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Mixing the Digital, Social, and Cultural: Learning, Identity, and Agency in Youth Participation

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Innovations in technology are, once again, shaping how adults and youth interact with each other in school, at home, and at large. Our focus in this chapter is on how youth use multiple forms of media and technology, in concert with their commitments to community dialogue and social justice, as they learn to be participants in civic and democratic practices. We share two case studies that revolve around youth–adult interactions in learning environments that offer youth real opportunities to be influential in their respective communities. We look firstly at youth media production in the context of a community-based media arts project, and secondly at how young people use technology in the course of their work as student representatives on their local school board.

Our aim in this context is to understand how digital media are used in relation to what we shall call *social and cultural technologies*, those tools that organize social participation in particular settings.¹ Our definition of the word technology is consistent with Raymond Williams's view:

A technology . . . is, first, the body of knowledge appropriate to the development of such skills and applications and, second, a body of knowledge and conditions for the practical use and application of a range of devices. . . . What matters in each stage, is that a technology is always, in a full sense, social. It is necessarily in complex and variable connection with other social relations and institutions. . . .²

As we have seen in the earlier chapters in this volume, youth are using a wide range of digital media that facilitate social interaction, from MySpace.com and instant messenger systems to video production and editing equipment, to organize access to and production of digital output such as the texts of online debate, Internet data (audio, visual, and textual), and text messages. Our goal here is to spotlight the intertwined ways in which youth are engaging with multiple types of digital media as a feature of their learning. We also consider how digital media combine and mix with social and cultural technologies.

Social technologies are tools that organize social activities. They intentionally focus the attention of participants. A key element of social technologies is the flexibility in form and in content. For instance, brainstorming is a technique used broadly to generate a list of ideas (and to define an area of focus), but it can be implemented in a variety of ways, using various and adjustable conventions (for example, providing a time limit, starting with an opening question and with any content). Cultural technologies, on the other hand, are formal tools that organize processes for communication in specific settings. They structure participation in standard ways that are consistent in form, but not necessarily in content. The standardization of form is a key element of these technologies, while the flexibility of content

allows for appropriation of the tool to achieve unanticipated outcomes. Examples of cultural technologies are legal resolutions, standard notation in musical composition, and so on.³

The notion of social, cultural, and digital tools being mutually constitutive of learning experiences also finds support in the work of John Dewey: "It is possible to isolate . . . several types and levels of tools, as well as several levels of functions performed. Plans of action at their various levels are tools, as is the hardware utilized in their realization."⁴ The idea here is that beyond what the media art forms and technology tools allow, their application and impact on learning and identity are mediated by the social positions and community contexts that organize participation.

Our view of learning is therefore very participatory.⁵ Whenever people are engaged in activities with each other, the potential for learning is there. In both the case studies we discuss, the practice of participating—that is, being a youth media producer or a student representative to the School Board—gives youth a chance to learn in a way that would be difficult to achieve in a classroom. The learning contexts are about constructing opportunities for youth to experience authentically how to participate in a community dialogue or in decision making. Mullahey et al. define participation in its extension into the broader community:

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.⁶

Through such experiences, students learn how to use the technologies, but they also learn to understand the power relationships, to be critical about the assumptions, to speak the language (i.e., to use the discourse of the organizing systems), and generally, how to get things done. In these learning environments, identity and agency are thus intertwined.⁷

Our two case studies feature youth learning how to have leadership voices in their communities. The cases are comparable in their prioritizing of learning goals, the importance of technologies in supporting both participation and learning, the presence of adult guidance and intervention, and youth-led attempts to steer community discourse. They contrast in their uses of digital media, the pedagogical approaches, and how these engagements enhance young people's participatory capacities. In the first case, digital media are front and center, yet dependent on the social technologies brought into the learning process. In the second case, youth are deeply immersed in cultural technologies and default to the use of everyday digital media to make progress. In both cases there are multiple channels through which these interactions happen, some with and facilitated by adults, and some through "back channels" that are created and negotiated by youth. We describe how youth and adults establish learning environments for each other, negotiate the grounds for participation, and explore the possibilities and limitations of the various technologies in the process. Both cases support the idea that this learning is something that young people do actively as agents in their own development.⁸

Education of the next generation of youth in the areas of youth leadership, civic activism, and social justice is proliferating worldwide in formal and informal learning settings.⁹ The idea of youth as agents who shape society stands in contradiction, at some level, with having their voice and agency managed by adults. Current attempts to promote positive youth development entail a range of participation opportunities, including public policy advocacy, community organizing, and organizational decision making.¹⁰ They emphasize youth voice,

and push toward reallocating systemic access to positions of power for setting agendas, taking actions, and making decisions in partnership with adult decision makers. While both the settings we describe are explicitly trying to engage youth in learning to participate in civic leadership, the use of technology differs in each case. While the media organization engages digital media forms as a function of its social justice work, the student board illustrates the use of *everyday* media that youth access as a means of organizing their participation in the policy-making process. Yet, as we shall argue, it is precisely in the combination or mixture of social, cultural, and digital technologies that the possibilities for learning and identity reside.

Identity and Youth Media: Learning to Change the Discourse

I make 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. —Youth producer, age fifteen

Working Together and Coming Apart: Adulthood

The young people had spent weeks getting to know each other, but now they were at a crossroads. Twelve ethnically diverse youth from New York City's public schools and low-income communities were in a group at Global Action Project (G.A.P.),¹¹ a social justice youth media arts organization. They were debating intensely what their collaborative documentary video would be about, and were starting to feel the pressure of the production deadline—they were running out of time. Frustrated by each other, the process, and their facilitators, the youth had to reach a collective decision quickly. Guided by Shreya and Max, two media educators new to G.A.P., the youth agreed on a compromise: they would make a video about their common experience with “adulthood,” the practice of adults' systematic discrimination against young people.

The topic of “adulthood” had emerged from a series of preproduction media workshops on identity and power designed by the media educators in which the youth had visually charted social relationships and questions about identity (e.g., how many people connect with a “subordinate” identity as the one that is most important to them? Why do you think that is? There are many dimensions of our identities we don't always think of—was there any privilege or power you had taken for granted?). In employing the organization's social justice framework for media production, which critiques systemic social issues by exploring identity, community, power and social action through a collaborative team work model, the educators had been hoping to cultivate common ground among the youth by having them generate shared experiences from their daily interactions with adults. What materialized was a raw, if limited, picture of urban youth being searched, followed, monitored, disrespected, and silenced.

Although they had spent workshop time brainstorming an array of topics for their documentary, such as abortion and substance abuse, the group had already generated footage on the theme of “adulthood” in their practice camera shoots and “vox pop” interviewing exercises (to investigate how media shape identity, identity workshops are paired with technical training exercises). Team building efforts such as generating safe space rules and expectations for working with each other (e.g., be respectful, listen) had created a functioning group dynamic, but ongoing and conflicting opinion in the room about “adulthood” as a topic was having a negative effect. Shreya reflected, “We had a contingent of youth who wanted the topic... then we had some who picked it because it would enable them to start editing



Figure 1

Youth slavery at the Harvard Club. ©Global Action Project, 2005.

and get to an advanced skills stage sooner, and then we had some who didn't want it, and eventually compromised but felt badly about it later." Amanda, a youth leader within the program, agreed, "It was really tricky to work on, because half of the group didn't like the topic. After lots of debate, it was the only thing more than three people could agree on, and so we went with that. I wouldn't really say that we 'chose' it." Adulthood, by default and design, had chosen them.

