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ABSTRACT

This qualitative, ethnographic case study investigates digital literacy practices and perceptions of students at an urban public high school in the Boston metropolitan area comprising a racially, ethnically, linguistically, and economically diverse student body, an under-studied demographic. The study compares in-school and out-of-school literacy practices and posits the role schools might play in preparing learners. The study examines digital literacy practices among student based on information gathered through focus groups, survey methods, and interviews. Three controlling questions guided the study:

1. What digital literacy practices are students in Washington High School engaging in outside of school?
2. What purposes do these youth have for engaging in these digital literacy practices? What role do these digital literacies play in youths' lives?
3. How are students asked to use digital literacies within the school setting? How do these compare to students' life world uses? With Web 2.0 conceptions of digital literacies?

KEYWORDS: digital literacy, digital literacy practices, urban high school, consumerist, Web 2.0

What does a typical day in the digital lives of Washington High School youth [all names of people and places are pseudonyms] look like? Vance wakes up and immediately checks his Facebook page, noting with interest any pictures in which he is tagged. Marcus texts surreptitiously throughout all of his classes, trying to avoid a dreaded phone confiscation from one of his teachers. Ronnie, who only has texting capabilities on his phone (texting-only plans are cheaper), joins in on one of these marathon conversations. After school, Dan takes a picture with his flip phone of himself posing by a sailboat and sends it to his mom. Unlike Vance's activities, this picture will not end up on Facebook as Dan has been burned by this medium before and is now staunchly anti-social media. Meanwhile, Kenny and his college friend/collaborator work on a website for one of their town's local businesses, a project for which they will be paid.

Much has been written about the so-called digital literacies these students' practices represent. With the advent of the Internet, the ways in which people interact with text has changed in significant ways (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008). The term "digital literacies" reflects these changes. It reflects that text no longer need be approached in a purely linear manner, with the reader beginning at "the beginning" and ending at "the end." Hyperlinks ensure that we can lead off reading in the middle of a text and navigate to somewhere new; in fact, some texts now have no clear and finite ending point. Text has come to include other aspects besides words on a page – images and sounds became integral to understanding (Brown, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; **C.** Luke, 2002; Mills, 2010). The ways and practices that people use to interact with these "new" types of texts are referred to here as "digital literacies."

Many have touted the possibilities of digital literacies, particularly with regards to their creatively-empowering potentials. Digital literacies open up possibilities for who gets seen as an expert, who is able to publish and how widely, and what gets counted as a text (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Gee, 2012). Digital literacies allow for a "participatory culture" (Jenkins, 2009), one in which contributors might find voice and agency. Additionally, being savvy with these sorts of literacies is becoming more important to success in the economic world (Leu et al., 2011). Despite these possibilities, teachers and schools have struggled to find meaningful ways of incorporating digital literacies (Hagood, Provost & Skinner, & Engelson, 2008). In thinking about how to employ digital literacies effectively in schools, it is useful that we consider both a) how specific youth are using these practices in their day-to-day lives and how this might be utilized in the classroom; and b) what practices and literacies youth might need to adopt and develop in order to find success outside of school.

Moje (2009) has suggested that new literacies research should pay particular attention to youths' practices across cultural, class, and regional groups as a means of "representing more fully the range and intensity of practices" (p. 355). Noting the digital literacy practices and perceptions of urban youth from working class backgrounds may give teachers insights on how to both build upon and expand these practices. Doing so allows us to ask what role digital literacies play across different demographics. If we fail to consider demographic difference, we operate from the false assumption that *all* students

practices align with the suburban youth most commonly studied. By considering a wide range of groups, we can avoid the historic practice of setting white middle class cultural values as the standard for achievement.

