



PROJECT MUSE®

Digital Tools in Urban Schools

Mahiri, Jabari

Published by University of Michigan Press

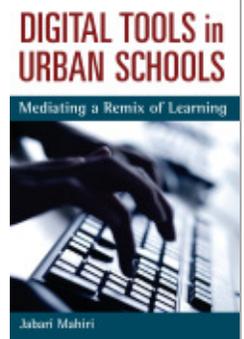
Mahiri, Jabari.

Digital Tools in Urban Schools: Mediating a Remix of Learning.

University of Michigan Press, 2011.

Project MUSE., <a href="

<https://muse.jhu.edu/>.



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/2393>



2 | HIP-HOP JOURNALISM

During the 2007–8 school year, students in Ms. Foster’s Hip-Hop Journalism class learned to use a number of digital tools that directly connected to her curricular goals of developing their skills with traditional and new media literacies. They created digital photography projects and blogs, digital stories and PowerPoint presentations, youth commentaries and podcasts, and lyrics and digital beats. They also wrote texts related to these projects and completed other writing assignments. Essentially, these students were using technological resources to sample, cut and paste, and remix multimedia texts for replay in new configurations through “digital DJ-ing” that reflected aspects of contemporary hip-hop culture. In the process, they were learning to access, understand, critique, and produce a variety of texts—including written texts—through project-based activities that utilized the strategies and tools of journalists.

This focus on working with students to develop journalistic skills using digital media was central to Ms. Foster’s instructional approach. It extended in part from discussions early on in the school’s PD sessions about effective ways to transform classroom dynamics for teaching and learning. In one PD session, we discussed the provocative book *Our America* (1997) by Lloyd Newman and LeAlan Jones as an example of powerful ways that young people could learn about the world and contribute to the learning of others as journalists. I shared research I had published on an underperforming urban school a few miles from V-Tech where a teacher had developed a successful curriculum unit in which her students did research, writing, and portfolio projects modeled on considerations from the book (Mahiri and Conner 2003).

LeAlan and Lloyd were guided and supported in their work by radio producer David Isay. At 14, these two African American boys began documenting and writing about life and death in the Ida B. Wells Housing Project in Chicago. In addition to the book, their work was also presented as two National Public Radio “special reports” in the late 1990s.

The second NPR special, “Remorse: The Fourteen Stories of Eric Morse,” won broadcasting’s highest honor—the George Foster Peabody Award. In one of the many tributes to these young men in the front matter of the book, Adam Matthews of the *Source* wrote that they “convey a reality and an urgency from which even the most learned academics and so called experts fall short, and in the process usher in a new stylistic vanguard of sensitive, first-person, urban journalism.”

During professional development, we talked about the viability of positioning students as journalists in each academic discipline, particularly in light of affordances of new media that have significantly increased the techniques and tools for accessing and producing information. This comes at a time when our understanding of what constitutes journalism is being challenged and changed. This was dramatically exemplified in the case of video blogger Josh Wolf. By refusing to testify or turn over his videotape of a protest against a G8 summit, he was sent to federal prison for 226 days. His case fueled debates about who is entitled to protections of the press like the right to maintain the confidentiality of sources (Berton 2008). In essence, it is a debate about who can claim to be a journalist as technology enables new ways to write and rewrite societal narratives.

In addition to the emphasis of our PD sessions, Ms. Foster’s appreciation of pedagogical possibilities based on a journalism perspective was also linked to her work with Youth Radio. Before being hired at V-Tech, she developed curriculum materials for teachers based on the digital productions of youth in this community-based organization. It has trained thousands of teenagers in broadcast journalism, production, engineering, and media advocacy since 1992. “At V-Tech,” Ms. Foster noted, “I wanted to see if we could engage students like they do at Youth Radio.” Supporting and observing her teaching helped us address central questions of the TEACH Project like what key possibilities and problems were associated with significant uses of digital media for teaching and learning in the school and what implications this approach had for wider school settings.

Ms. Foster was comfortable with me sitting in on her class, and over the school year, I observed and took field notes more than 40 times. Her only request was that I periodically let her read the field notes I wrote on my laptop during each visit. I was happy to comply. The class met during the first block of instruction every day except Fridays. The prin-

principal had structured the first period of school as a two-hour block for several elective class offerings, to support the students' overall academic development with engaging topics and also to help motivate them to get to school on time. As noted earlier, consistent attendance was a continual problem at the school. In her class, Ms. Foster had 24 students who pretty much reflected the demographics of the school: 7 black women, 5 Latina women, 10 black men, and 2 Latino men. I did formal interviews with Ms. Foster at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year and had many informal conversations with her and others who provided instructional and other support to this class. She also provided written narratives and reflections on her teaching as well as teacher-initiated surveys of student perspectives on different aspects of activities in the class. Additionally, two members of the TEACH research team did observations in the class and wrote descriptive and analysis notes. Importantly, the digital media itself conserved the products of the students' work for subsequent assessment and review.

Ms. Foster is an African American teacher who holds a master's degree in education as well as credentials in Spanish and French. She was 32 years old at the beginning of the 2007–8 school year, when she was hired to teach Spanish at the school. Clearly, she was already inclined to teach through a more task-oriented, hands-on approach rather than a more lecture-oriented style. Because she was a veteran teacher with seven years of experience—more than most of the other teachers—the principal and I “informally” asked her to take the lead in piloting the use of digital media in conjunction with the TEACH focus on professional development. She selected to do this primarily in the elective course Hip-Hop Journalism. She came up with the course's title to signal a curricular focus on topics that were relevant and of interest to young people, including issues surrounding youth culture, global events, social class, gender, and race. She later found that the students' use of digital media to engage these issues also reflected aspects of hip-hop culture. At the beginning of the first semester, the principal stopped by and talked with Ms. Foster about her plans for the class. Again, he affirmed his desire and support for the class to provide examples of the viability of digitally mediated learning. “I would like for this to be a model class,” he said. “Set up some technology stations. This could be a place to show what we want other teachers to do. Be on me to get things outta here that are not needed. I'm big on aesthetics.”

THE WORLD WIDE WALL

Midway through the academic year, 10 Mac iBook laptops that were carted to the classroom on a mobile computer lab were stolen in a break-in that occurred after school. After this event, the principal turned one classroom into a dedicated computer lab that had 12 desktop computers, 5 of which were new iMacs. However, the students in Ms. Foster's class lost a lot of their work that had been saved on the laptops but not backed up elsewhere. Consequently, she had all of her students get Gmail (Google) accounts so that the things they produced could be saved, accessed, and modified online at school and at home. She noticed that many of her students created their Gmail accounts with "RIP" (rest in peace) and the name of someone close to them who had died. She saw this form of memorializing as part of their attempts to deal with the tragic losses of loved ones that so many of her students had experienced.