With the deadline for the public screening of their video at a community-wide winter celebration fast approaching, the group dived into a frenzy of hands-on production work, shooting first-person narratives, editing, and sound scoring. Visually and conceptually addressing the topic remained problematic. They decided to have peers speak directly to the camera and recount their experiences with adulthood, and one after another, they described being victimized, tokenized and put down. One story features Tati, a young woman who attended a conference on youth slavery at the Harvard Club as part of a school-based human rights community service project. Sharply recalling how conference organizers made the youth wear humiliating baseball caps and sit in the corner of the room, denying them food, and ignoring their questions, she says, "It was like youth slavery at the youth slavery conference!" (see Figure 1). Outraged by her own powerlessness, she admits to rebelliously swiping a coffee cup from the club to make a point, albeit one she suspects went unnoticed by the adults.

To prepare for the public presentation of their video at the screening, the group discussed their concerns about the project. Although they had moved forward on the topic, the "us versus them" framing of youth/adult relationships was still a concern. What about loving parents and grandparents, favorite teachers, their staff facilitators? some asked. How would that be addressed? What about talking down to younger youth? others argued. Weren't older teens just as guilty of adulthood? With Max and Shreya, the youth discussed new questions about power—"how does this experience of power over-impact interactions with fellow youth and with adult allies? And how does it impact your self-image? How can you resist various levels of adulthood?"—and created a pre-screening audience activity called *Please Stand Up If*. They entitled their video *The Missing -Ism*, to underscore the absence of adulthood in a "canon" of inequalities (i.e., racism, classism, sexism), and wrote an artist statement to explain their intent:

Adulthood is the oppression of young people, through attitudinal, cultural, and systematic discrimination. We wanted to look at an issue that is ingrained in societies across the globe... that everyone faces at

one time or another, often without recognizing what it is. It is an overlooked -ism that many take as part of the norm in society, and therefore, internalize it. Especially in media, youth are portrayed as ignorant and apathetic—as a youth video group, this is our way of countering that. —Youth producers, 2005

The winter celebration was a packed community affair with youth, staff, family, friends and others. Two youth led the group's *Please Stand Up If* exercise. To allow all in the room to observe who else had experienced adultism and have people reflect on their own, they asked the audience to “please stand up if”:

- You have ever been called a name by an older person (e.g., stupid, ugly)
- Your dress, appearance, body size, height, shape or looks were ever made fun of or criticized by an adult
- You ever put down someone else for his or her dress or appearance, body size, height, shape, or looks
- Adults have ever ignored you, served you last, or watched you suspiciously in a store
- An adult or someone your age ever stood up for you.

The room moved up and down as waves of adults and youth stood together in response to the prompts. After watching the video, youth in the audience had overwhelmingly positive feedback. Their questions revealed how engaged they were by the topic—“I’m really glad you did this,” “teachers disrespect us all the time,” “why did you make this?” The group, although pleased, was surprised and some members spoke directly about the disagreements that were such a difficult part of the process, from representing adult–youth relationships, to feeling forced to choose the topic, to not even being sure what “adultism” meant. Yet presenting *The Missing -Ism* had become an occasion for the transformation of the group, enabling its members to see how their struggles could generate dialogue. It also challenged them to take on a greater level of ownership when it came to choosing the next documentary topic, regardless of the production timeline or staff-generated activities. They had experienced that “power is the ability to take one’s place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one’s part matter.”¹²

Critique and Questions: What Did They Learn?

Nevertheless, for the media educators and adult staff, *The Missing -Ism* was problematic. Featuring short pointed cuts of youth naming how they had been oppressed, the video was honest but overly simplistic. It lacked technical or aesthetic accomplishment, relied on “talking heads,” and focused solely on the issue of victimhood. Staff raised questions about why the video did not portray the disagreements youth had about the roles adults play in their lives, did not feature instances of youth who are organizing and responding to pervasive forms of adultism (e.g., against military recruitment actions, youth-led educational reform efforts), or present an analysis of “adultism” as a social justice issue. Significantly, some staff felt the topic was misleading as a “stand-alone category” and should not be equated with historical and institutional oppressions such as racism and classism. One member of staff asserted, “I don’t think rich straight white kids are oppressed. This country and its culture fetishize its youth population.”

The video also raised questions about the organization’s curriculum, the professional development of media educators, and the deep challenges of engaging youth and adults in a

collaborative process—a process that should, as education philosopher Maxine Greene has written, enable youth to discover the power of their voices through making media, when they “find themselves able to ‘name’ and imagine how they might change their worlds for the first time as they capture it through a scene or narrative, a gesture or dialogue.”¹³

Taking Charge: Producing “Set Up”

The youth and staff moved to the spring production cycle with renewed energy, focus and attendance. Staff encouraged youth to develop their topic further, and to ground it in specific daily life and community concerns rather than solely identity-focused ones. Other important elements were in place: the youth were working as a group, had completed a challenging project, and had developed their media making skills (e.g., camera work, editing). They had moved from being peripheral players to more central ones: the group was now positioned to increase the quality of their collaboration, production and analysis.

During topic selection it became clear that almost everyone in the room had, at some point, seriously considered leaving high school before graduation, and that two of the twelve were considering the Navy, in a time of war, as their only alternative. They saw that education affected them individually, as a cohort, and in relation to the political, economic, and social well being of their families and communities. This time the group agreed quickly on addressing the issue of “dropping out,” but with a twist. The youth felt, or had seen others, “pushed out” from completing high school by being discouraged, criminalized, punished for being pregnant, or having special needs. They planned a different kind of documentary, one that reflected their new skills as media makers. Through workshops and research, the group identified who and what they wanted to represent, from in-depth interviews with community activists and scholars who had studied the issue to young people directly affected by discriminatory school policies. They hosted advocacy group workshops on the legal rights of minors (with a special focus on mental health and reproductive rights, which have an impact on graduation rates) and attended youth media and activist conferences to interview peers about dropouts and pushouts in their schools. They brainstormed segments to produce or research. Shreya recounted, “we tried to get each young person to commit to something they wanted to do . . . for example, Gabriel wanted to do music and interview his brother who left high school and is still successful. Amanda wanted to add narrative elements and interview someone with a General Equivalency Diploma. Corina wanted to find a documentary she had seen on the history of education.”

Demonstrating greater visual storytelling, cinematography, and editing skills, the youth developed and shot dramatic reenactments of a young pregnant woman who believes she will be forbidden from graduating, and of a parent struggling with a confusing contract that waives her rights to keep her son in school. They also creatively represented educational statistics, and concluded with a powerful personal story told by Jessica, a participating youth, who tells of three generations of her family being pushed out of school and of her own determination to be the first to make it through to graduation and beyond. Reflecting an informed frustration with the NYC public school system’s policies and a belief that youths’ attempts to get the education they deserved were being routinely thwarted, they entitled the video *Set Up*. Again in an artistic statement, they explain:

This video questions why people leave school or fail to graduate. Rather than focusing on the more commonly held problem of “drop outs,” the video examines the trends of push outs, and the many ways that young people feel discouraged by the educational system. Interviewing educational researchers, students, and the young people in our group, we try to present the stories behind the statistics.

