:

- *A visible line to leadership*: From the minute a student walks in the door, they should see a clear pathway from student to teacher to leader within the organization.
- *Flexibility and fluidity*: Give young people power and voice in creating innovative approaches to program development.
- *Lead with inquiry*: teach media literacy and use posing questions to lead students to awareness, critical thinking, and observations. Encourage students to think critically about what is being presented to young people *about* young people, as this sets the stage for students to take control of images in the media, by creating their own.
- *Additional media “tracks”*: if you have the capacity

in your organization, add other media options (such as video, music production, print, and/or on-line journalism) to give young people exposure and alternative means of expression.

- *Co-creation:* Peer teachers should be a part of the process in making media with students and collaborating with adult professionals.

At Youth Radio, young people truly drive the direction of the organization through developing new curriculum, serving as peer instructors and growing with the organization—often serving Youth Radio in senior level staff positions. The ability to create a meaningful learning experience

for young people, as well as a chance to work with people in my own age group, made me choose the storefront non-profit over the flashing lights of the corporate machine. There has not been a day since that I regretted my decision—a testament to Youth Radio providing a visible line of leadership, valuing innovation and students' professional development, and using a peer teaching model to lead to our success.

Patrick Johnson is the Youth Radio's director of communications. He is a graduate of Youth Radio's class of 1998. To learn more about Youth Radio please visit www.youthradio.org.

Radio Stands Out

By: Ingrid Hu Dahl

Imagine going back to high school, where stereotypes, rumors, and cliques run rampant like the spread of flu in the workplace. Maybe you remember what it felt like as a young person to manage the categorization that consumed your daily attendance at school, which perhaps was at times, embarrassing and hurtful, but more often *silencing*. What would it have been like if, during our youth, there were safe and accessible ways to communicate our self-expression, perspective, identity and voice?

Youth-made radio is unique because it provides youth producers a sense of anonymity and freedom to express oneself outside of the everyday routine of social politics. With only the use of voice and sound, radio allows young people a space to openly ask questions and discuss issues regarding their communities, social and political issues, and personal identity.

The Power of Anonymity

Radio is a place for young people to explore expression, imagination and voice, no matter who they are or what their background may be. For ex-

ample, Erin Yanke from KBOO Youth Collective in Portland, Oregon explains, “radio is a unique tool for all people because you are not judged by your appearance and it is one of the few mediums where the more you talk the more powerful you are.” Radio is the exact modality for young people to amplify their deepest concerns and explore their personal development offering fertile ground to construct and express their *own* identity.

In addition, radio is cheap, accessible, entertaining, and transmitted across radio waves locally, nationally and internationally. With advances in digital radio and podcasts, youth produced stories are accessible world-wide.

Because anyone can speak on radio without immediately disclosing their identity, young people have a better chance to be heard by adults in this medium than on television, in public, or even in print. These other mediums present images alongside opinions. Images sometimes cause people to discount the ideas presented because the person is *too* young, *too* poor, or *too* ethnic. While radio by no means tries to hide the value of these critical perspectives, because of the limited cues that identify

people as a certain demographic, radio is able to captivate listeners to hear the messages of young producers. This aspect of radio helps adults hear the ideas of young people before judging them. For their opinions and ideas to have an impact on the larger community, young people need to be heard not just by other youth, but adults in the community.

In addition, the location of *where* broadcasts are recorded is not often identifiable, which again strips associations and pre-conceived notions based on one's background, class, or race. This is extremely important for marginalized youth; those who have been voiceless as a result of socially constructed ideologies. These young people have some of the most important and valuable perspectives on issues of injustice. Through radio, these young people can enhance their ability to analyze, critique, and speak out on issues and create solutions to the issues they uncover. In some cases, radio provides young people who cannot have a voice in the public—such as incarcerated youth—a platform to speak beyond the walls of detention centers. For example, in Portland, Maine incarcerated youth at Long Creek Detention Center have the opportunity to travel to WMPG, Greater Portland Community Radio every six to eight weeks to broadcast their features and interviews live. Having the chance to broadcast beyond the walls of a detention center is powerful for young people because they can finally have their voices heard without the visual stigma attached to prison life. Radio broadcast for many of these young people is the only way to get their voices heard and their perspectives represented, to an engaged and widespread listener base.

The voices of marginalized youth are important because they bring to the table perspectives that are not often heard or considered in the mainstream media and public debate. Without youth radio, adults would miss relatable stories and experiences told by their fellow engaged and concerned citizens—youth producers. For example, Kaari Pitkin, executive director of Radio Rookies states, “[We] get an overwhelming response

from adults affected by or relating to the story of a 15-year-old that they never would have expected to connect with.” Youth voice has a powerful effect on *all* people. Having a place to express their perspectives from the margins, and how they are a part of the struggle for equality in the U.S., is valuable for these young people. Since mainstream media is often full of voices who cannot relate to the struggle of injustice and representation, this opportunity for young people is critical for community members to hear a perspective that challenges pre-conceived assumptions regarding privilege, race, sex and class. Youth input can engage the public to involve their ideas, their action, and their perspective—an important step to valuing young people as informed citizens.

The Flexibility of Radio

Radio is a flexible medium that offers outlets needed by young people to express their ideas and opinions, depending on both the community and geographical/cultural context. There are over three dozen youth radio groups in the U.S. each of which provides spaces for young people to ask questions about their communities and personal development—starting with picking up a microphone in a sound room. From Portland, Maine—where voices of incarcerated youth can be heard—to Portland, Oregon—where young people equally join a collective of marginalized communities on air, youth radio is the place to speak out *outside* school walls.

In the U.S., outside the domains of school, youth radio programs provide a space for young people to facilitate creative approaches to ideas and shared knowledge. Claire Holman explains, “Schools really have limited First Amendment rights. We [at Blunt Radio] are not encumbered by the kinds of limitations a school would have.” At youth radio programs, young people can freely express their ideas independently or with peers to design, produce, and execute stories on air, without the formal censorship of schools and other institutions.

Sam Chaltain, executive director of Five

Freedoms Project explains, “In the U.S., rights for students in schools are not coextensive with the rights of adults however; the First Amendment does not preclude anyone from starting a youth radio program.” U.S. based youth radio programs capitalize on citizens’ freedom of speech as granted to them by the First Amendment. These programs, which are mainly offered after-school, provide a space for young people to process and question knowledge in a public forum. Learning how to put one’s thoughts on air teaches young people how to represent themselves, their beliefs, and their perspectives—no matter who is listening.

Around the globe, radio is used flexibly for the needs of young people, often used as a means to engage young people—who either attend or cannot attend school—with their communities. For example, at Voices of Youth (VOY) in Sierra Leone, radio is encouraged for young people—many who are illiterate—to make sense of and create grassroots change after a decade of war. These young people use radio to share their valuable perspectives in a country where 50% of the population are between the ages of 18-35. At VOY, radio is a major source of communication for young people who cannot read or write to be heard by peers and adults in the community. Using radio in this way provides marginalized youth both access and a platform to share their thoughts as they engage with communities in Sierra Leone that tune-in to Citizen Radio.

In Switzerland, Radiobus *needs* to use radio as a supplemental element integrated into school curriculum in order to teach young people how to fuse technology with processed information. Because Switzerland does not have many after-school opportunities for youth voice nor the same school-based limitations as the U.S., young people can access radio in schools as a way to process knowledge and enhance classroom learning. Denis Badman from Radiobus explains, “Few possibilities are offered to youth to try and practice media. [Schools] owe it to themselves to give students a solid and pragmatic education in media.”

From the perspective of Radiobus, youth radio is a flexible tool to enhance education while engaging young people in the effective use and practice of media. Because radio can be used innovatively for the amplification of youth voice, it can be tailored to marginalized youth and the different contexts of their communities around the globe.

Conclusion

Radio is the lynch pin of the youth media field. Because of its ability to provide anonymity for youth in an image-based society, amplify young people’s perspectives to large adult audiences, and use flexibility to engage youth around the globe in and outside schools, youth radio must be supported. Youth radio gives young people a head start on learning how to amplify their voices to a large, unknown audience—which prepares them to present ideas in the public eye, regardless of age, race, sex, class, and other forms of discrimination. Kaari Pitkin, executive director of Radio Rookies in NYC explains, “The process of reporting a documentary on something you care about, or that is important in your life, is a process of claiming your own story, often of self-discovery, intellect, and curiosity.” As a result of the important and innovative space radio provides young people, it is important to invest in this arena of youth-led media. Funders that value the voices of marginalized youth and their perspectives ought to support youth radio and not let the power of radio be cast aside, regardless of new and emerging technologies that attract the majority of media funding opportunities.

With radio, one has the freedom to construct content, an opinion, or a message—no matter who you are, what you look like, or where you are from.

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Amigos de las Américas: Incorporating Media with Service

By: Tara White

In today's fast-paced world of digital cameras and Blackberries, it may be difficult to imagine a place where roads are unpaved, running water is a luxury and digital technology is practically non-existent. With the media's oftentimes negative representation of young people, it may come as a surprise that young people in the U.S. are willing to serve indigenous communities in other countries—using digital media.

At Amigos de las Américas (AMIGOS), teen volunteers travel to Latin America to investigate, document, and share culture and history as they work to improve the local communities' living conditions. Each summer 600 volunteers—with an average age of 17—live with Spanish-speaking host families and participate in service programs in eight Latin American countries.

Last summer, an AMIGOS Digital Culture Project in Oaxaca, Mexico bridged youth media, leadership, and service-learning. Digital media was taught by teens to a local Latin American community, documenting indigenous stories and culture. In addition, blogs and online journals helped U.S. teen volunteers document and communicate service work, sharing their cross-cultural, global experiences back home.

