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Good Reception: Utilizing Mobile Media and Games to Develop Critical Inner-City Agents of Social Change



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# Good Reception:

# Utilizing Mobile Media and Games to Develop Critical Inner-City Agents of Social Change

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Antero David Garcia

2012

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Good Reception:

Utilizing Mobile Media and Games to develop Critical Inner-City Agents of Social Change

by

Antero David Garcia

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Marjorie Faulstich Orellana, Co-Chair

Professor Ernest Morrell, Co-Chair

This study examines the potential of mobile media and gameplay to develop critically literate, civically engaged inner-city high school students. Theoretically, this study is based on tenets of critical pedagogy as well as sociocultural and critical literacies theory. I also look to research on civic engagement and gameplay in structuring parts of this study.

Conducted over the course of a year, this study was divided into two phases. First, I conducted a qualitative study of student social practices with mobile media devices in an urban school. Conducting observations, focus groups, and interviews, this data focused on the student perspective of mobile device use within the school space. Inductively coded for the patterns and practices of mobile use, I analyzed this data to develop a framework for a wireless critical pedagogy and a curriculum to teach a class of ninth grade English students within the school site.

In the second phase of this study I taught the curriculum developed based on my qualitative analyses of student mobile use. Handing out a set of iPods to the students in the English class, I led the class through an alternate reality game that I created. “Ask Anansi” was a game that guided in-class youth participatory action research and critical literacy development. During the game, students identified areas of inequity to research and document, created and participated in a campus-wide scavenger hunt, and edited their school’s Wikipedia page. Daily fieldnotes, audio-recordings of the classroom interactions, and student work were coded and analyzed.

This study found that most students perceived time at school as fluidly social and academic. Students also used their mobile devices for some kinds of civic engagement; leveraging mobile devices for academic purposes in schools was largely a matter of mutual trust between teachers and students. Findings from the second half of this study revealed how mobile devices and games can cultivate youth research and engagement in issues of equity within their school environments. The nature of producing and interpreting media on mobile devices also signaled shifts in reading and literacies for today’s youth.

The dissertation of Antero David Garcia is approved.

Greg Niemeyer

John Rogers

Marjorie Faulstich Orellana, Committee Co-Chair

Ernest Morrell, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2012

# DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my father, Jose "Joey" Angel Garcia. He taught me to play, to question, to dream, to laugh. My work echoes this unique skill set that only he could pass on. He sang that "angels come and angels go," and his presence persists in my every action. He guided me to act with a sense of humility and to express gratitude for all that life has in store. Thank you. I miss you.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Antero Garcia received his B.A. in English with a creative writing concentration at the University of California, Los Angeles in 2004. Following this, Antero earned his M.Ed. in the Teacher Education Program at the University of California, Los Angeles in 2006. Serving as an English teacher at an urban high school in South Central Los Angeles for seven years, Antero served on numerous school committees including serving as the lead teacher for one of the school's small learning communities, a member of the school site council, shared decision making committee, and instructional cabinet.

During his final four years as a teacher, Antero was concurrently enrolled in the Urban Schooling doctoral program at the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angels. . Utilizing his classroom as a hub of youth participatory action research, Antero and his students researched the opportunities of mobile media devices for civic engagement and critical literacies within the South Central community. Antero is a 2010-2011 U.S. Department of Education Teaching Ambassador Fellow, providing teacher input and feedback on national education policy initiatives.

In the fall of 2012, Antero Garcia will be an assistant professor in the English department at Colorado State University. Currently Antero is conducting research on spatial literacies, mobile media devices, and computational thinking within English Language Arts K-12 classrooms. Antero's numerous publications and conference presentations address technology, educational equity, and critical media literacy.

## CHAPTER 1 RATIONALE

### Statement of Problem

Mobile media have fundamentally transformed society. Much more than a "phone," today's mobile media devices connect most places around the globe to key networks, economies, and civic opportunities. These ubiquitous devices are often banned from classrooms and seen as problematic distractions. As an English teacher with more than seven years of experience in an urban high school, I've seen how mobile media have transformed students' lives. Considering that the vast majority of urban youth of color regularly use mobile media devices such as cell phones, how can these devices and gameplay help students learn and, ultimately, mitigate current epidemic-level drop out rates?

If implemented in the classroom on a strong critical foundation, can mobile media become a tool for powerful learning? If so, how can these relatively new devices invite new forms of social participation, shape social practices, and guide civic learning for young people? In this research project, I investigated ways mobile media and gaming can improve critical literacies and civic participation within classrooms.

This work is motivated by the potential mobile device use possess to someday address the literacy achievement gap that has systemically separated students by income status; by increasing critical literacy development through innovative phone use and gameplay, phones could be a source for academic turnaround (Lee, 2006; Sirin, 2005). Utilizing student owned phones and principles of gameplay involves low cost structural changes to current teaching practice. As current research identifies a digital participation gap that largely aligns with the U.S. education achievement gap (Jenkins, 2008), analyzing the role of digital culture and literacies is nothing less than an issue of equity and civic justice. However, though numerous studies point to the

learning potential that new media poses in the changing landscape of education (Bonk, 2009; Plester et al., 2008; Schuler, 2009), little research focuses specifically on formal learning environments. Additionally, there is a dearth of research focused on utilizing technology primarily with underserved urban communities.

At the same time, the shifts in culture tied to mobile device usage and online activity among youth and adults alike also affected ways this study explored in-class engagement. The participatory nature of online resources like Facebook, YouTube, Skype, and Wikipedia reflects ways individuals interact with, learn from, and critique media products. This participatory culture is one that may require adjustments in classroom interaction and learning practices. As a result, parts of this study explored ways to move toward a wireless critical pedagogy.

With technology ushering in new learning challenges for the first "always-connected generation" (Lenhart, 2006), the role that this technology also plays in the growing global economy is taking a sharp turn. While mobile media, social networking and virtual environments "flatten" the world and impact global communication, services, and needed job skills, this flattening process also greatly increases America's academic competition in the global world (Friedman, 2005; Shirky, 2008). In recent years, the U.S. has fallen to number 12 in global rates of college completion **(**U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Though the current U.S. administration offers a vision of how to regain this position by the year 2020, vague references to "Promoting Innovation and Continuous Improvement" lack explanation of how such leaps will occur logistically and in a fiscally viable means in today's tenuous economy (2010). Even more troublesome, the vision of a college-ready student, as defined by the U.S. Department of Education lacks the nuanced definition of how America's posterity will interact, engage, and shape the public world around them. What is the civic *purpose* of schooling when it is narrowed

simply to a means of attaining college completion? Further, what is the role of imagination, innovation, and ingenuity that are harbingers of a competitive leader when curricula are not tied to the purpose of a context-specific community discourse? These are the larger questions that motivated this study.

In addition to thinking about America's role in the global educational spectrum, within the United States, education continues to remain stratified across race and class. Reports such as Judith Chafel's (1997) "Schooling, the Hidden Curriculum, and Children's Conceptions of Poverty" explain that not only is the gap of economic inequality widening over time, it is also intrinsically linked to academic achievement. At a statewide level, economic inequality in California is found to be directly affecting the learning opportunities of public school children. Further, this adverse effect of the current budget crisis affects the working poor's education more disproportionately than other socio-economic groups (Rogers, 2010). And while there are large, sweeping studies on the way that systemic economic inequality affects American life (Massey, 2007), efforts to describe ways to instruct and teach about this omnipresent issue seem mired in focusing on single lessons (Coghlan & Huggins, 2004; Kleinman & Copp, 2009; Leclerc et al, 2009). This study looks at how in-class instruction related to local civic issues could help mitigate issues of academic and economic inequality.

In order to engage *every* student in meaningful academic and civic development, today's public school children need to be immersed in situated learning environments that engage the multifaceted nature of learning today. These environments, mediated by mobile media and gameplay, could level learning opportunity disparities across race and class in America's public schooling sector. At the same time, educators need to gain a more nuanced cognizance of what is happening within classrooms and schools with mobile media devices. As a teacher, I often

assumed students were busily communicating, producing texts, and staying abreast of social changes within peer networks all while sitting within my classroom. This study explored what students in one urban school site do with mobile devices and ways they may already be using these devices for academic purposes.

**Explanation of Study**

This study investigated the effects of mobile media and what I call a pedagogy of transformative social play on civic development and critical literacies in English classrooms in one urban Los Angeles high school. By focusing on the role of mobile media and gameplay in an urban public high school English class, this study examined the ways the technology already available and utilized by students could be leveraged for critical thought and civic participation within a classroom. Additionally, this study explored how mobile media devices shaped and mediated youth identity and social practices within a school space.

Over the course of a year in an urban Los Angeles high school, there were two major phases to this study. First, I developed a framework of the cultural practices that are mediated by mobile media through focus groups and ethnographic participant observation. By looking, observing, and asking a group of students within the school about the formal and informal uses of mobile media devices like phones and iPods at the school site, I developed a robust image of how these devices are augmenting social interaction in and out of classrooms. As Heath and Street (2008) explain, the process of being a participant observer is more than attempting to observe specific instances related to a research question; it is a process of observing–of experiencing–the research site as a whole from which to draw forth subjective meaning making. As a teacher in this South Central Los Angeles-located school, my access to the site and

familiarity with the community grants me access for data collection that cannot be afforded by researchers more blindly entering this field.

Though there are significant studies focused on how students are currently engaging in digital media through mobile devices and writing practices, the majority of this work examines the informal learning environments that students are working within (Gee, 2010; Jenkins 2010; Livingstone, 2009). Even the strong critical literacy lessons that are being developed digitally are largely occurring beyond the walls of the classroom. Bringing digital media into *formal* learning environments like classrooms offers educators explicit roles of guiding students toward critical literacy skills. However, while there are significant limitations, turning a focused lens toward the pedagogic practice of utilizing digital media as a means of fostering stronger critical literacies and civic identity is an area that is not merely needed but an inevitable direction education research will need to face.

Next, I reviewed the landscape of mobile media use demonstrated through the initial ethnographic data collection. Using this information, I designed and implemented a formal curricular project that engendered student media practices and elements of gameplay for a ninth grade English classroom. This project, though hinging on a defined curriculum that adhered to state content standards and with goals of developing critical literacies and civic identity, was negotiated with the students in the classroom. By taking the theoretical idea of mobile media and games as means of conveying critical literacies and civic engagement and applying them in a real world context, this study's design experimental methodology reflects the process of building theory within a specific field (Palinscar, 2005).

The model of engaging youth in developing and implementing the curriculum filtered components of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) into the classroom environment.

This methodology presents the students in this part of the study as co-constructors of classroom practice and helps them further inform the study's initial ethnographic study throughout the instructional process.

Throughout this project, I collected qualitative fieldnotes including daily fieldnotes, interviews, and student-produced texts. Student work samples were collected and measured and class instruction was audio-recorded for close discourse analysis. Data in this study is analyzed utilizing ethnography of communication; I look at "speech events" as ways to understand the multiple meanings embedded in classroom discourse (Barton and Hamilton, 2005; Hymes, 2003). All data and analysis in this study are grounded in critical theory and sociocultural literacy; the rich, nuanced experiences and insight of the students within this project are framed through these theoretical frameworks to better highlight the multivariate nature of learning in urban America.

**Aims of the Study**

In investigating the principle research questions through qualitative methods, this research attempted to answer:

- how classroom learning is impacted by mobile media repertoires of practice
- new ways that principles of gaming via mobile devices can act as models for formal learning practices
- how the measurement and assessment of learning is done within an environment that incubates the potential of mobile media and gameplay
- the way a pedagogy of transformative social play shifts the context of classroom learning

- how youth social interaction in and around school environments is shifting as a result of mobile media
- the ways critical pedagogy can be updated to better resonate student and societal needs of the twenty-first century
- how classrooms can incorporate participatory learning practices

**Significance and Rationale**

Though the role of technology, its discipline and distraction problems in classrooms, and the "addictive" nature of its use is frequently discussed as cause for alarm (Frey and Fisher, 2008; de Vise, 2010; ICMPA, 2010), actual empirical data utilizing mobile media in formal learning environments is severely lacking. And while concerns about how mobile media should be used in classrooms may be up for debate, current statistics signal that the majority of students in classrooms–regardless of race and class–are online, utilizing mobile media, and frequently involved in game play. According to a 2012 Pew Internet and American Life Project survey, more than two thirds of American teens own mobile devices (Lenhart). In terms of access, this recent report demonstrates ways that urban youth are brokering the previous, incessant digital divide: The median number of texts sent by teens increased from 50 texts per day to 60 and "Older teens, boys, and blacks are leading the increase. Texting is the dominant daily mode of communication between teens and all those with whom they communicate" (Lenhart, 2012). For better or worse, these are facts for today's students. This study is posed as a contribution to understanding how students, utilizing mobile media and game play, could more effectively develop critical literacies and participate civically.

Simply put, college and career ready students will need to be able to adapt to new technologies and leverage media to cut across socioeconomic inequality; they will need to look toward creative routes towards achievement; they will need to find the impetus for such efforts within their classrooms. This study encourages researchers to look beyond how to close the achievement gap and increase college attendance, but to also reframe student learning environments and the meaningful day-to-day interactions students experience.

Similarly, measures of success expand beyond college enrollment and graduation metrics; implementing a pedagogy of transformative social play and developing mobile media use in classrooms, reifies stronger connections between learning and students' effect on the world around them.

This study does not presume or present game play and mobile media in U.S. classrooms as simple Band-Aids that quickly fix the educational achievement gap or issues of civic development; an updated *foundation* for education will be demonstrated. In looking at the role of mobile media and a pedagogy of transformative social play in formal learning environments, this study acts as empirical data about the possibilities of these tools as leverage for more equitable learning opportunity across the nation. Mobile media and principles of gaming are not additions to the work that teachers do as much as areas that can be embedded within and across all content areas to foster academic achievement, stronger connections to school communities, outreach to parents, and further improve rates of urban children attending universities. As a result, the data here acts as a significant re-understanding of how classroom learning can inspire and transform.

Encouraging "anywhere, anytime" learning, mobile devices signal a ripe area for policy investment in order to improve student achievement across socioeconomic levels (Schuler 2009). As noted by Kolb (2008), cell phones are "essential tools students use to communicate with the

world around them. Inside of school, learning is isolated from students' everyday technology culture" (p. 1). The current *Blueprint for Reform* states an interest in "programs for which there is moderate evidence of success; or develop and test promising practices, strategies, or programs for which there is potential and some research-based support;" policy encouraging districts to further develop "game-like" curriculum in schools is a useful means of closing the achievement gap (p. 36). In a report issued by the Joan Ganz Cooney Center, key descriptions of needed research around the use of games was identified, including identifying the learning gained through games and developing "rigorous design, practice, and performance metrics" (Thai et al., 2009, p. 8). As such, the need for additional research around assessment and learning through games is a significant reason further research–such as this study–is necessary.

Though mobile devices can offer significant opportunities within classrooms when properly situated in a wireless critical pedagogy, simply glorifying these devices is dangerous. The possibilities afforded by mobile devices are contingent on teacher pedagogy and on the teacher-student relationship. As my own students helped me understand in later chapters, bringing wireless devices into the academic realm of a classroom shifted these devices' context; what a phone means for a student immediately changes when brought into the adult-governed realm of a classroom. Without responding to and being aware of the contextual changes these devices undergo when used within classrooms, mobile device potential ceases to move toward a sustainable reality.

In a review of technology use in American classrooms throughout the 1900s, Larry Cuban (1986) writes that the general approach of teachers is to adhere to "constancy amidst change" (p.1). Specifically, Cuban notes how, "Those who have tried to convince teachers to adopt technological innovations over the last century have discovered the durability of classroom

pedagogy" (p. 109); a projector, a computer, video are all wrapped into traditional models of classroom instruction. However, with recent studies suggesting that youth are averaging more than one hundred text messages sent each day (Rosman, 2010), classroom practice must shift to recognize the digitally immersive nature of communication and literacy development that inculcates student identity-formation everywhere *except* the classroom. Teachers and administrators are no longer introducing the digital tools that are now appearing prominently in schools. Instead, these tools are in the hands of students and are now no longer under the control of teachers. Pedagogical practice will need to change to embrace the receptive properties of mobile media and the empowering nature of gameplay.

## CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter I draw out the key literature, existing data and research that act as a foundation for this inquiry into the role of mobile devices and gameplay as tools for critical literacies and civic empowerment. This research project's emphasis on empowering urban youth to develop critical understanding of their world and to equip themselves with the necessary tools for social change locates this work within the ongoing tradition of critical theory. I begin by looking at how critical theory and critical pedagogy inform this study's curricular design. Noting a significant dearth in empirical research around critical pedagogy, I point to case studies that offer insight into how to construct a critical pedagogy for the twenty-first century. Further, the inner debates and dialogues within current critical pedagogy discourse are summarized as a means of locating this study in an ever-maturing theoretical episteme. Following this, I look at the specific theoretical developments of critical and sociocultural literacies as they contributed to the ways participatory media tools like phones and games were used in this study. I then examine data about mobile media use in America and ways existing research incorporated mobile devices in learning contexts. Next, I note empirical evidence about the learning potential of games. Based on this data, I look at how theories of gameplay can be adapted into student activities within my classroom. Finally, I conclude this chapter by exploring the potential of game theory to directly impact civic engagement in learning environments; I draw upon existing research about youth civic engagement and identity to guide the ways students explored, communicated, and advocated about community issues in this study.

### CRITICAL THEORY - Critical Instantiation and the Potential of Digital Media

Critical theory's effect on the digital landscape can act as the impetus of widespread social transformation in urban communities. Within the burgeoning environment of digital media and access to technology in today's urban schools, disparities and inequalities follow similar racial and class trajectories that define today's achievement gap (Educational Technology Clearinghouse, 2004). However, the emancipatory, challenging call of critical pedagogy to level these pillars of inequality acts as a beacon for necessary pedagogical practice. Specifically, critical pedagogy acts as a fillip for undertaking social change and critique within schools and schooling practices; it has the potential to boost the achievement of the many disenfranchised working poor students of color within U.S. schools. Though critical pedagogy is currently mired by technical jargon and in serious need of an "imaginative" revamping, it is an imperative response to today's current trend of positivist epistemology surrounding educational research and the resulting high stakes testing that impedes some student growth (Weiner, 2007).

**Critical Understanding of Power and Schooling**

Arising partly from a Marxist critique of capitalism, critical pedagogy educates with the purpose of social and personal revolution; as Paula Allan (2007) explains, "Marx's explanation of capitalism, his theory of consciousness (praxis) and the possibility of critical/revolutionary praxis, when taken together, strongly suggest that authentic revolution requires the simultaneous and complementary transformation of both self and society." Along with a Marxist foundation, critical pedagogy also finds roots in Antonio Gramsci's (1971) definition of "social hegemony" as a means to create widespread "consent … caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production" (p. 12) Gramsci reminds educators of the need to question and make clear the way

hegemony is doled through media and curricula. Similarly, the role of critical pedagogues in changing the world with "subaltern groups" is echoed in Gramsci's notion that "Each man … has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought" (in Buras and Apple, 2006, p. 5). As individuals, students and teachers alike are to take up the task of questioning and redefining cultural practice for society at large.

Working from this critique of capitalism, critical theory helps reveal the internal mechanisms that separate students into various agents within society's workforce. Analysis of this process over time reveals the way that such efforts shift in context from one epoch to another. The hostile schooling conditions in Jean Anyon's *Ghetto Schooling*, for instance, look markedly different from Paul Willis' "Lads" in his ethnographic critique of labor, despite capitalist schooling creating similar outcomes (Anyon, 1997; Willis, 1977). And while schooling today is just as entrenched in a capitalist ideology, the factory floor that eventually inculcates students in *Learning to Labor* is no longer always a literal factory floor. Instead, the behaviors that schools prepare students to opt-out and adhere to hegemonic conformity are of informal communicative practices and mediation of duties through technology. Communicating online and utilizing multiple literacies are but some instances of the not so subtle shifts in capitalist education in post-industrial American schooling (Collins and Halverson, 2009).

Within an urban context, schooling today is marked by an environment of saturated capitalism, violence, and desensitization. Military recruitment, prison terminology like "lockdown," and corporate branding shape the daily experience of students in schools. Theirs are bodies restricted in a way that "assures dissymmetry, disequilibrium, and difference" (Foucault, 1975). Critical pedagogy allows students to become conscious agents of change within their

schools, possibly addressing an achievement gap that persists in academic performance. Data indicates that inner-city schools continue to remain segregated and lack both the qualified teachers and funding to provide equitable educational opportunities (Civil Rights Project, 2005; Orfield and McArdle, 2006). Add to this the fact that these schools are mired by high teacher turnover, layoffs due to budget cuts and inadequate nutrition for students and it becomes clear that the additional hurdles standing in the way of academic achievement by the working poor are not insignificant (Rogers et. al., 2010). In this study, these disparities in schooling experiences as well as the technological divide that separates predominantly white youth from their black and Latino counterparts are explored through an updated framework for critical pedagogy.

Offering guidelines toward a critical pedagogy that challenges youth to foment frustration about inequity toward purpose-driven change, Paulo Freire illustrates that the role of educators is not simply to *uplift* a working class but that the "great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed" is "to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well" (1970, p. 44). For Freire, this change stems from praxis: "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (1970, p. 51). Though there is not empirical research to yet support the ways students could use mobile tools to transform society, this study explores how a wireless critical pedagogy of the twenty-first century can foment lasting change. Acting upon both a digital and physical world, today's youth are positioned to change the paradigm of inequitable schooling from the guiding vision of Freire's vision. In *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?,* George Counts (1932) explains that "teachers must bridge the gap between school and society and play some part in the fashioning of those create common purposes which should bind the two together" (1932, p. 31). In this sense, critical theory within this study help build opportunities for students to not only

connect to the narratives and knowledge that exist beyond the walls of the classroom, but to also develop empowered identities to positively change this out-of-school world.

**Imagination and Critical Pedagogy**

One critique of critical theory this study seeks to address is that within it there is often a lack of student agency afforded to the students as active agents in the construction of their own paths; Willis and Bowles & Gintis in particular are faulted for critical research that disregards student agency (Au and Apple, 2009, p. 84). Critical pedagogy, however, can be a libratory approach to education that guides students, as co-constructors of knowledge, to build their own meaning and critique of the inequities in their lives. Moving these critical fulminations away from the head shaking of predestination, critical pedagogy helps guide students toward academic achievement as a means of social empowerment. Such an effort still calls for a seismic shift in the current capitalist school structures and also encourages significant group achievement; this "conscientization" finds students and teachers alike questioning social and historical inequities (Freire, 1970; Perry, 2003).

My study seeks to reinvigorate critical pedagogy in an age of participatory media. In looking toward the potential of institutionalizing and legitimizing critical pedagogy, it is necessary to acknowledge that the language and theoretical approaches surrounding it are archaic barriers. Appraising the current state of critical pedagogy, Peter McLaren writes that, "The field of critical pedagogy has become so institutionally vulgarized and domesticated" (McLaren, 2007, p. 13). Noting the clear tenet that revolutionary pedagogy "makes no claim to political neutrality," McLaren reminds researchers and educators that theirs is a role of revolutionary actors, one of redefining and reshaping the capitalist structures that pin ideology in America (p.

31). According to Michael Apple and Kristen Buras (2007) the docility with which critical pedagogy is discussed today belies its vision of radical change; they argue, "all too much of what counts as 'radical' theory in education is overly rhetorical" (p. 271). Similarly, another problem facing critical pedagogy is that instead of building upon the shifting context of schooling from one location and era to the next and updating pedagogic practice to fit today's twenty-first century youth, practitioners and researchers alike continue to stand heavily on Freire's initial work as a garroting, single pathway toward educational transformation. As Eric Weiner writes, "Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed was not supposed to be transferred to the United States or anywhere else; it was to be invented and reinvented for new audiences and in the service of new liberatory projects" (2007, p. 60). Instead of joining the "rhetorical" debates of critical pedagogy that Apple and Buras contest, this study is informed by these contemporary critiques of critical pedagogy. I attempt to reinvigorate and describe a wireless critical pedagogy to meet the needs of students in the twenty-first century.

Also miring the growth and widespread legitimation of critical pedagogy within the field of education is a general lack of empirical research about the achievement outputs of such an approach. While there are several qualitative case studies that attest to the transformative potential of critical pedagogy within schools, I have yet to read a quantitative or longitudinal study that measures critical pedagogy's potency. That being said, numerous empirical studies provide specific examples of critical pedagogy positively affecting student learning. Ira Shor (1992) shares how his practice as a critical pedagogy means that his classroom "functions as a research center," pacing emphasis on the fact that critical pedagogy does not promote social justice in lieu of academic content. On the contrary, Shor's application of critical pedagogy deliberately pushes to have students' academic work as "democratizing research." Further,

Morrell's (2008a) application of critical pedagogy expanded the types of student created products to more relevantly fit into a digital age. The youth he worked with published a web page, created digital films, and engaged in critical dialogue via email and online chat rooms. The existing bodies of research for critical pedagogy help point to key practices that help shape this practice and inform how this study's design attempts to update a critical pedagogy for a wireless generation. Though there are studies that point to the conscious raising role of critical pedagogy, evidence of how critical pedagogy does more than develop "militant illiterates" is severely lacking (Morrell, 2010).

**Addressing Technologic Inequality through Critical Pedagogy**

Looking at the challenges that inner-city schools face in terms of access to technology offers a way to demonstrate critical pedagogy's potential for liberation and addressing inequity in U.S. Classrooms. Today's inner-city public schools are mired by rundown, outdated-computers, faulty Internet access, and a dearth of instructional opportunities for utilizing these media tools (Collins and Halverson, 2009). Further, as media engagement and proficiency appear to be needed skills for career-readiness, this inequality is an issue that plagues urban schools and spurs their growth as "factories of cynicism" (Bigelow et al, in Share, 2009, page 116). Through guiding youth to push toward technological equity through advocating for policy changes and critically changing the landscape of media production, critical pedagogy's influence on technology in schools can spark revolutionary change for the process of schooling at large.

Looking at the contemporary landscape of inequality within education, the area that could be most significantly uplifted by the underpinnings of critical theory is that of implementation of technology within K-12 classrooms. Critical pedagogy will need to guide *use* of digital media

that can be seen as seditiously counter-capitalist; social networks, tools of production, and digital texts will need to foster and manifest outrage, anger, and revolutionary hope. Additionally, critical theory's guidance in developing Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) acts as a foundation for this study's design, as discussed in chapter three.

As Duncan-Andrade (2005) suggests, the investment in "popular cultural literacies" in curricula acts as a means to engage critically with students. Further, this youth culture - within the United States - is now a universally digital one. Despite differing means of accessing online content, whether through desktop and laptop computers or via hand held mobile devices, the vast majority of today's youth maintains a regular online presence (Lenhart, 2009). This does not simply signal a shift in *where* today's students are finding popular artifacts but also *how* they are engaging with this media. In *Convergence Culture*, Henry Jenkins describes the new landscape of youth culture as a "culture of participation" (2008). In defining critical pedagogy as a means for students to become self-aware of inequalities and to question and challenge dominant narratives about society, this new participatory culture is one that affords a mass of opportunities for young people to author and define experiences and circumstances of liberation. Such opportunities are ripe in the contemporary digital field; however, they need mediation from educators and mentors willing to help inculcate students into the creation of research and advocacy.

Further, simply because the vast majority of youth are engaging with digital media does not mean they are using it in the same way or for similar purposes. Recent studies show significant differences in how individuals are spending their time online based on race and class distinctions. danah boyd [sic] (2011) identifies a rift in the types of social networking sites that students use. Similarly, youth will need to address issues of representation such as how, in online

digital avatars and game characters, racial construction is skewed toward whiteness (Agloro, 2010). Nick Couldry writes, "The ability to participate in the production of shared fictions remains fundamental to any sense of belonging, and therefore to 'citizenship' and 'identity' themselves" (in Share, 2009, p. 14). Remixing and redesigning existing digital products, challenging the design of existing ones, and authoring entirely new digital texts is a key toward liberatory digital use. Turning the corner in education and defining a more equitable classroom space begins in this still divided digital space. Further, copyright and notions fair use are currently working within an old model that is predominantly designed to protest mass media (Lessig, 2004). Problem-posing inquiry, while developed decades ago is an approach that can be readily incorporated into a digital age for youth to interpret, "remix," and digitally challenge dominant narratives and power structures. The emphasis on guiding students' "Critical Textual Production" is a fundamental shift in how critical pedagogy applies to working with urban youth and technology (Morrell, 2008a, page 115).

Additionally the role of "viral" counter-narratives across sites like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, can lead toward the necessary critical conversations in formal classroom environments. This digital space is not divorced from the real world. The use of text messages, status updates, and online invitations are simple examples of how the digital world bleeds with students "physical" world. Freire's maxim that one needs to "read the world" is now a digital concern as well (Freire and Macedo, 1987). With participatory online media encouraging youth to comment, "like," and "reblog" content, the role of critically exploring, consuming and producing in a digital age point to how critical literacies look fundamentally different in the twenty-first century. In a recent white paper about the role that digital media can play in youth

civic engagement, Middaugh et al. (2012) identify four key principles about how participatory media can foment civic engagement:

1. Building community and connecting to social movements
2 . Encouraging and amplifying youth voice
3. Learning through models and authentic practice
4. Grappling with issues of social justice and fairness

Though Middaugh does not tie these principles to critical theory, all four of them speak to how critical literacies can be fostered for a digital age. In fact, the only component that is relatively "new" as a result of digital media is the concept of "amplification." In helping to draft this white paper, I viewed the ways online networks can share and comment on user-created content as an opportunity for student voice to reach wider audiences. The digital space of Facebook, for example means that a student can create both critical and non-critical content that is interpreted and commented upon by the hundreds of individuals within his or her social network. At the same time, this content can easily be forwarded and shared, still within Facebook to other networks at the click of a button. In this sense digital tools take the critical pedagogy tenet of cultivating youth voice about social justice issues and extends it through amplification.

In looking at today's digital tools, it is important to recognize that traditional critical literacies, though operating in a participatory media age, are not significantly different from the Freire's vision of education. Yes, the model and tools of critical praxis are different in 2012, but they are also based on tenets of how we communicate and interact as individuals. Elizabeth Quintero (2007) defines critical literacy as "a process of constructing and critically using language (oral and written) as a means of expression, interpretation, and/or transformation of our lives and the lives of those around us" (p. 202).

As media has historically been mass-produced, the new culture of participation opens up several other challenges that need to be noted here. Until recently, the work of critical media literacy focused on the need to better interpret and understand the power dynamics underlying media messages. Jeff Share's framework for critical media literacy, for instance, outlines key questions about power structures and underlying motivations youth should ask when encountering texts (Share et al., 2005). While such guidelines are useful they must be expanded to incorporate the fact that youth are also creating - not simply consuming - these texts. As Leah Lievrouw (2009) argues, today's students must "think about new media technologies and culture less as vast, impersonal forces and more as repertoires of practices, tools, and social arrangements that they can engage and play with, intervene in, hack, reconfigure, and remediate—not just consume" (p. 562). This participatory culture, though it is ripe for empowering media practice, requires the guidance of grounded critical theory when creating new media; the digital praxis that can bloom as a result instantiates the role critical pedagogy plays in affecting technological practice.

**Digital Critical Pedagogy, Ostranenie, and Repossessing the Culture Industry**

As a literary term, Ostranenie is the familiar and commonplace being suddenly made alien or unfamiliar; it is tied to both Russian Formalist art as well as Dadaism (Crawford, 1984). This estrangement creates a new perception and awareness of one's surrounding world: new meaning and interpretation result. Critical pedagogy's potential influence on digital media & technology in the classroom encapsulates ostranenie. The inequalities of everyday schooling and life in inner-city communities that are otherwise taken for granted can be seen as foreign atrocities.

The Frankfurt School's 1944 warning that the "totality of the culture industry" robs individuality to maintain a capitalist mode of production is still prescient (Adorno and Horkheimer). However, critical pedagogy's revolutionary digital potential signals an attempt to repossess this industry - to instill within this concept the "profound rebirth" that being a critical revolutionary entails (Freire, 1970, p. 61). Though the factory floor is one that is being digitized in technologic inequality, critical pedagogy offers hope for deracinating these power structures. However, this is an effort that must be accepted *communally*; "Neither critical/revolutionary praxis nor authentic revolution can be imposed on people; both must be chosen on the basis of a critical understanding of capitalism and a deeply integrated desire to begin the process of shaping our own and thus humanity's future" (Allman, 2007, page 34). Through making the everyday oppressive practices of hegemonic schooling freakishly unfamiliar–through the ostranenie of digital critical pedagogy–revolutionary progress can be attained and inner-city "factories of cynicism" dismantled.

**DIGITAL CRITICAL LITERACIES - Sociocultural and Critical Literacy**

In looking at sociocultural and critical literacies in this study, I explore the ways participatory media tools like phones and games can lead toward increased literacies development. While the emphasis in this research study is on the way digital media can help facilitate the development of critical literacy, describing the junction of critical literacy and sociocultural literacy helps illustrate the social context in which today's "digital natives" are developing their literacy repertoires (Palfrey, 2008).

Instead of a comprehensive overview of the varied perspectives of contemporary literacy research, I provided here an exploration of the sociocultural and critical development of literacy

extends the understanding of the present space for collusion vis-à-vis critical literacy, mobile media, and gaming. Below, I provide a brief outline of how literacy research has progressed toward understanding and interpreting today's digital culture; it acts as a useful lens through which to consider the role of criticality afforded by mobile media.

Though "the educational legacy of the Second World War may have been 'functional literacy' as a measure of vocational and social competence," the changing perspective of education's role in developing literacy is not a set concept; multiple viewpoints and opinions cloud and inform the ongoing discussion of what is meant by literacy and for what purpose literacy acts as a central concept in education (de Castell and Luke, 1983). New Literacy Studies saw literacy as "not primarily a mental phenomenon, but rather a sociocultural one. Literacy was a social and cultural achievement - it was about ways of participating in social and cultural groups - not just about mental achievement" (Gee, 2010). New Literacies - though the name differentiation is slight - moves the focus of literacy toward other forms of produced content; it "is about studying new types of literacy beyond print literacy, especially digital literacies and literacy practices embedded in popular culture" (Gee, 2010). The localization of "literacies" recognizes the need to "account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies" (New London Group, 1996). As a result, New Media Literacy Studies (NMLS) changes the focus of literacy studies to emphasize the way that individuals are more than mere consumers of content. For NMLS, the "emphasis is not just on how people respond to media messages, but also on how they engage proactively in a media world where production, participation, social group formation, and high levels of nonprofessional expertise are prevalent" (Gee, 2010, p. 36).

Not divorced from the chronology and movement of sociocultural literacy scholars, critical literacy also looks to expand understandings of traditional literacy. Positioning part of the role of literacy as understanding underlying power structures, Moje and Lewis (2007) point to the need of a "Critical sociocultural literacy" as a means of merging these similar interests. They argue, like proponents of critical literacy, "that greater attention must be given to the role of power in their opportunities to learn" (p. 15-16).

Looking at how the present state of NMLS connects to the historical trajectory of critical literacy as liberatory pedagogic practice provides a useful means of looking at how formal literacy instruction can fit within today's digital culture. Critical literacy is much more than acquiring the functional literacy skills for the current job market. Instead, critical literacy leads to understanding the role of language within traditional power structures (Shor, 1992). Similarly, critical literacy embeds traditional reading, writing and speaking practices within meaningful situated experiences (Finn, 1999; Gee, 2004). As such, the new spaces and interactive opportunities afforded by digital media present improved avenues to amplify traditionally disempowered voices of urban youth within the public sphere.