An African American male in her class who I will call DeShawn (pseudonyms are used for everyone named) was one such student. A close friend of his had just been killed in gang-related violence. For a class assignment, he wrote an essay about his friend's life and death. After class that day, Ms. Foster found DeShawn's username tagged in big letters on a table. The next day, she asked him to clean it off, and he did. A few days later, Ms. Foster had her class go to the computer lab and sign up for blogs. Like most of the students, DeShawn was excited about creating his own web page, and he stayed in the lab after the class ended to work on his blog while listening to music on the computer. A counselor who came into the lab and did not know what DeShawn was working on told him to turn off the music and go to his next class. DeShawn reacted to the tone of the counselor's request, and an intense verbal exchange ensued that resulted in him being suspended for a couple of days.

Upon returning to school, DeShawn was still determined to create his blog, motivated by his desire to pay tribute to his friend. He uploaded his essay and then went to work uploading pictures of his friend to an online photo album that he wanted to post as a slideshow with a musical background on his blog. But neither Ms. Foster nor other students in the class knew how to create a slideshow in a blog. So DeShawn struggled and experimented on his own until he discovered how to run the slideshow

on his blog site. His excitement at the moment of this accomplishment was apparent to everyone in the class, and he invited others to come over and see what he had done. He described his blog as a “world wide wall.” It had allowed him to make a specific cultural practice accessible globally. In the process, he helped make it officially “cool” to have a blog in the class. His enthusiasm was contagious, even spreading to another class. For example, when his social studies teacher also did a blog project, DeShawn brought what he had learned in his journalism class to the task. He became the resident “expert” in the social studies class on technical aspects of creating blogs, providing guidance and assistance to other classmates. “Y’all makin’ me feel weird,” he told Ms. Foster at one point as she praised his success with this project. “I ain’t never got so much positive attention up at the schoolhouse.”

This story of the World Wide Web being appropriated as a “world wide wall” reflected a number of ways that teaching and learning were changing in Ms. Foster’s class. She had established an active learning context in which DeShawn and his classmates moved back and forth between traditional and new media literacies while connecting to their unique experiences and interests. In so doing, they engaged new principles of learning that facilitated individual leadership and peer-to-peer collaborations on meaning making and problem solving. In this chapter, I further describe how these changes were enacted through project-based activities that utilized specific prompts to initiate learning processes that resulted in an array of products and presentations as well as written and other reflections. I explore how these changes reflected new principles of learning enabled by digital media, with its multimodalities, its semiotic domains, and its material intelligence and collective intelligence that combine to facilitate active, critical learning and probing to make meaning. I discuss how these changes reflected mediation through CREDE principles for effective instruction of joint productive activity; literacy development across disciplines; connecting academic content to students’ prior knowledge and experiences; instructional conversations; and engaging students in challenging, complex tasks for learning. Elements of Youth Radio’s collegial pedagogy overlap with some of CREDE’s principles, but I additionally show how youth-led inquiry was encouraged, how accountability was distributed among participants, and how student work was connected to attempts at influencing social change beyond school.

YOUNG JOURNALISTS

Since it was important to Ms. Foster and the TEACH Project to incorporate perspectives from Youth Radio, the principal provided funds for a person from that organization to work with the journalism class during the first semester of the academic year. Ms. Foster recruited Ms. Young, a 19-year-old Youth Radio intern who had been working for about a year as a photographer, youth commentator, and online producer. While consulting for Youth Radio, Ms. Foster had developed curriculum ideas for teachers that were posted on the organization's website. Several of these were based on radio commentaries that had been produced and aired by this young journalist.

Only a year or two older than students in the class, Ms. Young was an African American woman who connected to them in more ways than just her youth or race. She grew up in a nearby city known locally and nationally for its high rates of poverty, violence, and crime. In her work at Youth Radio, she has produced more than 35 commentaries, photo essays, and other projects for the organization's website and radio programs, and several of her works had been aired on National Public Radio. Her topics ranged from political events to art openings, but a number of them also focused on violence and crime. For example, she wrote and produced commentaries comparing the shootings at a major university to the shootings in her neighborhood ("We get shot here every month") and comparing working for a corporation to prostitution in the hood ("Sellin' your soul"). In one of her commentaries, she told radio listeners,

Shootings happen all the time in my city—I've even grown to expect them. But soon after my nineteenth birthday, there was one shooting that shook that attitude. It was my 17-year-old cousin Junior—my best friend. That night, I called around trying to get in touch with him. Junior's friend J-Rock said, "Oh, you ain't heard?" Right then, man, my heart dropped. He told me my cousin was shot.

Beyond this trauma (Ms. Young later found out that her cousin would be OK), Ms. Young's work clearly shows the journalism perspectives and skills that Ms. Foster wanted each of her students to develop. Ms. Young also possessed a framework for learning these things that had been shaped, in part, by her experiences as a Youth Radio intern. When I interviewed her about her ideas for collaborating with Ms. Foster at V-Tech, she said,

I think it's very important to have opportunities for leadership in this new school. Like here at Youth Radio, we youngsters take on the role of peer educators. A lot of us already have a lot of raw talent that needs a little polishing. With training we're able to deliver that knowledge to our friends while learning in the most effective manner. And the other thing I want to mention, we're put in real life situations and faced with real audiences here at Youth Radio. Use me for an example. I help a team of web designers build Youth Radio's brand-new website. I get to show off my work online and in a portfolio giving me opportunities to find additional work.

In Hip-Hop Journalism, Ms. Young worked with Ms. Foster to realize these ideas, along with other perspectives and skills promoted by TEACH that were observed at various levels in the digital projects, new principles of learning, and changing practices of teaching in the class.

DIGITAL PROJECTS

“On the first day of class,” reflected Ms. Foster, “Ms. Young and I set a precedent. We never assigned our students any assignments that we were not willing to do ourselves.” They were attempting to establish a culture of joint activities and joint accountability from the very start. “We also kept our class relevant to current events and personal experiences,” she continued. “Sometimes we pushed students out of their comfort zones, but we always participated as well. We wrote poetry together, rapped together, put questions in balloons and popped them and then answered them, wrote headlines that reflected our lives ten years from now, and played musical chairs and other games.” Ms. Foster felt that the foundation for learning was tied to building healthy, trusting relationships among all class participants—adults and students alike. Consequently, she started each class with a warm-up activity (what the National Urban Alliance for Effective Education calls “community builders”) that she and Ms. Young scoured from educational websites and acting books.

Another core strategy revealed in Ms. Foster's teaching was to create projects and activities linked to contemporary events in ways that encouraged youth-led inquiries into societal issues and actions for social change. For example, during the first month of the new semester, she and Ms. Young accompanied students who had decided to go to a Jena

Six protest on a university campus close to V-Tech. On the same day, a young black man from the surrounding community who a number of V-Tech students knew was shot and killed by the police in what was later found to be a case of mistaken identity. Ms. Foster quickly developed a unit on stereotypes. She accessed Youth Radio's website in class to play and discuss one of Ms. Young's commentaries on violence in her hometown that originally aired on NPR. She also played and discussed a short video she had made about an incident in which she and two black men were racially profiled by police officers. She felt that using these digitally mediated personal narratives made discussions of critical social issues and events more viable. They certainly did not need to be made more real for her students because immediate experiences with intense social conditions were pervasive in many of their lives. But Ms. Foster felt that the different examples of presenting these issues with digital media allowed students to appreciate new possibilities for telling their own stories about social conditions that affected their lives.