With this in mind, I conducted a case study investigation of the digital literacy practices and perceptions of students at Washington High School. This large public school is diverse in its racial, ethnic, linguistic, and social class makeup. Therefore, this work expands on the sparse literature on digital literacy practices within urban schools. In examining information gathered through focus groups, survey methods, and interviews, I use three guiding questions:

1. What digital literacy practices are students in Washington High engaging in outside of school?
2. What purposes do these youth have for engaging in these digital literacy practices? What role do these digital literacies play in youths' lives?
3. How are students asked to use digital literacies within the school setting? How do these compare to students' use outside the school setting? With Web 2.0 conceptions of digital literacies?

In investigating these questions, attention is first paid to my role as the researcher and the perspectives that I bring with me. I explore the theoretical base framing new literacy and review the literature regarding students' digital literacy practices. With this established, I turn to the practices and perceptions of students at Washington High, elaborating on the findings and implications.

THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

I am a former high school language arts teacher who fits the assumed demographic of the "typical" teacher – white, female, middleclass (Sleeter, 2001). Through my teacher preparation program, I became well versed in the study of literature; I felt well prepared to teach narrative, persuasive, and expository writing. However, I felt much less prepared to tackle challenges presented by the fact that my students' home literacies interacted with – both complementing and butting up against – the school-based literacies I fostered in my classroom. For instance, although I was aware, that my students were engaging in digital literacy practices outside of my classroom, I had no idea how they were actually practicing these literacies. Consequently, I had no idea of how to incorporate my students' literacy practices into my lessons, though it seemed to me important to honor, acknowledge and support their digital culture interests**.** Students experienced my conscious attempts to include *outside* literacy practices into my instruction as inauthentic. For example, I once asked my students to provide written feedback on postings in a class wiki. The students viewed our use of the wiki as overly structured, bound by deadlines, and *old school* in its lack of visuals, and viewed this exercise with waning enthusiasm. Unfortunately I'm not alone in the struggle to find useful ways of enacting digital literacies. Research supports the idea that teachers struggle to employ these "new" forms of literacy effectively (Hagood et al., 2008; Yeo, 2007).

As a researcher, I believe that learning from students – and making sure we listen to youth from a wide variety of contexts, cultures, and backgrounds – is crucial in understanding literacies that continue to gain significance in certain realms of our world. With this in mind, I investigated the practices and perceptions of youth at Washington High with both an eye toward their digital literacy practices and how these uses may or may not aid them in their futures. It was my goal as the researcher both to identify how students use and perceive digital literacies and to help teachers meet students where they are while simultaneously thinking about where they might be heading.

"NEW" LITERACIES: A THEORETICAL FRAME

I work from the assumption that literacy is socially situated and given meaning through historical, political, and cultural contexts (Gee, 2004; Scribner & Cole, 1981). Lankshear and Knobel (2006) draw the following distinction between the New Literacy Studies and "new" literacies:

> To say that 'new' literacies are ontologically new is to say that they consist of a different kind of 'stuff' from conventional literacies we have known in the past. It is the idea that changes have occurred in the character and substances of literacies that are associated with larger changes in technology, institutions, media and the economy, and with the rapid movement toward global scale in manufacture, finance, communications, and so on (p. 24).

The general public's literacy practices have been drastically impacted by the inception of the Internet. Whether it be browsing an online article and navigating hyperlinks or composing an interactive blog complete with pictures and video, today reading and writing practices often look different than they did even a few short years ago. It is necessary to reevaluate ideas regarding what it means to be literate in today's society, including rethinking how we approach the study of literacy in schools (Coiro et al., 2008).

Lankshear and Knobel (2006) arrived at their assertions regarding what constitutes "new" literacies by comparing and contrasting Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 thinking. Within this model, one ceases to think solely in terms of physical space, but also conceives of the wide-open possibilities of cyber space. Collective intelligence and collaboration trump the idea of one "expert." Within the notion of "expertise," roles are shared, exchanged, and distributed. The Web 2.0 model is a belief that is transformative; it's a new way of thinking about literacies. The Web 1.0 model is "old wine in a new bottle" (p. 55); it does nothing significantly different from the ways we've approached literacy for years.