As Freire and Macedo " (1987) explain, it is the task of educators to "invent and create methods in which they maximize the limited space for possible chance that is available to them. They need to use their students' cultural universe as a point of departure, enabling students to recognize themselves as possessing a specific and important cultural identity" (p. 127). In making literacy relevant to the larger experiential context of society and culture, Freire describes the need to read "the *world*" in order to engage in reading "the word" (p. 30). Freire's view fits into sociocultural understandings of literacy as developing socially constructed meaning. As Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz explain, "The move into literacy requires children to make some

basic adjustments to the way they socially attribute meaning to events and the process of every day world in order to be able to loosen their dependence upon contextually specific information and to adopt a decontextualized perspective" (in Ogbu, 1983, p. 231). This constant process of reinterpreting and re-reading the world as part of literacy development signals opportunity for critique and counter-narrative; critical literacy allows space for questions and multiple frames of understanding and interpretation.

**Developing Digital Criticality**

Bridging the work of Vygotsky and Freire, Fiore and Elsasser (1982) pose ways to help students better understand formal writing practices while still helping to "empower them to use writing to control their environment" (p. 288). Though Freire's pedagogy initially targets the physical world, the need to read the digital world is a part of the obligation of critical pedagogy in the twenty-first century. Jenkins points to the way that today's culture interacts with media in ways that extend beyond traditional roles of consumption. Describing this new era as "convergence culture," Jenkins (2010) explains that today's youth are interacting, remixing, producing, and participating with media. As such, sites like YouTube, MySpace, and Facebook offer newly emerging forms of media production and digitally assisted social interaction. Further, when utilized in structured environments, these sites offer students ways to critique and reevaluate traditional texts and offer formalized space for youth voice. Digital media is not simply an additional branch of literacy instruction; in the present culture, digital media is an inherent foundation on which literacy and general pedagogy needs to be built upon. As described by Jeff Share et al., "To be a functioning adult in a mediated society, one needs to be able to

distinguish between different media forms and know how to ask basic questions about everything we watch, read, or hear" (in Jenkins, 2010, p. 82).

While critical literacy skills are scaffolded, it is necessary to consider that these also work in tandem with critical media literacies. Not simply an additional adjective modifying "literacies," the inculcation of media here further recognizes the way that media is an inherent part of students' literacy practices today. Developing critical media literacy skills allows media consumers and creators to question and challenge the content they access, seek, and are confronted with on a daily basis.

Share presents a useful set of guiding concepts when interpreting media such as "recognition of the *construction of media messages as a social process"* (2005). This framework, however, needs to be updated, "to emphasize individuals' own active participation in selecting, creating, remaking, critiquing, and circulating media content" (Jenkins, 2010, p. 112). This seemingly small change points to the fundamental cultural shift caused by digital media - a shift that critical literacy needs to address; in affording students relatively easy ways to manipulate and remix existing media as well as creating new content, students need to be prepared to critically address existing literary content as well as their role in participating in its construction.

Specifically, digital media allows for students to collaborate and interact more closely with both peers and with their community. The way space is mediated by digital media allows for a stronger connection between the reading and writing practices of youth and the world within which these texts are produced. Transmedia storytelling, for example - constructing narratives that extend beyond a single medium - offer the potential for counter-narratives to exist and engage in dialogue with dominant ideologies.

**Constructing Knowledge and the Digital Return to Orality**

While digital media may be signaling a shift toward what Walter Ong (1982) calls "secondary orality," the way that space and learning experiences are established in schools signals a reification of typographic order. This order, as explained by Marshall McLuhan (1962) acts as a controlling mechanism. For McLuhan, typography is described as a means of creating uniformity and replicability. Originally manuscripts and pre-press culture found books to be performance-driven; they were meant to be read aloud. McLuhan argues that typography introduces "the author" as a presence; prior to this invention manuscript-culture was producer-oriented, not a society of consumption of literary products. As such, the uniformity of book culture lead to McLuhan describing print as a force for nationalism and control.

Further, as writing shifted society from an oral culture to a literate one, McLuhan examines how the alphabet desensitizes and "civilizes" readers. Books situated experience as a private, interior enterprise. Returning to an oral culture finds students working communally. In fact, McLuhan connects this culture to a situated understanding of learning, arguing, "John Dewey worked to restore education to its primitive pre-print phase. He wanted to get the student out of the passive role of consumer of uniformly packages learning" (p. 144). In this sense, the digital space acts as a canvas for collective lessons of literacy and social engagement lessons. Ong's notion of a "secondary orality" emerging from electronic media is akin to traditional oral culture "in its participatory mystique, its fostering of a communal sense, in concentration on the present moment" (p. 134). As such, an admission of secondary orality in today's digital media practices better locates digital media and learning within the charge of critical literacy.

Similarly, in his exploration of the creation of natural history in the sixteenth century, Michel Foucault's (1970) analysis of knowledge construction yields a useful lens for ways digital media can reshape learning in public schools. According to Foucault's work, the language used to build "order" is not natural; in fact, nature does not directly correspond to "human nature" (p. 309). Because language and the knowledge built upon it are contextual, they represent knowledge from a subjective position. The principles on which science, and disciplinary fields like psychology, and sociology are built upon rely on assumptions of commonly held truths. The concepts of order–the "*epistemes*"–that Foucault outlines are man-made not objective phenomena; they adhere to strict rules and guidelines of structure inherent in our language system.

And while Foucault's look at centuries-old creation of science and language seems far removed from the mobile media and phones that students utilize to access information in South Central Los Angeles, the construction of knowledge as a subjective, artificial process is useful for student orientation. As Henry Giroux (2009) writes:

> If educators are to function as public intellectuals, they need to provide opportunities for students to learn that the relationship between knowledge and power can be emancipatory; that their histories and experiences matter; and that what they say and do counts in their struggle to unlearn dominating privileges, productively reconstruct their relations with others, and transform, when necessary, the world around them. (p. 16)

To look at the schooling as a process *on* students and inequality as part of a human-embedded construction in society helps position students in a role to better construct civic practices around a specific cause.

As new digital literacies open up space for counter-narrative and critical inquiry, the need for structured space within formal learning environments is needed; a pedagogy of digital

criticality is needed to help guide the "decivilizing" potential of secondary orality and digital literacies.

**From Entertainment To Empowerment**

While the opportunities for literacy development and increased student voice offer clear reasons for formal learning environments like schools to focus attention on developing digital learning opportunities, there are still significant limitations to developing equitable digital learning opportunities. To be clear, the concept of a digital divide is not something new. Though the digital divide has been discussed even in reports throughout the 1990s, the "Falling Through the Net" findings and much of the resultant literature largely focused on access. The digital divide for the past two decades has been one of people that are able to get online and use computers. Jennifer Light, in "Rethinking the Digital Divide" (2001), looks at the ideological assumptions historically behind the role of computer use in education. Light explains that the arguments surrounding the digital divide act as a frame for what Joseph Gusfield describes as a "public problem;" the digital divide becomes a way for the public to discuss larger systemic issues of inequality. Further, Light explains that most policy reports related to the digital divide make two assumptions. First, introducing computers mitigates inequality. And second, digital life "frees individuals from other social constraints" (p. 712). The public discourse of these problems make sweeping assumptions about the role that technology plays in the future. Light points out that this is an attempt at finding a technological solution that redefines social inequality as a problem of access. Overemphasizing a hope on the role of technology avoids addressing the underlying systemic problems.

And while this "public problem" is still with us–in the form of digital, economic, and academic inequality–the digital divide looks starkly different today. Several Pew Internet and American Life reports point to the fact that not only are black and Latino youth online, but that they are actually spending *more* time online than their white counterparts (Lenhart 2009, 2010). In *The Young and the Digital: What the Migration to Social Network Sites, Games, and Anytime, Anywhere Media Means to Our Future, S*. Craig Watkins (2009) explains that the gated community of the Internet and access are a much different form of access than ever before. Instead of a divide around access, the digital divide of 2012 is one of participation. While black and Latino youth are online more than white, more affluent students, they are largely accessing the Internet via mobile media. Further, they are going online for activities such as downloading music, ringtones, playing games, and connecting via texts and social networks like MySpace. On the other hand, white students are generally accessing the Internet via laptops and desktop computers. And while white students are also online and engaging in social networking, recent reports point to racial differences between usage of sites like MySpace and Facebook (boyd, 2009). Facebook may be the fastest growing social network–and one that inculcates students' future employers and agencies. However, MySpace is still the site most predominantly used by urban students of color.

There is a key argument being made here; because access is no longer the key to the digital divide, students are in effect accessing two very different kinds of Internet. On the one hand, affluent students are able to be online to engage in specific learning opportunities and access rich data for research and academic growth. They are able to network with older peers via sites like Facebook that enmesh them within larger community of employers, adults with internships and opportunities, and general potential for civic engagement. On the other hand,

black and Latino youth are limited to the kinds of Internet activities easily facilitated by button pushing on mobile devices. They social network via a system that predominantly excludes older users and limit their social network to peers within similar socio-economic backgrounds.

In *Technology and Social Inclusion,* Mark Warschauer (2003) predicts, "As the Internet becomes more widespread, it is highly likely that its use will be stratified, with some using it principally as an entertainment device and others using it to seek and create new knowledge" (p. 109-110). This stratification is one that can be mitigated via critical digital literacies that empower under-served youth to speak clearly and critically.

Student use of digital media is, for the most part, a reality for today's youth. With the near ubiquitous presence of internet-enabled mobile devices for youth across racial and class boundaries, every student is able to become a media creator with a minimum of keystrokes (Lenhart et al., 2010). Though schools are still struggling to catch up to the media-producing tools that students are already carrying, the role of educators in guiding students towards critical understanding of their role as consumers and producers of texts, films, and transmedia is imperative.

As digital media signals a return to "secondary orality," the potential for critical scholarship and voice to rise from the realms of digital media is made explicit. Pedagogic practice can instill criticality within the newly emerging literacies that have resulted from the explosion of participatory new media; the formal classroom environment can transform into a networked area of peer interaction and counter-narrative collaboration. Though Light worried that an overemphasis on a digital divide avoids addressing underlying systemic problems, through critical digital literacy, youth can be guided toward wielding their new media literacies as potent tools for addressing these larger inequalities.

**MOBILE MEDIA - Dialing into Achievement via Mobile Media**

Reviewing the challenges of accessing digital media in schools, I provide a closer examination of how portable media devices like phones can affect learning. Called "the world's most ubiquitous computer" by the *New York Times*, mobile phone usage in public schools can address technology equity concerns, better situate students in meaningful learning opportunities, and help bridge parent interaction within schools (Markoff, 2009). Encouraging "anywhere, anytime" learning, mobile devices signal a ripe area for policy investment in order to improve student achievement across socioeconomic levels (Schuler 2009). As noted by Kolb (2008), cell phones are "essential tools students use to communicate with the world around them. Inside of school, learning is isolated from students' everyday technology culture" (p. 1)

Global studies of cell phone use highlight their ubiquity as a means of communication, social networking, and commerce facilitation (Israel, 2009; Kruetzer, 2009). Within the United States, the Pew Internet & American Life Project focuses research on how young people interact with mobile phones. Their regularly released reports speak volumes to the need for educators to reevaluate the learning potential that these devices can offer; cell phone ownership is "nearly ubiquitous among teens" and is being used most actively and at a faster pace by African Americans than other demographic groups (Lenhart, 2010).

As the achievement gap continues to stratify America's youth by race and class, the ubiquity of mobile media devices offers possibilities for closing the achievement gap by creating "digital equity, reaching and inspiring populations 'at the edges'" (Schuler 2009, p. 5). Though largely seen as devices for teens, recent studies note that more than thirty percent of 6-to-9 year olds own mobile phones and that ownership of mobile devices by children from 4-14 has

experienced “double-digit growth” since 2005 (NPD Group, 2008; Sesame Workshop, in Schuler, 2009, p. 11). Problematically, this study does not offer specific glimpses into the demographics of these growing groups of youth possessing mobile devices. While these trends may not speak directly to the demographic included in this study, they describe larger cultural shifts in how young people receive information and socialize. As a result, this data regarding youth adoption of mobile devices, guides my study’s investigation into application of phones within an English classroom. Questioning if the potential of mobile media to close the achievement gap not only in high schools but also through systemic cultural shifts in technology use throughout K-12 education, this study is a preliminary contribution of empirical research in this field.

Anecdotal discussion of the learning potential of phones is a regular topic in both mainstream news magazines as well as publications for educational practitioners (Baron, 2009; Friess, 2003). Similarly, as a critical mass of cell-phone wielding children flood America’s schools each day, a plethora of private companies are developing learning applications and software to be loaded on to these devices (Kamenetz, 2010). Though resources for educators have attempted to catalog potential uses of cell phones, these anecdotal guides are uninformed by empirical research and are hampered by the fact that the swiftly changing nature of new media devices makes them obsolete (Kolb, 2008).

One major claim about the positive impacts that mobile devices have in the classroom is that they help students connect more closely to their surrounding environment (Schuler, 2009). In addition to providing online access for underserved students, helping mitigate what Jenkins identifies as a “participation gap,” mobile devices can also help situate student learning experiences. Multidisciplinary units involving GPS-enabled cell phones have helped guide

participants to better invest and commit to service learning within their communities (Becker and Knowlton, 2006; Stein et al., 2009). For example in a study conducted by Stein et al. (2009), the authors created a story, "Tracking Agama" that utilized text messages, phone calls, and location-based components of mobile media to help guide participants *through* a narrative; the story unfolded through participants walking, listening, and *looking* at the world around them. In this example, mobile devices helped anchor story to place and connect the physical world that individuals are in to narratives being constructed about and within these locations. To be clear, a GPS-enabled phone does not in itself create more successful academic students. However, with meaningful teacher preparation in application of mobile phones, this study investigates if such functions could improve student achievement across race and class, transforming the social landscape one text and one call at a time. This could to the College Board's claim that "A major part of the challenge lies in erasing disparities in educational attainment so that low-income students and underrepresented minorities can take their place at the table" (2008, p. 7); in looking at the data of mobile media here, my research study looked at how these devices–when used in a classroom–address these disparities.

Another major area of study around mobile device use in the classroom is the role of text messaging. Although data is limited, a series of recent studies suggests that there is a positive correlation between student ability to translate text message abbreviations and academic spelling (Wood et al., 2009). More explicitly, these translation studies found that "The level of ability shown in spelling and writing … was strongly related positively to their use of textisms when they composed in text language, and also negatively to the number of interpretation errors the made in their translation from text language into standard English" (Plester et al., 2008, p. 142).

Likewise, this study looks at how mobile devices can help bridge in-school learning with voices and content tied to the surrounding community. As noted by Gray, director of learning for mobile software company Leapfrog, "Mobile devices help kids make connections between different spheres of their everyday world. It can help connect what they're doing in school with what they do in an after-school program with that they do at home" (in Schuler 2009, p. 17). By connecting a student to the world, he or she becomes "an intimate participant in the activities of the world to which it belongs," and "knowledge is a mode of participation, valuable in the degree in which it is effective" (Dewey, 1916, p. 338).

With more digital tools and applications being released regularly, the learning potential of mobile devices is multi-faceted. From GPS-related location-based learning to literacy-practices through text messaging, the options of these "immutable mobiles" in the classroom is limited only to the software installed on individual devices in the formal learning environment (Latour, 1983).

**GAMEPLAY - A Pedagogy of Transformative Social Play**

In shaping this study around an inquiry into the role of gaming within an urban classroom, I first examined existing data about the gameplay within learning contexts. Generally, there is a growing body of research that focuses on the learning potential of video games (Gee, 2007). Dempsey et al. (1996), for example looked at more than 90 examples of instructional games and found a majority of these games focus on higher-level thinking instead of rote knowledge and factual recall. Likewise, Randel et al. (1992) reviewed 67 studies of game-based learning and found the efficacy of learning from games rather than traditional classroom learning was mixed. The researches concluded that games could more likely improve learning when

applied to very content-specific contexts. However, while these are useful tools to aid in learning, the virtual experiences and collaboration afforded by videogames can be expanded beyond the realm of the digital world. Currently, there is a flourishing examination of interaction and learning principles within gaming environments that are not necessarily tied to the classroom. Alternate Reality Game (ARG) designer Jane McGonigal (2008), for instance, relies on Levy's concept of "Collective Intelligence" as a means of overcoming game challenges. Though originally defined by Levy in 1997, McGonigal applies the term to the way groups interact in the ARGs she helps design like the aforementioned "World Without Oil." Understood as a shared knowledge developed through mass collaboration, collective intelligence situates student experience and student learning within a societal context. In her research about ARG "I Love Bees," McGonigal noted how thousands of individual players worked together, like a "hive" to unravel a series of complex puzzles. Collective intelligence fits into the social network that embodies schools immersed more strongly within their surrounding communities. School and societal activities *should* be interrelated and part of the same system of experiences.

Additionally, the potential of games to assess and develop student aptitude is not something that has been lost on fields beyond education. The United States Army, for instance, has not only utilized the mass appeal of gaming to create interest through their free online game "America's Army" but have also utilized it as a means to gauge individual players' aptitudes. In the documentary film *Digital Nation,* Gee (2010) discusses the learning aspects of "America's Army," arguing that it teaches real-life principles through gaming: "The learning has to work or people can die… it is teaching people in a problem solving situation where they have to work collaboratively." This collaboration between the military and the private sector-entertainment

companies signals how non-educators are harnessing the learning potential of games (Computer Science and Telecommunications Board, 1997).

While recent studies show some positive academic, civic, and physical effects of gaming (Institute for the Future, 2009; Kahne et al., 2008; Thai et al, 2009), these studies are not primarily focused on formal classroom instruction and are somewhat limited. CryptoZoo (Institute for the Future, 2009), for example, is an Alternate Reality Game sponsored by the American Heart Association that encouraged physical activity by chasing fictitious animals. Though played over several weekends in 2009, the game and its online presence has all but disappeared since, suggesting that long-term sustainability of these games requires fan-like curation and support; while CryptoZoo points to the opportunities of a healthy integration of gameplay within one's daily life, it is raises issues of how to maintain enthusiasm and a user-base for gaming. Likewise, in a study of the civic opportunities of video games, Kahne et al. (2008) found that "quantity of game play is not strongly related to civic and political engagement." Though their report generally squelches some assumptions about civic issues in gaming it also found that "some aspects of the social context of game play are related to civic outcomes," such as an increase in seeking civic information online and persuading peers to vote. On the other hand, in a study of learning during in-class activities, Haystead and Marzano (2009) found that "using academic games in the classroom is associated with a 20 percentile point gain in student achievement;" games with low-stakes consequences targeted at specific academic content demonstrated the most learning effectiveness according to the study. Similarly, my own study engaging students in Alternate Reality play showed positive affects of game play on eco-literacies and development of twenty-first century literacy skills (Niemeyer, Garcia, and Naima, 2009). In this study of an original game, high school students engaged in a rich fictional premise

about communicating with a cloud of pollution that develops consciousness. During their communications, students took real air quality measurements in and around their school community, critically examined this data and developed environmental and spatial recommendations that were presented publicly. In post-game interviews and reflections, student data identified specific ways that this game affected student literacies and environmental awareness; through acting out the roles of "citizen scientists," the students later shared ways they informed their families and friends of air pollutants around them and consciously advocated for school environmental improvement.

In addition to the empirical data about connections between games and learning, my study adopts a framework that blends "work" and "play" through existing gameplay theory. Though play and gaming are innate in child development, efforts to bring them into the classroom illustrate the unique challenge of connecting them to learning (Farne, 2005). However, under the current emphasis on standardized testing and college enrollment as measures of achievement the room for play within formal curriculum–especially beyond early primary education–is severely limited. But as gaming moves beyond the boundaries of traditional social norms, it offers the potential of acting as a mechanism for engaging students in civic learning opportunities. While there are varying scholarly definitions of a "game" (see Abt, 1970; Bogost, 2007; Koster, 2005), Salen and Zimmerman explain that, "A *game* is a system in which player engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in quantifiable outcome" (2004, p. 80).

Though John Dewey does not speak in depth directly to the nature of games, his writing about the differences and similarities between play and work are essential to the analysis of this paper. In thinking about what entails "gaming," Dewey's chapter "Play and Work in the

Curriculum" in *Democracy and Education* (1916) is a useful starting place for developing an initial understanding. As Dewey discusses the inauthentic divide between work and play he writes, "From a very early age, however, there is no distinction of exclusive periods of play activity and work activity, but only one of emphasis" (p. 203). As a traditional model of schooling emphasizes work and mental exertion in contrast to play, games offer opportunities for students to escape from this stifling environment. They reconstruct the possibilities of learning and how it is felt by students immersed in it.

From this understood collusion of play and work, a more specific notion of gaming can be outlined. Recognizing the balance between work and play, gaming becomes a more finite space in which work and play coexist. A game orients players toward a predefined goal. These primary concepts will function as the central, rough definition of a game: a focused period of work and play toward a predefined goal. Games, can be contextualized as being the first to capture an opponent's king, being the first nation to send a person to the moon, or even creating inner city agents of social change. Because games are largely defined around rules, boundaries, and "artificial conflict" they offer the opportunity to lead toward action-oriented curriculum. They act as an ongoing means of rigorous assessment, situated learning experiences, and project-based assessment within schools.

In discussing the inauthentic divide between work and play, John Dewey writes, "From a very early age, however, there is no distinction of exclusive periods of play activity and work activity, but only one of emphasis" (1916, page 203). Expanding Dewey's notion, the implications of affecting play in formal environments Farne explains, "On the one hand, play is considered as a ground on which adults intervene by building paths, materials, structures that give it an additional value; and yet, on the other hand, due to a pedagogical project, that very

ground is preserved as natural as possible assuming that this is its true value" (Farne 2005, page 170).

Expanding the potential of gaming to forge meaningful learning experiences within this study, I turn to the work of Johan Huizinga's (1949) classic theoretical treatise on the role gameplay in society. In *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, Huizinga describes the space in which games are played as a "magic circle," emphasizing that the main characteristics of play are "that it is free, is in fact freedom" "play is not 'ordinary' or 'real' life. It is rather a stepping out of 'real' life into a temporary sphere of activity" (1949, p. 8). It is from this theory of a play space that I am framing a model of civic participation in school settings. As the magic circle of game play is one in which role playing, acting, and behavior that exceeds social norms, it is here that students can pose, flex, and experiment in different forms of participation. As Huizinga argues, it is from within this space that, "Culture arises in the form of play, […] Even those activities which aim at the immediate satisfaction of vital needs - hunting, for instance - tend, in archaic society, to take on the play-form" (p. 46). Further, it is necessary to add that games can act as a portal toward social change. Specifically, "Transformative Social Play," as described by Salen and Zimmerman, can shape learning opportunities that not only connect to natural student wonder but also expand student learning toward civic development. Transformative Social Play is a model that:

> forces us to reevaluate a formal understanding of rules as fixed, unambiguous, and omnipotently authoritative. In any kind of transformative play, game structures come into question and are re-shaped by player action. In transformative social play, the mechanisms and effects of these transformations occur on a social level. (2004, page 475)

Instead of considering game play pedagogy as a means of increasing student achievement, games are thus a means to better situate students in public participation. Such models of gaming could

encourage students to think critically about ecological awareness or help make students aware of the forms of inequality that are faced in schools and communities. Several empirical examples help illustrate the potential of gaming in education contexts. For instance, the game "World Without Oil" asked players to imagine their real community suffering from a sudden decline in global oil supplies; "The game called upon players to act in a civic capacity, entirely in keeping with the emergency scenario, and players responded enthusiastically to the opportunity to contribute" (Independent Lens, 2007). The game's thousands of players, through written blogs and video production explored the local impact of a global issue and acts as harbinger to the situated learning practices that can instill critical literacies, academic development, and civic engagement. As such, not only can engagement through gaming improve learning, but it can also help yield a transformation in social practices; students are not simply preparing for college, but are being developed as "gamers" that "are a human resource that we can use to do real-world work … that games are a powerful platform for change" (McGonigal, 2010). This learning finds students acting within communities of practice; a game's setting and multiple scenarios relies on situated student learning within specific contexts and provides key roles for students to undertake (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

One way that this study implicates students in transformative social play is in recognizing a link between this form of play and Augusto Boal's (1979) model, Theatre of the Oppressed. Blurring the lines between *play* acting and engagement, Boal's model is a conduit through which individuals can "reassume their protagonistic function in the theater and in society" (p. 119). Boal describes theater as a participatory, productive enterprise; in this mode, "its main objective: to change the people–"spectators," passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon—into subjects, into actors, transformers of the dramatic action" (p. 122). In posing students as civic actors, the

game performed within this study stretches the magic circle into realms of alternate reality gaming. Theatre of the Oppressed can help mobilize civic play into locations beyond the walls of the school: "The invisible theater erupts in a location chosen as a place where the public congregates. All the people who are near become involved in the eruption and the effects of it last long after the skit is ended" (p. 144).

In reviewing the role of Boal's work, Rosa (2009) points to the way Theatre of the Oppressed fusses with the "fine line between entertainment and critical education and begs the question: why not infuse pleasure, spectacle, and humor while simultaneously asking deeper questions concerning human suffering and liberation?" (p. 249). This call for a critical co-mingling of pleasure and spectacle is taken up in this study. It identifies the role that gaming and theater have as transformative mechanisms. It casts gaming beyond the harbored walls of theatrical make believe. It asperses the notion of play as diversion from work. And most importantly, it suggests play and gaming not simply as models toward civic engagement but as direct, standalone means of civic engagement.

**Casting Participation into the Magic Circle**

In questioning how mobile media and games may increase student civic engagement, I found Jurgen Habermas' (1989) delineation of a public sphere a useful means of ascribing the boundaries of social geography for this study. Habermas describes the public sphere as "a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed" (p. 231). As the realm in which dialogue and public voice is enacted, an understanding of civic engagement can be seen as guiding students toward participation within the public sphere; to the extent that young people are able to traverse the boundaries between schooling and public participation is a

useful measure of how democratically involved students are. Describing the public sphere as an open–even fluidly accessible–realm of society, Habermas writes that, "A portion of the public sphere is constituted in every conversation in which private persons come together to form a public" (p. 231). However, the implicit assumption of private individuals forming a public sphere undercuts the closed nature of traditional schooling. In understanding the nature of school and society, for instance, John Dewey challenges "progressive" educators to better connect those experiences within the classroom with the sphere of civic engagement beyond the walls of the school (1938).

At the same time, simply engaging or voicing opinion within the public sphere does not constitute a critical understanding of civic engagement. Likewise, social change through the public sphere is more than pressuring an existing legislature. As such, an understanding of the purpose of civic engagement in education can be seen as an expectation for students to be able to enter, speak, and guide opinion within a public sphere. This is not an enterprise that need consist of individuals. In order to engage students in gaming experiences around these expectations, I looked at existing models of civic engagement. Current research poses new models of civic engagement that classroom learning and gameplay in this study could adapt. For example, Fung and Wright (2001), examining five different innovative models of engagement develop a framework for "*Empowered Deliberative Democracy (EDD);"* in it, they explain that these kinds of models, "have the potential to be radically democratic in their reliance on the participation and capacities of ordinary people, deliberative because they institute reason-based decision making, and empowered since they attempt to tie action to discussion."

Also at the heart of the discussion of civic participation in this study is the way school curriculum affects teaching opportunities and pedagogy of teachers. While the theoretical

outlining of the division between school learning and civic engagement opportunities is delineated by Dewey and Habermas, rhetoric surrounding standard curriculum attempts to paint a picture of adequate preparation for engagement in society; the English-Language Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools emphasizes that "Participation in society… requires solid reading and writing competencies." Part of understanding civic development in an educational context is to question the civic goals of schooling. For example in "What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy," Westheimer and Kahne identify three forms of citizenship that are promoted through education programs: Personally responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented. These three types of civics education vary widely in terms of participation in public life. And while Westheimer and Kahne outline a personally responsible citizen education as a more conservative form of engagement and a justice-oriented citizen education as one that may critically assess issues of inequality and injustice, all of the forms of civic engagement still return to looking at how students will engage in the public sphere. A personally responsible citizen may be more apt to may donate blood and a justice-oriented citizen may be more apt to focus on the roots of systemic issues. However, what is lacking in this analysis is an expansion of how these entrances into the sphere begin, how students formulate the public sphere, and how students circumnavigate the distance between the public sphere and the school sphere.

Considering the barriers that critical educators need to address in creating entry to the public sphere, several researchers have furthered strategies to engage young people in developing a sense of civic engagement. For instance, Claudia Ruitenberg's (2009) description of "political anger" is a useful way to orient student goals (p. 277). She describes this as "the anger or indignation one feels when decisions are made and actions are taken that violate the

interpretation and implementation of the ethico-political values of equality and liberty that, one believes, would support a just society" (p. 277). Similarly, curricula that bases student civic engagement around their emotions acts as a response to Henry Giroux's (2009) challenge that "educators need to become provocateurs; they need to take a stand while refusing to be involved in either a cynical relativism or doctrinaire politics" (p. 17).

Michelle Fine (2002) documents the way that emotion and - more specifically - rage about inequality played out in classrooms. Writing that "resignation blends with anger concerning the extent to which their schools are lacking," Fine helps remind educators to balance academic lessons with youths' expertise and emotional vitriol (p. 6). Similarly, in sketching out the content of such a curriculum, the concept of "information poverty" speaks loudly to the context and challenges our inner-city students face today. Childers and Post (1975) define information poverty as:

> a 'culture' marked by three characteristics: [1] a low level of processing skills, marked by reading, language, hearing, or eyesight deficiencies; [2] Social isolation in a subculture, leading to unawareness of information known to a larger public, reliance upon rumor and folklore, and dependence on entertainment-oriented media like television; and [3] A tendency to feel fatalistic and helpless, which in turn reduces the likelihood of active information seeking. (in Case, 2007, p. 102)

These feelings of anger are mirrored in the language of Ruitenberg and in Fine's work. And while this isolation and sense of information poverty is steeped in the policy decisions made at schools that perpetuate the digital divide, lessons that cut down this divide extend student understanding beyond the four walls of the classroom and enmesh student experience within the community surrounding it.

As a final note, it is important in developing this study to recognize that digital media is creating a new space for public participation. Though the public sphere in the physical world

may be barred access, those that are able to get online — and the limitations to this have been discussed earlier in this chapter— are able to engage civically in ways that Habermas, Dewey, and other theorists may not have foreseen. Social networking can foster dialogue and civic action across geographical space. In a recent report related to the GoodWork Project (Global Kids, 2009)–an effort to conceptualize what "Good Work" looks like in curriculum and classrooms, a series of dialogues and scenarios revealed that "youth and adults are willing to engage in reflection and dialogue about moral and ethical issues that are raised in online spaces" (p. 6). Further, even as a digital medium that fosters participation in a virtual world, Internet-enabled mobile phones also mediate location-based connections. Popular social media applications utilize phones to physically locate individuals in conjunction to other social network users, popular landmarks, and opportunities for group engagement. Though these activities, through applications like Four Square and Meet Up, are primarily apolitical–they are not designed for specific civic activity, they signal an opportunity for mobile media use as a conduit through which civic engagement and identity may be found. Like the participatory "remix" culture explained earlier, the possibilities of social media could be a means of engaging youth; however, these efforts will need to extend beyond the limited walls of single classrooms and schools–they need to bridge formal learning into participatory–wide ranging culture in ways that are likely seen as problematic through the lens of administrative policy. Pettingill (2008) calls for "Engagement 2.0" a method of participation that is "a flexible understanding of group membership and commitment, coupled with an appreciation of the efficacy encountered in a participatory culture, may offer a more accurate way to understand contemporary youth engagement" (p. 159).

In reflecting on the history of typography, McLuhan questions the role books may have in stymieing experiential learning. He writes, “Could a book which would be read quickly and even silently take the place of a book read slowly aloud? Could students trained by such printed books measure up to the skilled orators and disputants produced by manuscript means?” (p. 145). Reading his questions through a lens of digital civic lessons, it is refreshing to think of the way student emotion and the fight against *disjuncture* - “the civic ideals of the United States and students’ daily lives” (Rubin et al 2009, p. 215) – are made manifest through engaged, digital inquiry. Through digital media, issues of inequality – digital, economic, academic – are confronted collectively. They are confronted loudly.

# CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

## Description of the Study

The literature and research studies reviewed in chapter two detail the existing research informing this study of equity and technology in an urban Los Angeles classroom. In this chapter, I review the principle methods I used in investigating the impact of mobile media and gaming on civic participation and critical literacies. The qualitative methods described in this chapter–participant observation, focus groups, and a design experiment–allowed me in later chapters to explore mobile media use from a youth perspective, build a curricular program based on this perspective, and build a framework for wireless critical pedagogy. In parts of this study, I created a space in the class to work alongside students. Though I describe this process of constructing and negotiating their learning experiences collectively as Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), it is part of the designed class curriculum, not the methodological framework. In fact, as I discuss in later chapters, I challenge the feasibility of YPAR within structured classroom spaces. Still, I have constructed the design experiment in the second phase of this study to deliberately imbue student learning with Freirean principles of elevating learning as a means of emancipation. Further, the qualitative data here takes strides away from essentializing students as survey results and statistics; spending substantial time within this field shadowing, questioning, and engaging young people in their media practices, I collected a set of data to build new understandings about students' in-school use of participatory media tools.

This study was designed to both challenge and explore the potential of shifting the foundations of education, empowering youth in community-specific contexts and empirically

exploring the on-going debate around mobile-media in classrooms. My methodology, as summarized in detail in the following pages allowed me to:

- Contextualize the nature of mobile media repertoires of practice at the school site.
- Co-develop an instructional intervention mechanism alongside my students utilizing digital media and games to better aid in the understanding of critical literacies and the development of the civic engagement opportunities.
- Better understand the language practices and meaning making in student discussions, work products, and group interactions from a critical stance.

I begin this chapter with a description of the research site and my own researcher positionality within this space. Next, I describe the methods of data collection I used during the first phase of this study, including observations, focus groups, and individual interviews. I then explain how I analyzed this data and the ways I then developed a curricular project based on my findings. Listing the key curricular goals of this project and the rationale behind some of the game design decisions, I not only explain what was taught but why, as a researcher, these components seemed necessary. After this, I describe the process of implementing and documenting how I taught this curriculum with a class of ninth grade students. Finally, I end this chapter by describing how I analyzed the data from this second phase of my study.

**A Note About Names**

To protect the identity of the students that collaborated with me on this research, I redacted the actual name of our high school. I have chosen to name our school South Central High School not only as a signal of the general geographic community in which this school and this study are immersed, but also to validate the counter-narrative of cultural prosperity that

persists in urban Los Angeles. Due to historical depictions of poverty, violence, and squalor in films, music, and news headlines, the community of South Central Los Angeles has, for the past several years been in a state of flux–mainstream media and the governing agencies of Los Angeles now refer to the community as "South Los Angeles." This change was made official in 2003 by the Los Angeles City Council (Gold and Braxton, 2003); it can be seen as an effort to erase a cultural past of uprising, resistance, and negative press through renaming the community. However, despite the flooding of "South Los Angeles" messaging in media, I have never heard any of my students refer to this community as anything but South Central.

Related, the name's stereotypical connotations of violence, gang activity, and generalized danger are made manifest through new media tools like search engines. Inspired by an activity in my class the year prior to this study: we critically analyzed Google Image Search results for popular professions like "doctor" and "lawyer". For the most part, the search results didn't surprise–predominantly white, male faces showed up as the top results. As a class, we talked about what the search *represented* and why it was one that didn't reflect our class and community demographics. The lesson was a place to continue our application of critical terminology like "hegemony" and "counter-narrative" and to think about the mechanisms that could change the results of this search in the future.

One of my students returned from our Thanksgiving school break with an exciting class activity. My student typed into Google image search "Beverly Hills." He said he noticed all of the clean streets and smiling white people. Next, he typed into Google image search "South Central Los Angeles" The contrast is striking: power lines, fast food, gangs, police making arrests. As a class, we discussed what *stories* are being told about these communities. What is

being left out and why? We continued to explore the "dual cities" in Los Angeles and how we could re-mold the story being told about our school (Lipman, 2003).

