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Keisha L. Green

Youth Voices: Youth Radio, Literacy, and Civic Engagement

By

Keisha L. Green

Doctor of Philosophy

Educational Studies

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Youth Voices: Youth Radio, Literacy, and Civic Engagement

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

Youth Voices: Youth Radio, Literacy, and Civic Engagement

By Keisha L. Green

This study explores the relationship among youth radio, literacy, and civic engagement. Employing ethnographic case study methodology, I examine youth radio production as one of the ways in which black youth critically engage media to resist, reinterpret, or produce counter narratives in an urban Southeastern context. Findings reveal that the youth participants learn about the history of the black radical tradition in the Southeast and develop both critical and media literacy skills that enhance their ability to evaluate, analyze, and critique media messages. Such an exercise in freedom of expression and access to media exceeds the kind of literacy learning expected in public schools where the social, economic, and material inequities further exasperate the urban public school crisis, specifically in the area of language and literacy acquisition.

This study explores the ways in which urban youth are critically engaged in sophisticated learning during pursuits beyond school walls, as they participate in the construction of new media and engage in community action. Understanding the role of urban youth in community contexts is critical to the ways in which language and literacy classroom curriculum and instruction can productively build upon the holistic competencies youth bring to schooling contexts. The examination of youth radio as a space for literacy learning and democratic education provides insight into the ways in which we can address social justice issues in language and literacy education that support multiliteracy and multicultural education outcomes inside the classroom.

Running Head: YOUTH VOICES

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I am, because we are!

Table of Contents

Introduction

Dem cant tek mi soun yanna (They can’t take my song you know).

Verse: So u beat them
So u mistreat them
So u lock them down and u think that you've won

Chorus
But dem ah hole a meditation (Dem ah hold a meditation)
Out inna I-ration (out inna I-ration)
Dem a follow Rastafari and a live, ah live out right
So tell me whe u a go do now (So tell me what you a go do)
Tell me wat u gonna do now (Tell me wat u gonna do)
Tell me wat u gonna do now that di youth ah hold dem roots
You can't water down and dilute
You can't hide di trut from di yout
You can steal di fruit not the root
Cos di yout ah hold dem roots

Instrumental: Hey yeah yea oh ohh

Verse: Give dem cartoons (Cartoons) to turn dem fool (Turn them fool)
You poison their foods and u think that you've won

Repeat Chorus

Verse: Come with yuh negative spirit
But di youths dem nah feel it
Come around with ur white lies trying to blind everyone's eyes

Repeat Chorus

Verse: You can steal di fruit not the root
Cos di yout ah hold dem roots

Verse: Live up now yout, live yu now, live up now.
Hey yea yea, live up now yout, live up now. Yout hold your root!
Hey dem can't water down and dilute
You can't hide di trut from di yout
You can steal di fruit not the root
Cos di yout ah hold dem roots

Roots, Youth Voices radio program opening song by Etana, Jamaican reggae musician

An anthem for African culture and black youth, the reggae song "Roots" is not only the familiar opening song for Youth Voices, an urban southeastern youth radio program on the community-based radio station WKLG 89.3 FM, but also an expression of "Sankofa" – a Ghanaian concept articulated by the Akan people to mean one cannot move forward successfully without connecting to his/her past. From Jamaican artist Etana's 2008 album, *Strong One*, "Roots" is an affirmation of the enduring quality of African culture expressed with nuanced vitality through black youth in America (e.g. hip hop music and culture, African American Vernacular English or African American language, and African influenced aesthetics and practices). Heritage knowledge and pride, as the song lyrics suggests, serves as a defense against the dominant political power structure's systematic erasure or colonization of black history, epistemology, and culture, as well as provides black youth with the critical tools necessary to "live out right" (King, 2006).

The idea of surviving and thriving in the American experience by returning to African "roots" has historically and routinely been taken up by independent black institutions (e.g. independent schools, community-based organizations, and churches) emblematic of the self determination and self reliance of black communities in the face of oppression (Winn, 2008). A central socializing force, schools and curriculum are considered contested terrains. African American studies scholars and educational researchers concerned with educating black children continue to theorize best practices for how to keep mainstream schools from "turning dem [black youth] fool" or, in other words, prevent the homogenizing or psychologically damaging effect of school on culturally and linguistically diverse students. The question de jour persists: How do

African American students acquire academic literacy skills without being severed from their "roots?" With declining academic performance greatest among students of color, who are most likely to drop out and/or encounter the criminal justice system, it is imperative that we revisit the polarizing debate. Importantly, how do we reform public education, change school climate, and prepare teachers to meet the needs of a diverse student body?

A 21st century civil rights issue, public education in the United States is a national crisis, most notably in the South where, according to the Southern Education Foundation (2010), "the students [of color] who now constitute the largest groups in the South's public schools are the students who in the aggregate are scoring lowest on state-mandated tests and on national performance examinations." Access to quality education is a social justice issue that requires an investigation (Greene, 2008). Yet high test scores are not the only marker of a quality education; strong support exists for creating rigorous academic environments with high standards within a caring and empowering learning environment (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Shor, 1992); students also require teachers who care and a culturally relevant curriculum.

With these questions looming in the horizon, we return to "Roots" as the chorus "live up now yout" fades and six dynamic black youth donning disc jockey headphones huddle around four extended microphones ready to take over the airwaves for the next 30 minutes. With the "on-air" red light ablaze, the Youth Voices radio program commences with, "What up young world, this is your girl, Miriam and you're tuned into [Youth Voices]." Every other Friday evening, inside a modestly furnished recording studio these youth engage literacy, making meaning of written and media texts, as "they represent,"

according to one of their adult allies, “an important voice, a voice that is usually not heard in our community and definitely, not on radio” (Spring marathon show script, 2008). The examination of Youth Voices provides insight into literacy learning at the intersection of youth media production and civic engagement.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of seven chapters. Now that I have contextualized Youth Voices in the broader issue of education reform, I continue, in chapter one, with the statement of the problem, purpose of study, and research questions. Next, I summarize the relevant literature in chapter two. A description of the methodology, data collection, and analysis is presented in chapter three.

Then, I explore the findings in three chapters organized by themes. In chapter four, I share findings that illustrate the literacy practices of Youth Voices. The chapter documents the ways in which literacy is defined and practiced within the context of Youth Voices activity. Chapter five highlights the dynamic intersection of critical literacy, youth media production, and democratic education as evident in the literacy practices of Youth Voices. Additionally, this chapter attempts to understand the connections among the three overlapping programmatic aims of the Youth Voices program. Next, chapter six examines how the activity of Youth Voices extends or complicates notions of youth civic engagement, particularly among black youth. Finally, a concluding chapter seven synthesizes the findings and themes and highlights their implications for current practice and future research.

Chapter One: Statement of the Problem

"Literacy educators further the development of authentic democracy—enlightened citizenry and all that—by helping to create informed, critical, powerful, independent, and culturally sensitive student voices."

~Keith Gilyard, (1996, p. 74)

Contending "there can be no democracy … without universal, critical literacy," Gilyard (1996, p. 74)) implies that quality education is a civil right necessary for a vibrant democracy. However, the public education system in the United States has yet to deliver on its promise of a quality education for all of its citizens regardless of race or class (Ball, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2006). For example, results from the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2008) in reading and writing reveal a persistent and stagnant achievement gap—most notably between white and black students. Despite the alleged promise of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, black high school students' test scores continue to lag behind their white counterparts in reading and mathematics (Leonardo, 2007). The *Nation's Report Card* (NAEP, 2007) indicates that 14% of black students performed at or above proficient reading achievement levels compared to 43% of white students in 2007. These statistics place black students at the lowest levels of achievement (scoring lower than Hispanics and Native Americans). The national agenda to raise student achievement, which has become synonymous with standardized high-stakes testing, has failed miserably—once in its primary function to raise test scores and a second time by narrowing curriculum and reducing student-centered activities (Au, 2009).

In addition to academic achievement, access to resources and qualified teachers are also measures, and perhaps more accurate indices, of quality education. According to a recent study by the Schott Foundation for Public Education (2009), only 15% of black students in states across the nation have access to a well-resourced, high-performing school, compared to 32 % of their white counterparts. In contrast, 42% of the black students across the nation are enrolled in poorly resourced, low-performing schools, compared to 15% of their white peers. In a study on the ways in which race and class matter in education reform, Fine (2004), asserts that, "poor and working class youth of color are reading these conditions of their schools as evidence of public betrayal" (p. 456). Now more than ever, educational researchers are charged with the challenge of examining successful practices regarding the education of black students who are disproportionately and most adversely implicated in the failure to meet the purported goals of NCLB.

Responding to the increased need to develop critical and academic literacies among urban youth, the National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) recently expanded its definition of literacy in the 21st century to include a "proficiency in the tools of technology," as well as an ability to "create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multi-media texts" (February, 2008). Radio production is one of the ways in which urban youth critically engage media and popular culture, and thus learn to "read the word and the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Equipped with media literacy skills, young people can critique, repurpose, and in turn, change the tenor of broadcast media (Morrell, 2004). Such an exercise in critique, freedom of expression, and access to broadcast media exceeds the kind of literacy learning demands in public schools where the social,

economic, and material inequities further exasperate the urban public school crisis, specifically in the area of language and literacy acquisition (Gutierrez, 2005; King, 2006; Noguera, 2003).

An Opportunity

According to the National Institute on Out-of-School Time, "there remains a profound gap between the knowledge and skills most students learn in school and the knowledge and skills demanded for the 21st Century." According to the Institute's report: *Making the case: A 2009 fact sheet on youth in out-of-school time*, "students need to learn academic content through real-world examples, applications and experiences both inside and outside of schools" (2009). Currently, schools are places where youth voices are silenced and inclusion of everyday lived experiences are unwelcome in an effort to maintain a facade of order, neutrality, and objectivity in the classroom (Meiners, 2007). The examination of youth radio as a space for democratic education can facilitate literacy educators' abilities to enhance the critical literacy practices and civic engagement of historically marginalized and underserved youth.

Purpose and Research Questions

In the United States, teenagers—of any race, class, or gender—are often cast in our collective imagination as moody, irresponsible, complicated, politically apathetic, and either anti-establishment or materialistic. However, youth participation in media production and distribution serves as an example of the ways in which young people *are* responsible, politically aware, and committed to critically consuming and evaluating texts toward becoming informed citizens. In and out of school, youth are accessing mass media and technology to produce "zines," (i.e. self-published magazines), documentaries,

digital stories, and radio programs to creatively and provocatively express their ideological stances about issues of import to teenagers. Literacy learning beyond school walls continues to demonstrate ways in which practitioners and educational researchers can reconceptualize what counts as literacy and develop sound strategies that ensure all students have access to "literacies of power" (Delpit, 1995; Morrell, 2004, p. 5).

In a preliminary study, I explored the relationship between the literacy practices of a youth radio program and civic engagement. In this dissertation, I examine the ways in which Youth Voices, an all-black youth produced radio program, is part of a legacy of the dissident press and reveal how such a space for alternative media and civic engagement continues the history of the black radical tradition in the South. Participating youth engage in a "pedagogy of disruption" by appropriating their access to media to become more than just consumers of popular culture, but also producers and critics of culture (Giroux, 2004; Powell, 2008). Using the radio as a forum, the youth collaboratively investigate problems, question current norms, disseminate information, and work to change the condition of their communities. At such a dynamic intersection of activity is an opportunity for youth to develop media and civic literacy skills.

Using ethnographic research methods to examine the kind of literacy practices at work in Youth Voices, I sought to answer three questions. First, how is literacy defined and practiced in the context of youth radio programming? Second, what evidence is there of the presence of critical literacy, media literacy, and democratic education? Third, how does the activity of Youth Voices extend and/or complicate notions of youth civic engagement?

Significance

Classroom teachers can learn from the ways in which out-of-school pedagogies have been liberatory learning spaces for youth whose needs are not always met in traditional classroom contexts. Such emancipatory pedagogy is often in contrast to normative school-based methodologies effected by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). At present, many public school teachers are charged with engaging students while adhering to scripted curricula and a culture of testing. Standardization has in effect worked to deskill teachers, who are less likely to be trained or supported to engage in inquiry driven pedagogy (Apple, 1999). Scripted learning seldom, if ever, leaves time for students to investigate social inequities or challenge power (Morrell, 2004). Education policy makers and administrators indeed have much to learn from the "activist labor" of community educators who embrace Kincheloe's (2007) claim that critical pedagogy involves more than "acquiring teaching methods, [because] teachers and leaders steeped in critical pedagogy also understand the social, economic, psychological, and political dimensions of schools, districts, and systems in which they operate" (p. 16).

Thus, critical literacy and media literacy emerge as both a pedagogical and curricular aim for educators invested in centering the lived experiences, linguistic skills, and culture of youth, particularly students of color, in classrooms within an oppressive environment (Shultz, 2003). This kind of critical literacy for democratic engagement is often missing from schools, but can exist in youth radio. According to Wagg (2004), "Youth radio participants become active agents in the creation and production of their own texts, hence giving them a legitimized voice that is often denied in the social contexts of school and family" (p. 269).

Implementing such concepts of critical literacy and pedagogy, while attending to particular academic literacy acquisition is a daunting, yet essential task considering the "educational debt" that has created an educational divide between students of color and white students in and among public schools in the United States (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Meaningful opportunities for youth to practice civic participation inside public schools are rare. Therefore, alternative literacy learning spaces provide sites for examining the ways in which youth may be engaged in youth-driven problem-based projects that cultivate the skills and knowledge critical to becoming active democratic citizens.

Definition of Terms

The following key terms, central to the scope of the proposed research, are defined.

Literacy. Traditionally, literacy has been defined as the ability to read, write, and understand symbols. Contemporary understandings of literacy extend the traditional definition of literacy to include abilities to make meaning, think critically, deconstruct texts, and speak. To capture the sociocultural, historical, and political nature of literacy, Macedo and Freire (1987) state, "in the broadest political sense, literacy is best understood as a myriad of discursive forms and cultural competencies that construct and make available the various relations and experiences that exist between learners and the world" (p. 10).

Academic literacy. Literacy valued inside school contexts may be called academic literacy. In other words, "academic literacy… refers to those forms of engaging, producing, and dialoging about texts that have value in primary, secondary, and postsecondary education" (Morrell, 2004, p. 11).

Critical literacy. Critical literacy is the ability to interrogate texts toward an analysis of underlining messages or an ability to question and critique normative discourse (Shor, 1992). According to Camangian (2008), critical literacy "poses an alternative discourse, one that stands against oppressive social conditions, ideologies and the institutions that marginalize the experiences and livelihoods of marginalized people" (p. 37). Critical literacy empowers youth to become critical inquirers of text and the world writ-large.

Media literacy. Media literacy is defined as "ways of understanding, interpreting, and critiquing media, but also the means for creative and social expression, online search and navigation, and a host of new technical skills" (Metzger & Flanagin, 2008). Furthermore, according to the National Council for Teachers of English, media literacy is the capacity to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms.

Out-of-school literacy. Literacy in out-of-school contexts includes literacy events and practices in nonschool settings or everyday literacy practices that involve an engagement with popular culture texts or multimedia forms.

Youth civic engagement. Civic engagement among youth refers to opportunities for youth to develop the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes related to civic participation, which may include asserting their voice in political matters and engaging in democratic exercise and/or civic action in and around the communities of which they are members (Bogard, 2006; Sherrod, Torney-Purta, & Flanagan, 2010).

Democratic education. In the context of this study, the definition of democratic education is process and a product. Drawing from literacy studies research, democratic

education references a pedagogical strategy or teaching and learning that is participatory in nature, equitable, and culturally relevant. According to the Institute for Democratic Education in America, democratic education is "learning that equips every human being to participate fully in a healthy democracy" (Fisher, 2005; Kinloch, 2005; Shor, 1992).

Theoretical Frameworks

This dissertation is guided by two theoretical frameworks. One framework used to examine literacy practices in the context of Youth Voices is critical literacy. Sociocultural activity theory is used to study the ways in which the youth participants learn in Youth Voices. The two theoretical constructs guide my examination and analysis of the activity in the Youth Voices program.

Critical Literacy Born Anew in New Literacy Studies

Critical literacy refers to the ability to identify and analyze the relationship between power and oppression embedded in media text, curriculum, and pedagogy (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Morrell, 2004; Shor, 1992). In the context of this study, the definition of critical literacy is nested in the New Literacy Studies (NLS) movement, signaling a shift from examining literacy learning as a set of decontextualized basic skills to examining everyday literacy practices in a sociocultural, historical, and political context. The NLS movement is "characterized by [a] focus on an understanding of literacies as multiple and situated within social and cultural practices and discourse" and it points "to the central role of power" (Hull & Schultz, 2002, p. 21). Generally, this perspective of literacy learning is a useful theoretical lens through which to view the kind of literacy teaching and learning in out-of-school contexts that seeks to understand the relationship between dominant or school-based literacy and home or

everyday literacy practices (Fisher, 2005a; Heath, 1983; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Mahiri, 2004, Street, 1993). In particular, the sponsoring organization for Youth Voices has an explicit goal to "encourage the youth to examine their own lives and communities, recognizing the various forms of oppression that limit us all; then get that message across the air to their peers and families" (Youth Voices program proposal, Appendix A). Within the context of Youth Voices there is an assumption that all texts are attached with historical and sociocultural meaning or associated with a particular ideology. Therefore, the literate events and practices evident in the context of Youth Voices involve consuming texts critically.

As a social practice, critical literacy empowers youth and their communities to become change agents (Heath, 1983; Scribner & Cole, 1981). Critical literacy as a theoretical framework first provided structure for my observations, interviews, and collection of artifacts. Second, critical literacy helped me conceptualize the learning that takes place in Youth Voices, as I sought to document the critical literacy practices and activities in which literacy had a role, in order to understand literacy practices and the values and beliefs related to literacy in the community.