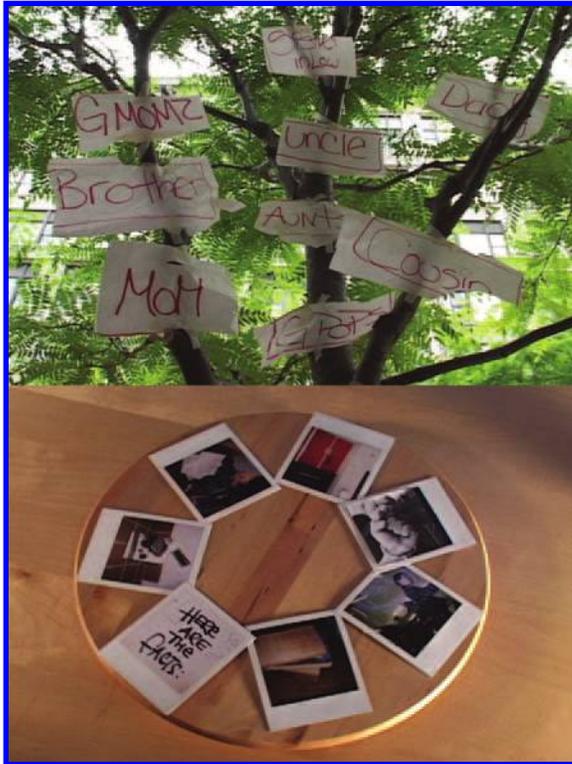


Figure 2
Screen shots from *Set Up*. ©Global Action Project, 2005.

For the final screening, the group produced a viewing sheet, which offered structured discussion ideas for audiences, and explained why they had chosen to address this particular issue:

This was a topic that was important to all of us in group. We all knew someone who had left school, or had struggled with that decision ourselves. During our research on why people leave school, we started looking at school policies, laws, funding, and realizing that the reasons why people leave aren't just personal. Students can be pushed out, literally, or *feel* pushed out in a subtle way. We focused on push outs, because it's something that people don't really talk about in mainstream media, and something that even people who *are* pushed out don't really realize what has occurred to them. We wanted to make a movie that showed some of the real reasons people leave school, and that would spur people to action.

The viewing sheet included prescreening suggestions: "How would you define a drop out? How would you define a push out? Does anything in this video relate to your life or personal experiences?" They also offered resources for learning more about the topic, from websites for groups such as the Drum Major Institute for Public Policy and Advocates for Children to the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University (see *Set Up* shots in Figure 2).

From conception to completion, *Set Up* reflected the active learning and participation that enabled the group to reach its potential for producing compelling media, in collaboration with peers and with the support of adults. Publicly presented and emceed by the youth at

the organization's end-of-year screening celebration to an audience of over 200 people, *Set Up* generated an intense viewer discussion, from personal reflections by adults who shared their own experiences with dropping out and appreciated seeing the issue framed in a new way, to youth who were being pushed out, to those who wanted to know what organizing work the young people were doing along with media making.

Set Up was not without challenges or limits. From the media educator perspective, it was clear that this video documentary went much farther than *The Missing -Ism* in terms of both group process and final product. Critiques of the piece focused on its potential to be used by youth as a teaching tool, the need for a more diverse range of experts (e.g. community-based, of color, young), and a suggestion for youth to offer strategies for solutions from their perspectives. The production reflects ongoing struggles to locate and define "youth voices" and to promote young people's participation in the wider social structures that influence their lives. At its best, this kind of participatory media production work reflects a "ladder of participation—from token representation to active self-determination"¹⁴ that the youth, the adults who worked and learned with them, and the organization itself were able to climb.

Digital Media, Social Technology, and Learning: The Broader Youth Media Context

Only by engaging in society—and working to make it better—can youth come to terms with who are, what they believe, and how they relate to others and to society as a whole. —Nicholas Winter.¹⁵

The number of programs in the United States that use digital media to engage young people in positive activities outside of school settings has grown tremendously during the last decade.¹⁶ What began as a small community-based arts movement is defining itself as a field, encompassing a variety of communicative art forms such as audio/radio, film/video, print, web and media production. From digital storytelling to documentary production, programs range broadly in their missions, methods, audiences, and media forms.¹⁷ Many focus exclusively on creative expression, while others actively use media as a vehicle for leadership development and civic engagement. The learning practice used by these kinds of programs is typically hands-on, experiential, and focuses primarily on production.¹⁸ Core challenges facing youth media practitioners include managing the delicate balance of process versus product, and defining "youth voice" in the context of making digital media.¹⁹ Those particular challenges are clearly reflected in the case above, where the most important decisions and experiences of the youth were responsively shaped—and contested—by production timelines, group dynamics, demands of adult educators, and young people's own developing skills and sensibilities as social issue media makers, as youth "with a voice."

The Missing -Ism and *Set Up* were produced in an organization that has spent years crafting a curriculum and methodology that aims to engage young people in creatively representing themselves and their communities, in making media that respond to the social, cultural, economic, and political forces that affect them daily, and in using media for dialogue and positive social change. These goals are not easy to attain, and their accomplishment requires ongoing questioning and negotiation by staff and youth, while meeting the demands of the production process.

Informed by approaches drawn from social justice campaigns, community media, youth development, and popular education movements, the organization has designed a critical literacy framework to engage young people in the collective examination and production of media. The term "critical literacy" is gaining more traction within the youth media field as a way of describing a pedagogy that teaches multiple literacies, continuous

inquiry, and reflection.²⁰ In this social justice youth media arts organization, it also refers to an intentional process supported by curriculum, teaching methods, staff training, media production/analysis activities, outreach efforts, and assessment practices that strive to be intergenerational and dialogic (as it explicitly acknowledges the role of adults in the mix). It also describes an intentional outcome, the goal of which is to enable youth to “read,” “write,” and “rewrite” the world through making media, and to encourage them to see themselves as active agents, able to shape their own identities, experiences and histories—what educators Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo have described as a “relationship of learners to the world” shaped through an interpretation, reflection, and a “rewriting of what is read.”²¹ In this sense critical literacy is more than a set of thinking strategies: it should enable youth to produce media that, as the staff describe, use “the power of storytelling to challenge dominant narratives and write new histories.” Steve Goodman, a leading US media educator, argues that this necessarily entails developing an awareness of one’s identity and agency, in which “learning about the world is directly linked to the possibility of changing it.”²² It also approaches the learning of youth and staff as a social endeavor that supports youth as coconstructors of knowledge and values creating a responsive setting in which young people can enter “a community with a level of expertise on which to build deeper understanding.”²³

Clearly, these are guiding principles on which practice is based, and it is in practice that the greatest tensions and possibility are seen. The developmental arc that young people experienced in the process of making media reflects the context and the intent of learning that was actively shaped, pushed, and at times limited by the critical literacy framework. Often critical pedagogies claim to empower young people through developing new knowledge, but they are also criticized for being directive and agenda driven, ultimately the work of an adult-initiated vision of justice or social change.²⁴ In this story, we saw adults and youth both struggling and working together to find their place in the process, sometimes successfully and sometimes not. Through production and public screenings that involved their reflection on identity, not least on what it means to “speak” as a young person or to represent young people, youth were organized and compelled to identify issues of importance to their lives and communities, and adults scaffolded access to working relationships, new skills, and meaningful opportunities for youth participation in reshaping social conditions that affected them. The social technologies of curriculum, activities, debate, public presentation, research, group dynamic rules, and organizational goals challenged youth to inquire, reflect, and apply their knowledge to connecting with and negotiating the world, producing media and content that offer an informed perspective. It is through these practices and with a sense of agency that the youth might spark a conversation, create a new understanding, or educate communities, peers, and organizers. Critical literacy, then, is the outcome of such participation. As one of the youth, Amanda, explains:

That is what youth leadership is about, having confidence in yourself to stand up and speak about your work, your beliefs and not be intimidated . . . youth are equipped to lead not only workshops but also entire movements if we wanted to. This is important because young people grow up and if they have the skills, tools and knowledge, changing the world is not impossible.

