

Creating Agents of Change through Civic Media Production, Critical Media Literacy and Experiential Learning

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ABSTRACT

This study applies the civic media model within a media literacy course to examine how the convergence of critical media literacy, civic education and experiential learning help college students understand themselves as engaged community members. Interviews with college students collected over three semesters is qualitatively analyzed to understand how civic media production and experiential learning build a sense of civic agency within college students as collaborators of voice, dialogue and critical consciousness.

Keywords: civic media, participatory media, civic engagement, media literacy, service-learning

INTRODUCTION

Recent studies have shown that the race and socioeconomic status of public school student populations are contributing factors in school choice decision-making, where white affluent families are more likely to perceive diversity as a negative characteristic of a public school (Holme, 2002; Siegel-Hawley, 2014). Parents self-select their school choices within the Salem Public School District in Massachusetts, which has shown a clustering of diversity at a small number of schools and a lack of diversity at others. For example, the representation of racial diversity in the district is 28.6% higher at Nathaniel Bowditch Elementary (80.2%) than the district average of 51.6%, whereas other schools in the district like Carlton Elementary is 13.5% lower than the district average (38.1%) (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017). Self-segregation across public school districts is an important social justice issue as communities continue to address issues of discrimination, equity of resources and quality of education for all children they serve.

Working within this context, this study focuses on a collaboration between the Salem Public School (SPS) District and Salem State University (SSU) to co-create civic media that address and deconstruct the “status ideologies” (Holme, 2002) and community mythologies that maintain discriminatory belief systems about public schools across the district. The focus of this project was to showcase the inclusion and diversity of student voices across the district through the creation of multimodal digital projects. The MIT Center for Civic Media (n.d.) defines civic media as “any form of communication that

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strengthens the social bonds within a community or creates a strong sense of civic engagement among its residents.” The practices associated with civic media focus on the design or appropriation of tools that create, coordinate or facilitate what can be called “civic” acts or actions taken in the world to benefit a group or community beyond one’s intimate sphere. This study examines the co-creation of civic media within the context of a critically-engaged civic learning (i.e., “service-learning”) project between Salem State University students and Salem Public School students using a communication civic media model (author citation, 2014). The purpose of this study is to understand how this media model can be used as a pedagogical tool within the classroom to facilitate the co-creation of civic media, with a focus on the construction of voice, dialogue and critical consciousness via critical media literacy. This study also examines how the convergence of critical media literacy, civic education and experiential learning can help higher education students apply their education in a real world context that builds their understanding of themselves as engaged community members. Civic media co-creation is found to be an effective way to engage college students and community members in difficult conversations that celebrate diversity and inclusion within the community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical Media Literacy for the 21st Century

According to the National Association for Media Literacy Education (2010), “Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create and act using all forms of communication...[it] empowers people to be critical thinkers and makers, effective communicators and active citizens.” While the traditional focus on media education has been the critical examination of media through the identification of media creators, intent, aesthetics, etc., contemporary media literacy educators have expanded this focus to account for the rapidly changing nature of the digital media landscape through digital media literacy and critical media literacy initiatives (Buckingham, 2003; Jenkins, 2006). Digital media literacy expands upon this focus to include an emphasis on the skills needed to navigate the 21st century digital media landscapes. Paul Mihailidis and Benjamin Thevenin argue that civic media literacy expands this scope further through the focus to prepare community members “for democratic participation by helping them analyze mediated representations of their communities, as well as address issues within their communities” (2013, p. 1615).

Though studies targeting the relationship between digital media literacy and civic engagement are few at this time, preliminary findings have indicated that digital media literacy activities significantly increase online political engagement for both high school and college students, proving to be a more influential factor than family discussions of politics, strengths of personal ideologies and general political interest (Kahne, Lee, & Feezell, 2012, p. 14). Joseph Kahne, Nam-Jin Lee and Jessica Feezell (2012) further posit that the level of digital media literacy may increase the likelihood of civic engagement among young people and therefore such initiatives should continue to grow in quantity and quality. Ellen Middaugh and Joseph Kahne (2013) also argue that through the production and manipulation of media, coupled with the understanding that there is an audience available, students can begin to develop their own voices and unique

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perspectives; however, further research is needed into the connection between production of media and self-actualization of youth.