Finally, in similar fashion, all names of students, teachers, and school officials in this study have been changed. Though their names still account for traditional gender-conventions (i.e. a female student in the study is given a traditionally female name), students in this study have been ascribed names that signal specific literary themes and concepts. For instance, one student in class is named Dante in a nod to the journey of the poet and protagonist of *The Divine Comedy.* Though an analytical lens need not be applied to these names–they are ancillary to the principle research questions explored herein–the names of students offer an additional layer to invite a playful dialogue to exist within these pages, between myself as research and teacher, and you, the work's reader. Lastly, all literary allusions pertaining to these names are derived from literature I have explicitly exposed past students to within my classroom–conversations with my classroom community around works by Cervantes, Ellison, Shakespeare, and Alvarez, have significantly enriched my passion to teach and my understanding of youth cultural and academic practices within the South Central communities to which my students belong.

**Description of Site**

Near a cross-section of traffic-laden freeways, South Central High School is one of the oldest public high schools in the city of Los Angeles. The site's constant change over time and its blemished academic record poses the site as a good location to look at the role that technology and gaming can play in classroom settings. Similarly, because of structural administrative changes to school operations at the site, the school is in an opportune position to represent the

way foundational changes in class instruction and organization may be mediated around youth cultural practices with mobile media.

The century-old campus has undergone significant challenges and demographic shifts in the last few years. With a student population of approximately 3400 students, South Central high school is one of the largest schools in the city and one of the few that is still on a year round 3-track schedule. That is, in order to accommodate the entire student population a third of the students is always "off track" and not scheduled in classes. In exploring the politics of the seemingly apolitical nature of school time, Orellana and Thorne (1998) state, "Invariably multitrack schedules involve additional disruptions to classroom instruction" (p. 462). To try to provide a meaningful learning experience to such a large population of students, the school is divided into eight small learning communities and one magnet academy. The demographics of the school's student population mirrors those of its surrounding community: 83% Latino, 15% black, 2% multiracial with an English Language Learner group that makes up 39% of the students, with 87% of the students receiving free or reduced lunch (CBEDS, 2010).

The school currently has one college counselor for the entire campus. Though there is a plethora of outside organizations attempting to provide services to this population, these efforts are scattershot and a comprehensive method of directing students to college information has not been established. The percentage of students that graduate from South Central High School is 35; of these students, 14% have completed their A-G requirements and are eligible to apply to most four-year universities (UCLA IDEA, 2010).

Because of stagnant, low scores on the California Standardized Test, South Central High has been designated as a school in Program Improvement year five for more than four years. As a result of evaluation measures from No Child Left Behind, Program Improvement "places the

school in a continuum of structured interventions designed to help identify, analyze and address barriers to student achievement" (LAUSD, 2012). However, Program Improvement has only established specific interventions for a five-year period, attempting to ensure no school is designated as part of Program Improvement longer than that. Because SCHS continues not to demonstrate higher standardized text score results, the school has been in year five of Program Improvement for four years and in Program Improvement altogether for nine years.

The past three years have yielded significant change to the campus. A grassroots effort led by teachers, parents and teachers in 2007 led to the school joining a district initiative called iDesign. In this model, public schools like South Central High were afforded charter-like autonomies and the school's day-to-day operations were managed by outside partners—MLA Partnership Schools and WestEd—instead of by the Los Angeles Unified School District. This change, though contentious and ultimately seen as a key reason for the principal's departure at the beginning of the 2007-2008 school year, transformed the adult culture at the school site; parents and teachers began more vocally organizing for structural changes at the school. The school spent a year selecting a new principal - the sixth in as many years.

In 2010, in light of staff concerns about ninth graders as an at risk population of dropping out, the school established a Freshman Preparatory Academy (FPA). The FPA was planned over the months of April-June, 2010 and officially started in July, 2010 (with the students in this study being part of the inaugural FPA class). Handpicking teachers perceived to be most effective with students based on anecdotal data and a self-nomination application, the FPA was designed collaboratively by its core teachers for each calendar track. Though common pacing plans were established in core content areas such as math and English, the principal stressed teacher creativity. Specifically, he encouraged teachers to pilot new pedagogical approaches that can be

adapted by others if empirical data—as measured primarily by test scores—can demonstrate student achievement. Though he did not speak directly to how mobile media or gameplay may be implemented his mandate for energetic change within the FPA was something I interpreted as an encouragement to explore the goals of this study within this research site. In December, 2010, this principal officially resigned under various allegations unrelated to the focus of this study. Though the FPA persisted despite his absence, a lack of leadership made teacher collaboration difficult.

In terms of technology on campus, the school was ripe for investigation of how to apply existing student mobile tools. While the school's assistant principals advocated incorporating technology within classrooms, school policy suggests that electronics students are most comfortable with are seen more frequently as distractions than as useful learning tools. The policy, in effect, constructs these tools as counter-pedagogical, despite recent reports on the learning opportunities phones and handheld devices offer (Ito, 2006; Shuler, 2009).

The policy on campus not only limited student engagement in online activities, but it also provided affective barriers to students seeking out information on platforms that students are already literate in. In looking at various case studies, Carol Kuhlthau (1993) explains that uncertainty and anxiety are integral part of the information seeking process. The environment and how information seekers feel within an environment affects the process of engagement and learning opportunities. The school's physical environment, resources, and policies help perpetuate the digital divide. When computers look dilapidated, are etched in graffiti, and load applications slowly, the message to students is one that suggests a lack of care for student learning opportunities. The civic lesson is one of explicit inequality: as students in poor schools, they do not deserve the same opportunities as more affluent schools.

**Researcher Positionality**

Recognizing both my interests in working in an urban high school and recognizing my own position as an adult, a male, and a multi-racial educator in an all minority high school, my positionality needs to be clarified in relation to this study. As Heath and Street (2008, p. 123) explain, delineating these positions "enables ethnographers to see their research within historical and structural constraints that result from asymmetrical power distributions." This reflexivity–"a process by which ethnographers reveal their self-perceptions, methodological setbacks, and mental states, often includes broad general critiques of the field"–helps outline the different ways I am perceived on campus, in South Central, and as a researcher both complicated and facilitated the research process at South Central High School. (Heath and Street, 2008, 123).

The son of activists and educators, I was raised with an appreciation for literature and social justice. After receiving a B.A. in English with a creative writing concentration, I transitioned into a social justice-oriented teacher credential and masters program in southern California. It was through this program that I connected what is a passion in education with a foundation in critical theory and critical pedagogy.

For the past seven years, I have been an English teacher and faculty member at South Central High School. Of the three tracks, I have taught on B track–the group that traditionally has had the most calendar disruption affecting their class schedules. As a member of the school's Site Council, a lead teacher for a social justice small learning community, a member of the school's instructional cabinet and several other leadership roles, I continually advocated for the needs of the students on B track. Similarly, as part of the school's grassroots reform movement, I played a major role guiding and organizing the school's transition into the iDesign division of

LAUSD. This process allowed me to work closely with the school's network partners–MLA Partnership Schools and WestEd–as well as to meet regularly with the school's current administrative team. Further, I have presented at school professional development meetings on technology classroom use. These activities have helped me to develop a nuanced perspective of how the school's organization affects classroom practice. These activities also make me a fairly public profile on the school's campus–other teachers engage me in dialogue about classroom practice, technology, and school governance.

In 2007, through a quarter million dollar grant from the MacArthur Foundation's Digital Media and Learning Competition, I co-developed an Alternate Reality Game to develop environmental literacy skills. The Black Cloud Game, created in collaboration with Greg Niemeyer at UC Berkeley, provoked students to take real time assessment of air quality in their community. Using custom-developed sensors that accurately measured and sent data online about Carbon Dioxide, Volatile Organic Compounds, Light, Sound, and Temperature, students critically analyzed the role pollution played in their daily lives, blogged about this information and developed 21st century literacies to utilize social networking sites like Twitter to communicate with each other and their community at large.

Since the school has focused on the academic needs of its ninth graders, I moved from my five years of experience as an 11th and 12th grade literature teacher to help plan and implement the English program for the school's Freshmen Preparatory Academy. The new role was a challenging transition as I learned to adapt to the needs of a younger student population.

As a multi-racial male, I was regularly perceived as someone of more privileged background than those that I taught, based on comments from students. Though my last name signifies that I am Latino, I am a monolingual educator and was usually assumed to be white by

my students. Within and around my classroom, I have been seen—often—as an advocate for student needs. Over the years of teaching, various students have confided personal information to me, asked for personal assistance, or admitted to feeling engaged for the first time in my classroom. I write of these discussions humbly, not to boast of effectiveness as an educator, but to outline ways I worked closely with a student population that came to trust me.

Because of my unique position as an insider into the school's adult population and already familiar with some conceptions of the school's social spaces for students, I was able to gain access for a study that focuses on the day-to-day activities within the school. At the same time, because I was already a familiar adult, gaining trust of students who were aware of my position of authority was an initial struggle. Students, as shared in the following chapter, hesitated to answer questions and were initially unclear if I was looking at their mobile use from my research perspective or as an on-campus adult aware of the policy violations I witnessed. However, former students helped me gain entree into the world of youth mobile media practice on the campus. Seniors I had taught the previous year advocated and introduced me to their peers to help reassure students that I was not looking at their mobile practices with a disciplinary eye. Perhaps more important than the issue of gaining access was that I needed to challenge my preconceived beliefs about student cultural use of media technology on campus. Though I've been seen as an advocate for youth use of mobile media in the past by teachers, administrators, and students, I also used my role as a researcher to explore, critically, the ways mobile devices hinder classroom learning. For this, especially, the use of disconfirming evidence in analyzing ethnographic fieldnotes was key throughout the study. In describing my intentions as a critical researcher explicit and describing here "the epistemological and political baggage" I lugged into

this study, I attempt to describe how my interests in critical pedagogy shape the ways I study and work with the youth in this study (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005, p. 306).

One of the biggest struggles I faced in this study was conducting research within my own classroom and within my own school. Though there is theoretical research that helps rationalize the necessary contributions of teacher researchers (Connelly and Clandinin, 1994), the day-to-day struggles were something I struggled with. As the needs of students within the classroom were not the same as my needs as a researcher, I often grappled with the need to balance my conflicting roles in the classroom. For example, while I would want to stop activities in my class to ask my students for more detail or even to stop momentarily to write down a detailed note about what I was observing, my responsibilities as a teacher meant that I needed to move at a teaching pace appropriate for the students I taught. Likewise, as I've spent much of my time as a teacher acting as a coach and sometimes writing for a teacher audience, it was sometimes difficult to shift registers and write, think, and analyze as a researcher. In contending that I did not find an optimal balance between my roles as research and teacher at SCHS, I want to note that the findings in the following chapter are often clouded with my teacher perspective. In particular, I struggled to slice away my dominant teacher gaze in sharing youth perspectives of mobile use in Chapter Four.

Kathryn M. Anderson-Levitt (2006) and many others note the need to make issues of power clear when conducting qualitative research (p. 283). As such, the fieldnotes I collected in this study speak directly to the tension of my positionality; I acknowledge my role as an adult wielding power within this research space. As the remainder of this chapter details how I collected and analyzed data, it is important to recognize the various roles and experiences I inherently brought into the research site. My insider perspective as someone interacting with the

students, balanced with my outsider perspective as an adult watching youth cultural practices helped yield the "dualistic approach" that exemplifies ethnographic research.

**Observations, Focus Groups, and Interviews**

I began this study by observing students on the school campus near lunch tables and in areas where students spend time between classes. As these are the primary social areas on the campus, I looked at school-based, non-classroom use of mobile media and explored how students used media in this space. The primary focus of this first phase of the study was to examine youths' use of mobile media within the school space. Though studies such as Ito et al.'s (2009) report explore the role that social and new media play in student lives outside of school, my discussions with students and in-school observations provide a stronger portrayal of mobile use within a school space. This also expands on Ito et al.'s report by looking in depth *within* a single school.

In this two and a half month phase of the study, I looked at how students used mobile devices. Not limited to just phones, I noted when students engaged with iPods and gaming devices. These observations took place in the school lunch area, the hallway of the school's Freshman Preparatory Academy, in my own classroom, and in the classrooms of six teachers at the school that allowed me in their rooms during class time. Because this first phase of my study focused on youth perspectives, my notes within other teachers' classrooms focused on what I saw students do and say in regards to mobile devices. However, in my analysis of this period, students often responded to and reflected on the role teachers play in affecting their mobile media use; this is discussed in the next chapter of this study. Additionally, I will describe the challenges of conducting qualitative research within my own classroom later in this chapter.

I paid particular attention to instances when groups of students were in both the physical world as well as engaging in virtual world interaction with each other through text messaging, social networks, and gameplay. Looking at this dual interaction involved, in some cases, noting how mobile media use earlier in the day later resulted in physical world interaction. For example, I noted student texting a family member and later, meeting the student at the school's gate to pick up food an older sister brought to her. Additionally, this dual interaction also meant observing a group's social conversation before class while one student both participated in the social group and texted someone not present. In particular, I observed mobile media use on the campus both in classes and outside of classes before school, during lunch, and as the students headed toward campus exits at the end of the day. This process of observing both in classes and in the various crannies of social life at the school site allowed me to analyze how students used these devices in places where they had varying degrees of freedom to use them.

As I observed, I often asked students about their mobile use—when they use their devices, what modes of communication they regularly engaged in, the barriers they faced in successfully utilizing mobile media throughout the school day. These conversations were in addition to the semi-structured interviews and focus groups I discuss later. I also observed students in the various campus settings and documented how their usage changed in different contexts: How were media used differently in classrooms? During short passing periods? During lunch? At least twice each week, I spent the school's lunch period observing and sometimes asking students about their mobile use. I also often spent the 20 minutes before and after school, in spaces where students congregated such as the student store, the front of the school, and the campus exit gates watching mobile use. I looked to note ways mobile use might be different in these different spaces and times of the day.

Throughout the study, I took in-field jottings in order to write more robust fieldnotes after the observation period, as described by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995). Instead of writing rich, thick accounts of events as they happened, I jotted a couple of words to mnemonically guide fieldnotes at a later time; these sparse notes allowed me to shadow, listen, and participate in observations and focus group sessions.

Though this study looks at mobile media social practices in this phase of the study, I recorded fieldnotes about the entire observation experience. As Heath & Street explain, the process of being a participant observer is more than an attempt to observe specific instances related to a research question; it is a process of observing–of experiencing–the research site as a whole from which to draw forth meaning making (2008). My notes at the beginning of this study broadly covered content students were studying in class, student conversations about plans after school or on the weekend, and complaints about other peers. However, as I drafted fieldnotes and weekly memos about these notes, I gradually began recording my observations about more specific areas of student mobile use.

This initial observation period, while providing general contextual information about how phones and gaming devices were used on campus, did not yield a needed specificity about these devices. I could not, for example, see the specific text messages that were sent back-and-forth between friends while in class and I could not see the ways students used phones during school would impact their social life once they went home. Because I could not observe all aspects of social mobile media use at my school site, and wanted to clarity about aspects of what I observed, I conducted focus groups with more than one hundred students at the school site. These focus groups ranged in size from six to twelve students and lasted approximately 45 minutes in length. Conducting 16 of these focus groups, I attempted to get student diversity

representing comments from all grades and tracks at SCHS. Additionally, while I did not ask students if they were in the school's advanced classes and university-partnered program or if any students had Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) that designated them as part of the SCHS special education program, I attempted to get students of mixed skills based on diversity of students approached. While the majority of these focus groups took place after school in the school lunch area, my own classroom, and the library, three teachers asked me to conduct focus groups during their class time and I took a subset of their consenting students to a separate room. Because these teachers gave me access to the majority of their classes, after student assent and parent consent were received, I was able to gather data from the spectrum of students within these classes.

Though these focus groups were comprised of students that volunteered to participate in my study, I deliberately sought students across the grade levels at the school; while approximately one third of my participants were ninth graders, the remainder of the focus group population were equally mixed between $10^{th}$, $11^{th}$, and $12^{th}$ grade students. I asked students I observed to participate and I also asked them to encourage peers to participate. This snowball sampling approach allowed me to delve deeper into the ways that significant mobile device penetration rates affected social life for students at SCHS.

My interview protocol for these focus groups is included in the appendix of this study. However, as student comments illuminated specific areas of mobile use at the school site, my questions would ask for clarity and additional information. For example, in one focus group, several students explained to me that they used their phones' text messages to organize a school sit-in. I asked questions to better understand the specifics of this civic action and even for them to show me examples of the texts that they sent.

These focus groups were conducted with students of varied grades, ethnicity, and gender. These focus groups—with the consent of interviewees' parents—were audio recorded. Using a LiveScribe recording device, my notes during interviews were attached to the audio recorded. For example, when I wrote down that I student discussed the school's sit-ins, the LiveScribe device would record not only what I wrote but also what was being spoken at the time. As a result, my notes during focus groups acted as an index to the audio recordings of the interviews. I was then able to transcribe these interviews while also organizing what was discussed to later look for patterns in student statements.

Additionally, I conducted individual interviews with several key informants for this study to further understand the meaningful way students connected with these "personal" devices (Ito, 2006). These formal interviews I conducted are in addition to the in-the-moment asking, observing, and experiencing that was a key component of my ethnographic participant observation. I selected these individual students based on two areas of the prior research in this study: my observations of mobile use at the school and student responses within the focus groups. As two students in observations were particularly eager to share and demonstrate the ways they incorporated mobile devices into their social life, I asked them if they would participate in individual interviews. Likewise, I asked two students in my own classroom if they would also participate in interviews. Finally, I asked three students in focus groups if they would participate in a follow-up interview, based on their focus group comments about civic activism, locations they use mobile devices at school, and how these devices affected family relationships.

These interviews, like the focus groups lasted approximately 45 minutes each and they focused on individual student areas of interest. For example, as one student talked about how he regularly looked at Facebook throughout the school day, I asked him questions about the

integration of physical and virtual social networks and if he could show me how his online interactions related to what he did while at school. Like the focus groups, these interviews were recorded using the LiveScribe recording device to annotate audio files with notes.

**Analysis of Observations, Focus Groups and Interviews**

After conducting observations, focus groups, and individual interviews, I analyzed the collected data with an emphasis on looking at how mobile media and games related to understanding concepts of self, school, and community. In particular, I looked for ways students talked about their devices, demonstrated personalized components of them, and mediated their in-school actions via their devices. I inductively coded my fieldnotes to build upon the patterns I'd begun to notice during my data collection period. My fieldnotes, along with transcripts and audio recordings of student focus groups were used to challenge, expand upon, and think through implications of my initial research question: how can mobile devices and gameplay improve students' critical literacies and civic engagement.

The fieldnotes collected were inductively analyzed. Specifically, I coded this data to look at how students interact socially through media devices, instances of conflict that arises through mobile media use on campus, and how physical interaction is augmented by virtual communication. I coded for specific ways students communicated and socialized with their mobile devices such as communication with family, sharing music, and taking pictures during class, I still documented instances of mobile media use in in-school contexts to note patterns in media use. Similarly, I looked at the different literacy practices students were demonstrating on their phones: multi-lingual textual production, information seeking behavior, and code-switching when speaking to different audiences are examples of the kinds of language practices I observed

and specifically coded for. I coded for these mobile media practices to identify the repertoires of mobile media practice students demonstrated. In order to best analyze and organize these fieldnotes, I initially coded these data using an inductive approach (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995). I looked for repeating words, ideas, and actions that arose from the fieldnotes and coded them in an index I created based on the fieldnotes. In analyzing the data, I was particularly interested in ensuring that I did not cherry-pick data that confirmed the value of mobile media. Instead I continuously sought disconfirming data for the patterns that I identified. The focus on the "particular" helped illuminate the role of digital media within specific settings. Relying on different types of data, I used "converging lines of evidence" to triangulate the main findings for this research (2006, Yin, p. 111). For example, my findings analyze anecdotal student demonstration of mobile media use with statements analyzed during different focus groups as well as analysis of existing school policy documents. As an example, in one classroom, I observed a student discreetly walking into the hallway in a way that appeared to me to be looking for a stronger signal for his phone. Later, in discussing reception at the school, students shared locations in the school that are known for having strong and weak phone reception, and one student pointed to various locations on campus and shared how to continue to receive messages from peers in these spaces. By looking at the nexus of these various data, I tried to accurately represent the practices and views students shared, rather than "cherry pick" unique instances within my data.

These fieldnotes and focus group transcripts were inductively coded for the patterns and ways of interacting with mobile devices in the school space; these allowed me to examine the cultural practices around mobile media use on campus. Issues relating to student discipline, communications with on- and off-campus individuals, and instances of cell phone use to

augment schoolwork are examples of practices that were specifically noted. Other examples of practices I coded include conflicts arising from mobile media use and ways physical interaction were affected by virtual communication; for example in numerous instances exact locations and times for physical world meetings were coordinated through text messages.

**Curriculum Design**

After analyzing my initial qualitative data, I developed preliminary findings about how mobile media is used by youth at the school site, what general kinds of practices these youth engaged in with the devices and ways these devices can be framed within a wireless critical pedagogy; these findings are shared in the following chapters. I used my findings to engage a class of ninth grade English students in a curricular project that lasted for seven weeks. Prior to this study, I taught mainly eleventh and twelfth grade English classes as well as ESL of various levels. However, I felt I designed this curriculum sequence and taught ninth graders based on the fact that this is typically the school demographic most at risk of dropping out, based on my conversations with counselors and my own students' reflections throughout my years of teaching seniors. As mentioned in the site description at the beginning of this chapter, B-track had been the most inconsistent track in terms of school time and disruption. This, along with the fact that I was most familiar with teaching within the B-track pace because of my experience, meant that I felt it both necessary and equitable to conduct this study with B-track ninth graders.

Though I designed the sequence and main activities of this curriculum, many components of the study were established to facilitate co-constructed research with my students; they developed the class research questions and my own investigation into the potential of mobile devices within an academic classroom were mutually explored. Thus, parts of the curricular

intervention that comprised the second phase of this ethnographic study follows the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR). For McIntyre (2000, 128), there are three dominant principles guiding PAR: "(1) the collective investigation of a problem, (2) the reliance on indigenous knowledge to better understand that problem, and (3) the desire to take individual and/or collective action to deal with the stated problem."

Working alongside young people in the research and collective action around issues with mobile media, this project is part of a rising tradition of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). Presently, there are several Youth Participatory Action Research projects that rely on critical pedagogy to improve student achievement and community-driven change. Exemplary projects such as the UCLA IDEA Council of Youth Research (Morrell, 2008b), the Social Justice Education Project (Romero et al., 2008), and Doc Your Bloc (Stovall, 2009) are examples of ongoing studies that are beginning to measure the application of critical pedagogy in formal learning environments. These YPAR projects demonstrate an updated implementation of critical pedagogy that connects youth to revolutionary change. Pushing such practice into the digital realm can signal the transformative process which critical pedagogy aims.

At the same time, the ways I designed YPAR within my classroom were more limited than in some of the above studies; as this unit needed to meet specific California Content Standards and students spent two days of the study taking a standardized test required at the school, decision making power was not equally distributed in the class. Instead, student agency with regards to the research in this class was most clearly shared when focusing on the class inquiry and the direction with which it was taken.

In particular, the class inquiry process allowed students to explore topics we collectively decided upon and using participatory media tools like mobile devices to conduct our research.

Our process fit into a modernized problem-posing model of education outlined by Freire. As part of this inquiry, I created a custom designed game, "Ask Anansi," to guide students toward identifying specific topics for critical inquiry and playing through the act of engagement and participation. By playing within Huizinga's (1949) "magic circle" students engaged in dialogue with peers, community members, and Anansi–the trickster spider god that is at the heart of this game. While a game design document summary can be found in this proposal's appendix, I want to briefly outline the main story and components of the game below.

**"Ask Anansi" - an Alternate Reality Game**

An alternate reality game (ARG), "Ask Anansi" functioned as tool to guide student-led research. Through a model of developing research questions and creating a plan to investigate these questions, the game allowed students to role play civic opportunities within their school, including publishing counter-narratives about the school and issues of equity within it. Using mobile devices to sustain dialogue with the fictitious character, Anansi and with their peers, students conducted research, created an in-class scavenger hunt, and attempted to share their research findings through transforming their school community. Mediated by mobile devices, the game allowed students to participate in a fictitious narrative that led toward literal shifts in the environment.

To begin this game, students were contacted by Anansi through emails and text messages. Though they did not know who Anansi was, the students' in-class research allowed them to understand the mythical figure and for them to quickly realize that, as their teacher, I was probably sending these messages *pretending* to be Anansi. As I told the class we were

playing a game, this kind of *pretending* was accepted within the class and students began to respond to and communicate with "Anansi."

In terms of my own design decisions, I felt it important to represent a canonical archetype, "the trickster," as it is depicted in non-Western narratives. Additionally, that a popular Anansi tale involves the spider gaining all of the world's stories was a useful avenue for students to begin a dialogue around constructing their own narratives.

After brokering a conversation with the class, Anansi invited students to ask questions related to their experiences at South Central High School; as he has *all* stories, he could provide the necessary narratives. However, as a trickster, instead of providing a story to students, Anansi elicited more information from the students: he asked them for pictures, interviews, primary document evidence, and their own opinions about their questions. In essence, he asked students to conduct their own inquiry projects. In this part of the game, "Ask Anansi" invited students to *imagine* a question they would like to answer and then to create critical narratives of their own around these questions. As students shared their findings with the class and with Anansi, he would ask for refinement to questions, additional data, and pose additional challenges. As a result, "Ask Anansi" functioned like an inquiry engine: students conducted research in iterative cycles that began with big questions–"Where do stereotypes come from in South Central?" for example–and delved into more specific and personal questions–"Why is their an absence of love in South Central?" for example.

As students continued to investigate their research questions, Anansi guided them on a scavenger hunt of the school campus. Using clues and asking students to scan QR codes (easily created and scanned barcodes that can be read with numerous Smartphone applications), students explored the school space. Next, students chose locations at the school that related to their

research questions and wrote clues that, while offering hints as to the locations students were sending players, also functioned as counter-narratives about the school space. Students used the scavenger hunt game model as a mechanism for sharing their inquiry research with classmates.

In a final component of "Ask Anansi" students were invited to write museum-like placards for the locations that were previously "hidden" as scavenger hunt locations. These cards publicly shared the student counter-narratives with anybody encountering them in their daily interactions at SCHS. A student concerned about the quality of a school water fountain, for example, had previously offered cryptic directions to the fountain's location. However, in this final phase, this student taped a very prominent card next to the water fountain advocating that students drink from a different, cleaner water source.

Throughout this game, students used mobile devices to communicate with the fictitious premise and to document their research process. The game's process was one that used the premise of pretending to encourage actual advocacy and critical thought. Through developing and investigating their own research questions and–later–sharing their findings publicly, "Ask Anansi" guided students toward involvement in the research process while also encouraging transformative social play (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004).

Further, McIntyre (2000) extended Participatory Action Research that "created spaces for young urban youth to 'give testimony' and bear witness to the experiences of what Ignacio Martin-Baro (1994) called 'normal abnormality'" (p. 126). In helping define a Youth Participatory Action Research methodology, McIntyre saw the research process as "engaging in processes that position youth as agents of inquiry and 'experts' about their own lives" (126). Through "Ask Anansi," students built a research base about inequities within their own school and also contributed their own expertise based on their schooling experiences. As students

selected the various topics we researched, including graffiti, violence, and "the absence of love in South Central Los Angeles," the research we conducted was mutually negotiated and developed; Anansi (within the alternate reality game) asked students to identify research questions and a method for investigating their questions. McIntyre warns, "Developing a predetermined program for working with participants within a PAR project runs the risk of constraining the emergence of the participants experiences" (128). This method of instruction—involving students in designing and exploring meaningful learning experiences—"contributes to a way of thinking about people as researchers, as agents of change, as constructors of knowledge, actively involved in the dialectical process of action and reflection aimed at individual and collective change" (McIntyre, 2000, p. 148-149).

In addition, YPAR, as it is utilized in this study, can also be viewed as a design experiment. In describing a series of design experiments, Alan Schoenfeld (2006) relates this methodology as a useful "vehicle for theory testing…. The development of theory and instruction was an interactive, self-conscious, and reflective process" (p. 195). By taking the theoretical idea of mobile media and games as means of conveying critical literacies and civic engagement and applying them in a real world context, this study's methodology is a part of the "theory building" process that is "integral to the work of advancing knowledge within a domain" (Palinscar, 2005, p. 219). Working within the myriad constraints of South Central High School illustrates that, "Design experiments are set in the messy situations that characterize real life learning" (Schoenfeld, p. 200). Likewise, Palinscar stresses the need for design experiments as a means to study "learning phenomena in the real world rather than in the lab" (p. 218). As the day-to-day challenges of school lockdowns, persistent student absences, and daily schedule

changes to augment mandated testing are some of the realities of urban schooling, this study examines the learning effects of mobile media and games with these factors in consideration.

**Curricular Goals**

Reviewing the analysis of the first phase of this study and the construction of "Ask Anansi," I identified the following curricular goals as outcomes of the unit:

1. **Adhere to the California State Content Standards** - This unit was not an ongoing activity that took place in addition to the required instructional time or efforts within a classroom; the unit needed to fit the requirements that all ninth grade English classes adhere to. Specifically, it needed to, "ensure that every student graduating from high school is prepared to transition successfully to postsecondary education and careers" (California Department of Education, 1998, p. 6).

2. **Provide opportunities for students to participate civically** - By inquiring what it means to be a member of the South Central Los Angeles community, students examined the way their own attitudes and actions impact the larger world around them. Students investigated socio-economic issues affecting the greater South Central community and established and implemented an approach toward action. In framing the classroom learning experience as a Freirean cycle of action and reflection, this curriculum guided students towards avenues of civic participation; application of digital resources, games, and traditional grassroots organizing may be adopted.

3. **Demonstrate critical literacies in written and digital student products** - Recognizing that many students are already authoring numerous texts, this unit guided them in analyzing and questioning both their own texts and those they regularly consume. They looked for examples of hegemony and questioned modes of surveillance and power encountered in these

media; in framing my lessons of hegemony, I drew upon the Gramscian writing. As a useful starting place to examine critical literacies, Freire's text "First Letter: Reading the World/Reading the Word" (1998) acted as a theoretically grounding text for the class. As critical literacies are, "essential to the redefining of the self and the transformation of oppressive social structures and relations of production," student textual production generated a critique of power structures in media and society (Morrell, 2008a, p. 5).

4. **Amplify student voice through physical and virtual presentation of student work** - As new media offer new opportunities for students to share ideas, socialize, and speak publicly, their are also significant concerns about responsible use of the ways the Internet amplifies student voice. Additionally, the virtual world of that is offered by new media is not a simple replacement for the blemished environment of students' schools or communities. This unit encouraged students to speak to audiences publicly through virtual locations like Wikipedia in addition to speaking to individuals through face-to-face interaction at their school site. Student-authored wikis, twitter updates, and virtual presentations augmented traditional presentation opportunities for peers and the general public.

5. **Participate in game play that looks at community assets and provides information about post-secondary academic opportunities -** As mobile media and game play provide opportunities for students to engage in their community, game play in this project provided opportunities to explore, virtually and in the physical world, the assets of the community. Recent technology adaptations such as QR coding—simple barcodes with customized information that can be read by some cellular phones—provide ways to "tag" data on the community in and around South Central High School; this is described in Chapter Six. Similarly, role playing acted as another model of play in which information about college resources, A-G requirements, and

college access can be transmitted. Both digitally-mediated gameplay like QR code scavenger hunts and offline play like charades acted as delivery mechanisms of key principles of engagement.

6. **Investigate the polymorphous nature of space within the classroom and community as informed by mobile media** - As much of new media for youth at the time of this study involved social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace, this project examined how these virtual networks can recontextualize the use of classroom space. For example Gee (2004) describes "affinity space" as a communal learning environment in which participants share expertise towards a common goal or objective. Contextually, this study attempted to foster affinity space for students. It explored how "people can connect or 'network' their own individual knowledge" within formal classroom settings (Gee 2004). Similarly, "interactional organization," and "Tacit knowledge - ["knowledge players have built up in practice, but may not be able to explicate fully in words"] are encouraged forms of digital cultural practice that can help organize and foster critical literacy through digital media and learning. Such practices help inform the digital world with the kind of lived literacy practices that foster sociocultural literacy perspectives. Gee explains that, "Because content is rooted in experiences a person is having as part and parcel of taking on a specific identity…. Learning is situated in experience, but goal-driven, identity-focused experience" (p. 26).

In reviewing the alternate reality game and the goals of my curriculum, this study's methodology brings together a design experiment method and a critical frame. I couched this gameplay and YPAR within my research methodology of a design experiment in my attempt to respond to the Gramscian call to challenge dominant, hegemonic practice within a classroom. This methodology asserts the "conscious line of moral conduct" that Gramsci charges educators

to utilize in bringing into being "new modes of thought" (in Buras and Apple, 2006, p. 5). Related, Brown (1992) explains that since design research is meant to "inform practice," "we must operate always under the constraint that an effective intervention should be able to migrate from our experimental classroom to average classrooms operated by and for average students and teachers, supported by realistic technological and personal support" (p. 143). Identifying—naming—these constraints is to point to the function of hegemonic power controlling the normative schooling experiences of urban youth of color.

In order to achieve the goals of this curriculum, a shared knowledge of mobile media and game play informs how the class interacts and inquires around the potential and limitation of these instructional mediums in the classroom. At the beginning of this curriculum, I conducted a Socratic dialogue with the participating students in the class. This focus group dialogue assessed student understanding of critical literacy and civic engagement. I then asked students to write a policy memo regarding school regulations of mobile media. These allowed students to expand on their discussion with independent reflection. I also asked students to create qualitative narratives taking inventory of their individual phone use as well as their historical experience playing games. These daily narratives included homework texted to me, in class writing, and collaborative descriptions with classmates.

Studying youth engagement, Yonezawa et al. (2009) explain the importance of context in shaping student experiences: "Youth do not live, work, and play in back boxes. Their homes, schools, neighborhoods, clubs, teams, and workplaces help determine how engaged they do or do not become" (p. 9). This project explores the expansive potential of digital space as a pedagogic tool; I see digital media as a potential for bringing youth *closer* to their surrounding community. As Dewey (1897) points to the way that schools are largely out of sync with the communities

that they serve in "School and Society." Instead of simply exposing youth to differences in inequality, crowdsourcing–getting a large public group to solve problems, traditionally via new media–local issues, creating space for dialogue and generally creating counter-hegemonic dialogue around inequality within communities like South Central are ways digital media offer inclusive models of bridging the digital with localized issues of inequality.

**Implementation and Analysis of Curriculum**

Once I developed the seven week instructional program for my classroom, the second phase of the study involved actually teaching this curriculum when my students from B track returned to school for the months of May and June. Throughout the unit, students authored numerous written products including a culminating policy paper, an edited Wikipedia page, and game clues (discussed in later chapters).

As in the first phase of this study, I developed daily fieldnotes. However, as I was the teacher within the classroom, my jottings were significantly sparser than during my initial study of the campus. To help guide my development of fieldnotes during this phase, I recorded all of my lessons using the LiveScribe recording device and referenced these recordings when creating my fieldnotes. Though I did not transcribe the full lessons, I used the recordings to ensure the accuracy of my own jottings and I transcribed portions of lessons where the language used in the class were pertinent to my research questions. These fieldnotes thus captured the day-to-day experience in the classroom, our class discussions, and the patterns of mobile use that were developed collectively.

Additionally, over the seven weeks of the gameplay and curricular intervention, I conducted six separate focus group interviews with between four and eight students in the class.

The first two focus groups took place in the first week of the study, the second set of interviews one month into the study, and the final two focus groups the day after the curricular intervention concluded. These focus groups allowed me to ask students about their individual experiences and compare them to my own notes about the class and their in-class writing and reflections. Additionally, as topics within the class were to a degree co-constructed, these focus groups allowed me to adjust the pace, the content, and the ways the class unfolded. For example, in one of the middle focus groups, several students told me that they were not keeping up with the class reading and did not understand the way the text related to what was being studied. As a result, I adjusted the reading schedule, added in-class discussions to draw clarity upon the texts and, later, attempted to look at how student statements about the difficulty of the text related to the ways they were or were not accessing the text on mobile devices.