The key point of this case is that the process of developing young people’s leadership and active participation in the world around them does not come about simply as a result of having access to the technology, or even to training in the analysis and production skills they need to use it. It is a complex, iterative process that involves identifying and thinking through what it is they want to say; interacting with adults, who play a key role in setting

parameters, offering possibilities and challenges; collaborating with peers in new ways; and taking account of the audiences that they are seeking to address and to influence. Taken together, these “social technologies” embody particular social relationships, expectations of producing media together, and ways of working that engage young people in dialogue, and support and challenge them to recognize their own capacity for inquiry and action. Learning doesn’t necessarily happen instantly, but develops over time as youth have the structured opportunity to reflect on and critique what they have done, with the goal of improving the next time around. “Social technologies” give digital media purpose as a means for youth to craft new identities as learners, and potentially as social leaders.

Mixing It Up: Everyday Digital Media and the Cultural Technology of Policy-Making

I think it just comes into our lives because we’re a technology-based age anyway. We’ve all grown up with computers, so it just kinda comes naturally to us. It’s not like we have to do any struggle to work with any, um, technology. —Interview with Eliza, junior, January 2, 2006.

Eliza was a representative for her school on the Student Advisory Board (SAB)—an officially recognized organization of a large, urban school district in northern California. Seventeen high schools in the district could elect and send student representatives to the SAB, which presented student perspectives on policy issues to the School Board and the Superintendent. In an interview about her experience as a student representative, Eliza argued that technology was simply a given in her experience. It was just a part of how she and other students lived in the world, and as such, it became a part of how they fulfilled their representative duties. Here, we will talk about shifts in the students’ use of digital media as they learned more about what it took to be responsible for raising “student voice.”

Like the youth filmmakers in New York, SAB representatives were part of an intentional learning process supported by adult facilitators, and they were committed to bringing a youth perspective into view. However, their use of digital media was not the primary focus in organizing their opportunities to learn. Instead, the SAB illustrates ways in which student representatives incorporated their use of “everyday digital media” into their work. By the term *everyday*, we are referring to digital media tools and electronics—mobile phones, instant messenger tools, websites, etc.—that students were using as a matter of course in their daily lives. These everyday media were appropriated for unanticipated or unintended uses (for example, using a text message on a mobile phone to spontaneously convene hundreds of people in a designated location). Yet activity on the SAB was dominated by youth learning to use the *cultural technologies* that made up their district’s policy making mechanisms, such as bylaws, parliamentary procedures, public notices, and resolutions. These cultural technologies organized specific forms of activity (for example, using a resolution to fuel public scrutiny of a contested decision). Taken together, the cultural and digital technologies became mutually constitutive of youth participation on the SAB (for example, using email to urge other students to react to a document or using a resolution to introduce a policy recommendation), and it is the combination that is of interest in understanding how students participated and learned.

As the student representatives on the SAB learned how to use the district’s cultural technologies while managing their own communication needs, the everyday and the formal gradually became intertwined, a process which had its challenges:

Over the phone and instant messenger, we could multitask with our homework and talk to people. . . . In the beginning . . . we tried to do instant messenger group meetings, like if we can’t meet, just to talk about

certain topics online. But that really didn't go so well because people were just joking around and stuff like that. That's an informal kind of thing that came into play. It was kind of hard to mix both worlds. [We're] supposed to be formal about something, but it's hard. —Interview with Chris, senior, February 11, 2006.

Chris's assessment of early attempts to combine their formal responsibilities with their everyday, informal online communication points out an instance where identities appeared separate and competitive—where what they were “supposed” to be doing as representatives was in conflict with what they *were* doing as students. The story of two events illustrates how competing identities were organized and reconciled between student and adult participants.

Meet the New SAB: Knowing and Showing How to “Represent” with a Cultural Technology

The goal was to emphasize how the whole group participated in developing and/or approving the bylaws. The group decided that Jack, Chris, Milton, and Janel would make the presentation at the board meeting . . . [and] that each SAB member present at the board meeting would come to the podium and introduce themselves (name, school, and grade). —Field note, SAB Meeting February 23, 2004.

Nine students were present at a February 23 SAB meeting to prepare for their upcoming presentation at a public meeting of the School Board, and they were concerned about demonstrating full representation in the face of declining participation. During the previous school year, the SAB had temporarily lost their sanction after a series of public disagreements with the Superintendent that resulted in the removal of one of their representatives from his position as a student delegate to the School Board. Following the suspension, the Superintendent required that the students update their bylaws before resuming their roles as official student representatives. The youth learned that the district required its official boards to maintain bylaws that defined the group's purpose and the rules governing its functions. They had been working toward presenting their revised bylaws for two-thirds of the school year, meeting biweekly as a whole group and in additional subcommittee meetings:

I just remember the bylaws because that's what our goal was. The first meetings were just an introduction to what we were doing . . . we were laying out the foundation of the [SAB] for the next year so it's stable. From my understanding, the Superintendent fired the old people who were working with us, so everything had to be rearranged and fixed. I wasn't really sure what happened . . . the superintendent wanted to us to have bylaws before we could represent the students. It took us almost the whole school year because there'd be something wrong. Then we'd have to go to a subcommittee. It was a back and forth thing until it was perfect for us. —Interview with Chris, senior, February 11, 2006.

Regaining the official sanction would ultimately require approval by the district's legal department, the Superintendent, and a majority of the School Board. In short, the youth were disenfranchised from their advisory roles, and the task of bylaw writing had consigned them to the periphery until it was completed.

Early in the rebuilding process, the students' use of digital media was very much an everyday matter. They used e-mail to set meetings and share updated drafts of the bylaws. They used their mobile phones during meetings to confirm their whereabouts with their families and for their usual social commitments. Milton attested to this, stating, “It's also an organizing tool, so students can get rides home. I get calls from my parents during meetings. Sometimes I don't take it right away to avoid being rude” (Junior, Interview, August 21, 2005). Their digital media use was secondary to and mostly separate from their focus on

learning to use the cultural tools required by the district for participation. At this stage, digital media were useful but not necessary to develop their intended identity as respected participants in district policy making.

The SAB members were primarily concerned with meeting high standards of conduct and professionalism. Issues of representation dominated the writing of the bylaws, particularly regarding the issue of quorum—the minimum number of representatives who must be present before the group can conduct business. Without the bylaws assignment occupying them, they would have been contributing to the district’s debates about how to improve school safety and addressing student concerns with the nutrition policy. Instead, they were tackling the issue of quorum from all angles (How do you count it? When do you need it? What can you do if you don’t have it? What is a high-enough standard?). They were regularly responding to recommendations for change from the Superintendent’s office and the legal department, and they were not quite sure what the quorum requirements were for voting on the incremental changes. Minutes of the meeting showed the quorum deliberations:

The group discussed what action could be taken about the revisions to the bylaws without a quorum . . . Could the smaller group simply accept the recommended changes, or was a quorum required for this as well?

Pro [Decide without quorum]	Con [Wait until we have quorum]
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If these are required recs, then a quorum isn’t necessary ▪ The [SAB] has already passed the bylaws ▪ Avoid re-doing the subcommittee process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Complete [SAB] voice isn’t represented ▪ It’s the right thing to get a full vote ▪ This meeting’s attendees can act as a subcommittee and make recs to full [SAB] ▪ Concern over legality of decision without a quorum

Decision: Work on bylaws at this meeting. Unofficial vote on recommendations. Bring recommendations to next [SAB] meeting for final discussion and vote. Work hard to make sure [SAB] has a quorum at the next meeting.