Having a youth-led media project was a new initiative for AMIGOS and provided great insights into the ways youth take the lead in teaching global communities about technology and how digital media can capture shared cultural exchange.

AMIGOS and the Digital Culture Project

AMIGOS is unique because of the leadership and

cultural sensitivity it requires of young volunteers. First, young people must go through about six months of extensive cultural training before stepping foot in Latin America. Volunteers are educated about overcoming cultural differences, trained on project-specific Spanish vocabulary and taught how to engage community members in Latin America. Once trained and on Latin American soil, small groups exercise their personal initiative and leadership in designing and implementing projects with their host communities. AMIGOS projects foster youth education to promote healthy social development, leadership skills, and creative expression of young people.

The first AMIGOS Digital Culture Project was created in 2006 by Jon Crail, a two-time AMIGOS volunteer and project staff member. The project incorporated the leadership of teens who team-taught media to inspire youth in the host community. Teen volunteers worked with adults and mostly young people between the ages of 8 and 16. These teens had a high interest in technology and media products.

Crail explains, "Video in particular can be really creative and empowering for young people in marginalized or indigenous communities." He continues, "People who are less educated [often] are scared to speak or write, so they end up losing their voice. Video and photography allow them a creative way to express that voice."

In the project, teens taught digital media skills through a hands-on approach with one-on-one tutoring. They worked in small groups, which allowed young people to learn about digital technology first hand. These small groups created a

special peer-to-peer relationship between community youth and AMIGOS volunteers. In addition, having a peer-to-peer teaching model set an example for the community to teach one another across generations.

Young children learned quickly about aspects of the camera and photography and took part in the documentation process. Teen volunteers posted photos and videos online in a digital museum, kept archives for the local community to use, and kept web journals on their experience in Oaxaca.

For example, Apporva Shah, a 2006 volunteer in Oaxaca kept an extensive blog about his experiences in the Digital Culture Project (apoorvainoaxaca.blogspot.com). Shah's blog is an example of the ways AMIGOS youth volunteers share their life-changing experiences with the worldwide online community.

Emily Untermeyer, executive director/president of AMIGOS says digital media is an expressive resource for young people. She explains, "Our young volunteers often experience a roller-coaster of emotions. For many, it is their first time being out of the country and the longest period of time they have spent apart from their family and friends," Untermeyer says. "The use of media provides a healthy outlet for them to share their experiences as they live and work within a new culture." As teen volunteers served the local Latin American community in Oaxaca using digital media, digital media served a purpose for their own expression and experience in Oaxaca—a two way system of learning.

Youth-led Media Serves Marginalized Communities

Youth are taking a leadership role in teaching, training and engaging Latin Americans in technology in ways that support and represent their culture in a digital age. The use of technology is shared across the Americas, and young people—as a new generation of technology users—are sharing their interest in digital media more globally.

Untermeyer explains, "AMIGOS volun-

teers and project staff are a positive catalyst in helping communities throughout the Americas to use the incredible educational and professional opportunities today's technology offers." The fusion of media with a cultural exchange service-oriented program is extremely beneficial to our young participants and our Latin American counterparts.

AMIGOS volunteers are excellent candidates for teaching digital media because they come with knowledge of digital technology. Most teen volunteers enter the program with computer and technology skills from growing up in the U.S., which can be shared with Latin American counterparts that have extremely limited access to technology.

Moreover, the use of media in service-learning can be effective despite language barriers. Young volunteers, though versed in Spanish, can more readily share technology despite language differences. Because an extensive vocabulary is not needed to teach someone to navigate the Internet or use a digital camera, digital media is a much more effective means to teach technology. Digital media can be shown, set as an example, as opposed to teaching video and photography verbally.

In addition, because AMIGOS volunteers are versed in Latin American culture and technology before they step foot in Oaxaca, they are prepared to remain conscious and respectful of cultural norms; introducing technology in ways that will benefit communities. Teens become aware that bringing digital media into a community can change the way of life for people who have had limited access to technology, having experienced the power of digital media in influencing cultural norms in the U.S.

As a result, young people encouraged indigenous people to use technology beyond the digital media program. Their leadership enabled the community to confidently use the Internet more frequently and become more comfortable with computers and digital cameras. Introducing technology benefited community members for future work, to store and share information, and to communicate virtually.

Digital Media for Cultural Exchange

Digital media allows host communities to express their ideas and share their culture with a worldwide audience. Using digital media serves the local community in ways that effectively allows young people to work together and interact more readily across cultural differences. Digital projects that embrace and document a community's heritage have been successful for *young people* at AMIGOS.

The leadership and digital media expertise of teen volunteers in Oaxaca enabled community members in 2006 to photograph artifacts and take videos of shared stories and indigenous cultural reflections—using technology to capture indigenous history. Digital documentation can be quickly transferred and easier to maintain than a physical museum representing diverse cultures.

The importance of using digital media in this way is that Oaxaca has a high concentration of indigenous people. Due to increased urban developments, these groups have begun to lose some of their rich history and culture. There are 16 total registered indigenous groups, with the most populous groups being Zapotec and Miztec. By documenting culture in a city that has a high concentration of indigenous people; young people are learning the importance of sharing stories and history to both a local and worldwide audience.

Crail said the AMIGOS Digital Culture Project helped document these important indigenous cultures through digital media. Digital media gave community members and volunteers another means of sharing culture through documentation. Used in this way, both community members in Oaxaca *and* American volunteers learned more about the history of indigenous Mexican culture. As a result, these community members gain a voice to share their history and vision of their community, while simultaneously gaining valuable technology skills and experiencing a lasting impact from cultural exchanges.

The digital program that Crail started at AMIGOS has influenced and launched new projects beyond AMIGOS, a trend for service projects that see youth-led media as a tool for host com-

munities to express their culture globally. For example, Crail's experience in Oaxaca inspired him to start his own non-profit organization called Digital Roots (www.digitalroots.org), an organization that specifically empowers communities around the world to investigate, document and share their culture and history by using environmentally friendly digital technologies, creating physical and virtual exhibitions and museums, and encouraging young people to reflect on the past, present and future of their community and their role as community members.

Conclusion

Youth-led media has been instrumental in introducing technology to Latin American community members through AMIGOS' digital media program. Teen volunteers have combined their knowledge of digital media and service-learning in Latin America to teach local community members how to use digital cameras and other technology, despite language and cultural barriers. These projects have provided community members with valuable technology skills and digital end products that feature their history and culture.

Digital media is a way for host communities to share their culture locally and globally. In Oaxaca, volunteers and young community members in the Digital Media Project simultaneously learned about Oaxaca's indigenous culture. From using digital media as a tool to document and enliven indigenous culture to using blogs and online journalism to convey cultural exchanges and experiences to their communities back home, young people serve as a cultural and global bridge.

Using digital media, young people—despite differences in language and backgrounds—can express their identity, history, and perspective to the world. Young people are using their knowledge of technology and bringing them to service learning sites in Latin America more frequently. Digital technology helps young people teach and learn how to express one's voice. Marginalized communities in rural areas such as Oaxaca, Mexico can benefit from young people's leadership,

peer-to-peer media training, and their knowledge of technology. Such bridging—of youth led media and service—can enhance social and cultural exchanges for young people in the U.S. and in cities around the globe like Oaxaca, Mexico.

Tara is the communication manager at AMIGOS and has a degree in Spanish and Journalism. She grew up on a 3,000-acre farm in Dodge City, Kansas and before moving to Houston, Texas she was the editor of La Voz online, the largest Spanish-language newspaper in Arizona. Tara was also editor of her award-winning college newspaper, The Baker Orange.

Explorers of Exchange: Girls Traverse the Digital Divide

By: Lyn Pentecost

We live in a digital age where it is assumed that all young people—a generation targeted to consume and use media—have access to media and media making. From cell phones to iPods, *MySpace* and *YouTube*, young people seem to have multiple ways to communicate with one another and express themselves freely.

For example, a recent Yahoo! News article describes a technological utopia in which the rosy-cheeked youth of the world pirouette from social networking websites to digital file sharing in a global dance of communicative bliss. According to Yahoo! “The *My Media* Generation is the first to fully leverage the freedoms that new technology has provided, and they are putting it into practice in all aspects of their lives.” It’s no news to youth media educators that this vision appears only to those whose eyes are already accustomed to gazing at monitors glowing with the limitless promise of the Internet. However, the reality of globalization and communication technologies is a digital divide between those who *have* access to information and resources, and those who *don’t*. This clear digital divide in the United States also exists in communities around the world, where access to media and technology access hinges on an imbalance of gender, race, and class.

Building Access on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, New York City

The Lower East Side (LES) Girls Club was founded in response to a grave discrepancy in access based on gender, race, and class in our own neighborhood—the Lower East Side of New York City. Founded in 1996, we sought to address the egregious disparity in programs for youth in the community, particularly for young women of color from low-income backgrounds (there were three “boys-only” clubs in the neighborhood at that time and no comparable programs for girls).

One of the first programs offered was photography because of its power to capture an individual perspective and share this viewpoint with others. Initially darkroom-based, we quickly turned digital and, by the end of 1999, our students were exhibiting their own “day in their life” work at museums and galleries throughout the city. Our “digital diaries” approach was born.

This approach works by connecting young women with technologies to examine, document, and display their lives and communities, providing them with a safe, all-female space in which to do so. Each girl who joins the Girls Club takes a quick, one-on-one, “Tech 101” class that gets her up to speed on blogging, pod casting, creating quick-time movies and slide shows, zipping around on

Google Earth, exploring Second Life, and more. Using technology education, we encourage girls to become part of the digital age.