As with the analyses in the first phase of this study, I coded and organized my notes into patterns based on ways that students interacted and participated in my class with mobile devices. Additionally, the student work collected as part of this study added an additional layer of data that was also coded and examined. The student writing collected for this study included formal, in-class writing as well as informal writing practices students utilize in class. These included digital messages such as student text messages, emails, and Facebook updates. Further, new media products like videos, Wikipedia entries, and "tagged" photographs helped illustrate ways students interacted in a "secondary orality" and the new language practices afforded by digital media. I collected and analyzed critical textual products (Morrell, 2008b). While Morrell's research drew on a high school summer seminar around civics and media production, I also looked at digital products such as text added to the school's Wikipedia page as "critical textual

production." Shifting the focus of understanding critical literacies from a consumptive practice to a productive one emphasized student agency as authors, critics, and activists.

Drawing on the literature informed by ethnography of communication, I looked at specific language events and the way students talked about mobile media, games, and civic participation. As described by Hymes (1974), "The term speech event will be restricted to activities, or aspects of activities, that are directly governed by rules or norms for the use of speech" (p. 38). Relying on the recordings made in class and messages sent and wrote, I was able to listen to and transcribe student speech and analyze the digital speech that occurred in text messages and emails.

While the class inquiry and gameplay activities within it challenged students to participate in civic role playing, critically analyze texts encountered and produce new texts, audio recording the interactions throughout class helped me assess student changes throughout the months of this YPAR component of the study. As Barton and Hamilton (2005) explain, speech events are "a key way of understanding written language […] to examine specific observable events and the role of texts in these events. The literacy event becomes a basic unit of analysis" (p. 3). As literacy events are "dynamic activities" that can include multiple perspectives, purposes, and participants, an understanding of dialogue and text in this study stems from a critical perspective (Barton and Hamilton, 2005, p. 6-8). As a result, the discussions noted throughout this study about mobile media use and gameplay in South Central were analyzed with a discourse analysis that focused on how language as a cultural tool mediates relationships of power and privilege in social interactions, institutions, and bodies of knowledge (Rogers et. al., 2005). For example, students created narratives that challenged the existing discourse of school structures and locations; a student (as described in Chapter Six) labeled the

sole green shrub at the school, "Captain Green," in a playful way that–she later told me–was meant to make people look at the shrub "in a different way." This mode of analysis is "an approach to answering questions about the relationships between language and society" (Rogers et al., 2005, 366). As a study that attempted to look at critical literacies and civic participation from this critical perspective, data analysis here explored the verbal and online dialogue that was produced and shaped meaning in the South Central classroom. Because a discourse is "productive" and iterative (Denzin, 1995), dialogue in my class was not something I viewed as isolated incidents as much as a string of incidents related to student literacy development (p. 11).

That these kinds of discourse may now transpire digitally in the virtual communities of spaces like Facebook, instant message logs, and text messages, the process of tracking and analyzing the discourse of youth in digital space is expanding beyond the traditional tools of ethnography and analysis. Recording screens and transcribing instant message exchanges also constituted the kinds of discourse that were analyzed. However, placing these texts in strings of dialogue like a traditional conversation negates the role that space plays in a new, digital discourse. As such, when analyzing these data, the time and place dislocation of the data were noted as part of the analysis. Bakhtin writes, "Discourse does not reflect a situation; it is a situation" (in Denzin, 1995, 11). However, traditionally these situations were bound by both location and time. In a digital sphere, the methods of analysis expands time and place and inculcate past and present participants and potential audience into a new mode of discourse that naturally exceeds classroom walls, school hours, and administrative oversight.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## Mediating Proximity and Avoiding Surveillance: A Look at Mobile Media Use at South Central High School

Though I interviewed more than one hundred students to gather the data presented in this chapter, it was my own student, Minerva, who most clearly got to the pith of mobile media use in schools today:

> **Antero**: Can you tell me how much time you spend at school on your phone?
>
> **Minerva**: The whole day!
>
> **Antero**: You spend the *whole* day on the phone?
>
> **Minerva**: Mostly.
>
> **Antero**: What do you do?
>
> **Minerva**: Everything.

From the student perspective of mobile use on campuses, nearly all decisions at all hours of the school day are channeled through mobile practice. In discussing student digital life at South Central High School, there were some parts of the SCHS student's daily schedule that students explained did not find them directly engaged in mobile media use. However, as will be discussed below, even these instances were carefully planned, mediated, and collectively negotiated through prior mobile media use.

Exploring in-school social use of mobile media devices, this chapter expands on existing qualitative studies of youth digital practices. In particular the sweeping ethnographic work led by Mimi Ito, *Hanging Out, Messing Around, Geeking Out* (2009) offers a comprehensive look at how youth utilize, communicate, socialize, and produce media products outside of schools. Here, I offer a look from *within* schools. Before moving forward, however, it is important to note that

this is a limited view: focusing on in-school use of mobile media devices could easily have been my entire study. I do not, by any means, present this as exhaustive. Instead, this is an initial study that served this study's look at the critical and civic opportunities that mobile devices can afford. In terms of the scope of this study's larger research questions, the observations, focus groups, and interviews analyzed in this chapter allowed me to make claims about student mobile social practices, to attempt to see the digital social climate at the school from a student perspective, and to attempt to build off of the natural ways youth engage with mobile devices within my classroom.

I also recognize that I entered this study with preconceived feelings about the role that mobile devices play within schools. As a classroom teacher, I found these devices often interfering with my initial plans and instruction during class time. As the instructor, I am aware that my interpretation privileged a power dynamic that tended to see student mobile device use as a negative influence on classroom learning. Through the qualitative research shared in this chapter, I attempted to see this mobile use from a student perspective. While I return later to how this use impacts the classroom, I attempt to share the basic findings of my inquiry without my etic judgment as a teacher.

In this attempt to look ethnographically from the student perspective, I also listened to how students talked about their mobile device practices within the focus groups I conducted. The focus groups were with student polled from various classrooms and various grade levels. In order to try to reach the various demographics represented at South Central High School, I attempted to conduct these observations with students from all three of the school's year-round tracks. Likewise, my observation of other classrooms and the fieldnotes that resulted came from sitting in classrooms from all three of these tracks; observations of B-track classrooms, however, were

limited to classes taking place during period four, since I was teaching during the other times of the day.

Looking into the nature of how students understood the concept of "mobile," I began my initial focus groups asking students what they considered mobile devices to include. They identified phones, iPods, game devices like Sony's PSP and Nintendo's DS. Two students suggested iPads. Not one student identified a laptop computer as a mobile device.

As I began asking questions of the students participating in focus groups, my understanding of mobile media use quickly corroborated the fact that the vast majority of the students at South Central High School were utilizing mobile media. Across five of the focus groups that I conducted, there were a total of eight students who claimed not to have a mobile device (two focus groups had single students and the others only two students). All other participants claimed ownership of a mobile device.

**School Tasks, School Time, Social Tasks, Social Time**

In talking with students and observing the ways they relied upon mobile devices for social purposes at school, it became clear to me that the prevalent student use of mobile devices in schools is not simply about student pushback on existing policy. Instead, the ways that students engaged in mobile-mediated social practices during school hours redefined how time was used by students, how they understood time and the elasticity and overlap of social and school time. For students, it is not merely that they are choosing to text *instead* of participate in academic work. Instead, students see these two areas overlapping as occurring concurrently. It is something that their peers recognize, allowing for delays and occasional hiccups in the time between text-message conversation responses. Before I provide further detail into the ways that

mobile media impact the schooling experience for youth in the remainder of this chapter, I want to first point to the specific ways these devices have oriented student understanding of the school space. In particular, class time is both instructional and social for students. Mobile devices are used to connect with peer networks, leverage online resources, and produce work for school. Finally, the opportunities to bring these devices by teachers into classrooms rely, according to students, on developing trust between teacher and students. Below, I develop each of these themes analytically and use these findings to pose possibilities for a wireless critical pedagogy in the next chapter.

**Sound, Talk, Privacy**

For a campus that is always connected, South Central High School is a generally quiet one. Asking students to silence their phones is not something I've had to do in my classes at all during the duration of this study. If anything the most frequent sounds heard on the mobile-enabled campus are the treble-y warble of music from earphones: these are often lopped over ears but with the speakers positioned outwards to quietly project the music students publicly experience. Similarly, students roaming halls in twos and threes will often play a customized ringtone to echo and be heard by students in classrooms with doors open. Taking popular songs and trimming them to single phrases or refrains, hip-hop is edited to the epitome of sexism and violence and looped endlessly.

Though students differed when it came to preferences of how to communicate digitally when speaking of "private" information, most student comments were concerned with whether information could be overheard or shared. For example, in one focus group, a student said when he was talking with his "girl" he did not want his classmates to hear their entire exchange, even if

snippets of his end of the conversation were audible. As such, both texting and phone calls in schools are problematic for students. Phone calls can be overheard and the emotions of the speakers inferred. As one student noted, "With a phone call, you don't want nobody to see it." If text messaging images are located in a highly visible area, student text messages can be seen, which means that the visible nature of mobile communication is eschewed through phone conversation.

At the same time, students expressed concern with information being shared. Text messages and Facebook messages that were assumed private, for instance, have been forwarded to third parties and beyond in ways that have been hurtful and embarrassing for many students. In discussions with my own students, Dante and Katherine recounted an incident, earlier in the school year when a classmate's explicit photograph was forwarded to many of the students at the school and–Dante speculates–beyond. As troublesome as this issue of teen "sexting" may be to adults, this points to ways student communication practices are shaped by the functions of their devices; because it is relatively easy to forward content from one device to another, students relate incidents like the one described above as warning about some forms of mobile use. In this sense, many students balance public and private discourse through mobile devices. For conversations of the most sensitive and immediate nature (those that students feel that can't wait to simply share in person), many students seek to quietly whisper phone calls around corners and in bathrooms at school. However, often, the content of a conversation or informal exchange via text or Facebook is augmented to ensure it appears innocuous enough to be shared with a larger, unknown audience. Many students profess love and also write cryptically in public Facebook posts that both encourage dialogue and occlude explicit meaning from all but a handful of close confidants. (For an in depth look at public privacy on Facebook, see boyd, 2011.)

**Proximity and Purposes of Mobile Device Use: A Conflict in Policy and Space**

Perhaps most striking to me about what my research has revealed is the way that youth interest in mobile use runs almost completely counter to adult provisional use of mobile devices. At South Central High School, students are generally allowed to use mobile devices during lunch and nutrition periods during the day and are generally not allowed to use their mobile devices during class time. While this is problematic for instructional purposes, these findings speak to ways that adults largely misunderstand youth interest in mobile media use.

In conducting focus groups with students, observing campus spaces, and sitting in various classrooms, a picture of what transpires during and between class periods points to the tension at work here. Namely, students don't *want* to use mobile devices during lunchtime or nutrition. In fact, some students told me that if they receive a text message or call during lunch they would wait until they head back to their classes to respond.

The reason, of course, makes sense in thinking about what kinds of things students are doing on their phones while sitting in my classroom and pretending to read a book or search for something in their backpack. Students spend much of their mobile media use in classes to socialize with each other, update each other on the latest *chisme*, and discuss meeting places and upcoming activities. With all of this organizing, planning and chatting in place, teens don't intend to waste the precious minutes of lunch in isolated relationships with their devices. This time, instead, is for talking with friends and socializing without these activities mediated by handheld devices. Discussing this topic with my ninth grade students revealed the specific purposes behind *when* students use mobile devices:

**Antero:** Do you use it as much during breaks?

**Dede:** No.

**Minerva:** Uh-uh.

**Antero:** Why not [Dede]?

**Dede:** Because you're interested in something else.

**Minerva:** Yeah.

**Dede: N**ow that people are out there you can put it away.

**Solomon**: Yeah, you don't need the phone to go out and start talking.

**Minerva:** It's just that when we're in class time we got nothing else to do.

**Antero:** You've got nothing else to do?

[laughs]

**Solomon**: you text someone instead of walking up to someone during class time.

**Antero:** Help me understand: Teachers think you should have your phones put away during class and take them out during lunch and nutrition. Right?

**Minerva:** Right.

**Antero**: But students use their phones during class and mostly put them away during lunch. Is that right?

**Minerva:** Cause at lunch you're having fun and people are around.

**Ras:** There's so much to do like during lunch that I might say, "Hold up Imma check this message during fourth period."

The fluidity of social time within schools for students means that mobile devices allow for planning and facilitation of face-to-face peer interaction. Because comments like the ones above where unanimously approved students in the focus groups, the way that school time is interpreted at South Central High School by students is significantly different from the ways they

are expected to conform to time as defined by adults. Whereas adult policy mandates student mobile use be relegated to lunchtime, nutrition and after school, students are clearly operating in a way that diametrically opposes this policy. In looking at this contested space between practice and adult policy from a student perspective, I recognized that students seem to be negotiating social time in ways that mimic adult interactions. I felt conflicted, as a researcher and teacher seeing students using devices in ways that are not allowed by school policy yet that I do myself– discreetly texting when I am in a meeting, responding to a request, or quickly scanning my texts, email, and social networks for information immediately pertinent to me. Seeing my own activity mirrored and reflected back to me as a student activity that is typically not approved by adults challenged my teacher perspective.

For educators, this brings us to a structural problem: yes, disciplinary issues arise and we can spend time discussing if the time students spend texting in class signals a problem related to un-engaging curriculum. However, if schools intend to be caught up to speed with the quickly shifting world of socializing with peers, they most contend with the fact that students are forced to break school policies as they interfere with student interpretations of school time.

A related finding from my study relates to the social norm students at SCHS share with regards to amount of time that can be acceptably passed between text messages. Most students said that even if they are in the middle of class work, they make deliberate efforts to respond to a text message as quickly as possible. One student suggested, “At least you should say you’re busy and can’t text right now. Otherwise, that’s rude.” Immediate responses to in-class texts are so accepted, in fact, that one student said that if someone isn’t responding right away, “It probably means their phone was taken away.” Several students nodding in agreement.

This cultural norm related to ways of using mobile devices sometimes frustrated students. Most of the students who shared the expectations of immediate text responses also found it exhausting. These students were fully aware of class rules about phone use but the rules that govern their social lives felt more meaningful even if they are oppressive than those governing time with teachers.

Asking my own students why they use their phones when they know they are not supposed to, Solomon shrugged and said, “It’s fun.”

**Ras:** Just because.

**Minerva:** Because if it’s vibrating you need to see who it is.

**Antero**: Why can’t you wait?

**Minerva**: It could be important.

Though the reasons students chose to use mobile devices when aware that adults expected them not to varied, the general result was the same: on-campus adult authority was thwarted. In silently challenging the rules and expectations of adult-dictated policy at SCHS, the students exert their agency. Though this often led teachers to see students as "distracted," "rebellious," or "rude," these are comments from a challenged authority speaking from the no longer stable despotism of school rules. Because of the ubiquity and compactness of mobile media, students are not so silently redefining school behavior. Social rules are superseding policy.

I want to also recognize that several students offered disconfirming evidence of being annoyed when friends text too much in class. Minerva, for instance, even though she said she tries to respond to friends within five minutes said she is frustrated when, “they [friends] like send you one text and if you don’t write back in like two minutes they send you like three fucking messages. That’s dumb.” In exploring the reasons behind this frustration with Minerva,

she explained that sometimes, "I just want to pay attention to what's going on [in class]." Though this comment disconfirms the kind of dependency on rapid-fire text messaging exchanges that her peers engage in, it also further enforces the student perspective as a fluid time that is both academic and social.

**Instructional Time as Social Time**

In recognizing the ways that student social interacting interfered with time that was otherwise primarily academic and defined by adults, it is worth considering how students tried to balance their roles as social agents with peers and as students within adult-run classrooms.

In talking with students days before the school's annual state standardized test, many students anticipated using the testing days as an opportunity to catch up with friends through mobile devices. Many students said they would use the time, even when actually working on answering test questions also to listen to music. One student, in this focus group, however, noted that she would often ignore text messages if she felt they interfered with her engagement in class. She stated, "I'm busy doing things so I can't be looking at my phone all the time so I get irritated if someone keeps texting me all the time." This is a viewpoint that was largely in the minority of the focus group data I gathered. I share this student's comment as disconfirming evidence that suggests opportunities for further consideration.

Despite Minerva's opening comment that students are always using mobile devices, my observations show focused pockets of engagement. Most students said they are willing to respond to text messages or check updates from their social networks with several minutes of delays. Essentially, when students feel bored or notice a resting place within the classroom structure (regardless of teachers' lesson plans), students will shift their attention back to their

mobile devices. Though some students stated the need to respond to peers' text messages immediately, as one student put it, "they obviously know you can't get back" immediately. This spectrum of responses illustrates that while the student perspectives tend to coalesce around specific practices, mobile ways of being at SCHS are not monolithic.

**On Using Mobile Devices Academically**

As one of the initial goals of this phase of qualitative data collection was to understand ways students used mobile devices throughout the school day and identify skills students could leverage within my own classroom for the second phase of the study, the student comments about mobile use for academic purposes are illuminating. Discussing the learning implications of mobile devices, Minerva said they should be allowed in classrooms “Cause it’s one way you can concentrate more at work like listening to music. I can. And if they let you like text or something and letting you do something that you want to do then you could probably do something that they want you to do, you get me?

Discussing with students ways teachers could use mobile devices for academic purposes, I recorded the following exchange with my ninth graders:

> **Antero**: Can you think of a time you would text an adults?
>
> **Dante**: I can.
>
> **Antero**: Go ahead.
>
> **Dante**: Like if you were absent and want to catch up.
>
> **Minerva**: We ain’t gonna do that!
>
> **Antero**: If everybody had a phone and I said, "Text me your answer now," would you do that?

**Minerva**: Yeah that would be tight. Then we would get our points and shit.

**Dante**: I wouldn't even give you my number.

**Antero**: [Dante] you bring up a really good point, are you worried if I had your phone number I would use it in a way that would make you uncomfortable?

**Dante**: Yeah.

**Antero**: So you'd feel weird if I texted you?

**Dante**: I guess, I mean you're my teacher, I don't know you like that.

**Antero**: So is a text message more personal than a phone call?

**Dante**: No I'd rather talk on the phone to someone but rather you text me than call.

**Minerva**: I feel weird and uncomfortable and awkward talking on the phone to you so I'd rather you just text me.

**Antero**: Okay, well have you ever been on Facebook with a teacher?

**Dede**: yours.

**Antero**: Oh yeah.

[laughs]

**Ras**: Really?

**Antero**: Yep. Remember you can be my Facebook friend – the info is on our syllabus.

**Dante**: Naw, you gonna burn me out.

**Antero**: What do you mean?

**Dante**: You'd find out too much about me.

**Minerva**: Yeah.

Though some students see opportunities to engage academically if a teacher were to open a space for mobile use as part of the classroom practice, the exchange above highlights that student opinions in this regard varied. Though tied to specific components of my own class structure, the students' comments exemplify the differing opinions I encountered in the other focus groups. Though some students, like Minerva, saw using mobile devices in classes as opportunities to increase their class participation, many others, like Dante, were concerned about the way teacher access to their mobile devices may uncomfortably extend the student-teacher relationship. Further, the nuanced nature of participatory media tools like phones and social networks means that there is no clear endorsement of digital device use in classes by students; Minerva, though she was excited that a phone means "we would get our points," is also wary that a teacher would "find out too much" in a social network like Facebook. Finally, even different features inherent on most phones are seen differently. Though Minerva seemed initially eager to use her phone to text responses to the class, the prospect of speaking one-on-one with a teacher via a phone call made Minerva "feel weird and uncomfortable and awkward."

As mobile devices are the strict domain of social circles at SCHS, to use them within academic contexts feels alien and threatening for many students. The fact that these devices connect students socially while in classrooms is an important feature that could be used to rethink student orientations to learning in schools. However, the skepticism, distrust, and apprehension that students expressed revealed that simply placing mobile devices within a classroom would do nothing to build stronger relationships or academic outcomes. This data from this study directly impacted the ways I approached a wireless critical pedagogy in the next chapter.

In exploring the ways these mobile devices may impact classroom learning, I asked students if any were already communicating or socializing with teachers through digital devices. Some students were in social networks and texted teachers that they trusted; "She's just different from other teachers, way cooler," one student said about the teacher she felt comfortable texting. Aside from this small pocket of teachers, most felt it would be uncomfortable and did not feel trusting enough to text or utilize mobile devices with teachers. Though students see mobile devices as tools for communication with peers and family, the devices do not signal the same opportunities for educators. In fact, this aspect of student use reinforces traditional adult-student interaction. While the introduction of prevalent mobile device use on campus technically introduces new means of communication between teacher and student, in general this ignored; students do not see their devices as connecting to the classrooms. While student time is fluidly mixed between academic and social time, the tool that facilitates this fluctuation is staunchly used for social purposes.

Finally, in exploring this data about trust and academic opportunities of mobile devices, the social and academic divide at SCHS is one that is worth considering. These focus groups deliberately tried to incorporate as many diverse groups of students from the campus. However, with a school that is comprised solely of black and Latino students, SCHS signifies significant ways that mobile device penetration affects student social life. As research identifies these students as richly literate during their "out-of-school time" (Moje and Tysvaer, 2006), the fact that students are seen as performing poorly in academic contexts is striking. If teachers are able to bridge social and academic time within schools and utilize students' vast mobile literacy skills, perhaps this is a way to both improve academic outcomes for SCHS students and to increase student engagement with content; my own attempts at this are detailed in the following chapters.

**Resources and Finances**

Recognizing that SCHS is a high poverty school, that many of my 11th and 12th grade students needed to work to help support their families, and aware that phones are expensive to purchase and to keep activated from month to month, I focused parts of my focus group discussions on how students were able to afford mobile devices, texting plans, as well as their strategies in saving on these costs. Most students indicated that they bought phones second-hand or through initial sign up with carriers. These two different avenues toward smart-phone possession highlighted two different financial strategies that students undertake. On the one hand, students who are signed into multi-year contracts often did so with a family. Many students said that they get minutes for their devices on a "family plan." On the other hand, other students get lower rates through popular month-to-month carriers. As ownership of these devices is required for engaging socially at SCHS for many students, it is intriguing to think of the ways this ownership extends beyond the social bonds of the school. When having to share minutes or a plan with a family, student ownership is more than an individual and parental decisions and budgetary constraints, according to focus groups, often impact mobile use.

Students also took advantage, as much as possible, of applications that can replace carrier fees for texting and calling. Additionally, as students were aware of the kinds of possibilities for ownership and the limitations of plans, their ability to negotiate cost and plan limitations knowledge of applications points to youth agency. My student, Solomon, for example, showed me several applications he uses that allowed him to text for free. He said he has had less success with the apps that allow for free calling than the texting apps, but comfortably changed from one texting app to another, sending random missives to friends in demonstration. In heeding the

lesson that Solomon provided, I would use the free texting app with my ninth graders as detailed in the next chapter.

**Youth Knowledge**

Each time I get a new mobile device (every few years as the wayward devices seem to break in suspicious sync when my mobile carrier's contract is up for renewal), I find myself flummoxed by the functional skills each device requires. I asked the students in this study if they, too, ever had difficulty figuring out or using their devices:

> **Student 1:** No… Only adults.
>
> **Student 2**: Yeah, my moms be having trouble but now she's got the hang out it.
>
> **Student 1**: Every phone's got the same shit. It's just in a little different ways that takes a bit of time to figure out.

Because students often look at each other's screens, sometimes share devices to listen to music, and often upgrade to newer devices when financially available, youth technology knowledge is implicit and abundant; in two different focus groups, students shared ways they would use features on their phone in a rapid exchange that, for me, was difficult to follow. The technical aspects of using these devices and talking about these technical aspects are such common knowledge that it is easily shared amongst peers and demonstrated. In most focus groups, I asked students to show me how they texted message quickly in class. Though I witnessed an array of devices demonstrated, I appreciated the sophisticated hand gestures, thumb button tapping, and finger-swiping that is second nature to the students. Watching the blurred and practiced dexterity of these digits, I was reminded of David Sudnow's ethnography, *Ways of the Hand* (1993),

detailing his efforts to understand piano improvisation. These students' hands understand, interpret, and cast out information in artistic bursts and haphazard taps.

Similarly, students said that the popularity of certain devices was nearly almost equated with price. The features that are noted prominently in advertisements are valued on these devices. Though they may not be the practical features, most students felt the need for their phones to have "the 4g," a touchscreen, and GPS (Global Positioning System). Asking a student if she used the GPS on her phone, she said, "Hell no. What I need to be using that for? You know we ain't going anywhere but the hood."

Aside from the phone's features, the other important factor in how students decide which devices to use is the cost of data and talk time based on various plans. Students seemed generally split. About half of the students had month-to-month plans that were typically paid for by a parent. The other half were part of a family plan in which data and calling minutes were shared in a pool with parents and siblings. Though both types of plans had limitations, students generally had strategies for the days near the end of the month when data or minutes would run low:

**Antero**: Do you ever run out?

**Student**: Yes.

**Antero**: So what do you do when I know you're about to run out?

**Student**: I stop using it as much.

**Antero**: You stop texting?

**Student**: Yeah.

**Antero:** So if someone texts you you tell them you can't text right now?

**Student**: I tell them to like call me on my house phone.

Further, the locations that students found themselves in throughout the school day also affected student mobile use. Students told me that they deliberately went to bathrooms at various locations on campus to have more time to use their devices or to meet up with friends in ways that were preplanned through mobile media use. Additionally, students were keenly aware of where phone reception is weakest at the school. Asking students if there were particular areas at school that had bad phone reception, the answers were clearly agreed upon by all participants. One student said the school's basement, where the school's Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) program is housed, is known by the students there as having bad reception. Another student then replied, "Yeah, in the JROTC building you got to be in the one corner at the end to get reception." Asking the students about this known space of reception in the basement, the students told me, "There's like half the class standing there." In following up with the students, they said that the JROTC Chiefs are oblivious to the reason behind the mass of students converging on the single corner of the basement.

As noted before, student social interactions now superseded adult academic expectations and policies. Students navigated the school space searching for mobile signal that can leverage and maximize their social engagement, with or without adult permission

**Mobilizing Activism: Communicating a "For Real Thing"**

Many of the SCHS students participated in a walkout and two campus sit-ins related to school budget cuts in California during the timeframe of this study and my focus group conversation illuminated understanding of the civic role the mobile devices played within school settings. Though teachers and administrators were largely aware of the fact that students

communicated protest plans via mobile devices, the kinds of preparation involved in such practices have not been clearly articulated in prior research. Below I share the student perspective on planning and participating within these school-based civic protests from students.

After discussing in-class use of devices, I asked the focus group students how they became aware of the on-campus sit-ins and walkout activities that were organized by students:

**Student 1**: I got a text.

**Antero**: Who did you get a text from?

**Student 1**: I don't know just, random people forward it to you.

**Student 2**: It says, like, send it to your friends and their friends and their friends.

**Student 3**: Almost everyone knew, and knew the day before.

**Student 2**: I got a text message and saw it on Facebook.

**Antero**: What did the message say?

**Student 2**: It said, "Walkout tomorrow after nutrition."

**Antero**: So how did you know what to do? Did you just follow the text's directions when it was the end of nutrition?

**Student 1**: People started walking to the yard.

**Antero**: so you could see them.

**Student 1**: Yeah, they were walking so we knew it was a for real thing.

In the exchange, there is a sense of chance and discretion for students when receiving these text messages that invite them into civic actions–activities that respond to and focus on issues related to their school life. Not until students in this group saw other students acting was it clear that this message detailed "a for real thing." Additionally, the time between receiving a text or Facebook message and the walkout was only one or two days according to the students; no students

expressed frustration at this short time frame. Within the current uses of mobile devices for civic engagement, these students paint a picture of shortly enacted and sometimes faulty plans; the hesitancy to assume the texts could be trusted signal ways students feel disconnected from the sources of information and need more trust when feeing compelled to act.

What is also striking about the way that mobile media informs and guides student organizing in the three examples I witnessed at SCHS is that it does so anonymously. Though several students in the focus groups helped author the initial text messages that were circulated amongst social circles at SCHS, most students did not know or inquire as to the text's origins. In this way, text messages about walkouts and sit-ins seem to run counter to many of the general tenets of how students understand and utilize their devices at schools: for the students in my own classroom and based on what is shared with me in discussion and observation, mobile devices are extremely personal. This understanding is corroborated by other qualitative research of mobile device use (Ito, 2006; Ito, et al. 2009). However, with texts related to student-organized activism, the information is depersonalized:

> **Antero**: I've heard students tell me it's going to happen again tomorrow?
>
> **Student 1**: Yeah.
>
> **Antero**: How do you know that?
>
> **Student 1**: 'Cause, it went around again.
>
> **Antero**: You already got it?
>
> **Student 1**: Yeah I got it back on Wednesday.
>
> **Antero**: But you don't know who sent it?
>
> **Student 1**: No it's like this little survey thing you're doing now: you said it's anony- ...

**Student 2**: Anonymous.

**Student 1**:We don't know who started it.

**Student 2**: We just got it.

The fact that these messages are anonymous can be seen as problematic when trying to tease out the actual "civic engagement" students experience. For a majority of the population of the students participating in the school walkout and sit-ins, the information about these events was communicated through anonymous text messages. While it is worth recognizing that marginal participation in activism and grassroots efforts are not only key ways to add to public engagement but also as important steps for youth to see avenues for more engaged, future civic participation (Anyon, 2009), the anonymity of these text messages ruptures student connection to identifiable groups or individuals. Instead, students said they felt united in these civic actions through seeing their peers participating in a "for real thing." Similarly, it is worth noting that the anonymous text message as tool for leveraging mass mobilization is synchronous with modern days methods of engagement and protest. The Occupy movement that would capture public interest just over two months after this study was completed leveraged digital tools like Twitter and Facebook to quickly communicate public updates and–later–to provide live footage of protests and police response. Similarly, online forms of protest are often swathed in Anonymity; perhaps the most notorious such group is aptly called Anonymous. As they staged physical world protests against Scientology and virtual protests against the Stop Online Privacy Act, the group takes deliberate efforts to mask (both literally and figuratively) the identities of its participants.

After my focus group sessions, several students forwarded me the text message that spurred students to participate in a school sit-in. The message I received was:

> FWD: FwD FWD FWD SIT DOWN THIS FRIDAY!!! AND HOPEFULLY ANOTHER WALK OUT!! FORWARD TO ALL STUDENTS DOESNT MATTER WHAT SCHOOL!!

The text message's defining characteristics speak to the nature of dialogue and communication in a digital age. The anonymity of the message (with the numerous forward notices) can be falsified by typing such letters into a text and can be used to protect the text's original authors. The all capitalized letters that "shout" to the reader also signal that this text speaks from a place of urgency that differs from most student's text messages and Facebook posts. Finally, that is offers clear instructions for students encourages action; it is easy for students to enter the handful of keystrokes required to comply with the message's request to continue to forward the message to others. I received this text message five different times from students during the course of my study. Each message differed only in the number of forward notices the precluded the actual caps-locked message.

**Teacher Mobile Media Use**

Though this chapter focuses primarily on student use of mobile media, I want to discuss, briefly, how students perceived adult mobile media use in school spaces. As students in one focus group said their math teacher used his cell phone just as much as the students, students seemed to perceive adult mobile use as frequent and hypocritical. "It ain't fair that he's texting and I can't," one student commented. Student responses thus point to parallels between adult dispositions toward mobile media use and student behavior. As the student above noted, some teachers ignored the restrictions and rules they set for the students in their classroom, clearly using their phones.

In some cases, teachers took a proactive role in attempting to freely utilize mobile media and connect with the world that looms beyond the walls of SCHS. Students discussed one teacher who brought in her own Internet router to school to access blocked websites. Because this teacher "doesn't have a lock on it," students in her class and in rooms nearby use the teacher's router for their own Internet use, allowing students to access Facebook and music downloading programs without using their own data plans, which may cost them money or be limited to monthly quotas.

**Trust and Deception with Adults**

Based on data shared above about possibilities for in-class mobile device use, and the hesitancy some students expressed around civic actions advertised through text messages, for students to engage with mobile media use responsibly in classes they require teacher trust. Simply put, if students do not feel that their teachers trust them, as reflected in classroom structure and pedagogy, mobile use may run in opposition to teacher goals.

Asking students in focus groups if, assuming I were their current teacher, they would feel comfortable giving me their cell phone number, a student said "We have to work on our trust." Though this somewhat echoes Dante's concern that I'd know "too much" about him if I were to see his Facebook page and Minerva's concern about preferring to text than talk to a teacher, this student's comment also signals a pedagogical path forward. As much as this study was an attempt for me to explore the ways mobile devices are presently being used by students and to see ways that they could be leveraged in classes, this student reminds me that, for students, the relational aspects of learning trump other concerns. Perhaps, more than any other challenge that schools presently face with mobile devices, the issue of trust is the one that looms largest, the

one that does not have any simple or clear answers to be found in policy changes. Unlike other pieces of technology, the persistence of "always on" mobile devices in classrooms means a temporary ban of these devices only positions students to act out against rules to which they will likely not adhere. Similarly, within many business settings that exist beyond students' schooling careers, young people will be required to understand appropriate and inappropriate times to engage in on-the-job mobile device use.

In a different context, regarding student phone numbers, one student told me, "Sometimes you have to give your number to a teacher if they are going to call your parents." Following this statement, I asked:

> **Antero:** Oh, and then they call you?
> **Student:** Yeah.
> **Antero:** And then what happens?
> **Student:** I keep my phone on silent.
> **Antero:** Do you answer trying to be your parent?
> **Student:** No, but I have an older sister to answer mine.

Thinking through the ramifications of the student's comment, it is worth recognizing that a phone number given under false pretenses is essentially useless information; if the teacher does not think the number is the student's, he or she cannot use it for in-class purposes. If students are not trusting of teachers and teacher-imposed rules, the likelihood of academic usage of mobile devices diminishes. In addition to the above example, the students shared constant forms of minor deceptive practices: every focus group told me that they would often text "behind a book" or "in my backpack" or under a desk. These in-the-moment deceptive practices are necessary for facilitating the fluid social-academic nature of student time in schools.

**Implications Beyond the Classroom**

My data suggests significant ways that student use of mobile media in schools orients students toward specific orientations when utilizing mobile media beyond the walls of school. And while the chapters that follow focus on ways the mobile media and games can leverage, promote, and insight civic action and thought, I want to recognize that the existing landscape of teen social use of mobile media in class guides students in school life that extends far beyond the classroom. Just as academic preparedness is a clear objective of public schools today, so too is the need for students to see themselves as participants in the world beyond high school. In shunning mobile devices in the "work" settings that these students are placed in, we are creating an artificial and stodgy experience that does not reflect ways people produce and develop innovations beyond the secondary schooling world. Likewise, by encouraging mobile use in social settings we are promoting behavior that runs counter to the norms of most groups of friends. I, for instance, have been reminded more than once that checking an email or replying to a text message at the dinner table is less than polite.

Mobile devices present unique opportunities for engagement, socialization, and civic activity on campus spaces. For students these are devices for continual communication with families and peers, planning, and sites of trust. At the same time, as I reviewed the data analyzed for this chapter, I also reflected on the chaos that I've seen ensue from the presence of mobile devices in a poorly managed classroom. I have horror stories of mobile devices gone wild–some in my own classroom. From the seemingly minor persistent in-the-backpack texter to a student that felt it necessary to answer calls on her phone during silent reading, mobile device use in my class has often been frustrating in the past. While this data has allowed me to look at the campus from the student perspective, I think about the lasting role that these devices have played in

shaping my pedagogical practice throughout my years at South Central High School. Though present in many classrooms for more than a decade at this point, it is worth recognizing that these are still relatively new disruptions within the archaic factory model of schooling. More than perhaps any other form of cultural wealth that students bring to school and or perform within school spaces, mobile devices mediate interactions between peers, students, adults, and parents in powerful ways.