Multiple studies illuminate the ways in which critical literacy learning is operationalized both in and out of schools (Chavez & Soep, 2005; Fisher, 2005a, 2005b; Friere & Macedo, 1987; Goodman, 2003; Morrell, 2004; Wagg, 2004). In particular, Morrell (2004) asserts that critical literacy enables students to identify and articulate how the privileging of academic literacies required in their schools relates to issues of access and denial. Similarly, Fisher's (2005b, 2007) research on the literacy practices of New York City high school students validates the alignment of youth culture, the

contemporary cultural form of spoken word poetry, and traditional elements of reading comprehension and literary analysis to develop critical consciousness and academic literacy in a high school writing class. Further, Fisher (2005b, 2007) exemplifies the relevance of multiplicity of voice, and experiential knowledge as evidenced in the "Power Writing" instructor's explicit aim to recover student voices from the margins and to elevate students' lived experiences. Morrell and Fisher underscore the role of critical consciousness, inquiry, multiplicity of voice, and experiential knowledge as core components of critical literacy.

Such an understanding of critical literacy creates the framework to understand the kind of teaching and learning apparent in Youth Voices. In analyzing Youth Voices, I draw on four key concepts that describe critical literacy: critical consciousness, inquiry, multiplicity of voice, and experiential knowledge.

Literacy Learning Rooted in Sociocultural Activity

Sociocultural theory assumes that learning is situated in a cultural context and, rather than an individual and purely cognitive endeavor, posits that learning is a social enterprise (Rogoff, 1995; Wenger, 1998). For example, the youth participants in Youth Voices learn by doing. In particular, the adult program facilitators model how to conduct meetings, create agendas, write or identify relevant curricula, and coordinate educational/training workshops. Across time, youth participants are involved incrementally in the facilitation of the aforementioned activities. Eventually, all of the youth radio production meetings and workshops are completely youth-led. According to Rogoff (1995) sociocultural activity may be observed on three interdependent planes: "apprenticeship, guided participation, and participatory appropriation" (p. 142).

Specifically, apprenticeship refers to a "culturally organized activity" with a goal to develop the novice participants. Such activity is specific and done in relationship to particular community practices and institutions. Guided participation describes the interpersonal activity involved in sociocultural activity "processes and systems of involvement between people as they communicate and coordinate efforts while participating in culturally valued activity" (Rogoff, 1995, p. 142). Finally, participatory appropriation is linked to the ways in which participants are changed as a result of their involvement in an activity, and to the ways in which participants are able to apply their new expertise in other/future contexts. These three overlapping planes of analysis frame the implicit and explicit interactions between the youth and adults in the Youth Voices space.

Similarly, Wenger (1998) describes such sociocultural activity as "communities of practice." In communities of practice, participants or members of particular communities—whether informal or formal—are groups of individuals who come together to perform an activity or coalesce around a "valued enterprise" and learn how to become experts in that enterprise through social participation (e.g. Youth Voices linked by shared interests in community organizing and by a common goal to produce a radio program) (Wenger, 1998). Actions and interactions engaged in by the members of the community are situated in the participants' lived experiences and mediated through sociocultural and historical contexts. Wenger (1998) posits that a theory of communities of practice is "learning as social participation" where "participation shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do." Youth are central in the activity of the youth radio program where the shared interest or goal is to learn how to produce a

radio program as a vehicle for youth power and tool for community organizing. Critical literacy and sociocultural theory frameworks drives the design and analysis of the literacy practices of Youth Voices and acted as guides to determine what to pay attention to during data collection and served to inform my approach to data analysis.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

I situate this study in four areas of literature organized thematically. The themes include: literacy in out-of-school contexts, media literacy, youth radio, and youth civic engagement. Together these areas inform my analysis of the ways in which students involved in Youth Voices understand and experience civic engagement.

Literacy Learning in Out-of-School Settings

Beyond—or in spite of—traditional classroom walls, youth are making meaning of language, text, and the world writ-large. Mahiri (2004) contends that "contemporary youth in their everyday lives—often through powerful influences from electronically mediated popular culture—both construct and consume personal/cultural meanings, pleasures, and desires that prefigure and inform their engagements with school" (p. 3). The practice of literacy learning in out-of-school spaces has a particular significance to the African American community. Once denied access to formal education, African American children and adults –making a way out of no way – etched out learning opportunities for themselves (Anderson, 1988; Smitherman, 2001). In her analysis of "the African-American philosophy of education," Perry (2004) concludes that education for African Americans has proved to be an essential role in obtaining freedom, literally and symbolically:

> You pursued learning because this is how you asserted yourself as a free person, how you claimed your humanity. You pursued learning so you could work for the racial uplift, for the liberation of your people. You pursued education so you could prepare yourself to lead your people (p. 11).

Similarly, in "'Knowledge is Power': The Struggle for African American literacy," Holt (1990) considers the historical roots of this pursuit of knowledge as a source of power in which literacy, once denied, is sought after "not as a means to conformity or submission but as a way to uplift, a way to change society for the better, a way to power (p. 91)." The literacy that many African Americans "made untold sacrifices" to obtain did not always result from formal schooling. Because the proposed study is situated in a learning space outside of the traditional classroom, scholarship on literacy learning in out-of-school settings informs the ways in which I conceive of the activities. Non-school contexts are worthy spaces of investigation, as current research demonstrates the viability of alternative, community-based approaches to accessing knowledge, constructing meaning, and acquiring reading and writing skills, particularly in communities of color (Fisher, 2005a; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Mahiri, 2004).

Contemporary research in of the varied and sophisticated literacy practices in which adolescents are engaged everyday across contexts effectively resists deficient interpretation (Kinloch, 2007, 2009; Kirkland, 2009; Vasudevan & Campano, 2009; Winn, 2011). Such research on literacy not only acknowledges the multimodal literate lives of historically marginalized youth in multiple contexts, but also seeks to evolve the traditionally dichotomous relationship between school-based and nonschool literacy practices into a more fluid relationship representing a continuum of practices. In doing so, literacy research moves toward rethinking practices of literacy teaching and learning to be reflective of and responsive to the practices of 21st century youth (Kinloch, 2009; Vasudevan, 2010). Further, this expanding body of scholarship on literacy in diverse educational contexts is careful to clarify that such a stance is not in opposition or

mutually exclusive from a collective desire for adolescents to be proficient in reading and writing (Kinloch, 2009; Kirkland, 2009; Vasudevan & Campano, 2009, Winn, 2011). Rather, such research is a call to action for educational researchers and policy makers to rethink our "starting points" for teaching and assessing literacy and language acquisition and development (Vasudevan, 2010).

In particular, Kinloch (2009) and Kirkland (2009) bring our attention to the spatial dimensions of literacy and varied modalities of literacy practices. Kinloch's (2009) study of the lives and literacy practices of black youth in New York City's gentrifying Harlem neighborhood pushes us to investigate literacy teaching and learning in multiple spaces, as well as at the intersections of race, place, and students' literate identities. Her writing about the ways in which urban youth engage "school-sponsored tasks such as writing assignments, presentations, group work, and standardized examinations" as their identities are linked to a particular place, or more specifically, influenced by community contexts, demonstrates an awareness of the "sociological distances that exist across rapidly changing school and community contexts" (p. 319).

As literacy is examined in multiple spaces, Kirkland's (2009) research reminds us that youth "expressions of human experience exist in multiple forms, which can present new challenges and possibilities for English education" (p. 375). Literacy as identity construction is linked to the body as a location for "a primary narrative" where the subject of Kirkland's study inscribes symbols that represent stories and makes meaning of self and the world (p. 389). Reframing our perspectives on literacy, Kirkland, provides a critical analysis of one black male's use of tattoos to "disrupt myths about literacy and

Black masculinity" (p. 388). In this way, literacy scholars humanize urban Black males and see their literate acts as an impetus to reconceptualize literacy.

Additionally, in an edited volume, Mahiri (2004) and contributing literacy scholars map the diverse terrain of literacy and learning activities present among urban youth of color in non-school settings. Exploring the multiple literacies of young people's everyday lives, the essays included in this anthology have a particular focus on "voluntary productions of literacy texts outside of school" (Mahiri, 2004). The featured studies chronicle youth engagement with literacy that is socially and culturally situated. Such contextualized literacy or communicative practices include what Mahiri calls "street scripts" or writing by a particular group of African American youth, "most likely to be written off as failures" (p. 45). These urban youth construct narratives about their complicated lives and offer their analysis of "being young, urban, and African American" (p. 19). In a response to Mahiri's research, Noguera (2004) sees such expression of "those without power" as a "potent form of resistance" (p. 43). That is, the "street scripts" run counter to normative depictions of deficient urban youth living in violent, crime ridden communities. Further, Mahiri deems the youth-authored narratives as worthy of the same kind of attention given canonical literature and challenges what is and what is not valued as "permissible forms of writing" in schools.

Moving from writing activities to performance, Winn (2011) and Vasudevan (2009) document theater and arts-based teaching and learning strategies engaged by adolescents who have experienced the juvenile justice system. Through the creative process of producing visual or performance art, these alienated youth are able to reclaim their literate identities and rewrite their future possibilities (Fisher, 2009; Vasudevan,

2009; Winn, 2011). Additionally, Sutton (2004) investigates spoken word or performance poetry as literacy events. In her study, many of the poet participants' first encounter with poetry occurs in traditional classrooms where the canonical poetry elevated was "alienating and uninspiring because it had little to do with their daily lives" (p. 223). According to Sutton, these same poets are (re)introduced to writing and poetry outside of schools where they report discovering that "in contrast to the poetry most of them were presented with in school, spoken word is, by definition, relevant to their lived experience" (p. 224). Similarly, in her research on youth engagement with poetry, Jocson (2006a, 2006b) documents the ways in which poetry "promotes a space for recognized silenced voices" (2006b, p. 8). In her work on urban youth participants of Poetry for the People, a program founded by African American poet, June Jordan, Jocson contends that the literate practice of creating, writing, reading, critiquing and performing poetry is relevant to literacy learning.

In summary, the scholarship on out-of-school literacy practices illustrates the tensions between academic literacy and everyday literacy practices engaged by youth. Such research challenges educators to broaden their notion of literacy to include multiple literacies located in the cultural practices of marginalized youth. Historical and contemporary accounts of literacy in out-of-school contexts illustrate the theme that within African American communities, in particular, teaching and learning is rooted in an historical, social, and cultural context. Additionally, the literacy research that investigates out-of-school contexts challenges notions of what counts as literacy. Also, each of these studies extends and complicates conceptions of literacy teaching and learning. Research that addresses our most alienated or marginalized students because of race, class, or

gender can serve to enhance our broader understanding of learning across contexts and inform our efforts to reform education.

Media Literacy

In addition to out-of-school literacy studies, scholarship on media literacy is another area that informs this study. Media literacy, within the parameters of this study, is defined as the ability to identify, deconstruct, analyze, and critique content distributed through various forms of broadcast, print, and digital media (Duncan-Andrade, 2006; Goodman, 2003; Morrell 2004). In their edited volume, *Media, Learning and Sites of Possibility*, Vasudevan and Hill (2007) include empirical studies that focus on the myriad ways media and technologies are engaged within classrooms. The featured studies explore media as pedagogy and youth as media producers (Hill & Vasudevan, 2007). In each case, the interaction of media with the everyday lives of youth is examined for insights into the ways in which educators currently support literacy learning and development (Hill & Vasudevan, 2007). Media literacy is informed by three themes: tools of agency, youth engagement, and media literacy as a critical lens (Chavez & Soep, 2005; Duncan-Andrade, 2006; Goodman, 2003; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2004).

Media literacy as a tool for youth agency, youth engagement, and critique appears in the scholarship of Chavez and Soep (2005) focused on a San Francisco Bay Area youth media organization called Youth Radio. Chavez and Soep (2005) analyze the interaction between youth and adult participants of Youth Radio, and conceptualize the collaborative nature of such relationships as a "pedagogy of collegiality." Exploring the ways in which youth and adults work together to conceive of and produce shows, Chavez and Soep emphasize Youth Radio's "explicit policy that youth development

considerations trump broadcast goals" even when there are tensions between the goals of the adults and that of the youth (Chavez & Soep, 2005). Soep's description of the production processes of Youth Radio demonstrates an emphasis on youth agency where young people are in control of (re)presenting themselves and acting to positively change the social, political, and economic status of their communities.

Moreover, Chavez and Soep are part of a broader shift in media literacy studies. The field of study was originally focused on raising awareness about the unidirectional proliferation and consumption of media, which positions young people as helpless victims of dangerous messages. Media literacy scholars are invested in recovering the ways in which media can be a mechanism by which young people can critique, co-opt, and in turn, change the tenor of broadcast media. Such a shift is evident in Goodman's research (2003) on urban high school students involved in a "Doc Workshop" with the Educational Video Center in New York City. In the documentary filmmaking workshops, students determine topics of import and lines of inquiry (Goodman, 2003). Additionally, "critical analysis of media is integrated throughout the documentary process" during which students critique a variety of media "to understand how the language of media can be used to communicate messages and tell stories (Goodman, 2003, p. 39). Goodman (2003) and Chavez and Soep (2005) provide a lens through which to understand the relationship between media literacy and agency, youth engagement, and critique of world issues. The work of Chavez and Soep (2005), in particular, is an instructive impetus for extending the scholarship in understanding the intersection of critical literacy, media literacy, and youth radio.

The intersection between youth culture and media literacy is explored in Duncan-Andrade's (2006) research on the ways youth develop critical civic literacy through media production. Youth involved in a summer seminar examined "the roles of schools and communities in the development of civically engaged youth" utilizing the tools of critical inquiry and video production (p. 150). Reconceptualizing literacy to include forms of electronic and digital media, Duncan-Andrade (2006) expands the definition of literacy even further to include not only media text in the written form, but also "images present in television, on the Internet, in video games, and conjured through oration on the radio, CDs, and MP3s" and argues that using such forms of literacy are strategic pedagogical tool for acquiring traditional forms of literacy valued in school (p. 151).

In summary, Soep, Chavez, Goodman, and Duncan-Andrade illustrate a youth-centered approach to teaching literacy skills through an engagement with media in and out of the classroom. Additionally, each researcher demonstrates the connection between literacy acquisition and civic action.

Youth Radio: "Making a world for themselves"

As scholarly work on media literacy and youth media production in continues to gain momentum, existing research on youth radio, specifically, remains limited. Within the context of the proposed study, youth radio is defined as an examination of the ways in which young people use the radio to assert their voice in order to shift public opinion to more accurately reflect their lived realities and to act as agents of social justice (Chavez & Soep, 2005; Gelvarec, 2005; Wagg, 2004). Youth radio studies is conceptually informed by research in and around youth empowerment and youth activism.

Christensen's (2000) writing on emancipatory pedagogy offers a practitioner's perspective on how to create classroom communities that center student voices and promote youth-led inquiry. In Christensen's classrooms, students "struggle together to achieve a common goal" and are encouraged "to question everyday acts or ideas that they take for granted" (2000, p. 5, 8). Such classroom environments are critical to youth empowerment. Furthermore, Morrell (2004), demonstrates how his students exercise their empowerment by "critically examin[ing] mass media advertising noting portrayals of certain gender, ethnic, socioeconomic, and sexually oriented groups" (p.100). Gelvarec's (2005) research on youth radio characterizes such critiquing of content distributed by other media forms, as "metatextuality," positing that radio is a forum by which youth "talk about television, magazines and other radio programmes" in addition to commentary about social, political, cultural, and economic issues (Gelvarec, 2005, p. 338). Youth engaged in this kind of "metatextuality" are also engaged in youth activism.

Such instances in youth empowerment and youth activism literature provide context for conceptualizing youth radio studies. Youth radio, then, has the power to be a space in which empowered youth exercise their activism through dialogue, collaborative creation of original work, and commentary about mainstream media content and other sociocultural and political issues (Chavez & Soep, 2005; Kinloch, 2005; Wagg, 2004).

In sum, to understand the potential for youth radio to be a critical lens for youth to critique and disrupt the messages and misrepresentations distributed throughout media about them and their communities, understanding the concept of critical literacy and media literacy is important. Because critical literacy and media literacy resists the privileging of majoritarian or monovocal discourse, youth radio emerges as a platform

from which youth may define and speak their own truths (Chavez & Soep, 2005; Delgado, 2000; Solorzano &Yosso, 2002).

Brief History of Radio and Connection to the Black Press

Radio is heralded as one of the greatest inventions of the 20th Century. Providing a new way to communicate and distribute information, radio rose in use and popularity during the 1930s and 1940s as primarily an outlet for entertainment including music, variety shows, major sports events, and soap operas or radio dramas. By World War II, listeners were tuning into radio for the latest updates on the war. Such programming ushered in a demand for political content and public affairs programming. Historian Barbara Savage (1999) in *Broadcasting Freedom* offers a history of radio broadcast in the United States and chronicles the emergence of "public affairs radio programs about African Americans that were produced by the federal government and broadcast by the national radio networks" (p. 14). Highlighting the significance of including an investigation of the role of radio in cultural studies, Savage goes on to posit:

> Despite its ubiquitous presence in American life for over half a century, radio is a medium whose political and cultural power and influence are not yet reflected in American historiography, American studies, works on American race relations, or studies of the media and popular culture. Studies of the media in general are dominated by film and television, as are the theoretical approaches to media explored in cultural studies critiques (p. 5).

Before the 1940s, "Radio was nearly impenetrable for nonwhite performers" (Hilmes, 2001, p. 211). Part of the legacy of legislated segregation, radio broadcasting upheld the conventions of the times being careful to remain politically "neutral" in content. For

example, as civil rights activism began to swell, station management would cancel any programming that included remarks about racial concerns. Access to broadcast media in order to portray a wide range of African American representation was viewed as a huge gain in "the battle to claim full citizenship" (Hilmes, 2001, p. 211). One such effort was found in the radio broadcast *Freedom's People*, "a federally sponsored national radio series broadcast in 1941 and 1942" (Savage, 1999, p. 63). As radio usage increased during World War II, Savage contends that "African Americans who helped mold the series used the show to spotlight the irreconcilable conflict between America's historical ideological myths and its continued unjust treatment of blacks" (p. 63). The program featured well-known black stars and leaders including Paul Robeson, W.E.B. Dubois, Carter G. Woodson, as well as choral groups from historically black institutions like Fisk and Howard Universities. (p. 72).

Radio, like other media outlets in general was contested terrain, another battle field for social justice. In a comprehensive historical account of the context in which the National Association for Black Journalists (NABJ) emerged, Dawkins (1997) tells the story of a rigidly segregated media world before the surge of the civil rights movement, during which the press is attributed with exposing the ills of legal segregation. In addition to teachers and preachers, Black journalists were "people with skills to influence, enlighten and move the public to action. The product they produced and disseminated was information," thereby becoming "important player[s] in the civil rights revolution" (Dawkins, 1997, p. 2).