Initial projects in the class mainly used digital photography, one of Ms. Young's major interests and strengths, with students learning how to edit and compose their work in Photoshop. Some of these projects culminated as photo essays and PowerPoint slideshows. Later in the semester, students worked a bit with video projects, but it was a while before the school had been able to install Final Cut Pro on several of the computers. As the year progressed, students created and communicated with blogs and used these sites to display their completed photography as well as some of their writing. Additionally, they learned to make music and beats using GarageBand, but this tool was mainly used for their youth commentary projects that were produced as podcasts.

I will discuss the development of a number of these digital projects, but first I want to provide a bit more insight into the dynamics of day-to-day activities in the class. Thus far, I have not fully illuminated the complexities of teaching and learning in this classroom (and school) context that surrounded development of the various digital projects. So, before looking at additional representative projects, I provide a portrait of the classroom dynamics—the patterns of interaction that emerged early in the school year—drawn from my field notes of a single but illustrative day in the first semester of the class (September 17, 2007). It is a depiction of what the teachers and students actually do and say while working in class, more so than what they say they do.

A Day in Class

The classroom is one of the nine “portables” that face each other—four on one side, five on the other—along the narrow grassy yard that runs down the center of the school’s small campus. When the bell rings to start first period, there are seven students scattered around the large circle of chairs that take up half the space in the room. Of these seven students, three are new and have not been in previous classes. Two of these new students are twin Latina girls who immediately took seats next to two other Latinas. One Latina, Rosa, is present and on time for every class. She does all of the work but rarely says a word. Emma is the other Latina already in the class, and she also attends consistently. As they wait for class to start, Emma is sharing a song on her cell phone with one of the twins; each has one of the stereo earplugs in one ear.

All the other girls enrolled in the class are black. Two are present and talking quietly to each other. One of them, with her hair styled in cornrows and dyed blond, is also new to the class. She refers to the other girl, Imani, with the “N” word, but it seems to be a normal part of their conversation, not adversarial. The same thing can be said for other curse words that flow in their streams of conversation. The other student present is Jamal, an African American male. He’s sitting alone with headphones on, bopping to the beat and audibly rapping along with a song: “To make hoes fit the track, and come back phat.” Ms. Foster walks over and asks him to take the headphones off. As he complies, he says, “I got speakers in my ears, and I got speakers in my shoes.” She doesn’t respond to his comment and instead turns to greet a few more students who are trickling in.

“I’m sorry I’m late,” Deja says as she goes to a seat. Maurice, Darnell, and Tyrone are right behind her, and they, too, find seats around the circle. These three African American males all have dreadlocks, and one has his dyed reddish brown. Like most of the students in the class, they are dressed similarly. All of the girls wear stylish, fitted jeans, while almost every boy has baggy jeans, a hooded sweatshirt, and unlaced basketball shoes. Yet each one of these young men looks distinct, with different kinds of sweatshirts in various colors and different styles of baggy jeans. Also, they all are wearing ball caps, which are often kept on during class. After about five more minutes, Jalen comes in. He always has lots of things to say about any topic being discussed in class. He is also notable

because he doesn't wear baggy jeans and sweatshirts. Instead, his slacks or jeans are more fitted, and today he has on a black sport coat, a bright red silky shirt, and shiny black leather shoes. "I'm so tired. I shouldn't even be here," he announces to no one in particular. "I didn't get to sleep until three this morning."

Now there are 12 students present, approximately 15 minutes after the bell rang to start first period. Ms. Foster gets everyone's attention with an announcement of her plans to take the class on a field trip to Youth Radio. Next, she describes the day's community builder: "Write a headline that would lead off an article in a newspaper about how you want to be in the future. In other words if there was an article written about you in the future, what would people read about?" One male student refuses to participate and puts his head down on the desk. The others write headlines on scraps of paper and put them in a box. Then they each select a headline from the box, talk briefly about it, and try to guess who wrote it. Ms. Foster and Ms. Young write headlines, too. As the headlines are read, it's clear that some have been written seriously—"All the seniors at V-Tech have graduated on time"—and some have been written as jokes. Yet it works as a community builder in that students and teachers are talking to each other about their lives and their hopes for the future. Two more students, Aliyah and Andre, come in as the community builder comes to an end. The total number that attends class on this day is 14.

Ms. Foster next begins a more formal part of the class where she is having the students respond to two newspaper articles about the Jena Six by finding the main points and comparing the perspectives of the authors. She reads the first article and guides them in discussion and analysis of its key points. Then they read the second article and write an introductory paragraph for an essay that will assess the differing treatments of this provocative issue. They are asked to complete the essay for homework. With this work, Ms. Foster is attempting to build their capacities to critique the media both orally and in writing. Student interest is high because of the article's topic, but the student who would not participate earlier still keeps his head on the desk. While the discussion is going on, a cell phone rings. Darnell says, "My bad," and stops the ringing before Ms. Foster can say anything, although she does give him a look. It turns out that it's a text message saying, "What are you doing?" We learn this because, to Ms. Foster's and everyone else's amazement, Darnell reads the message out loud. Then he answers it out loud to the

now captive audience of the class. “I’m in school. What you think I’m doin’?” he says, as if the texter was in the room. “This is like when you get a call at five in the morning asking what you doin’. I’m sleep. What you think I’m doin’?” Ms. Foster tells him they need to meet during the break.

As the activity on the articles comes to an end, Ms. Young sets up her computer and LCD projector in the middle of the circle and focuses it on a large screen on one of the room’s sidewalls. She uses this format to both tell and show students what she is doing on her computer and what she wants them to do on theirs. While Ms. Young is setting up, Ms. Foster is issuing laptop computers to the students from the mobile computer cart. The one young man who was not engaged earlier noticeably perks up when the computers come out. There are 10 laptops from the cart and five desktops lined up on the far wall of the classroom. So everyone is able to work individually on a computer, but most choose to work in pairs. Also, the laptops are preferred over the desktops.

Today, Ms. Young has the students going online to get images in order to work with them further in Photoshop. The specific task is for students to learn how to merge and edit two images by first finding a website that has a large-screen TV and then using Photoshop to merge that image with a photo uploaded from a digital camera, editing the final image so that the photo appears to be on the TV’s screen. The photos in the camera were taken in a previous class, and most of them were of the students themselves. So the final effect was having images of students in the class appearing to be on TV. “When you get to Photoshop, what is the first thing you do?” Ms. Young asks. Students shout out a variety of answers. “There’s nothing you can do until you unlock the background,” she continues. “Once it’s in iPhoto, it’s locked in there.” She asks Deja to come up and go through the process of uploading photos from one of the digital cameras. Deja takes over operating the computer, and Ms. Young guides her through uploading the pictures.