Girls need safe spaces to explore technology and be part of the digital landscape, particularly when mainstream media pressures young women to remain absent from such landscapes. Advertisements, mainstream films, television, and even institutions perpetuate gender-coded messages that can make girls feel objectified and voiceless, valuing appearance over skill or action. We seek to increase girls' confidence in using technology by placing cameras in their hands and paying attention to their stories.

This attentiveness encourages young women to speak, to share, and observe the world in which they live in, starting in the Lower East Side. But we quickly realized that low-income young women of color needed to be part of a global dialogue—and what better way to do so but with other young girls from a different country. The LES Girls Club embraces and values perspectives of the “other”—new people, new experiences, new ideas, and new environments—while using photography and digital media to cultivate a critical gaze in local and global communities.

Village Voices/Virtual Journey

The notion of cultural exchange has been integral to the LES Girls Club from the start. As an anthropologist, I have been working in Mexico for over 25 years, where I met the director of the Indigenous Photography Archive in San Cristobal and realized the similarities of our goals. The *Archivo* was training young indigenous photographers to document their communities using disposable and 35 mm cameras, technologies that, like the LES girls, these young women would otherwise not have accessed. The meeting was both logical and organic and took place at a time when our needs coincided. As a result, the opportunity to initiate the Village Voices/Virtual Journey project presented itself.

The Village Voices/Virtual Journey thus began as a collaborative project between the LES

Girls Club and young women from the Indigenous Photography Archives in Chiapas, Mexico. The project (2000-05) built a working relationship between our organizations and entailed, among other things, LES girls introducing digital technology to young women in the Chiapas program. In addition to creating this technological exchange, the first four years of the program also included two exchange trips, with LES high school girls going to Chiapas and young Mayan women coming to New York City. These four trips were complemented by exhibitions of the visiting girls' photography of their experiences in the host city and a published photography book combining both their projects. These exhibits and the book documenting the lives of teens in New York and Chiapas are only the by-products of what has been an ongoing lesson in global exchange and girls' empowerment.

This partnership has resulted in the founding of a sister girls club in Chiapas run by our Mayan photography partners (described below) and a blogging site called “Girlville.” Like all cultural exchanges, one's impression of the “other” hinges on which “others” one meets, and what *access* beyond the standard tourist experience one has. In this case, access was extraordinary for both groups of young people. Because the project unfolded over time, it fostered rich dialogue as the young girls, linked by a digital global platform, grew into and out of adolescence.

Girls Documenting Shared Culture

The sustained combination of photography, travel, and conversations revealed powerful similarities among the young women of Chiapas and the LES Girls Club. The process of documenting cultural differences, even the obvious and superficial, quite literally generated an expanded *collective* vision of the world.

Key to the collaboration was that each group had the experience of being both a visitor and a host. This allowed us to observe significant similarities in our own communities regarding, for example, gentrification and globalization—that

we come from places where we, the indigenous (or *marginalized*) cultures, are the subjects of *outsiders'* gazes. In Chiapas, buses daily bring tourists into town squares and markets viewing the way of life of the “native,” which tourism has greatly affected. On the Lower East Side, patrons stare from the security of new and expensive bistros and bars, or gaze down from double-decker buses at poor girls of color, often unreflecting about the changes that have challenged our communities and neighborhoods.

Since the publication of our co-produced photography book in 2006, our relationship has continued to deepen. When we returned to Chiapas with copies of the book, the Mayan women said “We want to continue working with the Girls Club.” In fact, they envisioned creating their own girls club based on our program to engage young women in environmental, ethical, and entrepreneurial projects with a strong digital and technological skills component.

After continued collaboration and fund development, there is now a thriving young girl’s club—Club Balam or “the little jaguars”—in San Cristobal de las Casas. This group meets every Saturday at Na Bolom, a prestigious research center that acts as the sponsoring cultural institution. Participants go out on digital photography trips and post photos and blog entries to the website, Girlville, shared with our LES girls, who then respond in kind. Thus, the partnership continues on the web.

Exchange and Technology for Young Women

For youth media organizations or efforts interested in global projects, international exchange is crucial. The Girls Club introduced young, marginalized women face-to-face with one another, using

photography as a starting point for continued communication and sharing of perspectives. This exchange provided fertile ground for exciting collaboration that continues on the web, extending the girls interaction with technology.

As the LES experience makes clear, digital technology can serve as a powerful vehicle fostering discussion and growth. Just as the young women of the Village Voices/Virtual Journey were able to see their shared experiences with gentrification and globalization in their photographs, any young person making media—photography video, music, or radio—can use technology to bridge real or perceived differences. What greatly enhanced the Village Voices/Virtual Journeys collaboration was that each organization was able to travel and meet the other and to witness first-hand their shared circumstances in terms of poverty, race, and gender.

We must continuously challenge the role of women by becoming independent actors in our own cultures—and it may just start with the click of a camera. It is critical for young women to engage in digital media and technology, for these technologies are part of the new global experience. With them, young women can become 21st century explorers, with cameras and computers, participating in shared ethnography of their own, and others,’ experiences.

Lyn Pentecost, Ph.D. is the Director of the Lower East Side Girls Club in NYC www.girlsclub.org. For over a decade, Pentecost was an adjunct professor of “Ethnographic Film Theory” at City College and developed and taught courses in “Teen Culture in Urban America” and “Urban Schools in Crisis” for the Metropolitan Studies Program at New York University.

Out of the Screening Room and into the Streets

By: Irene Villaseñor

It takes more than just showing up with a film and doing a Q&A afterwards if you want to make a deep impact with viewers—especially the local community. Young people need to go beyond simply making and screening a film. They need to learn how to engage an audience, present community issues for social change, and partner with affiliated organizations. They must effectively use their products as resources for education and action—an approach that fosters both the long-term growth of young producers and the youth media field itself.

This is what Youth Views does—it trains young people in using media for social change. Our activities seek to combine the power of media activism with skills in grassroots campaign building and innovative usages of technology to engage people and foster in them the spiritual and humanistic knowledge necessary to successfully work in marginalized communities.

About Youth Views

Youth Views is a project of the Community Engagement and Education department at American Documentary (AmDoc), a nonprofit multi-media arts organization that produces the acclaimed independent nonfiction series P.O.V. on public television (PBS). Building on AmDoc's mandate to leverage independent media as an effective tool for social change, Youth Views works with organizations to engage young people in community building, cross-cultural understanding and leadership training using media and art. Our partners across the nation include grassroots community-based organizations, human rights groups, neighborhood associations, counseling centers, museums, student clubs, and youth media organizations.

For over 20 years, P.O.V. films have been known for their unforgettable storytelling and their timeliness, putting a human face on contemporary social issues and presenting points of view rarely represented in mainstream media. Youth Views recognizes the power of independent documentary films to transform people's understanding of the world. Youth Views provides P.O.V. films and accompanying educational materials free to organizations interested in incorporating independent media into their existing programs.

Partnering with Youth Media and Community Organizing Groups

One of the ways Youth Views trains young people to use media for social change is through partnerships with youth media and community organizing groups. For example, Youth Views provides the Listen Up! Youth Media Network, opportunities to expose young filmmakers to social issues, study the documentary form and gain hands-on skills in outreach and organizing. At times, these partnerships involve teaching youth media makers how to encourage and lead dialogue at screenings. Maureen Mullinax, director of a youth media project at Appalshop (a multi-disciplinary arts and education center in Appalachia) stated, "Since 2001 it has been part of the curriculum for interns in the Appalachian Media Institute to produce P.O.V. community screenings. They see for themselves how media can generate lively discussions."

In addition to partnering with youth media groups, Youth Views cultivates connections with young community organizers. For example over five years, Youth Views has collaborated with Project Reach, a youth and adult-run, youth organizing and crisis counseling center that has been committed for over

35 years to empower and engage New York City's most marginalized youth communities. AmDoc has found that both types of partnerships are critical to our work because they foster in young people a commitment and passion for raising awareness about social issues with purpose.

These partnerships, in which films are used as a means to inform an audience of injustice through the leadership of young people, can be reproduced in both youth media and youth organizing fields. Both share goals of providing a safe space for young people to discuss their concerns and refine their communication and leadership skills. These partnerships support the efforts of young people—once equipped with necessary skills to use media literacy for social change—to see the power of using independent media as a tool in community-based work.

Using Film to Create Community and Social Change: *Señorita Extraviada*, A Case Study

Young people can use film to expand a community's perspective and raise important issues regarding injustice. In one instance, Project Reach and their partners—the American Indian Community House (AICH) in New York, NY and the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center (EPJC) in San Antonio, Texas—participated in the Community Engagement and Education campaign for the film *Señorita Extraviada* by Lourdes Portillo. This film examines the disappearances of hundreds of young women in Juarez, Mexico. While the film was not youth-produced, young people have used the film to train, organize, and mobilize their communities.

Señorita Extraviada was key to bringing communities together—such as border towns in southern Texas and migrant Mexican populations. Young people took part in assembling intergenerational teams to present community screenings; led dialogues that considered the connections between violence against women, the culture of machismo, poverty, and attacks against indigenous communities; and organized action in the U.S. and Mexico about the situation in Juarez. Overwhelmingly, the

audience was relieved that the film responded to an ongoing tragedy in their community with respect, cultural understanding, and a critical examination of contributing factors. The film, along with skilled facilitators to manage community discussions and experts ready to share their analysis and resources, drove people to action.

In addition, Project Reach screened *Señorita Extraviada* as part of their Summer Training Series, which is a community-organizer-readiness program that examined different forms of discrimination. Youth trainers were surprised by their peers' resistance to examining their assumptions about the roles of power and its misuse in relationships. In response, youth trainers asked the group to separate into male-identified and female-identified groups. They then had men view *Señorita Extraviada* while women participated in an exercise where each was given an index card to answer the question "How have you been personally hurt by sexism?"