Yet, today few people of color hold positions with decision-making power in the media, articulating a need for recruiting a new generation of journalists and an investment

in the professional development of those already working in the field. According to Dawkins (1997), "training programs should be started in high schools and intensified at colleges" (p. 2-3). The NABJ history reveals the critical importance of black-owned media and/or spaces for black journalists and those involved in media to network for the best interests of the black community. Likewise, the story of NABJ underscores the necessity for black leadership among media organizations and black-held editorial positions to make decisions about what is or is not covered in the press; what counts as a story and; what information is disseminated to the public. Additionally, Dawkins reveals the timeless need to recruit new ranks of journalists among our youth in the black community, which is particularly relevant to the proposed study, as black youth are prepared to pursue a career related to news media.

The intersection of media and education offers an intriguing way to view democracy, inclusion, and voice—all part of civic action. As online media provides opportunities for civic action beyond traditional practices, radio remains an accessible medium of communication that cuts across socioeconomic lines. Particularly, in the black community, radio programs like *The Steve Harvey Show*, *The Michael Baisden Show*, *Keepin' it Real with Al Sharpton*, and *The Warren Ballentine Show* continue to be a fixture in communities and a critical source of sociopolitical information. For instance, the aforementioned radio programs were key players in galvanizing communities to protest the discriminatory actions surrounding a case in Jena, Louisiana where African American students were implicated in a beating of a white student (Jena 6 case). Additionally, such programs inspired many African Americans to register to vote in America's historic presidential election of 2008. Across the country, Glevarec (2005), in

an analysis of youth radio as a "social object," suggests that "the sociological interest of these radio shows … lies in the fact that they are the only spaces where teenagers speak and are visible in public"(p. 341). Producing radio broadcasts and sharing them with listeners contributes to the development of critical thinking and communication skills, and is essential for authentic civic participation.

Youth Civic Engagement

Literature on civic engagement among youth in the United States suggests that "youth who attend urban schools, youth of color, immigrant youth and young people in poverty typically score *lower* on civic engagement measures than their White, suburban peers" (Fox et al., 2010). In "Critical Youth Engagement: Participatory Action Research and Organizing," the authors are clear to warn:

> Without careful theorizing about the lack of access, resources and opportunities to engage, the problematic indicators of engagement, and the relative lack of trust in civic institutions, it is understandable that young people of color and youth living in poverty appear more dis-engaged than their more privileged peers (p. 623).

Being careful not to equate "lack of access" with a lack of motivation among youth of color to participate in community affairs, Fox et al. note that it is important to complicate the concept of citizenship, the measures used to determine levels of civic engagement, and the context in which civic engagement occurs. How do young people become fully engaged in the political process of a democracy? According to Owen (2000):

> The process by which young people are socialized politically today is complicated, diffuse, and haphazard. The family and school, long assumed to be vital in developing preadults' political orientations, generally have not been

> effective political socializers. Children and adolescents spend a tremendous amount of time with mass media, increasingly alone (p. 639).

The media may influence political consciousness and inspire civic engagement among young people. For example, the authors of an extensive report called "Youth as E-Citizens: Engaging the Digital Generation" examine "the emerging role of the Internet as a tool for youth activism" and map the terrain of youth as e-citizens engaged in civic participation online. Ironically, mass media or the "new media generation" is also cited as a source for a purported decline in youth civic participation. Scholars like McChesney (1999) argue that current corporatized media are antidemocratic. Instead of inspiring a diversity of opinion and choices, media conglomerates promote a monolithic way of thinking, which is, according to McChesney, undermining the potential for a vibrant participatory democracy.

Beyond or in conjunction with the media, research suggests that service learning opportunities and extracurricular activities may reverse the reported decline of civic knowledge and civic engagement among youth in the United States. Janet Bixby (2008), in a qualitative study about Chicago youth who participate in a community organization "focused on education for democratic citizenship," explores youth perceptions of and experiences with civic engagement. Her study revealed that "urban youth experienced their work with a civically and politically oriented community-based organization as deeply social and relational, individual, and inextricably intertwined with a sense of identity" because of the "highly active, engaging, and authentic work that they did within the programs" (p. 277). The youth in Bixby's study developed a sense of political efficacy through apprenticeship.

Research on political socialization among youth explores innovative curricula for civic education reform. McDevitt and Kiousis (2006) investigated the influence of Kids Voting USA, an election-based curricular program for school children, on the civic development of students. Kids Voting builds on the momentum of a campaign to stimulate an interest in electoral politics. Students gain political knowledge, engage in discussions about election issues, and develop debate and media literacy skills. Over a period of three years, the study revealed that Kids Voting did contribute to youth developing a civic identity and provided possibilities for connecting classroom instruction to community activism.

Community-based youth organizations are sites for civic participation. O'Donoghue and Kirshner (2008) conducted an exploratory qualitative study of five community-based youth organizations (CBYOs), specifically in "working class and poor urban neighborhoods on the West Coast" (p. 229), to understand youth civic development from the perspective of the youth. The study revealed that CBYOs offer opportunities for youth to practice democratic citizenship by "emphasiz[ing] and encourag[ing] 'public efficacy,' which refers to the extent to which young people see themselves as capable of affecting or influencing both the CBYO and the broader community" (p. 234). Additionally, the study revealed an emphasis on identifying and understanding local issues or problems in the youth participants' communities, as well as, a collective conversation about decision-making processes. This kind of attention to consensus building and youth agency was all a part of the civic education designed to equip youth with the knowledge and tools to take action.

The proposed areas of inquiry outlined in the review of literature have informed my understanding of the activity of Youth Voices. Investigating youth radio is an opportunity for educational researchers to examine the intersections of literacy, media, and civic engagement to determine how such practices contribute to cultivating critically literate young citizens.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This study examined the ways in which youth radio production cultivates media literacy skills and creates opportunities for youth civic engagement. I used multiple data sources informed by qualitative case study methodology and ethnographic research methods. Specifically, the study is an ethnographic case study conducted within a specific time span and context of radio production by black youth in an urban Southeastern city.

Ethnography as a research method in the field of education is fundamentally committed to centering the perspectives and actions of the participants. According to McCarty (2005), "capturing the complexity of literacies and persons within ever-changing social and institutional contexts requires a methodology capable of attending to the fine-grained details of everyday discursive practices and their organization within larger cultural and historical frames" (p. xvii).

Through an ethnographic lens, I examined what is happening in the youth radio space, as well as seek to understand the participants and their activities situated in a particular cultural, social, and political context (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). The following questions guided the study: First, how is literacy practiced in the Youth Voices program? Second, what does civic engagement look like in the context of Youth Voices? Third, in what ways do critical literacy, media literacy, and civic engagement converge in the context of Youth Voices? Regarding data collection, I followed Emory University's procedures for the Institutional Review Board (IRB). For IRB approval, see Appendix B.

Participants

In this study, I focused on 12 members of a youth radio collective who participated in a youth development program, including a summer institute, sponsored by a nonprofit organization located in an urban southeastern city in the United States. Each participant completed at least one year of the radio collective program and attended the summer institute. Participants were recruited through my ongoing relationship with the nonprofit organization (See Appendix C for Letter to Parents). In other words, I did not conduct a formal meeting to ask for participants to be a part of this particular study. Instead, participants were identified organically as they fulfilled the criteria of consent or willingness to participate, consistent membership in the collective, regular attendance, and availability for interviews. Youth who decided to participate in the study identified as black or African American youth ranging in age from 14 to 21. The male and female youth represented a range of life experiences, socioeconomic backgrounds, and academic achievement. Each youth participant was given a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality (See Appendix D for a participant chart).

Setting

Situated in an urban southeastern city in the United States, the setting of the study is the multi-layered context in which the activity of a youth development program occurs. Committed to leadership development, the nonprofit organization engages Southern-based young people, people of color (predominantly African American), and low-wealth families. One of the organization's partners is a community-based radio station, home to the Youth Voices live bimonthly 30-minute broadcast.

Participants of Youth Voices meet after school during the week to develop the content of the program, which addresses issues ranging from self-respect to healthy teenage relationships, and community violence. Adult participants, who facilitate the youth development program, provide in-studio coordination and general program supervision. The Youth Voices mission includes centering youth voice and aims to "incorporate a human rights framework and encourage youth to examine their own lives and communities, recognizing the various forms of oppression that limit us all; then get that message across the air to their peers and families (for more details see the program proposal Appendix A)." Members of Youth Voices also participate in a summer institute designed to:

> Develop youth leadership by providing popular political education to young people in [Southeastern city], create alternative youth-run media programs and organize for local community power. The program addresses systemic mis-education of Black youth and youth of color in [Southeastern city] school systems and connects young people to social movements (Youth Voices mission statement).

The activity of Youth Voices is concentrated within two locations: (a) the facility of a community-based nonprofit organization, and (b) a "community-oriented, educational, alternative" station that broadcasts progressive information.The first location, a grassroots, community-based nonprofit organization, serves as the central hub of operations out of which the facilitators for the program work and where the youth radio participants meet regularly to research potential show topics, write scripts, and engage in political education workshops. Most Youth Voices meetings and work take

place inside the nonprofit's multipurpose room, which serves as the organization's library (several book shelves consisting of a substantial collection of texts on social movements, politics, culture, race, and histories of particular ethnic groups and their struggle for liberation), a computer and printer station, and small canteen area. The nonprofit office building is adjacent to a public high school where many of the youth participants are students. The high school and nonprofit are tucked in an area of the city that is populated predominantly by African American residents. Among the services provided by the nonprofit are community leadership and community organizing training, youth development opportunities, and popular education curricula designed to inspire action toward social, political, and economic justice.

The second location, a 100,000 watt noncommercial, listener-funded FM radio station is housed in a community center at the heart of a culturally rich neighborhood known for its liberal atmosphere and walk-able business district including an off-Broadway theatre and playhouse. For more than 30 years, the station has provided a voice for those who have been traditionally denied access to the broadcast media. Until recently, youth were not a part of the station's historically marginalized groups represented on the airwaves. In an effort to address the absence of youth programming and to demonstrate the station's commitment to attracting a younger listening audience, two new youth programs were added to the station's program roster. Youth Voices is one of two youth programs broadcast on Friday evenings. To produce the broadcasts, the youth radio participants occupy the radio station's shared multipurpose meeting room.

Sitting around rectangular tables in a room with dry-erase boards, Youth Voices participants are occasionally visited by station volunteers who freely move in and out of

the space as the youth prepare for their broadcast. The station has two paid staffers who are usually on hand to greet the group and share updates about upcoming events or feedback about past broadcasts. Under the supervision of the volunteer facilitators, every other Friday night, with a red "on-air" sign aglow, the youth deliver their live broadcasts inside the main studio complete with the necessary broadcast equipment including several microphones, mixers and soundboard.

Within the context of Youth Voices activity, there is a particular focus on the history and culture of the black community in the south. In preparing the youth to think critically about the issues they engage, the nonprofit organization's year-round youth development program draws on the legacy of black activism by youth participants reading and discussing excerpts from their toolkit called *Black Radical Traditions in the US South.* This publication serves as an historical text featuring information about key events and figures in black history. Youth also participate in exercises that involve reviewing historical timelines of social movements, accessing oral histories from elders in the community, and viewing popular documentaries like *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years*. Linking history with current realities is a tradition of the nonprofit and its partners including the community-based radio station.

Data Sources and Data Collection

The primary data sources for the study include qualitative interviews, program documents and student work, as well as observations of Youth Voices activity including workshops, radio broadcasts, a summer institute, and community action. The multiple sources offered opportunities to triangulate data for more credible findings and served to illustrate and/or explain the complexities or dimensions of the research site.

Interviews. One of the primary sources of data for this ethnographic case study was qualitative interviews. As stipulated by Rubin and Rubin (2005), interviews were structured as extended conversations with a responsive partner. Interviews with participants allowed for multiple interpretations of the observable activities (Genishi & Dyson, 2005). I conducted two rounds of semi-structured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. At the start of the first round of interviews, participants were reminded of the research purpose and were asked to verify their consent to participate verbally and in writing. With the consent of the participants, each session was audio taped and transcribed shortly thereafter to maintain the data's integrity. My synopsis of each interview was shared with the participants for their review for accuracy and clarifications. Participants had an ongoing opportunity to ask me questions or voice concerns related to the research project or interview.

The first interview was a semi-structured responsive interview with a conversation guide (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). All youth participants were asked the same open-ended questions with various probes provided there was more information to disclose (see Appendix E). This conversational interview focused on general participation in the youth radio collective and explored the nature of teaching and learning within the context of radio production in relationship to traditional in-school literacy practices. Youth participants were asked to describe how they perceived their role as radio program producers and to consider the ways in which their participation influenced their lives beyond producing a 30-minute radio program. Additionally, youth participants were asked about their expectations of the school year program, as well as the summer

institute. The first round of interviews primarily responded to research question one regarding the participants' perceptions the literacy practices in the context of the study.

At the conclusion of the summer institute, a second round of interviews was conducted to explore the relationship between youth radio production and youth civic engagement. The purpose of the second interview was to examine the participants' notion of citizenship and civic engagement. During this round of interviews, youth were asked to describe their perceptions of the goals for the summer institute and asked to share their experiences participating in the summer institute activities. In addition to the two rounds of scheduled interviews, I seized opportunities for informal interviews or conversations to probe for additional information and to unpack or extend previous thoughts.

Documents. I had access to the Youth Voices program proposal, academic year and summer institute curriculum, workshop agendas, facilitator planning notes, as well as student generated writing and scripts for the broadcasts. Document analysis helped to answer the research questions, added to the rich description of the radio collective, and served to inform follow-up interview questions or deepen my understanding of the phenomena or actions apparent in the data resulting from observations and interviews. I analyzed the documents, particularly program documents and curricular material, both for content and implementation.

Observations. I acted as a participant observer during the activity of Youth Voices including the summer institute. My observations served as a means of triangulating the data obtained from interviews and documents. As a participant observer of Youth Voices,

I maintained field notes during workshops, broadcasts, and meetings or events outside of the nonprofit organization and radio station including the summer institute (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002). My field notes captured the observable dialogue and action of the participants. My contact with the participants included more than three years of observing two to three-hour meetings and workshops at least two to three times per week afterschool. Additional contact time included Saturday workshops, weekend retreats, field trips, and observations over one four-week summer institute. After Youth Voices observations, I expanded my jottings to more detailed field notes. My observations were accompanied by a researcher's journal to document my own biases and ongoing developing understandings of the activity of Youth Voices. Upon consent of the study participants, a video camera was used to aid in capturing communicative practices and activity of the youth participants.

Data Management. To assist in the management of data, I labeled each transcript with the date and time of the interview and attached to a contact summary form. Pseudonyms were used to refer to participants and particular places to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Data from the research study including hard copies of completed contact summary forms, interview transcriptions, as well as any audio or video recordings were stored in a locked cabinet accessible only to the researcher. Additionally, I saved copies of transcriptions and any other research documents on my personal computer hard drive, as well as on a secure external drive.

Data Analysis

For this ethnographic study, data from interviews with the participants, artifacts (including, but not limited to, Youth Voices documents, student work, photographs, audio and video recordings), and field notes from participant observations was sorted, organized, compared, and analyzed for themes (Genishi & Dyson, 2005). The data analysis for the study happened as data collection progressed. Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend that researchers "code the previous set of field notes before the next trip to the site" (p. 65). This kind of ongoing data analysis informed the construction of subsequent interview guides and aided in directing the focus of participant observations. The study entailed two levels of analysis intended to distill emergent "concepts, themes, events, and topical markers" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The coding processes were "refined" as I spent more time with the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

My first level of data analysis involved transcribing all interviews and reviewing all participant observations and field notes. I examined the transcripts and field notes paying attention to identify important themes or concepts. Because qualitative research is an inductive process, I developed a coding scheme that emerged from the data collected (Genishi & Dyson, 2005; Seale, 2004). The codes and definitions were also informed by my literature review and theoretical frameworks. The second level of data analysis involved reviewing the frequency in which particular key terms or themes emerged across data, as well as noting any patterns or categories that allowed for the grouping, merging (or collapsing), purging, comparing, or contrasting of first level codes. Finally, the second level codes were reviewed to determine salient themes, which served as headings for my dissertation findings section.

Researcher Positionality

My experiences as an activist, teaching artist in community-based organizations, and youth development worker in out-of-school spaces, give me insight into grassroots education programs that incorporate popular education tools designed to politicize youth. As an African American female raised in the South, my own identity formation, world-view, and philosophy of education is connected to participating in community-based organizations that were often constitutive of people of color (e.g. African American Baptist church, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, The Urban League, and an all-African American Girl Scout troop). Additionally, my experiences in secondary school were devoid of opportunities to engage the literature, language, and culture specific to my history, confirming the interest of school to uphold mainstream values and dominant discourse practices without critique or agitation. Therefore, I am drawn to working with students of color who engage in critical literacy learning by participating in activities that are affirming of their communities' histories, relevant to their interests and lives, and immediately useful to improving social, political, and economic conditions of their communities.

In addition to my life experiences and secondary-education, my positionality is also informed by my shifting role as a researcher/participant-observer and co-facilitator in Youth Voices. As a child playing double-dutch, a jump-rope game—typically associated with African American girls, I used to wait with anticipation to jump-in at just the time to catch the opening or space between the rotation of the ropes. As the two ropes swung, they would blur and become one and moments later two again. My memories of double-dutch parallel the ways in which I experience my changing positionalities in

Youth Voices as observer, documentarian, co-facilitator, mentor, and researcher. Like the turning ropes, my roles are often fluid with unnoticeable boundaries, and yet at a moment's notice the same roles may be distinctly pronounced with one role taking precedent over another, perhaps sparked by an opportunity to note a significant occurrence or a need to step up as a workshop facilitator. I refer to the fluid nature of my researcher positionality as double-dutch methodology.

Reliability and Validity

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), reliability refers to "whether the process of the study is consistent, reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods" (p. 278). To address reliability, I attended to stating clear researchable questions and establishing the researcher's role and status within the site. Additionally, I maintained a record of systematic data collection and analysis including documentation of peer review to check the consistency of my coding scheme and emergent themes.