**Conclusion**

During the end of the second month of the school year that this study took place, the SCHS campus was placed on a five and a half hour lockdown due to a bomb threat. Having evacuated our classrooms and corralled in the school's auditorium and gymnasium, students and adults passed the time chatting, watching shows on their phones, calling friends and playing games. Four hours into the lockdown, the police notified all students and faculty that phones needed to be temporarily turned off: they were about to broadcast a signal to attempt to disable any explosive devices if present. The effort could potentially break or damage phones. Dutifully, the entire campus pressed buttons, swiped screens, and toggled options to turn off their phones and gaming devices. The hour that followed is most likely the longest stretch of time during school hours in the past decade that mobile device use ceded.

During the hour of digital twilight, I cannot claim that the school entered some sort of analog bliss. I cannot claim that suddenly students looked at each other in new ways. I also cannot claim that the school rolled into anarchy without its reliance on mobile devices. The fears that we over-rely on the devices seemed unrepresented in this brief window of disrupted social life at school without technology. Except for one thing: time. It wasn't until I was able to "turn

on" again that I was aware that an hour had transpired. Without a wristwatch and without the functioning wall clock in the auditorium, I shifted into unknowing, *feeling* time pass in the conversations with colleagues and the giggles I tried to reassuringly elicit from distressed students around me. The majority of the students and teachers I interacted with told me they shared this same feeling. As mobile devices are utilized in various ways, the banality of adorning a wristwatch is often left behind.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## Distraction, Differentiation, and Socialization: English Education, Pedagogy, and Literacy Acquisition in an Era of Social and Mobile Media

On a naturally warm day in May, I handed out a set of iPod Touches[1] to the 17 ninth grade students in my period three English classroom at South Central High School. Together, we were going to journey into co-created research focused on the possibilities of mobile media devices like iPods within formal learning environments; though I designed the structures for this exploration, I told students that their insight would help me frame our classroom practice. With significant challenges related to student practices with mobile media in many classrooms including my own, it was with some apprehension that I designed a framework for the use of iPods in my classroom. As my experience with mobile devices within my own classroom had been sometimes vexing, I felt uncertainty that I would end up creating more opportunities for distraction and disruption. Like a new teacher stepping into the classroom for the first time, I felt that uncertainty about whether I would be able to *control* the classroom. In reflecting on my notes of this opening day, I am conscious of how these concerns reflect a very traditional relationship with students: my concerns stem from unwillingness to cede my assumed power via the wireless tools this study utilized.

Several hours later, I had finished my work at school and headed to the grocery store at 4:04. I know the exact time I was about to enter the store because it is time stamped on a text message I received:

[1] An Ipod Touch is a portable media device that can play music and videos, run applications, access the Internet, and create still photographs and video. With a glass touch screen, the device is used through touching and swiping various items displayed on the screen.


Holden's text was only the beginning in a series of disruptive and troublesome events I will discuss that affected our class engagement with iPods for English education. However, while there are significant areas of educational policy and pedagogy that need to be addressed, mobile media ultimately offers several opportunities for critical English education. In this chapter, I look at social practices explored in the previous chapter and the ways students used phones in my own classroom to develop a framework for critical pedagogy in an age of participatory culture. To do this, I looked at how my students and I established a space for critical use of mobile media in an English language arts classroom, my implementation strategies for using mobile devices as part of critical pedagogy, and the pragmatic challenges of encouraging and relying on daily use of mobile media in core content area classrooms. While this chapter draws on examples from the ideas, thoughts, and comments my students shared

within our classroom and on my findings from the previous chapter, I mainly build a framework for wireless critical pedagogy here.

Through differentiation of academic practices and socialization of the classroom community–as I discuss in this chapter–mobile devices can help reinvigorate a critical pedagogy for the twenty-first century. Considering the specific ways mobile devices can build toward a critical pedagogy within the digital classroom, I point to challenges I encountered. Mobile devices and participatory media more generally are contentious topics within the field of education (Collins and Halverson, 2009); some individuals indicate mobile devices are valid, necessary tools for equitable education while a claim I have heard from teachers at South Central High School is that they distract students from academic learning. As I recognize the views of both sides of this debate, this chapter acknowledges that mobile devices are both tools for engagement and devices that distract; the context is dependent on the learning environment, issues of trust, and teacher pedagogy. By noting both opportunities and challenges my students and I experienced while using mobile media, I outline ways that mobile media can positively impact English education and disrupt traditional learning practices that may not be suited for the "shape-shifting portfolio people" we are educating today (Gee, 2004).

**From Classrooms to Hackerspaces: Toward a Framework for Wireless Critical Pedagogy**

Based on my findings in Chapter Four that mobile devices at South Central High School allowed students to see school time as fluidly social and academic, that academic use of these devices hinged on mutual trust between student and teacher, and that these devices have already created civic opportunities for students, I share below a framework for a wireless critical pedagogy. This framework outlines specific ways that these mobile devices may be harnessed in

classrooms not just academically, but for the purpose of developing critical consciousness. This framework is used as a guide for the activities described in detail in Chapter Six.

To understand how mobile media can be tools to guide twenty-first century critical pedagogy, an understanding of what mobile devices offer in the classroom is necessary. At the same time, it is also necessary to look at how critical pedagogy is also in a process of changing. Though this study is informed by the tenets outlined by Paulo Freire decades ago, the contexts of his pedagogy working with adults in Brazil are vastly different from my own work with my ninth graders at South Central High School. Instead of adapting a foundational though also archaic pedagogy, this wireless critical pedagogy looks to build toward opportunities for student empowerment, access to career-preparing skill sets, and distribution of youth counter-narrative within the school community. Within this vision of a modern critical pedagogy, mobile devices offer a pragmatic means for differentiation and for socialization. By helping to develop empowered identities via the mobile opportunities of differentiation and socialization, these devices can foment "conscientization"–a critical consciousness of the social and political elements of one's world and the ability to act upon these elements (Freire 1970). I will go into detail of both of these below and then connect these two areas to a general framework for critical pedagogy and mobile media use.

Differentiation through mobile devices means personalizing learning experiences for students in numerous ways. Most classrooms would benefit from differentiation tools included on most mobile devices, including:

- **audio engagement with texts** - This signals a shift in classrooms from privileging only print media

- **varied opportunities for textual production** - producing images, video reflections, interviews, and text messages vary the way "work" looked within the classroom
- **graphic organizers and supports** - previously discussed use of mindmaps, for instance, support students in thinking systemically and making connections across personal experiences and academic curriculum.
- **continual, formative assessment of student learning** - by asking students to respond to text messages while in class, I was able to quickly gauge individual student learning and engagement; I was able to revise lesson plans and instruction based on responses students sent to me or feedback they provided.
- **potential to explore resources & independent checking for understanding -** Through online searches and peer-collaboration, resources to further the scope of student research and investigation ballooned. Likewise, metacognitive reflection on the learning practices were multimodal and varied; students were able to mindmap, record, photograph, write, and text their experiences, highlights, and challenges within the classroom, taking greater ownership and responsibility for the onus of critical research within an English classroom.

Recognizing the many ways that student learning experiences were differentiated, iPods and other mobile devices are tailored to provide individual learning modifications for each student. Further, mobile devices in our classroom helped enrich in-class community and extend this community beyond the confines of the school bell. It also extended learning beyond the realm of the classroom walls. As such, below are several ways that mobile media devices act as tools for socialization:

- **enable communication between mobile users** - peer to peer communication meant collaboration on work for class took place at home, over the weekend, and sometimes during lunch periods.
- **signal student dispositions and identity practices** - the ways that students personalize their devices as discussed at the beginning of this chapter allow students to acknowledge and work with each other in ways that authenticate student performances of identity.
- **foster learning opportunities beyond the walls of the classroom** - students interviewed community members through text and chat applications, called local businesses for opinions, and documented their community through photography and documentary production.
- **bridge in-class experiences with civic opportunities for learning** - mobile devices allow for opportunities for students to increase ways of developing service learning both in and out of schools (see Middaugh et al., 2012).
- **develop technical literacies** - Through increasing student confidence with mobile media apps and digital textual production, students begin to see themselves as a community of researchers, utilizing technology to increase advocacy.

Though this is a general list of ways mobile devices can foster engagement in a critical English classroom, each of these examples is contextualized and analyzed in the following chapter. In looking at the above examples of socialization and differentiation, it is worth reflecting how these activities, within the active classroom mirror shifts in cultural interaction with media. Instead of classrooms functioning similarly to libraries–the classroom houses knowledge to be divvied to students and assessed, mobile-enabled classrooms function as hackerspaces. A

hackerspace is a recent social development that is essentially a guild-like space that affords members tools (from computers and 3d printers to hammers, nails, and power saws) to build, tinker, and invent. It is not purely a workspace as it is a community. It is a space of possibility, driven by peer motivation and is a physical representation of a passionate affinity space (Gee 2004; 2011).

Though my own classroom is devoid of power tools and 3d printers (it has mostly been devoid of functioning 2d printers), mobile devices empowered it as a space for collaborative and individualized engagement and production. iPods afford students the opportunity to engage more humanely within an institution that may have treated them otherwise. For example, in building a contemporary critical pedagogy with these wireless tools, I want to recognize that these devices help educators engender empowered identities in youth. Through connecting the personalized tools that already have youth-invested cultural capital to the classroom learning experience, wireless tools help make the classroom, sometimes perceived as uninviting, a space of familiarity. Culturally relevant curriculum, in a wireless critical pedagogy, is not simply the media used for youth engagement–the texts, films, music, and artifacts brought in the classroom. Instead, the *medium* is a critical component of a culturally responsive approach to engagement–iPods are a youth-validated tool that is now harnessed within this critical pedagogy. Similarly, this critical pedagogy becomes one that is student centered in its implementation. As tools that offer a direct connection to the teacher through calling, texting, emailing, mobile devices help further positive relationships and mentorship. They emphasize a teacher response to students–creating content, posing questions, and building theory, students share their work with each other and the teacher whom then provides feedback, suggestions, critique. And while these are ways that mobile devices facilitate relational development within classrooms, they do so under the

guidance of deliberate pedagogical decisions; it is the combination of technology and teacher pedagogy that drive a student-centered, wireless classroom.

In addition, technical literacies harnessed for critical purposes also contribute to this critical pedagogy framework. In the following chapter I will share ways students in my class utilized QR codes to create, publish, and distribute counter-narratives throughout the school. Though the production of these codes could have been framed as rote and procedural, the technical literacies are couched within the explicit purpose. In developing the ways my students used QR codes as part of the class gameplay, this framework helped orient applications and components common on mobile media devices (like the QR reading app) as tools of critical pedagogy.

Additionally, the possibilities of community and civic engagement that these tools offer signal ways that a wireless critical pedagogy may leverage participatory media tools to reach *across* the boundaries between school and community to comingle the location of the student learning experience both physically and virtually. That is, students can both physically interact and document learning in schools and communities and they can also connect to individuals through mobile tools for virtual communication, interaction, and provocation. This fluid exchange between school and community simply mirrors the fluidity students see of school time as social and academic, discussed in the previous chapter.

In guiding students toward this world-facing shift in classroom interaction, mobile devices can facilitate youth participatory action research (YPAR). In the following chapter I will describe the detailed sequencing of alternate reality gameplay that encouraged students to participate in community-building, amplified learning practices that reflect a possible application of YPAR within classrooms. However, rather than identify YPAR as an additional component of

a classroom, YPAR is better understood as a tenet of a wireless critical pedagogy. As these devices shifted classroom interaction from teacher-centered to student-centered, so too does a wireless critical pedagogy shift the onus of research questions and direction to the shoulders of students.

The tools for both independence and community-driven research and engagement here act as the fulcrum for a critical pedagogy in the shifting culture of mobile and participatory media. This critical pedagogy leverages wireless tools to build humanizing relationships within the classroom and to also extend the reaches of this classroom into the surrounding community. Looking at the many ways that mobile media can amplify student agency, voice, and community within traditional classrooms, these devices can be utilized in ways that challenge dominant power structures in schools. However, in doing so, a negotiation between teachers and students must be reached.

Below, I offer a chart highlighting several of the key tenets of a wireless critical pedagogy, as described above and in the following chapters. Though not exhaustive, this chart offers ways for educators to reflect on their own practice and in what ways it may instantiate wireless critical pedagogy. Though many of the tenets listed come from existing pedagogical traditions (and typically conform to traditional understandings of critical pedagogy), they are noted as ways a critical pedagogy may better respond to the cultural shifts that participatory media has brought to bear on classrooms and schools.

| **Key Tenets of Wireless Critical Pedagogy** | |
|---|---|
| **Student Centered** | • Student interest, knowledge, and perspective drive content and production.<br>• YPAR acts as a component of wireless critical pedagogy, not as a separate pedagogical approach. |
| **Empowered Identities** | • As mobile devices can allow students to document, share, and amplify their expertise, they can act as tools for Freire's (1970) concept of "conscientization." |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Likewise, adjusting the activities within classrooms to situate student learning within various roles shifts how students perceive and interpret class work and its relevance in the "real world." |
| **Community Driven and Responsive** | • In conjunction with youth-driven research practices, work within classroom contexts speaks to and focuses on community needs and concerns.<br>• Critical educators can help bridge in-class learning with the expertise, opportunities, and challenges that are faced beyond the school boundaries; through digital tools, visits, and role-play, alternate voices help bolster student interaction within their communities. |
| **Culturally Relevant** | • Though mobile devices can be seen as ubiquitously embraced as part of youth cultural practice, bringing these devices into classrooms changes the context of how they are perceived. Simply "using phones" in a classroom is not culturally relevant.<br>• Applying youth cultural practices, including student personalization of mobile devices and fluidity of social and academic time within classrooms, responds to and builds upon the ways mobile devices are interpreted in youth social interactions. |
| **Critical Technical and Academic Literacies** | • Classroom learning still places focus on academic literacies and technical skills. However, these are applied within purposeful contexts. Students produce academic texts and develop technically complex media in order to advocate, inform, persuade, and ignite discussion amongst an audience.<br>• While students still write and produce research reports, persuasive essays and other content expected within traditional classrooms, this work can look different: a student's essay may be a persuasive memo written to (and actually given to) the city council; a research report may be turned into an edited segment of a Wikipedia entry; a response to a literary text may become a blogpost to engage in public-driven discourse. |
| **Not Reliant on Technology** | • Though this pedagogy is responsive to cultural shifts as a result of participatory media tools like mobile devices, it does not require expensive technology.<br>• A wireless critical pedagogy is a revitalization of critical pedagogy for the twenty-first century, not simply utilizing digital tools within a classroom. As such, educators need to look beyond specific tools and apps, focusing on incorporating the cultural practices of participatory culture for critical education. |

While encouraging forms of mobile media use within my classroom, my students and I mutually created boundaries and ways to utilize these devices. Initially, we sought small areas these phones can augment traditional classroom structures; the Internet in the school isn't working again? That's fine, students spent time using their devices to look up information on the California Basic Educational Data System, Wikipedia, and the Los Angeles Unified School District Report Card database in order to compare inequities within their school. As students began searching for various resources online and I helped facilitate sites for research, I noticed Katherine and Holden bookmarking the sites I suggested and sites they encountered through their own online information searches. Likewise, Holden, pressing the two buttons on the iPod simultaneously, would take screenshots of relevant information instead of writing it down. Asking both of these students about these practices and *why* they were bookmarking and taking screenshots ("Because it's faster"), I asked the students to explain their strategies to the rest of the class. Highlighting student research practices emerge like this–simple components such as bookmarking data, taking screen shots of pertinent information–helps students reinvent new critical practice with mobile devices within the school.

However as mobile media ownership is nearly ubiquitous within schools today, forcing mobile media use into the marginal spaces of traditional pedagogy is problematic. The numerous limitations and disruptions already discussed signal the ways that South Central High School and the vast majority of public school are operating in modes that do not contend with the very different landscape of learning and engagement that students–not to mention the global economy–are immersed.

**Mobile Pedagogy and Orienting the Teaching Profession**

Prior to a widespread embrace of phones, iPods, and other noise-producing, distraction-causing devices in schools, teachers and administrators need to reassess classroom pedagogy in an era of participatory pedagogy. As research emphasizes the recent shifts from primarily consuming media to producing and remixing media (see Jenkins, 2008), ways that students engage with media and literature in classrooms and beyond is shifting. In particular, an era of participatory pedagogy needs to continually challenge ways that mobile media policies and on-campus technology still maintain socioeconomic disparities (Morrell and Garcia, forthcoming; Jenkins, 2010).

The role that teachers play in fomenting an attitudinal shift toward mobile media in schools needs to be recognized. In designing a curriculum that revolves around mobile media use in my classroom for this study, I explicitly focused on utilizing features and applications that were intuitive and already largely in use by a mobile generation (Lenhart, 2009; Lenhart et al., 2010). By looking at the basic functions that are featured on most mobile devices it insured a universality of applicable use in most classrooms across America. And while this approach looks at the digital tools available, it is also focused on the kinds of dispositions these tools are orienting America's workforce; though global laborers rely on mobile media (Ling and Horst, 2011), schools like South Central High School treat the devices like unnecessary toys.

I focused on the most basic features of mobile devices with two explicit goals in mind. Within my own classroom, I wanted to ensure student familiarity, comfort, and confidence with how these devices were used. Based on my analysis of student social practices with mobile media devices, I knew that basic functions like texting, listening to music, and creating photos and videos were regularly utilized by youth. At the same time, a goal that extended beyond the scope of this study was to alleviate teacher discomfort with utilizing these devices. In working

with my peers at SCHS and at two different teacher education programs, introducing new technology and sets of tools into classrooms was generally received with trepidation. I wondered if using very basic attributes of mobile media devices might make them more readily adaptable by other teachers after this study was completed.

Previously, I have written about the way that even the phrasing of "new media" dissuades many educators from adopting tools for a critical mobile pedagogy, stating that, "without redefining the terms we are using to describe these tools and student work, digital technologies can actually be perceived as a cult-like sub-genre of the stuff teachers use; it can be looked on with bemusement by a critical mass of teachers as a pedagogical circus sideshow" (2011). Teacher use of new media is largely relegated to an ancillary, optional activity. A lack of confidence with understanding and using a seemingly complicated feature of a mobile device would be an easy reason for a teacher to shun a pedagogy that includes mobile media practices. If teachers merely have to understand how to text, photograph, and scan images with a phone (often practices teachers are regularly engaged in), the transfer of this study's curriculum becomes a more possible enterprise. Of course, this too will change; as various media production practices become enfolded into mainstream use, the charge for educators will also evolve. As such, the burgeoning research on mobile media in classrooms, as described in this chapter, signal that teacher preparation and professional development need focus on mobile media dispositions and adaptation than on preparing teachers to utilize specific tools.

**Mobile Disruption: Space and Time and Text**

As a teacher, the word "disruption" signals a problem within the classroom. Entire pre-service classes are shaped around managing classroom "disruptions." In this context, they are to

be avoided at all costs. However, outside of the classroom, when discussing developments in technology, a "disruption" is often seen as positive. A disruptive device–like a Smartphone or iPod–changes ways society interacts, behaves, produces work. It disrupts culture in ways that produce and reframe forms of knowledge. As such, globalized economies are disrupted by the potential of digital media in positive ways. Nearly everyone is interacting or working in ways that are mitigated by mobile devices except for most public schools.

Digital tools like phones function as literacy tools that disrupt in several different ways simultaneously. They bisect the possibility of textual construction by time, place, form, and context. Communication can now be disrupted by both place and time–my students were encouraged to text me class updates despite the fact that I was not near the school when I had a substitute. Similarly, in past experiences working with social networks (Garcia, 2008), conversations do not need to happen in physical time; a conversation on a space like Facebook can continue through comments and updates over the course of weeks.

If, as several literacy researchers contend, spatial literacies are based on constantly changing and multiply interpreted contexts, phones act as a mode of recontextualizing readings of school-based literacy practices (Leander and Sheehy, 2004; Hagood, 2004). This is a feature that may both frustrate a taking in of a spatial literacy topology and expedite student growth of these literacy skills. Ultimately these disruptions can be funneled into strategies to reshape classroom practices.

In addition to disrupting adult-created ways of being in schools through distributed communication and varied modes for textual production, this study engaged my typically low-performing students. For instance, though Katherine is usually a quiet student within the classroom, I received emails and text messages of her contributions to the class almost daily.

Though some of these were received during the hours the class was held, I also received emails in the evening of her work tied to class conversations. During the third week of class, for instance, I asked students to reflect on the ways individuals outside of South Central may understand the geographical community. I received an email from Katherine that begins:

> 5.19.11 homework; I think our community has a bad rep. Because we kinda make it look bad but unintentionally . & then we realize that people judge our community because Of us but in reality we can change this because we're not really bad as people we're just Human beings . I could't really get the pictures because idk [I don't know] what proves my statement

Though Katherine points to the shortcomings of her work, her reflection allowed for an opening dialogue the next day in class. I asked Katherine if she would mind if I shared her sentiments with the rest of the students and her homework became the lynchpin for an ongoing discussion about perceptions of South Central Los Angeles. As a result, then, a quieter student like Katherine that I found myself often gently prodding to participate emerged as natural leader; submitting work, voicing ideas via text messages, and engaging in multimodal inquiry expanded the palate of engagement options available for students. Disrupting the traditional repertoires of in-school practice, mobile media devices act as a foundation of support for the entire class.

**In Practice: A Need for Parent Dialogue**

During the week that I handed out the iPods to students, I asked them to bring back signed forms from parents and guardians acknowledging the use of iPods in the class. The purpose of these forms was twofold:

1. I wanted parents and their children to accept responsibility for use of these devices while at school. Though I did not nor did I intend to ask parents and students to pay for lost or damaged iPods, I hoped that by signing the form students and parents would be cautious

of their use of the devices.

2. I felt it important that parents were apprised of the pedagogical shift within the classroom - just as in-class engagement looked distinctly different in a mobile-media enriched classroom, engagement in "school-work" at home looks significantly different; as a participatory pedagogy of mobile media would include texting, producing media, and communicating with peers, this work would likely be formally iterative of the practices that Ito et. al describe at length as "Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out" (2008). At the same time these social practices are precisely that. As a result, the same somewhat discomforting shifts discussed in the classroom may signal cause for concern for parents that see mobile media use as a move away from academic content; the form sent to parents was to signal the change in work habits anticipated within our classroom.

A day after handing out the sheet informing parents of changes within the classroom, Solomon came up to me before class and handed me his iPod. He said his mom didn't want him using it. I asked Solomon if she gave him any reason in particular.

"She says I'm not responsible enough to be using it, I guess," Solomon responded.

To ensure that Solomon's mother and I understood each other correctly, I called her later in the afternoon - we had spoken several times in the past about Solomon's academic and behavioral needs.

As I described the work that I hoped Solomon would be doing while using the mobile device, his mother patiently listened to me and suggested I let Solomon use the iPod during school hours and to hold onto it for him before he went home, ensuring it wasn't lost, stolen or damaged.

To put Solomon's mother's concerns in context, it is worth pointing out that Solomon and

his classmates have gone through school in ways that clearly communicate the mobile devices are a problem at schools. Despite continual messaging from the district, the state and national educational agencies that increased use of modern technology will positively impact student learning, the use of mobile devices is limited. One reason schools like South Central High School restrict mobile media use is because they cannot control or filter content that students encounter during school hours.

Ultimately, Solomon utilized his iPod during the school day and returned it before going home each afternoon, finding time throughout the day to listen to the class audiobook, text me written homework assignments, and still - somehow - add new songs, games, and images to his iPod. This anecdote is shared to recognize that even within a fostered classroom community, even when teachers enrich learning with the possibilities of a more democratic learning environment through mobile media, the conversation must still extend beyond the walls of the classroom; a significant oversight I clearly neglected during the design of the research. As the key premise of critical pedagogy is one of liberation, without illuminating and discussing strategies of mobile media with stakeholders like parents, in-class efforts are significantly limited.

**A Note on Substitutes**

A significant event took place while this study was in progress: I was absent and required a substitute teacher. Twice. At each instance, the class was affected in ways that speak to the challenges students face in regards to continuity and a balanced learning environment as well as to the potential of mobile media within the context of stabilizing an otherwise inconsistent learning experience.

At the very beginning of the study, I was out of town and requested a substitute for the first two days of the quarter. Though a teacher's absence and resulting substitute is disruptive at any point in the class, I anticipated that the sub would be able to guide students through the initial part of the course prior to handing out iPods. I wrote the class lesson plans as a letter addressed to the students; the substitute's lesson plan simply requested her or him to hand out the letter and encourage the students to collaboratively follow the directions. In the letter, I deliberately asked a student to send me a text message with the students present and absent so I could adjust my lesson plans for the following week accordingly. However, instead of a text from students, I instead received an image of the attendance roster and the following message from the substitute teacher:

> They r  very lazy today, tried to help them out with answer chart n 80% dint want to participate. Now I have them working on their own. […] Take care and sorry to bother you. [sic]

In this instance, it is striking that mobile media was used as a way to further the control and purview of authority; the substitute detailed problems he noticed in the class and took it upon himself to report attendance to me instead of having the students do it as I requested.

The second time I had a sub was one month into our study using iPods. I was warned by a teacher who shares our classroom space that the students had a difficult time with their substitute. The teacher, Mr. Raskol, spoke of the class less as disruptive than as unwilling to accept derogatory remarks from a disruptive substitute. Mr. Raskol, in fact, described how two students–Solomon and Dante–"acted transformatively" and removed themselves from the class to deliberately avoid an escalated situation. As the third period students shuffled into their classroom, nearly every student expressed how much they did not like the substitute and how

"mean" she was. After silent reading, I asked students to reflect on their experiences and we then engaged in Socratic dialogue. Using our mobile devices, I asked the class to help me document our conversation using a mindmapping application Dante helped install. The mindmap allowed students to visually connect the main points of the discussion and to organize, edit, and move branches of their map to help them interpret the ideas classmates shared.

As students opened their applications a flood of suggestions of what to put on the map were shared loudly. Katherine began the conversation. She explained, "She was talking about how we so ghetto and we don't know anything and that everything's better somewhere else."

Almost immediately, Minerva added to the statement by noting that the substitute "was comparing us to somebody else like our community and shit .... She said that supposedly we were being rude and that that represents our parents."

Elizabeth, one of the two students in class that were black said that the substitute told her, "You acting stupid," and then added, "She said, 'You are the only two African Americans in this class,' and something about representing yourselves, 'Why you acting like that?'"

During this exchange many students spoke at once. Some added contributions to what the substitute did or said ("She asked if you from Africa or something like that."). Others made disparaged the substitute's appearance ("She's the one looking poor in her old skirt.").

Hearing my students become frustrated and becoming frustrated with them, I realized that I wanted the students to be able to do more than complain and "transformatively" leave the classroom. As the class became filled with the excited chatter of the students working themselves up with vitriol, I said:

**Antero**: Here's the slippery slope, we can take our anger and we can criticize her appearance and the things she said or we can look at this more critically, right? I just got

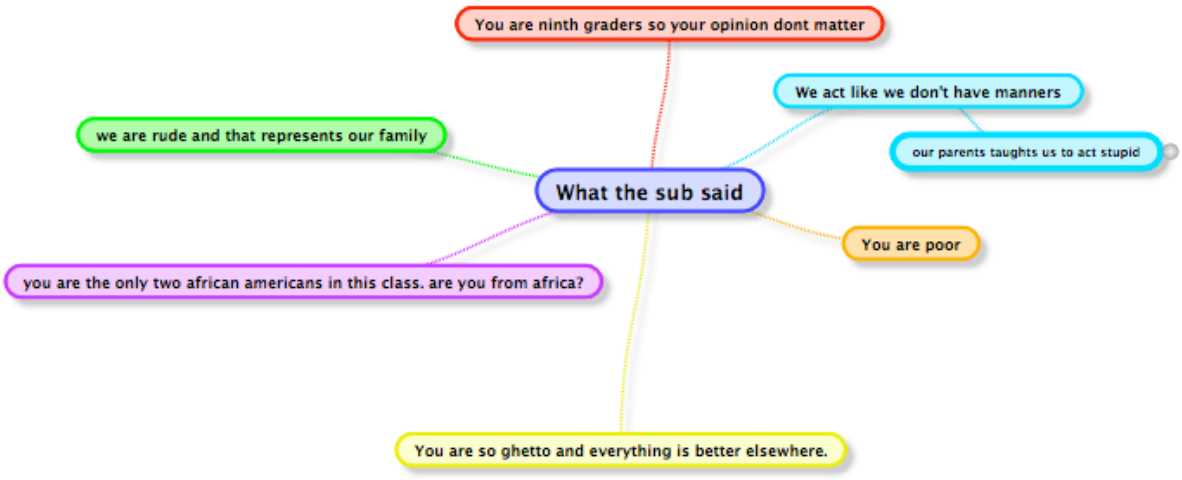
a bunch of data from you, right? It sounds like we received an injustice in this class on Friday: for some of you, this might have been a sign that you didn't want to continue going to school with these kinds of conditions.

**Precious**: I don't.

**Antero**: Do we just sit there? We're just ninth graders and that's okay that that happened?

**Minerva**: Hell no.

The students then decided it would be best if they organized their complaints and shared them with the school's administrator that processes who is a substitute at the school. Minerva volunteered her initial mindmap that she created during the class discussion as the basis for the list delivered to the administrative team. Based on this discussion, Minerva's mindmap was eventually saved as the following image:




Though this image does not capture the robust nature of the class conversation, Minerva relies on a tool to capture the main components of the student concerns; though I suggested the

mindmapping application as a tool for recording our conversation, it was ultimately Minerva's decision to use it. As elementary as the mindmap may seem, it helped provide an itemized perspective of critiques that the students had about the substitute and served as a record of her comments. And while this mindmap could have been generated without a digital tool, Minerva's predilection for mobile device use to–as she discussed in the previous chapter–"get our points" meant that she was closely engaged in both the class conversation and in documenting it digitally. Is this digital tool critical by nature? Certainly not. However, when leveraged within a classroom to build student empowerment and to critique the immediate power structures that students experience, in this case that of a substitute teacher, the possibilities of this mindmapping application contribute to a wireless critical pedagogy.

In these instances, mobile media was the least of the concerns that students faced when left with a sub. Even when I attempted to utilize mobile media as a means of establishing continuity and communicate with students despite my physical absence, my efforts were thwarted by the realities of urban schools. My students and I were able to utilize the experiences with the substitute as data for the class inquiry into school equity and to later produce counter-narratives that reframe the day-to-day lived experiences of students at South Central High School. The incident also speaks volumes to the need for an explicit disruption of traditional schooling practices and–I argue–to the possibilities of mobile devices as ways to disrupt traditional practices in a positive way.

**The Hazards and Limitations of a Mobile Media Enriched Classroom**

Though much of this chapter explored how mobile media devices can be added to a framework for an updated critical pedagogy, offer below narrative vignettes of limitations I faced

while researching mobile media use in my classroom. As the disruptive challenges of mobile media are the focus of many inconsistent school policies at present, being able to pinpoint the nature of these disruptions is necessary for articulating a path forward (Rojas, 2011). In particular, I discuss:

- Relying on youth expertise
- Theft and out of school limitations
- Mobile media as a source of distraction

By discussing these three aspects of the challenges I faced in utilizing mobile media in the classroom, I try to present a balanced view of the positive and challenging aspects of mobile devices in my classroom. In doing so, I attempt to clarify how technological inequity in public schools impacts youth learning. Before delving into these limitations, I should note that the first limitation, "Relying on youth expertise," is fundamentally different from the other two. While the other limitations were aspects that led to a decrease in classroom engagement because of mobile devices, the reliance on youth expertise was a perceptive shift necessary for me as a teacher. As I state below, I anticipated controlling and being the authority of the mobile devices. I came face-to-face with the realization that youth knowledge far exceeded my own and that these devices thus shifted power. As a result, my practice better matched my framework for wireless critical pedagogy by distributing classroom power and embracing indigenous youth knowledge.

**Wresting Adult Authority via Youth Expertise**

Like computers today, iPods require users to set a password to deter from unwanted users accessing and deleting content. Additionally, like computers, users load their iPods with

applications that customize each iPod based on their users' viewing, listening, playing, and productive dispositions. Prior to handing these out, I created accounts for each using my own computer, installed several applications on the devices I anticipated using in the classroom, and opted to require my own administrative password to install additional applications, music, and other media content on the devices. Even as I did this, I recognized that this severely limited the kinds of social practices that I know these devices richly enable. As a teacher, my principle concern was on the learning taking place in my classroom and I accordingly attempted to cordon the ways the devices could be used. However, I had deliberately installed ways for students to communicate socially with students, including text-messaging applications and the popular Facebook application. Further, as I acknowledged to my students that they were likely to use their own mobile media devices to install applications and "be social," I noted that my intentions were to apply these devices, as a tool for shaping pedagogy and learning. I also reminded students that this was an experiment we were conducting together so their thoughts on learning with mobile devices would be important for the class.

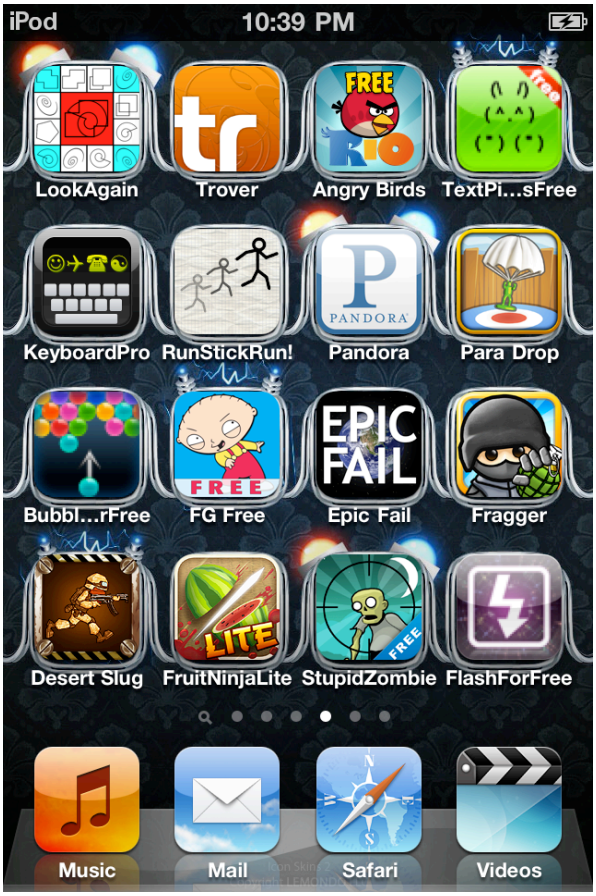
This acknowledgement also brings up one of the major limitations of this study. By *adding* an additional, teacher-provided device that students would use, this research design collapses the natural familiarity of a mobile device and makes it an impersonal imposition. It would be much more natural for students to use their own mobile media devices during the activity; the devices would be familiar to the students from a technical proficiency standpoint and also ascribed with personal value. Additionally, the students were also informed that if they opted to create a password on their iPods to limit others' use of the devices, they needed to share the password with me as well, so that I may administer and add information relevant to the class. Again, this imposition of adult, teacher authority is a break from the way the devices act as

"personal, portable, pedestrian" (Ito, 2006). I intended to control the ways students used mobile media in classroom contexts. However, within a day of handing out the iPods, I realized that I had (of course) underestimated the ability of my students to overcome my digital mandate.

A day after handing out the iPods, I noticed students coming into class transfixed by games, music, and customized backgrounds on their iPods. Within this 24-hour period, students had quickly figured out how to install applications on the iPods including the popular game, Angry Birds, pirated music, and–on a few devices–a program that acted as a local police scanner. As noted in the previous chapter, what students did here was co-opt and personalize their mobile devices in ways that shifted the devices to again weave the social with the academic. In trying to bring devices into the classroom for academic purpose, my significant oversight was in not intentionally allowing for students to shift mobile devices toward a social use.