Civic Education and Participatory Politics

Scholars have critiqued the shortcomings and failures of traditional civic education in the classroom, pointing towards a notable decline in the quantity and quality of civic curriculum over the past four decades (Putnam, 2000; Walling, 2007). However, recent scholars, educators and practitioners have focused efforts on reinforcing the importance of civics in K-12 and higher education as well as addressing the gaps that exist regarding who has access to this education and who does not (Kahne, Hodgin, & Eidman-Aadahl, 2016). As democracy itself evolves, researchers in the field are calling for a wider definition of civic engagement to include not only traditional electoral activities, but also activism, civic activities and “lifestyle politics,” which favor self-expression and self-actualization (Kahne et al., 2012; Kahne, Middaugh, & Allen, 2014). Scholars argue that the relationship between an issue and one’s individual identity may play a key role in the likelihood of civic engagement, and Christina Spurgeon, Liz Ferrier, Lisa Gunders and Phil Graham’s (2012) findings indicate that youth and adults alike are more engaged by “localized, identity-based forms of civic culture and participation” (p. 917). Qualitative studies have supported the theory that participatory politics make up the bulk of youth political engagement, linking participatory online culture to increased political participation in youth across all racial groups (Kahne et al., 2014). Contributing factors to this participation include opportunities for investigation, dialogue and feedback, circulation, production, and mobilization. Furthermore, evidence suggests that involvement in some form of participatory politics increases the likelihood of voting (Cohen, Kahne, Bowyer, Middaugh, & Rogowski, 2012).

Critically-Engaged Civic Learning

Phillip Motley and Amanda Sturgill (2014) define service-learning as “a specific domain of experiential learning that strives to encourage learning about course content as well as about civic responsibility, in the context of meeting community needs” (p. 169). Research on service-learning courses involving media literacy indicate that it can help students recognize the gap that exists between the media’s portrayal of marginalized populations and their realities (Motley & Sturgill, 2014). While the 21st century has seen a rise in service-learning, criticisms of this approach have also increased. According to Tanya Kajner, Donna Chovanec, Misty Underwood and Ayesha Mian (2013), traditional service-learning stems too often from a charitable orientation, “fails to explore and address the root causes of injustice...and ignores critical issues such as the presumption of neutrality, privileging of ‘whiteness,’ and imbalance of power relations that support social inequalities” (p. 36). Middaugh and Kahne (2013) have also identified the potential for a hierarchy between teachers/adults and students/youth as a possible obstacle in traditional service-learning and suggest that adults can help level the playing field by entering a realm where the student can leverage their expertise.

In light of these criticisms, we use a new approach to service-learning, entitled *critically-engaged civic learning* (author citation, 2018). This approach expands upon scholarship and criticisms to traditional service-learning by focusing on six guiding

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principles: social justice, power dynamics, community, civic learning objectives, reflexivity, and sustainability. While building from critical service-learning (Mitchell, 2008) and community-based frameworks (Post, Ward, Longo, & Saltmarsh, 2016; Stoecker, 2016), this approach goes further to emphasize the importance of holistic and sustainable approaches that reinforce equitable partnerships between faculty, students, community partners, and community constituents. Identified outcomes of this framework have been seen in six overarching areas: social change (incremental and holistic), civic engagement (civic learning and agency), workforce development and preparation, community building (knowledge-making and understanding), individual success (student and community member), and personal growth (self-awareness, self-efficacy and self-empowerment) (author citation, 2018). Research indicates that experiencing the feeling of being a part of a greater movement, something historically meaningful, is a key motivating factor for civic engagement (Cohen et al., 2012; Middaugh & Kahne, 2013). This approach offers students a variety of civic opportunities, to include “authentic learning” as a means for practicing civic engagement, establishing or enhancing relationships to community and social movements, the ability to find one’s voice and practice decision-making, and assessing issues of justice and fairness (Middaugh & Kahne, 2013).

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study builds upon existing research that looks at the role of participatory and civic media for increasing civic engagement in marginalized groups and communities and is situated in the newly emerging field of civic media (author citation, 2013, 2014; author citation, 2016). The first anthology for this field was published in spring 2016 by MIT Press and is “anchored by a vision to better understand how digital media are fundamentally advancing or threatening the capacity of [community members] across politics, activism, education, art, health, expression, games, and society writ large” (Civic Media Project, n.d.). The type of communication created can be as varied as technological apps and digital storytelling to performance art pieces and graffiti, with the central goal of bringing people together to create communicative messages and processes for the common good. While the term “common good” is deeply subjective, the idea is that the process and outcome of participation should be towards the benefit of the community.

