

Youth voices: connections between history, enacted culture and identity in a digital divide initiative

Donna DeGennaro · Tiffany L. Brown

Received: 11 February 2008 / Accepted: 11 February 2008 / Published online: 14 March 2008
© Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2008

Abstract The design of educational experiences is often mediated by historical, institutional, and social conceptions. Although these influences can initially shape the way that educational opportunities are created and implemented, this preliminary form has the potential to reorganize. In this paper, we illustrate how history shows its presence in the ways that instructors systematically arrange a technology course for urban youth. This original approach to the course inhibits youth participation. Incrementally, however, the cultural enactments of instructors and students lead to a reorganization of activity. Through highlighting history and examining the intersection of culture, we provide insight into the ways in which adolescents of color become successfully engaged in learning technology. We focus our study by asking how co-existence and the dialectic of structure and agency play a role as youth develop an identity as a technology user. Further, this emergent learning design affords outsiders a unique view of the educational and contextual experiences of these youth. Our illustration of how history, enacted culture and identity mediate the emergent learning design stems from a grounded theory approach to analyzing video, interview and artifact data in this after-school technology course.

Keywords Technology education · Emergent culture · Identity · Urban youth · Historical context

Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the 'present'...

(Bhabha 2006, p. 1)

It is approximately 2:30 on a sunny Tuesday afternoon. A typical school day ends. About a dozen Black¹ teens walk the streets of North Philadelphia headed toward the same

¹ We use Black rather than African American because neither all of the teens—nor the residents of Philadelphia are of African descent. Rather, some are from Jamaica, Haiti and the West Indies.

destination. They leave their middle school, the Frederick Douglass School, to attend an after-school program organized by Project H.O.M.E. At Project H.O.M.E., these students engage in activities organized to enhance literacy. Today they will attend a web design course taught by teenagers from a suburban private boy's high school.

Focusing in on the faces and voices of these teens as they walk toward the after-school program; one would ostensibly and at first glance see the picture of a "normal" teenage existence. These youth walk together, dressed in school uniforms (Philadelphia Public instituted a dress code), carrying their books and sucking on lollypops. They are laughing and smiling. They tease each other. They make fun of their teachers and gossip about the events of the day. As they enter the historic church rectory that was converted into a learning center, their voices permeate the hallways. With obvious and boisterous presence they scamper up the stairs and sit together in one of the learning spaces. The teens quickly sit and pull out their snacks for the day. Often these included the chicken wings and fries or Chinese food they purchased from the local stores around the corner. Laughter and discussions continue as they eat. This is a usual weekday routine for the members of this group. The characteristics observed are what seem to be the typical expected interactions of middle school Americans.

Rewind and look not at the faces of these teens but at their surroundings as they journey from school to after school learning center. The backdrop reveals the reality in which these teens exist. Visitors might describe the neighborhood as "bombed out" and as resembling a war zone. Walking through the blocks of this all Black community, the teens pass numerous abandoned, condemned and burnt out buildings. Neglected storefronts, with steel window shades and metal bars, are drably painted and dilapidated. Other buildings have significant amounts of graffiti. Still others, though inhabited, appear to be on the verge of collapse. Garbage sits in the sidewalks and regularly blows through the roads. As these teens walk the neighborhood streets they do not wince, they are not distracted, and nothing seems to agitate them. Yet beneath these facades, they live every day with fear as well as knowledge of the dangers around them. At such a young age, members of this group will share with us the penetrating influences of drugs, crime, shootings, and even death. It becomes evident that this is a regular part of their daily existence as the youth design their webpages.



Over the course of this semester, these youth will design webpages. The stories reflected in these youths' projects not only emulate their identity, but also a living history of Philadelphia. Seen in the artifacts created in this after-school course is the fact that these Philadelphia teens live simultaneously in the past and the present in all aspects of daily life.

What they express about themselves, their neighborhoods and their hopes and fears illustrates that existence is co-existence (Nancy 2000) and that culture, though influenced by history, is dialectally related to the agency (the power to act and change one's own circumstances) of these teens and thus continuously interacting, transgressing, and trans-forming each other (Bhabha 1994).

As these youth of color walk amongst the shadows of their ancestors, they are actively constructing a present account of themselves. Through a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967), we argue that emanation of the simultaneity of past–present existences (Appiah 2006); and enacted culture² are reflected in the artifact construction and inter-actional participation in this web design course. Analysis, interviews and artifacts reveal historical footprints in present constructions as well as emergent culture within this learning environment. As each of these data points reveal the youth's developing identity as technology users, we give credence to historical events in an effort to understand these North Philadelphia teens' symbolic and cultural capital. We do so in an effort to circumvent deficit thinking such as the use of phrases “they can't” or “don't have the skills” or the implication that “they are lesser.” The emergent characteristics of history and enacted culture help illuminate a rich depiction of how these youth of color become successfully engaged in learning technology. We ask how co-existence and the dialectic of culture and agency play a role in these youth developing a technology identity and affording outsiders a unique view of these youth.

The relationships between past and present existences mediate the schema and practices of groups. These schema and practices, when enacted, are part of the structures of experiences (Sewell 1992). Here structure refers to the principles within a social system consisting not only of cultural schema and practices but also of dynamic and continuously present enacted culture (Sewell 1992). In the intersection of schema and practices of not only several individuals, but also of different groups, identity is not static; rather, it shifts according to the setting and changes over time. “Identity can be regarded as one of the outcomes of a person's participation in ongoing activity” (Roth et al. 2004, p. 50). Bringing awareness to the adaptability of structured experiences is critical to how participation is encouraged and ultimately how it affords identity development. We define identity as “individuals' perception of their characteristics, abilities, beliefs and values integrated with perceptions of future development” (Arnett 2007, p. 164), “awareness of group membership, expectations, social responsibilities, and privileges according to group membership” (Thomas and Speight 1999). We chose this definition because it recognizes the dynamic relationship between internal (schema) and external (practices) factors in shaping one's identity. Identity development is important for this group if they are to see themselves as technology users.

Emerging from this definition, we present a characterization of identity as a technology user. An identity as a technology user is one where individual perceptions are such that users see themselves as creating with and learning through technology in collaboration not only with self but with others. This process is not an achievable state, but one of continuous evolution and development. The key for that incessant progression requires that learners begin to see themselves as technology users. Gaining this association with technological tools and uses of them is similar to the notion that educational success requires a belief that performance is a potential basis of self-esteem and requires a continuous reaffirmation that learning is connected to how students see themselves (Sirin and Rogers-Sirin 2005).

² “Culture denotes the ensemble of standard practices, artifacts and tools, and agential possibilities that define a particular society or community” (Roth et al. 2007, p. 1).

In what follows, we propose that tapping these concepts of history and enacted culture is essential for these youth to identify as technology users.

In this paper, we illustrate that analyzing this case with respect to historical reference and enacted culture, both giving way to a developing technology identity, serves two purposes. The first is that understanding the simultaneity of past–present as to enlighten educators about the residuals of institutional and social structures that often inhibit Black teens’ learning and development. More specifically we would like to assist educators’ comprehension of the reasons for resistances that arise in the interstices of structures of participation. The second is that we seek to facilitate positive educational and identity outcomes in Black youth. We view this web design course as a possible route to attaining these goals. Our effort with this paper is to help educators see that these teens’ connections with technological artifacts as nodes for leveraging positive engagement rather than perceiving such characteristics as “threats” to authority or as negative attitudes. This is of particular interest to teachers and those who have a stake in improving educational conditions for youth in urban settings. To begin this journey and to consider the concepts of both history and enacted culture, we offer a brief history of North Philadelphia as a means of understanding the course of time from which these youth become known. Our purpose is not to imply that history determines the outcome of these youth. Rather, we include this section in order to contextualize the institutional and social structures surrounding the realities of these North Philadelphia teens.

Briefly outlining the history of Philadelphia

“We must understand not only how the whole evolved in certain ways but how the parts changed and fitted together to produce such net consequences”

(Harris 1989, p. 262)

In asserting that existence is co-existence, Nancy (2000) maintains that no “I” exists before “we” and no “we” without “I.” In other words, there is a continual co-construction of who we are through multiple means of influence. The co-construction of these youth in part relates to their history. In this section we provide a brief historical view of Blacks in North Philadelphia.