Validity refers to meaningful and accurate conclusions from data collected. Validity is strengthened with triangulation through multiple data collection methods, peer review, member checking—all of which were employed in this study. Given the small sample size and qualitative nature of the proposed study, generalizability is not a goal. However, I provided rich and thick description of the setting, participants, and procedures related to the study to help readers determine whether or not results from this study are applicable in their own or other settings (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Specifically, I approached the data collection and analysis process as Gallagher (2007) suggests, moving from a "concern for the 'generalizability' to the 'contextuality' of ethnographic research, such that the goal of 'universal generalizability' is replaced by our emphasis on

contextuality and heterogeneity of knowledge" (p. 11). To further ensure validity of subjective observations and field notes, I engaged in member checks—sharing interview transcripts, field notes, or preliminary findings—with the community of participants. In a desire to be a credible, socially responsible, and transparent researcher throughout the research process, I shared research material including research questions, early drafts of the proposed research design, and transcriptions of interviews with the participants of the study.

Limitations

The qualitative nature of the ethnography limits the ability to generalize the results. Given the focus on a case study in a single setting at one point in time, generalizability is not the goal. Additionally, although a strength of participant observation is the ability to provide specific and complex data including rich descriptions of speech events and actions, it is also time consuming and requires skill in documenting observations with accuracy. As the principle investigator, I was the primary research instrument and, therefore, challenged to meet the demands of recording conversations and actions happening simultaneously among a group of people. The challenging task of capturing the activity and talk in a particular context was mitigated by using audio and video recording devices as a second pair of "eyes" and "ears."

Chapter Four: Literacy Practiced within the Context of Youth Voices

"I think education is really brought forth here but not so much in school."

~ Anaya, 17, June 19, 2009

At least twice a week, Youth Voices members filter inside a humble two-story wood paneled building bordering an urban public high school. Before climbing the stairs to occupy their second floor meeting space, the youth must walk through a freshly painted hallway adorned with maps of continental Africa and framed images of important black freedom fighters including Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Ella Baker, Amiri Baraka, and Sonia Sanchez. On occasion an all-black youth ensemble of actors, singers, and dancers who share the space can be heard practicing on the ground floor auditorium for an upcoming performance. Many days, the youth are greeted by local community members lining the hallway as they await services from the food pantry housed downstairs and operated by three black women who are mothers, aunties, and sisters to the members of Youth Voices. This building, dedicated to the elimination of poverty and oppression particularly for communities of color, is, according to Aniya, "like a second family." Upstairs resides an institute that regularly hosts workshops on undoing racism, as well as the nonprofit organization that sponsors Youth Voices.

The purpose of this chapter is to document the nature of literacy activity in Youth Voices and to discuss the ways in which literacy is defined and practiced within the context of Youth Voices. Findings are arranged in two sections. First, I examine how literacy as a social practice is enacted to form a community of practice. Then, I explore the salient literacy practices evident in the Youth Voices program.

Literacy as a Social Practice and Community-Based

The literacy events within the context of Youth Voices foster community. Across time, Youth Voices became a community of practice with observable language, symbols, and activities unique to Youth Voices (Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger,1998). What makes the Youth Voices community a community of practice? As Wenger (1998) suggests, every community is not a community of practice. In this case, however, Youth Voices has become a community of practice because of the shared history and culture among the group; the mutual interests and accountability associated with accomplishing a shared mission and goal; and the shared language and familiar routines that are created anew and reproduced over time. In *Communities of Practice*, Wenger (1998) writes that "learning is a part of our participation in our communities and organizations" (p. 8). Furthermore, Wenger (1998) explains characteristics of practice as a source of community—"joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire." In the following sections, I illustrate the ways in which Youth Voices activity demonstrates three overlapping characteristics of communities of practice.

Youth Voices is a joint enterprise. According to Wenger, the practices associated with a joint enterprise involve negotiating roles and responsibilities as they relate to "getting the job done;" responding to the conditions of the job; and "mutual accountability." Youth Voices is a space for youth to work together to produce a product. Niqua describes a typical planning day:

> We get together with the plans [for the upcoming radio broadcast] and once you get that plan then we take action basically. But it's all a process and it's a whole team work[ing] together to get to this process that you trying to get to. And as

> long as we work together and if anyone else wants to join then that's an even better process… cause two brains [are] better than one brain. So if anybody… [does] what we do and put input in what we doing we get a lot accomplished as far as the show… like planning for the show and community action also.

Many of the youth participants are initially attracted to Youth Voices because of the prospect of being part of the "finished" product, which is the live radio broadcast. However, in the context of the Youth Voices program, process is equally, if not more, important than product. Elevating process over product or evaluating process requires a paradigm shift for many educational programs or youth development programs whose sustainability is dependent on funding sources that prioritize product, tangible deliverables, or measurable outcomes.

Within the context of Youth Voices, the process or the "joint enterprise" of producing a radio show is a source of community coherence. Youth participants develop their literacy skills (read: critical inquiry, reading, writing, and public speaking skills) in the very process of communally negotiating their roles and responsibilities, shaping radio show topics, and determining how to engage their peers and community-at-large. According to Fisher, Purcell, and May (2009), in the context of Playmaking for Girls (PFG), a playwriting and performance program for teen girls in the Southeast, "process, and more specifically the creative process that leads to writing a play and preparing for a public performance, is something to be chronicled rather than evaluated" (p. 338). Using the work of PFG as a lens to view the work of Youth Voices reveals the ways in which the process involved in preparing for and producing a live public affairs radio broadcast is intended to engender more process and hopefully participation in activities beyond the

youth radio program (Fisher, Purcell, & May, 2009). As Niqua's statements indicate, the youth radio production process gives way to cultivating a collaborative community where youth learn from each other and are invested in a common endeavor. Further, Niqua seems to understand that the youth stand to accomplish more by working together and perhaps by pooling their skills and sharing responsibilities for the mutual benefit of the process and the product.

Mutual engagement in Youth Voices. Youth Voices is comprised of a medley of youth. Besides the diversity in age, gender, and grade level, the youth are also different in their personalities, backgrounds, socioeconomic status, and skill sets. What binds this aggregate of youth does not entail their individual makeup, but rather their mutual engagement in political education via popular education tools, radio broadcast production, and community action as they make it happen at Youth Voices. The youth are compelled to be present at the meetings and broadcasts and community events because of this mutual investment in Youth Voices. This difference among the individuals that constitute Youth Voices teaches the youth to appreciate diversity, an act that is not always elevated or cultivated inside schools. A participant, Brandon, a 17-year-old junior, describes the social stratification that plays out in public school and often interrupts learning:

> At school you got like people worried about … outcasts, lames, and the pee-ons, and the what nots. But here [at Youth Voices] even if you lame or whatever… you got people like Lumumba, Jermaine, and Assata that ain't looking for nothing, but no oppression. It's like basically anybody can fit in cause like we just have to learn to adapt to people like that because that's how the world is…

Embedded in Brandon's remarks is one of the objectives of the nonprofit that sponsors Youth Voices, to end oppression. Above anything else, Youth Voices is guided to engage in anti-oppressive activity. This mutual engagement is less about who the individual youth are and more about what they do and create—together. The youth are engaged mutually because of the work at hand—to use broadcast media as a vehicle for community organizing to end oppression.

Shared repertoire in "air-shifting." According to Wenger (2008), the repertoire of a community of practice includes routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice" (p. 83). Youth Voices has a distinct culture because of the shared experiences, language, and activities engaged in by its members across time. Youth refer to the adults as adult allies, some of whom the youth address with "brother" or "sister" before their names. Embracing, hand shaking between young men, and inquiring about life outside of Youth Voices is a regular occurrence. Meeting agendas written on flip chart paper are a mainstay, as well as routine beginnings and endings. No gathering begins without a round of checking in about participants' daily lives, current feelings, or recent experiences, just as no meeting ends without some kind of ritualistic circle, recounting of work done during meeting, and/or collective call and response with hands on shoulders and fists pumping the air: "Who you with? I got your back!" The meeting guidelines, a product of the popular education instructional practices, are eventually memorized and incorporated beyond meetings to shape all interaction within the meeting space.

Because of the program's emphasis on a knowledge of African American history and culture, youth members expect to connect radio show topics to information found in one of their curricular materials, the *Black Radical Tradition*, a publication of the Youth Voices sponsoring nonprofit organization. As a result of the nonprofit work and the Youth Voices activities, the youth participants are becoming familiar with concepts including race, power, and oppression, and are using phrases like "collective responsibility" and "youth power." The shared language and commitment to working within a human rights framework, serves to cultivate community among the participants. Whenever literacy events and practices occur within the context of Youth Voices, the participants are developing "habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking that go beyond surface meaning" (Shor, 1992, p. 129).

Literacy in the context of Youth Voices is defined as a social practice, more specifically, in communal terms. More than an individual exercise, literacy is to be engaged in with social others including the adult allies and their peers toward community liberation. As Kari explains, "Youth Voices is a program for youth designed to build leadership skills and connect with other youth around [Southeastern city] and the country." This rising tenth grader makes it clear that he "enjoy[s] the radio show, meeting other youth, and building [his] own skills," and is aware that literacy is not a neutral act as he describes Youth Voices as having a "focus more on political studies" than at his private school. A focus on the political nature of literacy is endemic to the black power ideology espoused within the context of Youth Voices. Literacy is key to community power. Youth Voices provides an illustration of the ways in which literacy is a situated

social practice where the youth learn ways of being, thinking, and acting over time and in relationship.

The Literacy Practices of Youth Voices

When defining literacy in the context of Youth Voices, I determined literacy was acquired and developed in community. As a result, particular Youth Voices facilitators, both veteran community activists, emerge as Frierian public intellectuals who believe in education for liberation. Facilitators, referred to as "adult allies" by the participants, are just as concerned with the youth's research, writing, and speaking skill development as they are with the youth's conscientization (Fisher, 2009a; Friere, 1970). The facilitators understand that the literacy and media skills gained through Youth Voices are some of the same skills and tools that can be applied to school-based literacy and pro-social activities. According to their proposal, "youth have played vital roles in various resistance movements and revolutions. Youth Voices will seek to foster and capture the spirit of youth activism inside and outside of the studio" (Youth Voices proposal). This effort to create an environment conducive for cultivating critical consciousness raising and developing community organizing skills was evident on the first day of training. In the following sections, I illustrate how the popular education tools utilized by the Youth Voices facilitators enhanced literacy learning.

Popular Education as Literacy Pedagogy

One occurrence of literacy is apparent in my observations of Youth Voices workshops and meetings. I noticed that popular education tools were utilized by the workshop facilitators to engage participants. According to programmatic material obtained at the research site, popular education includes three tenets: "1) Valuing and

using personal life experiences in educating each other; 2) Using multimedia and various techniques to create a framework for consciousness raising; and 3) Using our histories to build one future and take action" (Project South workshop material). This kind of popular education includes active listening skills and is not education for education's sake.

Instead popular education is about reflection:

> Sharing experiences obstacles, victories, joys or struggle based on people's expressed needs; critical analysis of our collective practices and our understandings of their root case on society's structure. And new action new ways of looking at the world, engaging each other and acting for change (Project South workshop material).

This kind of popular education should be, according to Miriam, in schools. She interprets popular education as "learning things through your perspective." During an interview about her experience in Youth Voices, Miriam goes on to describe popular education as "a space, an opportunity where youth can learn about different stuff that they are not going to tell you in school. That's what popular education is… Something they're not going to tell you in school." Miriam's reflections echo Aniya's sentiment that education is "really" happening in the context of Youth Voices. The youth are learning about power and oppression, racism and liberation, as well as about community organizing all in a context that is participatory, inclusive of different experiences, and related to solving real-world problems.

Learning through personal experience. Standing in the upstairs hallway of a well-used community-based organization's office, 12 black high school students are asked to consider a wall-chart timeline documenting historically significant events related

to government programs and policies, major economic shifts, and social or popular movements occurring over the past 100 years in the United States of America. The adult facilitators leading the youth participants through a political education workshop issue directives for navigating this particular literacy event—the goal of which is to "incorporate the [students'] lived experience with significant historical events." One after the other, students' names are called and details about individual defining moments are shared. Of all the poignant narratives of self-actualization, one is especially emblematic of what this particular space engenders. The story belongs to Felicia, who takes her place at the center of the circle. Her life changing moment on the timeline is current:

> Back in May, when our most wonderful teachers [were] leaving—all of our 10th grade teachers had left, and at the end of the year… they really inspired me. One specific [teacher], his name was Mr. Smith. He was like no matter what you do, always speak up for yourself. He was like, no matter how the system is put in place or what anybody else is telling you, you have to use your voice. You know what I mean, he was like if you don't learn nothing from school, nothing, always know that you can be heard and speak up and do what you gotta do to make it. So, he really inspired me with his words (Personal Communication, 2008).

Invited to view their defining moments of personal growth as an integral part of a broader historical timeline of important social and political events that have shaped the trajectory of the United States, Felicia and her peers are poised to imagine themselves as historical actors and agents of change. Sharing lessons learned from everyday lived experiences, the youth are positioned to effect the direction of the future. The timeline exercise exemplified the first tenet in popular education: valuing and using personal life

experiences in educating each other.

Learning through multimedia. Beyond icebreakers like the historical timeline activity, Youth Voices participants are engaged through multimedia. Youth view Youtube clips, streaming video, or short documentaries that document social justice movements involving youth and adults across the country. Expanding the traditional notion of a literacy event, Morrell (2004) considers film and music as text. For example, the *Eyes on the Prize* documentary series is a constant piece of the Youth Voices curriculum. Workshop participants view a section of the series once a week and are asked by the facilitators to engage in an exercise called Consciousness, Vision, and Strategy (CVS). As community organizers in training, the youth learn to use the CVS process as an analytical tool and plan for action. To complete the consciousness part of the activity, adult allies ask youth to note what is taking place. Then, to construct the vision part of the activity, youth are asked to describe what they hope to see. Finally, for the strategy portion, youth and adults brainstorm ideas for how to move from consciousness to vision. Brainstorming yields ideas and concrete action steps to achieve what the youth hope to see happen in their communities. The *Eyes on the Prize* video instruction and CVS analysis are examples of the second tenet in popular education: using multimedia and various techniques to create a framework for consciousness raising.

Learning from history. Another element of Youth Voices curriculum includes the study of black history, particularly in the United States. Many of the black youth participants attend public schools where black history is either reduced to mere mentioning of prominent black figures during Black History Month or not included at all. For instance, 16 year-old Miriam, had no idea the events on Bloody Sunday March 7,

1965 in Selma, Alabama propelled the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to be signed into law five months later. Reflecting on her experience traveling to Selma with Youth Voices, Miriam said, "I learned a lot about my history. I haven't heard [about Bloody Sunday] in my entire life at all. I learned a lot about what it was for and why it was significant for the south during Civil Rights." While in Selma, Miriam was able to record interviews with several elders of the Civil Rights Movement and interact with locals who participated in the march over 40 years ago. Upon returning, Miriam was responsible for sharing what she learned with the Youth Voices group.

Too often, academic learning privileges canonized knowledge or "the classics" for the sake of being well educated in "predefined forms of knowledge" (Apple 2000; Freire; 1987). Literacy, then, is detached from social, cultural, political, and historical contexts and reduced to mastery of techniques through skill and drill instruction that effectively "ignores the life experience, the history, and the language practice of students" (p. 146). In *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, Woodson (1933) claims "so-called modern education … does others so much more good than it does the Negro, because it has been worked out in conformity to the needs of those who have enslaved and oppressed weaker peoples" (p. xviii). What Woodson names Eurocentric education left the Negro students then and black children now "worthless in the development of their people" (p. 2). By centering the voices, experiences, history, culture, and legacy of activism among African Americans in the United States, particularly in the south, Youth Voices facilitators fulfill the third tenet of popular education: using our multiple histories to build one future and take action.

Literacy through Critical Inquiry and Dialogue

Each week, Youth Voices facilitators, participants, and the parents of participants contribute to the development of broadcast topics. Although the youth are ultimately responsible for writing and reporting their show scripts, everyone is involved in shaping the content for those scripts. In Soep's (2005) work, "Youth Radio and the Pedagogy of Collegiality," collegiality is defined as "a relationship of shared collective responsibility" where neither "'student' nor 'teacher' can be silent in collaborative media production, and both, in a sense are interrogators – of one another and of the conditions they jointly explore" (p.6). Here, I share an excerpt from a discussion about a show topic on the various types of formal education.

> Lumumba (YST facilitator): What messages are we trying to get across?
>
> Cierra (YST member): Normal school isn't challenging. You have to be more gifted to get in magnet school.
>
> Mama Lynn (Kwesi's mother): Well, you have to audition for some magnet schools. And they are usually related to the performing arts or a specific subject like science. You don't want to discourage folks from wanting to be in magnet schools.
>
> Lumumba: Yeah, let me flag that comment about magnet schools because we may offend. There are gifted folks in public schools.

On "critical dialogue versus teacher talk," Shor (1992) posits the benefits of dialogue as an instructional method. According to Shor, "dialogue is a democratic, directed, and critical discourse different from teacher-student exchanges in traditional classrooms" (p. 87). Here the Youth Voices facilitator initiates a conversation that encourages youth to

reflect on their personal experience in schools and count that as knowledge. Although Youth Voices activity involves research to develop show topics, in this instance, their own experience counts as evidence and content for a show about the various types of education. The group goes on to share their thoughts on the purpose of the show topic.

> Kwesi: Unbiased opinion on different forms of education so people can choose.
>
> Rita (YST member): To know there are other choices to public school like [the state] Virtual Academy.
>
> Cierra: Have people see that there are other options.
>
> Alim: Choices. People should walk away with more options.
>
> Martin: More choices. They teach differently in charter schools.
>
> Lumumba: Okay, the goal of the show is options. If we are sharing options is there contact info that you can give people?

Regularly, Youth Voices facilitators engage Youth Voices members in dialogue about issues relevant to the show topics. Through dialogue Youth Voices explores the multiple perspectives and possible implications of an issue. Such inquiry and "mutually created discourse" are critical features to literacy learning in a social context (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1992). More than instructional strategies for teachers who want to create democratic classrooms, multidirectional dialogue or dialogic exchanges can lead to positive "human and social development" (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1992). Workshopping show topics creates opportunities for dialogue which in turn leads to youth development.