**Student Personalization and Ownership of Mobile Devices**

Student transgression of my imposed–and password protected–decision to limit what material was available on the iPods mirrors the way students also transgress adult authority in terms of mobile use in classrooms. Prior, my students would frequently hide phones and iPods beneath their desks or in their backpacks when using them during class. However, after handing out iPods students flaunted the latest additions and modifications they made to the iPods on loan to them in the class. For instance, Ras showed me, during the second week of the class the background image he had installed on his iPod.




The fact that Ras demonstrated his new background while also showing me the pages of games and applications suggests that he saw the iPod not solely as an educational tool, but also as a tool for entertainment and identity construction. During the 30-minute advisory class that I taught, Ras would sometimes allow other students to use the iPod he was borrowing for other students to play games. Though Ras would then sit at his desk sometimes turning the pages of a book or talking with a classmate, he seemed content that his device was being used. through borrowing and using his device, peers accepted Ras as a content curator and the decisions he made when installing specific content on his device. The content youth curate on their mobile devices does not simply reflect personal tastes but may also cater to peers for acceptance, socialization, and affiliation. Ras's screen not only demonstrates a preference for a colorful backdrop for his device and predilection for gaming, it signals his *familiarity* with mobile device use. By looking at his

screen, peers can glean that Ras is capable at quickly and–based on the titles of many of the displayed apps–freely add content to his phone.

Ras's iPod image highlights an important theme within the data I collected. Students personalized their devices in significantly varied ways. As I examined student use of the iPods in the weeks following the course, I noticed that nearly every iPod in the class had been personalized. From screen backdrops to placing the iPods in cases that glittered to prominently using bright green earbuds instead of the standard white earbuds provided with the devices, students altered their devices in ways that deviated from what I initially handed to them. Though some students, like Dede, did not add additional programs, the iPod was still customized with images that were imbued with personal meaning and value. Dede's iPod image, showing a stock image of a rose personalizes her device. Even as a device that wasn't her primary tool for communication, Dede's iPod is personalized in a way that signals to classmates aspects of her identity she publicly enacts.

As students took personal ownership over the way their mobile media devices appeared and the content included on them, I realized that by ceding authority over mobile media use in my classroom, even involuntarily in this instance, student identity practices and student voice were naturally included within the classroom. Though not all students were so eager to share their iPod modifications as Ras, the students comfortably displayed and shared their content choices with each other in the classroom community. As students shuffled in before class they would exchange tips on where to download specific images, the songs they were listening to, or how to beat levels of certain games; social talk about student iPods helped seep participation into the class.

At play here are two considerations for teachers. First, by stifling student use of mobile media, many teachers are also, in effect, cutting students off from the social networks within their communities and from outside resources made available on Internet enabled devices. Second, stifling student use of mobile media also stifles the ways students express and behave within a classroom setting. As I continued to look at ways students "act out" when texting or utilizing mobile devices these actions are largely efforts to display forms of identity that are made up by interactions with mobile devices - their own and others that they communicate with. By demonstrating something as innocuous as a digital flower on the screen of an iPod, students imbue the space around them with their personalities.

**Students as Experts**

Mentioned in the previous chapter, student expertise with phones is prevalent and assumed within peer and family networks. In looking at the data when using iPods within my classroom, this expertise became a necessary component of the classroom community. A week after handing out the iPods, I needed to add a PDF and set of audio files to each student's device for the classroom curriculum. During silent reading, I took my laptop to students and asked each to plug his or her iPod into my computer. However, I was confronted with an error message on my computer and was unable to transfer the files. After floundering frustratingly with the computer and iPod, Dante called to me:

*"I can fix it," he said without looking up from his iPod, on which he was clearly typing something.*

*"It's not accepting my computer or recognizing it, I guess," I said, frustrated.*

*"Lemme see," Dante said, rising from his seat and walking to the computer.*

*Taking over the space in front of my computer, Dante asked me which files I needed transferred and quickly showed me how to properly transfer the files with which I was struggling.*

While I consider myself technologically literate, I ultimately relied on Dante's expertise. Within our community of practice, Dante's expertise shifted how students in the class understood power. Dante continued to sit quietly in class eyes often glued to his own device, whenever I had yet another technical difficulty in regards to the iPods, I would ask him for his assistance. In brokering dialogue around mobile devices, Dante became used to me asking him questions, engaging him in dialogue, and bringing him directly into classroom conversations. In a later chapter, I will articulate Dante's journey as a digital expert and classroom leader. Within a classroom that incorporates devices like iPods that are largely the realm of youth expertise, the benefits of these devices are yielded at also dispersing power in ways that rely on every participant's expertise. When focusing on academic content, I often assumed the role as classroom expert to begin our classroom work. However, frequently, when troubleshooting the school's wireless network and iPods–as illustrated above–or investigating historical inequalities within our school, student expertise guided the classroom work.

**Theft and Out-of-School Limitations**

Perhaps the biggest limitation that mobile media faces in widespread implementation in schools is the lived realities of many urban youth. The anecdote of Holden's stolen iPod that begins this chapter was not extraordinary in terms of the challenges my students faced with mobile media within their campus and school community. Holden's iPod was not the only device in the class that was stolen. A week later, Jay came into class visibly upset. As the bell rang and

the students took their seats, Jay asked me if he could talk to me outside. He explained that his locker was broken into during P.E., his backpack was stolen, and his iPod was taken along with his backpack.

Reported theft continued throughout the quarter. By the last day when I collected iPods from students, the iPods that returned in functional condition had significantly dwindled. Of the 17 iPods that I handed out to students, seven were returned in functional condition–two were cracked, one displayed a frozen screen and was not usable, six were reported as stolen, and one student was withdrawn from the school and numbers to reach him were not functioning. As my initial study posited the positive opportunities of using these devices in the classroom, the lack of devices returned was significantly worrisome for me as a teacher. However, as a researcher, the data suggests the rich ways in which mobile devices provided in classrooms may be folded into more direct ownership of campus and community members. As I took my students at their word that the six iPods were stolen, there is obviously the possibility that some students continued to possess and own the devices I lent to them beyond the dates of this study.

**Entertainment Portals and Sources of Distraction**

The final limitation I wish to acknowledge and describe is the not-so-silent elephant in the mobile-media debate room. While it would be ideal to present a report of a distraction-free classroom–iPods functioning solely to guide students toward continually engaged, focused learning experiences–there were plenty of instances when they impeded learning and focus in the classroom, based on my perspective. In attempting to note these incidents while also teaching in the class, I tried to write down times when I noticed students were focused on activities not tied directly to the classroom activities, times I verbally asked students to stop using devices, and

moments when students were tangentially talking about things unrelated to classroom material. Additionally, I reviewed, daily, the audio recordings of these classes while writing my fieldnotes in order to ensure I captured as much accurate data as possible about these instances of distraction. Were there times when I was frustrated by the lack of focus in the classroom? Of course. I clearly faltered at times as an educator and felt frustrated with how technology use in the classroom distracted my students. In my daily fieldnotes during the seven weeks that students were given iPods, I coded 138 instances of mobile media–either the iPods I provided or students' personal phones–as sources of distraction, averaging almost four instances of disruption per day.

In exploring the instances I coded instances of distraction in my classroom, I noted that students were distracted based on three general categories: "socializing and communicating," "listening to music," and "gaming." I also coded the times I intervened and addressed the in-class distractions and the times I chose not to address them. Though unsurprising based on the qualitative data in the previous chapter, the majority of student mobile use in my class was for social purposes (82 of the 138 coded instances). Additionally, my efforts to stifle these distractions by intervening generally had mixed results. Between half and thirty-eight percent of the time students would continue to use their mobile devices despite the fact that I'd asked them to stop. Though this data is specific to my own classroom, it suggests that my classroom practice in attempting to reign in mobile device use for academic purposes finds resistance in the student interpretation of school time as fluidly social and academic. These patterns reflect both blind spots within my own practice as a teacher and persistent areas of mobile use throughout the classroom time.

Recognizing the significant challenges I faced within my classroom, I want to note that these challenges also signal a potential for mobile media to function in ways that increase student

engagement and academic growth. Below, I describe the kinds of practices that occurred in my classroom that are easily scalable for teachers in many other contexts and settings. In doing so, I attempt to emphasize this work as more than simply a single teacher working in isolation; I am confident that the practices and shifts in pedagogical dispositions I describe below are easily transferred from one class to another, from one group of youth experts to another.

**Conclusion: Mobile is Social, Social *Can* be Critical**

Often times, discussions of twenty-first century skills and tools describe uses of technology like social media, mobile media, and digital networks of communication. While the research in this chapter points to the value of all of these components in a powerful pedagogical approach to learning, they artificially divide learning practices. To be clear, mobile media *is* social media. Not only are mobile devices used regularly for youth to check their Facebook pages and communicate on the social network, but the mobile device functions as a primarily social tool. As noted in the descriptions of how these devices differentiate and socialize for and within student learning environments, this social function of mobile media can be leveraged for a liberatory pedagogy when sharing power amongst students and teachers. To disregard the social application of mobile media is to denigrate the way these potential learning tools are embraced by youth and to naturally include these organizational networks within the framework of educational research.

Critical use of mobile media means specifically bringing in youth expertise of mobile media and–in turn–bringing in the devices as sites of social capital. And while this chapter details some of the challenges that I experienced with mobile media devices, similar challenges are largely occurring within our schools while furthering the fissure of power between teachers

and students in schools. Without collectively working toward a responsible, humane use of mobile media in schools, our in-school mobile media practice will perpetually run out of sync from the real-world experiences for which we are preparing youth, daily. That I regularly text, email, and socialize with others while at work without worry of rebuke illustrates the ways acceptable participatory media use is cleaved at my school site. A wireless critical pedagogy pushes for an empowered identity for young people in relation to their mobile devices; through continual and responsible use of these devices within classrooms, students can enter universities, job settings, and the public sphere with an orientation toward purposeful use of mobile media.

As we reinvent a critical pedagogy in an era of mobile media and media production, a democratization of in-class learning experiences becomes a greater possibility. Mobile media signals the opportunity to further ally teachers, our students, parents, and community partners in redefining an English education that liberates as well as educates.

## CHAPTER 6

## Hacking and Storytelling Social Change: Critical Civic Agency, Scavenger Hunting, and Curating Counter-Narrative

In this chapter I detail a key sequence of play within the Ask Anansi alternate reality game. Students were recruited to write an empowering counter-narrative about their community and existing dominant stereotypes. Though the product of this game is one of problem-posing critical thinking and civic participation, the goal of the game is one based in the ARG's fiction: they must satisfy the insatiable need of Anansi for a *good* story. The topics students chose–trash, violence, graffiti, pollution, stereotypes and love–are discussed and repositioned through counter-narrative and critique of dominant stories told by and about the community through popular media texts. Next, students proposed actionable solutions to move from repositioning stories of the community's past to threading the narrative toward the future.

### Offline Hacking As A Critical Literacy And (re)Writing the World

While computational literacies, by their nature, focus on digital tools and dispositions like hacking and online media remixing, part of the work done by students in this project involves extending these skills into a physical world and deliberately offline environment. These activities serve several purposes, including:

- alleviating teachers from the strain of a digital participation gap
- fostering physical world relationships amongst students in classrooms
- illustrating the connections between 21st century literacies and the academic literacies that are most heavily emphasized by standardized curricula, tests, and policies.

In order for me to explain the value of having students in my 9th grade English class run around on a multi-week long scavenger hunt and the ways this work creates critical engagement in both physical and virtual environments, I want to first discuss the potential of hacking as a critical literacy and language arts skill. Traditionally, the word "hacking" is interpreted with a malicious, pejorative connotation; mainstream media's emphasis on hacking scandals, and the general sense that hacking is done *to* individuals *by* strangers makes it a learning practice that feels dangerous and disconnected from the kinds of experiences traditional pedagogues hope young people experience. At the same time, ethnographic accounts, and research analysis of the efforts of hackers demonstrate that only small portions of this community act maliciously (Kelty, 2008; Lievrouw, 2011); in these studies, hacking is a productive and collaborative effort invoked by programmers to respond to the needs of users. In looking at the history of open-source software development that has led to popular software such as Mozilla's web browser, Firefox, Eric Raymond describes the hacker communities as operating as a "Bazaar"–trading ideas, code, and innovations to help the general populace (2001). In contrast, Raymond delineates traditional non-hacker production (e.g. companies like Microsoft) as modeling more of a "Cathedral" like model–myriad teams of designers spend a digital-eternity creating a product that, once it is competed, may already be outdated. In illustrating this Cathedral and Bazaar contrast, the role of hackers in promoting productivity and spurring innovation illustrates this potential within an academic context.

A hacker ethos points to the ways that literacies are expanding. When students hack online spaces, they copy, remix, and recontextualize information. By its nature, hacking requires a synthesis of an original author's content, intentions, and form. Students need to be able to understand the nuanced genre within which they are performing, producing, hacking. I use these

three verbs together to demonstrate the way online practices mirror practices students engage in academically and socially. Hacking becomes an innate component of how an individual performs an identity for and within a specific community; it demonstrates an embodied role, and with it an embodied code of interaction practices. Likewise, there is an intentional product that is developed as a result of hacking. Like a five-paragraph essay, a research report, or a video composition, a hacked site is a newly created production that depends on the works and contributions of prior authors.

Hacking engenders an individual within a community of practice; studies of hacking communities of both adults and young people (Kelty, 2008; Ito et. al, 2009) demonstrate the way hacker communities demonstrate idealized applications of affinity spaces for community and engagement (Gee, 2008). As noted previously, the hacker bazaar becomes a space for exchange. In sharing expertise and code, individual programmers are able to build quickly upon the ideas of others. And while the possibilities of hacking for positive productivity are documented, so too are the negative purposes to which hacking has been prominently seen in the media. I share these positive components of hacking as a means of shifting the public villainization of all hackers and reclaiming the title for its positive roots; their practices can significantly alter formal educational structures.

In thinking about all of the literacy skills that are promoted by hacking, it is also necessary to recognize the reticence that many teachers will likely feel towards engaging in hacking lessons in their schools. Even if teachers are to subscribe to this view of hacking as a healthy and productive youth endeavor, it is not something that may necessarily be embraced by a larger school and administrative community. Despite tools like Mozilla's Hackasuarus that make hacking an easy and intuitive tool for learning, schools districts like my own intentionally

block or have policies in place that limit the possibilities of students to hack. More importantly, because it is not a mainstream practice, hacking is likely perceived as well-beyond the experience and comfort level of many educators. And while I, too, fall into the camp that lacks significant online hacking proficiency, this project demonstrates how to appropriate hacking dispositions and applies them to offline engagement. By illustrating to students ways that their physical world and community can be reinterpreted, this work emphasizes young people as critical agents.

**Inform, Perform, Transform**

This scavenger hunt sequence illustrates the ways youth may hack and recontextualize their physical surroundings. This sequence followed a key thematic approach to critical transformative practice: Inform, Perform, Transform; this is adapted from my own experiences with the Black Cloud Game (Niemeyer, Garcia, and Naima, 2009), in which students' actions focused on improving local air quality and were informed by data collected at various nearby locations.

As its name suggests, there are three thematic components to this approach within my classroom and each of these had distinct activities tied to them:

**Inform** - *Students gather, analyze, and collate information in order to produce their own, original work.*

Students furthered three types of knowledge during this phase:

1. Indigenous expertise of their communities
2. Conceptual understanding of the function of game-play and problem-posing inquiry

3. Functional literacy skills including creating and reading QR codes, writing challenging, engaging clues, and properly logging and reflecting on found items.

**Perform** - *Utilizing the knowledge and information acquired through their informational inquiries, students produce/perform new work that is tied to a larger critical, conceptual, and/or academic goal.*

Students developed scavenger hunt clues for their classmates, hid them in and around their school space, and–later–searched for each other's clues.

**Transform** - *Extending their performance toward publicly shared knowledge and action, students focus on directly impacting and critically transforming their world.*

Students adapted the closed, class-only scavenger hunt into a publicly curated exhibit to impact the public's reading and interpretation of the South Central community

In allowing students to develop their own body of knowledge, with the teacher acting as facilitator in this process and encouraging transformative performative action, Inform, Perform, Transform is process that makes explicit a YPAR design (McIntyre, 2000). I will go into further detail below how each of these separate components unfolded within this project, the kinds of literacy practices and civic practices they developed, and the ways that this three-step process highlights a shift toward transformative social pedagogy in English Language Arts classrooms.

**Informing: Fostering Indigenous Knowledge and Developing Functional Critical Literacies**

In the first phase of this scavenger hunt process, I relied on traditional pedagogical practice: I modeled what I felt was an engaging learning process for students, asked them to

share their own knowledge in regards to this topic, and then guided them through ways to explore and apply new critical literacy skills. I scaffolded the searching process in the practice scavenger hunt; the class collectively analyzed clues that led them to QR code badges hidden at SCHS. The first clue was intentionally easy and in extremely close proximity to the students. The final clue I provided was significantly more difficult: the vocabulary utilized to describe the location, the spatial thinking required, and the fact that the clue was located in a place many students had not explored before led to a more challenging and collaborative problem-solving process.

In the anecdote below, I recount the process of watching the first scavenger hunt clue move students from tepid, required participation, to out-of-the-seat ownership of the class curriculum:

*As I handed out the printed-paper that described the location of the first clue, students took the papers with their standard nonchalance for schoolwork:*

> *"*This badge is tucked away in the corner of one of Mr. Garcia's favorite things: a book! There are many here … so which one is it? To successfully find this badge you need to find a book someone wrote about his own life, just like you have. He had many names: Homeboy, Satan, Minister, El Hajj Malik El Shabazz. This Badge can be yours if you look on page 165."

*As soon as Dante realized that he was looking for something in the classroom and that this was a sort of game, he stood up and started pacing, looking for things that might be askew amongst the disheveled bookcases. While many of the students looked uncertainly back and forth from their paper to me for further instruction, Dante had now roused Solomon and Jay and all three had now congregated around the bookcase.*

*As Dante and his friends looked through my shelves of books, Tess focused on the final sentence of the clue description. She pulled out her iPod and, with the device placed in the*

*middle of her table to collaborate with Holden, tapped "el hajj malik el shabazz" into her Wikipedia mobile application. The result redirects users to the page for Malcolm X. While more students continued to congregate around the bookshelves, Tess sat and took stock of our room: to her left nearly half of the class was looking at or in books. Scattered in front of her, the rest of the class, including myself, was looking at the scavenger hunt clue or at the mass by the bookshelves; the walls were cluttered with student work.*

*And then she saw it.*

*Perched high above the white board, strikingly out of place once noticed, a single paperback leaned casually by itself. She nodded to Holden and they slowly rose from their desks attracting nobody else's attention. She dragged her chair to the shelf and Holden stood on it, retrieved the black book and handed it down to Tess. Flipping to page 165, seeing a QR code paper clipped above an underlined passage, Tess looked at Holden who yelled, "We found it!" Surprised "You did?" comments (and disappointed grumbling from Dante) came from across the room.*

*I asked Tess to explain how she and Victor found the clue and then she read the underlined passage aloud for the class:*

> The devil white man cut these black people off from all knowledge of their own kind, and cut them off from any knowledge of their own language, religion, and past culture, until the black man in America was the earth's only race of people who had absolutely no knowledge of his true identity.

*Minerva, after the quote was read–before anyone could speak or reflect–and specifically before I could ask the class any guiding discussion questions as is my wont–quickly said, "That's a nice quote. Okay what's the next clue?" The rest of the class looked to me expectantly.*

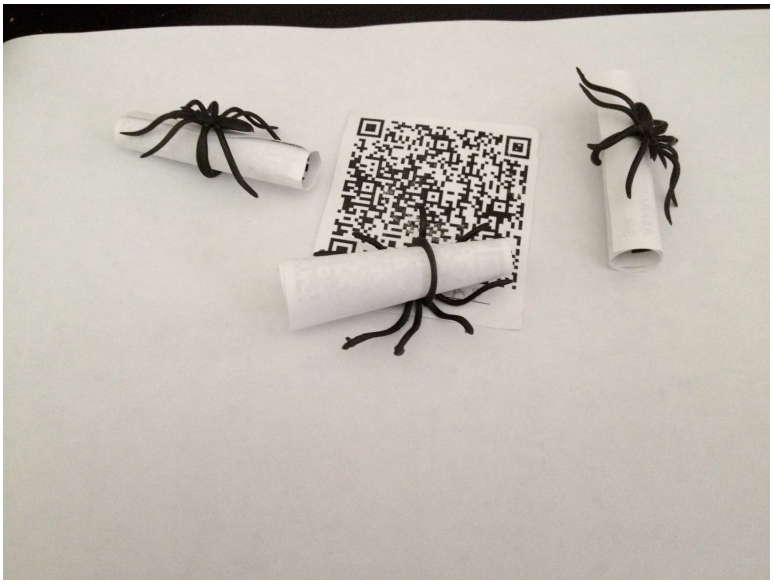
Though Dante seemed somewhat disappointed that he didn't find the clue, the class was interested in the process of looking for and eventually finding a tangible object. As a game, the

scavenger hunt increased student participation for the day; a student like Dante did not usually appear so willing to join class activities. As a result of their participation, all of the students and I were later able to participate in a conversation about Malcolm X, school facilities, and school-based authority. We reviewed the clues' language, our process of discovery and the materials we encountered in our search. While Minerva, above, is impatient to interrupt the game to engage in this dialogue, doing so after all of the badges were found allowed students to reflect on their process of finding and the content they encountered through this search. These discussions that I facilitated paralleled some of the tenets of Freire's culture circles (Freire 1973); the conversation was purposefully facilitated with questions toward understanding of the socio-political nature of schooling at SCHS. For example, once the entire search was over my sequence of questioning attempted to help students see meaningful connections between the various clues they encountered: "*Why do you think the principal's desk looks the way it does?–look at your pictures if you need to."; "Can you compare the principal's desk to Mr. Raskol's Armadillo?"* [described below]*;* and *"What is the purpose behind the wheels of Mr. Raskol's desk?"* are examples of the questions that helped ensure these conversations, like culture circles, were deliberately focused on topics of equity.

Additionally, initial cultural circles for Freire were image-driven. Drawings of everyday life would help guide participants toward meaning. In our class discussions, students relied upon photographs that they had taken in order to share evidence and explore the questions I asked. In building off of the class game toward discussions of equity and action, entanglement with critical theory became a product of gaming as a pedagogical instrument. Finally, it is worth recognizing that Minerva's impatience in the anecdote is a sign that the structure of the game could have interfered with more critical explorations in the students' attempt to get to the next clue. By

debriefing each clue *after* the hunting portion of the game concluded, I attempted to blend play and critical inquiry as naturally as possible.

To connect to the class understanding of Anansi as a spider, the remaining badges (and the ones that students would subsequently create and hide) were wrapped scroll-like inside the ring portion of black plastic spider rings - the kinds typically given out to children around Halloween.



The next clue eventually led students to examine the portable desk that Mr. Raskol utilized to travel from room to room. I asked the students why they thought I ended up hiding a clue in the bright red desk that Mr. Raskol affectionately called "The Armadillo." Before handing out the third clue, the class spent a few minutes discussing my intentions as the game designer for the clue:

*Elizabeth, the student to successfully locate the badge in a paper tray, said, "I think you wanted us to think about the fact that Mr. Raskol doesn't have his own classroom."*

*"Maybe you wanted us to look at the big-ass desk that Raskol has to move every period," Solomon added.*

*"This school can't even afford to give its teachers their own rooms and it will still probably fire Raskol at the end of the year," Jay said.*

After discovering each clue, students were required to document their findings by logging a brief entry into a Scavenger Hunt Finding Log. The log prompted students to write down the factual information about the clue: what it was called, who authored it, when and was it found. The log also briefly asked students, “What do I think this space’s story is? How does it help tell a story about the community?”

After a second clue that led students to discover a clue hidden on the principal's desk, students were given a final clue eventually to the “Hidden Vestibule" as I'd named the clue. An abandoned classroom space in an upstairs alcove of one of the school’s buildings, students were signaled that they were in the right location by a solitary spider dangling from a string in the doorway of the rundown room.

Marjane quickly grabbed the plastic spider and posed to highlight her win. Other students shuffled into the cramped space. Katherine let out a sigh of dismay, "It's so dirty up here. Oh my god." She said this while also holding her iPod up to her eye level and began snapping pictures of the disarray. Holden and Elizabeth also walked into the room and began snapping photos. Dante brooded in the back of the pack, dismayed that he'd only discovered one of the four badges for the day.

It is worth noting the fluid nature with which Katherine and our other co-researchers internalized the process of documentation. After nearly a month of being asked to photograph, document, or text qualitative data about their community for “Ask Anansi,” it was now a natural performative element of how the students understood their role when engaging in academic work.

While students in later class reflections would point to the scavenger hunt–both the model I've described and the version that students perform later in this chapter–as a "fun" component of the class, it is also a significant pedagogical step forward for how the students interacted within the class and with their community. In many ways, this was the foundation for transformative youth voice becoming a primary goal as articulated by students. While the class continued to maintain competitiveness in searching for badges and in writing "difficult" clues, these became anchored in challenging the hegemonic norms of their surroundings. Each clue was written to present a “different point of view,” as explained to students; student counter narrative was a key component to the gameplay sequence. This was a transparent goal I'd designed into the

gameplay curriculum and it was one that was understood by students and articulated in their textual products: SMS messages, scavenger hunt clues, video reflections.

Aside from the textual production student iPods were utilized throughout the class to document the experience, the creation of QR codes was the only component of this scavenger hunt that required digital media tools. At the same time the QR codes–as they are essentially a personalized text themselves, are no different a productive tool than the ability to create a text message, an essay, or a photograph.

*A student's QR code: "I miss my dad"*

Further, the QR code isn't even a crucial element of the scavenger hunt; all of the element of hiding and of seeking would still be in place regardless of whether QR codes were used. In addition to being a functional literacy tool to add to students' bodies of knowledge, the QR codes were adopted for this unit to add feelings of exclusivity and, as a result, strengthen class community. As I printed out and posted on the classroom walls the numerous QR codes students would send to me in response to daily quickwrites and class discussions, our walls became literally encoded with the sentiments and frustrations of the class. "I miss my dad," "[Jay] is the best at dis," and "Its not fair when they call home when Im late to school" are all examples of QR codes that proliferated in the class that students would scan with their iPods to decode.

Seeing Tess and Marjane scanning codes and nodding knowingly as I prepared before the class bell rang, the codes helped not only illustrate the ease of use with which the students created and deciphered QR codes, they also allowed the humanizing sentiments of being a student at SCHS to be shared and accepted by others within the class. Though QR codes are becoming more and more a mainstream media tool seen on advertisements, magazine covers, and even functioning as business cards, the students in my class and in the focus groups I conducted as part of this research project did not know QR codes by either sight or name. With this in mind, they seemed like a foreign, "secret" language that my students were able to detect, create, and dialogue *through*. Like a digital Pig Latin or other playful language system, QR codes allowed students to communicate with each other, with me, and with those that found their clues in a way that was occluded from the public, dominant gaze.

These functional literacies did much more than simply mirror the way that literacy acquisition occurs in traditional ELA classrooms. Specifically, students understood how to use QR codes in ways that related back to their own identity development. In terms of learning to use a tool like a QR code reading application on a mobile media device, this is a significant negotiation that pedagogically plays out in the learning environment. Instead of *pulling* student-endorsed mobile media into the classroom through appropriation of youth tools and culture, the QR code application is instead engaged in a “third space” (Gutierrez, 2008). The application is necessary for class-participation but it also becomes an additional ascribed layer of how students practice, flaunt, and share their mobile media repertoires of practice.

During this first process of playing, the class and I developed three key knowledge sets that would be used throughout the rest of the activity:

- Indigenous expertise of their communities

- Conceptual understanding of the function of gameplay and problem posing inquiry
- Functional literacy skills including creating and reading QR codes, writing challenging, engaging clues, and properly logging and reflecting on found items.

**Performing: Producing Clues Tangling with Webs**

By the time the class finished the first scavenger hunt that I prepared for them, students had expressed interest in creating their own scavenger hunt clues and hiding badges. Minerva and Dede formed a team and began plotting locations to hide clues. Likewise, Dante appeared thrilled about the competitive prospect of potentially finding clue before others. Instead of his usual seat in the back, Dante moved his seat closer to me to show me the progress he was making while writing and to ask questions about his writing.

Students had opportunities to write clues and hide scavenger hunt badges in pairs before being asked to produce them independently. Over a one day mini-search, students collaboratively wrote clues about areas located within the classroom as practice for writing individual clues; this activity led to an influx of clues written about the colorful closet painted years before I began teaching in this classroom. My student, Tess, labeled her clue of this space "The Reckless Closet":

> Notice how a chair has to hold up the two doors for this closet. Also how there's tagging all over it and it just looks like garbage now. This area relates to the reputation of the community because our community has tagging anywhere & everywhere. Also because no one tries to take care of our community and it's like if we basically are dependent on other people to take care of it for us. Wouldn't you say the same thing?

This aspect of the game transitioned the class from being merely a community of shared practice and shared production to a space where students highlighted and presented individual work to a shared space. In this way, it speaks to the balance between workplace environments that deemphasize individual work products and academic spaces where original work is what often receives the most merit. Although I asked each student to hide a minimum of four badges and turn in four clues, eight students, nearly half of the class, turned in additional clues.

In a clue titled "Captain Green!" Dede attempted to draw her classmates' attention to the few plants and vegetations on the camps:

> We all know where we study but we don't seem to take a look at this Green friend of ours. After school some of us walk right next to it its real close. Notice how you see this everyday when you come in. Why is Captain Green all alone? [sic]

Dede's clue is similar to many of her peers'; it is simultaneously playful and provoking. Though the clues point toward critical thought they do so while also allowing students to enjoy the scavenger hunt as a game. In structuring the clues, students were asked to cryptically identify a space to the reader/player. At the same time, the clues were encouraged to provoke questions tied to issues of equity and the class research questions. Students provided the beginning of a dialogue through these clues. When participants searched, they were forced to look at–to read– the locations which each clue sends them to; they were reading a dialogue that simultaneously guided, provoked, and questioned. Likewise, Minerva's clue, leading to a spider taped beneath the building's water fountain, helped her classmates look at how the poor conditions of her school environment are normalized. In the middle of her clue she writes: "We use it or have used it before but still we think it comes out nasty. Its where we walk by everyday and sometimes we don't even look at it" [sic].

With three days to write and hide their clues, students in class spent much of the week busily creating and revising their clues. Meanwhile, the class service worker, Bruce, was busy aiding with the preparation of the clues. Because SCHS does not have ample electives to offer juniors and seniors, students may choose to act as classroom aids in classrooms. Though Bruce

usually asked to focus on his own schoolwork, he was also in the classroom helping students understand assignments, answer questions and–in this context–preparing to disseminate dozens of clues to the students. Bruce acted as the collator of clues: as students finished revised clues, Bruce would make a class set of the clue and collate them for impending distribution. By Friday, each student received a sizeable workbook of more than eighty original clues. With a class period and a weekend to search on their own, students hunched over clues and copies of campus maps. During the class period students were encouraged to develop strategies to find as many clues as possible and they thus scanned their maps plotting how to not only retrieve clues based on where they speculated they were hidden, but how to do so efficiently: two students–Elizabeth and Marjane–grouped clues by proximity to each other, in an effort to find badges that were closest to one another and build a mapped journey of searching across the campus; Elizabeth started with searching for several badges that were in our building before venturing to the outside quad, the neighboring building, the main lunch area, and two badges that were located near the school's auditorium.

In preparing students to hide and search for each other's badges, I deliberately attempted to provoke a subtle identity shift for the students. As the "Ask Anansi" narrative culminated in students sharing the storytelling duties of and about their community, Anansi revealed that the members of the class were recruited as "Agents of Anansi." Students were provided badges that allowed them to move around the campus on specified dates and times in order to look for appropriate hiding places and to place their badges in the correct locations. By wearing a physical badge that labeled the students as "Agents of Anansi," student classroom identity shifted once again - no longer were they simply doing "English work" or playing a game, students could interpret their actions as embodied role playing, performing a specific identity practice.

As students abruptly shifted their roles from hiding clues to now seeking them, it was enlightening to see the different ways students played and attempted to deal with the bulk of data that was presented to them–with such a large stack of clues to work through, students problem solved their assignment in very different ways. For example, Dante, donning his “Agent of Anansi” badge, took his clues and immediately left the room on his own accord. Unaccompanied, Dante would end up finding more clues than any other class member. In contrast, Elizabeth slowly riffled through the clues, sorting them as mentioned by location but also by what she felt was the difficulty that they were to "solve" and, in her own words, the clues "that [Dante's] probably already gone found by the time I went out there."

**Critical Literacies at Work and at Play**

By filling out searching logs and reflection forms after the hunt, students captured data based on their observation and participation with the world at large. The role-playing component of this activity also meant students embodied research practices while searching for scavenger hunt badges. The scavenger hunt ensured that critical literacy was embedded within students’ school practices well beyond a single classroom activity. By definition, critical pedagogy challenges the dominant narrative and "hidden curriculum" (Anyon, 1997) of school. And while this curriculum, too, looked to push back on dominant and positivist constructions of literacy, it also functioned to do this while preparing students for meaningful post-secondary engagement and employment. By approaching critical literacy from a pedagogy of transformative social play, students incorporate literacies of resistance and–in turn– amplify their own emerging critical viewpoints through performance. The literacies developed here illustrate how participatory digital tools can help connect contemporary student concerns with a history of inequity; Dede’s

"Captain Green" is not merely a student playfully questioning the lack of vegetation at SCHS. It is an indictment of the school's inhumane school setting *performed* and published. A wireless critical pedagogy is not about a specific tool like an iPod or a phone as much as it is about *how* students and teachers frame these devices as tools for critical literacies. As noted by other researchers working within classrooms that used mobile devices, "without substantial attention to the specific contexts of schooling and learning," mobile tools yield little systemic change or improvement for the amount of investment they could require (Philip, Schuler-Brown, and Way, 2012).

Similarly, this activity guided ninth graders facing three more years of secondary schooling to approach future classes with questions, criticality and playfulness. While the duration of the activities that took place were limited due to the school's rigorous testing schedule, the literacy practices were purposefully developed to be applicable to myriad environments and circumstances. Exploring space, questioning author or producer intent, game-design thinking: these literacy-building skills helped students for classes that would likely not engage in alternate reality gameplay. Through these approaches, young people develop humanistic practices of critical literacy that extend beyond the English Language Arts classroom, the walls of the socially sequestered school space, and into the liberatory and pragmatically relevant realm of the civic. In this curriculum, mobile media devices framed the modes of engagement; mobile devices and the ways these tools were applied to the class context facilitated student playing, documenting and communicating.

**Transforming: Ensnaring Public Discourse in the Webs of Critical Transformative Action**

Once students had completed the scavenger hunt, we discussed what students encountered on their journey, who the class considered "the winner" of the hunt, and next steps. As a principle of most–but not all–games is often the way that they are competitive (Salen and Zimmerman 2004), the students were intent on quantifying their experiences to determine the winner.

