

# Digital Media & Learning Conference 2016, UC Irvine

## Individual Talk Abstracts

2:00pm – 3:00pm | **Activism and Civics**

Emerald Bay A

*Speakers: Jill Koyama, Kiley Larson, Ashley Lee, Diana Lee, Erica Van Steenis, Krishnan Vasudevan*

### **225 - Individual Session    Research** **Our Voices Matter: Black Activist Media Makers in Austin, Texas**

Krishnan Vasudevan | University of Texas at Austin | @kvasudevan

The untimely and tragic deaths of Trayvon Martin, Sandra Bland and Freddie Gray inspired protests and rallies along with embodied activism in the form of films, music and art. Our Voices Matter is an ethnographic film and dissertation research project that examines the lives and work of several black activist media makers in Austin, Texas. The project examines how these young artists are generating counter-knowledge about black bodies and culture often depicted negatively through popular media and distributing their work virally through social media platforms as a way to be heard. The project also examines how producing activist media can be a way for young people to learn about their histories and culture while also engaging in the political and civic process. Along with a feature length film and book length manuscript, I am developing interactive pieces with each of the study's participants as a way to better understand their motivations and processes. Our Voices Matter was born out of the Doing Innovation project led by S. Craig Watkins and sponsored by the Connected Learning Research Network and MacArthur Foundation.

### **255 - Individual Session    Compelling Models** **Building a Resource Together to Support Teaching and Learning about Race, Racism, and Participatory Activism**

Diana Lee | USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism | @MsDianaLee

As a pedagogically-oriented researcher scholar, I often grapple with how to best bridge the demands and values of academia with my desire to directly support educator practitioners and learners in their everyday teaching and learning activities. "What can I do about this in my own classroom?" teachers often ask after I present my research on participatory activism and counter-narratives against racial microaggressions, the layered, subtle, and often unintentional expressions of everyday racism experienced by people of color. Yes these creative examples of resistance and counter-storytelling are great, they say, but what tangible, teaching and learning tools can I use now and with my own students to help unpack and address these issues?

This presentation seeks to respond to these questions by exploring the pedagogical potential of a collaboratively created resource that can be utilized to support antiracist and social justice work. By Any Media Necessary (BAM) is a free, media-rich web resource created with and for educators and activists that features original media produced by activist groups and networks, curricular resources and activities, critical reflections and conversations with project partners, and more. By learning from how educators use BAM, such as a high school teacher who was inspired to create and

# Digital Media & Learning Conference 2016, UC Irvine

## Individual Talk Abstracts

share an adaptable, multi-day lesson plan about racial and regional identity, stereotypes, and citizenship, we can see how this web resource, as well as participating in developing it, can serve as a reflexive, generative process and tool that mutually benefits the work and pedagogical efforts of researchers and practitioners.

### **251 - Individual Session    Research** **Dialogue and Disagreement in the Era of Facebook and Twitter**

Ashley Lee

I examine how young digital activists navigate moral conflicts and disagreements that arise in civic life online, and explore the expressive moves and rhetorical strategies they employ to engage and persuade others with different opinions. The functioning of a healthy democracy depends on open debates around differences. When young activists run into arguments arising from moral or fundamental differences online, what strategies do they employ to navigate and negotiate differences in opinions? Further, I ask what moral and ethical considerations (if any) inform their decisions to enter, persist in, or leave disagreements. Finally, to what extent do young people adopt a disinterested stance (Gardner, 2015) when engaging in online debates?

This study draws on in-depth interviews with 40 young activists. My analysis is informed by modes of deliberative discourse. At the core of Habermas (1991)'s "public sphere" is dispassionate, rational deliberative discourse of a reasoning public. Bakhtin (1981) and Levinas (1988) further underscore dialogical ethics, which they locate in "an open and ongoing obligation to respond to the other, rather than a static march toward some philosophical end or conclusion" (Nealon, 1998).

Preliminary findings suggest that youth are well-versed in rational deliberative discourses. However, they appear to struggle when it comes to forms of relational deliberation that emphasize reciprocity and meaningful engagement with the other in situations where moral differences arise. The study points to potential gaps in educational support structures that prepare youth for addressing disagreements, which are critical to participating in a democratic dialogue.