"Air-shifting": Literacy in Action

To describe the kind of critical literacy activity at work during radio broadcasts, I re-appropriated the term "air-shifting," an expression used by participants to refer to the

technical and soundboard engineering at the radio station. In the context of this study, I use "air-shifting" to refer to the youth radio collectively learning how to question, critique, and engage in social, political, and cultural discourse through community radio programming. In this way, youth radio production becomes a "pedagogy of disruption" by appropriating the access that they do have to media to become more than just consumers of popular culture, but also producers and critics of culture (Giroux, 2006).

The youth participant's first act of "air-shifting" involved writing the script and selecting the music for the Youth Voices promotional piece to air on WKLG, but not before hearing a history of the community-based radio station that would feature Youth Voices. Delivering this history and description of the current mission and programming policies of the radio station was operations director, Ayinde Mfume. Mfume, a robust figure with salt and pepper dread locks discussed the ways in which community-sponsored radio differs from commercial radio and reviewed the station's mission to provide "free and open access to the broadcast media" particularly to those traditionally denied. Mfume spoke frankly about his high expectations for WKLG's newest and youngest cadre of program producers and explained that the youth were going to be more than just on-air personalities. Indeed, Youth Voices was expected to carry out the mission of WKLG. With that admonition at the forefront, the following is the promotion created by the youth to advertise their new public affairs show:

> Background music plays **l**yrics by India Arie: "If young people would talk to old people, it would make us a better people all around." The music fades out as Youth Voices fade in.
>
> Youth Voice 1 (Marcus): It's our time!

Youth Voice 2 (Byron): Time for youth!

Youth Voice 1: Time for truth!

Youth Voice 2: 98.3

The youth is you and me

If you trace us to the motherland

You'll find our master plan

We're not from the same race

But we're from the same place

This is our time to talk about politics

How the world's gone crazy

How the government really is

So if you understand

The youth is here today

And if you do like this

We takin' compliments all day

Youth Voice 1: Tune in on Fridays at 7:30pm to hear youth speaking truth to power on your listener sponsored community radio station for progressive information WKLG 98.3 FM and at www.WKLG.org.

Youth Voice 2: Youth Voices!

Background music plays lyrics by Goodie Mob's Cee-Lo: "You can't have no revolution without the women and you can't have no future without the children. Youth Voices fade out, as music fades in.

Literacy studies theorists argue that media studies should be part of secondary public school curriculum because young people—coming of age in the new mass mediated society—are bombarded with messages about identity and world-views including representations of who they are in relationship to others, what they can do, who they can become, and what they should think (Duncan-Andrade, 2006; Goodman, 2003; Hill & Vasudevan, 2007; Morrell, 2004; Soep, 2005).

Creating the public service announcement, youth intentionally choose music that reflects the Youth Voices mission to "fight for change in [their] communities and communities beyond." The artist, India Arie, whose music provides the backdrop for the introduction, is well known for her conscious lyrics and critique of sociocultural issues. Similarly, Cee-Lo, is also a hip hop artist who has experienced mainstream/pop success and is known for his political lyrics. Through the text of the promotion, Youth Voices display an awareness of their role as social change agents. Youth declare, "It's our time" implying an understanding of the sociopolitical and historical tensions around who has the right to speak. To understand why media—specifically radio—for black youth, as a forum for dispersing information, is part of a continuum of education for liberation requires an understanding of the ways in which, according to historian V. P. Franklin, "education and literacy were greatly valued among Afro-Americans enslaved in the United States because they say in their day-to-day experiences—from one generation to the next—that knowledge and information helped one to survive in a hostile environment." (p. 86) The history of slavery and resistance in the United States has particular significance to this study situated in the Southeast.

According to the youth, “the world’s gone crazy” and the government is not really what it seems to be—a democracy for the people and of the people. The Youth Voices radio promotion demonstrates that the activity of radio production in this context—one intentionally aimed at politicizing youth-of-color—serves as a bridge to cultivating critical literacy that is, as Camangian (2008) argues, “critical literacy in this sense poses an alternative discourse, one that stands against oppressive social conditions, ideologies and the institutions that marginalize the experiences and livelihoods of marginalized people.” In order to resist, reinterpret, or produce counter narratives, black and brown youth, in particular, “need to understand the difference between reality and the media’s various representations of reality and that media representations of themselves reflect ideologies and stances about the world” (Morrell, 2004, p. 93-94). Equipped with critical literacy, youth participants are able to engage media production critically.

Chapter Five: Youth Voices and Civic Engagement

"[Youth Voices] changed my life because it gave me a community awareness. I never really grasped the concept of community work until I was here at [Youth Voices] and now I feel like I have a responsibility to effect change in other people's lives not just my own." Aniya, 17, September 10, 2010

Civic engagement is about far more than voting. Otherwise, the young people involved in Youth Voices, particularly those under the legal voting age, would have little to no opportunities to practice civic engagement. Instead, civic engagement is about individual and collective actions that serve the purpose of identifying and addressing community issues of concern (Sherrod et al., 2010). It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes. Radio production allows for such civic engagement.

This chapter responds to the second research question: What does civic engagement look like in the context of Youth Voices? In response to research question two, I found that civic engagement activities in the Youth Voices program could be categorized using the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) indicators for civic engagement. As depicted in *Figure 1* below, CIRCLE situates indicators of civic engagement in three categories including civic, electoral, and political voice.

Figure 1. CIRCLE indicators for civic engagement

Civic	Electoral	Political
Community problem solving	Regular voting	Contacting officials
Regular volunteering for a non-electoral organization	Persuading others to vote	Contacting the print media
Active membership in a group or association	Displaying buttons, signs, stickers	Contacting the broadcast media
Participation in fund-raising run/walk/ride	Campaign contributions	*Protesting*
Other fund-raising for charity	Volunteering for a candidate or political organization	Email petitions
		Written petitions
		Boycotting
		Buycotting
		Canvassing

** Indicators evident in Youth Voices are italicized.*

I found that civic engagement opportunities were apparent throughout the Youth Voices program activities and could be clustered in two categories: civic and political. Given that the program emphasis is not on electoral organizing, it is not surprising that electoral activities were minimal compared to civic and political. Within civic and political categories, the majority of the Youth Voices activities were examples of the following civic engagement indices: active membership, community problem solving, and

protesting. The following sections provide examples of the civic engagement opportunities found within the context of the Youth Voices program.

Active Membership in Youth Voices as Civic Engagement

One indicator of civic engagement is active membership in a group or association. Youth participant involvement in Youth Voices is one of the more obvious observations of civic engagement. Youth Voices is a group of young people who consistently volunteer their time after school to attend multiple meetings or events each week. Letters to parents of Youth Voices participants doubles as an application form for each youth member. The form lists their requirements for membership and includes a number of benefits as a result of participation. Abbreviated below is a list of the program aspects that the youth can expect to experience from participating in the program:

- Getting leadership and organizing skills (public speaking, running meetings, strategizing, etc.)
- Being connected with youth leaders across [Southeastern city], Southeast region, and Nationally
- Gaining power and respect
- Access to a bimonthly youth radio show
- Running for leadership positions; signing up for committees
- Voting at meetings
- Membership card and free newsletters
- Invitations to all meetings, trainings, celebrations and actions
- Opportunities for travel
- Have support of [Youth Voices] on an individual level
- Responsibilities

- Attending popular political education meetings twice a week
- Participation in youth agreed upon work
- Participation in one youth led and facilitated fund raising for the [Youth Voices] program
- Coming to organization-wide events
- Upholding [Youth Voices] agreed values
- Respecting yourself and others
- Taking responsibility for making positive change in yourself, your school and communities
- Continuing these changes across the region

The programmatic content and aims presented in the letter reveal opportunities for youth to be involved in civic activities including decision-making, working collaboratively, and community organizing. Although the nonprofit organization does not refer to itself as a service learning program, many of its program goals parallel the skills and knowledge needed for civic engagement. Through youth leadership roles, the youth participants are able to experience meaningful and supportive relationships with their peers and adult members of the community, engage in challenging, but achievable experiences that foster civic engagement skills, and develop their attitudes and beliefs about the difference one person can make to their communities and the world-at-large. For example, Miriam, in her description about her role in Youth Voices, mentions the kind of skills she is gaining through the experience:

> I'm an action team leader. It just means that we got a little bit more responsibility than the participants… which means that we interact with the staff. We are closer

> to the participants in age. We are the first line of defense and establish some pretty role modelship if you want to call it… and really just kind of set the rules… I chose to participate in that roles as a member of [Youth Voices] and it was a way for me to step up my leadership role and really practice facilitating and communicating with my peers on a level of positive leadership, positive role model and just a way to step up my game and really learn what it takes to you know be a responsible youth leader. (Interview, June 18, 2010)

Miriam's account of her role in Youth Voices is an illustration of the program's claim to provide youth with opportunities to develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed for civic engagement. She is apprenticed into such a leadership role over time. Because of her active membership, she is invested in the overall success of the program and in her ability to forward the mission of Youth Voices as new youth join the organization. These skills are transferable to the world beyond Youth Voices as discussed in the following sections on solving community problems.

Community Problem Solving as Civic Engagement

In addition to active membership, the youth participants engaged in community problem solving. The concept of community within the context of Youth Voices refers to multiple social groups including, but not limited to, the youth program, youth in general, the local surrounding neighborhood, broader Southeastern city, as well as people of color. By joining Youth Voices and becoming an active member in the program, the youth participants are essentially signing up to engage in social change. Therefore, the young participants of Youth Voices encountered opportunities to engage in community problem solving. The data revealed that most examples and opportunities for community problem

solving were connected to Youth Voices activities. Before engaging in actual problem solving, the Youth Voices activities incorporated problem solving techniques and tools. The problem solving skills gained and developed through the internal group work is preparation for tackling community problems at broader community levels.

One of the most important tools utilized by Youth Voices throughout their work with youth and adults is a set of guidelines. In the context of the study, I found that the guidelines established a framework for how to conduct meetings and shape the environment of the meeting space. Guidelines for Youth Voices activities were collaboratively created by youth members of a youth council that existed in the nonprofit organization prior to Youth Voices. The guidelines are designed to circumvent problems that might occur within the youth space or youth meetings. Each guideline or ground rule is recited before meetings as a reminder for how to address potential problems that may arise among a group of teen aged youth include teasing, bullying, making controversial statements, extroverted youth speaking with more frequency than more introverted youth, and differing opinions and interests.

The guidelines may be well intentioned; however, two of the youth participants expressed concern with their effectiveness and authenticity. According to one youth participant, Shea, the youth were introduced to the guidelines because Youth Voices is more of a "collective organization and they [the adult allies] were enforcing the collectivism values." She went on to describe the utility of the guidelines as a necessary tool to make progress. In her words, "You gotta have rules to make things go. 'Cause if everybody had their way, we'd all be standing still." Shea did, however, express her concern for the time that it takes to allow for a collective process. According to Shea,

"it's a fair system," but "no one wants to be stuck in a situation because nothing's happening." In her view, being sure that everyone's opinion is heard may mean decisions or projects take longer to get done.

Also challenging the purpose of the guidelines, Sayisha claims they were created to "make people feel like they're not being controlled. It's less preachy … people don't like that." However, she is not convinced that the Youth Voices program utilizes the guidelines as she describes. Instead, she feels like "sometimes it can be like overwhelming how much they [the adult allies] enforce it. Sometime they enforce it too much where it's kind of being contradicted." Continuing, Sayisha offers an example of how the "step up, step back" ground rule could be misleading or have unintended results. The principle is intended to be a reminder to be conscious of any one person dominating conversations, in an effort to provide space for others to speak and act. According to Sayisha,

> Step up, step back. Like okay so sometimes we're told… 'people who talk more step back and let people who don't talk as much or the people who they view as the underdogs speak'. When you start to play that role you step back. Then all of a sudden they want you to step up because the people that normally don't step up, still don't step up. So you're stuck in a rock and a hard place (Interview, May 19, 2009).

Sayisha's reflections highlight the challenge of creating an equitable and democratic space. The youth are learning inside Youth Voices how difficult it can be to generate consensus in spaces outside of Youth Voices. Through the "step up, step back" guideline the youth are grappling with how particular voices, identities, and personalities could

potentially and unintentionally silence others. Like the "step up, step back" principle, the "one mic" guideline is intended to ensure that a speaker is heard and not drowned out by multiple voices. By saying, "one mic" a youth or an adult ally may signal that one person has the floor and is speaking. As Shea and Sayisha note, the guidelines are not without flaws or points of contestation. Occasionally, new guidelines are added for particular workshops. Overall, these guidelines seem to help youth understand that in order to work together in a group, everyone needs to feel respected, heard, and valued. In this context, Youth Voices supports solving problems in a way that requires broad participation and equity in representation among community members.

Another problem solving technique used within the context of the Youth Voices community is reflection. After each educational workshop, activity, or radio broadcast, the youth participants evaluate "what worked" or "what didn't work." Sometimes this process is referred to as the "+ or ∆" or known as "plus" and "minus or change." Another version of the evaluation process that took place after radio broadcasts was "highlight" and "lowlight." Most often, though, the evaluation process is called, "yes, no, maybe next time." Either iteration of the evaluation process involves taking time as a group to reflect on the content, quality, and components of the experience in question. For example, after each radio broadcasts, the youth convene for about 30 additional minutes to critique the process and quality of the radio production. Even with inconsistency in applying reflective practice, the quality of the radio broadcasts have improved overtime and an element of sophistication evident in the structural format of regular segments including interviews, a black radical tradition moment, and a group dialogue about the show topic

to close the show. Other components of the Youth Voices program have been influenced by the reflection process.

Civic Engagement Beyond Youth Voices

Progressing from problem solving internally, Youth Voices participants applied their skills to contexts beyond the youth space. Previous political education workshops taught Youth Voices participants that community problem solving begins with youth and people, in general, believing that they can make a difference. The activity known as the "Power Grid" entails dividing a space into quadrants. Four signs with the phrases, "youth can be themselves," "youth can with other youth," "youth can't," "youth can with the support of adults" are posted, one in each quadrant of the room. The workshop facilitator instructs participants to move to the quadrant that best describes what they think youth are capable of in response to a particular issue. In the case below, Naima, a senior participant in Youth Voices, uses the "Power Grid" activity during a workshop she and a fellow Youth Voices member facilitate off-site during a visit with youth in New Orleans. This time, the phrases are altered slightly:

> The [Youth Voices] workshop was the last workshop held before the Peoples Movement Assembly (PMA). It was my first time facilitating a workshop during an out of town, youth-led function. [Biko] and I led the 'Power Grid' activity, where we asked participants questions about the current state of youth power, where they would like to see youth power, and why. After each question, the participants moved to designated areas that were marked with the word they agreed with: 'Powerful,' 'Powerless,' 'Isolated,' and 'Collective.' This workshop was a great segue into the PMA. Knowing where we thought youth power was

> currently and where we wanted it to be helped when the time came to decide on resolutions. (Project South periodical, Vol. 18, Issue 1, Spring 2010)

This kind of collaborative brainstorming and community engagement illustrates the process that Youth Voices engaged before pursuing any kind of community direct action. Similarly, an excerpt from my field notes of a Youth Voices meeting depict the way the organization engaged as community builders, which was put into practice at the 2010 United States Social Forum.

Civic Engagement at the United States Social Forum

Another opportunity for Youth Voices participants to be civically engaged beyond local action projects was during their trip to the 2010 United States Social Forum (USSF), a national convening of social justice activists, community organizers, youth workers, cultural workers, and human rights advocates. The conveners of the USSF made it clear that the gathering is a movement building process and not a conference, but rather a space to come up with grassroots solutions to education, economic, and criminal justice crises. According to the organizers of the USSF, the gathering represents "a struggle to build a powerful multi-racial, multi-sectoral, inter-generational, diverse, inclusive, internationalist social movement that transforms the country and changes history." The mission of the forum, "Another world is possible," declares what the world should look like and the youth use the week-long meeting to start planning the path to get there. According to the mission statement, the USSF provides spaces to learn from the experiences and struggles of those who gather, share, and analyze the problems oppressed communities face, build relationships, and align with international brothers and sisters to

strategize how to challenge the status quo in an effort to discover alternative paths for self and social development; remaking society.

As I prepared to travel with Youth Voices to the USSF, I asked several youth participants what they expected from the experience. Nia claimed she was looking forward to gaining "knowledge, new perspectives, and daily experiences." One of the younger participants, Katti, a ninth grader, said, "I want to take home a new social studies brain when I go home. I want to be a tactic leader when I go home." Miriam explained, "I'm looking forward to knowing, learning more about popular education this week in these workshops." In the mindset of her new project related to the incarceration crisis in the United States, Aniya remarked, "I want to get a better understanding of the school-to-prison pipeline and how to change, effect systems." Hannah and Brandon were hoping to "learn more about leading, activism, experimenting with documentation" and looking forward to "learning about what hurts my community the most and coming home to change, make a difference." The learning started on the bus ride to Detroit on a caravan that began at the Youth Voices building. The Caravan traveled through the Southeast and Midwest with stops in four states and on to Detroit for the USSF.

Protesting as Political Voice

An additional component of civic engagement defined by CIRCLE's indicators is political. Within the political, Youth Voices participated in one main aspect: protesting. Closely linked with community problem solving, protesting is another civic engagement feature of the Youth Voices program activities. One highly visible example of the youth participants engaged in protesting abuses against the civil rights of communities of color, occurred during the journey to the USSF. Nearly 40 years after the freedom riders, civil

rights activists who rode the interstate buses in 1961 to test the Supreme Court case *Boynton v. Virginia* that granted interstate travelers the legal right to disregard local segregation ordinances regarding interstate transportation facilities, 23 youth boarded a bus with several representatives from a variety of community-based organizations who work in partnership with Youth Voices for social justice. Together, we traveled the road to Detroit, Michigan retracing history along the way. Education on the bus included lectures about the Kentucky black coal miners and new sources of green energy as we passed the wind turbines.

Our journey to Detroit included being "schooled" by Nathan, a public intellectual and community organizer with the Youth Voices community. Stepping into the role of "teacher" Nathan helped us understand a theory of the African episteme that allows for polyculturalism. He explained his theory of an ecology of knowledge that recognizes the coexistence of other knowledges. Youth Voices participants learn on their bus ride to the social forum about their role as citizens. Not your typical school field trip; it is, according to an adult ally, "education on wheels." We connected with the historic migration of African Americans from the South to the North. The education grounded us for relating to the different communities with whom we convened in Louisville, Kentucky and Chicago, Illinois.