At one point, the computer freezes, and students start offering suggestions for how to unfreeze it. Andre says, “What you do is close down the program and get out of Photoshop, and then start the program over again.” This gets the computer working again.

Ms. Young commissions Andre, who is already skilled with Photoshop, to help her and Ms. Foster go around and work individually with the new students and any others who have problems working on the assignment. Someone asks what the word *megapixels* means, and Ms.

Young explains, “The more megapixels you have, the sharper the picture comes out.” There is continual chatter around the classroom as students work together and help each other out. They are able to figure out a lot of the technical details of what they are doing. Most students seem to be on task. A couple try to go on to Myspace, but the school blocks it. Jamal is reciting raps while working, but he is clearly doing the project.

As work continues, a school staff member comes by and leaves a large basket of food—milk, dry cereal, juice, muffins, yogurt, and an assortment of fruit—on a table by the entrance. Soon, Ms. Foster gives the students their 15-minute break. During the break, students select snacks and go outside to mingle with friends from other elective classes who are also on break. Ms. Foster’s desk is in the far corner of one side of the room with the entrance at the other corner. Her desk is pretty big, so the corner is like a separate module in the larger classroom. She and Darnell have a quick conversation there, and he apologizes about the cell phone incident. He also agrees to apologize to the class. As he goes out, Aliyah comes over and talks to Ms. Foster about plans to get a job at an amusement park 35 miles away. Ms. Foster is concerned about the commute, and Aliyah tells her that it’s only on the weekends. She also tells her that she is currently staying with a friend, “until my mom gets her stuff together.” Outside, Imani shows Ms. Young some moves she has learned from a girls’ dance group that recently formed at the school. Ms. Young is in a dance class at the community college she attends, and she reciprocates by showing Imani some steps too. She has just started wearing her hair in braids, and Imani comments, “I see you got twisted up; it looks nice.” All during the break, Deja continues to work on the photo assignment, and I ask her why. She answers, “I just wanted to understand how to work with Photoshop, to mess with things, see what they’re like.”

After the break, Ms. Young begins by projecting more pictures that the students have previously taken with the digital cameras onto the big screen. A student who doesn’t belong in the class came in with the others returning from break. He sat at a vacant computer station, intensely observing what was going on. When Ms. Foster notices him, she comes over and ushers him to the door. Meanwhile, Ms. Young is showing one of the pictures that a student took of a tattoo on his arm to demonstrate the importance of having a neutral background when editing a photo: “When you have a white background, it’s easier to manipulate the picture. So while working in Photoshop, you need to give the main image a solid background.” She models additional editing techniques with the

pictures they have taken of themselves: “Another thing I was telling you guys is that when you see something doesn’t fit, you can ‘blur’ to make things fit.” The students are smiling and commenting, and their attention is keenly focused on the screen (although Emma has slipped an ear-plug for her iPod into one ear).

A short time after the students have gone back to their individual work, the school’s security officer comes in and makes a short announcement: “We all know that there is a funeral today, and some of you guys have decided to go. We have to let you know that if you go and you don’t get back for your third-period class, your parents will be called. And, at the last few funerals [he names the city where Ms. Young lives], there have been drive-bys at the funeral. So please be careful.” I’m surprised that the students don’t really diverge from their work to talk about this. There are a few side conversations, but, mainly, they continue to work toward completion of the day’s classwork. Shortly before class ends, the principal comes in. Deja is sitting near the entrance, and she puts out her fist to bump fists with him. He does not initially see her, and she says, “Oh, you goin’ to leave me hanging?” He turns to her, and they bump fists. He observes for about five minutes and then starts to leave. “What’s up?” Maurice asks while calling the principal by his first name. “When we gonna start that revolution?” The principal replies, “It started two hours ago when you all got to class.”

A number of considerations for teaching and learning are depicted in this class portrait, which is presented here in order to frame the following descriptions of work on digital projects throughout the academic year. These projects began with digital photography and continued with PowerPoint presentations and digital stories, blogs, and the production of youth commentaries and podcasts. These are important tools for accessing and creating meaning and for making social impacts and connections. In the following discussions, I will show more of how these students learned to use these tools for academic development as well as to amplify their voices and views on critical issues that affected their lives.

The Magazine Project

At the beginning of the school year, technology resources for the journalism class were sparse. There was the mobile computer lab, but the laptops had very little software on them to facilitate the teachers’ ambitious plans for the class. The class also did not have digital cameras and photo

printers or voice recorders initially. Students joked about how going to V-Tech with no technology was like going to a Chinese restaurant where there's no rice or a KFC where there's no chicken. The principal had ordered a number of needed items, but the administrative structure of the school district was painfully slow. To facilitate activities for the first month of classes, I used TEACH resources in order to purchase several digital cameras, a photo printer, a desktop computer, and higher-end speakers. When the cameras and printer were delivered to the class, Ms. Foster started poring over the instruction booklets. In comparison, Emma and Deja immediately started unpacking and setting up the new equipment—putting in the memory cards and batteries, connecting them with the appropriate cables and power cords, and setting the time and date functions. Jalen commented while observing this scene, “I feel like I’m in one of those movies like *Freedom Writers* or something, where kids don’t have anything.”

There were numerous examples of students like DeShawn staying after class or Deja working through the break to continue with their projects. Deja’s work in Photoshop was a good example of ways this project was stimulating student learning. The initial work in Photoshop evolved into a project of the students creating an article for a magazine with appropriate graphics to support their written texts. “We need some ideas to write about,” one student yelled out after hearing that writing was a key part of the project. They got some of their ideas from assignments to read and critique selected magazine articles. Some students were surprised to see that even the hip-hop magazines like *Vibe* and the *Source* were written in language styles more reflective of the academy than the streets. Similarly, they found that the blogs of several local hip-hop journalists, like Davey D, were written in Standard English. The final goal was to combine all of the articles, add a cover and table of contents, and eventually print it in paper copies.

In setting up the project, Ms. Young announced, “I’m about to show you guys an example of a magazine cover that I did last night in Photoshop. I did everything in layers. I took this picture in [a nearby city].” She projected a beautifully done mock cover of an African American woman with a city scene in the background. “I took this picture from up on the thumbnails and dragged it to Photoshop,” she continued, and then she gave the following step-by-step demonstration of how she had worked on parts of the example magazine cover.

The magic wand I used to select a big body of color for the background. If I need to delete something, what I do is go over and click on the magic wand. If it was a whole lot of stuff in the background, I would not be able to erase the background that easily. This thing right here is used to drag everything around. But it's locked, so I have to click on it. If I want to, I can make the background another color; I can make the background another photo. When you work in Photoshop, you want to do everything in layers so that when you mess up you don't have to start all over again.