North Philadelphia’s history is couched within a larger national trend for Blacks. In tracing the experience of Blacks in America, slavery, emancipation, segregation, and perceived inferiority collectively underlie US society’s ideologies, socio political practices, and general assumptions about this group. Beliefs that Africans and Blacks from other world regions were genetically, morally and physically inferior to White European Americans maintained and supported the enslavement of Blacks in this country, as well as the subsequent oppression, segregation, discrimination, and racism against Black Americans throughout US history. These racist ideological beliefs were born and incorporated into the fabric of the US mainstream culture during a time when traditions of a new nation were being created. Thus, these philosophical assumptions have become an integral part of the social and economic stratification of this country as well as the beliefs and practices of many societal institutions. As a result, Black Americans have experienced a variety of challenges historically battling socioeconomic disadvantage, job discrimination, educational inequities, residential segregation, and differential access to medical care, overt and covert forms of racism, as well as unsafe neighborhoods and violence (Garcia Coll et al. 1995). Philadelphia, “The City of Brotherly Love,” is no exception.

For Black Philadelphia, one can infer the foundations of this conceptualization in the unfolding historical events that date back to 1682. It is this year that William Penn came to Philadelphia and began to oversee this territory. Despite a belief in tolerance for humans, Penn and the Quakers ironically owned and traded slaves. Slaves entered not only with the Quakers from Europe but also from Jamaica, the West Indies, Barbados and sometimes directly from Africa (Nash 1988). Though the Quakers would institute the first Emancipation Act, history had taken its toll on social life. Following the Emancipation Act, Black Philadelphians were still enslaved and those who were free continued to be subject to unequal treatment. Whether it was access to jobs, education, severity of punishments, or strict laws instituted solely for Blacks, an attitude and a perception grew over time. What is more, the perpetuations of such structures increasingly established not only mindsets but cultural habits of this group and how others saw them: Black is inferior, Black is lesser. Unconsciously, the historical, institutional, and social structures create a conceptualization within. These conceptualizations become rhetoric which ultimately mediates our engagements with others. Words reflect meaning and meaning becomes realized, however unintentionally and unconsciously.

In many ways, we are our histories: consciously and, most often, unconsciously. History shapes and is shaped by structures, representations and rituals in society (Tobin 2006). This is by no means to insinuate a deterministic path. History does not have to suppose a “predictable” course. Rather, these teens influence not only the educational outcomes, but also change their possible future through their evolving actions and interactions with others.

We commence this assertion by opening with a detailed description of the educational significance in this context. In describing the context, we share how these youth initially explain technology and its connection to their world. Next, we provide a brief overview of the course evolution illustrating enacted culture and moments where agency is inhibited and where it is facilitated or exemplified. Furthermore, we convey the relationship between structure and agency enacted in this course to illustrate cultural transformation. Finally, we share works taken from a larger pool of website constructions created by the youth. How these youth develop an identity as a technology user is present in each facet of this process. In analyzing each work, we show co-existence through the reverberation of history. Through this analysis, there are constant reminders of how quickly history can emerge when we impart control rather than pay attention to possibilities. Given the voice, the youth will not permit us to surrender to the former.

Educational significance and context

A great many people think they are thinking, when they are merely rearranging their prejudices.

William James

Project H.O.M.E.’s web design course provided these Philadelphian youth with technology access. A noteworthy reason for making technology access a priority for youth in this community relates to the proliferation and increasing popularity of computers that has permeated all sectors of our society. The directors of this community center observe that society has experienced significant shifts in the ways in which employees carry out jobs and find employment as well as how they obtain and distribute information and negotiate our social interactions. Emphasis in the center had been placed on seeing technology as a

key to economic success (Wilson et al. 2003) and a means to social inclusion (Warschauer 2002).

The perceptions of the directors likely come from the dominant “digital divide”³ discussions. This rhetoric positions Blacks as having little or no access to or knowledge of technology; therefore they are marginalized from particular career opportunities. Thus the directors of this course placed an emphasis on technology access and skills as well as a relation to work-related uses of technology. Namely, the initial goal of the web design course was to provide Black youth with technology exposure and experience that would be contextualized within the activity of researching future job aspirations. The expectation was that outside instructors would assist the learners in using technology to obtain information about a chosen career and how technology was used in that occupation. The learners would construct a webpage about their career interest as the culminating activity.

While the efforts and focus of the community center directors were well intentioned, the concept of a digital divide far exceeds a have/have not dichotomy. Simply providing these youth a situation that reflects how dominant cultures use and learn technology is not enough. Coming to learn and see a need for technology is more readily an identity concern. Specifically, learning technology needs to relate to an individual’s view of him or herself as well as their group’s relation to technological participation. Furthermore, it needs to be connected to who they are. Just as youth of color struggle with achievement in the sciences because of the difficulties they have in seeing themselves as relating to science (Olitsky 2006), they also have encountered challenges of identifying themselves as technology users. The dominant discourse within science classrooms and schools often stymie the development of science-related identities in Black youth because they fail to make connections between the purpose of learning science and how it relates to their personal interests and experiences. Similar challenges exist when outsiders attempt to expose these youth to technology.

In order for Black youth to develop identities related to science (or technology, for that matter), they must see these disciplines as an option for future careers or endeavors in life. In science, for example, learning designs must help students make clear connections between the science they learn in their classrooms and the science that occurs in their day-to-day lives as essential to developing a science based identity (Kozoll and Osborne 2006). Black youth similarly need to have access and experience with technology grounded in real world applications. Without connections to how they might use technology in their world, it is difficult for these youth to develop a technology identity. This in turn encumbers their success with technology and their openness to it. Although learning designs address a connection between skills, access, and career potential, connections to the life of urban youth is not always accentuated. The importance of this connection is essential.

Project H.O.M.E. put forth an effort to foster technology knowledge and skills in urban youth without considering cultural connections. As mentioned, the initial goal focused specifically on ensuring that the instructors taught discrete skills and imparted the reason and rationale for technology, as well as the purpose of technology in particular occupations. Every Tuesday for twelve weeks, six suburban high school boys taught these skills and dispositions in a webpage design course. The learners included 10 female and 2 male urban, middle school teens. As a part of the boys’ service learning requirement, they traveled 30 min from their private high school to teach these middle school teens. The suburban students were juniors and seniors from a predominately White, affluent,

³ Gap between those who have access to new information technologies, the information ‘haves’, and those who do not have access, the information ‘have-nots’ (Kvasny and Keil 2006).

technology-rich school in the suburbs of Philadelphia. The inner-city teens were low-income Black seventh- through ninth-graders who attended the neighborhood community center. These youth also attended Fredrick Douglass, the neighborhood middle school.

Illuminating a technology identity

As part of comprehending where these students' skills and understandings of technology were, we distributed a survey of technology use and conducted an interview to determine how these teens defined technology. We learned that many teens had computers and Internet access at home. The primary use of these computers was for school work, playing games and occasionally (when the Internet worked at home) looking up pop-culture items such as music, artists, and songs. At the community center, these teens had the opportunity to participate in other technology activities. One option allowed them to create a "Teen-zine" magazine using digital cameras and Photoshop. Another alternative was a video class where they used digital video cameras to film skits about their lives and later created iMovies. Despite using technology in many aspects of their lives, these teens did not seem to clearly and confidently define the term. Responses to the question: "When you think of technology, what comes to mind?" were as follows:

- Mia: yes When I think about technology, I think about computers and science. I'm on the right track right?
- Iona: Working with electric stuff and doin' stuff with technology. Like (pause) I don't know. Toasters, computers... Electronics
- Denea: Computers. And things that got to do with it. Like something—I don't know I can't get it out. I don't know.
- Fatia: Devices, hard devices. Hard things—you have to learn and they are hard to learn.
- Rod: When I think of technology I think of different tools like uh batteries and all that. I think of that as technology.
- Rod: And math.
- Interviewer: What about math is technology? Rod: Algebra.
- Rod: I am not sure.
- Terrell: I don't know. Lights, things like that. Refrigerators. I don't know.

The uncertainty around defining the term technology is evident across these responses. Even though the teens used technology in different aspects of the after-school program, school and home, there was still a weak group identification, or group membership, with this field. Although researchers have suggested that in the lives of youth, technology has become transparent (Lave and Wenger 1991), teens that identify themselves as technology users have a language with which to speak about the tools that they are using in their lives as well as how they are using them to achieve certain goals.

In order to effectively develop a technology identity, these youth need to be able to create with and learn through technology. Furthermore, these youth need opportunities to draw upon their developing uses as connected with their lives (Brice-Heath and McLaughlin 1994). As we have stated, developing an identity as a technology user is an ongoing process which includes learning when engaging in something connected to themselves and their culture. The question became: would striving for an outcome of identifying technology for future career goals hold the attention and help students see themselves as technology users? Even if the answer to this was yes, simply focusing on this

outcome alone would not have been sufficient. Yet focusing on this goal was the initial and unwavering purpose of the community center directors.