These two communities were in the midst of intense protest around environmental issues and housing rights, respectively. At each stop, the youth participants joined the protests carrying their own signs and shouting chants in solidarity with both communities. Youth interviewed during the journey responded to their experiences. According to Aaliyah:

> [The] spirits were so genuine, and the determination I felt from them, inspired me to want change even more and work hard for it. In Kentucky and Chicago I participated in protests, and the experience was very riveting, because I felt like one of my ancestors or someone that maybe I had seen before in a documentary, literally taking the steps forward to progression! (Interview, June 19, 2010)

Aaliyah's account of her experience protesting underscores the meaningfulness of civic action beyond local conditions. Stepping outside of the Youth Voices community, Aaliyah and her peers are able to see themselves connected to a larger social justice movement. Protesting was an act of working in solidarity with communities-of-color to make a better world. Similarly, Aniya describes the kind of hands-on learning opportunities evident in their protest experiences. She recalls feeling "especially excited to have landed in Kentucky and witnessed the 'better air' protest because it really brought to life what environmental justice was. You could actually smell the pollution that was being admitted into the air from the factories that surrounded Louisville." Continuing, Aniya describes how she felt being a part of a critical mass of demonstrators. She recalled being in "Chicago [where] a large protest was held. The police were on edge and were running around like chickens because they realized how powerful collective action was." These protest experiences served to shape the youth participants' attitudes about their own political efficacy and abilities to make change.

Reconceptualizing Civic Education and Complicating Citizenship

In response to the second research question, I further found that the nature of youth civic engagement was connected to the nature and content of civic education experienced by the Youth Voices participants across variable contexts. Civic education in

school and out of school should help young people acquire and learn to use the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens throughout their lives. Civic education aims at imparting the knowledge and skills are needed for effective participation in the community, government, and politics. When students were asked to compare their experiences of civic education in school with their experiences in Youth Voices programming, two themes emerged. According to the youth, civic education inside school focused primarily on the structural components of the United States government including the three branches of government and cursory knowledge of the constitution. For instance, Sayisha, recalled, having "a civic law and government class." She went on to explain that in class they "don't learn political rights. We learn about constitutional rights and social movements." Similarly, Miriam contends that her "civic class was on government and we're learning like how the government system works and stuff like that." According to Miriam, as a result she knows "the roles of the legislative branch and the president and stuff like that." Seemingly, the nature of civic education evident in the public school curriculum experienced by both Sayisha and Miriam was one dimensional, stopping short of the kind of critical civic education experienced by another youth participant, Naima who recounted her experience as a student in an online home school run by her father. "We do learn about critically thinking about how to analyze what's going on politically. And we learn what it means as a person to be involved and [about] the power we have to be involved and the power at different levels." Naima's experience is more closely related to the type of civic education evident in the Youth Voices context.

My attempt to understand the kind of youth civic engagement apparent throughout

the Youth Voices program uncovered youth perceptions of themselves as citizens. The term itself was a tenuous concept, as Biko, an African American male and recent high school graduate, admitted "the word citizen throws me off a little bit." Pausing to collect his thoughts, Biko seemed resistant to internalizing an absolute or narrow idea of being a U.S. citizen. "I would call myself several different things," he explains. Biko elaborates:

> It may stir a little controversy. First and foremost I do identify myself as a black male. And for my own sake and you know healing my woundedness I call myself an African. Just so not to lose touch from where I really come from. I guess as a citizen, I don't really feel [hesitates]… I guess like for one the incentives that come from being a citizen [he stops to reorganize his thoughts]… right, so truthfully, I can vote. I personally don't see where my vote really falls into place. So, I'm not sure how they can convince me that my voting has weight. I don't see how my voting has weight in the decision. Personally, I don't really see it… or really feel like my view-point, my world view contributes to how this society operates. Especially as a youth, I feel like we do carry the torch of our ancestors and our elders. I don't really see [Southeastern city], the decision makers of [Southeastern city] really taking into account our voices or the work … I don't see the mayor on this bus. I don't see the people who give citizenship to me… doing or making change for the better in our world, personally (Interview, June 19, 2010)

Probing his thoughts about feeling disenfranchised or invisible to Southeastern city decision-makers, I ask Biko what, if anything, his participation in Youth Voices has taught him concerning his and other youth voices in relationship to power and influence.

Essentially, I am asking Biko to tell me why he is participating as a youth action team leader if he believes that his "view points" do not carry "weight." Biko expounds:

> I do it for the people, for my people, for the people who struggle due to what's already set in place regarding how this society is run… people struggling because of that. We're all coming together … people who feel just like me about citizenship. The fact that we don't think that our voices are really heard or taken into consideration enough to really make the world what we want it to be. So, I feel like I'm a little ant in a big anthill of people who want to collectively move mountains. Just me being there… the energy that I give off. It's like one of them ants. I'm carrying my ten pounds… I'm carrying double, triple however much they say an ant can carry times their weight. I believe everybody on this bus is as well. Each and every last one of us for one is the make up of everybody that existed in our blood before us. So, even that in and of itself is powerful. I feel like I'm comprised of all of my ancestors running through my blood. When necessary, I can call on them and react and respond and really be dynamic. I feel like everyone of us can. Especially at the social forum… when it comes to struggle and people who got fire inside of them… ain't nothing you can do but build or tear down, and tearing down ain't always a bad thing (Interview, June 19, 2010)

The nature of civic engagement and attitudes about civic action in the context of Youth Voices was informed by a pan-Africanist sociopolitical world-view which involves struggling for the rights and liberation for all African people anywhere and everywhere, as evidenced by Biko's own perception of himself as a black male African.

Sitting next to Biko, another youth leader in Youth Voices describes her perception of a citizen. “I guess I see a citizen like being a person in your community, being there for a long time, knowing each other, communicating with people. Going to work in that community.” According to Miriam, “people got like different perspectives” about citizenship. “People saying citizenship is like if you vote… it’ all how you perceive it. It’s like a label… you can label yourself as a girl. It’s just a title. And some people like to be called citizen and some people don’t.” In describing who or what a citizen is, Miriam seems to focus on the roles and responsibilities of a citizen, rather than on any specific relationship to a particular geographic location, nation, or cultural group. She hints at the idea that citizenship duties extend beyond voting to include an investment in “your” community.

Chiming in again, Biko adds to his previous thoughts. “I’m from America, from [city of study], I’m from [state of study].” Qualifying his statement, Biko continues, “Though I may have been born here, I wouldn’t necessarily say I’m from here all the way … and how ever controversial that may seem…I think that for me it kind of helps me to reconnect with where I’m from. I didn’t come over here...” His final words trail off as he alludes to the involuntary or forced migration of enslaved Africans to the Americas. Biko, like many of the Youth Voices participants, are shaped by the environment created by the sponsoring nonprofit organization. Concepts about civic engagement and citizenship are informed by a prevailing Afrocentric world-view.

Volunteerism vs. Community Organizing as Civic Engagement

Based on the CIRCLE survey and other literature, indicators of civic engagement include volunteerism. In the context of Youth Voices, sustained community organizing

and movement building is preferred over volunteering or a "once and done" paradigm. According to Youth Voices philosophy, volunteering conveys a distance from the community, rather than an effort to empower communities most affected by a particular issue to organize on their own behalf. Community organizing for Youth Voices starts with accessing their own collective power and identifying their assets. As illustrated in the meeting agenda below, working in the community is considered part of the Youth Voices long term programmatic goals.

Part of Meeting Agenda:

Activity:

- *How do we design programs that solve problems and not prolong them?*
- *Example [Missing and murdered children history in Atlanta]*
- *Define a problem: Most ATLiens don't know that this happened.*
- *Envision a change that we could organize for in four months*
    - *Air on radio show; functions or forums;*

1000 people know about it; memorialize/document/publicize [strategies]

- *Youth in three groups are given an organization to work within…*
    - *Soup kitchen*
    - *Mentoring with children*
    - *Elderly home [post-it notes]*

- *Debrief and reflect on process*

"What we can do with what we got" –Biko

As evidenced by the agenda notes, ongoing community service is promoted throughout the Youth Voices activities. Community action projects meant to be institutionalized, part of the programmatic structure of the program. In this way, Youth Voices participants are socialized to conceive of civic engagement as a continual lifelong affair.

This chapter explored the ways in which the Youth Voices activities extend our understanding of civic engagement among young people. Our study of civic engagement and ideas about best practices related to youth civic engagement in and out of schools must consider how youth of color enact radical forms of civic life. In this chapter, the participants of Youth Voices provide insight into the ways black youth, in particular, assign meaning to participating in a community (i.e. their Youth Voices community, school communities, neighborhood community, and Southeastern city community writ-large), citizenship, and collective power. The data revealed that for Youth Voices, the majority of civic engagement activity is primarily in response to local social conditions, but also informed by the ways in which local social conditions are in relationship with broader national and global social justice issues. In other words, as the youth participants of Youth Voices are exposed to other youth organizing efforts across the region and across the nation, they become conscious of their role in a larger movement to make the world, specifically for minoritized and marginalized communities, a better place in which to live.

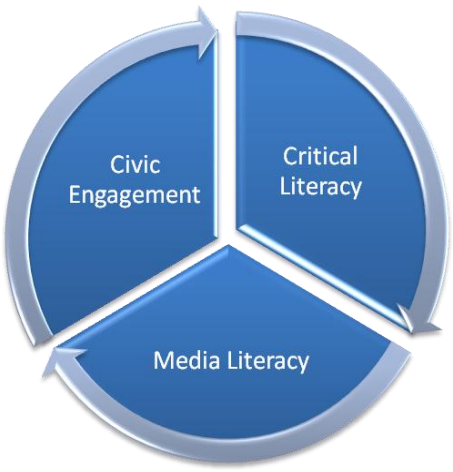
Chapter Six: Literacy, Media, and Civic Engagement Converge

Reflecting the fire for change growing inside budding revolutionaries, the walls of the Youth Voices meeting space are painted a glossy bright red. In black, a mural of freedom fighters Malcolm X, Che Guevara, and Rosa Parks against a sprawling tree and its substantial roots greets all youth, staff, and volunteers at the second-floor entrance. The images are a symbolic representation of the "literacy for liberation" philosophy that undergirds the Youth Voices activity. In this context, "working and oppressed communities do not have the time or inclination to argue meaningless points," relays Lumumba, one of the adult allies. Instead "the goal is to think deeply about pressing issues of the day." Youth Voices is able to do so through activities and curricular content that cultivate and provide opportunities to develop critical literacy, media literacy, and civic engagement.

In response to research question three, chapter six provides evidence of the ways in which critical literacy, media literacy, and civic engagement converge in the Youth Voices program. As I found that many, if not all, of the Youth Voices activities referred to in previous findings are inclusive of the skills and knowledge necessary for critical literacy, media literacy, and civic engagement. The relationship among the three concepts is expressed visually below in *Figure 2*. As the figure illustrates, the components form a triad of interrelated program goals. Each part informs, supports, enhances, and leads to the other part. If considered distinctively, critical literacy includes the youth participants' thinking, reading, writing, and making meaning of text related to black history and culture, as well as current events. The youth are critically engaging text using a social justice framework for analysis and critique of important issues concerning their

communities. A second component of the program includes media literacy, which connects most directly to the Youth Voices talk-radio program that often incorporates news written by mainstream and alternative news sources. Weekly, the youth participants are engaged in a process that requires them to consider the sources of their radio broadcast material. Additionally, the youth are regularly contributing their own thoughts about critical issues that form show topics and considering their listening audience. Time is also devoted to investigating historical and contemporary examples of how media has been a destructive and/or construction medium in society. The third component of Youth Voices includes civic engagement. Often inspired by the previous two program components, the community action projects are natural extensions of both critical and media literacy. The atmosphere in which the three programmatic goals are cultivated can be described as democratic in nature. Youth are civically engaged, invited to participate fully in an exchange of ideas to make decisions about programming. Popular education tools are used to help create an atmosphere where youth feel heard and are encouraged to lead the radio production process.

Figure 2: Three Outcomes of Youth Voices



Replete with evidence of critical literacy, media literacy, and civic engagement, the Youth Voices program is intentionally designed to prepare the youth participants to participate in a democratic society. The weekly political and popular education workshops, weekend retreats, technical training, radio broadcasts, field trips to partner organizations, and community action projects are all constructed to raise the consciousness of its participants. With each agenda item, current events discussion, or consideration of the youth program's guidelines careful attention is given to creating spaces and opportunities for critical inquiry and dialogue, analysis of underlining or "hidden" messages, critique of ethnocentric forms of knowledge (in favor of indigenous ways of knowing), and reflection on possible civic actions. The following sections demonstrate the ways in which critical literacy, media literacy, and civic engagement converge in the context of the Youth Voices program to create what I am calling a democratic educational experience.

Convergence at the Youth Voices Retreat

As the 2010 calendar year unfolds, the second half of the Youth Voices program is bolstered by a weekend retreat to reflect on past program activities and to frame the agenda for the months ahead. In the warmth of a rustic log cabin tucked in the mountains, 12 youth learn how to organize a social justice campaign. On the agenda, for the first day of this two-day retreat, is an activity that involves interactive role-play where the youth are asked to consider the multiple perspectives of an issue. Because almost nothing in the Youth Voices program is learned abstractly and almost everything is contextualized in historical, cultural, or political relationships, the youth are invited to apply this skill of considering multiple perspectives by investigating the unforgettably devastating Atlanta

child murders of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Long before any of the participating youth were born, the city of Atlanta was terrorized by the mysterious disappearance of more than 20 young black boys. This grotesque part of Atlanta history garnered national attention from then President Reagan who approved federal resources to aid the investigation into the murdered and missing youth, and was documented by essayist James Baldwin who wrote "The Evidence of Things Not Seen" to explore the racial undertones of two years of fear among the African American community in Atlanta—the city "to busy to hate."

For the purposes of the exercise, the Youth Voices youth engage in a multimodal approach to examining the issue. Through media (and/or visual aids), written text, and role-play (or performance), the youth engage in a kind of literacy that moves beyond memorization or skill and drill toward critical thought and, in this particular case:

> Habits of thought which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse (Shor, 1992, p. 129).

The youth began exploring the issue by viewing an excerpt from *Eyes on the Prize* to gain historical and political context. Scenes included clips depicting the election of the first black Mayor of Atlanta, Maynard Jackson, which coincided with the murders, as well as with the development of the city's mass transit system and international airport. After watching the film, Youth Voices participants considered the circumstances

surrounding the event. During their role play, they respond to prompts that ask them to perform several scenarios including a portrayal of the mainstream media coverage of the incident versus the African American community's response. Other scenarios involved developing a response from an imagined youth organization. The youth are asked to consider ways youth could have organized, either on their own or with the support of adults or other youth, during the time of the events. Each of these activities fosters critical thinking, analysis of a historically significant event, and reflection upon possible civic action. The social and political context surrounding the event is considered. Additionally, there is an effort to identify the varying power of elected officials, the private sector, the community, and the media to frame and respond to the story. Illustrating the convergence of critical literacy, media literacy, and civic engagement, this particular curricular activity incorporated media with critical literacy skills to inform future civic activities.

Convergence in Youth Voices Radio Broadcasts

During one of the most historic events in American history, Youth Voices covered the 2008 presidential campaign, which resulted in the election of the first African American president in the United States. Before Election Day, Youth Voices decided to produce a program to inform the public about third party candidates. The youth felt it was important to consider alternatives to the Democratic and Republican parties. Reflecting on how the show was constructed, Sayisha recounts the show planning process:

> Well to figure out what the show is going to be about we always try to think about what's going on like for example, for the last show we knew that the elections were um going on of course for a long period of time now, but we knew that

> voting day is around the corner so because we knew that we wanted to get people educated on third party candidates (Interview, October 20, 2008).

When asked to explain how the Youth Voices broadcast, in particular, a show about third party candidates, is a form of education, Sayisha replies:

> Most definitely. I mean I didn't really know about all the candidates that were running and I don't really think I would have ended up knowing because my family they were already voting for Obama, so I don't think they could have told me that there's like three other candidates running or four for that matter, other than McCain and Obama. And this last show, doing that research, that helped me learn … it even helped me in my economics class to have, when we had a discussion about the elections and third party candidates, I was able to participate more inside of the discussion because I had that background knowledge that I had researched during our meetings at [Youth Voices] (Interview, October 20, 2008).

In this example, by drawing on critical and media literacy skills, as well as an objective to be engaged civically, democratic education was promoted through Youth Voices activity as youth developed civic and political knowledge and reflected upon issues facing citizens.

On Friday evenings, the youth meet to review their plans for the upcoming radio broadcast. Scribbled on a flip chart is an outline for the show. Just days after a catastrophic earthquake struck Haiti, members of Youth Voices respond to the news. The agenda illustrates the convergences of their growing critical and media literacy skills, as well as civic engagement.

Agenda YCAP 01-14-10

Check Ins

Haiti & Other Show Additions (i.e. Teddy Pendegrass)

Youth Voices Show Segments

Assign Segments

[Miriam interviewed/recorded Will Copeland (on the road to Detroit; youth delegation)]

Emery: opened meeting asking what folks have heard or think about earthquake.

I. *United States Social Forum: Goals: 1. Outreach; 2. USSF education; 3. Ways to get involved*

Corina can do a segment on youth working group

Potential interviews with Copeland; Oya; Tracy /Saundra (Southwest Workers Union); Derek from People's Institute

II. Black Radical Tradition spotlight on Haitian revolution (and play a news clip)

III. Haitian Relief Efforts

--news clips

--where to go to help; donate (Miriam); how to get involved…

--possible interview

Miriam: "I can find the government first response" (we can play a 5 minute clip)

*--possible ways to get involved: * grassroots inc.; Haiti action; translators; taxes (Naima parent's making $5 donation per person until end of Jan.); local groups; special interests; transAfrica – Naima*

--what is youth voices doing? (commit to providing regular updates at end of each show)

--statements (commentators) –Naima

Close show with Teddy Pendegrass

Emery: Constantly teaching; inserting information about history; culture…

***Quick lesson on perspective**. Haiti (poorest country in western hemisphere/first independent black nation in western hemisphere); Detroit (murder capitol & poorest state in nation).*

Naima at 6:10pm closed meeting. She asked Corey and Michael what they got done. She documented everything on flip chart.