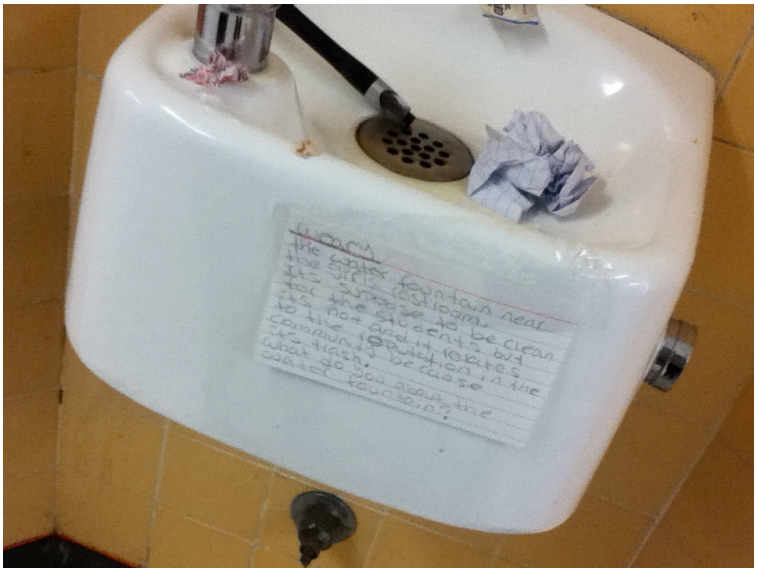
As I did not anticipate the need to select a “winner,” I attempted to shift the class discussion to focus on how the game could be taught to others; we engaged in a discussion of what fairness means. No students ever raised concerns that the game was “unfair.” Additionally, in a post-study interview, students affirmed that they felt that the game was played fairly when students independently searched for badges and relied on no other individuals while searching. I pointed out to the class parallels between gameplay and school structures–that fair gameplay and equitable gameplay essentially establish similar patterns of inequality.

Fair also meant to the students making a “reliable” clue. As Jay explained, "Some clues were just like finding a piece of grass on the lawn. It was impossible." The specificity was of a degree that made finding some clues more tedious than provoking. It is worth noting, however, that even these clues that were too detailed in location, were still critical of the location they directed students. As Holden said when discussing the single blade of glass example, "I wasn't going to search every piece of grass on the field and I could see the point of the clue–the field is dirty and looks all dangerous.”

As we continued to discuss the game, Elizabeth opened up a discussion of what made playing successful: for her, winning this game was about participation in both aspects of the play performance: writing challenging and enlightening clues and searching "with all your energy" for the clues that could be found. Looking over their process of transforming the interpretations of

the school environment for their classmates, the final step was to invert this game. The "magic circle" of gameplay made role-playing, performing the role of the clue-placer/writer and searcher acceptable; the strict social rules that students learn as part of the informal curriculum of going to South Central High School were eschewed for the experience of "play."

Selecting two of their locations, I asked students to write very short descriptions of what they encountered, along with an informative or intriguing title. The assignment also asked the students to conclude their descriptions by posing a question to the individuals that read them. After these cards were written and revised by a classmate, students posted them prominently in the spaces where they had originally hid clues. The hidden badges morphed into prominent public displays of knowledge and dialogue. Minerva's clue once hidden underneath the dusty water fountain outside our classroom, for instance, was later translated by her into a note-card that was taped directly above the water fountain, unavoidably within the line of sight of anyone using the fountain.



This exercise placed the critical literacy practices of understanding hidden narratives of power within the community as a component of transformative, empowering student voice. As

educators and policymakers explore ways to weave participatory and mobile media practices into classroom practice, the potential demonstrated here, suggests the value of mobile media to empower not only the individual learner but the community at large through easily replicable critical digital literacy instruction. Though students produced non-digital products like the note cards in this sequence, they were still empowered to do so this wireless pedagogy: connecting to their community and documenting this process extended merely writing on paper to an ongoing process tied to digital practices and digital tools.

Further, the transition from making this a "closed" game only available to the students in my class into an open dialogue with the community is–to me–the most transgressive element of this curricular endeavor**.** Like graffiti or billboard advertisements, curating the space and reconfiguring how people see their environment is invasive; though the note cards that students wrote can be removed–nothing permanent was added to the spaces–when they were up participants are confronted with a counter-narrative to the way space is interpreted and engaged. For the students, this component was an extension of the entertainment they felt while playing the game. In an interview after the game's conclusion, Solomon said, "The hiding and the finding and the writing those little cards, that was dope." Hearing Solomon's affirmation, Katherine added, "It wasn't just that it was cool though to write the cards, it felt like, I don't know, like the way to explain this work to our friends."

In writing placards and physically curating the experiences of their community members, students express critical digital literacy as an opportunity to expand beyond reading the word and reading the world (Freire and Macedo, 1987) into a productive process of *writing* the world. As peers encountered this work, Katherine's statement reflects a student understanding of the role that peer-networks can play in building on critical thought. Katherine's implied endorsement of

sharing this work with friends can be interpreted as sharing the curricular experience with friends and it can also mean sharing the student-created counter narratives with them. In both cases, students like Katherine felt compelled to iterate their critical production to continue to share and engage their community.

Later, the digital world, too, was written upon by the class; the students took to the official Wikipedia page for South Central High School. As part of the class activities that I assigned, they edited it using Standard English and the database's citation format. Students captured qualitative data about student opinion about the food, emphasized the school's dropout rate, and noted the small number of custodial staff for the large school.

> As of 2010, the dropout rate at [South Central High School] was 68%.[9]
>
> With more than 90% of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch provided by the Los Angeles Unified School district [10] some students have noted that sometimes meals are not heated properly.

Students included details on the Wikipedia page that, while just as factually sound as the existing information about the school's history and alumni, allowed students to voice what they felt was necessary, important, and relevant to the public that may want to access the Wikipedia page. Both footnotes nine and ten in the Wikipedia excerpt above point readers to the UCLA Educational Opportunity Report (2010). Holden and Jay, the students who felt it necessary to add the school's dropout rate as additional information to the page struggled with the Wikipedia platform. Each time they clicked "Save page" on the SCHS screen after making changes, they noticed that seemingly instantaneously their changes were removed. It wasn't until the students copied the formatting code for previous citations and replaced the text with their own linked source that the Wikipedia platform accepted their included data. Nearly one year after the students made their changes, the above additions to the Wikipedia page are still intact.

**The Limitations of In-School Youth Participatory Action Research**

As I continued to develop and guide students throughout the gameplay of Ask Anansi, students expressed to me the ways this activity felt "different" from what they had done in other classes. While I felt enthusiastic about the student responses and what they may mean for in-school YPAR, I also realized that a significant challenge also loomed in extending this work in sustainable ways. The challenge with this project was not one of motivation or of finding the "right" question for students to investigate and–later–act upon. My challenge was specifically around creating democratic decision making and planning within the formal confines of a classroom.

While my classroom practice subscribed to critical pedagogical efforts of distributing knowledge and moving toward world-facing stances of engagement with curriculum, this classroom is one that is still legally bound to teacher-authority and to pre-existing socio-cultural assumptions from students about classroom spaces; students and school administrators have specific understandings of what schooling looks and *feels* like. As a result, I entered this project optimistic about instantiating YPAR within my classroom. However, while the project here engaged and drove student interaction and advocacy within the school community, I am not fully convinced that it reflects the YPAR within formal school spaces. As a larger point of discussion, I am not clear about how feasible YPAR is within formal spaces of learning. As mandated sources of authority, forms of standardized testing and teacher evaluations based on these tests drive "schooling" today, a pedagogy of "thinking about people as researchers, as agents of change, as constructors of knowledge, actively involved in the dialectical process of action and reflection aimed at individual and collective change" feels difficult (McIntyre, 2000, p. 148-149).

Even within the confines of Ask Anansi, I had to remind students of the work I was requiring them to complete and the ways this work was tied to grading windows. As I've described, at several points I had to assert my adult authority to facilitate conversation and ensure an equitable learning environment. I performed these tasks as my responsibilities as a teacher but realize they may step in the way of a full-fledged YPAR within schools. Ultimately, I relied on the fictitious Anansi to liberate the classroom space and help weave webs for developing the critical agents within my classroom.

**Toward a Pedagogy of Participatory Media**

Through examining existing hegemonic narratives of their community and reappropriating space through textual performance, students developed critical literacies that directly engaged in community dialogue; the reflection on their scavenger hunting and the texts they produced and performed as both clues and curated note cards reflect these expansive literacies. At the same time, the academic process of "properly" editing the school's Wikipedia page signal the kinds of practices that reflect academic literacies being harnessed for critical processes. While their use of mobile media facilitated and made easier the types of productive practices that are embedded in this curricular exercise, this unit emphasized that a pedagogy of participatory media can instill 21st century critical literacy development without overly relying on complicated digital tools. Though students regularly engaged with mobile media throughout this project–documenting evidence, looking up Wikipedia-related research, and writing discursive notes as both game designers and game players–it was never the central pedagogical spotlight of this work. Ultimately, the research that the students and I conducted yielded critical practice that decentered learning from a traditional classroom; it located engagement in spaces

that students explored critically and instilled literacy instruction within experiential community knowledge.

Too often, I hear my teaching colleagues and administrators pass off mobile media as a novelty at best and–more often–a significant distraction to learning. When educators and policies deliberately exclude the opportunities demonstrated through mobile media and participatory media pedagogy, they are perpetuating an achievement gap that further cleaves society by race and class (Jenkins, 2008).

Getting students to move more freely beyond the walls of traditional classroom pedagogy required recognizing the types of practices that students engage in through their informal literacy practices and adapting them for formal, critical engagement. Similarly, even when the pedagogical design of this game-based activity meant students were not using their iPods during many parts of this work, the project was designed to replicate online participatory media shifts. The tools and forms of critical digital practice are insignificant; students need in-school practices that expose them to ways that engagement with media and with society has shifted, regardless of the tools used. In this study, iPods were used. However, even if my students and I were unable to utilize these devices in our co-research, we would have been able to still participate in critical digital literacy instruction and learning. A pedagogy of participatory media, as demonstrated in this chapter, responds to the needs and interests of youth and engages them in practices they are familiar with to develop a transformative, community-driven voice.

## CHAPTER 7

### Narratives of Trust, Resistance, and Leadership Via Media Production and Play

It is the second week of June and the frenzied energy in the class matches the substantial workload the class has looming before it. In addition to completing their curation of local space through the Ask Anansi game, students are engaged in research related to editing the South Central High School Wikipedia page, writing autobiographical children's stories, and revising final research reports related to their topics of inquiry. Seeing exciting writing from students that earlier in our year seemed unmotivated to engage in "school work," I began asking students if they would want to share their work with other classes, schools, and teachers.

Katherine interrupted me as I spoke. She complained that all of this research, while it's "fun and all," ends up "never doing anything."

I asked her what she meant and she said, "We've done work like this in Mr. Major's class too. It's fun and all, but it won't change anything."

"They don't listen," Solomon said, agreeing with his classmate. "It doesn't ever matter."

As the students spoke, I recognized the frustration that the students felt. Annually, students in my classes enter the process of Youth Participatory Action Research expecting the kinds of large paradigm-shifting changes that are reflected in Hollywood "teacher movies" and highlight reels of protests on the nightly news. The realities of slow-moving change are out of sync with student expectations in ways that warrant frustration and discussion within the classroom. Identifying media-consumption expectations within a study that promotes students as media producers means questioning the changes in student perceptions and agency throughout the class.

In thinking through the challenges with critical research in classrooms driven by standardized tests, pacing plans, and teacher assessment models tied to these restrictive forms of assessment, how educators interpret growth is particularly challenging. At its heart, the conversation that begins this chapter points to the challenge of defining "success" within contemporary YPAR. What does it look like? What does it mean to do "something" as opposed to Katherine and Solomon's voiced frustration? Presently, critical educators may engage young people in critical discussions; problem posing and inquiry into deliberate solutions, but the slow steps toward action are not clearly outlined. How do we teach in ways that lead toward actionable civic outcomes for young people? Is such a goal even feasible within public schools? Measuring and exploring changes in student agency–especially within the span of seven weeks–is an extremely tenuous enterprise.

During the seven weeks of this study, I looked for indications of students shifting toward critical production of texts and media and how these changes reflect student agency. After myriad data were inductively coded and I continued to return to my fieldnotes from within my classroom, I identified several emerging trends in student behavior and potential shifts in student identity. While this study's time length is short, I noticed several emerging changes in student engagement and learning.

In reflecting on the kinds of changes I can claim I observed within the classroom over the seven weeks of this study, my data pointed to aspirational and social changes in the classroom much more so than standard academic changes. Though students were able to produce, read, and analyze academic text, the biggest changes in student abilities over the limited timeframe of this study were not about academic literacies as much as they were about ways students interact with and participated within social and public environments. As such, I focus in this chapter on stories

from my classroom that are transformational for students and their ability to act, produce, and critique schooling and neighborhood challenges. I write, in this chapter, a series of narrative vignettes of single moments of interaction or dialogue with students. Looking at the relationship that this curricula fostered between students and media products, my data revealed how students produce, critique, and lead through participatory media use. As a result, I share three vignettes that frame student identity shifts related to digital pedagogical engagement in the classroom. Starting with the process of producing non-digital work to, later, looking at a student's leadership manifested silently through text messages, these individual moments illuminate how a classroom culture of media production and play may shift the civic outcomes of high school students. In reviewing my fieldnotes, I noticed myriad individual moments and interactions that showed student growth and that challenged my thinking as both a researcher and teacher about the possibilities of participatory media. However, in selecting these three vignettes, I was particularly drawn to the ways they each function to highlight specific components of participatory culture in classrooms for civic identity. In the first example, Minerva helps illustrate that a culture of participation does not always rely on tools that blink, flash, and need to be recharged. On the other hand, Solomon's discussion of "like reading" pushes practitioner and literacy researchers to step back and think about the identity and reading practices when engaging with mobile tools. Finally, Dante reinvigorates the ways traditional leadership can be identified and illustrates how his youth expertise can reshape classroom interactions. Though these are brief moments within the classroom, they signal how youth agency and developed skill sets may be eventually brought to bear on students' civic engagement in the future.

**Minerva as a Media Producer**

Throughout the year, I would see Minerva in the halls of ninth grade academy building when I was on my conference period. Often, she would tell me, she was kicked out of class. Her language and deliberate decisions to not participate in classrooms meant she was kicked out. In group discussions, as can be seen in previous chapters, Minerva mixes obscenities into her repertoire of language fluidly and frequently. However, while this social performance is one that yields high peer social status for Minerva it is also one that clearly limits her academic growth by getting her kicked out of classes; in her first two quarters of high school, Minerva failed most of her classes. She got a C in my class and in her community action research Social Studies course. In the vignette that follows, Minerva and I discuss ways for her to engage with media in deliberate and personal ways. Highly personal, Minerva's text and her initial hesitancy in producing it suggest ways that writing practices may be amplified within digital environments as well as the complications of doing so.

*"I've got stories to share, but I think they are too much for kids."*

*This is what Minerva tells me in class just after I ask students to continue their work. She is quiet and introspective as she often is when she and I speak privately by my desk or in the hallway. As other students are working on developing an autobiographical children's story, Minerva brushed the dark hair out of her eyes, already welling with tears. Though this is one of the few assignments in the quarter that I've asked students to complete with paper and colored markers, the response to producing media products for Minerva is similar to the other assignments in the class. Minerva's engagement with producing media products related to her research topic–"the absence of love in South Central Los Angeles"–results in highly emotional reflections on her life thus far.*

*"So you mean my story doesn't have to be a happy one?" Minerva asks.*

*"If you think that's the best way to convey your story and your experience with the research theme you've investigated. Of course there are some happy children's stories, but this is an opportunity for you to share the knowledge you have in a way that would be understandable for young people.*"

*As Minerva and I discussed the powerful role and responsibility of being a media producer, I recalled two sentences she wrote while I guided students through the process of producing Quick Response (QR) codes. Asking students to practice she had produced during one of the lessons on using the QR app in the class; during the lesson students were required to simply write one sentence, create a QR code with the sentence embedded within it and send it to me. Minerva's two sentences: "I hate school." And "I miss my dad."*

*Minerva shuffles back to her seat, folds several sheets of paper in half to make the pages of a book.*

*And she begins to write.*

*Pausing occasionally to punch responses to incoming text messages, Minerva completes a draft of her story, which she hands me with a cheerful, "Here you go," before bouncing out of class for lunch. Each page has text carefully written in only the bottom third of the paper, saving space for forthcoming images. There are no crossed out words; while the draft has some grammatical and spelling errors, it appears to me like it is written in a single coherent thought from beginning to end:*

> *Once upon a time there was a girl named Jessica. She loved her mom with all of her heart. They were so close like pb&j. They were like best friends, sisters, anything you can name they told each other everything good or bad and always stuck by each other. What a good mother.*

*So one day, little Jessica was in the park enjoying her day with her love, then she gets home everything falls apart in her life. She can already feel it. She got some really bad news about someone she cared about so much. She can feel her heart fall all the way down to her toes.*

*Well guess what her mother had got into some trouble with the copes and the cops when crazy looking for her. One day, they decide to break into our house. They through everyone on the floor and handcuffed us. What a terrible night to remember.*

*So the very next day Jessica's mother finds out about what happened and she decides to take off and that day Jessica dropped so many tears, she felt like she had lost everything she ever had. No one could make her feel better. She had lost her mother.*

*Ever since that day she feels really lonely especially when she sees mothers and daughters together. All Jessica does is think about the past and every moment she spent with her mother. But deep inside her heart she knows her mother is by her side.*

*What a sad story. So yeah, hopefully they could reunite one day but for now that's about it. We should all enjoy every single day with our loved ones because you never know what can happen. The end.*

Unlike many of the other narratives constructed by her peers, Minerva dwells on issues of loss. In producing her own narrative for a potential younger audience, Minerva illustrates a history of pain without explicit consolation. The way that Minerva's story is processed and reinterpreted as appropriate children's literature points toward a greater understanding of both literary structure and interior turmoil. The line between fiction and non-fiction is intentionally blurred in Minerva's narrative.

The conflict is one of internal dissemination and acceptance. There is regret and anger– not at her mother, however, but at the exterior tensions that inevitably crash in on her family.

If, as in most children's books, there is a lesson or moral that Minerva is teaching here, it is offered at the book's end with little more than a shrug. While Minerva offers the trite,

statement at the story's conclusion, "So yeah," there is a deeper insight to be gained from this story. While this final page suggests a story about losing a loved one, Minerva's text relies predominately on critiquing ways that she is powerless to the forces that impact her life such as the police and "a terrible night to remember." In Minerva's narrative, family and happiness are deracinated in ways that adhere to children's story tropes. In her advice to readers, "We should all enjoy every single day with our loved ones because you never know what can happen" Minerva shares guidance for a world that she distrusts. She makes the familiar environment of home and community unfamiliar as she invites readers to quietly shuffle the corridors of her memory. There is no warmth in these final sentences of advice. This is the conclusion of a story about separation, loneliness, and estrangement.

It is worth considering how digital tools could impact Minerva's media production here. On the one hand, Minerva's powerful narrative could be amplified for peers, youth, and the public at large, acting as a powerful counter story about one familial narrative in South Central High School. However, complicating the potential benefits of media production with a culture of participation, this work may not have been produced if it were written for a public or an audience that Minerva did not necessarily trust. For instance, weeks after Minerva turns in her story draft, I revisited my transcription of one of the final conversations that Minerva and I had during the study. Sitting across from each other a few minutes before the bell rings for lunch, I ask Minerva, "Do you think you've changed how you see your role in the school?"

Minerva turns the answer away from herself and projects ways the games and technology and research impact students generally: "Now you can start talking about it telling people about it you can just point things out more." Just as I think she's done speaking, Minerva pauses for a moment, inspects a cuticle and says, "You're a teacher that understands us… I don't know.

Probably I got so much done because you understand me. Before you even kick someone out you try and understand."

This vignette suggests the potential of storytelling as a tool for student agency and as a means for students to speak back about lived experiences in ways that could empower social participation in the future. By describing her anger and indignation at the ways Minerva feels her family is wrested apart, she claims a space for action and advocacy. In the next vignette, we build upon this potential to advocate and speak back by looking at Solomon's unwillingness to "read" within a classroom environment and how his engagement in digital media reversed this stance.

**Solomon's Resistance and "Like Reading"**

In ways that have been explored in previous studies, the culture of school and power structures in place foster resistance on the part of many of my students (Noguera, 2003; Delpit, 1996). Working with ninth graders, resistance to traditional schooling practices is something that my experience at South Central High School has prepared me for. As such, Solomon's resistances to the daily silent reading practices that are standard at the school are not surprising. Even less surprising (though admittedly disappointing) is the way I–in the moment–react in ways that reinforce the power structures and schooling practices that Solomon's actions admonish.

What *is* surprising, however, is the way that participatory media tools like the class iPods and the gaming pedagogy offered new ways to address, mitigate and challenge student resistance. Students resisting reading traditional print media such as the class novel, for example, were now offered the text as a PDF on their devices, an audiobook, and an editable simple text file. Though this did not guarantee that all students now read the book, it illustrates ways that the

media of the class curriculum was diversified to offer more opportunities for student participation. Additionally, the vignette that follows illustrates the possibilities of participatory media to instill student participation in classroom and social activities while also challenging current literacy practices. Ultimately, my vignette with Solomon highlights how digital tools may be used to lead and engage in ways that extend beyond the world of the academic and "boring"–as Solomon would label it.

*It is nearing the end of May, halfway through the class research study. As the class comes in and the bell rings, I settle into the usual routine of encouraging students to take out their silent reading books and prepare for the usual twenty minutes of sustained silent reading. As usual, a smattering of earbuds are protruding from students' ears. I ask Ras, sitting closest to the seat I've settled into, if he would mind turning his music down since others can clearly hear it in the class. After five minutes of the restless rumble of the class, a brief scan suggests to me that all of the students are reading, pretending to read, or–in the case of Precious and Solomon–perusing my bookshelves in the back of the room.*

*I turn my head down and focus my eyes on the academic text I'd brought for silent reading.*

*Five minutes pass. I look up. I cast a disapproving glance at Ras who was fixated, moments ago, on what was most likely a game on his iPod (based on my previous observations of him) and he returns his attention to his book. I then look over to see what book Solomon selected from the class library. Instead of reading however, I notice Solomon is staring absentmindedly ahead, nodding his head in time with whatever is pulsating out of the single earbud in his ear.*

*I try to quietly get up and I make my way over to Solomon, inconveniently located diagonally from me. As I approach, Solomon looks at me and nods his head to suggest, What's up?*

*I point to my book and raise my eyebrows questioningly: Why aren't you reading?*

*Solomon shakes his head subtly and purses his lips: Naw, ain't gonna happen.*

*Wondering if I am misinterpreting our silent conversation, I breach protocol and speak quietly, "Where is your book?" This elicits a displeased look from Elizabeth.*

*Solomon rolls his eyes. He and I both know how this routine goes and I almost feel guilty that I somehow go through the same conversation with Solomon on a near-daily basis. Clearly, my strategy has not been working and yet I find myself, now, in the position of hearing Solomon saying, "I told you, mister: I. Don't. Read."*

*What follows is then my vexed conversation with Solomon who is resolute in his obstinacy. To Solomon, the issue is cut and dry: reading is* boring. *Period. Just because he has demonstrated in the class that he* can *read does not mean that he should* read.

*Twenty minutes later in class, we are discussing the fictional social network created within our class novel Little Brother. At one point I realize by the glossed over looks on some students' faces that I rambled a bit longer than planned in explaining the topic. "Sorry," I say, "Does that make sense? Did I bore you?"*

*Katherine says, "No, it's more interesting when you read it. Can you just read it to us?"*

*Other students nod their heads in agreement with Katherine.*

*I respond, "Hmmm. If only there were a way for you to listen to the book being read to you... Oh yeah, I put it on all of your iPods!"*

*Though most student laugh at my overt sarcasm, Ras shakes his head:* "*No, but that's boring.*" *Clearly the audiobook is not a hit with Ras.*

*Speaking loudly above the general chatter and giggles from the discussion of the audiobook, Solomon says,* "*No, you just gotta listen. You can't do anything else.* It's like reading."

While I was aware the Solomon was listening to the audiobook (he frequently led the discussions about *Little Brother* in class), I was surprised by how he viewed the act of audiobook listening. For Solomon, within minutes, to go from clearly stating that he does not read to guiding classmates through the process of engaging with work that is "like reading" suggests significant changes in literacy development and the possibilities of participatory media for improving individual student outcomes. Further, the resistance that Solomon and I faced could have been negotiated differently had we both recognized the other types of activities that Solomon could undertake during silent reading that are still "like reading." As text becomes a multimodal enterprise with some young adult literature now including links to videos that continue the text's narrative and myriad books now including QR codes that provide supplemental material, the process of reading and engaging with an author's work becomes much more than turning pages physically or virtually.

The class took Solomon's point seriously, recognizing the kind of full attention that Solomon claimed he invested when listening to an audiobook. However, Solomon's off-the-cuff remark that *listening* is now "like reading" signals a shift in the ways that digital media are changing the in-class environments that English teachers face. Though new media literacies and multiliteracies researchers have pointed educators to the fact that literacies are no longer bound to paper and ink (see New London Group, 1996; Lankshear and Knobel, 2008), pedagogical

implications of these continually developing literacies are still being grappled with in classrooms nationwide. At the heart of the challenge that educators and teacher preparation programs face is figuring out how to reorient teachers, school policies, and instructional material to meet student literacies and skills as they are embodied and practices in social and career contexts.

Solomon's comment illustrates the fact that the socioeconomic context for which we are preparing young people is strikingly different than "the three r's" of traditional schooling guide much of public school's curricular practices. However, despite all of these global changes in ways we interact with and socialize through media, English classrooms still largely use tools that–while still foundational–disregard the kinds of products students will be expected to interpret, produce and improve in the future. When I am vexed at Solomon's unwillingness to read, I am vexed at the disconnect between the way my classroom reinforces traditional textual consumption in an era where participatory media is not only the lingua franca of students out-of-school but also a necessary component of 21st century civic participation. For Solomon to be "like reading," he needs to engage with texts but necessarily in ways that look familiar within classrooms. Though he states that attention must be focused this activity–"you just gotta listen"–he does so while also sometimes multitasking; I have seen Solomon listen to his audiobook while texting and engaging in other activities on his mobile device. "Like reading" does not require the total engagement that I–as a teacher–may traditionally expect or demand in a classroom.

Further, at South Central High School, the role of these digital literacies is even more prescient when recognizing the demographic context of the school. SCHS faces steep challenges when it comes to state recognized forms of academic achievement and falls staunchly on the dismal end of America's literacy gap. However, my own preliminary research regarding on campus mobile technology use signals that students at this school are often engaged in social

practices that are “like reading.” Aside from constantly reading and responding to messages from peers, student mobile devices provide access to the scanning of social network updates that mirrors the ways a previous generation might scan a newspaper’s pages. Likewise, even the personalization of mobile devices described in Chapter Five, though not text-based, is something that other peers browse and “read” to interpret the cultural and social cues performed on each students’ mobile device.

It is also worth noting that, for a student like Ras, the audiobook did *not* adequately change the context of reading engagement in the class. The text was still “boring.” As the framework presented in the previous chapter suggests numerous ways critical engagement can be extended in the classroom via mobile devices Ras reminds educators that not all strategies or uses of mobile devices will be excitedly adopted by every student.

Solomon's comment about listening to an audiobook being "like reading" leads me to question more basically, the very definition of reading. What does it mean to “read” when moving beyond the context of content standards and into the sociocultural realm of student-lived experiences? Yes, Solomon’s comment speaks directly to consumption of an audiobook, a form of media that certainly has not newly emerged in the last few years. However, his enunciation of audiobook listening as “like reading” suggests that, as teachers and policy makers lack an understanding of the ways that digital tools change and re-mediate literacies, students are also left feeling like their daily practices lack value and meaning. That the student mobile practices described in Chapter Four are often viewed as policy violations from school administrators highlights a denigration of these practices by the adult guise. Further youth mobile media use extends reading beyond being a text-based activity: students in Chapter Four read their physical

space to find the best signal within the JROTC basement and read student activism activities to see if a walkout is a “for real thing.”

In this absence, too, is the recognition that engagement with literacy-based tools like audiobooks and participatory media can possibly lead to civic action. Because of his self-proclaimed hatred of reading, Solomon would not have been able to speak up in class, share his ideas, reflect on his process of learning, or naturally lead his peers through content and social discussions had he not relied on participatory media to do so. If my expectations in asking Solomon to read were fulfilled in him instead doing something that is “like reading,” how is his process as a learner in any way diminished?

Moving beyond simply questioning modes of literacy in a digital age, I am more principally concerned with the disconnect between the kinds of "reading" that Solomon and his peers engage in and the ways literacy skills are assessed. When we restrict reading and literacy development to the basic skills and tools of the twentieth century, we disregard the literacy practices that students engage in during “out-of-school time” (Moje and Tysvaer, 2006).

More importantly when we exclude "like reading" practices that students engage in socially–viewing and commenting on online videos, text messaging peers, producing original photos, videos, and tumblr posts–we further isolate school relevancy in ways that severely limit the civic outcomes of learning for young people. Perhaps more importantly, these "like reading" practices have value in the world beyond schools; students can apply these abilities in ways that are encouraged in work environments even if they are not measured on standardized assessments.

Part of the “like reading” challenge that Solomon illustrates is that educators and education policy alike are attempting to force cultural advances via participatory media into

traditional pedagogies. If we only use mobile devices to replicate existing literacy practices, not only do we irresponsibly squander school financial resources but we also falsely convey that digital tools are tied to old paradigms of engagement. Last year, my school invested heavily in placing a SMARTboard in nearly every classroom on campus. As a teacher known for using technology within my classrooms, I helped many colleagues go through the motions of plugging in their computers and tapping on the large board in a process of acclimating to the new digital device. And while I helped many teachers figure out how to "use" SMARTboards, I also recognize that ultimately the majority of the SCHS classrooms merely replicate what was already being done on a white board (which, in turn, replicates what was already being done on a chalkboard). If technology is not used to push forward new methods of engagement–to help illustrate new ways to be "like reading"–it is a financial sinkhole.

And while the implications of Solomon's comment have thus far elicited necessary recognition of the learning repercussions of participatory media, the fact that the digital tools allowed or motivated Solomon to participate also speak to the identity shifts represented by the tools. In Solomon's view, the kinds of work he was doing by listening to an audiobook was fundamentally different from reading a "boring" book. However, they still allowed him to not only engage in the class lesson plans I'd developed, but they allowed him to lead others in disciplinary learning practices. Because of his own use of digital tools, Solomon could advocate specific modes of learning and lead. This is not to say that the digital tools I'd provided the class were the result of Solomon's leadership. Instead, they provided an avenue for Solomon to speak up because of his expertise. Though this vignette focused on this one exchange with Solomon, his continual understanding and questioning of the text suggested to me that he was engaged in a prolonged process of "like reading." Coming into class one morning, Solomon asked about the

context of the “Harajuku Fun Madness” and began an almost-daily informal check-in with me about his progress *listening* to the text. As a piece of literature, *Little Brother*–in an audioform–provoked Solomon to question, interpret and relate the text in ways that continued to mirror reading well-beyond the exchange in the above vignette.

As Solomon's teacher, reflecting on the vignette above allows me to see Solomon's identity in the classroom shift from someone who adamantly does not choose to read to a student knowledgeable about the literary text and the ways to engage with it. In choosing to utilize the class audiobook, despite claiming a hatred of reading, Solomon redefines the rules of what classroom learning looks like. Through personal ownership of the curriculum, Solomon ultimately leads his classmates toward ways to utilize participatory media in the classroom.

One issue that needs to be addressed in regards to the shifts in Solomon's identity is the seamlessness with which he shifts from hating reading to demonstrating content mastery. One critique that can be inferred from the way I encouraged Solomon's participation is that perhaps I am reinforcing (and maybe even encouraging) Solomon to continue hating to "read." I disagree with this statement: to me, Solomon's definition of "like reading" is not that different from my own expectations for why my students need to "read." A love for literature of reading, in my view, is generally not tied to the paper products that I prefer to hold when I am engaged in the act of consuming a literary text. Solomon makes this clear to me in his content knowledge and makes this clear to his peers in his assumed role as a classroom leader.

**Dante’s Mobile Mediated Journey**

In a reflection about my fieldnotes during the first week of this project I wrote:

> [Dante], in three days, has gone from not participating at all to explaining assignments, leading, and arriving early to do different kinds of work. I need to

> figure out how this can be translated into grade improvement since he failed last quarter and how what in the class is causing this radical reinvention.

Throughout the remainder of the class, Dante's work would be staunchly independent and focused. Choosing to sit away from the rest of his classmates, near the back of the classroom, Dante would often holler responses to discussion prompts. Similarly, the alternate reality game play allowed Dante to be highly competitive. As noted in an earlier chapter, Dante was highly driven within the scavenger hunt sequence of the game to find the most hidden badges.

Although Dante's enthusiastic participation in this project's scavenger hunt and curation activities is documented in Chapter Five, I want to look, here, at a specific interaction within the class that suggests Dante's growth as a leader due, in part, to the pedagogical affordances of participatory culture vis-à-vis mobile devices and gaming.

My understanding and narrative of Dante's academic journey throughout this project begins with an anecdote that was more a caveat than anything else: Joining the class halfway through the year, Dante and I had only known each other for two months before this study began; he did not have the same amount of time as the rest of the class to participate in shaping the class community. In fact, at the end of our first week of class together in January, I talked briefly with Dante as he was putting his backpack on. My intention was to check in with him, as I did with any new student in the class, to see if he had any concerns, how he was feeling, and what could be done to help him transition into the community; all of these very formal goals are brought up in the rather colloquial question along the lines of, "How has your first week at [South Central] gone? Is there anything I can do to make you feel more comfortable in this class?" Of course, the traditional power dynamic perceived between teachers and students means I usually have gotten responses from students in this situation that are general shrugged shoulders before slipping out

for lunch or to their next classes. Dante, however, told me very clearly that his week went fine and that I shouldn't bother checking in on him.

"Why's that?" I asked.

Dante told me that he should be left alone because he "probably ain't gonna do any work." He then paused for a moment before adding, "Besides, at my old school, I made my teacher cry, so you should leave me alone. The only reason I come to school is because my moms makes me."

And with that, Dante headed to the door and walked out.

Over our two-month break due to the year-round schedule, I found myself spending significant time ruminating upon this interaction with Dante. I was convinced that it was not a threat from Dante or a challenge. His matter of fact demeanor in sharing his previous experience felt, to me, like a statement of his expected laissez-faire time spent within my classroom space. Between his initial statement that he would not do work and his warning that he made a teacher cry, Dante punctuated his response to me with a deliberate pause, adding gravity and ensuring that I understood his *power* as a student.

The following vignette takes place during the middle of the scavenger hunt activities described in detail in Chapter five, students are–along with other assignments–writing their own scavenger hunt clues and hiding the badges (and spiders) throughout the school and surrounding neighborhood.

*Jerry gets to class early. I'm erasing notes from the period two discussion and selecting music to play as the students will walk in. Dante runs in, pulls the door shut behind him and scans the room to ensure that all of his classmates are outside. He tells me he has to hide his*

*badge and spider and asks me to leave. Even though I won't be participating in the scavenger hunt I oblige, walking out and offering greetings to students as they walk by.*

*Dante emerges a moment later smiling.*

*Twenty minutes later, after silent reading, I give students their "Daily Journey Gauge" worksheets* [see Appendix]*, a sheet that allows students to self-assess their understanding or progress on a specific topic. On the board, I write the topic: "Knowing how to write clues and hide badges."*

*As I walk around looking at student responses, Dante races through the writing on the paper. Within two minutes he hands his worksheet to me.*

*In one section of the paper students are asked to write when they know they are successful at their task. For this section, Dante writes, "I hide clues that none finds."*

*I put my finger on Dante's paper below this line and say, "Dante, when I hid clues for the class on Wednesday, do you think I intended for you to never find them?"*

"*No,*" *he says while typing on his iPod.*

"*What do you think I wanted?*" *I ask him.* "*What was my goal?*"

"*You wanted us to look for the clues and figure them out on our own.*"

"*Yes,*" *I concede.* "*And why?*"

"*So we'd figure it out,*" *Dante sounds irritated by the incessant questioning.* "*Whatchu mean?*"

"*I mean, why did I put the clues where I put them?*"

*"You wanted us to see those places and think about them?*"

"*Yes, exactly. So what is the goal if you are writing clues?*"

*"For people to struggle before finding them right away, but to find them at some point.*"

"*Cool, so would you mind revising your response on your worksheet?*"

*Dante scratches out his answer, draws an arrow indicating readers flip his paper to the other side of the page and writes, "I write clues about places that I think about that people struggle with but eventually get there."*

*Moving on to look at other students' work, I notice that Jay has a similar statement: "Write clues so no one finds it." I tell him I would like him to revise it.*

*Jay says,* "*It's alright, I got it.*"

"*I'm concerned that you've written that it will be successful if people don't find your badges,*" *I say.* "*Ask Dante why this concerns me.*"

*Jay looks to Dante and nods,* "*What's this about?*"

*Dante, looking up from the iPod he has returned to tapping on, gets out of his seat and stands above Jay's desk. He looks at what Jay has written and I walk over to help other students as Dante grabs a nearby chair to sit next to Jay. When I return a few minutes later, Jay has not crossed out and rewritten his response like Dante did. Instead he has added a caveat to his original statement: "Write clues so no one finds it* in ten minutes."