Enacted culture: fostering or inhibiting agency in the interstices of the structure

Histories are carried and are a continuous flux of social practices, to which each new generation contributes, while inevitably transforming it.

(Vianna and Stetsenko 2006)

Disconnected design

Though perhaps not consciously, the initial design of the course is reflective of the oppressive history of Black Philadelphians. Namely, this web design course was developed to control the students because of stereotypes about the neighborhood and this population. The mindset of controlled and organized lesson plans reflects the institutional structures that emanate not only from conventional teaching expectations that focus on controlling student learning (Tobin 2005), but also the historical perspective of educating Black youth (Bacon n.d.). Just as in many educational initiatives implemented in similar urban settings, an imposed control and externally defined outcome will prove not to resonate with these learners. Over time, the course objectives and design would change. The emergent design was a result of many interactions and resistances. In this section we provide data that support the reasons for the control and we offer an analysis of the incremental change in the course design.⁴

Control over the youth in this course stemmed primarily from the community center personnel. Specifically, the after-school director was adamant about having detailed plans for each lesson. The reason, she espoused, was because the instructors were high school juniors and seniors. She feared that if these boys were not prepared, the middle-schoolers that they were teaching would not be occupied and would become unruly. However, it was also evident that the director felt that rigid rules would be best for these youth. This was apparent in the ways that she enforced rules and disciplinary action. Forms citing regulations of the program were signed by parents, students behavior contracts, and no tolerance policies were in place. Rhetoric of controlling and disciplining low-income, Black, inner-city populations is pervasive in numerous inscription devices and in the conversations of community center personnel. Whether the director intentionally or unconsciously followed this rhetoric to set this tone in the center was not clear. Despite this, the attitude was pervasive.

As a result of the director's request, the high school boys structured the lessons in a step-by-step fashion. Several examples from the data represent this structure. Below is one early example.

Kenny: Now hit return. Ok, now hit return two more times. Type the next question
Ianna looks to the board.

Ianna: What was the next question?

Kenny: Hit enter

He stands an arms length distance from Ianna. He points to the screen but never reaching to touch it.

Ianna pauses.

Kenny comes slightly closer.

⁴ See The Journal of Curriculum Studies for the story of this change.

Kenny: Ok. See? Here. Now hit enter again and now type your job
Ianna follows his directions.

Kenny releases one hand to point on Ianna's screen again.

Kenny: OK—now hold the shift to put a colon here. Now return one time. Type your answer.

(Video, October 1 2002)

The practices employed in this setting create a structure where the instructor, Kenny, continues to take a dominant role and the learner, Ianna, reacts as a passive receiver. The instructor constrains learners to adhere to his directions. Ianna had no explicit opportunity to think through the process of completing the activity. Rather, Kenny told the learner what to do, how to do it, and when. By doing this, Kenny was managing the access to and use of the resources. This in turn limited any opportunity for learners to talk, to access personal knowledge, or to deviate from the immediate task; actions we have argued are necessary to developing an identity as a technology user. In adhering to the control of resources, the instructors also inhibit an association with the learners. This unidirectional approach stifles learners' potential ownership over the process, the chance to tinker with technology and the opportunity to connect the use with their own lives. Within this approach, the youth acquire a learned helplessness rather than develop a technology identity. Moreover, the rigid structure perpetuates a historically employed control over this group and potentially reinforces how youth see themselves, in this case as technology users.

In the early stages of the course, a scripted lesson approach continued. The following vignette exemplifies how the instructors planned these kinds of lessons together. While collectively designing this activity, the boys' belief systems begin to emerge.

Alex and Steve started constructing the lesson before Kenny and Tim entered the meeting. They continue to talk this time listing discrete skills that were to be covered in the lesson. These discrete learning skills are as follows:

- Tell them [the learners] what a webpage is
- Explain the difference between a webpage and a website
- Goals: make 1st page of website (homepage)
- Create folder
- Open Dreamweaver
- Create 1st page
- Save page—save homepage as index.htm
- Create title
- Show how to use page properties (colors, background)
- Show how to type in I-Poem
- Show how to import image
- Show how to make links to favorite sites
- Save again

I observe as they go through what both have and work collaboratively to consolidate their plans. Most of the discussion is related to how to order the list of things to be covered according to what would make chronological sense. The four instructors

decide that Steve will lead the upstairs group and Alex will lead the downstairs group.

(*Fieldnote, October 22 2002*)

Similar to how decisions have historically been made for this community or for schooling in general, these instructors created a learning activity that is teacher directed. The list that they created contains words—such as tell, explain and show—which assume the role of the teacher is active and the learner is passive. What is more, the teachers define the goals for the students. The design of the activity does not consider what the student brings to the situation: what the student knows or cares about or what might motivate them in terms of technology use. Although there are occasions for students to have a hands-on activity, the power of what gets created lies primarily in the hands of the teacher. Organizing the resources to teach in this way inhibits the youth finding or thinking about how this activity has a connection to themselves. Furthermore, it separates the youth from the collective process of the activity and instead provides a message of *I will tell you the way that technology is used*. “When we offer judgments it’s rarely because we have applied well-thought-out principles to a set of facts and deduced an answer” (Appiah 2006 p. 72). The instructors were designing the learning environment without careful consideration of the how the learner would be part of the learning process.

The well organized lesson and perceivably effective goals seemed logical to these boys. Previous classroom experience provides the confidence for them to expect that everything should go according to plan. However, when this plan was put into action, the learners did not act as the instructors expected. Instead, the youth talked to the instructor and they talked to each other.

Steve: What is a webpage?

Vicki: “Do you always wear the tie?”

Steve: “Yes we have to. Dreamweaver is...”

Vicki: (interrupting Steve) “What time do you all get out of school?”

Steve: “We get out at 2:10.”

Vicki: “How long does it take to get here?” (She rocks back and forth on her chair.)

Steve: Ok, let’s get started. Everybody up here. Does everyone here know what a webpage is? (Steve is sitting. His shoulders are slightly hunched and his eyes scan the room. He looks down on his paper)

Vicki: Yes we do! Ain’t *this* a webpage? (She dramatically points to her screen)

Hana: I don’t know. Isn’t it like when you go to the Internet... Like Yahoo! (transcript from videotape, October 22 2002)

The seemingly well-structured lesson quickly showed itself as ineffective. During a break in the continuous stream of the unfolding class, students found an opportunity to shift the momentum by interjecting jokes and fun-loving flippant responses. By doing this, learners challenged the instructors’ conceptions of teacher as knowledge holder and puppeteer of resources. The instructors unsuccessfully made an attempt to maintain the flow. Once one learner saw a weakness in the enforced structure, others joined in. As the fractures in the lesson increased, so did the swelling energy among the learners. What followed were increased playfulness, laughter and talking among the youth. This example is a demonstration of the unconscious influences of the learners taking action. For the youth, this harmless uprising against attempts to control them revealed a felt disconnect with the use of the technology and participation in the course. For the instructors, the unconscious manner of acting in accordance with the dominant teacher culture became realized. These were initial

interactions which are not uncommon, but which subsequently played a significant role in improving the conditions of the design of the learning environment.

A rigid design of the lesson and the reaction to its futility is not uncommon for teachers who are enculturated into a conventionally controlled model of teaching. This design is consistent not only with a traditional notion of teaching, but also with the tendency to see oppressed societies as dependent. Outsiders historically perceive Black youth as needing to be schooled, reformed, and disciplined. Yet, when the minute-by-minute plans did not ensure that the youth would remain occupied and eliminate “behavior” problems, the instructors responded by attempting to control the ways in which they participated. It is not unusual for teachers to exclude or try to reform students who do not exhibit White, upper-middle class traits (Lemke 1990). In fact, teachers often view the conduct of Black youth—high energy, loud and aggressive—as “attitude” or as evidence of apathy. When Black students continue to exhibit movement and rhythmic orientation toward each other, teachers also perceive this as youth being “unsystematic or showing off,” or “immature, irrational, and too emotional” (Boykin and Toms 1985, p. 43). Yet, these characteristics which present themselves in learning situations are both a reaction to the control that is begin attempted over them and a representation of these teens’ identities. Historically, in Black Philadelphia, teens act similarly with family and friends, in their communities, and on the streets. This cultural enactment is a way for them to show that they are not controlled and that they can assert themselves. This however was not apparent to these instructors; thus they were taken by surprise. The implication is a continued perception of the need to reformulate the ways that this community acts in order to be successful. In this case, adhering to this structure would solidify a disinterest in learning technology. Yet without cultivating a connection to the youths’ identities, the chances of developing a technology identity were diminished.