The youth had been working on the bylaws for four months when they had this discussion, and attendance had dropped to roughly one third of the group. They were concerned about leaving themselves open to attacks on their process that might further hamper their ability to function as representatives of the student voice. So, for the public record, they agreed to wait two more weeks for a vote on the recommended changes. They put the word out by phone and e-mail that they were ready for a final vote and managed to double attendance to achieve quorum.

Their concern with appearing thorough and professional was unmistakable, and it extended into every discussion that followed. This event clarified an early intersection of the students’ representative and youth identities. Their identities as representatives were beginning to be expressed through their use of the cultural technologies for “official” participation, in this instance, bylaws and quorum. Their identities as youth were being expressed through their use of everyday digital media for managing the constraints on their physical presence (i.e., being distributed in neighborhoods across the city and grappling with transportation challenges).

Formality Gets Familiar: Using Everyday Digital Media to Assert Powerful Identities

My committee had chats on AIM [AOL Instant Messenger] about stuff. We debated a lot over AIM. I remember long chats debating stuff like the Superintendent’s raise with four or five people in a chat.

There were pretty much two sides. We had things we all could agree on, but different opinions about how to do it. —Interview with Vince, sophomore, September 17, 2005.

Over a year after rewriting their bylaws, the SAB was back on track. They focused on rebuilding relationships with adult decision makers in the district, and they refined their processes for accomplishing work. Attendance was up, and they rarely worried about achieving quorum. They also had the cultural technologies well in hand. Meetings ran smoothly on parliamentary procedure with two or three students chiming in to second a motion they supported. They successfully wrote, revised and passed formal resolutions addressing curriculum needs and equitable access to extracurricular activities that were endorsed by the Board of Education, and they successfully convened a summit on safety and sexual harassment drawing hundreds of students across the district to boot. As a result, their attention was no longer focused on how to become representatives but on *being* representatives. Milton, a three-year veteran of the SAB, put it this way:

I think another big challenge is training. If you're going to get a bunch of new members, you need to get them to a point where they can start thinking about these issues by themselves. . . . Once I understood the ropes and the processes, I got more comfortable understanding what I could contribute. —Interview with Milton, junior, August 21, 2005.

SAB representatives refocused their attention on issues rather than processes, and their identities as both representatives and youth began to meld. Their abilities to take action and need to involve many students affected their use of digital media tools. Vince offered the practical perspective, saying, "On a phone you can get three-way, but on AIM you can get as many people as you want to talk, and you won't run up a phone bill." Students consistently reported using web tools to communicate and conduct research, and using mobile phones to convene youth-only meetings. Their resolutions contained lists of citations with URLs to support their claims. What was originally experienced as unfamiliar formality became absorbed into students' everyday practices. So, at the end of the 2004–05 school year when the students tackled two of the most controversial issues in their district, their combined use of cultural technologies and digital media was nearly seamless.

In the wake of budget cuts and school closures, members of the SAB drafted two resolutions that directly challenged the Superintendent's decisions. The first and most controversial called for the renegotiation of her contract after a recently approved pay increase and renegotiated severance plan. The second opposed "reconstitution,"²⁵ a feature of one of her signature reform programs. These were contested issues among a wide range of communities connected with the school district: the teachers' union, parent groups, youth activist and governance organizations, and inside the School Board itself. The youth faced pressure from all sides. Students contacted the local media, and the Superintendent's office responded with a 30-page press release suggesting that adult-driven interests were co-opting a student group and drawing them into a political debate that was not appropriate territory for the SAB. At the same time, other groups such as the Teachers' Union mobilized to support the resolutions.

During this storm of activity, representatives used their access to digital media to bring the formal world of policy-making into the "youth-only" spaces they had created in their everyday lives. The intensity of the moment gave them a formal purpose inside their typically informal world of digital communication. It also allowed them to express themselves more freely: as Eliza put it, "You can display emotions on e-mail!"

Based on accounts in interviews, by the time the resolutions were introduced for the first time at an SAB meeting, most of the representatives were already familiar with them and had spent significant time debating their merits in online discussions and phone calls. This was evident during a heated public meeting where some members were pushing for an immediate vote on the resolutions:

Eleanor said she hoped the group would not vote on the resolutions tonight because they needed to hear both sides first. Manny asked if there was anyone there who could speak from the other side. Katherine, the SAB's staff person, responded that the group would need to invite someone else to speak. Shannon encouraged the group to vote tonight because, "you should trust yourself and your thoughts about it because you've already heard about it before." —Field Note, SAB Meeting, May 23, 2005.

Shannon, a junior, spoke about the group's use of mobile phones, although she did not own one herself, explaining how they used them "to schedule the secret meetings and not-secret meetings . . . Eliza and I sat at [a pizza place] and called everyone, passing Eliza's cell phone back and forth and checking our numbers against each other."

At the last regularly scheduled meeting of the school year, tensions ran high. Adults accused each other of trying to manipulate the students. Students accused adults, on all sides, of pressuring them and stepping into what they felt should have been a youth-led decision. Still, the students managed to run their meeting according to parliamentary standards. Members of the public complimented the SAB for their efforts to conduct a professional meeting, and the district's legal counsel congratulated them on "navigating a difficult meeting very well." Still, a decision on the resolutions had not been made, and the students opted to schedule a special meeting for the following week—a date that came after the completion of the school year.

At this point, the Superintendent asserted her legal authority to postpone the meeting due to her inability to attend. Attempts to negotiate alternative solutions failed. Student representatives anticipated that summer break would make it difficult to get a quorum, and they resisted the attempt to postpone. They tried a novel approach to beating the system by resigning their positions, via e-mail, to reduce the quorum requirement. After the first four attempted resignations were sent, Milton responded with this message:

. . . quorum was established for a reason: that we would have at least a MINIMAL amount of all [schools in the district] represented when we make decisions, so when we lower quorum, we are lowering membership represented, which is the strength of our voice because we are representatives . . . It's a weighty responsibility, to be a representative, so even if it is just because you can't make the meeting doesn't mean you should give up. Try to get an alternate. If all else fails, at least we all would be doing our jobs in trying to get the most represented out of all the schools in the district, cause it's more than us bringing ourselves, it's bringing our schools' representation. —E-mail to SAB and staff, Milton, June 11, 2006.

As it turned out, the resignations were not necessary because the group reached a quorum on the night of the meeting. It is noteworthy that representatives used their understanding of the resignation policy in their bylaws and their access to e-mail to formalize their strategy. The integration of cultural technology (in the form of bylaws and quorum) with digital media (in the form of e-mail communication) indicates that the students had developed a degree of confidence in their identities, to the point where they felt able to resign in service of the student body. They had developed a *collective* identity as a student group with the right to be heard and had moved beyond their *individual* identities as representatives. Meanwhile,

Milton made a plea to their shared identities as representatives to challenge the resignation maneuver, reminding them of their strength as a group.

Ultimately, the students chose to hold the meeting in opposition to the Superintendent. Eliza wrote this email to the Superintendent in defense of their decision:

We believe it is important to have this vote. In accordance with the Brown Act we could not legally vote on these resolutions Monday the 6th because we did not notice it 72 hours in advance, hence the meeting being called this Monday. We cannot postpone the meeting, nor does anything [you say] have the legal right to do so. We have checked with lawyers on this matter, to make sure that we are not over stepping our bounds in keep the meeting as is, as well as parliamentary procedures. Everything I have read and everyone I have talked to has stated the same thing: (1) that the only people with the power to [cancel] or postpone the meetings are the members, and (2) that it says nowhere that the superintendent, nor any other staff, has the power to postpone the meetings. Even I, the president, do [not] have the power to postpone the meetings. . . the students want us to speak on it, and our first concern is to the students. Though we would like you to attend the meeting, it is unnecessary seeing [as] we are talking for the students. We speak for them, not for the adult[s] of the district.