Above, my notes from the broadcast planning meeting reveal the objectives for the upcoming broadcast dedicated to addressing tragic earthquake. Notably, there is an emphasis on investigating the reaction of the United States government. The US federal government response is considered against community-based or grassroots relief efforts. Additionally, the young journalists are sensitive to the mainstream media's portrayal of Haiti as "the poorest nation in the Western hemisphere." The mainstream media constructs a particular image and, according to the perspective of Youth Voices, fails to paint a complete picture of the first black republic. This outline for the Youth Voices broadcast is an example of how the youth participants are able to build on their critical literacy skills to evaluate the media coverage associated with the earthquake in Haiti and in turn respond by producing media that is relevant for the communities they serve.

In another radio broadcast, the youth participants explored the roots of the Thanksgiving holiday traditional to the United States. In an excerpt form the show introduction, Brandon, the host for the evening announced to the Youth Voices listeners:

> What you've just heard was a reading by Shea from Chief Seattle's speech called *The Unanswered Challenges*. … Today's show mostly pertains to Native Americans and their views on the Thanksgiving holiday. We will have three interviews, two Native American readings and some great music, so just sit back and relax (Radio Broadcast Excerpt, November 27, 2009).

In an effort to be inclusive of multiple perspectives, the youth participants have incorporated perspectives from Native Americans, as well as a segment including their own ideas about the American holiday. Following an interview with a representative from the International Indian Treaty Council, Morning Star Gali, one of the youth reflected on what she learned.

> Well just talking to Morning Star Gali earlier it really gave me a new meaning of what thanksgiving truly means because I know traditionally American families we sit around the table, we go around the table and we explain what we're grateful for and you have to think about the indigenous people and they explain what they're still fighting for, they explain what still needs to be done and it's a totally its' two sides of the fence and I really think that today I just got the chance to unite those two sides of the fence. So in the future Thanksgiving, indigenous peoples day, day of mourning, whatever you want to call it I'm really going to think twice about how I celebrate it (Radio Broadcast Excerpt, November 27, 2009)

Several youth participants echoed Sayisha's reflections and acknowledged that they were not aware that, for some, the traditional U.S. Thanksgiving holiday was a day of mourning. In this context, critical and media literacy, as well as civic engagement is

about questioning a mainstream holiday, valuing multiple perspectives, and acting to provide what may be new information to the general public. In each instance, the radio broadcasts were examples of how critical literacy, media literacy, and civic engagement converge to create a democratic educational experience.

Convergence in the Allied Media Conference

Another example of convergence in the Youth Voices program was evident in the youth participants' application of their multilayered skills to the context of a national alternative media conference. With my assistance, the youth members of Youth Voices submitted a presentation to the 2009 Allied Media Conference, an annual convening of activists who utilize media as an organizing tool. This gathering attempts to demystify media and technology and explore the advantages of media production for social justice work. The role of the youth during the conference was two-fold. Two youth facilitated a workshop on the importance of radio for community organizing and later joined a third youth member to broadcast a live show during the conference.

Presenting at and participating in the Allied Media Conference is one of the ways Youth Voices allocated time toward developing critical and media literacy competencies that enabled them to analyze, evaluate, and create messages through multiple media platforms (e.g. radio, facebook, text, and youtube). During conference sessions about citizen journalism, youth-produced documentaries, and building computers and radio stations from salvaged parts, Youth Voices participants are become increasingly aware of their ability to transform their community, the world and themselves through media. Such a realization underscored Youth Voices members to not just be, "radio personalities," but rather "air-shifters" well aware of their influence on the community.

Combining their skills in literacy, media, and civic engagement, the youth under the guidance of their adult allies designed a workshop for the conference with three goals: (a) emphasize the importance of community radio for community organizing; (b) demonstrate how to plan and implement a youth-led radio program using popular educational tools; (c) build momentum and a network among youth for the 2010 United States Social Forum in Detroit, Michigan. These goals reflect the ways that the youth began to think critically about the possible use of media for community action.

Youth Voices as Democratic Education

In the context of the Youth Voices program, critical literacy and media literacy are closely related to a quest for a democratic education. As outlined by their sponsoring nonprofit, the goal of the Youth Voices program is to develop youth leaders, empowering them to utilize their voice and collective power. Such aims are associated with a vibrant democracy. Literacy, particularly among African Americans, has historically been linked to liberation. The fact that Youth Voices has its own radio program is demonstrative of democratic ideals including equal access by diverse cultures and voices in society to media production and distribution.

Youth-Led with the Support of Adult Allies

Youth Voices offers an opportunity to observe the relevance of critical and media literacy in promoting the multiple voiced, student driven, participatory characteristics of a healthy democracy. In an interview, Aniya reveals a disconnect between the rhetoric and practice regarding her school's purported agenda to empower students.

> At my school we have something called the student government, but it's not a student government. It's just an exercise where we like put up posters, but like

> after its over its still up to the principal [regarding] everything that goes on, so here [at Youth Voices] it's like the whole opposite of it. Like it's the people's choice, you get what I'm saying. They [the adult allies] suggest what to do, but they don't tell us. It's really our power (Interview, May 19, 2009).

Aniya's reflection confronts the ways in which schools claim to give students choice and agency. It is clear that Aniya perceives Youth Voices as a space for youth power. Through activities like "dotmocracy," the Youth Voices members are able to vote on meeting agenda items, show topics, titles for youth workshops, and future programmatic directions for the youth program. In addition to the kind of democratic practices at work in Youth Voices, the role of the adult allies is a critical component to Aniya's conception of youth power. Renowned poet Gwendolyn Brooks's notion of adult allies or "adult initiators" is connected to a goal "for other young people to develop leadership skills and continue the work in interesting and innovative ways" (Fisher, 2009a, p. 41). Another participant, Rita, underscores the importance of creating spaces for youth voice and power.

> I like the space that youth are given to think for themselves. We have adult allies but they [are] not really like pushy like teachers. They don't tell you what to do. Like we get to decide what you want to do. That's like the only space that I have and still have that I could go and just be like okay this is how I feel let's talk about it to like hundreds of thousands of people and have callers and stuff like that (Interview, May 19, 2009).

The youth power that Aniya and Rita allude to was actualized when the youth determined they needed to hold a few meetings without adult allies. Disapproving of the tense and

confrontational way in which one adult ally expressed his frustration with the level of focus the youth seemed to be exhibiting, the youth asserted their autonomy and spoke back to authority, demanding respect and the right to be heard.

Rather than feeling threatened or compelled to take back control, the adult allies took the opportunity to observe the youth in action and discovered the youth were indeed living up to the goal of the program—to build and sustain a youth-led program. What began as a potential crisis, ended with youth determining the agenda. As a result, the youth appear bolstered by their agency and seemed even more invested in the process. Youth taking ownership of the radio process without the presence of adult supervision is an illustration of Rogoff's (1995) activity theory. As Rogoff posits, the youth have developed through the three planes of sociocultural activity, progressing from novice apprentices, to guided participants, and finally are appropriating what they learned and participating as leaders in a position to lead a new group of novice participants (Rogoff, 1995). Such a progression was not only evident in the youth-only meetings, but also present when two Youth Voices participants, once reluctant to speak up during meetings, much less live on-air, led a workshop during an Allied Media Conference in Detroit, Michigan (July, 2009). Without adult facilitation, these two youth led 20 audience members through the radio production process and discussed how Youth Voices uses the radio as a form of community organizing. In the end, it is the respect afforded the youth that stands out for Niqua, one of the workshop facilitators.

> Well you can just express yourself… not just verbally or physically or however just by knowing and thinking… you see somebody who respect you and you respect them. It's all about respect. The way I look at the world…a lot of people

> don't have respect. But when I came here, I seen that most people had respect. I gained more respect. You can tell when somebody don't respect you (Interview, May 19, 2009).

For many black students in urban public schools, males in particular, respect from authority figures may determine their connection to school-based activities (Fisher, 2007; Johnson-Bashir, 2009; Kirkland, 2008; Mahiri, 2004). Fisher (2007) notes "establishing this relationship around literacy is foundational; once respect is established, teachers and students expand the teaching and learning possibilities" (p. 87). In the context of Youth Voices, Niqua is praised for his participation and contributions, rather than judged by his appearance or criminalized by his behavior. Niqua's expressed value for respect experienced in the context of Youth Voices is shared by Corey, another African American male participant. Corey indicated that he felt "kind of influential" and seemed to appreciate the diversity among the participants.

> I like the different cultural backgrounds that different people bring to the table. Because I like the way they present themselves it makes me know that they are interested in coming too. And I like helping other youth get a feel about what they want to do. It makes me feel kind of influential (Interview, May 19, 2009).

Democratic education as a way of teaching and learning is equitable, invites participation from all students, and encourages agency. As a result of the youth-adult relationships, as well as the literacy and civic engagement skills gained, these youth participants are growing to believe they can change their circumstances, as indicated by Aniya in her reflection on major themes of the program. When asked to identify the ultimate goal of the Youth Voices program, Aniya responded:

> Change. Like it's always a constant theme here, like you can change your community; you can change, change, change. So I feel like I been equipped with like that will power. To like oh I don't have to put up with you know bad schools. I don't have to do that because like before hand I thought well that's just how it is. But now I know I don't have to really put up with some of the stuff that's going on around. So, like I feel more confident that oh, you know what I mean, it don't have to be like that. I can do whatever I want (Interview, May 19, 2009).

Aniya is poised to do what Freire (1987) calls "conscious participation in the reconstruction of society" (p. 65). In the context of Youth Voices, literacy learning is about naming injustice and taking action to change (Freire, 1970). Aniya's statements reveal that critical literacy, a literacy that leads to a wide awakeness or consciousness is about self-determination and is inextricably linked to civic engagement. In this way, such engagement affords more opportunities for a democracy to be more fully realized.

Convergences and Divergences across Learning Contexts

Comparing Youth Voices to formal school experiences was not a research question or an explicit aim in this study. Still, such comparisons were inevitable for many reasons including the obvious proximity of the Youth Voices meeting space to a public school where several youth participants are enrolled. Weekly, the youth participants traversed the boundaries of their classrooms, schools, and the community meeting space. Their experience as students and participants in a youth leadership development program made them worthy experts in identifying successful models of democratic education. According to Shor (1992):

> Democratic education seeks to maximize participation in the curriculum, so that students develop intellectual curiosity, scientific thinking, cooperative relations, social habits, and self-discipline. Unfortunately, this is not happening in mass education. (p. 136)

Sayisha points out the advantages of the out-of-school context of Youth Voices in her comparison of the freedom to express her ideas in and out of school. She is aware that the inflexibility experienced inside school may be attributed to a disproportionate focus on standardized curriculum and teaching to the tests.

> Well I think you have a little bit more freedom because you're able to… like I can't just yell out controversial topics in every class that I have at school. Because, of course, teachers are gonna be like okay this is not in the curriculum for today. But if I want to come to [Youth Voices] and talk about oh well I really think that this bail out plan is not right. At school, I can't say that maybe the government is being a little greedy or that will automatically be taken like okay that's good, but you need to write a whole research paper about it if you wanna speak about it in class, but with [Youth Voices] they say well if you think that you're passionate about this topic you need to research it and maybe we can do a show about it (Interview, October 20, 2008).

Sayisha's comments reveal that literacy is not only about speaking the unspeakable, but also about authentic writing experiences. Her enthusiasm for conducting research with an audience in mind seems to be far greater than her enthusiasm to conduct research for a potentially dead end graded classroom assignment. If education is meant to foster authentic learning that is meaningful and relevant to students, a concerted effort should

be made to consistently advance a democratic education. The convergence of a democratic education is crafted throughout aspects of Youth Voices via critical literacy, media literacy, and civic engagement.

Chapter Seven: Discussion

"*I'm definitely becoming a leader in my community*." ~ Miriam, 16, September 10, 2010

"*...Just don't sit around and think that other people can do it for you and speak for you. Speak for yourself because that is the only way you're going to be successful in life, and be successful at what you want to do."* ~ Omari, 16, September 10, 2010

"P - O W ER… We got the power... 'cause we are the collective. P - O W E R… We got the power... 'cause we are the collective." ~ Youth Voices chant created June, 2010

Operating from a dated two-story structure in a predominantly African American community and adjacent to a public high school that has undergone a transformation reflecting the "small schools" movement, the Youth Voices sponsoring nonprofit is organized around the needs of the community, offering a holistic program including initiatives designed to develop youth leadership. Youth Voices participants as "air-shifters" own the word community; participation in this program empowers the youth to shape, shift, and redirect community. As reflected in the above quotations, participation also helped them understand they are the ones they have been waiting for to make a better world. Change starts with their individual and collective youth power.

In the community of Youth Voices, literacy is a social practice in which cultural knowledge, media production, and youth civic engagement play a role. This dissertation is an attempt to investigate the literacy practices evident in the Youth Voices program. Guided by three research questions, I sought to describe the literacy and civic activities that Youth Voices participants used to make sense of the word and the world (Freire &

Macedo, 1987). This chapter is a discussion of the research findings, implications for educational research and practice, and possibilities for future research.

Culturally Embedded Literacy Practices of Youth Voices

A consistent thread evident in the diverse literacy practices of Youth Voices is a belief in the emancipatory power of and truth in African American culture and history. Refusing to accept the cultural deficit laden rhetoric that shapes the current discourse around black student achievement in the United States, Youth Voices addresses the mis-education of youth-of-color (Hilliard, 1995; King, 1996, 2004; Woodson, 1930) by making visible the significant contributions of communities of color and by connecting with the legacy of competency among the African American community, particularly as it relates to literacy and social action.

This study captured the perspectives of high school-aged youth participants who had particular "funds of knowledge" and expertise in their lived experiences in and out of public, private, and home schooling contexts (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Although diverse in class, gender, and degree of exposure to community activism, all of the youth share a common Afrocentric history and culture. According to Hilliard (1995):

> Groups that have a cultural identity draw upon it and replenish themselves not only through study, but through appropriate rituals and symbols. Rituals and symbols such as naming, rites of passage, holidays, distinctive dress, etc., help to formulate and to crystallize ideals, values, rules, which give meaning to life itself. This is the basis for group cohesion and solidarity that is a prerequisite to group power (p. 69).

Youth Voices exemplifies the ways in which Hilliard's theory of culture at the center of group cohesion and power manifests at the macro level among blacks in America or

people of the African diaspora. As explicated in the findings, this group cohesion and solidarity was evident in the Youth Voices literacy practices.

Additionally, the findings from the study underscore a need for a culturally responsive approach to research design and a need for a cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) as a framework for analyzing the activity among the Youth Voices participants. The results from this study illustrate the usefulness of CHAT and analysis, which, according to Lee (2005), calls for viewing cultural practice and activity as units of analysis. The emphasis on culture and identity in the context of Youth Voices as "valuable cultural funds of prior knowledge" underscores the critical importance of attending to the "cultural worlds" of marginalized students.

Based on Lee's (2005) contentions, the race or ethnicity of the participants in Youth Voices is not irrelevant to their learning and ways of engaging literacy. Instead, the ways in which the participants identify and acknowledge their cultural histories matter. For example, it mattered in their choices of radio broadcast content (e.g. opening song), and it was reflected in the ways the curriculum was forged from a black radical tradition (King, 2006). Across all Youth Voices activities, literacy is embedded in the cultural practices of the youth participants. As Holt (1990) writes, within the African American community, knowledge is power and literacy has been a cornerstone of accessing and levering that power. Similarly, Perry (2004) notes that, historically, literacy in the black community is about liberation. In this way, the literacy goals in the context of Youth Voices are to educate, validate, and empower. They do so by utilizing curricular material including the *Black Radical Tradition Toolkit,* which includes narratives of the contributions of local black leaders and community members, as well as their attention to

the cultural history as evidenced in their use of the *Eyes on the Prize* documentary series, and their accompanying field trips to places like Selma and Birmingham, Alabama to retrace pivotal civil rights moments all designed to enhance their knowledge, validate their cultural and racial experiences, and inspire their own legacies of liberation and change.

Such attention to race and culture reflects (or are indices of) what Lee (2005) frames as culturally responsive design. The curriculum and activities within the context of Youth Voices has been designed to make relevant the identities of the participants. In this space, it does matter that the youth all identify as black (or African American, Caribbean, African, or of the Diaspora). Lee (2005) argues through CHAT we may understand why and how race and culture matter to a particular context and are fundamental to our understanding of the learning and developing learning tools. Boasting a mission to address the mis-education of youth-of-color, Youth Voices is culturally sensitive or responsive in its design by attending to the cultural worlds of its participants.

Centering race and culture in the context of teaching and learning is significant because, as mentioned in the introduction, educators and researchers are seeking ways to improve the academic achievement of youth-of-color without severing them from their cultural roots. Literature suggests that such cultural competence is linked to growth in learning and literacy acquisition (King, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994). This kind of asset-based education, building on youths' cultural funds of knowledge is likely to be successful and has positive implications for student engagement and motivation, as discussed in the next section.

Youth Voices, Radio, and Civic Engagement

Civic engagement is defined in various ways. In general, civic engagement refers to opportunities for youth to develop the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes related to civic participation, which may include asserting their voice in political matters and engaging in democratic exercise or civic action in and around the communities of which they are members. Examples of civic engagement among youth are evident in multimedia spaces. For example, through social media, documentary filmmaking, and online magazines or "zines" youth are forging new spaces to express themselves and make meaning of a wide range of texts and social issues (Hill & Vasudevan, 2007). Like school, the radio airwaves are contested terrain. Public education and public radio or alternative radio is ostensibly for the masses. Radio in particular is an accessible media form in terms of set up, reach, and availability. In the context of Youth Voices, radio is the chosen form of media that manufactures certain productivity skills that enable civic engagement. It is also through this medium that youth participants demonstrate culturally embedded literacy practices. Such practices in conjunction with civic engagement are instrumental aspects of democratic education.

Youth Voices as Democratic Education

As the results of the study indicate, critical literacy, media literacy, and civic engagement converge to create what I contend is democratic education. Such convergence extends Fisher's (2005) notion of "literocracy," which sits at the intersection of literacy and democracy, creates possibilities for African American youth to define and enact literacy practices as a means of emancipation from otherwise repressive modes of social and academic learning. The democratic agenda evident in the Youth Voices

activity is connected to a rich history of black educators' conceptions of education as an expression of freedom and humanity (Swartz, 2007), which incorporated "principles of reciprocity, group well-being, and the value for a collective humanity in education" (p. 177). According to Swartz (2007), such principles were "formed and supported by the retentions of an African worldview" and served "the best interest of all, not just some" children (p. 177). Such democratic principles are supported by the critical literacy, media literacy, and civic engagement opportunities evident in the context of Youth Voices.

