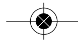
Avila d_ch 4_t1a 9/20/2012 3:09 PM Page 63



CHAPTER FOUR

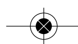
Critical Literacies and Social Media

Fostering Ethical Engagement with Global Youth

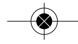
Anna Smith & Glynda Hull

In an era when digital information and communication technologies proliferate, so do opportunities for social interaction and communicative exchanges across localities and nation states (Appadurai, 1996). Via digital means we are now easily able to compose in multiple modes and, with access to the Internet, to do so in response to and in collaboration with international others. Such practices are, in fact, increasingly viewed as central rather than peripheral to literacy (Andrews & Smith, 2011). *Critical* reading implies a reader's active response, as Rosenblatt (1938/1995, 1978/1994) long ago taught us. The interpretation of written language and image resides at the intersection of text, the reader's personal experiences with other texts, and the social world. In a digital age, a reader's response can become manifest *materially* (cf. Coiro & Dobler, 2007). When readers engage with a blog, for instance, they are able, indeed expected, to click on links, add comments, and reblog or remix content. Such response is a customary, expected part of the reading experience. Thus, the reciprocal relationship between reading and writing becomes tighter in the digital sphere, making authorship more obviously tantamount to readership, and vice versa.

New digital configurations of people and ideas have the potential as well to shift social power relations. Previously only those with knowledge of coding languages and access to servers, or even further distant, those with access to publishing companies and their processes, could contribute to and critique the existing bodies of



Avila d_ch 4_t1a 9/20/2012 3:09 PM Page 64

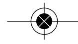


knowledge in a given field. Although inequalities certainly still exist and proliferate (Hargittai & Hinnant, 2008; Schradie, 2011), the capability to be producers and critical consumers of knowledge is now more widely available. Through social media outlets, more people of diverse ages, nationalities, genders, and socioeconomic positions produce news, comment on social issues, and even stage revolutions. These new configurations, in turn, necessitate a new ethic of exchange with distant, unknown, imagined others (Appiah, 2006). Critical reader-writers must orient themselves to take into consideration not just the interpretations they have intended as authors, but also the possible interpretations of audiences previously unimagined and out of reach. Thereby the rhetorical framework of composing not only widens but shifts as compositions wind their way through media and audiences. Writers not only design their meanings via multiple modes (cf. Kress, 2003; New London Group, 1997), but for unknown audiences who have the capacity to respond directly, becoming genuine interlocutors. These new configurations of digital reader-writers and audiences require new critical and creative dispositions toward reading and composing in the digital age.

Hull and Stornaiuolo (2010; Hull, Stornaiuolo, & Sahni, 2010) have suggested that the new ethic of digital literacies is "cosmopolitan" practice—reflexive and hospitable dispositions and habits of mind necessary for ethically motivated rhetorical and semiotic decision making in relation to wide, interactive, and potentially global audiences. In doing so, they drew on research with youth engaged in social interaction and the exchange of arts-based artifacts on a global social network, Space2Cre8. With colleagues and participants from India, South Africa, Norway, Great Britain, and Australia, as well as U.S. sites in California and New York, they described how youthful exchanges on this network are mediated through a developing cosmopolitan ethic—a growing common understanding of how to effectively interact and exchange meanings and artifacts across linguistic, worldview, and geographic boundaries. Such an ethic includes, importantly, sensitivity to the range of possible interpretations and responses to their own and others' postings. As youth begin to compose self-reflexively, revising their profile pages and creating movies and other artifacts to share, and imagining others' possible interpretations of their work, they develop "hospitable" stances in their reading of and composing for their distant audiences. As an important part of this process, youth participate in a collective mentorship method by which they share and appropriate productive practices of critique and commentary as a community.

We find cosmopolitanism, with its emphasis on inclusivity and mutual respect, a generative framework for thinking about the ethics of authorship and readership in a digital and global world. In a nutshell, cosmopolitanism is the idea that one can become, indeed should aspire to be, a citizen of the world, able to embrace local ties and commitments, but also to extend well beyond them, engaging a wider human

Avila d_ch 4_t1a 9/20/2012 3:09 PM Page 65

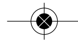


community, even across divides of seemingly irreconcilable differences. Scholars from a range of disciplines have explored the implications of cosmopolitanism, often in order to respond to conditions associated with globalization and the recognition that ours is an interconnected and interdependent, if conflicted, world. Such implications are far reaching and require, some have argued, a "cosmopolitan turn" in all of the social sciences and humanities (Beck & Sznaider, 2006). In education, cosmopolitanism has been taken up primarily by educational philosophers, who have recently begun to formulate cosmopolitan-minded frameworks to underpin conceptions of teaching and learning appropriate for a global age. Rizvi (2009), for example, explores how we can frame education so as to provide students both a knowledge about global transformations and also an ethical orientation towards them. He thus calls for "cosmopolitan learning" that fosters "a critical global imagination" (p. 265). (See also Hansen, 2010; Papastephanou, 2005.) Our own work, drawing on the concept of hospitality as a crucial cosmopolitan disposition for critical reader-writers in a global and digital age, is one answer to Rizvi's call.