After the screening the groups reunited, and each man received an index card to read out loud. Responses revealed that each young woman in the program had experienced some form of sexual violence. This startling revelation left the young men shaken, newly aware of the reality of sexism across transnational/cultural boundaries as well as on a personal level. As a result, participants in that session vowed to challenge sexism wherever they saw it and support the rights of women and girls.

Señorita Extraviada was also used on Youth View's Talking Back program, with young people producing and airing video letters from across the country as part of the national PBS broadcast of the film, which reached over one million American homes. Video letters are still available for viewing online via P.O.V.'s website www.pbs.org/pov. The *Señorita Extraviada* video letters included responses from Amnesty International USA, Feminist Majority, activist Eve Ensler, and Congresswoman Hilda L. Solis (D-CA). Participating groups created a reel with an array of the video letters and also screened it to raise awareness about the Juarez murders and the range of activist

campaigns to raise awareness and influence policy around the issue. This campaign was also presented to young leaders from around the world at the United Nations during the 49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women illustrating how young people can use independent media as a catalytic tool for social change.

Lessons Learned

The *Señorita Extraviada* campaign is an example of how film can provide opportunities for young people to lead community discussion and trainings while widening communities' perspective and engaging them to dismantle injustice. Some tips on using youth-created media to raise community issues include the following:

- *Using film as an ice-breaker:* Film can be one of the best ice-breakers for groups to get to know one another and to raise awareness of community issues, as the *Señorita Extraviada* experience shows. Discussing someone else's experience is a safe way for people to begin sharing their perspectives and identifying solutions to ongoing issues.
- *Training to move beyond the initial screening:* Film educators and professionals in youth media programs can help by training young people to leverage the social issue content of different films in order to raise awareness and facilitate deeper understanding around the wide array of issues in their global/local communities.
- *Identifying appropriate audiences.* To get films off the shelf and engage communities, youth must identify key audiences. If young people want to work nationally, identify which cities or regions have the highest populations of the groups represented in a film. Or, identify which neighborhoods in their own city are confronting similar issues.

- *Organizing an event:* Young filmmakers seeking to engage community should consult with relevant community groups and suggest venues, times, and facilitators, as well as advice on how to best make an environment a "safe space" for sharing and learning. For example, the best format for a screening may be in a classroom with a trusted teacher or another affinity group that is tackling the issues raised in a film.

- *Creating mechanisms for feedback at screenings:* At screenings, it is vital to provide opportunities for viewers to present feedback to the filmmakers. For example, Am-Doc asks the audience to evaluate the film in writing to obtain further feedback and share contact information if they want to stay connected. It is also important that there be time for the community to discuss ways to get involved and share strategies and resources for addressing these issues.

- *Respecting diversity:* A fundamental element that enables our staff and participants to work successfully with many different types of groups is that we deeply value diversity and respect for other cultures. We honor those values by participating in anti-bias awareness and education trainings and honoring historical and contemporary social justice movements. Staff working with young people at the Youth Views Training Lab encourages participants to identify their points of view and examine how it has been influenced by factors such as race, class, gender, and sexuality. Such intergenerational exchange helps young people understand what influences their perspective and how it impacts their interactions with others.

Conclusion

Through partnerships with youth media and youth development organizations, young people can stra-

tegitally leverage the power of independent film to inspire community awareness, civic engagement, and inspire social change. Though each young person starts in a different place—whether as a media producer, event organizer, facilitator, advocate, activist or educator—all young people can continue to be agents of change in their communities throughout their lives.

The process has revealed over time that youth engagement heightens their commitment to civic engagement and increases their understanding of civic and social responsibility. P.O.V.'s Youth Training has had this type of impact. The combination of increased personal awareness and sensitivity to the stories of other communities along with the development of skills in areas such as critical thinking, media literacy and community organizing has helped young people see how to

make impact on communities large and small.

Being able to examine and use a film—in partnership with grassroots organizations—can be the very example young people need to build a more democratic society. From my experience as a youth media maker and community organizer, the youth media field is in a powerful position to support this larger goal for society.

Irene Villaseñor manages Youth Views at American Documentary, Inc. | P.O.V. She is a graduate of the Educational Video Center's High School Documentary Workshop and Youth Organizer's Television. For her first campaign, she joined her parents in advocating for the rights of immigrant workers. If you would like to get involved with Youth Views, contact Irene at vil-lasenor@pov.org.

Turning the Lens toward Community

By: Samuel Bathrick

Traveling across the world to teach any form of media arts to youth requires a willingness to re-think what we already know about the processes of teaching and learning. What is perhaps more important than developing a curriculum is our willingness to incorporate into our classrooms the values that govern the social environment in which our students live.

When I lived in Ghana, West Africa teaching Junior High English, I became friends with a local photographer named Godwin Yao Azameti. We discussed the idea of teaching children photography as a way of combating what Godwin termed the "Western cultural tsunami," a powerful wave that not only drowns indigenous perspectives in Ghana, but also shapes the way youth value their own culture. How have those shiny and impossible images beamed worldwide in the form of western magazines, movies and TV affected the way Ghanaian youth see themselves in relation to the outside world? What does it mean for their

generation that even representations of their own culture in mass media have largely been shaped by the words and lenses of foreign visitors?

Godwin and I decided that the first step in reinstating an indigenous approach to media making was for youth to own and understand cameras—"foreign" instruments that had historically been used by visitors or researchers to document "cultural" phenomenon. Understanding the process of creating permanent images—the choices and consequences of capturing and reproducing information—could help students develop a sense of subjectivity in the midst of the great "wave." Our hope was that an opportunity to redirect the lens would encourage them to seek out and emulate the values of their own communities.

Zongo Junction Youth Photo Program

Thus began the Zongo Junction Youth Photo Program, a series of afterschool photography work-

shops at the Gina International School, in which we encouraged Ghanaian youth to reflect on their communities. At first, we opened the program to only five of my most serious academic students in junior high English at Gina International. The intimacy of this group was beneficial in the early stages, but more importantly it reinforced the values of the school by rewarding those who worked hard, motivating others to follow.

In the first few classes, we talked mainly about the technical aspects of our cameras; essentially, how does this machine work? How do I hold it? What is happening inside? We looked at pictures from the local newspaper, foreign magazines, and even pictures taken by other children around the world. We listed all the objects within the frame and all the objects we imagined were outside the frame. Then we cut squares out of paper and practiced making smaller pictures by reframing existing ones. We talked about how the image in the viewfinder changed depending where we stood.

The idea was to help the students see that each photograph constituted a series of choices. For all the students, this was their first time holding a camera, a machine that had until now been used to take pictures of things out of their grasp—New York City skyscrapers (buildings that actually touched the sun), Arnold Schwarzenegger (the most powerful man on earth), and Kwame Nkrumah (The champion of Ghana's independence). But these were all objects from a world to which they did not belong—famous and impossible things.

The idea was to first demystify photography as a phenomenon. As a Ghanaian, Godwin had a unique way of communicating with the students and helped reinforce the idea that photography was something that could *belong* to them. After all, Godwin explained, photographs were how he made his living.

I knew as their English teacher that for these students there were right and wrong answers to every question. The trick to school, they had learned, was discovering the right answer, memo-

rizing it, and being prepared at all times to deliver the information on cue. Often this included chanting in unison as a class.

For this reason, my creative writing assignments had worried them. I was encouraging them to say something different and unique from one another. Creativity was dangerous, for it left them exposed. For instance, I would ask them to write about a dream and later to describe someone they admired. They found these exercises challenging, for what is the most interesting and relevant dream to have had and what are the four most appropriate reasons to admire one's older sister? These rules had yet to be defined and memorized. Godwin and I recognized that there were rules concerning photography in Ghana too.

Approaches to Youth Photography in Ghana

First of all, a camera was a strange object for a child to carry around, unless he or she was on his way to deliver it to someone older. Many parents would have never owned a camera themselves and would be wondering how their child could have become qualified to undertake such an adult, if not foreign, task. For this reason, I sensed my students were hesitant to take on this responsibility and were relieved to hear that our first week's assignment was to take portraits of family members to be presented as gifts. This was an important first assignment because it began the process of establishing trust with the students' families—a very important step to teaching photography and youth media in Ghana.

Most of the student's early rolls of film were of household chores—cooking, cleaning, bathing their younger siblings and putting them to bed, and studying their daily lessons. While younger siblings proved ever-loyal subjects, after a few rolls of shots in the confines of their own rooms, we began encouraging our students to venture out into their larger communities, though not without warning.

According to the custom of their culture, an elder member of the community could call a younger child and question him/her about his

camera, even confiscate it if the elder felt that the child was behaving disrespectfully. And what is more disrespectful than taking a picture of someone without asking permission? Still, we wanted the students to take photographs that truly captured the vibrancy of their environment. Thus, in those early classes, we practiced both hiding the cameras in the torn seams of school uniforms and asking permission to snap a photograph.

In the next few months, we allowed more students to join the class. The understanding was that hard work and good behavior were the ticket to get in and would have to be redeemed weekly. The school was pleased about this policy, and my students seemed to work harder. I asked the first group of five to teach the next group what they had learned.

Peer to Peer Training

Peer-to-peer training became a staple in our workshops and allowed students to process what they had learned. For example, after a few weeks of shooting, the experienced students could explain in their own words what "capture" and "portray" were supposed to mean. This greatly enhanced the experience of new students in the class because photography immediately appeared to be something that they too would be able to grasp.