Additionally, this study builds upon the well-established research and literature on participatory media. This study relies on Shirley White’s (2003) definition of participatory media, which views the participatory process as dependent on interaction and dialogue where communication is the foundation of any social change process. The concept of participatory media is used due to its focus on the media production *process* rather than the *product*. According to Clemencia Rodríguez (2001), video-as-product focuses on creating a product produced by an external source, whereas video-as-process focuses on the symbiotic relationship of the external and internal agents working together to create a video reflective of that community. White (2003) argues that participatory communication must be visualized as “process methodology” that enables people at the margins or grassroots level to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to generate their own messages.

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This study uses the civic media model that was created based upon these theories and scholarship (author citation, 2014) and applies it as a pedagogical tool within a college media literacy course. The model begins by delineating three interlocking phases that occur as individuals create media that consist of: 1) voice articulation, 2) communal dialogue, and 3) critical consciousness. As individuals participate in the creation of their own media they engage in each of these phases in a non-linear and rhizomatic manner, idiosyncratic to their own progression. During voice articulation, participants identify, construct, and articulate their voices as they engage in critical dialogue with the facilitator and other participants. This is based on a Freirean (1970) model of dialogue of equals, where the focus is on mutuality, supportiveness, and facilitation to ensure ideas can be shared through dialogue. Communal dialogue serves as a vehicle for participants to critically analyze their positionality, as well as the positionality of others, with regard to larger structural forces of oppression (e.g., economic and political). These discussions in turn help raise critical consciousness for participants and enable them to be open and receptive to identifying a personal sense of agency as well as the possibility of their own power to be used to create social change within their community. As a result of engagement in the civic media process, participants saw an increase in self-empowerment and a sense of agency (author citation, 2014). The next sections of this paper will describe how this communication model transformed into a pedagogical model and the inherent changes that needed to be made when the facilitator position shifted from the instructor to the college students.

METHODOLOGY

This paper examines interview data collected from students enrolled in the COM220 Media Literacy course at Salem State University (SSU). Our research questions focus on the role media production plays in civic participation, the impacts of civic media production, and how civic media education facilitates the self-empowerment of young adults.

- RQ1. How can the civic media model be implemented in a higher education classroom setting and with what effect?
- RQ2. How can the convergence of critical media literacy, civic education and experiential learning help college students apply their media literacy education in a real world context that builds their understanding of themselves as engaged community members?

Interviews were collected over the spring 2016, fall 2016, and spring 2017 semesters. A total of 23 interviews were qualitatively analyzed for this study, using a combination of grounded theory and the civic media model paradigm as a framework. The civic media model provided five main themes through which the data were analyzed: voice, dialogue, critical consciousness, self-empowerment, and agency, and an additional theme was added to address pedagogical aspects of the data. Additionally, interviews were analyzed through open coding and constant comparison to ensure consistency of coding and reliability in data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). A second close reading was conducted, consisting of axial coding, where re-analyzed categories either merged existing categories or abandoned categories as irrelevant. This analysis resulted in the

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creation of six themes and 28 sub-themes, which will be explicated further in the next section.

To implement the project, SSU students collaborated with Salem Public School (SPS) students to co-design, co-create and co-edit civic media projects that consisted of showcasing at least one element of diversity at the SPS through the creation of short multimodal narratives. Each final project presented a multimodal narrative that raised awareness of a diverse perspective within the SPS and included ways to convey the narrative across platforms/technologies. SSU students were assigned to work with at least one SPS student and sometimes required to work with one other college student due to the larger college class size. College students usually partnered with 5th graders across the school district, although some semesters they worked with 3rd, 4th, 7th, or 8th grade students. SSU and SPS students met an average of six times over the course of the semester for the project creation and two more for final project showcases. The first meeting served as an informal ice breaker for students to get to know one another and begin to build trust and rapport. During the second and third meetings, students engaged in co-design strategies like storyboarding, cognitive and context mapping, collage-making, and paper prototyping. The next two meetings gave students time to create their civic media project and the final meeting was reserved for finishing co-creation or undertaking co-editing of the final project. At the end of the semester, project teams presented their final project in a project showcase at the elementary school.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Pedagogy