The notion of hospitality has long been part of philosophical thought around cosmopolitanism (e.g., Derrida, 2002; Kant, 1983), for as a phenomenon it brings to the fore the nature of our relationships with guests, outsiders, foreigners, and others (cf. O'Gorman, 2006). For example, according to communications theorist Silverstone (2007), cosmopolitanism requires us "to recognize not just the stranger as other, but the other in oneself" (p. 14). He continues: "Cosmopolitanism implies and requires, therefore, both reflexivity and toleration. In political terms it demands justice and liberty. In social terms, hospitality. And in media terms it requires . . . an obligation to listen, an obligation which . . . is a version of hospitality" (p. 14). As a metaphor for communicating respectfully across difference in a global age, we find the ideal of hospitality to be rich with possibility. An obligation to listen implies a thoughtful openness to possible meanings in a pluralist sense, and an acknowledgment that we can't assume what to expect in terms of others' reactions and intentions. Indeed, we may not always be cognizant of our own intentions and reactions, which makes being open to and adept at critical reflection not only about others' meanings, but also about our own actions and motives, all the more important. To be a hospitable reader, writer, and viewer is thus to tolerate the discomfort that comes with honestly engaging with another around the uncertainties of attempting to understand and to be understood.

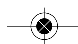
In this chapter, we foreground the composing processes and media exchanges of youth in one U.S.–based site on the Space2Cre8 network in relation to their developing digital ethic of cosmopolitan practice. At this New York City site, youth were introduced to the Space2Cre8 social network during a four-week alternative college-preparatory summer academy, which not only fostered cosmopolitan practices via participation on the network, but also offered cosmopolitanism as a philo-

Avila d_ch 4_t1a 9/20/2012 3:09 PM Page 66

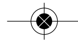


sophical concept at the center of the academy's curriculum. This double emphasis on cosmopolitanism through formal study and discussion in tandem with the practice of cosmopolitan values on the network is unique among the current sites, which typically provide opportunities only for the latter. The compositions that we discuss in this chapter are drawn from two cohorts of 25 youth who attended the program in sequential years. These young people were incoming juniors and seniors from high schools in New York City's Bronx borough. They traveled from the Bronx to New York University for the summer program—in effect, journeying across cultural, geographic, and economic boundaries. The academy was funded externally as a community center–university collaboration set to improve college preparation in terms of traditional school reading, writing, and critical thinking. Students were selected to participate by the community center, and in year two, many participants were acquaintances of the first cohort, as the first-year cohort encouraged their friends to participate during year two. The youth had a variety of interests and future aspirations; several looked forward to futures in film (production and acting), athletics, or criminal justice. They also shared, with many high school students, limited practice composing long-form academic texts. Most reported never having written a full essay independently, and thus, one of the aims of the academy was to demystify academic writing both by providing practice in its traditional forms, as well as by bridging to and from multimodal composing. Anna, co-author of this chapter, served as the director of the program and the instructor of the 21st-century composition course in the summer academy. To devise an alternative approach to college preparation for high school students, she along with the other instructors and researchers at this site designed three college-level courses to be taught by professors and graduate students. These courses mediated students' experiences learning to read and write college texts, while engaging them in a philosophical exploration of college as a cosmopolitan experience—not unlike the participants' current experiences living in the 21st century in an urban center.

In addition to participating in an international digital exploration of cosmopolitan practice, youth at this site studied the concepts of cosmopolitanism through multiple modes of philosophic inquiry. As part of the program, youth read and discussed *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (Appiah, 2006) in a seminar, while also drawing and analyzing neighborhood maps, blogging about digitally created belief collages, writing college application essays exploring the connection between their personal experiences and their values and beliefs, and designing "cosmopolitan conversation" digital stories (Hull & Nelson, 2005) in their 21st-century composition course. Like youth at other sites around the world, these young people interpreted, critiqued, and posted creative and critical compositions; polled and chatted with one another; and experimented with representations of self through the construction and maintenance of an online profile.