Behind the disconnect

There was a great deal more going on here than control for the sake of appeasing the community center director. The high school boys who taught this course may have begun teaching lessons as scripted because the community director insisted that they do so. However, these boys had more historically grounded reasons for structuring the classes in a rigid and proscribed manner. The motivation for such control emerged through several sources of data. The following quote reflects one of the rationales.

The only thing that what we [the instructors] were conscious of... was our experience in school. For us, you [the learner] sit, shut up and you [students] absorb... you don’t ask a question because you would be stupid. You are there to learn—not interact...

(Instructor interview, March 18 2003)

This quote reflects the passed down notion of teaching in our educational institutions. Whether or not it seemed like sound pedagogy, the boys felt that this was the way a classroom was supposed to be. The image of particular teacher and student roles however was not the sole reason that the boys initially adhered to the rules of community center director. Another theme that emerged was that of a cultural barrier. This example represents a discussion about such a boundary.

I am White; I live in the suburbs, and never go to the city. Consequently, I know very few Black people or people of other racial backgrounds in general. As I said before, all the kids were Black. In all honesty, I did not give that a second thought, but when

I tried talking to them, they were unresponsive. Over time, I found this unresponsiveness was due to my approach. I knew if I wanted to teach them or learn with them, I had to figure out what this wall was made of and break through it.

(Alex)

Implicit in Alex's words were the separations that we often make between *us* and *them*. Alex stated that he didn't consider the fact that the learners were Black as an issue, but at some level he must have, given that he broached the topic. Many of us try to suppress the fact that "*us/them*" discussions create an unspoken division that is often unconscious in our society across generations. The fact that Alex didn't find things to talk about illustrates how nervous he was to enter "the big bad city" and his lack of experience communicating with people of color. The "wall" he describes was an invisible distance that came from stories about this community which in turn accompanied associated stereotypes. Comments by others in the group reflect the dominant discourse which paints a deficit picture of the city itself and the residents of this community. The following is an example that represents many of these kinds of comments made by the boys.

We were prepared for 'problem children' and because North Philadelphia isn't really the greatest neighborhood in Philly we were even a bit scared (at least I was).

(Kenny)

This concise statement spoke volumes about how kids who have never been to the city conceptualized life there. The *problem kid* was in quotes because it represented a softened image of these youth. Associated with this term was the notion of discipline. Connected to the need for discipline to control "depraved" kids from "dreadful" neighborhoods was the idea that these kids will be mouthy, ornery, and perhaps even dangerous.

The next assumption that the boys made was that these kids were not smart, did not have skills, and were not interested in learning. This theme repeatedly surfaced. An example of this statement is taken from a mid-course interview.

Like the first week we were there I think that they knew a lot more about the Internet than I originally thought that they would know. But now that I am getting to know them more—giving them free time, they know a whole lot. They know how to work sound on it and like digital divide. It's working because they are learning that they can search for more than bands, but for the most part they know a lot already.

(Mike)

The instructors did not believe that these youth would have any technology skills whatsoever. On top of this, the instructors had the sense that they were there to tell the youth the purpose of technology, how it would help them, and how they should use it. This lack of confidence in the youth's abilities or visions for the use of technology was the additional purpose for the scripted lessons. Throughout the beginning of the course, the fear of the bad neighborhood and the bad kids, the distance between *them* and *us*, and the perception of the skills each contributed to the perceived need for the instructors to impart control over the youth.

Through these explanations, the boys try to provide clarification for the employed control. The reasons were based on their identification of the students as having limited technology knowledge and behavior problems. Yet, the "efforts to justify what we have done—or what we plan to do—are typically made up after the event, rationalizations of what we have decided intuitively" (Appiah 2006 p. 72). The shared reflections reveal the ongoing deficit view that the boys (and the after-school program organizers) have of the learners and of this community.

The perpetuated and employed deficit view of these learners leads to several problems. A deficit view fosters low expectations. When teachers have low expectations of students, they are less likely to perform (Massey et al. 1975). Additionally, deficit views limit understandings of the learners. This was evident in this case. The learners' interpreted resistance of the instructors' method of engagement reflects the teens' "code of the street." This code consists of a set of informal rules governing interpersonal public behavior or rules that prescribe both the proper comportment and the proper way to respond if challenged (Anderson 1999, p. 33). Realizing this and using it to the instructor's advantage is a challenge for many urban educators who fail to see this. As a final point, deficit views that result in control of students will inhibit youth's ability to draw upon their resource in order to successfully engage learners.

While these instructors, from an upper-class, predominantly White neighborhood, were attempting to enact a particular schema of teaching and learning, the teens in the community center were drawing on cultural and historical traditions in their community. The cultural practices exhibited by these teens are in fact connected to certain values and perspectives present in Black culture and those of West African traditions. More specifically, the strong presence of emotional expressiveness, affect, expressive individualism, interdependence, communalism and oral modes of communication in African American communities are believed to be grounded in ancestral African heritage (Boykin and Toms 1985). Jointly these issues resulted in cutting off cultural ways of connecting to or integrating with these youths' existing identities. Perpetually inhibiting the cultural capital that these teens bring to the learning environment would only continue to isolate them rather than afford them opportunities to gain a sense of group membership and ultimately to develop an identity as a technology user.

Confluence through awareness

Overtime, the instructors adapted their views of the learners and their participation. Based upon conversations, interactions, and emergent unconscious perceptions, many new views began to surface. For example, as a result of acting side by side with the learners, the instructors came to see them as capable and similar to them. In this excerpt, the instructors were beginning to talk about the realization that the youth did have particular technology skills.

Kenny: This whole digital divide.... I don't think that it is that big on them, in the sense that I gave them the last 15 min free because they got everything done.

Mike: I know exactly where you are going...

Kenny: They know how to search online. They know how to go on all the band websites—ya know the music that they listen to. Like a lot of them—they didn't know how to work an outline and now they do. [] how to check their spelling and now they do. [] how to copy and paste and now they do. They know... Like the first week we were there I think that they knew a lot more about the Internet than I originally thought that they would know. But now that I am getting to know them more—giving them free time, they know a whole lot.

(Fieldnote, October 15 2002)

No longer did the instructors view these learners as completely deficient with technology. Here, Kenny cited many technology skills that the learner exhibited. What was more; he began to identify the kinds of things that connected the youth to understand technology. In addition to this awareness, the instructors came to see the

potentiality of the youths' learning abilities overall. The realization of these connections was essential to considering how to help these youth build an identity as technology users.

Last week, I had not realized what was accomplished until we were in the van. Terrell typed up his neighborhood poem, by himself. He wanted to add pictures to his website so he told me he wanted pictures as if he wanted me to do it. I looked at him and politely said, "you know how." I knew I was trying to teach him how to do these tasks, I just did not know he learned what I had taught so well. The website is not complete, but his ability to use what I have taught him shows how much has been accomplished. What I hope to discover tomorrow though is whether or not he realizes how much has been accomplished.

(Alex email, 12-03-02)

There are several changes worth noting in this excerpt. Alex's weekly response expresses surprise at Terrell learning what he taught him. While this may have been a revelation for Alex, the fact was Terrell was always able to learn. Because of the change in structure and goals, Alex's role became different through the higher quality interactions between him and Terrell. Terrell began to talk about and demonstrate his interests and show his abilities. Rather than obtaining an image for Terrell, this instructor suggests that Terrell do it himself. It is important not only that Alex is developing Terrell's self-esteem in his abilities to find the picture, but also that Terrell is afforded the opportunity to choose the image that he wants to use. What Terrell gained was a connection from using technology to his lived experience.

Aside from academic realizations, the instructors came to share acute awareness about these learners as human beings. In the following passage, Kenny shared such an insight. Ms. D,

I'd rather not speak about last week and the work done because I think that's what everyone will speak about. Rather, I'd like to speak about the relationship that has formed between Vicki and I and the conversation we had this past Tuesday (November 5th).