More experienced students proudly warned new students about amateur mistakes they'd made, like forgetting the flash in the dark or allowing a finger to block the lens. Godwin and I urged the students to return to this idea of each photograph consisting of a series of choices. In these classroom discussions, the students were able to see the ways in which their photographs affected their peers, and relate this to their choices in setting up a shot. We urged them to notice which questions their images answered or left unanswered, the elements they found undesirable or beautiful in each other's work, and most importantly, the aspects of their shared existence that they had all chosen to represent in their work—the values they shared as 11- and 12-year-old Ghanaian children.

Capturing Culture through Writing and Photography

In many ways, learning photography was for these students—like learning English—a process of internalizing a second language. Their assignment in both media (written and visual) was to capture and portray their immediate environment—their community. While a novice in any language may be able to instantly convey basic ideas, they will often create garbled and meaningless sounds (a finger over the lens) or accidentally convey the opposite of their intended meaning (the subject's smiling face appears as a grimace in low light).

Bringing the photographs into our English classroom enhanced our students' skills in both media, while enabling them to express a more holistic perspective of their environment. In my English class, we suddenly had amazing visual tools to work with. Simply describing the events that took place before, during, or after the time a photograph was snapped became page-long essays. While the people and events depicted in these photographs were obviously important to the students, what they seemed to value even more was the opportunity to explain an image that might otherwise generate a rumor or embarrass someone—something not taken lightly in this close-knit community.

For example, Bushiratu Abubakar, one of the braver and more curious photographers who had snuck through her house to snap her father asleep in his bed, was quick to explain in her essay that her father was a hard-working man and only slept so deeply after a full day working to support his family. In fact, she was so eager to disprove any semblance of laziness portrayed in the photograph that the next week she did a series of portraits of her father in the same bedroom drinking his early morning tea and reading the newspaper, which she titled, "Lost Time is Never Found." Mr. Abubakar, for his part, would become a willing and dramatic subject in many of Bushiratu's photo essays because, I believe, he trusted his daughter's motives for snapping his picture. Seeing Bushiratu's pictures, the other students also began to construct and direct scenes.

Theophilus Ansah photographed himself with his friends in various poses with his uncle's mobile phone. It was here that we asked the students to consider the question of truth telling and encouraged them to seek out examples of media that might convey a false truth. For instance, if a well-dressed man is standing next to a new car, should we assume he is wealthy? How easy is it to wear another man's clothes or borrow an object for a photograph? What are some scenes from films that might not be real and how might a photographer have used a camera to create an illusion? These were questions we hoped our students would be brave enough to ask of Arnold's Terminator.

As our English assignments often mirrored the photographs, the photo assignments began to compliment the essays. One assignment was to interview an elder in the family to learn proverbs or wise sayings. In their essays, the students tried to explain what these proverbs meant. In our photography class, we thought of ways to represent these proverbs using still images.

After the rolls of film came back, the students wrote second drafts to their essays, using the photographs they created to elaborate on the themes. Since our students were mostly girls, most of the proverbs they heard from their elders were about charity and chastity, though many touched on greed, forgiveness, respect for one's elders, and even the inevitability of death. While the act of writing down one's parents' rules might not have appealed to junior high school students in the U.S., our students seemed to love this assignment most of all. As a class, it enabled them to represent the rules of their culture, the values they shared as Ghanaians. As individuals, it allowed them to honor and respect their families by displaying in a more public way the extent to which they had been raised well.

While the students treated their photographs like collectors' items—hiding them in their textbooks, under mattresses, and in back pockets—what impressed me most was their willingness to give them away to family and friends. In this spirit, in January 2006, with the support of the school

community and the blessing of the students' families, Godwin and I organized an exhibition of the students' photos and writing at the University of Ghana. The event, like the images themselves, was a celebration of the school community. It became a forum for parents, teachers and visitors to praise the students' creations. It was in many ways the most essential aspect of our program for it helped the students grasp the greater impact of their work and assured them that what they had created now truly belonged to them as well as their community.

Best Practices to Teaching Youth Media Globally (and locally as well)

Gain the trust within your community and include them throughout

- Learn people's names and how to greet people in the local language as well as gain familiarity with cultural customs and taboos. Getting a sense of culture and language will better situate a youth media educator in a foreign country to teach and implement a media program.
- Ask permission from parents to conduct a media arts workshop. One way of sustaining a trusting dynamic with parents and the community is to have students involve their families in assignments early on. For example, taking family portraits or "day in the life of" shots work well.
- Generate opportunities for families to see their children's work on display and offer feedback. Having a culminating exhibition was powerful for the photographers, their families, and their community.

Incorporate cultural customs into classroom

- Assign students to write about or demonstrate the rules of their society as they pertain to expectations of youth. Such assignments serve as a guide for young peo-

ple to examine their own interpretation of culture, social rules, and identity.

- Create rules for your own class that incorporate or parallel these customs. For example, even having access to the photography class required young people to work hard and have good standing with the school and local community.

Collaborate with local media makers

- Include members of community in the teaching and curriculum building process. For example, my relationship with Godwin helped create and launch the program. Additional collaborations helped organize the culminating exhibition of our students' work.

Incorporate peer-to-peer training

- Allow experienced students to teach new students and incorporate the language and teaching methods they use with your own teaching. This was extremely effective in my classes in Ghana, where experienced students could explain and teach photography, expressing their interpretations and lessons learned to their peers. Educators ought to observe and learn from youth as they lead and interpret/share information.

Combine media

- Encourage students to act out, write about, or discuss their own photographs as well as

each other's work. Writing a story alongside a photograph engaged Ghanaian youth to represent their perspective, their choice of story, and their community—a task that was unfamiliar to youth who are often taught to memorize and recite as opposed to create and analyze.

There is much to be learned from teaching youth media globally. Our most important challenge is to alter our existing pedagogical approaches to meet the needs of the communities in which we work. As educators, we need to encourage youth to own and represent *their* cultural identity rather than passively embracing western *conceptions* of identity, which affects youth around the globe.

Our success as facilitators is dependent on our ability to provide young people with the tools they need to explore and our willingness to follow their lead. This will allow youth media makers to work within the value system of their own communities to produce media that they and their families can be proud of.

In the Zongo Junction Youth Photo Program, our students turned the camera lens toward their community, a space beyond the reaches of the Tsunami in which to explore their identities.

Sam Bathrick is the co-founder of Devirwo Projects, a collective of media makers and educators who seek to enable Ghanaian youth with the skills to document, preserve and re-invent their own culture. A native of Atlanta, Georgia Bathrick lives in New York City and aspires as a writer, teacher, and musician.

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Media Savvy Arab Girls Respond to the Mainstream

By: Grace Smith

Across the country, young media producers are creating works expressing their perspectives on and experiences of immigration, often directly combating negative portrayals put forth by mainstream sources.

For example, a radio documentary, “The Migration Project,” produced by KUOW (a Riverton, WY radio station) and Generation PRX (a project of the Public Radio Exchange to support, connect, and distribute youth-produced radio), focuses on issues of identity in the lives of young immigrants, while Global Action Project recently launched a video detailing the military recruitment of immigrant youth. Both these pieces challenge mainstream media narratives. But what happens to a youth media organization when directly attacked by a powerful media source not because they cover immigration, but because their own immigration status marks them as a “terrorist threat?”

Arab Women in the Arts and Media

This is precisely what happened to Arab Women in the Arts and Media (AWAAM), a community organization in Brooklyn, NY that offers media training to young women ages 14-18. AWAAM also makes the “Intifada NYC” shirts that received much media attention in fall 2007.

In brief, when *New York Post* reporter Chuck Bennett asked Deborah Almontaser, founder and then-principal of the Khalil Gibran International Academy (a new public middle school offering studies in Arabic and English), about the meaning of the word, *intifada*, Almontaser responded that the word’s Arabic root meant “shaking off” (*The Post*, August 9 2007, “City Principal is ‘Revolt-ing”). She acknowledged the word’s negative con-

notation, arising from its use in the Middle East, and explained: “I don’t believe the intention [of the shirt] is to have any of that kind of [violence] in New York City. I think it’s pretty much an opportunity for girls to express that they are part of New York City society . . . and shaking off oppression.”

The *Post* then published a series of articles linking Almontaser to AWAAM, which was depicted as an extremist and Muslim organization (AWAAM is in fact a feminist, Arab American, but not necessarily Muslim, organization). The *Post* claimed that AWAAM was “hawking T-shirts that glorify Palestinian terror,” and accusations echoed across the right-wing blog-o-sphere. Although the only connection between Almontaser and AWAAM is that the (now) ex-principal (Almontaser resigned as principal of the school in August) is a board member of a Yemeni-American organization with which AWAAM shares space, with one loaded interview question, the *Post* was able to weave AWAAM into the web of anti-Arab/immigrant feeling mounting in the city in opposition to the Khalil Gibran Academy. Quite suddenly, the women of AWAAM found themselves the target of media attention.

Hostility Unmasked

The anti-immigrant feeling revealed by the confrontation with the *Post* was not news to the young women of AWAAM—indeed they encounter such attitudes daily. A radio piece that the teens produced a year before, entitled “The War At Home,” documents such encounters. In the documentary, one young woman discusses strangers’ prolonged gazes at her *hijaab*—the scarf worn by many Muslim women. Another recounts an incident on the

subway where a woman threw her coffee on a group of Muslim high school students. Throughout the piece run the kind of comments these young women hear all the time: “Take that stupid rag off your head, you terrorist,” or “Go back to your country.”

The *Post* incident occurred at the end of AWAAM’s summer media program. Young women organizers had spent several months preparing to inaugurate the Brooklyn chapter of the Coalition for Muslim Holidays, a diverse initiative working to include Muslim holy days as official New York City Public School holidays. With the publication of the *Post* article, reporters began gathering outside the doors of the building where the summer media workshops took place to get the story on the organization that had made the “Intifada NYC” shirts.