Employing a Web 2.0 conception of digital literacies means accepting that these "new" literacies make use of multimodality in complex and sophisticated ways (Mills, 2010). By modalities I mean here the integration of text, video, images, sound and movement. The Web 2.0 conception further implies a shifting notion of authorship and identity (Vasudevan, DeJaynes, & Shmier, 2010), with practices such as "remixing" becoming commonplace. "Remixing" involves taking existing texts and cobbling together or replacing elements of audio, visual, and/or print to create something fresh and new (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). It means rethinking literacy practices as means of

providing ongoing services rather than finished products. An example of a literacy practice as an ongoing service would be the active fan fiction sites that have sprung up in connection with popular books, animation, music, video games, movies, and TV shows. In fan fiction forums, authors compose and publicly post texts based on their favorite media. Other participants have the opportunity to post commentary and reviews of these texts. These sites give rise to collaborative writing, peer review, and experimentation with different genres (Black, 2009). Fan fiction sites provide opportunities for participants to experiment with, rewrite, and relive beloved stories with others who share their love of the originating text.

CREATIVE POSSIBILITIES

Some are quick to point out how digital literacies have revitalized communication. C. Luke (2002) has suggested that digitally mediated literacies have ushered in an "explosion of writing" (p. 137), with a return to letter writing the likes of which hasn't been seen since the 18th century. Digital literacies can expand our sense of audience; as Bruce (2002) explains: "The notion of a community of writers thus seems more real and present than ever before" (p. 7).

Above all else, however, those who extol the virtues of digital literacies' possibilities point out that these sorts of practices allow the participant to become not just a consumer of text, but also a producer, a creator (Bruce, 2002; Gee, 2012). Different than other literacy practices, digital literacies allow more free range in our ability to push back with our own responses. Graham and Benson (2010) refer to this as "creating knowledge rather than simply gathering it" (p. 94). Participants of digital literacy practices are able to create and post their own media and designs and gain extended audiences without the professional credentials that have traditionally been required to do so (Gee, 2012). The multimodality possibilities of digital open the doors wide to the creator. People fluent in digital literacies can incorporate text, video, images, sound and movement in complex and sophisticated ways. Digital literacies are used to communicate, to discover, to critique, and to reflect (Tierney, Bond, & Bresler, 2010).

Because conceptions of "expertise" and authorship are changing, educators and students have struggled with negotiating how works are authorized, validated, and evaluated in an academic sense. What looks like "remixing" and collaborative writing in the digital literacies world may look more like plagiarism in traditional schooling definitions (Thomas & Sassi, 2011). Additionally, teachers may worry that students are unwilling or unable to determine a material's credibility or quality. Schools are accustomed to seeing knowledge as coming from someone deemed "expert"; in this view, knowledge is often viewed as "located" either in individuals or institutions rather than in the collective (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). The different viewpoints of the world of school and world of digital literacies have proven difficult for both student and teacher to reconcile.

RESEARCH OF YOUTHS' DIGITAL LITERACY PRACTICES

Much of the literature concerning youths' digital literacy practices falls into particular demographic patterns. Many studies explore youth from middle to upper class socioeconomic, primarily white backgrounds (Chandler-Olcott & Maher, 2003; Jacobs, 2006; Lewis & Fabos, 2005). One study of the out-of-school practices of three "struggling" gaming aficionados tracked the gaming behaviors of boys from a suburban school, recognized by *Newsweek* as one of the "top 500 schools in the nation" (Abrams, 2009, p. 339).

Most research concerning youth from urban demographics has been conducted largely in the last ten years. For instance, Turner (2011) profiled the skills urban youth acquired through a multimodal media production unit[1], while Schillinger (2011) studied the wiki interactions of girls in a private school with girls from an urban public school. Additionally, several recent studies have explored digital literacy practices of English Language Learners (ELL) including in-class use of podcasts (Smythe & Neufeld, 2010; Wilson, Chavez, & Anders, 2012), and ELLs participation in primarily English-text fan fiction communities (Black, 2005).

