Chapter 7

Digital Narratives of Immigrant Youth: Cultivating Mobile Activism and Mobile Journalism Skills

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focused on cultivating mobile activism mobile journalism with middle and high schoolers of a town in Long Island. The youth film production effort was in response to a hate crime. An immigrant was attacked and killed by a group of young males after a suspected spree of other attacks that same night. After the murderous incident, immigrant parent and students of the local schools feared for their lives. Working towards the goals, the organizers set out to teach students how to use mobile and computer technologies for filmmaking. Using themes of human rights, they also focused on responding to hate crimes and immigration issues. This chapter offers key discoveries and lessons. The short intensive program provided academic and workforce development skills as well as how to use computer technology for digitizing personal narratives. The program also offered informal academic purposes, along with observations, opportunities, and recommendations from the findings for other K-12 digital video filmmaking endeavors.

INTRODUCTION

In 2011, a summer media workshop was implemented to cultivate mobile activism and develop mobile journalistic instincts with 1.5 generation Ecuadorian middle and high school students from Patchogue, New York. To start working towards the goals of mobile activism and mobile journalism, the organizer and her partners arranged a hands-on, project based, short term engagement. The summer workshop was set up to teach students how to leverage technology for digital narratives with the theme of human rights.

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The 2011 summer human rights media workshop was the second pilot of the effort and employed a professional videographer. The goals were to enhance 21st century academic skills, promote civic engagement, encourage intercultural dialogue and empower youth. This chapter will focus on the 2011 summer media workshop, explore the process and highlight the lessons learned as well as offer some examples from around the world and how these video projects were used to connect young students from around the world.

This chapter also focuses on the broad domains of practice, in terms of youths’ digital narratives and video production that foster a host of critical thinking, hard and soft skills, agency as well as academic enthusiasm. Invoking enthusiasm was also achieved by utilizing multimodal stimulation and active engagements. The review will also bring attention to how mobile messaging has been leveraged by formal organizations and educational institutions. This literature review has the potential to aid international students or offices who might consider leveraging the ever growing mobile messaging services to help students acculturate to a new environment. Simple information sharing with these students could aid connecting them to their home support networks or by forming new virtual and/or physical networks.

This chapter will offer key discoveries and lessons from a summer media and human rights program. The short intensive summer program provided access, use, as well as highlighting the value of computer technology for digitizing personal narratives of understanding. The program also offered informal academic purposes, along with observations, opportunities, and recommendations from the findings for other middle and high school digital video narrative and filmmaking endeavors. The program inadvertently also empowered and provided young students with new skills that they could explore for future studies, or career tracks. Whether they focus on digital autobiographies, family stories, capturing oral histories or responding to hate crimes, immigration, or protests and activism.

BACKGROUND

The summer media and human rights workshop was in response to a hate crime in 2008 when Marcelo Lucero, an Ecuadorian immigrant was attacked and killed by a group of young males who were out “beaner hopping”. A derogatory term used to describe the despicable act of group attacks on people perceived as undocumented immigrants. After the murderous incident, the Southern Poverty Law Center released “Climate of Fear”, detailing other incidents of violence against Latino immigrants in the community over the last decade. The finding of this report triggered an investigation by the Department of Justice into the Suffolk County Police Department. Immigrant students of the local high schools feared for their lives and parents and teachers concerned for the safety of their children suggested that their children never walk alone and always walk in a group, to and from school.

LIFE through My Eyes, a human rights media project was a result of the tragedy. It was initially funded by the WK Kellogg Foundation through their America Healing initiative and co-sponsored by Film and Educational Research Academy (FERA) as well as the Long Island Teachers Association (LILTA) as a summer workshop for immigrant Ecuadorian youth. Apart from educating students on human rights and how bullying violates those rights, the program goals also focused on empowering youth with 21st century academic skills, promoting civic engagement as well as encouraging intercultural dialogue. Computer and information technology is interwoven throughout students’ lives and does not run separately from their daily interactions. Be it their mobile phones, social media or other computer technology, students traverse their lives in an ever-growing computer-mediated manner, that demands learning how to use