Vicki is one of those girls who seems so hard and you just wonder how many times she's gotten in trouble over the past week let alone the year. A very good word to describe the girl is misunderstood. She is nothing but a sweet, caring, educated girl. And when I say educated I do not mean in the schooling prospective that I and the other guys had at the age of fifteen, but morally, socially, and her keen common sense. I spoke to Vicki for the greater part of the hour about race and the differences a Black person has with a White person and vice versa. I think all my life thus far I have wanted to know but I had never met anyone smart enough for the question and anyone I felt would respect my question and not take it badly. My first question with Vicki was, "what would happen if I went to your school with you for a day." Her response was a very simple, "you'd get the shit kicked outa you." I wasn't sure if I should have been surprised so I went on. I asked her what she felt about racism and she didn't even....

I'm not really sure where this is going...I think my main focus is on Vicki being an amazing girl. Sometimes I fear her parent(s) and teachers don't understand. She told me on Tuesday she wished she had one of the 'White teachers' at school because they seemed so much 'cooler.' Vicki is the epitome of everything I hope for in the

future. I know that when this session ends I will miss our conversations and just simply working with her on her website.

(Email, November 7 2002)

In this shared reflection, Kenny reveals multiple insights. For one, Kenny comes to see Vicki as something more than *other*, he identifies her as an educated inner-city youth. He saw her as knowledgeable not only in the strict sense of being schooled, but also educated in all forms of life. Kenny also saw Vicki as similar to him, someone with feelings, needs, and fears. Just as in Kenny's community, people in Vicki's community had perceptions of the suburbs and of these youth. Principally, the realization was that each was just trying to survive just like the other, even though Vicki and others in her community would have a much harder fight. What becomes important is that these interactions surpass the historical separations between these individuals. If we know how to identify with youth we can integrate these understandings into the learning designs. We often miss these attributes because of our historical view of each other.

The developing and evolving conversations and interactions were important steps to getting used to each other (Appaih 2006). The communal interchange brought about opportunities to unearth connections between learner and context. The instructors translated the realization of personal attributes and detrimental superficial boundaries into considerations of engaging the learners in using technology. They began to discuss novel ways to design the learning environment. Evidence of this is in the following vignette where the instructors are sitting on the floor of their suburban high school talking about how to rethink the focus of what they are doing with the youth.

Kenny: I agree with what Dave said about tricking them. I think that a good thing today or one of the days is to go look up your like I don't know—something—not like a singer or anything, but maybe look up your favorite animal and see if they know.

Rich: They do know that.

Kenny: I know but just see—guide them along as much as you can... I think that they realize that the internet is more... but they don't have a reason to go forward with that.

Rich: That's what I'm saying. They look at music and they do that. We don't have to teach them... When they are getting their pictures and their links—that is what they are doing. It's being learned as they do it.

D: So, are you saying that they have a lot of these skills or they will learn them as they are doing something that motivates them?

Rich: Exactly. Like the one of Tim's kids was looking up old Jordans and fake Jordans... He was looking for something that was rare or hard to get. It would be the same difference if looking for something like a job. That's all this is.

D: So are you saying that it is more personally meaningful for him to do that?

Rich: Yes. I don't sit at home and look for things about my future job.

(Fieldnote, November 5 2002)

When we begin to see the patterns of our actions, the way that we are thinking, and the reasons for what we do, we can begin to see ourselves and those around us differently. With a heightened awareness of themselves and of the learners, the instructors started to articulate that what they are doing is not conducive to the students' development of technology use. Drawing on their experiences with the learners, they expressed new ways of thinking about structuring learning as well as why this should change. The instructors

saw that these learners' ideas, actions, and ways of being needed to shine through, to be recognized as valid to afford opportunities so that identities as technology users could grow and transform. What materialized was an agreement that better understanding the learners was essential to effective engagement.

Following this meeting, the youth and the instructors sat together to collectively determine a new direction. The consensus was that the websites would no longer focus primarily on jobs and how technology was used in potential careers. Instead, the constructed websites would comprise of four major components: About Me, My Neighborhood, My Job and Favorite Links. Including the youth in the determination of outcomes opened a window to leverage the cultural capital of these youth. This new vision and new goal was a celebration of and an incorporation of others' differences to create a community (Appiah 2006). Furthermore, the youth became part of a community that allowed them to exhibit skills, knowledge and language related to technology (Wenger 2000). In one-on-one situation, they were working in small collaborative groups. Within the groups, the learners and instructors created interstitial forms of culture to allow for successful interactions and transactions. Hence, they learned to work together and created social bonds that transcended race and class. The bonds increased youth contribution in goals and created artifacts, which are central to fostering identities as technology users.

The following two sections are artifact analyses of selections from the teens' final websites. The content of the website gives a tremendous amount of insight. We chose to analyze the "About Me" and "My Neighborhood" artifacts. The rationale for choosing these is because they assist in illustrating youth identity as co-existence and as culture and agency dialectically shaping their technology identities. What is more, we feel that these artifacts are a result of agency shaping the culture of activity within this setting. In these artifacts, we acquire a view into how these teens feel about themselves and their surroundings. In creating these artifacts, the teens are not just writing about "the hood"; they are not just using the pop media images as glitz; they are expressing their living history that represents who they are. What they felt important enough to include on the sites is central to how they define themselves. This was the connection and the entry point into seeing themselves as technology users.

A representation of self

Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have the exact measure of the injustice and wrong which will be imposed on them.

Frederick Douglass

The selected two webpages are representative of how these students chose to characterize themselves. Each student wrote a poem within the same format. Evident in these poems is the deep, perpetual, lived experiences of the oppressive institutional and social structures in which Black Philadelphians have lived since the inception of the city. This oppression is explicit in the choice of words in these poems, words reminiscent of years gone by. The words in the poems also reflect the possibilities for agency they envision.

Being Equal

<u>About Me</u>	
I want = To be equal	I want = To be equal
I see = you looking like i'm not equal	I see = you looking like i'm not equal
I feel = you fee i'm not equal	I feel = you fee i'm not equal
I touch = your head and i feel what you	I touch = your head and i feel what you
think that i'm not equal	think that i'm not equal
I taste = sucess that i'm equal	I taste = sucess that i'm equal
I want = To be equal	I want = To be equal
I fear =that you know i'm not equal	I fear =that you know i'm not equal
I Hope = I'll be equal	I Hope = I'll be equal
I love = To be equal when the times come	I love = To be equal when the times come
I cry = because i'm not equal	I cry = because i'm not equal
I want = to be equal	I want = to be equal
I hear = That i'm not equal	I hear = That i'm not equal
I say = i am equal	I say = i am equal
I want = to be equal	I want = to be equal

For Haddy to write at such a young age about the fears and realities of inequality is difficult to comprehend for many of us. At age 13, Haddy shares in great detail the situation into which she has been born. Although never outside of her neighborhood, she understands the stratification around her and feels the judgment of those that look in upon her. Her choice of words makes this exceptionally evident. For example, she purposefully chooses to say “I fear = you know I’m not equal” rather than “I fear = you *think* I’m not equal. This suggests Haddy’s awareness of how others see her as not being equal. An interpretation of this is the self-identification of “place” within the strata. Along with this espoused position, however, comes the desire (I want to be equal), the optimism (I hope I’ll be equal) and the vision (I love to be equal when the times come) of having the same opportunities as she knows are not easily within her reach. Haddy’s words are spoken in the 21st century, but we will come to see that this poem could easily have been written by her ancestors in the 17th century. The struggle is familiar and is one into which she was born. While in the beginning of the course Haddy acted as a passive student, her actions later provided a new experience of, while working with others, being able to participate in the course by connecting her voice and her personal experience.

The initial instructor–student relationship represented a power differential, an inequality that Haddy expresses here. Yet because of the change in structures in the learning environment, Haddy was able to draw upon her cultural capital to write this poem and create the webpage in they way she envisioned. The technology became a mechanism or a vehicle through which she can express her views. This became an opportunity to see herself in the artifacts she creates; that is to represent her feelings and illustrate the way that she perceives herself in relation to others. The occasion sets a foundation to allow her to see herself as a technology user. The interactions in this activity nourish her authority to make personal contributions such as expressing her oppression. Throughout the activity, Haddy recognized her ability to decide what gets created and knows that others potentially can see and hear her voice.