Still needed are systematic examinations of what urban adolescents from working class backgrounds are thinking about and doing with digital literacies. Without this data, we run the risk of defaulting automatically to addressing digital literacy practices that may be far from universal, never fully understanding how digital literacy practices are shaped and occur in different socioeconomic contexts. For students who already experience a deficit in how their lived experiences are portrayed or ignored in mainstream media (students of color, students from economically disadvantaged homes, and students with first languages other than English), misrepresentation and under representation follow all too familiar patterns.

THE STUDY CONTEXT

Washington High School (WHS), constituting about 1500 students, is part of an urban district in a city that is itself within ten 10 miles of a major metropolitan area (Massachusetts Department, 2012). WHS bills itself as an academic center that also offers courses providing career and technical skills, such as auto-mechanics, graphic design, culinary arts, and broadcasting. In 2010, WHS relocated to a new building equipped with many sophisticated technological tools, including digital interactive whiteboards in every classroom.

According the Massachusetts Department of Secondary and Elementary Education website, students at WHS identified as about 10% African American, 30% Asian, 6% Hispanic, and 54% White. Thirty-two percent of the students in the school speak a first language other than English, and 54% of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch (Massachusetts Department). With these demographics, students at WHS represent a population whose digital literacy practices warrant more study.

[1] Other digital media projects take place primarily in out of school spaces, such as Nichole Pinkard's partnership with the Chicago Public Library and her creation of the Digital Youth Network (digitalyouthnetwork.org, n.d.)

METHODOLOGY

I used a case study methodology to examine practices and perceptions and to raise questions regarding the status quo (Merriam, 1998). For this study, I designed a sequential survey and qualitative individual and focus group approach to best ascertain students' viewpoints and determine their uses of digital literacies.

THE PARTICIPANTS

I first met with a focus group of students who self-identified as being interested in and savvy about technologies. The focus group consisted of nine senior boys, all enrolled in an elective engineering and technology course. We sat around a large table in a room decorated with posters about possible future careers in technology. (One picture labeled "Girls in Engineering" stood out blatantly, as no girls were enrolled in the class). The boys filled me in about their uses, preferences, and thoughts about technology. In our second group meeting, the youth provided feedback on terminology and questions to include in the survey to be distributed to the larger student body.

To gain a broader view of students' uses and perceptions, a study hall group of 90 students was asked to take the survey. Thirty-seven students chose to participate. Participation was voluntary and no incentive was offered. Of these 37 students, 19 were female and 18 were male. Twenty-five of the students identified as White, two as Black or African-American, three as Asian, one as Hispanic or Latino/a, and six as having more than one ethnic or racial background. In order to gain further insight into the survey, all participants were invited to take part in an additional focus group. Of those invited only two freshmen students, Dan, a white male, and Patrick, an Asian American male, agreed.

DATA ANALYSIS

For the purpose of data analysis, I used audio recording and subsequently transcribed the first focus group and follow-up interview. Additionally, I drafted research memos with initial thoughts and observations to aid me in recreating our conversations. Through the use of these memos I was able to tie pieces of data together and began to recognize the general themes that arose from the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A grounded theory approach to the analysis of data was used. The goal with grounded theory is to "focus … data collection and to build inductive middle-range theories through successive levels of data analysis and conceptual development" (Charmaz, 2005, p. 507). This approach to data analysis is appropriate for researchers aiming to stay immersed in their "studied worlds" while attempting to develop theory explaining the hows and whys about what they're seeing (Charmaz). Guiding questions initially allowed me to explore the attitudes and perceptions of members of the preliminary focus group and to identify their digital literacy practices. Consistent with a grounded theory approach, I used both open coding, through which I attempted to identify, name, categorize, and describe phenomena found in the data, and axial coding, through which I sought to relate these codes' categories and properties to one another (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). By using open and axial coding with the data in conjunction with my theoretical framework concerning Web 2.0 "new" literacies, I was able to determine what questions might be beneficial in the survey targeting the larger population at WHS. I broke down

the data into categories while continually comparing and reevaluating these categories. Using this constant comparison method with the survey data and the focus group data helped me to determine patterns, similarities, and points of departure. From this, I determined gaps in my understanding, which then led to my conclusion that a follow-up interview would add a desired depth to my knowledge of digital literacy practices of WHS students (Strauss & Corbin). I used the focus group interviews, the survey, and the follow-up interview to establish patterns in the data and to triangulate my observations.