In another context, it would have been a singular opportunity for showcasing youth work, but the environment was anything but a safe space. Spelled out by the *Post* and amplified by rightwing bloggers, anti-Arab sentiment was now aimed directly at AWAAM and its youth media constituency. When the organization’s website was hacked into, the threat became even more intense.

Safety and Expression

AWAAM director Mona Eldahry was put in the difficult position of having to negotiate between the safety and free expression of the young women she served and “outing” them as producers on the website. After conferring with parents, colleagues, and the girls, she decided that the environment was too dangerous for the young women’s work to be published online. AWAAM removed the names of the young female producers from work on the organization’s website. In addition, an entire summer’s youth media work was not posted, and the screening to accompany the Muslim holidays coalition was cancelled. Says Eldahry, “I felt like it seriously handicapped us because our asset is the media youth produce.” The organization faced further challenges as educators had to shift their focus from programming and fund raising to coor-

inating press releases, participating in interviews, and monitoring the website.

In spite of the strain on the organization, the youth media-makers were resilient. They were enraged, according to Eldahry, but defiant. Their response was, “We cannot be silenced.” Taking action into their own hands, the young women of AWAAM did exactly what they had learned during the summer—they made a video, countering the attacks, documenting the truth, and reclaiming their voices. Manipulating the constraint of anonymity, they shot the video, entitled “Silenced by the Media,” without including their faces, resulting in chilling images of decapitated bodies and dissociated voices telling the truth about the scandal and Almontaser’s resignation.

Conclusion: Combating the Negative Images of the Mainstream Media

The spirited response of the young AWAAM women to the media’s uninformed and negative portrayals of their work is one encouraging example of how alternative media can and must respond to mainstream news outlets.

Another example occurred at an October conference in New York entitled “Building Bridges: How African-Americans and Immigrants Can Create Social and Economic Justice Together,” where Hugh Hamilton, host of “Talk Back,” a noncommercial call-in radio show, discussed how mainstream media’s negative and false representations of African-Americans and immigrants reinforce stereotypes and foster fear, contributing tensions between the two groups who have many similar interests and face similar challenges. In response, an educator in the audience spoke passionately about the important role youth media could play in challenging those stereotypes and helping reframe the immigration debate, in particular.

With the 2008 presidential race gaining momentum and with immigration reform increasingly central to the campaign, there will no doubt be many opportunities in the coming year for youth media organizations to mount projects and campaigns to counter the mainstream media and

present a more balanced view of this important issue.

Grace Smith is the assistant editor at Youth Media Reporter. Born and raised in Baltimore, Smith lives in Brooklyn where she makes queer performance art and tends chickens.

Note: On October 15, 2007, Debbie Almontaserre-applied for the position of principal at Khalil Gibran International Academy. AWAAM is currently seeking

mentors and space for their weekend media trainings this fall.

For more information:

AWAAM www.awaam.org

Khalil Gibran International Academy

<http://kgia.wordpress.org>

Islam and Media Stereotypes

<http://www.cair.com/beyondstereotypes/>

The New York Immigration Coalition

<http://www.thenyic.org/>

Using Media, Fair Use and Copyright

By: Katie Donnelly

Recently, when youth media educators learned about the legal victory of the music industry over the single mother from Minnesota ordered to pay more than \$220,000 for sharing a mere 24 songs online, it only confirmed their suspicions that the copyright landscape is rapidly changing.

After learning of this court decision, Shay Taylor, a high school video production teacher from Montgomery County, Maryland expressed her fear, explaining, "I've got a stash of videotapes with copyrighted excerpts of TV shows, movies, advertising, news and music videos that I use all the time in my teaching. I wonder if they're going to come after me some day."

At a time when online digital technologies are enabling users to create and share an ever-widening array of multimedia texts, there is an increasing climate of fear among educators about the use of new resources for teaching and learning. The changing legal environment and high levels of copyright confusion surrounding digital media affect educators and their students in a variety of school, university and non-profit settings.

It is important that media literacy educators better understand their rights, since under the fair use provision of copyright law, they are entitled to use such materials in their work, with proper citation.

The Cost of Copyright Confusion

In K-12, higher education, and afterschool programs and workshops, educators face conflicting information about their rights, and their students' rights, to use copyrighted material. They also confront complex, restrictive copyright policies in their own institutions and organizations. Although copyright law permits a wide range of uses of copyrighted material without permission or payment, educators today have no shared understanding of what constitutes acceptable fair use practice.

On September 25, 2007, Renee Hobbs of Temple University's Media Education Lab, Pat Aufderheide of the Center for Social Media at American University and Peter Jaszi of the Program on Information Justice and Intellectual Property in the American University Washington College of Law released *The Cost of Copyright Confusion for Media Literacy*, a report funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. More than 60 educators, youth media professionals, librarians and college faculty were interviewed about their understanding of copyright and fair use as these concepts apply to their work.

This research revealed that, in order to deal with copyright restrictions, teachers may adopt one of several coping strategies: they may

avoid sharing lesson plans, curriculum materials, or student productions; they may “hyper-comply,” by creating unnecessary copyright restrictions for students as a result of ignorance or fear; or they may blatantly ignore copyright all together, close the doors of their classroom, and do whatever they like. As Renee Hobbs pointed out, “Some of the fundamental goals of media literacy education—to cultivate critical thinking about media and its role in culture and society in order to strengthen creative communication skills—are compromised by lack of understanding about copyright law.”

Building Consensus about Fair Use

In the current phase of the project, Hobbs and her colleagues are attempting to create a shared understanding of fair use among media literacy and youth media educators by hosting small-group consensus-building meetings in cities across the country. So far, meetings have been held in Boston, New York and San Francisco.

The meetings brought together diverse groups of youth media educators, university faculty, and K-12 teachers. The discussions were led by Peter Jaszi of the Washington College of Law at American University, who is one of the country’s leading legal experts on copyright and fair use.

Fair use is the most important (and most misunderstood) tool in copyright law for educators, and many youth media educators and K-12 teachers are unfamiliar with the concept. It is intended to balance the rights of owners with the rights of users by encouraging the widespread use of cultural products. While most educators see copyright as primarily protecting the property rights of creative producers, in fact, the concept of fair use shows that users are entitled to borrow, quote, or make use of the creative work of others in developing their own ideas, with proper citation.

Unfortunately, educators often receive conservative copyright advice from lawyers who wish to minimize the potential for lawsuits. For example, one youth media curriculum developer at a major nonprofit organization described her experience of developing curriculum materials: “When we actu-

ally published the curriculum, our attorney said we could not provide people with material or suggest how they obtain it—we could not say ‘photocopy’ or ‘tape.’ I got around this by just saying ‘obtain.’ These restrictions made it difficult for us to be creative.” Limitations like this constrain the development of media literacy programs nationwide.

In each city, key themes emerged from meetings with media educators. In New York City, educators questioned fair use and digital sharing. In Boston, the focus was more about getting copyright permission and in San Francisco, educators were curious how to balance the rights of owners and users.

New York, NY: What’s Fair about Digital Sharing?

It is no surprise that life in a digital world changes the way creative work is circulated. It is easier than ever for educators to copy and distribute the intellectual property of others, and in a meeting held at the Academy for Educational Development in New York City this fall, educators discussed “what’s fair” about such sharing. Participants discussed various hypothetical situations that elucidated points of consensus and disagreement among educators.

A discussion based on photocopying copyrighted materials immediately shifted to a conversation about scanning, digitizing and electronically distributing documents. There was confusion among educators regarding the acceptable scale of distribution regarding the educational use of copyrighted works. Several participants noted that various gatekeepers at their institutions prevented them from making copies—usually based on an arbitrary guideline or rule with no legal standing. Many agreed with one university administrator, who remarked that when it comes to using copyrighted materials for educational purposes, it is a “Don’t ask, don’t tell” culture.

Media literacy educators are highly aware of the changing economic models emerging in traditional mass media and new media industries. As organizations like *The New York Times* grapple with how to preserve their own economic interests

in a digital world, youth media educators who rely on timely and current information find they cannot afford to wait for industries to finalize their business models. One youth media curriculum developer in New York City warned that media educators need to be careful about balancing creators' interests with their own: "As educators, where do we draw the line? I don't want to stifle media producers from producing."

Music and popular culture are prime artifacts of the cultural environment and more and more students want to be able to use appropriation and remix techniques in creating their own work. However, there is great confusion over the role of music in youth media productions. "It's a mash up world," said one youth media educator, "but we are afraid of letting students get away with this, especially if they want their work seen in screenings and festivals."

The fear surrounding the appropriation of popular music was disproportionately higher than fear concerning the use of video, photocopies or other forms of media—perhaps because the music industry has been aggressive in taking legal actions against unauthorized sampling and downloading.

Boston, MA: What's Fair about Permissions?

When should media literacy and youth media educators get permission to quote from or use the copyrighted works of others? When is permission unnecessary? In a meeting at Wheelock College in Boston, hosted by Professor Petra Hesse, this issue was hotly debated. Participants argued over when it was appropriate to ask a copyright holder for permission to use his or her work.

Most youth media and media literacy educators agreed that when engaged in the practice of "comment and criticism," permission is not needed. But one university professor eschewed the idea of asking permission to use copyrighted works in the classroom for any purpose, stating: "I feel entitled to use whatever I want to use in the classroom—it is my raw material, like numbers are a mathematician's raw material."

Many participants voiced concern about

business models that allow for copyright holders to charge educators to access their works. According to one participant who worked with incarcerated youth, "I have a huge concern that if people have to start paying for access to info, it is going to leave a huge gap between people in advantaged and disadvantaged communities." Others recognized that "producers have children who need to eat," and a number of participants were sensitive to the function of copyright permissions as allowing authors to control their own creative work and profit from it.