This project intentionally used a transformative pedagogical approach based on the works of Paulo Freire (1970) and bell hooks (1994). This approach was first implemented in the classroom prior to the initiation of the project by deconstructing the “banking” concept of education and asserting, from the very first day of class, that no one involved in this project (professor included) knows everything and that everyone involved has something valuable to contribute in the co-construction of knowledge. By starting from this perspective, power dynamics were instantly confronted and questioned, which is a process that continued outside of the college classroom and into the community setting. This approach also strove to establish a “dialogue of equals” between all participants (again, professor included), in which no one person held a superior rank or “owned” knowledge, but instead engaged in the co-construction of knowledge through dialogue and critical consciousness raising. By taking this approach, college “students...[were] now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher” and their SPS partners and strove “for the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality” (Freire, 1970, p. 81). As a result, “Students, as they [were] increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, [felt] increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge” (Freire, 1970, p. 81). This pedagogical approach also strove to create a sense of community among participants based on a learning and re-learning of cultural codes stimulated by “a climate of openness and intellectual rigor” (hooks, 1994, p. 40). This environment required participants to engage in learning “to accept different ways of knowing, new epistemologies, in the multicultural setting” (hooks, 1994, p. 41).

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Within our analysis, our pedagogical approach was discussed by students in terms of process and strengths. During the interviews, SSU students reflected on their process for building trust and relationships with their partners. Students were candid about the foundation of shared knowledges and authority needed to build trust and rapport with their partners. For example, one student stated:

[My SSU partner and I] really listened to what [our SPS partners] were saying and were trying to guide them in the right direction instead of us both telling them what to do or one partner telling the kids what to do. It was a collective thing where we gave them guidance, but they had their own ideas and I think that a mix of all those things, and the girls being great girls to work with, that was just a really good experience.

In this sense, students were able to consciously describe a central Freirean argument: through shared knowledge and a dialogue of equals, educational facilitators can serve as catalysts for participants to gain critical consciousness and empower themselves. In order for this to occur, dialogue must take place in an open environment where interlocutors view each other as counterparts (a dialogue of equals), each with valid knowledge and experiences (Freire, 1973). During interviews, students also reflected on the process of executing the Freirean pedagogy through brainstorming sessions and the outcome of their final projects. Through co-design strategies of brainstorming, storyboarding and prototyping their projects, students engaged in opportunities to confront inherent power dynamics by questioning traditional student-teacher dynamics. Through this collaboration, students constantly confronted the questions, “who is the teacher?” and “who is the student?” By deconstructing traditional power paradigms students found spaces within traditional learning environments to push back against and reframe dominant narratives of knowledge holders and authority.

Communal Dialogue

Based on Freire’s work, this theme addresses the power of dialogue in creating social change. Data that applied to this theme addressed dialogues that occurred between SSU students and SPS students and how dialogue was used to help articulate SPS voices, raise awareness of their power and work towards social change. Freire (1970) described “authentic education” as “not carried on by ‘A’ for ‘B’ or by ‘A’ about ‘B,’ but rather by ‘A’ with ‘B,’ mediated by the world” (p.74). The dominant sub-themes pertaining to dialogue were “Rapport/Inclusivity,” addressing the relationship and ease of communication between the facilitator and community partner, and “Equals/Shared Authority,” which addressed the horizontal power structure allowing for a dialogue of equals to emerge. A smaller sub-theme, “Empathy,” tended to serve as support for “Rapport/Inclusivity,” as many students established connection with their partners based upon relatable experiences (such as living in the same community or sharing a personal understanding of the immigrant experience) or similar personality types (e.g., introvert, extrovert).

Before co-design and co-creation of the media projects could begin, SSU students needed to establish a rapport with their SPS partners in order to build trust. In order to establish this rapport, White (2003) advocates for the use of “process skills”, where the first step is for the facilitator to get to know their collaborator through strategies like seeking out areas of similarity and difference and the behaviors which may serve to

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engage or disengage the partner (White, 2003). During their initial meeting, students were encouraged to focus on getting to know their partner and did so through casual conversation to explore their interests, personalities and talents. One student reflected, "I treated [my SPS partner] like he was just another person; that's how we broke the ice: handshakes and casual conversation...I feel like if I was informal he'd be more likely to share his actual opinions. That might be easier for him." College students noted the strategy of asking open-ended questions to get to know their partners and many found they were able to establish rapport based on commonalities. For example, some SSU students discussed technology and media with their partners and found that they used the same social media apps or had similar interest in YouTube videos.

Our analysis showed that SSU students understood the importance of equality in their dialogical partnerships. Many noted a conscious effort made throughout the project to let their SPS partners take the lead, viewing themselves as a guide and consultant along the way. Here, SSU students embodied the concept that one's humility, as well as faith in their partner's capabilities, are integral to the dialogical process (Freire, 1970). We also found that differentiating between the roles of each interlocutor helped SSU students maintain a sense of shared authority. Prior to the start of the project, SSU students were instructed to regard their SPS partners as the project leaders of content, while SSU students would serve as the project leaders of technology. This differentiation helped SSU students take ownership of their roles as facilitators, using their knowledge of technology to help create a platform for the SPS students' voice. One student said:

It was very much fifty-fifty. She took a lot of control with the creative design process and I was just watching...like, "No, we can't use that specific picture. Why don't you try this one that we can have the rights to." And she was like, "Okay, I didn't know that was a thing." She learned what I taught her and I learned what she taught me.

