Chapter 3

Moving Urban Students Beyond Online Public Voices to Digital Participatory Politics:
A Teacher's Journey Shifts Direction

Nicholas Lawrence
East Bronx Academy, USA

Brian Bechard
Mission Trail Middle School, USA

Joseph O'Brien
University of Kansas, USA

Ed Finney
Maple High School, USA

Kimberly Gilman
Hocker Grove Middle School, USA

ABSTRACT

The authors explore a teacher's 10-year journey to foster his urban middle school students' public voice and then their ability to engage in participatory politics. The authors first provide a conceptual and experiential context for how the teacher came to question whether cultivating 8th grade students' online public voice in a U.S. history was enough. Second, they discuss how two teachers created online interschool deliberations about contemporary issues and how a third teacher used low and high tech to enable her students to take civic action. Third, they discuss the essential elements of an online participatory learning space. Fourth, they address the challenges of integrating digital deliberations about contemporary public issues and online civic action into a U.S. history curriculum. Finally, they present how they adapted a site devoted to deliberations about just war in the context of U.S. history to a focus on just action in a contemporary setting.

INTRODUCTION

As an urban social studies middle school teacher, I have engaged in a decade long journey to foster students' civic skills and online "public voices" (Lawrence & O'Brien, 2011, 2016). During the first phase of my journey (2008-14), I confronted challenges related to technology integration, curricular alignment, selection of relevant digital tools, and the establishment of online academic norms for students. As I met and adapted to those challenges, by 2014 new challenges began to emerge such as discerning what constituted student-driven learning with technology, deciding how to let middle school students' thinking guide how justice related matters are addressed, and determining how to seamlessly weave hardware and software into a larger instructional system while remaining sensitive to technological change.

During the second phase of my journey (2014-16), collaboration with Kansas and New York colleagues with shared interests caused me to realize that cultivating my students' online public voices, which entails the art and skill of persuading "other people-beyond one's closest friends and family-to take action on shared issues" (Levine, 2008, p. 120) related to matters of justice, was insufficient for two reasons. First, while I had grounded matters of justice in the New York U.S. history curriculum, I grew more cognizant of how "current, controversial public issues [are] inherently engaging for students," particularly issues "related to students' ethnic, national, gender, or religious identity" (Avery, Levy & Simmons, 2013, p. 112). I wondered if my students were missing a learning opportunity when I placed social justice matters primarily in a historical, rather than a contemporary, context. Second, I realized that cultivating students' online public voice was but one component of participatory politics, which "are interactive, peer-based acts through which individuals and groups seek to exert both voice and influence on issues of public concern" (Kahne, Hodgin, & Eidman-Aadahl, 2016, p.3). Students needed not simply to deliberate about matters of social justice, but to consider ways to act on them in an online participatory learning space. What I learned during the second phase has served as the impetus behind the third and latest phase of my journey (2016-present), which ironically has resulted in a dramatic revamping of my use of technology and a revisiting of matters and challenges that I addressed earlier in my journey.

In this chapter, I first offer a conceptual and experiential context for how I came to question whether cultivating 8th grade students' online public voice in a U.S. history was enough. Second, I offer an example of how two teachers sought to create online interschool deliberations about contemporary issues and examples of how a third teacher used low and high tech to enable her students to take civic action, which inspired me to change the direction of my journey. Third, I explore the essential elements of an online participatory learning space as they relate to these core practices of participatory politics: research and dialogue with diverse

23 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/moving-urban-students-beyond-online-public-voices-to-digital-participatory-politics/207661

Related Content

Hybrid Privacy Preservation Technique Using Neural Networks
R. VidyaBanuand N. Nagaveni (2019). *Cyber Law, Privacy, and Security: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 542-561).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/hybrid-privacy-preservation-technique-using-neural-networks/228744

Analytical Study on Privacy Attack Models in Privacy Preserving Data Publishing
Sowmyarani C. N.and Dayananda P. (2019). *Cyber Law, Privacy, and Security: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 1518-1538).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/analytical-study-on-privacy-attack-models-in-privacy-preserving-data-publishing/228797

Security and Privacy Issues of Big Data
José Mouraand Carlos Serrão (2019). *Cyber Law, Privacy, and Security: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 375-407).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/security-and-privacy-issues-of-big-data/228736

Digital Privacy Across Borders: Canadian and American Perspectives
Lorayne P. Robertson, Heather Leatham, James Robertsonand Bill Muirhead (2019). *Emerging Trends in Cyber Ethics and Education (pp. 234-258).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/digital-privacy-across-borders/207669

Cyber Resilience for the Internet of Things
Marcus Tanqueand Harry J. Foxwell (2019). *Cyber Law, Privacy, and Security: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 1018-1049).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/cyber-resilience-for-the-internet-of-things/228767