FINDINGS

WHAT DIGITAL LITERACY PRACTICES ARE STUDENTS IN WHS ENGAGING IN, BOTH IN AND OUT OF SCHOOL?

Scholars and researchers have stated that outside of school, many youth are using digital literacies in creative and generative ways (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). In other words, they are using new literacies to actively create something to share rather than engaging in activities involving passive watching or reading. While some youth at WHS do exhibit these creative behaviors, others seem to behave solely as technology and media consumers.

Among the creative behaviors students surveyed engage in, picture taking and posting is a hugely popular activity. Other generative activities included website creation, video production, and "remix." Some students also reported seeking collaboration opportunities, sharing creations with larger audiences, and asking for feedback from other parties online. (See Table 1.) All the creative behaviors are consistent with Web 2.0 conceptions of digital literacies.

"Students engage and feel comfortable in…"	Number of Students/ (Percentage)
Creating a website	10 (27%)
Creating videos on cell phones or on computers	15 (41%)
Creating and posting videos online	9 (24%)
Participate in the practice of remixing	10 (27%)
Sharing something they've made online	9 (24%)
Asking for feedback on something they've made	9 (24%)

Table 1: Generative Behaviors of Students at WHS

Far to the right on the spectrum of creative behaviors was Kenny, a member of the initial focus group. Kenny not only told of his personal ventures creating music using the Apple software, GarageBand, he also spoke of an entrepreneurial enterprise he had started with a former WHS student, now a pupil at a nearby university. Together, they offered their services to a number of local businesses, creating websites that extended the businesses' visibility in the community and beyond. Several businesses had hired these two young men to provide their knowledgeable and expert services. For students like

Kenny, generative uses of digital literacies provide not just creative personal outlets, but also represent potentially lucrative career opportunities.

However, with the exception of the category of taking and posting pictures, for each of the categories representing "creative" behaviors, less than a quarter of the students surveyed reported engaging in the literacy practice. By contrast, the categories representing digital literacies more aligned with a consumerist approach to digital literacy practices, such as reading content, checking Facebook, or watching online programming, proved to be far more popular digital literacy practices, with the majority of surveyed students reporting engagement. (See Table 2.)

In what ways do you use the Internet?	Number of Students/ (Percentage)
Reading things that interest you	24 (65%)
Watching things that interest you	25 (68%)
Checking social networking sites (like Facebook)	33 (89%)
Watching videos/shows	28 (76%)

Table 2: Consumerist Behaviors of Students at WHS

Even among members of the preliminary focus group, the young men who self-identified as liking and being skilled in the use of technologies, the majority reported far more consumerist than creative activity. Marcus, for example, checked Facebook many times a day but rarely posted to it, stating that posting pictures and tagging were stereotypically female behavior. He reported that most of the creative digital literacy practices in which he engaged occurred in conjunction with his advanced engineering class.

WHAT PURPOSES DO THESE YOUTH HAVE FOR ENGAGING IN THESE DIGITAL LITERACY PRACTICES? WHAT ROLE DO THESE DIGITAL LITERACIES PLAY IN YOUTHS' LIVES?

From my first conversation with the students at WHS it became apparent how important new media and digital technologies are in their day-to-day lives. The young men in the senior engineering and technology class stated emphatically their reliance on cell phones, with one student admitting to racking up a two hundred dollar phone bill while visiting family in the Dominican Republic. Another student described his "typical day" with technologies, stating: "I'm on my computer from the time I get home until I go to bed. I do my homework, I'm on Facebook, I talk to friends."