The SAB had come full circle. They were back to focusing on process, but in a qualitatively different and unanticipated way. Eliza's e-mail to the Superintendent is an instance of student-representative agency, though it did not focus on the issues directly. She asserted her view of what processes were legitimate to a leading authority in the district. After hearing public comment from lawyers, parents, teachers, and students and choosing to hold the meeting in direct resistance to the Superintendent's postponement, the SAB passed both resolutions.

Once student representatives had an opportunity to reflect on the events, they spoke with pride about their abilities to stand up for student voice in the face of intense opposition. In interviews, they spoke of having real power, and how their views of their abilities to make change were bolstered by the standoff with the Superintendent. Still, at the end of the day, their resolutions did not achieve their stated goals as they did not prevent the Superintendent from obtaining her compensation package or from engaging in school reconstitution. This fact did not dissuade the student leaders. One of the group's long time members put it this way:

We all came together and were so united. Initially, we were all over the place, we had a lot of media attention and our principals calling and threatening us. We still came together because we knew it was right for the students. . . The Superintendent was screaming at me and making accusations, and she's at the top of the whole district. I had to stand up to her, and I think she was taken aback that I could handle things like an adult. . . Sometimes all you need is your peers saying, "Yes, you can do it." —Interview with Eliza, January 2, 2006.

Combining Social and Digital Technologies: Comments on the SAB Case The cultural technologies and digital media played an integral role for SAB representatives in relation to their learning and their developing sense of agency. This, in turn, promoted the growth of a participant identity that was both supported and contested in the broader community. For the SAB, the cultural technologies were imperative for participation. In order to operate in an official capacity, they were required to have approved bylaws and to carefully follow state regulations for public meetings. When they intended to make an advisory statement to the Board of Education, they were compelled to produce formal documents called resolutions written in a format that was distinctive in its language and unfamiliar to most high school students. During their public meetings, they learned to use parliamentary procedure

to work through the agendas in order to convey a professional and thoughtful approach. As they became more confident, they developed their own protocols to be used in conjunction with these formalized procedures. These were the technologies that lent them legitimacy and, more importantly, opened up opportunities to influence school policies and to become active agents on behalf of the students in their district.

These cultural technologies resided in the deliberation space of adults, but through communication facilitated by digital media, the students appropriated these technologies and used them to their own advantage in public meetings that were open to scrutiny and regulation by powerful adults. For student representatives, digital media became a key element in making those adopted cultural technologies their own. It was in the youth controlled spaces of instant messenger chats, text messages, and “secret” face-to-face meetings that students more freely considered strategies, priorities, and implications of various courses of action. The digital space was the site for students to consider creative ways of using the cultural technologies at their disposal to achieve their goals. It was also a place to create themselves as thoughtful and powerful participants—in a sense, to practice their agency before going public.

Digital media allowed students to learn as they moved forward, first testing ideas among peers before presenting those ideas to the district and the community at large. When they were wearily writing bylaws, they had not yet discovered ways to put the bylaws to work in service of their own goals. The same was true as they developed a process for deliberating about proposed resolutions. In the digital space, one student said it was difficult to accomplish much early on, because of the off-topic conversations and playfulness. Yet, as their facility with the District’s tools increased, their learning became evident in their resolve to use digital communications for strategy, debate, and reflection. During the standoff with the Superintendent, the youth were required to be deftly improvisational in their use of bylaws, resolutions, and the local media.²⁶

Their entrance into that political space was not welcomed by the Superintendent but was validated by some Board members, some adult staff, and members of the public. Still, tensions between youth and adults in all capacities ran high. The struggle for participation and the story of the SAB members’ hard-won agency is important because it illustrates how youth can move beyond being token representatives in adult civic processes.²⁷ Still, students experienced even the adults who spoke in favor of their resolutions as politically opportunistic rather than as committed supporters of youth involvement and leadership. On one hand, the presence of so many different adults participating in this debate, fueled by student resolutions, gave the student representatives a sense of their own agency and ability to influence the public conversation. On the other hand, the actions of many adults—including the Superintendent, SAB staff, teachers’ union representatives, and local journalists—disrupted the process students had diligently created to manage their own deliberations. Ultimately, the final vote was more about a show of solidarity in a struggle for student voice than it was about the content of the resolutions themselves. Relative to other decisions made by the SAB, the text of the resolutions that was passed received less scrutiny and revision during meetings. This was due in part to time pressure and intense public debate. Yet much of the concern over *how* the resolutions should be worded was addressed in the informal spaces of youth-only meetings and back channel communications rather than during formal public meetings where changes could legitimately be instituted.

The SAB members’ use of both digital and cultural technologies developed significantly over the course of the debates we have described. During the early bylaws assignment, they

did not yet understand their purpose or use and were acting solely on adult directives. Before they learned ways to appropriate the cultural technologies in conjunction with their everyday digital media, the Superintendent more successfully managed their involvement. However, that style of management did not work as effectively once the students learned to resist and apply their knowledge in the political arena of the School Board. Learning, identity, and agency were therefore tightly coupled in the SAB case. Without their learning experience, their representative identities—both individual and collective—would not have developed, and their agency as representatives in this policy-making environment would have been compromised.

Discussion

Our case studies of youth making documentaries and youth on the School Board provide powerful examples of young people learning to participate in their larger communities. Through their media productions and board resolutions, the youth learn to engage and lead in worlds where they previously had few participation rights, no access to power, and few skills for organizing.²⁸ The youth learned these lessons in intentional, yet informal, learning environments, and we believe that, as learning contexts, these settings offer youth a unique combination of problems to tackle, social relationships, and technologies that engage learning and identity development in seamless ways.

Each story alone is a complex one; yet taken together, we believe they have two major implications for educators who work with youth in an increasingly sophisticated technological world. The first is that social, cultural and digital technologies are in constant interplay in learning environments connected to larger community participation. The second is that in these intentional yet informal contexts, learning, identity development and the ability to act with agency are deeply connected. We discuss each of these points in turn.

Social, Cultural, and Digital: Supports for Learning and Participation

Examining these multiple and varied technologies and how they are put to use in interactions by and for youth is important to understanding how they encourage and support learning and open the door to many kinds of capacities. Curriculum, brainstorming processes, or specific activities such as *Please Stand Up If* are all versions of social technologies that provide process and content. Cultural technologies such as *Robert's Rules of Order* (for parliamentary procedures) or bylaws provide structure, and digital media such as film, cell phones, and Internet activity mediate dialogue and participation spaces with and for youth. While references to digital media are familiar and commonplace, the social and cultural are not typically considered as tools in the technology toolbox. What makes them technologies is their design and use: they intentionally organize activity and can be appropriated in novel and unexpected ways. In these learning environments, authentic participation opportunities are created through the shared appropriation of the multiple technologies.²⁹ The combinations of these technologies and their associated practices help youth and adults create something authentic in terms of engagement, identity development, and meaningful participation in democratic activity. We see digital, social, and cultural technologies as tools for crossing borders that make it possible to reveal, generate, or bridge “fault lines” of power and ownership between youth and adults and the institutions in which they participate.