SSU students showed respect for the thoughts, perspectives and talents of their SPS partners, and reflected on ways in which they learned from them. Such an environment of respect and esteem allows for the freedom of creation and the sharing of knowledge (White, 2003). SSU students understood that they were sharing in a co-learning experience with the SPS students, from which they were both transforming.

Critical Consciousness

Based on Marxist theories of power and Freirean theories of critical consciousness, this theme addresses the ability for SSU students to become aware of the connection between knowledge, power and positionality; their place in power and hierarchical structures; and their potential for changing those structures through the production of alternative counterhegemonic media (i.e., civic media). Within this framework, critical consciousness is an essential element in order for participants to become aware of their potential for self-empowerment and agency. For SSU students, this occurred within two frameworks: critical consciousness raising via critical media literacy and critical consciousness raising around issues of diversity and inclusion.

Critical consciousness raising first begins in the classroom through dialogue, where students and professor collaborate to confront and flatten hierarchical power

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dynamics in order to create a learning environment in which students and professor can co-create knowledge to “identify challenges facing their communities, research these issues through critical analysis of media and other sources of evidence, and cooperate on creating and circulating alternative media that raise awareness about these issues and prompt political action” (Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013, p. 1615). Within this approach, SSU students began to see themselves simultaneously as Subjects of their own learning as well as facilitators in the process of SPS students understanding themselves as Subjects of their own learning, or as Freire (1973) terms it, “the role of [human] as Subject in the world and with the world” (p. 46).

This process is then continued as civic media production occurs within a context of critical media literacy education, where critical media literacy provides students with the “pre-production” knowledge and contexts they would need to apply their civic media production skills with their SPS partners (Hobbs, Donnelly, Friesem, & Moen, 2013). In the interviews, students most described this connection as they talked about the use of critical media literacy and civic media production to create space for marginalized voices that are consistently cut out of dominant media systems. For example, one student stated:

At least in a really broad sense, I think that from the highest levels down there’s obviously a lack of diversity [in media]. Like the way that most of the board rooms for the corporations that own everything below them—it’s a lot of just straight white males in the board rooms. Certain demographics aren’t getting a true representation of how they would see themselves, the way that other straight white people would see themselves in the media. It’s like a looking glass self, where it confirms your identity when you see yourself in the media like that. So I think that diversity is really important, the lack of it is a problem, and hopefully in some way [this project] helps a little bit with sort of getting gears turning on [SPS students’] involvement in the media.

According to Douglas Kellner and Jeff Share (2007), this connection reflects a way for students who are members of dominant groups in society “to engage with the social realities that the majority of the world is experiencing” and for students who are not part of the dominant group to “receive the opportunity to use these tools to tell their stories and express their concerns” (p. 62).

Critical consciousness around issues of diversity and inclusion was the largest area we saw college students focus on in their interviews, primarily because diversity was the central theme and purpose of the collaboration. This theme addresses the ability for SSU students to become aware of the value and importance of diversity in society as well as self-reflective of one’s own privileges/oppressions and how they may serve to support or be complicit in maintaining systems of oppression. Within the course and project we took an intersectional approach to learning about diversity, based on the works of Patricia Hill Collins, Kimberle Crenshaw, and bell hooks. In this study, the idea and definition of diversity is established broadly to encompass the varied ways in which it presented itself throughout the collaboration: age, ethnicity, class, gender, and ability, among others. We saw an awareness of critical consciousness of diversity expressed by SSU students as they discussed the importance of diversity and diverse voices in media systems and throughout society, accounting for intersections of age, race, ethnicity, class, and gender.

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For example, one student said, “We do need more diversity [in media] and I think more people are aware of it. I think people are valuing it more.” Another student stated:

I feel like you have to have diversity to be able to help communities because a community is not just made up of one specific type of person. Community is itself an extension of diversity: Everyone is included. Everyone is there. I think diversity plays a big part in civic media because you can't just have one distinctive person of one type of culture help a community get better or help something be bigger or get them out of issues...you have to be diverse.