San Francisco, CA: Balancing the Rights of Owners and Users

At a meeting of youth media and media literacy educators hosted by Just Think in San Francisco, participants worked to understand how to balance the rights and limitations of owners and users. As in New York and Boston, group members struggled with the limits of digital distribution and the emerging economic models of the media industry. Although most participants expressed distaste with the media industry's attempts to charge educators for essential learning tools, one participant acknowledged: "It's a double standard. I'm a filmmaker and I wouldn't want teachers just ripping and burning my film and giving it away."

Participants also debated the merits of licensing fees and whether it is reasonable to expect youth to ask copyright holders for permission—or even to cite the copyright holder in all circumstances. Because youth media and media literacy educators are such a diverse group, perspectives on fair use span a large spectrum. Many media educators, such as the San Francisco filmmaker, are also media producers and copyright holders—which adds another dimension to the discussion.

Although some points of interest are beginning to emerge from these meetings, media educators still have a way to go toward developing a shared consensus on fair use. In the meetings, which will occur in cities around the country over the next year, media literacy and youth media educators will offer their input on this valuable and

timely issue.

Currently, many educators feel they can avoid this issue by freely using copyrighted materials in their own educational settings but refusing to share curriculum materials and student productions with wider audiences. However, it is in the long-term benefits of young people that educators adopt a consistent approach to teaching about and responding to fair use and copyright law.

Towards a Code of “Best Practices”

In fall 2008, the discussions of these meetings will help media literacy and youth media educators familiarize themselves with their rights under the fair use doctrine in a follow-up report. Youth media educators who work with documentary filmmaking already have an existing resource in terms of fair use: *The Documentary Filmmakers’ Statement of Best Practices in Fair Use*, which was created by Pat Aufderheide and Peter Jaszi, two of the authors of *The Cost of Copyright Confusion for Media Literacy*.

Many youth media educators struggle with the balance of letting youth experiment freely with

copyrighted materials versus training them to treat copyrighted materials exactly as a professional media producer would: going through the process of asking permissions, or relying on royalty-free images and music.

When students become media producers, they often want to make new and creative uses of existing copyrighted works in their own productions. They will also likely desire copyright protection for their own work.

Fair use, to some degree, allows for both: it was intended to balance the rights of the copyright holder with the rights of the user. Youth media educators do not need to live in fear and confusion when it comes to copyright—they need to educate themselves about fair use and reclaim the rights that already exist under copyright law. The next phases of The Cost of Copyright Confusion project intend to do just that.

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Listening Across Borders: Virtual Spaces for Youth Global Exchange

By: Mindy Faber

As we transition into an increasingly global and technology dependant society, new participatory media networks have the potential to affect an international youth-led social justice movement. Because youth media programs are consistently at the forefront of technological innovation as well as the development of youth-centered educational practices, as a field, we are in a unique and exciting position to facilitate and incubate new youth-centered forms of global exchange.

However, there are few spaces where young people of different backgrounds and global per-

spectives can interact under conditions not mediated and controlled by adults—even in youth media. Innovative models that provide instruction on how such interactions can take place must be thoughtfully discussed, tried out, and shared among educators, which requires learning new pedagogical approaches.

As youth media educators, how can we create a different kind of pedagogical space where young people from around the globe can use the tools of participatory media (blogs, wikis, social networks, digital sharing sites, etc.) to connect po-

litically and socially? How do we learn to “listen across borders”—the first step in creating a youth platform for global social justice?

These sets of questions inspired me to create YouthLAB, a program where youth are in charge, conceptualizing how to use participatory media as a springboard for youth leadership, activism, and organizing.

About YouthLAB

YouthLAB, (Youth Listening Across Borders), an intensive two-week program, took place in summer 2007. Twenty young people from Barbados and Chicago came together in a virtual space to create global exchange using peer-to-peer networks and other tools of participatory media.

Each day during these two weeks, youth from Barbados and Chicago would meet physically in each of their respective locations but would also come together in a variety of wired worlds as well (such as online video chats, blog posts and comments, video letters, GoogleMaps, and Facebook).

Before the official start of the two-week exchange, a 16-year-old Chicago-based member of YouthLAB traveled with me to Barbados to provide computers, cameras, high-speed Internet service and skill training for eight young people at Mela Berger’s Caribbean Institute for Cultural and Healing Arts (CICHA). During that time, we shared knowledge on how to produce journalistic videos using iMovie and Final Cut Pro, shoot digital photographs, use social networking sites, and upload content to blogs and Google *MyMaps*.

Despite the high incidence of poverty on the island, the Bajan youth were digitally literate. Most youth access technology such as *YouTube* and satellite television regularly, although few had ever worked on Macintosh computers or software. While all the Bajan participants were black (as is 98% of the population), they were diverse in terms of socioeconomic status, schooling opportunities and the parish in which they each lived. In Chicago, the participants were comprised of 12 youth, 16–18 years of age (African-American, Caucasian, Latino, Muslim, and from a range of income levels).

Physical and Virtual Contact Zones

The diversity among the youth participants, within and across sites, is a critically important component of the YouthLAB model. As the work of Michelle Fine, Maria Elena Torres and others in the Participatory Action Research Collective have shown, “contact zones”—in which different cultures meet, clash and negotiate meaning—are not always neat and conflict-free. In fact, these messy spheres are necessary in order to create the kind of conversations that kindle democratic dialogue and richer forms of cross-cultural understanding.

Bringing youth into conversation about oppression and injustice both in physical and virtual spaces fosters critical consciousness. In such “zones,” new relationships form across previously uncomfortable differences. This is an area that is essential for educators to support if we are to “listen across borders” and help build global social justice movements by and for youth.

Pedagogical Approach

Part of YouthLAB’s mission is to provide a space where young creators and activists in Barbados and Chicago could engage in meaningful talk and listen and learn on their own terms, using their own tools and cultural forms of communication. The intrinsic properties of open source and Web 2.0 technologies are perfectly suited for this form of global learning.

While far from being naïve about the problematic aspects of social networking sites, most youth still perceive *YouTube*, social networks and other “affinity zones” (Henry Jenkins, MIT Comparative Media Studies) as having ample “street cred” precisely because of the way they exist outside the control of adult authorities and institutional gatekeepers.

In creating new spaces for young people to conceptualize their creative media and dialogue, I drew inspiration from the work of Harvard law professor, Yochai Benkler and his book, *The Wealth of Networks*, where he expands on the theory of “socially-motivated commons-based peer production.” Benkler describes a new public sphere, in

which the creative flow of many people is galvanized into large-scale, participatory projects, but without the baggage of traditional hierarchies and profit motives. In other words, commons-based peer production supports many voices coming together to shape an idea or product.

Benkler identifies several defining features to commons-based, peer-to-peer production; however, in designing YouthLAB, we focused on the following:

- *Make the work “granular.”* Everyone should contribute something of value that advances the overall cause.
- *Make the work modular.* Divide the tasks into self-selected individual projects so that the work is divvied up equitably and progress is clear.
- *Make the work capable of integration.* Individual contributions can be assimilated efficiently into a meaningful and publicly shared final product.

YouthLAB put this theory of socially motivated, commons-based, peer production into pedagogical practice. All 20 participating youth joined together to create media and dialogue about racism, segregation, inequality, migration, and social justice through the collective authoring of a central multi-media blog.

For example, this cadre of teens co-created an interactive multimedia *GoogleMap* on migrations, which contained both personal and historical travel and migration routes, embedded geo-tagged photos, stories, and videos and placemarkers indicating past, present and future landmarks. In addition, teens raised and answered questions in the form of videos, online chats and blog posts for a global exchange.

YouthLAB developed a networked system that allowed youth to see themselves as contributors to a shared political discourse. Integrating collective intelligence into the participatory frame-

work, youth became actors in a public global arena rather than passive recipients of mediated information.

Emerging Practices for Youth-Centered Global Exchange

Start with a leading, genuine question. For example, in YouthLAB our exchange was launched through a joint inquiry: “Does evidence of the legacy of slavery, injustice or inequality exist within your everyday lives and communities today?” This leading question spurred research and dialogue and led to a new set of questions posed and pursued by youth participants.

Enter into “interpretive discussions” about youth-made videos. Several videos and clips were posted on the YouthLAB blog and youth participants engaged in “interpretive discussions,” analyzing the meaning of videotexts. For example, a fascinating exchange centered on the video, *A Girl Like Me*, where the teen filmmaker raises the question, “Why do so many of the Black children in the social experiment choose the white doll to play with?” The videotext can operate as a fulcrum for a shared discussion in which everyone contributes. In this way discussions can move beyond limited and non-interactive comments towards real exchange and communication (see: youthlab.net/category/interpretive-discussions).

Pose cross-cultural questions and responses through video. For example, the youth in Barbados produced a video asking a series of questions of their U.S. counterparts in Chicago and vice versa. Each YouthLAB team then created videos responding to these questions. The questions ranged from lighthearted, to social, political and educational. Some of the more complex topics incorporated research and street interviews, which teens posted onto *YouTube* or on the YouthLAB blog.

Use “skyping” and online chats to build intimacy. The immediacy and realness of these interactions through live video chats provide personalized ex-

changes and visceral experiences across borders.

Use online mixing and mashup tools for collective authorship. In YouthLAB, we created a split-screen video with images of Bridgetown Barbados on one side and Chicago on the other. We also began experimenting with a video online mixer tool housed on the video-sharing site, *Motionbox*. The possibilities for new forms of creative collaboration through digital content-sharing applications are endless.

Step back and give young people the lead. In YouthLAB, peer-to-peer teach-ins, collective intelligence-sharing, and co-construction of “tag clouds” through social bookmarking were important ways that youth participants not only created media products but shaped their own curriculum and instruction as well.

