

Podcasting and youth engagement



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Introduction:

In today's world students are connected now more than ever to the digital (Ng-A-Fook, Radford, Yazdanian, and Norris, 2013). The pervasive use of social media does not inherently translate to increased digital literacy or digital citizenship. In line with Professors Kane and Radford's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), *Developing Mobile Media Spaces for Civic Engagement in Urban Priority Schools*, I developed a social action research project that invited students to explore issues of living represented in texts that open up a range of questions about civic engagement (Sagor, 2000). Students critically engaged with and analyzed the online resources and authored their own digital content to present their findings. This study examined to what extent the use of digital in the English and Law classrooms would engage 21st Century urban youth as citizens within the school and wider community. By immersing our students in the opportunity to gain digital literacies, we are one step closer to helping our students maneuver the digital world ahead of them and to become engaged, responsible citizens.



Conclusion:

The results did not support my hypothesis fully, some things were concluded as I suspected but most of my results were very different from what I originally hypothesized.

These results are important because they show us our students are not as knowledgeable about media as we perceive them to be. Growing up in a tech world means they are around it, but does not mean they necessarily are comfortable with all forms of media. It also does not mean they know how to maneuver the digital world in relation to civic engagement.

We need to open more spaces like this within the institution of learning in order to teach our students positive online presences and civic engagement within their schools. Creating safe spaces where students and teachers can integrate technology appropriately into their classrooms allows students to have the opportunity to learn digital literacy skills.

Looking forward this call for further research to develop these projects and make it easier for teachers to incorporate them into their classrooms. Giving students a platform to voice their opinions on civic engagement is also needed within schools. A further push to incorporate the multimodal in the classroom to coincide with everyday learning would be helpful for students.

References:

Ng-A-Fook, N., Radford, L., Yazdanian, S., and Norris, T. (2013). Empowering Marginalized Youth: Curriculum, Media Studies, and Character Development. *Canadian Journal of Action research*, 14(1), (pp. 38-50).

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Results:

Maneuvering through the use of technology and what was taught about civic engagement, the students adapted quite well. Students not only worked with their literary texts and the digital media, but they also found clear connections from their text's themes that were relevant to their own lives. They discussed them in detail, pointing out important controversies and problems within our society that need to be changed. Even those working with dystopian novels were able to see connections to our everyday lives. This multimodal process allows for inquiry and the articulation of issues, both local and global, that matter to students. (Vasudevan, 2014).