Understanding that education must be of a critical nature, the Youth Voices includes opportunities for cultivating critical literacy. Evident in the workshops devoted to examining the events surrounding incidents like the murder of Oakland youth, Oscar Grant, by police, the Youth Voices popular and political education workshops were aimed at challenging the youth to grapple with contrasting perspectives and constructed to help youth develop critical analytical skills. Overlapping critical literacy is the presence of media literacy as the youth engage in questions about the role and power of media. Opting for a view of media as a tool or resource for youth, the nonprofit pushes youth participants to consider the ways media production can serve as counter-storytelling. Additionally, critical literacy and media literacy are cultivated in an atmosphere that encourages broad citizen participation.

The joint enterprise of radio production was a space holder for individual and collective identity and action. Although the live broadcast was considered one of the main products of Youth Voices, the dynamic process of developing the skills necessary for radio production and content for the broadcasts was most important. Radio is one of the tools that the group uses to accomplish its overall mission to end oppression. The

youth attempt to do so in an oppression-free space. Establishing such an inclusive and equitable space is not a static process, as it presents daily challenges for the youth participants. This arena invites tensions that allow for growth and opportunity, which is in contrast to many public school environments that silence or limit the opportunity for youth to engage civically. Although Gallagher (2007) writes about the possibilities of drama in schools, the results from this study extend her notions of creating spaces to out-of-school spaces where youth are able to bring their plural identities to a space and are given opportunities to grapple with the tensions within and between participants. If we are to take seriously the concept of democratic education, we should recognize such creative spaces as Youth Voices, which integrates media literacy in teaching and learning, as also a potential space for cultivating critical literacy and civic engagement.

Findings from Youth Voices revealed that civic engagement among black youth may be expressed differently from conventional indicators of youth civic engagement. Additionally, scholarship on citizenship and civic engagement among school-aged youth reveals that the "civic education" gap between white students and students of color is expressed in poorly resourced schools where higher percentages of students of color are enrolled and opportunities for civic engagement are rare. Youth Voices provides insight into the circumstances in which students of color are likely to practice citizenship. Authentic opportunities that result in direct action or actualized change seem to engage the youth involved with Youth Voices. As such, civic engagement is connected to critical and media literacy.

Implications for Teacher Education and Classroom Practice

Youth Voices is a transformative program for the youth participants in many ways. Through radio production, the youth develop and represent critical and media literacy/ies that fosters civic action. The type of civic action embarked on by the youth included sharing their experiences inside teacher education programs. Pre and in-service teachers, teacher educators, community-based educators, and youth workers can learn from the experiences of the youth explored and examined in the findings of this study.

Youth Voices from the Margins to the Center

As this particular study seeks to examine the ways in which students of color learn across learning contexts, one of the most salient themes to emerge from the study is the competence of the youth, including and in particular youth of color, to articulate what they need in order to succeed. As mentioned in the introduction, youth are absent from the proverbial table concerning public policy related to education in the United States. Relegated to marginal spaces like youth programs or blog contests, youth perspectives are rarely seriously taken up beyond novel and/or cursory nods. The examination of Youth Voices provides an instructive model for how to center youth voices and establish communities inside schools. The youth participants in this research study routinely attribute their connectedness to the content and goals of the program because of the "family" atmosphere. If advocating for an authentic democracy, teaching and learning literacy in an era of diversity and multiculturalism require that members of viable communities need to feel ownership, agency, respected, valued and empowered in order to thrive (Gilyard, 1996).

The findings from this study and other similarly situated studies have important implications for teacher education and classroom practice. Teacher education programs should include student voice. Students should be afforded opportunities to actively shape their education. Teachers through their curriculum and instruction have opportunities to incorporate civic engagement activities that promote lifelong civic participation. For example, teachers may integrate critical service learning (See National Service-Learning Conference Youth Series or United States Social Forum) or participatory action research (See Fox et al., 2010).

Re-framing Urban Youth Achievement

Youth Voices is an example of the capacity and agency of urban youth. Youth Voices demonstrates literacy and civic learning outcomes that are sometimes hard to measure by high stakes tests or traditional assessment tools. Currently, public education is challenged by linking literacy to civic action in and out of school. With access to programs or educational environments like Youth Voices, youth-of-color engaged in relevant learning experiences have the potential to develop high order critical thinking skills, a skill often rendered absent by the dominant role of static learning in schools particularly for urban youth stigmatized via school-to-prison pipeline deficit beliefs about themselves and their communities. Instead educators should be versed in positive youth development theory that taps into the potential of youth as partners in designing and implementing curriculum. Youth Voices does not solve all ills or problems effecting youth-of-color, but certainly offers innovative strategies and creative spaces for meaningful learning.

Youth Voices as a Literacy Learning Context

Learning is taking place in the context of Youth Voices as the participants produce radio content for a public affairs broadcast. The literacy and civic engagement skills that the youth gained in Youth Voices are applicable across informal and formal learning contexts. Additionally, apart from more technical aspects of literacy, the youth participants learn the ways in which texts are used to persuade, influence, or inform the public, which, in turn, reveals the political and social nature of literacy. As one participant noted, she learned over time how to communicate in varying contexts. More than babysitting, this after school space illustrates the possibility of innovative curriculum and instruction.

Furthermore, as students develop literacy skills, how can we reconsider the ways in which we construct the school day, classroom size, cultivate community, and curricular aims to meet standards, but not at the expense of student engagement? Youth Voices demonstrates how literacy learning is embedded in relevant problem solving and community building. Youth are learning valued literacy skills as they develop as journalists and productive citizens. Once the emphasis is placed on solving real problems, mitigating real circumstances, meeting real needs, learning shifts from detached arrangements of disciplines or artificial silos of academic traditions to an interdisciplinary and experiential process. In short, these young people are literate beings whose lives cross the contexts of school and community.

Future Research

Recommendations for future research include replicating this study at the same site at another time to investigate whether or not the findings are consistent or influenced

by the timing or characteristics of participating youth. Similarly, researchers could conduct this study in another youth radio program in another city or region of the nation to make claims across contexts regarding whether or not the findings are idiosyncratic to the particular context. Replicating the study in another context may provide insight into whether or not similar outcomes will occur in other youth radio programs. Additional research could investigate classroom teachers' perspectives of the same youth participants inside schools.

Future research could also examine if there is a relationship between the young people's participation in Youth Voices and their school performance or academic achievement. Additional examination of the youth participants' schooling experiences in comparison to their experiences in Youth Voices could offer insight into the strengths and weaknesses of both institutions. In particular, many of the participating youth are educated in home-school environments or are students in African-centered independent schools. Future research could uncover the rationale of the parents and youth who pursue alternatives to traditional public school.

Conclusion

Documenting and evaluating out-of-school learning spaces at the intersections of youth literacies, media, and civic engagement have significant implications for conceptions of learning theories and classroom teaching practices that involve media education, the teaching of literacy and language skills, and constructions of democratic educational experiences inside schools. Therefore, an examination of the literacy practices at work within Youth Voices offers an opportunity to observe the relevance of critical literacy in promoting the multiple voiced, student driven, participatory

characteristics of a healthy democracy. Additionally, the insight gained informs classroom practice by providing teachers and literacy educators with the knowledge and skills to enable them to provide opportunities for all students to reach their highest capacity to be successful in and out of schools.

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Appendix A: Youth Voices Program Proposal

"Youth Voices"

WKLG Program Proposal

Submitted by Jamila Arnold and Lumumba Weusi

December 5, 2004

****

Youth ages 12-18 from the [name of city] community will create and produce a 30 minute weekly public affairs program called "Youth Voices" on WKLG 89.3, "the station for progressive information." They will develop the content of the program, addressing a range of issues from school to relationships to crime to politics to music, etc. Jamila Arnold and Lumumba Weusi will provide in-studio coordination and supervision.

In our programming, we will incorporate the human rights framework and encourage the youth to examine their own lives and communities, recognizing the various forms of oppression that limit us all; then get that message across the air to their peers and families. They will talk about a variety of topics, from hip hop music and popular culture, safer sex, school district policies and curriculum and current issues like the death penalty

for youth. There will also be a weekly segment on youth-centered news and current events. In order to connect with youth on a national and global level, "Youth Voices" would periodically play segments from www.youthradio.org, which is based in the Bay Area in California. We could also submit some of our segments for posting on the youth radio website.

Below is a sample format of "Youth Voices":

Youth-Centered News and Current Events	10 minutes
Human rights commentary on a relevant topic	5 minutes
Girl Talk (girls talk about their issues and their rights)	5 minutes
If We Ruled the World (youth interview their peers – and periodic guests - to imagine a better world)	5 minutes
Music to open/close the show and smooth the transitions	5 minutes

WKLG currently has no youth centered programming. [name of public radio station] produces one minute commentaries on their Morning Edition program with students from [name] High School. However, there are no other youth produced programs on the air in the [name of city] area.

"Youth Voices" would be different because it would allow substantial time and space for the voices of youth who are rarely heard and who are heavily impacted by politics they often have no voice in. This program is needed to advance the human rights of Atlanta's youth, including those who are incarcerated.

We are trying to reach youth and their families. They will gain the rare experience of hearing young people on the radio and a youth-centered perspective on the world and on their lives. Historically, youth have played vital roles in various resistance movements and revolutions. “Youth Voices” will seek to foster and capture the spirit of youth activism inside and outside of the studio.

“Youth Voices” fulfills the mission of WKLG by centering the show around young people and allowing them to produce it. In this way, we are giving media access to “those who continue to be denied free and open access to the broadcast media” and “those who suffer oppression or exploitation based upon class, race, sex, age, creed or sexual orientation.”

Particularly urban youth of color suffer under these various forms of oppression and are often hardest hit by the realities of their oppressed communities. We are giving the opportunity for them to advocate for themselves and their communities on air and challenge their peers and all WKLG listeners to create a better world for all of us.

Appendix B: Summer Institute Description (adapted)

"Air-shifting:" Youth Radio and Youth Civic Engagement
Principle Investigator, Keisha L. Green

The Summer Institute is a youth leadership development and community organizing skills building experience for young people living. We use local and regional history to learn about community organizing and develop skills to make positive community change.

The Institute is held every day for four weeks in the summer. Out of the Institute, the next Youth Leadership Team is chosen to lead the youth programs in the upcoming school year. Youth-led programs include the Youth Voices radio program, and the Youth Community Action Project.

The Summer Institute is an annual cornerstone for youth and strives to shift the City's community-based infrastructure by developing a new generation of leadership prepared for active participation in social justice work & community organizing.

Appendix C: IRB Approval Notice

FROM: Aryeh Stein, PhD
Designated Reviewer
Emory University IRB

TO: Keisha Green
Principal Investigator

CC: Fisher Maisha Educational Studies

DATE: February 15, 2008

RE: **Notification of Expedited Approval**
IRB00006099
"Air-shifting": Youth Radio as Critical Literacy

This is your notification that your above referenced study was reviewed and APPROVED under the Expedited review process per 45 CFR 46.110(7) and 21 CFR 56.110. The approval is valid from **2/14/2008 until 2/13/2009**. Thereafter, continued approval is contingent upon the submission of a continuing review request that must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to the expiration date of this study.

Any reportable events (serious adverse events, breaches of confidentiality, protocol deviation or protocol violations) or issues resulting from this study should be reported immediately to the IRB and to the sponsoring agency (if any). Any amendments (changes to any portion of this research study including but not limited to protocol or informed consent changes) must have IRB approval before being implemented.

All correspondence and inquiries concerning this research study must include the IRB ID, the name of the Principal Investigator and the Study Title.

Sincerely,

Aryeh Stein, PhD
Designated Reviewer
Emory University Institutional Review Board
This letter has been digitally signed

- *Study approval was granted continuation through 2/18/2011.*

Appendix D: Letter to Parents

Greetings Youth Speak Truth,

I hope my letter finds you well. Many of you know me, but for those who don't, allow me to introduce myself. I am Keisha Green, a volunteer with Youth Voices. Additionally, I am a third-year doctoral student in the Division of Educational Studies at Emory University. Two years ago, I met Jamila Arnold and Lumumba Weusi through my academic advisor, just as Youth Voices began in September of 2006. Immediately, I was engaged and felt connected to the people and purpose behind Youth Voices. My research interests include critical literacy studies and teacher education. I am most interested in documenting the work that community-based organizations do to help educate African American youth.

Youth Voices is an example of such a program committed to youth development. For two years, I have been participating as a volunteer observing, occasionally taking notes, and recording some of our sessions to help inform the parameters of a potential research project.

With your permission and collaboration, I hope to officially begin a collaborative research project aimed at documenting the activities of youth participating in a radio collective by and for other youth. Through this project, I seek to illustrate how Youth Voices cultivates critical thinking and contributes to academic literacy learning and development. I hope that together we can document how Youth Voices influences the lives of its participants.

Definition of Critical Literacy:

"Critical Literacy: Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences f any action, event, object process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse; thinking in-depth about books, statements, print and broadcast media, traditional sayings, official policies, public speeches, commercial messages, political propaganda, familiar ideas, required syllabi; questioning official knowledge, existing authority, traditional relationships, and ways of speaking; exercising a curiosity to understand the root causes of vents; using language so that words reveal the deep meaning of anything under discussions; applying that meaning to your own context and imagining how to act on that meaning to change the conditions it reflects."

(Ira Shor, Empower Education, 1992)

Appendix E: Youth Voices Participants

Martin	14	Freshman	African American
Kwesi	14	Freshman	African American
Miriam	15	Freshman	African American
Marcus	15	Freshman	African American
Jamal	15	Freshman	African American
Cierra	16	Sophomore	African American
Rita	16	Junior	Guyanese
Corey	17	Junior	African American
Niqua	17	Junior	African American
Brandon	17	Junior	African American
Aniya	17	Junior	African American
Niqua	17	Junior	African American
Felicia	18	Senior	Liberia
Aaliyah	17	Senior	African American
Sayisha	17	Senior	African American
Shea	17	Senior	African American
Hanna	17	Senior	African American
Biko	18	Senior	African American
Naima	18	Senior	African American

Appendix F: Interview Protocol

Draft First Round Interview Protocol

Youth Speaking Truth: Youth Radio and Critical Literacies

Principle Investigator, Keisha L. Green

Research question one: What are the literacy practices of Youth Voices?

~ The data sources for question one include field notes from participant observations and artifacts including, but not limited to, Youth Voices documents, curriculum, student work, as well as audio and video recordings.

1. Ask for background/demographic information: name; age; grade level; place of birth; ethnicity; name of school.
2. What is Youth Voices?
3. How did you become involved with Youth Voices?
4. Describe your role in Youth Voices? How do you contribute?
5. Why do you participate in Youth Voices?
6. What are the best parts about participating in Youth Voices?
7. What have you learned from being a part of Youth Voices?
8. (Does Youth Voices help you with your reading skills/help you become a better reader?) In what ways does Youth Voices help you with your reading?
    a. Name and describe specific activities that have involved reading.
9. In what ways does Youth Voices help you with your writing?
10. In what ways does Youth Voices help you with your speaking?
11. How does Youth Voices compare to your in-school experiences with reading, writing, and speaking?

Draft Second Round Interview Protocol

Research Question two: What does civic engagement look like in the context of Youth Voices?

~The data sources for question two include field notes from participant observations (of meetings, radio broadcasts, and community action projects), as well as artifacts including, but not limited to, Youth Voices documents, curriculum, student work, as well as audio and video recordings.

1. How do you define or describe of citizenship?
2. What events or experiences make you feel like a citizen (of…)?
3. Tell me about the community projects that Youth Voices has organized.
4. Why are you participating in the Summer Institute (with objective to learn about community organizing)?
5. What (and how) have you been taught about being involved in your community?
6. What (and how) are you learning about being involved in your community?
7. What are your expectations regarding the trip to Detroit to participate in the United States Social Forum?
8. What do you think it will be like?
9. Do you believe you (and other youth) can make a difference in your community?
10. What kind of changes would you like to see in your community, school, and/or society?

Appendix G: Preliminary Codes and Code Definitions

Youth Speaking Truth: "Air-shifting," Youth Radio, and Critical Literacies

Principle Investigator, Keisha L. Green

Codes	**Definitions**
Youth Speak Truth (YST)	Descriptions or definitions of Youth Speak Truth, a youth radio collective constitutive of Black youth in the Southeast.
Traditional Classroom (TC)	Descriptions or definitions of traditional public classrooms.
Youth/Student Voice (YV)	References to students speaking up or out; References to students feeling empowered to speak or share their ideas.
Agency (A)	References to students feeling like they have power to act on their behalf or on behalf of their peers and/or community. References to student-centered activities or interactions. References to students feeling like they control their actions/behaviors.
Reading in YST (Rdg)	Reading that occurs within YST.
Writing in YST (Wtg)	Writing that occurs within YST.
Speaking in YST (Spkg)	Speaking that occurs within YST
In-School Experiences (IS)	References to or descriptions of in-school experiences, interactions, structure, or policies.
YST and School Comparison (Comp)	Descriptions or references to the similarities between YST and School.
YST and School Contrast (Diff)	Descriptions or references to the differences between YST and School.
YST as Education (Edu)	References or descriptions of YST as an educative tool. References to students

	learning in the context of YST.
Peer Review/Feedback (Peer)	Occurrences of student-to-student collaboration on show topic research, writing script, delivering information on-air, and critique or feedback about all of the above.
Community (Cmty)	Descriptions of the literal community of Project South, WRFG, and Youth Speak Truth and references to activities aimed to cultivate community among the participants.
Citizen/Citizenship (C)	References to identity or descriptions/impressions of self as part of a democratic society (or part of the US); or a participant in public/community affairs, decision-making, civic activity. Descriptions, definitions, attitudes, or beliefs about citizenship.
Civic Engagement (CE)	References to activity in broader community beyond the youth radio program. References to identity as radio producers or journalists. References or occurrences civic engagement; attitudes about and expressions of civic engagement. Evidence of community involvement.