The American Dream

<p style="text-align: center;">About Me</p> <p>I want huband,kids,car,nice house I see home with grassland in the front I feel happy,satified,with life I touch the hearts of my children I taste accomplishment and satified with it I fear of dying in a tragic way I hope for a good life like,I want I love rashan I cry if this dosen,t turn out the way I want it to I hear daeth knocking at my door steps Iwonder if I,ll accomplishments everythings I want I pretend I am not scae of life when I am I dream of a great grown up life I want people in my life because its my life</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">THE MOMENT OF MY LIFE by Jovon</p> 
--	--

In this poem, Jonna describes the vision of attaining an American dream. The picture of that dream is descriptive, vivid, and traditional: the husband, children, cars, and house with land alongside a happy and successful life. These are all attainments that have not easily been accomplished for her community members or her Philadelphian ancestors. She senses it, lives it, and knows that this dream may not be realized. The words in the text represent this awareness: *fear of tragically dying*, *hearing death at the door*, *pretending she is not scared*. Jonna's writings imply that the events surrounding her in the street, more than anything, inhibit her success of this dream. Despite all of this, Jonna continues to pursue her future. "I want to be a lawyer, I *know* I will be a lawyer" is her response during face-to-face interviews. Jonna experiences what it will take to go beyond her current circumstances in order to achieve this goal. If the designs of learning environments for these youth reflect a sense of control, the visibility of possibilities may continue to be hidden. Furthermore, youth are explicitly and implicitly told that they have no future. Lessons done to them by *the other* rather than with them or with their culture in mind contain a message. Outsiders need to tell this population how to prepare for the future; a future that we recognize instead of one we help them build for themselves. Through being open to and a part of the conversation related to what is happening "to her" in this course, she takes on a new role of "speaking" to her instructors through her created artifact. By doing so she is questioning possibilities, understanding and potentially changing the expected historical outcome that others have set for her.

In allowing students to learn the technology through the building of artifacts, (which reflect their voices and their cultural understandings) these youth are addressing two purposes. They are concurrently building a technology identity while simultaneously revealing the co-existence of self through historical lenses. These two selected poems are representative of an identity formation reminiscent of historical, institutional, and social structures. In Haddy's example, there is a clear conceptualization that she and her community are not equal. For Jonna, the fear of actually achieving her visualized future as a "good grown up life" is more prominent. Though the history of this country (and "the city of brotherly love" for that matter) is built on tolerance and meritocracy as a basic right, the Blacks of Philadelphia do not always reap the benefits of such a system. Instead many factors (including deindustrialization, zoning, economic competition, and underlying racial inequality and tension in Philadelphia) set up a confusing and conflicting reality that Black youth have to negotiate. In writing about the negotiation of these barriers to access the American dream, Jonna shows a clear

understanding of the real obstacles that confront urban Black youth. Where do these identities originate and why are they important to constructing an identity as a technology user?

Identities are the intertwining of influences that penetrate across boundaries of time, school, neighborhood, families and any given experience (Elmesky 2003). The way in which Haddy and Jonna express inequality and the attainment of the American dream is rooted in experiences of Black Philadelphians. The institutional and social structures in the American society denied Blacks access to school, economy and social life.

When the Quakers started schools in the 1600s, they did not educate Blacks, however, they did open a school for Blacks in 1774 (Nash 1988). Other initiatives followed. The Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS) established a number of schools specifically to educate Blacks. Historical documents reveal the perception toward this group and the need for their education. Statements read: “Instruct them mentally and morally and place them as apprentices in some useful occupation with persons interested in their welfare” (Bacon 1856, p. 7) and “gratified to see how steadily they advance in knowledge and refinement” (Bacon 1856, p. 3). Obvious in these quotes is the inferiority of this group and of external decisions related to what Black Philadelphians lack. These statements imply a need to alter the present state of Black knowledge and ways of being.

Additional quotes from these documents illustrate that their cultural differences and abilities to learn were not recognized from the onset. Education, it was believed, would serve in “vindicating the character and rights of this oppressed people more effectually to repel the slanders of their enemies” (Bacon 1856, p. 3) and “to correct the erroneous impressions of some of their friends, respecting their readiness and capacity to acquire learning” (Bacon 1856, p. 2). If they were educated, educate them, then others will see that they were not evil and were not to be feared.

These perceptions echo in modern rhetoric. “Business, government, and media elites increasingly saw Philadelphia’s poor city schools as undermining the economy and quality of life. Middle class parents did not move into the city because of the schools. Employers complained about the poor skills of graduates, not to mention the drop outs” (Maranto 2005, p. 156). Although attempts have been made to provide education for Blacks in Philadelphia, the schools remain unsuccessful. Black Philadelphians undoubtedly saw, and perhaps continue to see, themselves as increasingly external to the conventional society.

Without an education and because of undue prejudice, people of color were often locked out of economical opportunities in the city. In the early years of Philadelphia, Blacks were not allowed to apply for mainstream jobs. As a result, they had no choice but to resort to menial tasks. Some assignments were too unbelievable and unfathomable. For example, many political figures hired Blacks to threaten or harm their competition. Desperate for the money because of no other options, they would take the jobs. There were implications of this inequality. A culture of violence as a way of life was becoming acceptable for some Blacks and fear of this race escalated.

Social structures were just as inhibiting. Blacks were told who they could marry, how far and when they could travel, and what establishments (few as they were) would accept them (Harper 2003). Not having the money to access or leverage a voice and a position, they were unable to enter many social circles. It was one thing, Martin Luther King Jr. told his colleagues, for Blacks to win the right to sit at a lunch counter. It was another thing for Black and other poor people to get the money to buy a lunch.

The exclusion of Blacks from schools, economy and socialization with particular strata becomes one that influences the way in which these teens see themselves in the world. The perception of self through denied and lived experiences over many years permeates

through these poems. All these pieces contributing to the identity as a Black Philadelphian: *You are not equal* and *Good luck to you in attaining the American Dream*.

A representation of neighborhood

Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe.

Frederick Douglass, Speech, April 1886

Analyses of the following three artifacts and associated excerpts taken from the websites produced by the youth provide valuable insights into how the teens see themselves with respect to their immediate environments. Inherent within these narratives detailing their present neighborhood conditions are connections to Philadelphia's historical timelines. How these teens—and Black adolescents more generally—see themselves and their neighborhood directly associated with their perceptions of future expectations and potential achievement (Mello and Swanson 2007). In essence then there is a noteworthy bridge between neighborhood and identity.

Lived Confusion

People doing drugs
 People feeling sad
 People wondering why
 People moving out
 Kids staying out way pass midnight
 horns going bep-bep+
 As the traffic goes bye
 smelling like old feet
 as the people come
 People not knowing whats going on
 People haveing babys while there still babys
 People Fighting
 People getting scared
 People not understanding
 How I feel
 Making me think that i'm
 Not real
 Sometimes ,but at the end its a nightmare



In describing her neighborhood, Haddy projects a sense of a lived confusion. At three different points in the poem Haddy makes reference to *people wondering why*, *not knowing what is going on*, and *not understanding*. This city is alleged to be rooted in the concept of tolerance, humanity, and freedom for all. This is not true for Haddy's current community and neighborhood. It seems counter-intuitive that a neighborhood can exist in such oppressed conditions but is couched within a city that is built on principles supportive of "equity." Living in such a situation, the people of this neighborhood experience fear and sadness in the presence of high levels of violence. Her words caused us to consider that perhaps Haddy experiences her neighborhood as inhumane in ways that make her question the value of her existence and her humanness.

What becomes visible in what Haddy describes is an integral part of the context in which she learns. Although what she explains occurs outside the school walls, these

instances permeate through the walls of participation just as the history continuously emerges. Reflections like the one that Haddy shares are critically important for instructors to better understand these urban based learners. What gets highlighted here becomes part of what mediates student learning. When teachers acknowledge that context matters, they are less likely to view home lives and neighborhoods through deficit lenses. Information like this should not cause teachers to pamper or feel sorry for these students. Instead, these kinds of understandings are stepping stones to the creation of productive learning environments. We know that “[g]ood teachers know their students. For to prepare an appropriate curriculum they have to address their emotional, motivational and cognitive needs. Who are our students? How can we find out about them and what their needs are? How do students understand themselves today as compared to yesterday and tomorrow?” (Roth et al. 2004, p. 143). Reaching beyond the internal expectations of our culture helps us to realize the issues to scaffold better learning experiences for these youth.