When she finished the demonstration, she let the students practice in Photoshop and work on their magazine assignment, telling them, "Go online and get a picture, and start making your graphics." In her approach to demonstrating how to work with the media, she also modeled and provided opportunities for the students to work in similar ways on their own and with peers as well as with adults.

I observed Deja for a while as she worked on her magazine project. Earlier, she had been writing fluidly to compose her text. Then she shifted to working on the images. As she worked, she talked to me about what she had done so far.

I went to Google and got this 500 × 500 megapixel picture, and dragged it to the Photoshop icon. When you click on that, it automatically gives you a perfect size of the picture you choose. You can get a picture from anywhere and it will also be able to be dragged to the Photoshop icon. Then you click and merge the layers so you take one picture and drag it on top of the other picture.

I went to the first layer and erased the background of it so that my picture would show up. You can go to filter gallery, and it has different kinds of textures you can use for your photo. Then you have to adjust your picture with the picture gallery. I went to filter gallery. They give you different types of textures, and I clicked on the one that looked like a crayonlike texture, and it put that onto my original picture.

There was a clear correspondence between how Deja was able to describe what she had done and Ms. Young's explicit directions for what the students should do. Deja's growing expertise in using Photoshop excited her, and she worked intensely on both composing the written text and creating the graphics for her article. "It's a new way of learning," she told me. "It's faster and more fun." As it turns out, the class never actually produced the paper version of the magazine. But when I asked Deja later

how she felt about the magazine project, she said, “Hey, we went stupid on our pictures. I loved doing it. We went stupid.”¹

Almost every student shared Deja’s enthusiasm for the projects they were doing in the class. A few students, like Malik and Andre, were even more skilled than Deja because they had prior experiences working with digital media for their own purposes outside of school. For example, Malik was a student who joined the class after the magazine project was well under way, but he quickly caught up with everyone else. When he entered class for the first time, another student immediately said, “Oh, we got a new student in the class. Introduce yourself.” The students stopped what they were doing and listened as he told them his name and a couple things he likes to do. He said he liked to rap (he has a “gold grill” on his teeth) and that he was really into sports. When the class started working on an assignment, he went over to the computer, got online, and showed Ms. Foster his Photobucket website. He had numerous photos posted, and Ms. Foster commented about how they were nicely done. It was clear that he already had some of the skills that were being taught to the students. Ms. Foster told him that it would be great if he could help other students. But Malik said, “I’m not good at explaining stuff; I just know how to do it.” She suggested that he think about checking out Youth Radio in order to further develop his interests and talents.

Digital Stories

Ms. Young led the work on the photography projects, but Ms. Foster designed and guided the work on all of the other digital projects in the class. The idea was to jump-start the class by immediately working with digital media while Ms. Foster was getting new ideas and gaining confidence in using digital tools in the PD sessions. As the semester progressed, she became more and more comfortable with trying in class the things she was learning in professional development. She worked extensively to have her students create blogs (exemplified earlier), digital stories rendered in PowerPoint, and youth commentaries that were eventually produced as podcasts. She also had her students work a bit with writing lyrics and making digital beats that were sometimes integrated into their other projects, and she developed activity centers in different areas of the classroom to support the kind of work being done on the specific projects.

PowerPoint presentations have become common in some schools,

but most of the students in Ms. Foster's class had never actually created and delivered one before. This was particularly true for Rosa, who was always present, very soft-spoken, and extremely shy. She rarely talked in class, except to her friends. I initially thought she was not engaged, but I found, instead, that she had a different style of participation. In one of her essays, she described herself as "always listening, always quiet, always thinking about others." As I noted earlier, she did all of her assignments in the class, and I came to see that she was tuned in to everything that happened, but she was more comfortable being quiet and actively listening. She was challenged by a digital story project because one of the requirements after writing and rendering the story in a PowerPoint format was to present it to the class. Her story was about an incident her family had experienced, involving racial profiling by the police in her neighborhood. She told Ms. Foster that she could not present her story in front of the class. However, after she completed her PowerPoint that combined written text, images, and music, she realized that the story kind of told itself. The class watched and listened intently to her digital story, and it prompted lots of questions. Rosa was able to respond to their questions and provide more background and details about her story. Afterward, her classmates made comments like "That is the most I've ever heard her talk." Later, when Ms. Foster asked her how she was able to do it, she replied, "No one was looking at me." She felt they were focused on the images, words, and sounds in the digital medium she had produced rather than on her personally.

Podcasts

Like the digital stories, Ms. Foster also used youth commentary projects to develop and amplify her students' voices as hip-hop journalists. In the second semester of the school year, she had her students do a number of these projects linked to their ongoing critiques of traditional media as well as the productions of their own media. These projects would begin with writing prompts on current issues and events and how they were portrayed in contemporary media. Then some of the students' written work would be turned into youth commentaries ultimately produced as podcasts. Ms. Foster provided models for her students' projects from the Youth Radio website. Produced by young people like her students, the Youth Radio reporting styles in commentaries and "news breaks" were engaging, and the content was timely and relevant. Since the audio

broadcasts were accompanied by written transcripts on the website, these models were particularly useful for struggling readers and writers.

With this curricular focus, Ms. Foster guided students in generating ideas to spark an inquiry process that utilized web-based resources to get information that they collaboratively subjected to analysis in order to develop critical perspectives. During the work on these projects, Ms. Foster would engage individuals and small groups of students in mediated interventions to help them broaden and complicate their understanding of the issues. She would elicit their experiential knowledge but expand it with information from textual and digital sources. Interestingly, she came to see that the use of digital sources actually facilitated deep explorations of controversial or emotional issues like race and racism, gender, oppression, incarceration, and violence. Students revised and refined their writing, and they learned how to transform their perspectives into journalistic commentaries and produced some of them as podcasts.

I will conclude this part of the chapter by discussing the podcast projects in terms of key issues that were addressed by students in the Hip-Hop Journalism class. Most were communicated in the style of short, verbal essays, while some were spoken word pieces. The process for producing these podcasts began with individual and collaborative research on issues, using online sources as well as articles and books. The students also wrote and edited a number of drafts of the texts to be podcasted. They worked in teams when using the GarageBand program on the Mac computers to digitally record, merge, and edit the audio tracks and other sound effects. Their commentaries focused on a wide range of issues, but there were three major, recurring themes. One consistent theme dealt with getting an education and achieving goals in life. Another major theme dealt with problems of youth, like pregnancies, injuries, drugs, violence, incarceration, and health. A final provocative theme dealt with experiences and critiques of race and racism in society. I will provide examples from three podcasts that reflect each of these themes to give a sense of the substance of the students' work, even though I have excerpted considerably from the complete audio texts.