The urban youth's I surveyed used digital literacies in primarily social and relational ways. Marathon texting conversations made up students' days, especially for youth like Ronnie whose cell phone plan included only texting capabilities. Students surveyed also used Facebook as a way of "catching up on the gossip" and seeing each other's worlds in pictures. An interviewee, Patrick, indicated that his use of online gaming played a crucial role in his social life, enabling him to team up with friends online to take on opponents from around the world.

The survey information corroborated the interviewees' reported social interests in digital media. Over 90% of students reported spending time with other users online. (See Table 3). In an open-ended survey question, one participant stressed, "I use my computer to video call friends and talk to them on Facebook." Utilizing digital literacies allowed the youth surveyed to fulfill social and relational needs (Ito et al., 2010). What was less evident was any online gathering centering on interests rather than relationships – what Gee (2004) calls "affinity spaces" – which tend to lead to the most creative and generative behaviors (Ito et al.)

Activities Spent With Other Online Users	Number of Students/ Percentage
Playing games online with other users	15 (41%)
Engaging for social reasons, such as talking to friends	30 (81%)
Engaging for school reasons, such as homework help	24 (65%)
Gaining feedback on things like writings, drawings, video	9 (24%)
Sharing an interest through something like a fan site	10 (27%)
Sharing something I've made	9 (24%)

Table 3: Activities Spent with Other Users

HOW ARE STUDENTS ASKED TO USE DIGITAL LITERACIES WITHIN THE SCHOOL SETTING? HOW DO THESE COMPARE TO STUDENTS' USES OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL SETTING? WITH WEB 2.0 CONCEPTIONS OF DIGITAL LITERACIES?

Many students reported being asked to use technology in their classes, with 27 of them (77%) reporting that they were asked to use technology in school once a week or more. When asked about the sorts of technologies they used in school, the most prevalent response was that they were required to use computers. Some students also identified as "technologies" the use of specific software, explicitly listing Microsoft Word and PowerPoint. Others indicated they were required to employ skills such as word processing and researching on the Internet.

However, when asked to consider how technology use in and out of school matched up, students stated they did not see a close alignment. While 41% of those surveyed suggested that the digital literacies expressed in an out of school were "somewhat similar," only two students indicated a good match-up between home and school based digital literacy practices. Most of the students did not seem to feel that the ways they were using digital literacies outside of school were reflected inside of the school setting. While some of this may have had to do with different tools and access at home, it became apparent that the biggest differences lay in the practices encouraged and supported. The majority of students reported technology use matches between in-school and out-of-school worlds were "not that similar" or "not at all similar." One survey

participant responding in the last, open-ended question noted that technology was for "school and recreation." That divide, while perhaps unconsciously stated, seems telling.

The study participant perhaps most enthusiastic about the in-school use of technologies was interviewee Dan, who described the school's technological capabilities as "amazing." Dan cited the school's inventory of new computers, broadcasting equipment, Smart Boards, and specialized software for graphic design. In reporting how he saw in-school and out-of-school uses as different, he stated:

> You can go from, like, using a phone at your house and just a simple laptop or something like that to here where you have, um, engineering. You have welding uses a lot of technology. They have a plasma machine, and that's just amazing, they can cut whatever you want for them. Um, and the auditorium – there's so many different audio systems; there's so many different lighting systems. It's very diverse.