The most salient aspects of diversity that students connected with were age, race, and ethnicity. This study comes at an interesting juncture in the research on youth and media activism, where, for decades scholars and commentators have forewarned the crisis of civics: youth are apathetic, disengaged, uninformed, and distracted by technology (Putnam, 2000; Walling, 2007). However, the youth activist landscape has been changing for years and in 2018 we saw this reach a pivotal moment through the #neveragain movement. We should point out that #neveragain did not appear from thin air, but instead was slowly building as interested and engaged youth watched, learned and participated with older activists who executed their own movements like #blacklivesmatter, #MeToo, LGBTQIA+ civil rights, and the immigrant rights movement, among others. It was only a matter of time before these youth engaged on a mass scale with their own unique movement.

Against this backdrop of national youth civic engagement, SSU millennial students collaborated with the next generation of leaders in creating civic media projects that amplified youth voices and projected their stories and perspectives through the intersections of age, race, ethnicity, gender, class and ability. This collaboration was initiated to increase exposure to diverse others in a way that introduces authentic representation of experiences and contributions from marginalized individuals and communities in order for college students to recognize and value the feelings, lives and perspectives of diverse others. From this experience we saw a shift occur for SSU students as they confronted their predispositions and implicit biases against youth. The collaboration for this project stemmed from a need for community members to recognize the value and importance of youth voices; however, college students were not immune to the idea that certain voices hold more value and relevance in social space (Coudry, 2010) and as such, worked hard to identify this implicit bias and challenge it through their collaboration with public school students. We also witnessed a shift in the ability for college students to describe their own social locations, identities and experiences and understand their personal privileges/oppressions. For example, one student stated:

It was very much humbling to know and also understand privilege in a way as well. I'm very lucky to be where I am ... age, race, ethnic background, all of that, where some people aren't that lucky and they're given a bunch of challenges along their way where it's not that challenging for me. It was a very humbling thing to understand my own personal experiences with diversity.

By co-designing and co-creating the civic media projects with diverse student populations, college students were better able to understand the positionality and perspectives of their public school counterparts as they engaged in shared authority, a dialogue of equals, and the civic media co-creation process.

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For the most part, students expressed positive attitudes towards exposure to and engagement with elements of diversity. The project design and implementation relied upon hooks' (1994) assertion for "a transformative pedagogy rooted in a respect for multiculturalism", where students actively worked together to build community that "creates a sense that there is shared commitment and a common good that binds us" (p. 40). One of the greatest ways this was observed was as college students identified and expressed a heightened sense of empathy. For example, one student stated, "it was easy to talk to [my partner] because I knew how it felt to be different and how it felt to be able to tell a story much different from other people's." Another student stated:

[My SPS partner] told me a little bit about his family. His mom works, I can't remember what it was, but she did something. His dad also works, but he said that "I'm struggling, but it would be better if someone else could add to that." That kind of made me think like, we kind of came from similar backgrounds, so I related to him like, "Yeah, my mom was the only one working." I knew at times it was tough, so I could empathize with that.

The connection between diversity and empathy for college students proved to be a strong contributing factor to an increase in critical consciousness of diversity. This is explained in part by intercultural communication research that has shown that "empathic feelings for a member of a stigmatized or marginalized group can contribute to more positive attitudes toward the group as a whole (Batson et al., 1997)", which in turn can contribute to a decrease in the stereotyping and derogation of marginalized groups (Walton, 2013, p. 29). While many college students expressed empathic statements towards their SPS partners, we also noticed a tendency for others to rhetorically frame their partners' ideas or actions as "little" or "cute", which consequently reinforced their partners' marginalization. To help curb this thinking, we recommend that other pedagogical facilitators not only have explicit conversations on power dynamics and marginalization prior to and throughout the experience, but also a thorough debrief after the experience to help college students continue to confront their implicit bias and work through their own internalizations of oppressor influence.

Voice Articulation

One of the deviations we noticed between the civic media communication model and the civic media pedagogical approach was how and when voice articulation occurred in the process. As previously mentioned, in the original model, voice articulation primarily occurred at the beginning of the transformative process as participants engaged in communal dialogue. However, in the pedagogical approach, we saw this phase occur more as a result of communal dialogue and critical consciousness as SPS students shaped their voices through the civic media production process.