One of Aliyah's podcasts was framed as a letter to young people but was addressed specifically to a female cousin, to have her rethink her life choices and goals.

Have you ever thought about going to college? If you haven't, at least think about it. It doesn't have to be the top college in the world, but that would be nice. You can go to a community college or a two-year college

to get your associate's degree. But that's just like getting your high school diploma. Do you know what you want to be after you graduate? You might want to start thinking about that because time is going to pass faster than you think. I still don't know what I want to do. But, I can do hair, so that's a little kick push for me. . . . I would like to stay in school because it's something I want to do. . . . My mom and my dad didn't go to college and they're always working these mediocre jobs and always struggling. I would like to go to college, and me being the youngest, I think it's best for me.

Jalen's podcast on post-traumatic stress syndrome was a riveting comparison of the mental health conditions of some soldiers returning from war and the experiences that conditioned his mental and physical health growing up with violence.

PTSS stands for post-traumatic stress syndrome. This term is usually used for veterans of war. It would usually occur when soldiers would see someone shot, when they were shell shocked, or any traumatic event that would happen in the line of fire. Because this disorder does not necessarily cause any bleeding or the soldier does not lose a limb, it is not considered a wound, and the soldier does not get a purple heart for having it. . . . It is passed off as just a condition that therapy can cure or stabilize. . . . I personally have had PTSS for a little more than 12 years. Of course, not through war because I am only 18, but through my life's challenging events and the mental pictures stuck in my head. For example, seeing my sister beat up men and women because they owed her money. . . . Seeing my cousin shoot three boys who happened to be no older than me at the time. Or, even when I seen my older brother sell crack to his aunt. . . . Like soldiers, I have had therapy and anger management . . . for ten years. . . . [But] these sessions have failed. I currently suffer from anxiety attacks and what doctors say is a cycle of migraines. I take medicine for both of these conditions.

Tyrone's podcast on racial inequities was in spoken word style, and it ended with the line "Racism equals prejudice plus power," which also would be a good title for the piece.

I look in the mirror, double take on my face.
 Running cold water on my scalp
 I question the true meaning of race.
 Africans were captured from Africa with no trace.
 Slavery trapped human beings, no chance to escape.
 And it still goes on today.
 My question is, why and what for?

I stress the message with emphasis.
 What is institutional oppression?
 What about white supremacy?
 No answers Mr. Governor? What is you givin' me?
 Tell me why it's a sin to be young, black, male?
 So much negative energy
 Directing me straight to the jail cell. . . .
 And I can't talk about this in a song
 Because I'm afraid it won't sell . . .

In February of 2008, Ms. Foster's students participated in a conference at a nearby university and conducted a workshop in which they presented their podcasts and blog commentaries to faculty members and graduate students there. Her students also filed and disseminated their commentaries digitally and put a collection of them on a CD to share with friends, families, and fellow students. Some introduced their commentaries by saying things like "Hi, this is Jalen. I'm a hip-hop journalist." Seeing their work as an extension of hip-hop culture was important to them. Kitwana (2002) contends that more than anything else, hip-hop has helped to shape contemporary black youth culture as well as youth cultural production globally. Like the authors of *Our America*, these students came to take their work as young journalists very seriously. Adam Matthews's characterization of Lloyd and LeAlan's book applies, in some measure, to the work these V-Tech students produced, in that the students' work also conveys "a reality and an urgency . . . [through] a new stylistic vanguard of sensitive, first-person, urban journalism." In talking about her class, Ms. Foster noted, "It's the human aspect that strikes me the most in reading all the digital texts . . . [overcoming] a fear of public speaking, mourning the loss of your friend, empowering one's self with the knowledge to transcend." With each digital project, students were able to build on their experiences and interests to increase their learning, expand their critical analysis skills, and develop important new skills with digital media.

NEW LEARNING PRINCIPLES

Surveys of the students' perceptions about the use of computers in the journalism class revealed that they felt greatly facilitated and even

inspired to do research as an engaging way to learn. As one student reported in our anonymous survey about using computers in the class, “You can look up info, voice your opinion, listen to music, watch videos, et cetera.” Another student wrote, “It gives me other options for work.” An additional student noted, “It’s easy to get information off of computers, so that’s the first source I turn to instead of books.” One student claimed, “Whenever I have to research stuff for class, I start learning better.” These perceptions were strongly affirmed by a student who wrote, “Technology expands my mind each day as I research every day what I need to learn.” There were also a few drawbacks mentioned: “Sometimes they move slow”; “Some sites are blocked”; “I hate typing.” But another student replied, “It has made writing easier.” Based on their experiences with computer-based learning in the class, the students were also asked what they would like to learn more about. Examples of their responses were “the history behind computers,” “the engineering of them,” “sound and graphic design,” and “how to use a computer good.” Another ambitious response was “I would like to know how to build a computer and about how to really make my own website like the blogger. I like that a lot.”

The students’ understanding of the importance of doing research as a key way to learn was directly linked to their use of computers, the Internet, and other digital media for their work on various projects during the school year. In this section, I discuss how the digital photography, digital storytelling, blogs, and podcast projects they did reflected new principles of learning. Of the 36 learning principles defined by Gee (2004), the TEACH Project focused on 6 that we found to be useful for framing the work with digital media at the school: the multimodal principle (how meaning and knowledge are built up through various modalities, not just words); the semiotic principle (that learning involves interrelations with and across multiple, complex sign systems that form semiotic domains); the material intelligence principle (that thinking, problem solving, and knowledge are already stored in material objects); the probing principle (that learning is a cycle of probing and continually reflecting in and on this action); and the active, critical learning principle (that the environment created by new principles of learning encourages learning to be active and critical, rather than passive); and the “distributive principle” (that meaning and knowledge are distributed across the learner, objects, tools, symbols, technologies, and the environment). Ultimately, as Shaffer (2006) argued, rather than focusing on the digital media itself, what

is important are these new ways of thinking and learning that it enables.

Words, still images, moving images, and sounds are significantly more accessible and able to be manipulated in constructions and remixes of meaning using digital media. The writing in this book, by comparison, mainly communicates in just one of these mediums. So, although I tried to represent the work on digital projects in the class through writing, much is lost by not being able to elicit more of the vibrancy of these multimodal collages of visual, audible, and tactile sign systems. A basic cell phone's capabilities to provide voice, music, pictures, video, a variety of written texts, Internet access, and much more exemplifies affordances of digital devices to integrate and allow one to manipulate multiple expressive modes. As Horst and Miller (2006) showed in their study of cell phone use in Jamaica, the social consequences can be both dramatic and unanticipated as varying potentialities of the technology are appropriated for different contexts and purposes. This was also the case in the journalism class, where both planned and unanticipated uses of digital technology influenced the learning and social dynamics of the class in novel ways.