The combination of technologies plays a vital role in these identity building experiences. In both cases, youth worked with technologies to help them get their messages across.

The work that they did to get to the point where they could exercise agency and have impact was substantial. In the case of the *Set Up* group, they spent a great deal of time working with facilitating adults to explore their identities, their relationships to each other, and what they had in common, and completing a great deal of creative planning, research, and production work. In the SAB, students spent nearly an entire school year agonizing over the minutiae of writing bylaws so they could eventually have a voice in School Board policies. The resistance from powerbrokers led them to use everyday digital media “behind the scenes” for brainstorming, planning, and establishing plans of action. In both cases, participation was increased and learning became evident as youths developed their voice through the interplay of technologies.

Learning with increased participation, engagement, commitment, and action changes both the youth themselves and the vision of the adults who work with them. In both our cases we see youth-allied adults envisioning what youth participation can and should be, scaffolding ways for youth to participate, working with them, and eventually enabling power shifts that allow youth to define participation on their own terms. We also see dynamics of regulation and resistance to aspects of youth participation that do not align with adult expectations. In the moments where misalignments are apparent, both digital and social mediating tools are used in an integrated fashion that makes democratic participation accessible, even while it may be contested.

Identity, Agency, Learning in Intergenerational Contexts

Identity development is an emergent process that comes with sustained participation in existing community structures and discourses.³⁰ Adults in these cases are intentionally guiding youth through learning processes that support them in intervening in the communities in which they seek to participate. Evidence of this process of identity emergence abounds when youth engaged in unfamiliar or newer forms of discourse collide with adult expectations, intervention or regulation. It is in these moments that we see youth assert their agency, while making use of the community’s social and cultural technologies, as they put their everyday electronic media into action.³¹

The documentary-producing youth tell a promising story of critical pedagogy at work, yet it is also a story that illustrates some of the tensions between adults and youth. It exemplifies how youth and adults create knowledge, culture, and social action together, and how media production can foster young people’s abilities to creatively communicate, alternatively represent, and impact others as they document and possibly change their lives. The collaborative video production was a medium through which young people developed “critical literacy” and recognized their potentials for leadership, for peer-to-peer-mentorship, and for social change. This example illustrates how important it is to create and sustain intergenerational environments where youth can learn to lead in demonstrable and powerful ways.

By contrast, the youth on the Student Advisory Board were embroiled constantly in intergenerational tensions as they sought participatory rights to represent student issues to the School Board. After many months of slogging through a process of writing bylaws, and struggling with attrition of their membership, the students finally won back their participation rights. The adults representing the interests of the Superintendent and aligned board members still found ways to resist the students’ participation, while the youth used “back channel” digital communications to organize in ways that kept their participation active, to the point, and youth-driven. This makes the point that, even in organizations that aim to

engage youth in civic participation, there can be a reluctance to accept the participation of youth who fully and freely engage. When youth do things that violate expectations or move into areas thought to be off-limits, it often terrifies adults.

Taken together, the stories help us better understand the tensions, contradictions, and promises of educating youth for participation and leadership. Appropriating media for “back channel” communication is possibly subversive of adult power, yet it can assist in achieving youth development goals. At the same time, this is impossible in isolation: other mediating technologies become necessary to move the conversation into a public space for democratic participation. Youth use digital media to “convene” when other channels are adult monitored. They instant message, engage in-group dialogues, go on the web and pull down and share information. Sometimes they are experimenting with new identities or organizing for action. These back channels conjure images of traditional youth culture in its differentiation from adult culture, while at the same time exemplify the practices of leaders who operate behind the scenes to move practices in the more formal arenas forward.³²

Both our case studies are about how the mix of social, cultural, and digital technologies brought youth to new levels of participation—levels that surprise, inspire, and even threaten the adults who support their democratic engagement. Technologies, as communicative vehicles, serve as platforms for dialogue, discourse, and connection. By using a mix of technologies educationally, youth learn to represent themselves without being confined to the structures that keep them out of the public debate, or tokenizing their “voices” as pure, and therefore either true or naïve. Youth in these kinds of intentional learning environments may in fact be able to join in developing what Jenkins et al. (2006)³³ have called an emerging “participatory culture” made possible by new media. Undoubtedly, significant challenges remain here—ranging from unequal access and the lack of critical understanding of how technologies shape perception to “the breakdown of traditional forms of professional training and socialization that might prepare young people for their increasingly public roles as media makers and community participants.”³⁴ Yet well-practiced education with technology can allow for forms of participation that Miles Horton, an educator of social movement leaders, would recognize as truly significant and transformative:

If we are to have democratic society, people must find or invent new channels through which decisions can be made . . . the problem is not that people will make irresponsible or wrong decisions. It is, rather, to convince people who have been ignored or excluded in the past that their involvement will have meaning and that their ideas will be respected. The danger is not too much, but too little participation.³⁵

Notes

1. See Larry Hickman, *John Dewey's Pragmatic Technology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 17–59, for a discussion of Dewey's theory of technology and inquiry that addresses the use of tools in context for the purpose of inquiry as a foundation for knowing.
2. Raymond Williams, *What I Came to Say* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1981; 1989), 173.
3. For further explanation of these technologies and others such as philosophical technologies, see Angela Booker, *Learning to Get Participation Right(s): An Analysis of Youth Participation in Authentic Civic Practice* (Unpublished PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 2007).
4. Hickman (1990) interprets John Dewey on the role of technologies and inquiry.
5. Socio-cultural theory views learning as socially based in contexts and activities. See Buckingham, this volume, for an explanation of the perspective as viewed by authors in this volume. See Lev S.

Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, ed. Michael Cole (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Jean Lave, *Cognition in Practice* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991). For how this is treated in media arts programs see Meredith I. Honig and Moira A. McDonald, From Promise to Participation: Afterschool Programs through the Lens of Socio-Cultural Learning Theory, *Afterschool Matters* (No. 5. New York: Bowne & Co., 2005).

6. Romana Mullahey, Yve Susskind, and Barry Checkoway, *Youth Participation in Community Planning* (Chicago: American Planning Association, 1999).

7. See Dorothy Holland, William Lachicotte, Jr., Debra Skinner, and Carole Cain, *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), for a discussion of how learning, identity and agency are reflexive.

8. Francisco Villarruel, Daniel Perkins, Lynne Borden, and Joanne Keith, *Community Youth Development: Programs, Policies, and Practices* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003), 397. They state: "Positive development is not something adults do to young people, but rather something that young people do for themselves with a lot of help from parents and others. They are agents of their own development."

9. Scholars increasingly acknowledge childhood as a socially constructed phenomenon shaped by economic, political and sociocultural forces that determine the extent to which young people can be assertive (have a sense of agency) and influence the adult world [Janet Finn and Lynn Nybell, Capitalizing on Concern: The Making of Troubled Children and Troubling Youth in Late Capitalism. Introduction, *Childhood: A Global Journal of Childhood Research*, 8, no. 2 (2001): 139–145; Sue Ruddick, The Politics of Aging: Globalization and the Restructuring of Youth and Childhood, *Antipode* 35, no. 2 (2003): 334–362]. Older conceptions of youth as merely acted upon in the world have given way to analyses that acknowledge young people as social actors with citizen rights [Mark Jans, Children as Citizens, *Childhood* 11, no. 1 (2004): 27–44]. See Sharon Sutton, Susan Kemp, Lorraine Gutierrez, and Susan Saegert, *Urban Youth Programs in America: A Study of Youth, Community, and Social Justice* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2006), 16. Youth have been central to many major social movements around the world in the last forty years including but not limited to movements to protect the rights of indigenous people and human rights in general, as well as protests against war and occupation. In the United States, the historical mark of youth movements of the 1960s is present in the current dynamics of youth participation in social and political discourse. Such movements functioned to establish youth as powerful civic participants and opened a cultural space where youth could expand their roles as agents for change. Those same movements also brought with them a sense that youth participation in political and democratic practice must be managed in order to prevent the disorder that was a feature of those movements. See United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Youth Report*, ST/ESA/301, October 2005; Mark Kitchell, *Berkeley in the 60s* (Three-part documentary film, San Francisco: California Newsreel, 1990).