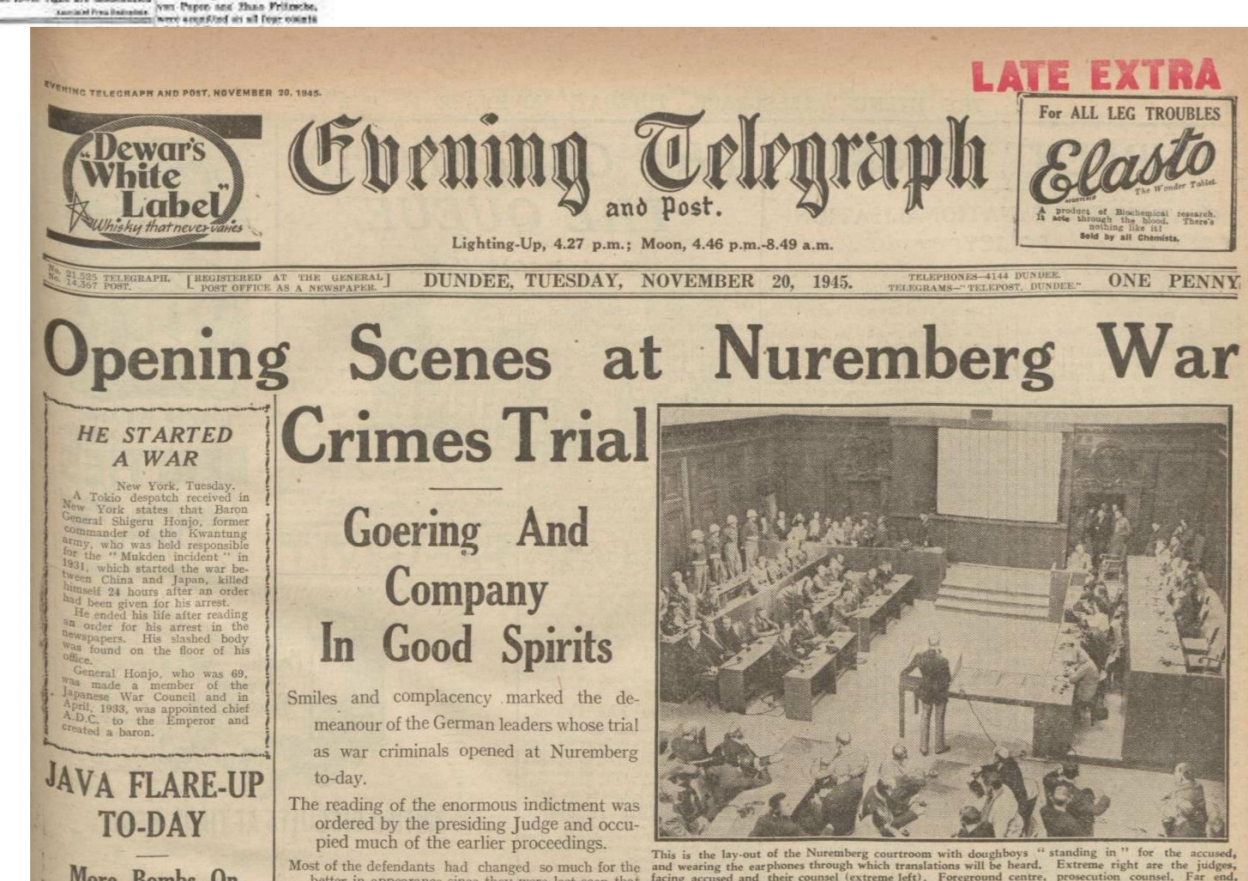
The results were surprising, as it is often assumed that students are well equipped with the knowledge to maneuver the digital world and are comfortable using new technology. While they struggled with learning the technology to share their work, the podcasts demonstrated the students engagement with pressing issues in their lives and society, and provided them with a venue to share their ideas of civic importance with the greater public for the first time.

We also struggled getting these assignments and media work spaces up and running within our school. This approach to facilitated learning was new to the teachers and required additional consultations. However, pushing through these challenges became a positive experience for the teachers and students involved, as it showed the possibility for digital literacy and civic engagement in the classroom as proactive.

Methodology:

The students who participated in this study were asked to critically engage with their texts and to author digital content to present their analysis. Students developed podcasts to explore issues of living represented in their texts and to compare it to the larger world. Students were given a list of resources including podcast websites, script outlines, and examples of acceptable literary podcasts.

We sought to understand the knowledge that was gained during and after the implementation of this social action curriculum project (Radford, and Ng-A-Fook, 2015).



What I Hypothesized

- Students would be able to adapt to whatever media program we gave them to work with
- Students would collaborate with peers
- Students would start the podcast right away and make little use of the script outline
- Students would already understand the use of podcasts
- Students would know the conventions of a podcast and how to incorporate them into their assignment
- Students would be able to adapt their literary texts to real life and be able to select an appropriate topic for further discussion

Results

- Students did not know where to start with the given podcast websites
- Students chose other website and alternative ways to record audio in order to avoid using an unfamiliar website
- Some students relied closely on peers to help solve their problems and complete their final pieces
- Students allocated more time to working on their scripts in order to avoid the use of new technology
- Most students had never heard a podcast prior to our class
- Most students picked one really easy convention to add to their podcast hoping that would be enough to complete the specific expectation on their assignment rubric
- Students could easily adapt their literary texts to their real lives but struggled narrowing their topics to a 3-5 minute podcast