Key to this work is that youth media educators become “invisible” in the learning process—which is different from most of the training we received as educators. As youth interpret the meanings and questions their peers bring up, they bring their own perspectives, informed by a complex set of experiences, seen through the lens of race, class, privilege, gender, and nation. Young people in global exchanges hear challenging and different perspectives, which lead to new questions and understandings that can strengthen the social justice field.

Conclusion

The YouthLAB participants needed no persuasion

to merge social activism with cultural production using digital networks. They did not need to be coaxed to talk about the issues affecting their lives with peers from a different country or prodded to sit down and watch media made by other youth. On the contrary, they couldn’t get enough of it. Clearly, youth with access to the tools of participatory culture experience new international and media-based sites as powerful and vibrant, fostering imagination, youth activism, and international exchange.

As an educator I was schooled in the methods of *backwards-design*; however, in a learning environment built around youth-led, commons-based, peer production, adult facilitators need to relinquish predictable outcomes in favor of a more elastic approach. We need a different type of pedagogical space—one where youth are in charge at the outset to use media as a springboard for leadership, activism and organizing. Using tools like commons-based peer production, interpretive discussion, and virtual contact zones, we can provide the types of environments for online global youth media to develop.

By creating these pedagogical spaces where hierarchies are flattened out but differences are not erased, youth media makers can provide a global example of dialogue by listening across borders.

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Music=Youth Media

By: Ingrid Hu Dahl

Music is a powerful medium for youth expression, identity and social change. Young people, who rely on music as a way to channel a range of emotion, rarely find opportunities in the adult world to produce, write, and record original music.

“Rock camp changed my life” is a quote I have heard from several 8-18 year old girls from sites in Brooklyn, NY, Chicago, IL and Portland, OR. The rock camp movement now includes 15-20 sites in the U.S, as well as Japan, Britain, and Canada.

Just as youth media programs across the U.S. are redefining mainstream media, youth-created music is changing the face of music. Youth music is enabling underrepresented groups to take leadership in shaping the industry. Specifically, teaching young women to find voice in writing original music and performing in all-girl bands mirror the mission of many youth media organizations to encourage young people to come to voice and power.

Despite these similarities, music as a medium is often left on the periphery of the youth media field. Music is an effective medium to engage young people and should be incorporated in the youth media field as strongly as video, print or radio.

Youth Music *is* Youth Media

Youth-created music *is* media. Youth music programs introduce and teach young people an instrument, get them to work together in bands (diverse in age, class and ethnicity), write original music as a group (negotiating between different levels of musical capability), share leadership, practice, and perform live at the end of the program. Youth music relies on adult allies to support young people through their creative journey. Embedded within youth music programs are workshops on media

literacy, building networks and allies, and using music as a means of expression.

Common elements of youth music include becoming media literate and aware, gaining confidence and voice, learning how to play an instrument, sharing leadership, developing kinship, constructing a network of allies and sharing access and perspective across differences. These elements are not only common among youth music organizations, but, not surprisingly, they are the same elements found in most youth media programming.

The Rock n’ Roll Camp for Girls: A Case Study

As a large network of similar non-profits, the rock camp movement—which speaks to the many camps that have launched individually since 2001—have formed from a desire to encourage young women to gain a skill, self confidence, a network of allies, a creative approach to combat stereotypes, and a channel to voice an opinion—even if it is through shouting lyrics in a band, rocking on guitar, or banging on drums. Rock camp is not just about the music. It is about empowering girls.

The program is founded on the proposition that music can serve as a powerful tool of self-expression and self-esteem-building for girls and young women, and can help combat racism and stereotypes by building bridges of communication and shared experience among girls from diverse communities. Like many youth media organizations that focus on teaching youth video, print or radio, the increase in youth voice in a medium is a major part of the end goal.

Becoming media literate and aware. Rock camp engages young women with hands-on media and critical analysis in order to spur creative understandings of identity, the self, society, and commu-

nity. Embedded alongside instrument instruction and band practice, media literacy workshops, zine pages, and hands on classes with technology (sound boards, mixers) support young girls to develop critical questions on mainstream media's audience, messages, and how to combat oppression creatively. Youth media programs also incorporate—and in some cases rely upon—media literacy to support young people as they connect their work with the “bigger picture.”

Gaining confidence and voice. Rock camp exists beyond the medium it teaches (instrument instruction). Sarah Dougher, a writer, academic and musician living in Portland, who has volunteered at the Portland camp for a number of years, described seeing girls (Oregon Humanities, Fall 2002), aged 8 to 18, “find the strength to resist injustice and prejudice through musical composition and collaboration, where everything they did in their lives could be about their song writing and about their music.” For some girls, Dougher stated, this is the “first time they have played an electric instrument, and for nearly all it is a life-changing event.” Rock camp provides a platform for young women to be recognized, come to voice, and express themselves outside the constraints imposed by other institutions *using media as a tool*. In the same exact manner, youth media programs create environments to amplify youth voice and support their creative expression using media, just like rock camp. Set against the mainstream, rock camp encourages young women to question sexism and the music industry, much in the same ways that youth media questions youth inclusion in society overall.

Developing kinship. Kinship is shared equally among campers and counselors and across age differences. At camp, everyone is expected “to be real” and leave their titles (or privileges) at the door. Run by un-paid female volunteers who want to be a part of a supportive environment that they rarely experienced in their lives as teens and/or female musicians, the atmosphere of camp is compassion for youth and passion for music. In essence, rock

camp is run by mentors that are young (between the ages 19-35) and learning as they go, investing in a common interest (in this case, rock n’ roll). Many youth media organizations are staffed with young people and educators, some who work for free, and many (if not all) who are passionate about the young people they serve—an exact parallel to rock camp.

Sharing leadership. A few camp organizations have a youth advisory board, and many alums apply as interns, band coaches, band managers, and instrument instructors after the age of 18. The experience in playing in a band among peers is a space for young people to define leadership, work as a team, resolve conflict, respect differences and listen to one another. The campers and alums are in a position where what they learn from the program will one day *lead* the program. Patrick Johnson, a graduate turned employee of Youth Radio in Oakland, CA, remarks in a previous article published in YMR that the organization provides “a visible line of leadership.” Youth media values youth leadership, where adult allies and mentors encourage young people to share positions of power like the volunteers at camp who share the power to rock.

Constructing a network of allies. Organizers of the Portland, OR rock camp called for a Girls Rock Camp Alliance last year to share best practices, curriculum, and dialogue across camp sites (many of which are their own, separate non-profits). These educators are dedicated to keeping each camp’s mission unique but in line with the overall goal of empowering young women through music and bands. Such networking, sharing, and dialogue is exactly what Steve Goodman and Diane Coryat call for in their OSI white paper, “Developing the Youth Media Field.” If rock camp answers the call that leaders in the youth media field raised in 2004, youth *music* is directly in line with youth *media*.

Sharing access and perspective across differences. Like the youth media field, rock camp does a fantastic job at providing under resourced youth access to

technology and expensive equipment. Approximately 25% of the campers report annual household incomes under \$20,000, and more than half of campers receive partial or full scholarships (full tuition for the 2005 and 2006 sessions was \$500). The camp reflects the racial and ethnic diversity of the U.S., with more than half of the campers identifying themselves as African-American, Latina, Asian or multiethnic/multiracial. Similarly, youth media programs across the U.S. aim to serve underrepresented youth that often, do not have access to media or media programs. Many youth media organizations come at low or no cost in an effort to reach their target audience. Youth music is not *common* to youth media, it *is* youth media

Youth Music Intersects with Youth Media

While efforts like rock camp exist across the country and around the globe, the youth media field has not turned its attention to this work. Similarly, rock camp has not reached out to the handful of youth media organizations that focus on girl-empowering video, radio, or print programs. Though in the future, these perfectly-suited collaborations and partnerships will eventually occur, to date they remain untapped.

There are, nevertheless, a few points of intersection between youth music and youth media. Some youth media organizations are recognizing youth music as youth media, incorporating music production in their programming within recent years, such as BAVC and Youth Radio in the Bay Area. Even some organizations have made partnerships with youth music. For example, Youth Media Records in Oakland, CA—a youth-directed label based on principles of justice and social engagement—partners with local youth media organizations, such as Conscious Youth Media Crew, to provide music to video pieces and vice versa. These partnerships have found that using youth-produced music is a viable method to bypass copyright laws that come with using mainstream music in video and on air. These musical opportunities are spaces for youth to meet, share different per-

spectives, and work on creating multi-media as a team.

Scattered within the youth media field exists youth music programs but they remain in the shadow of video, radio or print. For example, in Portland, OR, Ethos Music Center is dedicated to music-based education for youth in underserved communities. Similarly, Music4U in the United Kingdom brings musical opportunities to young people in communities with high levels of poverty, particularly those living in geographical isolated rural and urban estate communities. The mission statements and drive for many youth music programs are right in line with youth media. Mainstream music is arguably more dominant in young people's lives than film, television, or radio, which carries with it, the same loaded messages as these other mediums. Young people need the tools to deconstruct, question, and create music in their own terms, just as they have done so powerfully in video, radio and print. It is time for the field to fully embrace and collaborate with youth music.

Conclusion

From rock camp to youth-directed record labels, music is perhaps, one of the most important mediums accessible for youth expression, voice, and desired change. As such, youth music should not be on the periphery of the youth media field.

Music is media. If the field continues to simply intersect with music, it will only fraction and weaken the field. Music must be embraced as part of the youth media field. When youth media educators talk about youth media it *must* be all inclusive, incorporating music, video, radio, print and technology equally. The field is, after all, bigger than we think.

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