10. Assumptions in youth development models in the United States have shifted from viewing youth as passive recipients of intervention strategies to viewing them as active agents for change. These shifts have opened up opportunities for collaboration between youth development professionals and youth civic activism organizers as well as multiple avenues for youth participants to combat adultism and assert their participation rights. See Taj James, Empowerment Through Social Changes, *Bridges, a Publication of Health Initiatives for Youth* 3, no. 4 (1997): 6–7; Shawn Ginwright and Taj James, From Assets to Agents of Change: Social Justice, Organizing, and Youth Development, *New Directions for Youth Development* 96 (2002): 27–46; Inca Mohamed and Wendy Wheeler, Broadening the Bounds of Youth Development: Youth as Engaged Citizens (New York: The Ford Foundation, 2001); and Linda Camino and Shepherd Zeldin, From Periphery to Center: Pathways for Youth Civic Engagement in the Day-To-Day Life of Communities, *Applied Developmental Science* 6, no. 4 (2002): 213–220.

11. Co-founded by Diana Coryat and Susan Siegel in 1991, Global Action Project is nationally recognized for its synthesis of youth development principles with media arts and for its critical literacy framework, which helps youth recognize and act on their potential for making positive social change and engage in civic debate through media production. For more information, or to see excerpts of youth media produced at G.A.P., visit: <http://www.global-action.org> (accessed December 24, 2006).
12. Carolyn Heilburn, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: Ballantyne Books, 1998), 18.
13. See Maxine Greene's Foreword in Steve Goodman, *Teaching Youth Media: A Critical Guide to Literacy, Video Production, and Social Change* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2003), ix-x.
14. Sutton et al., 2006.
15. Nicholas Winter, *Social Capital, Civic Engagement, and Positive Youth Development Outcomes*, Paper prepared with support from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and City Year, Inc., 2003.
16. Youth media is also an international movement. See Sanjay Asthana, *Innovative Practices of Youth Participation in Media* (Paris: UNESCO, 2006).
17. For an overview of recent trends in the growth of youth media as a field, from its role in changing the nature of literacy to recent evaluation strategies to assess audience impact see: Kathleen Tyner, *Literacy in a Digital World: Teaching and Learning in the Age of Information* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998); Kathleen Tyner and Rhea Mokund, Mapping the Field: A Survey of Youth Media Organizations in the United States, in *A Closer Look 2003: Case Studies from NAMAC's Youth Media Initiative* (San Francisco: National Alliance for Media Arts & Culture, 2003); and Traci Inouye, Johanna Lcoe, Jennifer Henderson-Frakes, and Rebekah Kebede, *Youth Media's Impact on Audience & Channels of Distribution: An Exploratory Study*. Prepared for The Open Society Institute and The Surdna Foundation (Oakland, CA: Social Policy Research Associates, 2004). Additionally the *Youth Learn* web site at Education Development Center provides a general overview of youth media as well as background on their collaborative research and evaluation work of the field, which generated an outcomes model. See http://www.youthlearn.org/youthmedia/evaluation/collaborative_research.asp (accessed December 24, 2006).
18. For a review of the history, qualities, and importance of hands-on production in youth media and learning see: David Buckingham, ed. *Watching Media Learning: Making Sense of Media Education* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1990); David Buckingham, Jenny Grahame, and Julian Sefton-Green, *Making Media: Practical Production in Media Education* (London: The English and Media Centre, 1995); Jenny Grahame, The Production Process, in *The Media Studies Book*, ed. David Lusted (London: Routledge, 1991), 146-170; and Tyner (1998).
19. For examination of role of youth voice in media learning, see: Steve Goodman, *Teaching Youth Media: A Critical Guide to Literacy, Video Production and Social Change* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2003).
20. Steve Goodman, The Practice and Principles of Teaching Critical Literacy at the Educational Video Center in *Media Literacy: Transforming Curriculum and Teaching*, eds. Gretchen Schwarz and Pamela U. Brown for the National Society for the Study of Education (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), Yearbook 104:1. Identifies three key practices and principles for the pedagogy of critical literacy within youth media. These are teaching multiple literacies, teaching continuous inquiry, and teaching reflection.
21. Donaldo Macedo, *Literacies of Power: What Americans are not Allowed to Know* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2006); Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, translated by Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970); Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*, translated by Patrick Clark (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998).
22. Goodman, 2003.

23. Honig, 2005.
24. Allison Cook-Sather, *Authorizing Students' Perspectives: Toward Trust, Dialogue, and Change in Education*, Educational Researcher, (Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association, 2002), 31(4): 3–14.
25. Reconstitution is a process that can be applied in several ways. The form referenced here requires teachers in a school to reapply for their positions when their school becomes part of the reform program.
26. See Holland et al. (1998) for a discussion of agency and learning.
27. Discussions of the changing nature of youth development from tokenism to authentic participation can be found in Camino and Zeldin (2002); Ginwright and James (2002); and Mohammed and Wheeler (2001).
28. Renato Rosaldo, Cultural Citizenship, Inequality, and Multiculturalism, in *Latino Cultural Citizenship*, eds. William Flores and Rina Benmayor (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 27–38; Jonathan Zaff, Oksana Malanchuk, Erik Michelsen, and Jacquelynne Eccles, *Promoting Positive Citizenship: Priming Youth for Action* (Washington, DC: Report prepared for the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2003).
29. Jody Berland, Angels Dancing: Cultural Technologies and the Production of Space, in *Cultural Studies*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), 38–55; Hickman, 1990; Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974).
30. For views of identity considering the role of social, community-based identity work is especially salient in the Buckingham's Introduction and the chapter by Weber and Mitchell. David Buckingham, Introduction: Fantasies of Empowerment? Radical Pedagogy and Popular Culture, in *Beyond Radical Pedagogy*, ed. David Buckingham (London: UCL Press Limited, 1998).
31. Our notions of identity trace back to those who consider the social in the conceptualization of identity. We consider George Herbert Mead as he describes the self. See George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934). On the more recent front, these positions are represented and discussed in Holland et al. (1998), as they represent arguments by Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977) and Vygotsky (1978).
32. John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, and Brian Roberts, Subcultures, Cultures, and Class, in *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, eds. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (1975); Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour* (Farnborough, UK: Saxon House, 1977).
33. Henry Jenkins, Katherine Clinton, Ravi Purushotma, Alice J. Robinson, and Margaret Weigel, Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century. An occasional paper on digital media and learning prepared for The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (Chicago: The MacArthur Foundation, 2006), 3. They discuss the role of media literacy in building bridges to an emerging participatory culture made possible by new digital media forms. They define a participatory culture as one “with culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one’s creation, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices” (p. 3). The paper identifies a growing “participation gap”—“unequal access to the opportunities, experiences, skills, and knowledge that will prepare youth for full participation in the world of tomorrow”—and makes recommendations for addressing it.
34. Jenkins et al., 2006.
35. Miles Horton, *The Long Haul: An Autobiography* (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1990), 134.