In addressing new principles of learning revealed in the work on student projects, I will also reference a few instances of unanticipated uses of cell phones in the class. In the earlier description of class activities, for example, Emma shared music on her phone with one of the twins before class formally started (each with one of the stereo earplugs in one ear). In so doing, she seemed to be welcoming the new student to the class by making her feel more accepted and "connected" in a new environment. Darnell, in contrast, violated a class code with his highly audible response to the message on his phone after it rang during class. Yet his personification of the phone as a proxy listener to his reprimand for the call coming at an inopportune time was also an instance that revealed something about the material intelligence designed into the phone. It offered differing ways of interacting with and differing associated meanings of the physical device for its user as well as for others who, by their proximity, became part of the communicative situation.

There are varying possibilities as well as potential problems for learning linked to the material intelligence designed into digital devices. According to Gee (2004), the thinking, problem solving, and knowledge "stored" in digital media can help learners to combine "the results of their own thinking . . . [with the material intelligence] to achieve yet more powerful effects" (210). In the example of Rosa's digital story, it was

clear that aspects of the material intelligence of the computer allowed her to “give voice” to more of what she knew about the backstory to her project. With her classmates focused on her preconstructed digital story (which had its own multitextual communicative structure), she found that, despite her shyness, she was able to extend the meanings of the story she produced in a particular format with additional discussion points and answers to questions. Utilizing these kinds of affordances allowed Ms. Foster and Ms. Young to provide more choices and differentiation to tap into the variable resources, interests, and learning styles of their students. This aspect of learning is captured by the earlier student comment that the technology “gives me other options for work.” In effectively connecting and building on the backgrounds and experiences of youth, the cultural competence of teachers must now extend to the microcultural affiliations that individual youth have that reveal knowledge gained from digitally mediated experiences in semiotic domains of highly specific affinity groups.

There were additional instances where student cell phones were used in concert with the overall goals of the class. For example, because there were few digital cameras available, some students used their phones to take pictures for their projects. Emma provided an interesting example of this. She had not been able to find the image that she wanted for one of the projects, so she decided to draw it. She took a picture of the drawing and sent it to her e-mail account. Then she downloaded the picture on the computer and dragged it into Photoshop to edit and merge it into her project. Emma was also one of the students who immediately began to help set up the digital cameras when they first arrived in class. She and Deja clearly did not need to read the instructions because both had some intuitive knowledge along with dispositions to probe how the devices worked. Intuitive knowledge, according to Gee (2004), is built up through repeated practice and experience with technology. Like Emma and Deja, DeShawn also had prior experiences uploading various kinds of digital texts. So he was both comfortable and somewhat competent in probing another digital environment, a blog, to figure out how to tap its capacity to host a slideshow on a “world wide wall.”

These instances of ways that students were independently probing and learning to use (or reappropriating the use of) various digital devices revealed another consideration for new learning principles—the role of a “third participant.” Essentially, the material intelligence designed into digital devices plays important roles in the learning dynamic through

ways that it teaches us as we engage it. In other words, systematic processes for learning at differentiated levels have been designed into digital devices including multi-user virtual environments. I believe that this requires us to augment sociocultural theories of learning and considerations of concepts like the zone of proximal development. Work in Ms. Foster's class provided glimmers of ways that the material intelligence in digital media itself functions as an "expert other" (a third participant in addition to the original notion of expert and novice) to guide the development of learners through various levels of potential. Teachers must understand how to most effectively utilize this third participant, and they must also realize that it has significant potential for stimulating learning that does not depend on the physical presence of a human "expert," including a teacher. Also, as will be seen in chapter 4, on "virtual" world media, the virtual presence and interactions with other "more capable peers" online can similarly contribute to advancing learning in virtual zones of development. This is the "collective intelligence" produced through interactions of an individual with others in learning events that can be virtual or actual. Work at V-Tech provided insights into the play of both material intelligence and collective intelligence in the learning of students and teachers.

The photography, digital storytelling, blog, and podcast projects were all created by converging an array of multimodal texts as well as written texts. These convergences required the students to understand and appreciate complex, semiotic interrelations across multiple sign systems. Their learning resources, styles, and interests were aided by the multimodal nature and the material intelligence of the digital media that facilitated students actively and critically probing for and producing knowledge and meaning about the world. Yet the role of the teachers in designing and mediating activities and projects in ways that systematically guide student interactions with digital media is still paramount to the overall efficacy of the students' learning.

CHANGING TEACHING PRACTICES

Urban schools in the United States are marked by stark disparities in academic performances and disproportionate negative outcomes for particular groups of students. Although there are historically entrenched economic, political, and geographic structures that contribute to shap-

ing school and classroom outcomes and issues, it is clear that much can be done to ameliorate approaches to teaching and learning. At V-Tech, the challenges were exceptionally intense. Students were transferred out of the traditional high school and sent to this school at any time during the year, as was highlighted in the description of a day in the life of the class. Once at V-Tech, students rarely attended consistently. In some cases, infrequent attendance was the reason a student was sent to the school in the first place. In other cases, it was because a student had adult responsibilities outside of school, like taking care of family members or needing to work long hours. This was the case of Darius, a highly motivated student who was clearly capable of excelling academically and loved music production but had to work several jobs to help his family. There were also cases of chronic mental and physical problems, like what Jalen revealed in his podcast. Sometimes, frequent absences were the result of students being caught in various processes of the juvenile incarceration system.

Transformations in schooling are needed to reengage marginalized students, but the need is just as crucial to more effectively prepare all students for the mercurial and risky global economies, dramatically changing technologies, intense contact zones of intersecting world cultures, and critical environmental conditions that demarcate life in this century. In this regard, it could be argued that most of our students are at risk. As Luke (1998) stated over a decade ago, “There is also a risk that our teaching might succeed—succeed at generating forms of reading and writing that don’t have much purchase or power in New Times” (3). If we are able to change teaching practices to effectively address these challenges, we will also significantly reduce the number of marginalized students. As we rethink the learning and literacy needs of contemporary youth, we cannot merely draw linear trajectories from our own backgrounds and experiences. Like with the emergence of cell phones, earlier analog practices do not necessarily prepare people for the plethora of novel communicative possibilities that now exist. It will not be sufficient to simply reengineer models of schooling based on our own educational experiences; we need to invent new models. We can begin by scrapping dated structures of the traditional subjects that are taught.

In this concluding section, I discuss ways that the work in Ms. Foster’s class informs how teaching practices can change in order to help students acquire more power and purchase in and beyond school. I also show how work in the class reflects key perspectives of the TEACH Proj-

ect. First, however, I provide a brief consideration of what it is that teaching practices need to change away from, along with why the structures and cultures of U.S. schooling are so intractable. Every year, I teach a class in my university's program for English teacher preparation, and there are stark contrasts between the pedagogical perspectives of our program and the reality of teaching in many surrounding public schools. For example, while I was writing this chapter, one of the new teachers told me that the English department in his school required him to teach a whole class on grammar every day of the school year. The teacher himself felt this was a complete waste of time, and his distress in teaching this class seemed to be exceeded only by that of his students. This situation implicates the culture of a particular school, but of more concern is the pervasive structure of schooling in the United States that both permits and requires it. Changing teaching practices is ultimately tied to changing the underlying values, beliefs, and cultural models that dictate and sustain and reproduce the practices, even when they are ineffective or, worse yet, actually harming youth.