Avila d_ch 4_t1a 9/20/2012 3:09 PM Page 67



Cosmopolitan Conversations

This chapter focuses on processes of composing and the circulation of "cosmopolitan conversation" videos through Space2Cre8. In the composition course, the youth initially discussed images from blog posts and profile pictures posted by distant others on Space2Cre8. They considered how they interpreted these images and how to critically read images in blogs and posts. Then Anna provided the youth a series of compositional challenges. As a pedagogical approach to giving assignments, these challenges were designed to build on the youths' existing knowledge and experiences in ways that left compositional and rhetorical choices up to the youth. In the first of these challenges, youth composed their own image-based blog posts on the topic of the seminar course—how our values and beliefs are deeply rooted in our personal experiences—and experimented with a variety of design techniques introduced in the composition course, such as juxtaposition, color, visual metaphor, and foregrounding/backgrounding. They then invited other participants on Space2Cre8 to respond with their own interpretations. Finally, students were given the challenge of composing a digital story with the Space2Cre8 global audience in mind, a movie in which they would explore the intersections of personal values, goals, and experiences (about which they had already blogged) with issues in wider society and the world (which they had been discussing in the seminar course). In this way, youth put into practice the concepts of cosmopolitanism that they had been studying—such as how we engage with strangers whose backgrounds, values, and points of view likely differ from our own.

In their videos, the youth were asked to demonstrate their ability to think deeply about the important issues of our world, to reflect on the perspectives of others, and simultaneously, to consciously maintain or adjust their personal worldview, beliefs, and values. They were also asked to make mindful design choices, planning visual and audio effects to communicate their intended meanings. To begin their compositions, the youth critically viewed and discussed two videos posted on Space2Cre8 by others in the global community. Practicing reflexive and hospitable readings of the videos, they juxtaposed their own interpretations, the possible intentions of the authors, and the possible influence of design elements on both. After responding to the videos and discussing their initial reactions, they reviewed the cosmopolitan conversation video challenge (see Figure 1), and watched the two videos a second time.

First they viewed a video created by Bakhti, a 17 year-old girl from an extra-school site in India, and a frequent contributor to Space2Cre8. Bakhti's video included photographs from her daily life—of family, work, and school—with a voice-over that described aspects from each of these realms, including her father's alcoholism and the lack of a "proper kitchen" in her home (see Hull, Stornaiuolo, & Sahni, 2010). After viewing this video, the New York youth sat silently for a

Avila d_ch 4_t1a 9/20/2012 3:09 PM Page 68

moment and then went on to comment about how they had been struck by her straightforward and honest discussion of her economic status (which required her to work to support for her younger siblings) and familial situation (the death of her mother and neglect by her father). In fact, several participants mentioned how surprised they were that she was open about topics that they would have kept private. One student mentioned that he appreciated Bakhti's revelations, for without them he would have not known how much they had in common, and in this way, she had engaged him by making a connection across boundaries of country and culture. Next, the youth watched a video made by a group of students in Norway in a school-day program. This video showed several images of homeless people, overlaid with a musical track with a sad tone. It concluded with a scrolling message and matching voice-over about why and how people should care for the homeless, to wit, a kind of public-service announcement. The youth mentioned that the music changed how they viewed the pictures, evoking emotional responses that allowed them to picture themselves in similar situations, and though they found the video impactful in this way, they felt the voice-over sounded "scripted," making it also seem a little preachy, or in their words "too much." In these ways, this video reminded them of ones they had previously made in school about social issues, such as drug abuse and dropping out. The participants were finally given the challenge to take on the social issues that matter to them and to a global audience—such as homelessness in the video from Norway—and to do so in a way that was sensitive to their own experiences so they could engage others as powerfully as Bakhti from India had engaged them.

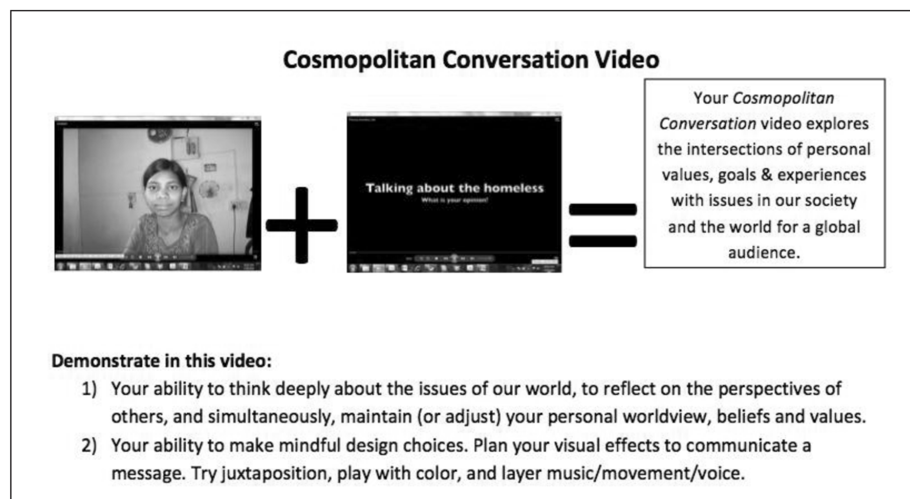
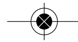


Figure 1. Cosmopolitan Conversation Video Challenge Description.