Between Two Worlds

<p>My Neighborhood</p> <p>People sale drugs People do drugs People kill people People have baby's at young ages The schools don't teach you anything My street is boring</p> <p>But I use to live in Bridgeton, N.J.</p> <p>The people are nice People treat people with the same respect The school teach you alot You don't hear no gun shots</p>	
---	---

This poem demonstrates the distinctions between the characteristics of a desirable neighborhood and those of an undesirable neighborhood. The latter is the one in which she now lives. What stands out in these words is the indication that in a good neighborhood there is respect and, ultimately, an ability to learn and acquire knowledge. Vicki seems to understand what those who study urban learning point out. For example, in urban settings respect is central to “participants working together to meet their goals” (Tobin 2007). The proposed benefits of mutual respect is that it is symbiotically connected to identity development, learning potential, and thus to ongoing educational progress. This relationship leads to resonance in participation. Rather than attempting to continue on the path that the instructors saw for the students, the boys gained respect for the desires and interest of the learners. Resonance or synchronicity of participation was realized when control was eventually released. As the instructors began to respect the ideas, voices, and skills of the youth, the dynamic changed the energy of the classroom. The dynamic in the room moved from each seeing the other as “disruptive, defiant, and disturbing” to collectively acting in constructive, cooperative, and amenable ways. Instructors and students worked together toward a coherent participation and collaborative production. This shift in turn opened the opportunity for these learners to see themselves as creators with technology.

*Let Me Choose***My Neighborhood Poem**

This neighborhood is one neighborhood you don't desire at night. All you hear is gun shot fires. People on the corner selling drugs and little kids running down the street thinking they're thugs, people selling drugs rollin dice betting dubs. But they already know they're really bugs. People are crying families are dicing every day. Person that got killed just going to the sky and going to god. These days have changed they use to have gangs punching each other in the face with rings. I 'm just saying let me choose old people on the porch singing I got the blues. Now, thats the end of my neighbor hood poem.

Terrell portrays his neighborhood by highlighting themes of violence, death and despair. He focuses on guns, drugs, gambling, murders, and the sadness emerging in the midst of everyday experience. The statement "I'm just saying just let me choose" points to a desire to be heard, an aspiration to do something about these circumstances and a yearning to exercise one's agency.

Each of the youth's poems present vivid depictions of the neighborhoods in which they live. The themes of violence and fear that reverberate throughout these poems echo a dark history of Philadelphia. Ethnic and racial tensions have characterized much of the violence in this city's history, and many of these acts involved the Black community (Frey 1981). During the 1830s the Black community and antislavery activists were faced with several incidents of hostility that included: the invasions of homes, looting of businesses, and the burning of their churches (Wilson and Coval n.d.).

In 1964 the infamous Philadelphia riots were incited on Columbia Street, which occurred one block from the community center where this after-school program was housed. Once a pristine, thriving, integrated neighborhood now continues to deteriorate. The riots of 1964 resulted in the destruction of 225 store fronts and an immediate "White flight." Business activity declined after the riots as many store owners did not rebuild their damaged stores after the riots (Wikipedia, accessed September 17, 2007). The community would never physically or economically recover.



Despite the downturn of this section of Philadelphia, Blacks continued to move here. This was primarily because the neighborhood was cheap enough. Blacks did not experience the economic successes that other Philadelphians would enjoy. In particular, Blacks did not have access to jobs; thus their ability to gain capital to buy into better neighborhoods or build up their own was restricted.

The cycle continues in present day Philadelphia and these teens recognize it. The history of racial segregation in Philadelphia helps to contextualize the depth of these poems. Blacks, in comparison to every other ethnic group, have historically experienced a steady increase in the level of segregation between them and Whites. All other racial denominations seemed to integrate more steadily. White slaves, Puerto Ricans and Hispanics find ways to find “status attainment characteristics” (Goldstein and Clark 1985, p. 391) which closed the gaps on the ability to integrate more fluidly. These populations “were not trapped in the barrio in the same way that Blacks were trapped in the ghetto” (Massey and Mullan 1984, p. 870). As a result, the rising social status did not allow Blacks in Philadelphia to assimilate spatially in the ways that it allowed other ethnic and racial groups (Massey and Mullan 1984). Therefore Blacks became disproportionately isolated in declining inner city areas (Goldstein and Clark 1985). Overall, the pattern of residential segregation between Blacks and Whites in Philadelphia follows a unique pattern; the segregation patterns do not follow the assumptions of structural theory of stratification, which proposes that neighborhood segregation is directly linked with status attainment characteristics (Goldstein and Clark 1985). This has important implications for the ways in which Blacks view their pathways of upward mobility. The weak connection between status attainment and neighborhood segregation must send a very strong message to Blacks in these communities: *It doesn't matter how hard you work, you will always be trapped in the ghetto.*

The unfolding events of this course began to dissolve the simplistic notion that working hard allows people to rise out of adverse social circumstances. Instead we see that recognition of how we perceive others and how open we are to their part in the development of goals leads to more opportunities for youth agency to materialize. In this case, the learners become part of the conversation and, subsequently, part of the outcomes. Here youth voices are valued and *we* are privileged to hear them as they echo through the creation of these technology artifacts. We hear the teens' depiction of their neighborhoods. We are reminded of the highlights of a haunting history of inequality and oppression of Blacks. What we hear is an expression of themselves, their fears, and their struggles. The direction that this course took gave these students the right to be heard, a right that had been silenced by many educators and by a history of disregard. What we seem to hear these youth say is: *If someone can hear me and see the world as I see it, if someone can give me the chance to be understood, perhaps, I too have a chance to be part of shaping this world.*

Despite this history, there is hope. There are countless occasions to recognize our own constraining methods so that we can reorganize our work to better engage youth. There is always a way to be open to others so to gain insight into how to motivate the movement beyond what is “set.” In this case, the instructors found a way to draw on what these learners know to help them begin building a technology user identity. Here, simply inviting learners into the conversation reframed and reconstructed the possibilities. The resultant youth skills, knowledge, and language to use technology are straddled by the present and by the evolution of becoming. In other words, the teens are expressing an identity reflective of historical events through the created artifacts. At the same time, they are beginning to see themselves as users of and creators with technology. Voices are heard, stories are revealed, and the instructors are seeing them in a new light. Once perceived as having

limited ability, instructors found commonalities—hopes, dreams, struggles, basic needs—that create a familiar connection between learners and instructors. The overlapping cultures, the realizations of history and the moments of agentic potential in the fractures of the evolving structure each contributed to a course transformed from control of one path, to an opportunity for multiple possibilities.

Urban youth and the development of a technology identity

The cosmopolitan knows that people are different, but also knows that we have much to learn from our differences... Because there are so many human possibilities worth exploring, we neither expect nor desire that every person or every society should converge on a single mode of life. Whatever our obligations are to others (or theirs to us) they often have the right to go their own way,

Appaih interview with Quiñones 2005



Many urban educational initiatives are created by outsiders who have cultural histories that are quite different from these youth. As a result, these individuals and groups have a tendency to structure experiences in ways that do not resonate with this community. This course began with a rigid and unwavering organization and purpose. Specifically, the course was designed to bring knowledge, impart skills, and enlighten the youth's "appropriate uses of technology" connected to conventional careers. The design assumed that the learners had no prior technology expertise nor did they understand why and how it "should" be used. As a result, the boys created lessons that were ultimately disconnected from the youths' experience and exposure to technology as well as their histories. It became increasingly apparent that there was a severe disconnect between how the course was shaped and the reality of how the youth would successfully participate in this course.

Over time, the youth's conflicting responses to how the boys attempted to instruct them gave way to incremental changes in the structure of the course. The faults in the structure left spaces for youth to both reveal their technological abilities and begin to develop a technology identity. Although the actions of the youth initially reinforced the boys' idea that Black youth would exhibit behavior problems, this perception slowly waned. Youth

actions became visible indicators that the boys' approach was not only ineffective but also reflected of a historical repressive structure for this community. When the youth began to *play* with technology (TeenChat) when they were not supposed to or when given free time on the computer as a reward, the boys began to rethink the deficit lenses they had for these youth. Restructuring a deficit view also materialized through conversations. During these times, the boys began to develop a deeper understanding of the youth and about what might engage them. The simultaneity of past (historical views) and present (actions and interactions) conflicted to shift and reorganize the structure. The identifiers of this shift were not only of the boys (related to the youth) but also the youth (related to the boys). These changes emerged through continuous transformation and transition based on interactions between the boys and the youth.

In the end, interactions, transitions, and transformations were realized for both groups (Bhabha 2006). The instructors altered their identities as "teacher" to those of facilitator and friend. They also began to see this group and themselves differently than when they began the course. This was a result of where overlapping cultures found a relative convergence of ideas to afford students the opportunity to be part of cultural production and development of the learning environment. The youth gained a more legitimate role in mediating how their identity "fit" in a technology field and how they could potentially enter into a technology user arena. With value placed on the urban youths' cultural histories and identities, the teens found points of entry where they could begin building an identity as technology users. What materialized were extremely powerful representations (the webpages) that reflected their life experiences. What was seen in the artifacts and actions during this after-school program is how histories of the participants shape who they are and how they act. We are left with an exposure of how to foster effective engagement.