Voice as a theoretical concept and theme refers to the ability for people to express themselves, which could include verbal communication, nonverbal communication, mediated communication, etc. Theoretically, voice is very powerful in the self-empowerment process for helping marginalized people express their struggles and experiential knowledge and serves as a form of agency (Couldry, 2010). Within this phase, we examined how SSU and SPS students worked together for the articulation of SPS voices around issues and topics of importance to SPS students. The first way we

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saw this occur was through the facilitation process SSU students engaged in with SPS students to articulate voice. This process heavily relied upon the shared authority model to establish a more flattened power dynamic between partners. Due to this approach, students worked together collaboratively to identify articulation strategies that worked best for them. SSU students were specifically instructed to not dictate strategies and approaches to their SPS partners and as a result, SSU students implemented strategies that reinforced their shared authority model, being mindful of language use, stepping back from taking the lead on content decisions, and reinforcing their partners' ideas, whether or not they entirely agreed with their partner.

I tried to let [my SPS partner] take more of the lead just because...group projects have always been kind of a struggle for me. I usually like to work on my own and...I just kind of feel like I take the lead a little bit for whatever reason...Since the project was more about getting his voice out there, I tried to let him kind of lead more so I was kind of trying to be more reserved and give him the reins on the creation of the project.

Strategies like these ensured that horizontal power dynamics were constant and SPS partners felt their voices and perspectives were valued.

As students worked collaboratively to articulate voice, SSU students noticed how this process enabled them to better identify and understand the role of civic media for addressing the possibility and necessity of a diversity of voices to be heard in society. While college students quickly grasped the need and importance of young community member voices being circulated throughout society, they still struggled with checking their own predispositions of youth capabilities at the beginning of the collaboration—an issue that was better resolved over the course of the project as their critical consciousness around diversity increased. One reason for this can be explained by Couldry's (2010) work on *voice-denying rationality*, which he defines as the undermining of voice “in subtle ways through the organization of social relations” (p. 10). One student touched upon this stating:

Yeah, I'd say [this project helped to articulate a voice that is typically silenced in our community]. Maybe silence is probably the right word. Children's voices, I feel like, are just contained in their certain boxes. Their parents will hear them when they want to. Their teacher will hear them when they want to. They don't really get out there. It's really hard to hear actual opinions of children in mainstream society.

Co-designing and co-creating the civic media projects allowed SSU students to better understand the positionality and perspectives of their SPS counterparts as they engaged in shared authority, listened, and valued their partners' experiential knowledge and standpoint.

Self-Empowerment & Agency

This section will also address how the civic media model as a pedagogical approach deviates from its version as a communication framework. As a theoretical concept, self-empowerment looks at how individuals come to feel like they have a sense of power over forces in their life that may be oppressing them (Sadan, 2004; Sen, 1997). Typically in the communication framework, self-empowerment would look at how participants creating civic media to amplify their own voices would feel a sense of self-empowerment through

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the transformative process of media creation. However, in the pedagogical approach, we argue that facilitators (in this case, college students) will also feel a sense of self-empowerment as they begin to see their role in creating media with marginalized groups fill a gap in dominant media messages. Gita Sen (1997) describes two key aspects of empowerment: extrinsic control and intrinsic capabilities. Extrinsic control includes resources that create power such as money, technology, and people, while intrinsic capabilities focus on the self-confidence of individuals to succeed in acts of agency. We saw self-empowerment for college students coincide with these two approaches via self-empowerment through media production (extrinsic control) and an awareness of self-empowerment (intrinsic capabilities). As one student stated, "...especially with media production. It's like wow, I have the means to kind of do something that can change the world, or like one person's view. Get one person's voice heard that isn't normally heard. That I have some power to help." Through access to media production equipment provided by public institutions (university and public school district), students felt they had extrinsic control over the means of production. Because we also took a mobile media approach, using apps and technology available on most smart phones, students also felt they could take this extrinsic control with them after the course ended. "Getting a community involved in an issue is so important that I feel like I could definitely see myself using [civic media] down the road. Even if it's just a simple Tweet or something," another student remarked.

Intrinsic capabilities was seen as students expressed an awareness of self-empowerment and sense of agency. In this study, agency refers to the ability for someone to take action, specifically community or political action (Campbell, 2005; Dewey & Rogers, 1927/2012). Agency also involves speaking as well as taking a physical action, e.g., protesting. In this theme, we were specifically looking to see if college students had a shift in their own sense of agency through participation in the project. One student stated,

I feel like if we wanted, if we as students wanted to do something to promote change in our communities, I feel like we definitely would be able to do it. I definitely feel like showing us these problems and showing us what we can do about it definitely made us feel more empowered.