Lakoff (2004) provided an analogy for how underlying values and beliefs of traditional orientations to schooling in the United States can be conceived as a "strict father" model. The prime element of this model is that preserving and extending a conservative form of morality is the highest goal with education and other societal institutions aligned and dedicated to serving that goal. A key aspect of this construct is the need to establish obedience to a moral authority. For education to do this, its character should be that of a strict father who rewards achievement in mastering curriculum content that reflects particular values and views and who punishes and shames undisciplined students whose very failure is an indication that they are not worthy of societal benefits and rewards. Mastery is extensively assessed by testing with definitive right and wrong answers. Lakoff contrasted the strict model to a "nurturant parent" model. Prime elements of the nurturant model are empathy and responsibility. Through empathy and responsibility, a nurturing parent will try to take care of and protect youth while working to ensure that they have opportunities for fulfilled, free lives.

The essence of the change reflected in Ms. Foster's practice was in her enactment of a nurturant model of teaching and learning with her students. This contrasted markedly with the strict model that had framed her students' experiences in school before coming to V-Tech. To be sure, this nurturant model was at the core of the whole school's approach to

working with students with its emphasis on relationships, rigor, and relevance. But it is significant to show how this model was enacted as the context in which Ms. Foster's students learned. It began with her and Ms. Young's willingness to do and share projects right along with their students. So, rather than the instructors' personal backgrounds and interests being apart from the class, they became a part of the class. One consistent structure for this was the daily warm-up activities in which they did things right along with the students like wrote short poems together, wrote headlines about themselves, popped balloons with personal communication prompts, and addressed questions about themselves that were generated by these activities. In a response on our survey that asked what was liked and disliked about the class, one student noted, "The thing I liked about the class was every morning when I came in here, there was positive energy."

These community builders facilitated members of the class sharing experiences and being responsible to each other as human beings in concert with sharing experiences as learners. For example, one class started with a brief game of musical chairs. At one point, a male student didn't get to a seat on time but felt that someone else had played unfairly. He quit and went over to the other side of the room. But his fellow students started encouraging him to come back in such a humorous way that it allowed him to return to the circle without losing face. In addressing the social context of classrooms, Dewey (1938) wrote, "Every experience affects for better or for worse the attitudes which help decide the quality of further experiences" (38). Ultimately, the nature of each experience in class is tied to how students feel about themselves, about each other, about their teachers, and about learning. Another response from the survey stated, "Everyone was really nice and respectful toward each other. I really enjoyed coming to class everyday. What I like about the class is that everyone got along and there wasn't any drama and people fighting."

Dance's (2002) research vividly captured how youth who live with conditions of violence are often prone to bringing postures of toughness from the streets ("being hard enough") into the school, both for protection against peers and as a way of resisting schooling practices. Yet, despite the fact that many of the students at V-Tech were assigned to the school for severe discipline issues among other things, there was not a single instance of a fight in Ms. Foster's class during the entire academic year. Instead, the "drama" was in the actual learning activities that the students felt were challenging as well as fun. Many of the survey

responses reflected this, as in the following example: “We hardly did a lot of boring readings. Everything we do in this class makes me think and we have fun doing it.” In addition to the excitement and challenge, students felt that the activities were relevant. One of the survey responses that reflected this noted, “I liked that we talked about real stuff instead of boring stuff that doesn’t effect [*sic*] me.” The students were given a wide range of choices in how they could approach their projects, but clear guidelines were set for the quality of work expected as well as how the work would be assessed. It was also clear that the students’ genuine voices and views were welcomed in the class, even if they were sometimes strident. This was exemplified by the response of a student who “loved the energy, the discussion, the fact that we had real freedom of speech.”

Ms. Foster’s approach was reflective of and also shaped by central considerations that the TEACH Project promoted in professional development with all of the teachers in the school. In the first semester, the project worked with practice-based examples of the effectiveness of mediating learning through classroom discourse in the context of particular kinds of social interactions between teachers and students and among students as collaborative partners. The CREDE principles as well as principles of collegial pedagogy provided a common language and set of perspectives to explicitly delineate what the nature of these communicative and social interactions should be. So work across the teachers’ classes was guided and supported with respect to ways that they were attempting to enact joint productive activities, develop students’ literacy through particular projects and across disciplines, plan activities to directly build on students’ prior knowledge and experiences, utilize specific instructional conversations, and make their projects both interesting and challenging by designing complex tasks for learning.

Additionally, the professional development used the issues and activities that teachers shared from their current practices to address how youth-led inquiry could be encouraged, how accountability structures for the work of students could be more effectively distributed, and how student projects could also contribute to influencing social change beyond school. Regarding this last point, Ms. Foster did a number of things with her students that went beyond the classroom that I will only briefly mention or note again like the Jena Six event conducting a workshop at a nearby university, attending a series of classes at a nearby community college on urban sociology, and taking a contingent of students to the first national Youth Bill of Rights conference as well as an Ameri-

can Anthropological Association conference in Washington, D.C. This group also toured black colleges in the area while in Washington.

Ms. Foster and other V-Tech teachers shared work that they were doing in their classes with their colleagues in the PD sessions, and the framework provided by this complex of teaching principles and perspectives was used both as a guide for influencing and an optic for seeing the changes in their teaching practices. The main focus of the project, however, was to facilitate these principles of effective teaching through higher levels of digital mediation of instruction. Ms. Foster indicated at one point that she felt her students were influenced more by the human aspects (the relational aspects) of the class than by the technology aspects. Yet it is clear that her holistic approach to learning through building healthy relationships among participants in the class was appreciably realized through the dynamic interactions and communications enabled by digital media. The technology also provided unique resources for virtually supporting and extending her students' learning beyond the temporal and physical limits of the classroom. In the case of Darius, who had to work to help his family, for example, Ms. Foster was able to keep him "plugged in" to the class via the Internet. He kept up with much of his class work by using computers at the local public library. Similarly, the class came to have thoughtful and, at times, intense discussions on their blogs prompted by topics that originated in class.

Ms. Foster eventually created direct links between the work in the class and specific state academic literacy standards, just as Youth Radio creates lesson plans linked to national standards based on some of its digital productions. Consequently, the principal decided that the second semester qualified as a core academic course rather than just an elective. Reporting the vibrancy and efficacy of learning and literacy in the Hip-Hop Journalism class unfortunately may be construed as needing to prove once again that these students are "worthy" to have society's benefits and rewards meted out to them. These young people are acutely aware of how they have been profiled and positioned, but as one anonymous response on our student survey aptly noted, "We are smarter than they think."