At the close of the course, the youth felt that they had entered a world of technology users. In exit interviews and journal entries they expressed confidence and gave reference to how the interactions with their teachers helped to shape this identity. The following are exiting journal entries and interviews:

Rich is a good teacher. He's helpful, nice, patient like the time when I almost shut down my computer without saving my stuff and we been doing all day. Hes here to help me do things I never thought that I could do things on computer, I never been good at computers until I meet Rich. I am telling you if had to take a test on all the stuff he took me I would definitely get a A+

(Jonna)

The above passage illustrates how the connection between teacher and student materialized over time. The interactions between instructor and youth altered the youths' visions of themselves and what they bring to the community. Through these connections, the learners increasingly saw themselves in a place where they could become not only a voice in the process but creators of their own stories through digital means. Inviting, recognizing and being open to engaging youth in the conversation gives way to emergent structures that embrace culture and ultimately afford successful participation.

Other community based programs that work with urban youth can learn from this experience and from the unfolding process outlined here. In this incident, the structural shift included various insights to the success of being able to assist these youth in beginning to develop identities as technology users. Of emerging importance in this case study is the idea of transforming the perceived obstacles and inequalities within urban communities often colored by historical social and institutional pasts. Moreover, these youth have resources that we need to recognize. Their social and cultural capital can be

transformed into something possible and positive. The question then becomes: how do we overcome these obstacles and perceptions to leverage the capital these youth bring to the classroom? The intersection of culture brought about new forms of culture. Seeing possibilities, engaging youth in conversations, and allowing them to have voice helped these instructors make connections between history, enacted culture, and identity in order to understand these youth better and to allow themselves to be open to learning as well. The transformations of youth and instructors were equally poignant. Through interactions with others and through raising our consciousness about historical, institutional and social influences, we unlock opportunities to build new histories.

References

- Anderson, E. (1999). *Code of the streets*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Appiah, K. A. (2006). *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a world of strangers*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co.
- Arnett, J. J. (2007). *Adolescence and emerging adulthood: A cultural approach* (3rd ed). Saddle River, NJ: Pearson-Prentice Hall.
- Bacon, B. C. (1856). *Statistics of the colored people of Philadelphia*. Philadelphia.
- Bacon, M. H. (n.d.). *The Pennsylvania Abolition Society's Mission for Black Education*. Retrieved from: <http://www.hsp.org/default.aspx?id=818>
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. London: Routledge.
- Bhabha, H. K. (2006). *The location of culture*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Boykin, A. W., & Toms, F. D. (1985). Black child socialization: A conceptual framework. In H. P. McAdoo & J. L. McAdoo (Eds.), *Black children* (pp. 33–51). Newbury, CA: Sage.
- Brice-Heath, S., & McLaughlin, M. W. (1994). Learning for anything everyday. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 26(5), 471–489.
- Elmesky, R. (2003). Crossfire on the streets and into the classroom: Mesolmicro understandings of weak cultural boundaries, practices and a sense of the game in an inner-city chemistry classroom. *Cybernetics & Human Knowing*, 10, 29–50.
- Frey, C. P. (1981). The house of refuge for colored children. *The Journal of Negro History*, 66(1), 10–25.
- Garcia Coll, C. T., Meyer, E. C., & Brillion, L. (1995). Ethnic and minority parenting. In M. H. Bornstein (Ed.), *Handbook of parenting: Vol. 2 Biology and ecology of parenting* (pp. 189–209). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine De Gruyter.
- Goldstein, I., & Clark, A. (1985). Residential segregation and color stratification among Hispanics in Philadelphia: Comment on Massey and Mullan. *Journal of Sociology*, 91, 391–396.
- Harper, D. (2003). *Slaver in the North* Retrieved on September 17, 2007 from: <http://www.slavenorth.com/pennsylvania.htm>
- Harris, P. M. G. (1989). The demographic development of colonial Philadelphia in some comparative perspective. In *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* (Vol. 133, No. 2) Symposium on the Demographic History of the Philadelphia Region, 1600–1860, pp. 262–304.
- Kozoll, R. H., & Osborne, M. D. (2006). Developing a deeper involvement with science: Keith's story. *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, 1, 161–187.
- Kvasny, L., & Keil, M. (2006). The challenges of redressing the digital divide: A tale of two US cities. *Information Systems Journal*, 16(1), 23–53.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lemke, J. (1990). *Talking science: Language, learning and values*. Norwood: Ablex Publishing Company.
- Maranto, R. (2005). A tale of two cities: School privatization in Philadelphia and Chester. *American Journal of Education*, 111, 115–190.
- Massey, G. C., Scott, M. V., & Dornbush, S. M. (1975). Racism without racist: Institutional racism in urban schools. *Black Scholar*, 7(3), 10–19.
- Massey, D. S., & Mullen, B. P. (1984). Processes of Hispanic and black spatial assimilation. *American Journal of Sociology*, 89, 836–873.
- Mello, Z. R., & Swanson, D. P. (2007). Gender differences in African American adolescents' personal, educational, and occupational expectations and perceptions of neighborhood quality. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 33(2), 150–168.

- Nancy, J.-L. (2000). *Being singular plural*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Nash, G. B. (1988). *Forging freedom: The formation of Philadelphia's Black community, 1740–1820*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Olitsky, S. (2006). Structure, agency, and the development of students' identities as learners. *Cultural Studies of Science Education, 1*, 745–766.
- Roth, W.-M., Tobin, K., Elmesky, E., Carambo, C., McKnight, Y., & Beers, J. (2004). Identity as dialectic: Re/making self in urban school. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 11*, 48–69.
- Roth, W.-M., Tobin, K., & Ritchie, S. M. (2007). Time and temporality as mediators of science learning. *Science Education, 92*, 115–140.
- Sewell, W. H. (1992). A theory of structure: Duality, agency, and transformation. *American Journal of Sociology, 98*, 1–29.
- Sirin, S. R., & Rogers-Sirin, L. (2005). Components of school engagement amongst African American adolescents. *Applied Developmental Science, 9*(1), 5–13.
- Thomas, A. J., & Speight, S. L. (1999). Racial identity and racial socialization attitudes of African American parents. *Journal of Black Psychology, 25*, 152–170.
- Tobin, K. (2005). Building enacted science curricula on the capital of learners. *Science Education, 89*, 577–594.
- Tobin, K. (2006). Aligning the cultures of teaching and learning: Science in urban high schools. *Cultural Studies of Science Education, 1*, 219–252.
- Tobin, K. (2007). *Learning to teach urban youth: Post-Bourdieuian perspectives on the salience of praxis, success, and positive emotions*. Paper presented at American Research association.
- Vianna, E., & Stetsenko, A. (2006). Embracing history through transforming it: Contrasting Piagetian versus Vygotskian (Activity) theories of learning and development to expand constructivism within a dialectical view of history. *Theory Psychology, 16*(1), 81–108.
- Warschauer, M. (2002). Reconceptualizing the digital divide. *First Monday, Vol. 7, No. 7*. Retrieved July 9, 2007 at: http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue7_7/warschauer/index.html
- Wenger, (2000). Communities of practice and social learning systems. *Organization, 7*, 225–256.
- Wilson, K., & Coval, J. (n.d.) City of unbrotherly love: Violence in nineteenth-century Philadelphia. Retrieved July 9, 2007 at: <http://www.hsp.org/files/thephiladelphiariotsof1844.pdf>
- Wilson, K. R., Wallin, J. S., & Reiser, C. (2003). Social stratification and the digital divide. *Social Science Computer Review, 21*, 133–143.

Donna DeGennaro is an assistant professor at Montclair State University in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching. She earned a bachelor's degree in physics at Susquehanna University, a master's degree in educational technology from Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia, PA and a PhD in Educational Leadership from the University of Pennsylvania. Her research interests center on youth technology practices and interactions to inform innovative designs of learning environments.

Tiffany L. Brown is an assistant professor in the Family and Child Studies Department of Montclair State University. She earned a bachelor's degree in psychobiology and a master's degree in social science, both from Binghamton University in Binghamton, NY and a PhD in child and family studies from Syracuse University, located in Syracuse NY. Areas of research include African American parenting and African American adolescent functioning and development.