Importantly, the majority of technology usages that Dan reported appear to occur in elective courses. Washington is a school that specializes in career and technical programs, such as the engineering track. When discussing the use of technology in his core classes, however, Dan talked about a more limited use of these tools. Although every classroom has a Smart Board, Dan noted that these were sometimes underutilized, specifically stating, "I know my history teacher, he uses the SmartBoard. He uses it for PowerPoints and stuff like that. But my math teacher, she doesn't even deal with it; she just goes straight to the whiteboard and just writes whatever she wants to do." While school personnel at WHS do have access to sophisticated technological tools, data from the focus group, survey, and interviews suggest that students perceive these technologies are sometimes underutilized or used only in highly specialized settings. It appears that students who were not taking technical classes that incorporate specific technologies had limited exposure to more collaborative, creative, and authentic uses of digital literacies in line with Web 2.0 conceptions.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The data from this study suggest the lives of urban students at WHS involve digital practices, integrally, just as studies have shown is generally the case for suburban youth. WHS students use digital technologies to keep tabs on one another, to project facets of their identities, to maintain relationships. However, in this small sampling, evidence points to these youth practicing digital literacies in manners more consistent with consumerist tendencies than creative activity or to support their formal learning. This corroborates the work of Attewell and Winston (2003), which found that youth from households with higher socioeconomic status (SES) tend to pursue their interests with digital literacy in more academically and career-oriented ways than youth from lower socioeconomic households. By contrast, the researchers concluded members of a low-SES group exhibited behavior with multimedia that was "limited to consumption, not creation" (p. 194). While all of the youth in the study were using digital literacies to achieve specific, goal-oriented purposes, the youth from the higher SES-backgrounds were more likely to use these literacies in ways that granted them access to academically and career-bound notions of success.

Learning and media theorists such as Gee (2004) and Jenkins (2009) have made persuasive arguments about the potential learning possibilities of digital literacies. However, the benefits accrue most to those who practice digital literacies in creative ways. Without engagement in the more creative and critical practices of digital literacies, these youth may be relegated to the role of mere consumer rather than become shapers of the culture around them.

As a new facility, WHS does have access to a number of impressive technological tools. Students surveyed reported that many of these technological tools operate in the service of "non-academic" classes, the technical and career courses such as graphic arts, plumbing, and broadcasting. However, as evidenced by the focus group, survey data, and interviews, students may only be using these technological tools in extremely specialized ways. Those not enrolled in courses serving specific career or technical aspirations may instead be exposed, in school, to practices that Fishman and Pinkard (2001) described as the result of "technology planning" instead of "planning for technology." The researchers note this is a common trap schools fall into, particularly urban schools. In this faulty model, educators assume that simply being surrounded by technology is beneficial to students, and this becomes an end unto itself.

If, as my limited student data might suggest, WHS has fallen into the "technology planning" trap that has led to a "computer skills" model of classes, as opposed to a model that relies on careful instructional design, then the school is not alone. Warschauer, Knobel, and Stone (2004) found that in schools with students from low-SES backgrounds, teachers spent disproportionate amounts of time on software and hardware operations, choosing to focus on skills rather than technology that serviced their curriculum and encouraged deep thinking. In urban schools, "technology" is taught as its own separate class, instructed as discrete and out-of-context "technology skills," often within the computer lab. In this model, digital literacies are not truly being utilized as students are "learning the technology" instead of "learning with technology." This use of technology ignores the possibilities of multimodal digital literacies serving and being served by core curriculum (Tierney, Bond, & Bresler, 2010). Technologies need to go beyond being seen as "adjunct[s] to the classroom" to truly make a difference (Fishman & Pinkard, 2001, p. 64). Otherwise, as promising as these technological tools may be, they go from potential purveyors of authentic and transformative digital literacies

Mahiri (2011) stresses instructional design over a school-based focus on teaching students the skills involved in digital tools, an approach which forefronts creative activity. Mahiri quotes the perspective of a principal interviewed during the study: "It's really about imagining the kinds of things you want students to create and thinking about the design and intersection of the kinds of applications that will allow them to do these things" (p. 136).

In Mahiri's estimation, the key to incorporating digital literacies into the classroom in real and transformative ways is to help teachers see new media as "central to their designs for student learning" (p. 142). Educators must find ways to both meet students where they are and incorporate youths' digital literacy practices. Simultaneously, educators must push youth forward with the types of creative digital literacy practices that will help them beyond consumption to critique and transform the world around them. We need further research to identify the specific characteristics of teachers and students involved in generative, creative digital literacy practices in schools,

as well as additional studies that examine the myriad and complex ways youth of diverse demographics practice and view digital literacies.

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MORE TO EXPLORE

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