Agency was seen in two ways: a sense of self-actualization and self-efficacy, and the potential for agency by college students. For this study, self-actualization was defined as the realization or fulfillment of one's talents and potentialities, especially as a drive or need present in everyone, and self-efficacy was defined as one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations or to accomplish a task. This was seen through statements like, "It's hard to create change by yourself in the community but I do feel like I could now, after this" and "I do want to [create social change], but it's hard. But I could do it, yeah." SSU students expressed potential for enacting their sense of agency as they brainstormed possible scenarios they could carry out in their communities to enact change. For example, one student stated, "I think [this project] possibly sparked interest in helping out in my local schools, definitely something like that. Seeing what these kids can do, I'd love to see what kids from my neighborhood would be able to do."

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to understand how the intersection of critical media literacy, civic media production, and experiential learning help college students understand themselves as engaged community members. To answer our first research question: How can the civic media model be implemented in a higher education classroom setting and with what effect?, we saw the pedagogical version of this model transform to account for the role of the college student as facilitator. In this civic media pedagogical approach, we saw the initial phases move from being interlocked to more linear as participants engaged: 1) communal dialogue (building rapport/trust), 2) critical consciousness (digital/critical media literacy and diversity/inclusion), and 3) voice articulation. This was seen as voice articulation transitioned from a phase of civic media creation to a result of critical consciousness and communal dialogue. As college students worked with SPS students, they engaged in communal dialogue, shared authority and reciprocal power dynamics to establish the trust and rapport needed for SPS students to shape and articulate their voices and perspectives. The pedagogical model also saw the expansion of critical consciousness beyond digital and critical media literacy to include consciousness of diversity and inclusion as well. This was both a cause and effect of the experiential collaboration. As college students partnered with SPS students, they shaped and were shaped by the experience of collaborating with someone holding a different standpoint than their own. As one student stated:

The fact that we got to talk to people that live in Salem, that live in the community, and are actually dealing with these day to day things I thought was probably the most amazing part of that whole dynamic of having the community and the issue come together. We're using technology as a vehicle to voice the community's issues rather than people that just happen to be residing in the community for a short amount of time.

As a result, SSU students came to be able to explain the political implications of representation and their possible social implications as well as describe their own social locations and identities and experiences of inequity to understand their personal privileges/oppressions. Lastly, the pedagogical model shifted to account for the role of college students as media facilitators, which allowed for them to engage in transformative pedagogy influenced by bell hooks and Paulo Freire. Through this transformative approach, college students felt themselves transformed in the interaction through their own realization of self-empowerment and sense of agency. For example, one student said, "I think I could more likely create social change, mostly because now I have more of a desire to. I suppose earlier I was just like, 'Eh,'...but that's really what social change is all about—the desire for social change."

The second question we sought to answer in this study was: How can the convergence of media literacy, civic education and experiential learning help students apply their critical media literacy education in a real world context that builds their understanding of themselves as engaged community members? We found that transformative pedagogy via civic media production can provide college students with ample opportunities to engage with and reflect upon opportunities that shaped their idea of what social change is and what their role in creating it could be. In their research on democratic participation and community involvement, John Dewey and Melvin Rogers

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(1927/2012) argued that the need exists for more community involvement to incite civic discourse based on critical inquiry and critical reason. According to Dewey and Rogers (1927/2012), “activity is a condition of the creation of a community,” and activity through interaction is dependent on communication (p. 151). A sense of community can be established to encourage activity and engagement when “we” and “our” exist, and “the consequences of combined action are perceived and become an object of desire and effort” by community members (p. 151). This project asked students to engage in a community through experiential learning and communal dialogue. The civic media pedagogical approach provided students a way to not only learn course concepts by applying them in a community setting, it did so in a way that left college students engaged in their own sense of power and agency to continue creating social change. For example, one student said, “I did have to step outside of my comfort zone a little bit, but [this project] made me want to find out more about my community and in a way get more involved. We'll see how that goes.” Another student stated:

This particular [project], it definitely is [civic engagement]—it's more than just babysitting, right? I can babysit my elementary school brothers and sisters—but going into the learning setting and really doing something meaningful that makes them feel like their voices are heard and also teaching behaviors that aren't commonly taught in the community. When we're doing [these] things, it doesn't take much effort on our part to help out. So [civic engagement is] taking what we're already learning and just applying it to an area that could really benefit from it.

In conclusion, we found that when students are provided opportunities to intersect their classroom critical media literacy concepts with this civic media pedagogical approach in an external context with an identified community need, college students become aware of themselves as self-empowered civic agents, capable of creating change in the world around them.

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