### **109 - Individual Session    Research** **Regenerate Chicago Neighborhoods: A case study of youth and participatory politics**

Kiley Larson | New York University | kileylarson  
Erin Bradley | New York University | @NYU\_ErinB  
Richard Arum | New York University  
Cecilia Ackerman

*For many years I taught a project where I told kids, "Let's learn about the neighborhood we live in and let's redesign, or let's come up with suggestions [for improvement]." [At Journey], a young lady, when I made up the story about, 'Oh, this is because we are on a task force for the mayor and we're gonna get millions of dollars for the best one,' she got up in class and was like, 'The mayor doesn't give a fuck about us, and no one's gonna actually give us this money.' That was kind of our impetus. The original goal was just to make it so kids would want to do this because it was actually real.*

-Mr. Davisson, Lead Educator, Regenerating Chicago Neighborhoods

# Digital Media & Learning Conference 2016, UC Irvine

## Individual Talk Abstracts

This paper explores a collaborative educational effort between formal and informal educators that occurred in a Chicago-based Charter School (CSS). CSS serves students from across Chicago, the majority of whom are economically deprived. This collaboration, called Regenerate Chicago Neighborhoods (RCN), attempted to engage youth in participatory politics by encouraging students to identify problems in their neighborhoods and then to create actionable plans that resolved those issues. Student participants made use of multiple web-based tools and resources in order to research, design, and solicit community support for their unique projects. Project educators actively cultivated space for youth to experience voice as a process for identity negotiation and as something that was valued by local officials and other adults in their communities (Couldry, 2010) by creating a culminating showcase event for students to present their projects to invited community members and local officials. This project also intentionally put into action 'connected learning,' defined by Ito, et al. (2013), as the space of integration between young people's interests, peer culture, and academics. These pedagogical efforts were geared toward fostering a deeper sense of civic engagement in otherwise disinterested students by helping youth bridge in- and out-of-school experiences through both digital technology use and in-person experiences. By creating a space where students could learn to amplify their voices and immediately see that their voices were valued, educators were able to overcome some of the teens' apathy towards civic involvement. An increase in student interest was particularly evident during the final project showcase, which helped youth gain an understanding of how their work could spark a dialogue that might result in community change. Drawing from ethnographic observations of classroom activities and interviews with both educators and students, we illuminate the successes and struggles of RCN educators and students as they worked together to build basic digital skills and deepen civic engagement through project-based learning.

### **230 - Individual Session    Research**

#### **Musical Pathways: How youth explore civic engagement, critical self-awareness, and learning partnerships through music making**

Erica Van Steenis | University of Colorado, Boulder

Digital media spaces with a specific focus on music making provide new opportunities for youth to engage civically and politically. A growing number of researchers explore new digital media opportunities for young people, but there is less known about the relationship between music making and youth's civic and political engagement. I investigate the potential that music creation holds for the expansion of these pathways.

This paper draws on a recently completed ethnographic case study of a Community Based Youth Organization (CBYO) in Northern California. Through participant observations and semi-structured interviews, I explored how young people's participation in digitally mediated music production in a community youth organization facilitated their activism and critical consciousness development. Findings included a wide array of evidence for this impact. The youth performed at multiple local campaigns including an organized protest for Schools Not Suspensions. They partnered with adult youth workers to write songs that explored gentrification in their city, and the ways in they are marginalized.

The production of the music led the youth to form deeper self and social awareness on the social, civic and community levels. This presentation will highlight the musical

# Digital Media & Learning Conference 2016, UC Irvine

## Individual Talk Abstracts

creations of young people in order to make a case for the power of digital media spaces. I hope to add to a growing conversation about youth participation in music making and the opportunities it provides for young people to develop and sustain pathways into self-realized and more critically aware identities.

### **60 - Individual Session      Research** **Carving Out and Constructing E-Spaces of Civic Praxis**

Jill Koyama | University of Arizona | @Koyamawonders

A central goal of public schooling in the US is to cultivate citizens, and formal civics courses and the discourse surrounding such education centers on limited and normative interpretations of civic engagement. However, we know that youth, especially those marginalized by racism, xenophobia, misogyny, and linguisticism, challenge what is marginalized, and often devalued, in current notions of civic engagement. Increasingly they engage with forms of digital media, including social network platforms, to raise their political awareness; they utilize, create, disrupt, and distribute ideas through digital media to participate in society, politics, and government. In this presentation, I investigate issues of power, materiality, and reproduction embedded within civics education policy; reified through and practices in schools; and challenged through digital contexts. I explore the questions: In what ways do Latino high school students, in Southwestern Arizona, interpret, understand, enact, and co-construct discourses of civic engagement? What are the relationships between the required civics education and the youths' civic practices with digital media? I draw on a mixture of textual (including blog threads, tweets, Facebook sites, and digital videos) and discursive (events, acts, and practices) data collected in four high schools in a SW Arizona school district, in which 88% of the students are identified as 'Hispanic.' I demonstrate how these youth create transnational online communities to address multiple social issues, including immigration actions, indigenous water rights, and the well-being of transgender youth.