*Dante has returned to his seat, his earbud playing rap music his fingers dancing above the glowing screen.*

Though Dante allows me to engage in an exchange about academic work despite his earlier warning, it is also clear the ways that Dante focuses on working independently. He initially resists my suggestion that he revises his writing and his behavior at the beginning of the class suggests a disconnection from the classroom community.

Perhaps most relevant in the changes noted in Dante's engagement in class are the ways that the context for learning shifted. Described in detail in previous chapters, Dante's work can be seen as part of an intricate patchwork of text, images, and activities that are less about school as work than school as narrative development. Because Dante is expected to communicate with fictional and real individuals, to utilize his existing set of informal communication tools such as text messages and because he is not only encouraged to but expected to create work within the class that looks different from traditional work, he is able to perform differently within the class.

This is not to say, however, that Dante does this work in ways that would traditionally emphasize the transformation I've seen in him. Instead, someone visiting the class would see Dante's behavior as exceptionally resistant. In my own fieldnotes about Dante, I documented that:

- he spent the majority all of his class time on his iPod and listening to music.
- when he did do work it was scribbled quickly so that–as he explained to me–"you'd stop pressing me."
- when challenged about work that I felt he could have done better, his statements–"Naw it's good" and "It's done, isn't it?"–seemed defensive and resistant to criticism.
- the music from his headphones was on several occasions loud enough that it interfered with other students during silent reading in class. At one point Elizabeth sighed as she looked from Dante to me and asked me if I was "going to do anything?" Though Dante turned down his headphones, in this situation, saying "My bad," it occurred again in the same period.

Before confronting these cursory challenges, I want to note that these are precisely the ways I interpreted Dante's behavior in the first months of my engagement with him. His lack of work

and his aggressive response to my attempts to work with him often left me feeling defeated and ineffective as an educator. What is striking to me about the changes in class are not that they are due to the fact that technology was implemented as a tool for learning in the class, but that these changes were *revealed* due to the fact that technology was implemented as a tool for learning in the class. More likely than not, Dante was already regularly utilizing participatory media throughout my class for recreational purposes; his critical production was not recognized academically by me–as his teacher–prior to this activity. Dante's academic behavior didn't change as a result of the curriculum. Instead the tools of participatory media came to encircle Dante's repertoire of digital, productive practices. To put another way, students like Dante are likely frequently and without coercion engaged in the kinds of literary analysis and responses to literature and curriculum that English teachers seek. However, the traditional classroom typically renders Dante's efforts and textual production largely invisible. Frequently, their efforts are not only invisible but they are seen as hostile to the learning environment.

Though I state that, from a traditional perspective, Dante's work did not significantly shift academically–his formal writing of texts in Standard English remained rushed and inconsistently completed–I do want to point to the ways that he emerged as a somewhat reluctant leader. Because Dante (as described in the previous chapter) took ownership over the game-like elements of participatory media integrated into our classroom, he was able to apply his own interests to ways he guided his peers. Additionally, the more that participatory learning practices–from playing games to texting me rhymes–allowed me to see Dante's role in the classroom differently, the more he felt comfortable engaging in his work being critiqued and challenged by both peers and myself. As a result, the exchange in the middle of the above vignette, where I challenge Dante's writing about success, would not have been possible without

the shifts in engagement prior to the exchange occurring. In domino-like fashion, the exchange that followed, in which Dante aids his classmate in understanding, too, would have likely not occurred. Again, like with Solomon, the use of technology did not make Dante a better student. Instead, it allowed existing learning practices and expertise to emerge in ways that allowed Dante to positively contribute to the classroom.

Further, the shift in the classroom to one of narrative design shifts the understanding of school structures beyond simple school binaries. Instead of a class being something Dante passes or fails, constructing narrative offers choices, expectations, and guidelines. In a blogpost about the possibilities of gameplay and storytelling, I described the impact of storytelling and narrative as one that essentially removes failure from the vocabulary of educators: "When we shift the context of learning in a way that engages youth in storytelling, there is no longer need to frame things in terms of failure. Failure ceases to be a concern when children are emboldened as storytellers. Instead of failing, storytelling allows narrative to help guide proficiency" (2011). For Dante, writing clues and projecting a new narrative on a space that has generally been one of opposition with adults allows the possibilities of success to be reshaped. Even when writing clues so that people "eventually get there," Dante is redefining schoolwork as a journey for others, a narrative that is not about failure but about meandering toward a general direction. More pragmatically, students like Dante and Minerva (as described in the vignettes in this chapter) shifted their own focus as storytellers as aspects of the curricular components of this study. Both of these students, though they did not pass my class earlier in the year, earned C grades at the end of this study.

I want to conclude this rumination on this interaction with Dante with an idea that challenges how I view the effectiveness of this project. In essence, I recognize that students feel

comfortable utilizing the digital tools that I provide in the classroom: They are comforted with audiobooks and text messages. Many of the students elected to squint at an e-book of Little Brother rather than simply read a traditional paper book. A cursory review of this suggests technology is a ripe pedagogical tool for solidifying classroom instruction and making clear the kinds of practices that were rendered invisible in traditional classrooms. Exploring ways that Dante emerged as a leader because of the visibility of his practice reveals that wireless tools help reinforce trust between students and teachers; these tools mediate the critical conversations that yield leadership, learning agency, and academic engagement.

**Conclusion: A Personal Engagement with Participatory Media**

As I type this document, a voice on my iPad drones quietly in the background; an app is displaying a series of photographs for T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland" while a reader recites the poem. The application also includes an annotated copy of the poem, a live performance, commentary, and a plethora of various readers and supplemental information. If taken collectively, the "text" of the canonical poem expands significantly beyond ways Eliot may have intended or even wanted. In encountering and feeling challenged by a poem that has vexed me since my years as a surly undergraduate English major, I wonder if my participation with this digital text is reading or "like reading." Additionally, my sense of engagement and worldview feels challenged by the way this application opens up the world of literature in ways the felt more bounded during my formative undergraduate years as an English major. Even then, being an "English major" was a major part of how I was identified. In recognizing the shifts in technology that alter ways I communicate and communicate, I think too, to how it has allowed me to engage in the civic world of educational politics: as a regular blogger (for both nationally

syndicated sites and my own web-real estate), as an active member on numerous email listserves, as a generous consumer of educational media that I tweet, "like" and "+1", as an occasional producer of photo and video products that demonstrate and advocate, as a frequent commenter on news sites that–until recently–offered only one-way distribution of information. All of these participatory media activities find me engaged within local and national educational issues in ways that were not previously fostered in secondary classrooms. More importantly, I recognize that many of the ways I engage in the civic world of education today are mediated by the digital tools I immerse myself in. That is, without examining my participatory media use, the ways that I engage in political and civic activities is largely invisible.

This past decade has seen entertainment industries individually and collectively attempt to grapple with the changes brought about by the pervasiveness of Internet use. File-sharing programs like Napster not only financially challenged the music industry but also changed the ways that society consumed, distributed, and interacted with music. While book publishers, videogame producers, and video content creators have innovated to maintain relevancy in an era of digital ubiquity, teachers and teacher educator programs have largely ignored the changing digital landscape through which our students traverse throughout the day (and often well into the night via logged hours on *World of Warcraft,* Facebook, and text messages to friends).

Solomon's adroit recognition that listening to a text is "like reading" acts as a quiet, incessant and necessary request for educators to begin looking online *with* our students for expanding definitions and assessment of literacies in the current context. Likewise, Minerva's personal voice foments strength and courage through the opportunities that these digital tools encourage. Even the staunch resistance that Dante performs in class even while highly engaged in ways that are largely invisible to traditional pedagogies suggest that classrooms need to

expand to include the civic paths that individuals may take toward leading and engaging. Ultimately, the current policies in place and traditional pedagogies used by many teachers at SCHS largely limit civic imagination for young people and their avenues for pursuing engagement in public life beyond high school. The lessons students thus learn reflect limited and–certainly for Solomon–"boring" pathways toward engagement; the digital on-ramps toward civic participation are cordoned off within the school's present setup.

## CONCLUSION

### A New Pedagogical Paradigm: Seeing Beyond Distraction and The Rise of the Rhizome

**Antero:** If you had to describe what we did in this class to a friend, what would you say?

**Dante:** I'd say we did a game that was fun.

**Precious:** We used the iPods to look up some information instead of taking time to go down to the busted ass computer lab.

**Ras**: The thing I remember the most is reading and you always telling me to put my iPod away.

**Antero**: Right, so for a class where I gave you iPods, I told you to put yours away quite a lot. What happened with that?

**Oscar:** I was on it too much.

**Ras:** We need to use Facebook for school though.

**Antero:** Oscar, do you think it was a bad idea for me to have given you an iPod?

**Oscar:** Maybe yeah. Not a bad idea to give them to us, but you could have locked them so we don't have games on them.

**Antero**: I tried.

Though the past four chapters focused on the role that participatory media and tools like games and iPods play on the South Central High School campus and in one ninth grade English classroom, it is imperative that readers understand that fancy technology is not the answer to lasting, sustainable, educational reform. In fact, as the in-class exchange above demonstrates, one of the biggest changes within the classroom was a diversification of student experiences. Just

as the iPods, as described in Chapter 5, allowed for numerous modes of production and participation, the overall effect of increasing the reflection of today's participatory culture within a classroom was a wider spectrum of experiences for students.

Importantly as a teacher, aspects of this project–as Oscar and Ras draw out in this chapter's opening discussion–were rife with frustrating distraction. As I'd coded such instances of distraction in depth (discussed in Chapter 4), it is important to recognize the significant challenges faced throughout this study; the role of wireless distraction is presently a topic of passionate debate in public media (see Carr, 2011; Turkle, 2011). However, I also recognize that the ways the mobile media *revealed* literacy practices previously at work within my classroom, such as Dante's writing practices on his phone. As such, it is likely that much of what teachers perceive as distraction in classrooms could be mediated to become a "third space" of formal and informal social interaction (Gutierrez 2008). To personally contextualize this statement, I want to recognize that I was regularly frustrated with mobile media use in my own classes throughout my career. While I still perceived and noted these times of being frustrated, this study allowed me to see that some of the time that I am frustrated is actually time when students are at least partly engaged in academic and critical literacy development. That is, times when I was frustrated were because I was not aware that students were doing the kinds of things students in English classrooms probably *should* be doing.

Within educational research, I would claim that the challenge for educators is one of competing paradigms. In the landmark text *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), Thomas Kuhn argues that within the paradigms of specific forms of scientific research, individuals are tied to seeing, doing, and understanding in limited ways. When research comes along that significantly alters this mode of understanding, a new paradigm essentially competes

to redefine how individuals see and interpret the world. For Kuhn, this is a revolutionary process. As this study asked me to look at the work occurring within my class from a lens that differed from my usual teacher practice, I contend that this was a paradigm shift for me. It wasn't that I was choosing to accept my students' practices differently because of mobile media. Instead, I was literally learning to *see* their literacy practices on mobile devices and in gameplay in ways that the previous paradigm would not allow.

Discussions of scientific paradigms can feel like they should be about *big* ideas and earth-shattering findings. I recognize the reluctance some readers may feel in hearing of student participatory media use in terms of paradigm shifts. However, in looking at the disconnect between in-school interpretation of participatory learning and out-of-school contexts, I would argue that this paradigm shift within public schools has been too long in coming. Over the year of this study, revolutionary use of participatory media in the Arab Spring continued. WikiLeaks founder, Julian Assange, voiced and appeared as a character in an episode of *The Simpsons*. A video about a talking dog on YouTube logged more than 95 million views. The Occupy Wall Street movement became a movement of dissent with shifting discursive practices globally. Apple released an application for individuals to create and publish iPad-only textbooks, offering a significant shift in consumer and democratic access to academic texts. To critical acclaim, *Bear-71*, an interactive web documentary that traces the entire life of a grizzly bear in Banff National Park using cameras located on the park's trails debuted as a short film at the Sundance Film Festival. And, by the existing metrics of graduation and academic performance, growth at South Central High School flat lined (LAUSD, 2012). There is a reason that a litany of the participatory learning texts that have been published recently have language of a new paradigm: it is so painfully clear that it is here that it is time that schools catch up. As Thomas and Brown

note in the title of their recent book, it is time to encourage *seeing* differently within the paradigm of "a new culture of learning" (2011).

Of course, along with this new paradigm is a new set of responsibilities and discursive language practices that need to be carefully negotiated within the classroom space. Ras and Oscar, for example, are acutely aware of the ways that their media use interfered with the classroom learning expectations. A new paradigm for participatory pedagogy does not imply that the problems of the previous paradigm disappear. While I will ultimately conclude this chapter with suggested pathways forward for teachers and students both, it is necessary to acknowledge that this new paradigm of learning is not an excuse for poorly managed mobile media policies, use, and pedagogy within schools like South Central.

Part of this paradigm of participatory media is about the shifting nature of how educators *see* mobile media within the classroom. The pedagogical implications of such a shift are partly explored in previous chapters of this study, as are suggestions for ways to utilize digital tools and games for critical engagement. However, the other significant aspect of the paradigm shift in participatory media is the ways that learning can be fragmented into unique paths for engagement. In this chapter's opening vignette, along with the discussions of being distracted, students cite various ways they engaged and enjoyed the work we did as an English class. These differing responses are as telling of changes within a new paradigm of participatory media as the reflections about distraction. The numerous modes of entry and the varied ways that student experience differed reflect Deleuze and Guittari's notion of the rhizome (1980). A model for looking at research and culture, the notion of the rhizome differs significantly from traditional tree-like hierarchies. In particular, the two philosophers state that multiple entry points and paths

are necessary within the rhizome; "any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be" (7).

Within the classroom, while the alternate reality gameplay I designed explicitly moved along a narrative path, students generally approached and participated in ways that could be seen as fractured, unrelated, and differentiated. Though differentiation is a word that is common within the realm of instructional design, it is often within the context of intentionally guiding students toward similar outcomes at similar times through *differing* activities and curricula. What is significant about the differences in my classroom, when viewed as a rhizome, is that students essentially chose different entry points into the critical literacy work we engaged in and then continued to participate in ways that differed significantly throughout the study.

Pedagogically, the rhizome offers significant challenges as well as benefits. Within the current context of pacing guides, mandated curriculum, and statewide testing often guiding departmental timelines at South Central High and other schools, the idea of diverse modes and content entry points for key concepts may appear both overwhelming and unsustainable. Teaching within the old paradigm makes the rhizome seem like the very impractical effort to offer shotgun-scattered opportunities for students and hope for the best. That, however, is not what rhizomatic learning within this school setting looked like. As I've described throughout the previous chapters, there was a clear intentionality and pacing to the activities I designed for the class. However, students focused on varying topics and produced academic work in ways that differed significantly. Further, as these students wandered from one activity to another within the academic rhizome, I also regularly drew the class together to look, as a group, *across* the various learning experiences we collectively engaged in. In this way, we meandered together toward

common goals focused on sharing the critical textual products created and provoking responses within a school and virtual community.

Looking at the philosophical framework of the rhizome, the academic potential of the rhizome becomes clearer. In particular, the rhizome offers a kind of pedagogical resiliency in that, "A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines. You can never get rid of ants because they form an animal rhizome that can rebound time and again after most of it has been destroyed" (9). The continual and constantly evolving activities through which students can engage within the classroom rhizome mean each student can be meaningfully engaged in ways that are lasting despite the disruptive nature of testing schedules within South Central.

Within rhizomatic learning environments, engagement may wander across domains and modes of production. However, like an absent-minded flâneur*, aspects* of learning are returned to again and again: "There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines explode into a line of flight, but the line of flight is part of the rhizome. These lines always tie back to one another" (9).

So far, the rhizome reads as a potential pedagogic disposition, not a component of the new paradigm of participatory learning. However, when student social practices with media are scrutinized, it becomes clear that, culturally, students are already enmeshed within rhizomatic learning. Participation within online affinity spaces (Gee, 2004), for instance, reflects perpetual engagement in highly diverse activities. Similarly, ongoing research from the Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project continue to point to myriad ways that young people utilize digital tools for communication, entertainment, and learning (see Raine, Lenhart and Smith, 2012; Lenhart, et al. 2010). While the abundance of tools and activities used by students

is clear from such reports, what is significant is that despite the wide array of tools available, students tend to coalesce around similar topics and activities. Facebook communication, YouTube production, viewing, and commenting, and even coordinating physical world meetings all occur in ways that suggest rhizomatic involvement of youth culture. Further, the constant fears of multi-tasking and lack of attention described in detail in recent texts like Turkle's *Alone Together* (2011) and Davidson's *Now You See It* (2011) suggest students are moving along various pathways within a rhizome rather than the prescribed and more familiar ways that teachers view "time-on-task." Clearly, the learning rhizome is present but, also, not seen prior to the new paradigm of learning.

Presently, there has been a growing body of research looking at the rhizomatic nature of participatory learning in both physical and virtual spaces (see Sheehy and Leander, 2004; Chen, 2011). Generally, however, this research often focuses on singular experiences. For instance, online spaces are tailored for a rhizomatic individual learning experience where the user's growth trails across a network of pathways. New models of pedagogical entanglement with rhizomes will need to develop in order to better meet the ways students interact and explore within the current social paradigm in which they engage.

Reflecting on the changes I noticed in what I was able to see within my classroom as a result of the sustained inquiry of this study, I suggest two ways that a new paradigm of learning is significantly informed by participatory media. As a result a new participatory pedagogy, one that focused on moving beyond distraction and resembling Deleuze and Guittari's rhizome needs to be defined. In the remainder of this chapter, I look at some of the ways this participatory pedagogy can be defined and the necessary steps that educational participants–including

teachers, parents, students, and administrators–will need to take to comfortably adjust to this new paradigm.

**Looking Beyond**

Over the year of inquiry represented here, I explored the social, pedagogical, and communal practices of participatory media; mobile phones, iPods, gameplay, and digital tools encouraged modes of communication, engagement, and production in ways that are often stymied in many classrooms at South Central High School. The possibilities of game-based Youth Participatory Action Research within a participatory learning paradigm suggest that greater emphasis on collective engagement can be achieved even when students complete individual activities within the rhizomatic classroom.

Though much of this text focused on the digital tools that were utilized by students both socially and academically, I want to remind readers that the 20 iPods used for our classroom's research were not the top-of-the-line in terms of digital tools available to schools and classrooms. However, as a cost effective means of getting all students to utilize the same set of options, the iPods allowed the class to gauge the ways to use a popular kind of mobile device for learning practices. And while the framework of teacher professional development within a paradigm of participatory learning needs to be more clearly delineated, there are also other significant challenges that students and teachers alike are facing in the constantly changing realm of digital engagement within the world. Most specifically, I want to argue that it is no longer enough to simply encourage use of digital tools for critical and civic means. Instead, being able to create and critique these tools is a necessary part of what will be required by future society for today's students.

Media theorist, Douglas Rushkoff writes about the necessary move towards being able to create, critique, and self-limit the digital tools that are a part of the lynchpin of engagement in society today (2010). For Rushkoff, this need to "program or be programmed" is essentially an issue of personal freedom. Noting that "the people programming [applications] take on an increasingly important role in shaping our world and how it works" (8), Rushkoff ultimately speaks to the fact that simple functional literacy with computer programs is not enough within the current paradigm of participation and production.

Largely cordoned off to the realm of elective computer science classrooms, programming languages need to be uprooted from the underexposed spaces of computer labs to meet the often underserved needs of English Language Arts classrooms. Part of academic production and authorship needs to subsume producing interactive texts such as programs and mobile applications. A rudimentary example of something like this could be a persuasive application that includes the standard elements of ELA writing in ways that encourage users to explore and interpret the programmer's decisions. Without the baseline literacy in coding and computer programming, an entire language of power that has emerged in recent years will end up locking students out of numerous jobs in the growing global economy. As Rushkoff notes:

> Digital technology is programmed. This makes it biased toward those with the capacity to write the code. In a digital age, we must learn how to make the software, or risk becoming the software. It is not too difficult or too late to learn the code behind the things we use–or at least to understand that there is code behind their interfaces. Otherwise, we are at the mercy of those who do the programming, the people paying them, or even the technology itself. (128)

As an example of the importance of this move toward programming languages within English Language Arts, I want to briefly refer back to the way the students and I edited the Wikipedia entry for South Central High School. The process of getting student writing to "stick" to the openly-collaborative online encyclopedia pages and not be removed by site administrators and

other viewers was a challenging one; students discovered that Wikipedia primarily requires all entries to have citations or they will often instantaneously be removed. Recently, in fact, this aspect of Wikipedia's functionality has come under criticism as it recognizes westernized forms of scholarship and less of the kinds of oral knowledge shared by diverse communities (Cohen, 2011). Other than "figuring out" how to use Wikipedia, my students and I did not undergo a lengthy exploration or criticism of the Wikipedia system. To me, this is a significant limitation. In the new paradigm of participatory learning, thinking through the design decisions that Wikipedia's creators made is a significant form of critical literacy development. Even more, students need to be able to not only critique existing systems but also envision (and eventually be able to execute) a system that would respond the their criticisms: critical literacies will need to necessitate student ability to create their own, better Wikipedia.

Of the concerns I've heard voiced when I discuss the need for ELA teachers to take the lead in guiding students toward the programming skills required for the future, the most common concerns are of existing external pressures in an era of continuous standardized testing and the fear that focus on new critical digital literacies will exclude the traditional values often instilled via literature in English classrooms. The new paradigm of participatory learning, I believe, is one that pushes back, naturally on the restrictive forms of assessment and evaluation that hold teachers and students to testing schedules. The multiple forms and modes of assessment and performance suggest that measuring student growth is a process that occurs over the course of a year. Computer programming, in one sense, expands the modes of evaluation available and also pushes against notions of failure within educational settings. In programming environments, a moniker that is often shared is of encouraging failure: "fail early and fail often." For programmers, failure is an opportunity for evaluation, innovation, and progress.

Further, the role literature played in the classroom of this study is something that has not been significantly discussed. However, I firmly believe that the pedagogical framework for the new paradigm of participatory learning needs to expand the role of literature and engagement with poetry and novels. Though it is not a large focus of the research conducted here, the students in the class read the young adult (YA) novel *Little Brother* by Cory Doctorow. Echoing sentiments of Orwell's *1984*, literature in this class framed, guided, and enticed. Even Solomon's comment of "like reading" was elicited primarily because he acknowledged his interest in reading a literary text and in thinking through the challenges of applying literature to one's life.

Two months before the students and I began the Ask Anansi unit and our YPAR inquiries, we read, performed, and critiqued *Romeo and Juliet*. Perhaps no secondary ELA text is more discussed, written about, and pressed on the nation's ninth graders than this text. However, instead of simply performing the text and viewing canonical film versions, the class and I utilized Shakespeare's play to look at other youth constructions of scenes of *Romeo and Juliet* that were uploaded to the online video database YouTube. Seeing middle class, and primarily white students the same ages as my own students portray urban youth in modernized gang depictions of the Capulets and Montagues, my students were able to engage in canonical literature in ways that also allowed them to reflect on the world around them, their engagement within it, and the ways that participatory media push beyond simply consuming text, films, and ideas. In this example, literary texts continue to grow and include elements of the changing digital world in which that they are read. The "text", in this sense, grows beyond the pages that Shakespeare wrote more than 500 years ago; the "text" includes my own student responses, the YouTube portrayals that were a part of our class analysis, and the emerging and performative work my students ultimately submitted as part of the final evaluations for the unit.

Personally, the role that English teachers and their teaching of literary texts played in my life reflects my own passion for reading, my own critical view of power structures in education, and the ways that I see civic action cannot be overstated. Literature is often what guides my actions and worldview and teachers help mediate the triangulated relationship between students, texts, and the world. Like with *Romeo and Juliet*, ELA educators will need to work toward grounding their pedagogic in the participatory learning practices of this new paradigm. Literature is not going to be left behind (if we don't let it); it will be as integral as it was in my own educational development for the students of tomorrow.

**Marching Orders**

On April 9th, 2011, at the American Educational Research Association's annual conference in New Orleans, more than thirty high school students from Los Angeles urban schools including South Central High School shared their collected data and recommendations about educational equity within their schools. This group, the Los Angeles Council of Youth Research not only articulated clear research practices but served significant recommendations forward. At the end of their well-attended session, one of the Council's co-founders, Ernest Morrell, addressed the audience of primarily professors and doctoral students: "We tell the students when they speak, 'do not let anyone leave the room without marching orders.' This is not entertainment. This is engagement. There is a difference."

Respecting this tradition of delineating specific paths forward based on the research shared, I want to conclude with a series of marching orders for the various constituencies engendered in the research described in *Good Reception.*

**Marching Orders For Researchers and Teacher Educators:**

- The potential of students *as* researchers not subjects of research needs to be reflected in the research conducted, methods of this research, and modes of sharing of this research. The opportunities of Youth Participatory Action Research allow for co-research within classrooms and schools to mirror and reflect the hopes, dreams, and frustrations of students mired by educational inequity.
- Expand current methodologies to recognize the existing challenges of digital tools and virtual worlds. Challenges within this research and that of many of my colleagues speak to the fact that traditional ethnographic tools and modes of analysis are not equipped to deal with the disruptions of space and time of asynchronous communication in spaces like Facebook, a text message, an online massively multiplayer online role playing game.

**Marching Orders For Students:**

- Be intentional in your mobile use at school. If you are aware of ways to seek information related to a class concept or an outside resource that could be emailed or called, deliberately suggest to your teacher using your mobile device for such a purpose. In this way, demonstrate modes of participatory learning for the teachers who may be struggling with this new paradigm and possibly disciplining accordingly.
- At the same time, this also means being responsible in your mobile use at school. The above encouragement to use mobile devices in schools is not a free pass to–in the words of Gil Scott Heron, remixed from Timothy Leary–"plug in, turn on, and cop out." Though this work recognizes the socially important role that phones often played at South Central

High School, it is also an indictment of the difficult power struggle that plays out daily in classrooms at the campus as a result of these devices.

- Play as much as possible. Explore. Create. Build. Remix. Participate. Revise. These are the ways of being within a culture of participatory learning and they are the building blocks of the new paradigm of learning. Whether in your English classroom, your afterschool hackerspace, or at home in a garage with a soldiering iron, use the excuse that you are a young person as an opportunity to create and understand the world around you as a producer. Just try to do it safely.

**Marching Orders For Teachers:**

- Move beyond an assumption of distraction. For too long, I was not able to see the literacy practices constantly occurring in my own classroom as anything buy distraction from the classroom curriculum. The mobile devices that are prevalent in our classrooms are sites of opportunity. They are an opportunity to meaningfully engage with every student in a classroom. They are an opportunity for continuous dialogue and feedback for students. They are an opportunity for creative performance and collaboration. They are an opportunity for students to see your classroom as more than one period per day and the space encompassed by the four walls that surround you.
- Foster purposeful play. How many games do your students play in your classroom? How do you instantiate a pedagogy of transformative social play? Weave elements of storytelling, role-playing, and simulation within your classroom. Regardless of the content area you are working within, games are an opportunity to embody alternate

realities, to see what cannot be seen from the limited vision of traditional school space, to find ways to grow in ways that a fictitious identity may encourage.

- Vocalize, share, remix, and publicize the ways you encourage participatory learning within the classroom. Too often the practices of participatory learning are cordoned off from mainstream practice as "what happens down the hall, in Mr. Garcia's room," for instance. If we are not intentional as critical educators of the need for participatory learning and of ways we have seen it manifest within classrooms, educational spaces will not hear the mandate for participatory learning.
- Effective educators are researchers. Inquiries into individual student needs, classroom environment, and pedagogical strategies are natural components of effective teaching. As on-the-ground researchers, demand attention from the academic research community and advocate to policymakers based on educational expertise.

**APPENDIX A**
**Interview Protocol for Student Focus Group**

**Purpose, Time, and Location of Use**
Do you have a mobile phone? If not, do you want one? Why?
Do you have a handheld gaming device or iPod? If not, do you want one? Why?
How much time do you spend on your phone during school?
What are the kinds of activities you are usually doing? When do you use it?
Do you use the phone during class? Are you allowed to do this?
Where are the places and what are the times you think most students use their phones at school?

**Learning & Practices**
Do you ever use your phone to work on schoolwork?
What can you learn from using your phone that you have not learned in classes?
Do you think these devices be allowed to be used in classrooms?
How do you think your phone or electronic device could be used in a classroom?
What is the default language you have your device set to?
Do you ever have difficulty understanding information on your device or how to use it?

**Social implications**
How did you choose to use the phone you use?
What are the features you are most proud of with your phone?
Who pays your phone bill? What kind of rate/plan do you have?
Are some devices more popular than others?
Do you communicate with your parents or other adults with your phone?

**Discipline**
Have school adults ever disciplined you for using your device? How? What were the results of this?
What do you understand as the school policies about phone use?
How do teachers react to phone use in their classes?
Do phones ever interrupt your learning experience?

**APPENDIX B**

## Ask Anansi: An Inquiry-Based Alternate Reality Game of Tricks, Riddles, and Spiders

Game Concept by Antero Garcia

### Overview

"Ask Anansi" is a community-centered action alternate reality game. In this game students engage in inquiry-based problem solving by communicating with and helping to unravel the stories they are told by Anasi, the trickster spider god of Caribbean folklore.

Anansi, the story-wielding spider god has answers and solutions to any question students can imagine; and fortunately, these students have recently received a means of communicating with him. Students pose community-centered inquiry questions to Anansi via his progeny: it's common knowledge that spiders can relate questions to Anansi if you ask them nicely. A classroom spider will help students initially communicate with Anansi.

Anansi's responses, however, are not always the most clear: he likes tricks, riddles, and befuddlement. As a result, students will require critical literacy skills to unravel the web of Anansi's hints and instructions. Some clues are found outside the walls of the classroom and may appear as posters, barcodes, or phone calls. Once a question is asked, it cannot be unasked and Anansi is known to grow impatient with small children that do nothing but waste his time by not solving his puzzles - who knows what would happen to their teacher or their classroom materials if they dawdle.

Each Anansi question will take group effort to "answer." However, be careful. Anansi is never satisfied with simply finding the answers to the many questions students ask; he often requires that students work towards solving the challenges they discover.

### Concept Outline and Scenario of Sample Play

Ask Anansi's goal is to guide students toward collective inquiry around a

negotiated topic and civic engagement in addressing underlying causes of these topics. For example, a class may investigate why the food at their school is so unpopular. Through research of nutrition, budgeting, and distribution of food as well as qualitative surveying and ethnographic analysis of student perceptions of school food, students may determine that a lack of variety due to budget and contracting constraints as well as a social perception that the food is "bad" is detracting from students receiving adequate nutrition during the day. Next, students may determine that a course of action is to begin developing a coalition of concerned parents and students, speak at school board meetings, and even stage a cafeteria sit-in. Students will reflect on their efforts, discuss changes they have made, and record these steps in text messages, video, and mapping applications on mobile devices.

Though the main product of this game is one of problem-positing critical thinking and civic participation, the goal of the game is one based in the ARG's fiction: they must satisfy the insatiable need of Anansi for a *good* story. Asking Anansi a question seems innocuous. A comment is fed to the class's spider to communicate to Anansi: "Why is the food at our school so bad?" A day later a response is given cryptically: coordinates to the loading dock for the school's food shipments and a riddle guiding students to photograph and blog about the nutritional information they can ascertain.

The game's initial premise of asking a simple question has significant repercussions: Anansi will not simply provide an answer; he tricks, confounds, and teases students. Anansi's messages are often shrouded as riddles, QR codes, or even latitude and longitude coordinates that need to be determined and visited. Like the media messages that students are challenged to critically assess, Anansi's dialogue with students is one that challenges concerns of power, dominance, and agency in a capitalist environment.

As students gain more information, Anansi's responses become more demanding. Students will regularly dialogue and blog about their experiences. Anansi may hack or edit their information in an effort to further a *good* story. After a particularly intriguing development (a great development of the plot for Anansi & a useful analysis of data for student inquiry), students will be given goggles to view a situation through the eyes of Anansi: this eight-eyed mask will guide

students to analyze media, their actions, and the information they gain through various theoretical lenses: reader-response, historical, Marxist, feminist, post-colonial, psycho-analytic, ecological, post-modern. Students may continue to use these “goggles” in the class long after their initial encounter with Anansi.

Once students have complete initial research and analysis, Anansi tells the students that they have the pieces of a great story but they need to now weave them into action; students need to begin working toward a course of action around the information they have received. Collective action and models of engagement are examined by the class and a strategic plan is developed and enacted.

Students will develop an evaluation mechanism to determine the effectiveness of their plan and revise for further iterations as encouraged by Anansi.

In good nature, Anansi confesses at the end of the game to having tricked the students in places with his difficult clues. He suggests the students recruit others to continue the story they have weaved together. After all, Anansi will remind players: a story never really ends; we may continue to tell of what happens until the next series of adventures. An inquiry and effort to improve food quality at a school is an ongoing endeavor and one that students will continue to work on.

**APPENDIX C**

Sample Curriculum Worksheets

**Anansi Communication Log #__**

Name _____

Date/Time Message Was Sent: _____

Portal: _____

Sent Message:

_____

_____

_____

What did I think Anansi would say?

_____

_____

_____

**Response Received?** Yes / No (circle one)

If message received Date/time: _____

What did Anansi actually say?

_____

_____

_____

What do I think this means?

_____

_____

_____

What questions do I have? What words/ideas are unclear?

_____

_____

_____

Class Next Steps:

_____

_____

_____

**Ask Anansi Brainstorming Activity: Asking A Question**
**Name** _____

Over the past week, you and your classmates have investigated the background and identity of Anansi.

**1.** Please describe three characteristics of Anansi that you have discovered and how you know this information:

**Attribute** **Source**

**a.** _____

**b.** _____

**c.** _____

**d.** _____

Today, as a class you are going to come up with a question that you are going to ask Anansi to answer for you. This question should be one that is related to this community and that affects your day-to-day experiences here at Manual Arts.

**2.** To do the collaborative work that follows next, please select classmates to perform the following roles:

***Diplomat (Helps facilitate work between group members)** _____
***Engineer (Oversees construction of work)** _____
***Checkered Flag (Keeps group working in a timely manner)** _____
**Tourist (Looks at the work from the view of the "other")** _____
**Portal (sends the question to Anansi – 323-xxx-xxxx)** _____

**3.** Discuss with your classmates the two issues you have been thinking about and, as a group, come to a consensus about a question. Write the question down here:

**Question:**

_____
_____
_____

**4.** After you are done, please reflect on this process on the back of this paper. What did you think about how your group interacted? What was challenging? Why did the class think the question you chose was important? What do you think Anansi will say?

**Daily Journey Gauge** **Name:**

**Journey Topic**_____ Date_____

Snapshot (draw a marker where you are): [----------]

Start Middle End

1. Briefly describe the journey/story for this topic. _____

_____

_____

2. Draw a chart or picture showing your progress on this journey

3. Where are you trying to go/what is the ultimate goal for this journey? _____

_____

_____

4. How will you know when you get there? _____

_____

_____

5. How much progress have you made so far? _____

_____

_____

6. What are your next steps? _____

_____

_____

7. Do you have any questions related to this journey? _____

_____

_____

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