Avila d_ch 4_t1a 9/20/2012 3:09 PM Page 69



Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

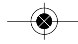
In addition to using the results of an automated tracking system that recorded the activity on the social network, we conducted open-ended and focused thematic coding of daily observational field notes (Dyson & Genishi, 2005) to explore how participants took action through talk, enacted identities, and negotiated joint activities. Daily saves of raw media and written compositions were made throughout the month-long academy to capture the sequence of participants' design choices. Documents, which were the result of academy activities, were also collected, such as student-drawn maps of what the youth considered their local neighborhoods before the academy, and reflection on and revision of these maps at the end of the academy. Students filmed commentary regarding these revisions. (See Appendix A for Eva's maps and commentary.) We also conducted and analyzed pre- and post-academy interviews, and we asked the students to capture commentary on their written and designed products via video. We have done verbatim transcripts of these recordings. Reproducing participants' language as accurately as possible, we have not changed their speech or writing to match standard conventions.

As the youth neared completion of their cosmopolitan conversation videos, we conducted composing-process interviews (see Appendix B for this protocol). In these interviews, we asked youth to share their intended audiences, messages, and tone; what design strategies they employed; their composing and collaborative processes; and the reactions they expected from those on Space2Cre8. We also asked them the origin of their initial ideas and feelings for their video; what changes, if any, they considered while composing the film; and what they viewed as the resulting effect of the video. We then watched the video each had created frame by frame, discussing compositional choices. Multimodal transcripts of these interviews were constructed, drawing on Hull and Nelson's (2005) analytic. That is, in a three-column chart, we aligned scene-by-scene the screen shots of the videos in one column; notes about other modes that youth employed in their designs such as sound, transition effects, text, etc., in the second column; and the transcript of the composing interview that referred to the scene in the third column. The transcripts helped us to uncover how students' multimodal compositions conveyed meaning through different semiotic systems such as image, sound, and language.

Authoring Cosmopolitan Practices

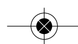
Our analyses shed light on the nature of individuals' engagement with cosmopolitan practices—their semiotic, linguistic, and social choices, intentions, and aspirations with global others as made manifest through a social network, Space2Cre8.

Avila d_ch 4_t1a 9/20/2012 3:09 PM Page 70

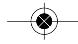


The interactions with and reactions to peers both distant and local influenced the ways in which the youth took up, resisted, and negotiated cosmopolitan practices on- and offline. Reactions to each other's activity online varied, especially initially. One youth, Cody (student names are pseudonyms), did not want to interact with someone he had never met in person. Even when instructors assured him that they personally knew that the youth from the various countries actually existed and were in fact who they said they were, he refrained from engaging, emphatically stating, "They could be anybody." It was only after a Skype video phone call with youth at the London site, for which Cody was asked to be the spokesperson for the New York site, that he watched the videos that youth from the London site had made and posted on Space2Cre8. Then he responded with verbal comments, but not online. In contrast, another participant, Ally, readily interacted with international youth, each day choosing a different country in which to locate youth on the site and to whom she would then post comments. She structured her cosmopolitan conversation video—an illustrated poem—to resemble a video she had seen on Space2Cre8. Students articulated a similarly wide range of influences on how they interacted with and reacted to others. As a result of reading and discussing the texts of the course, youth reported a change in how they approached international and local peers with whom they disagreed, as well as how they approached strangers with whom they imagined they might potentially disagree. Youth also professed that the choices they made in their interactions online and how they interpreted the posts of others were influenced by what they had learned about design elements and multimodal meaning-making.

Drawing on our analyses of youths' engagement with distant others, we call for an ethical turn in digital literacies studies in order to acknowledge and support dimensions of authorship in a global age that require the exercise of empathy and "hospitality" (Silverstone, 2007; cf. Hull & Nelson, 2009). We believe that such a turn is paramount now because of new global formations, opportunities, and challenges, and we hope that it offers a fresh direction for critical literacies studies, engaging the implications of the digital compression of space and time. The youth in our project demonstrated that, not only was authorship for distant audiences central to critical digital literacies, it was key to the development of their own cosmopolitan ethical dispositions. We describe two such youths' composing processes, which were representative of the larger group in terms of how they described the roles that designing and composing played in their growing understandings of cosmopolitanism and the ethical turns they attempted in interacting with local and distant others. First, we examine Tyson's authorship and the role that reading, writing, and video production played for him in developing a cosmopolitan understanding of the concept of "struggle." We then explore Eva's experience of authoring a film that she entitled *Making Conversation.* In her words, this project had an "awesome" impact on how she interacted with others both on- and offline.



Avila d_ch 4_t1a 9/20/2012 3:09 PM Page 71



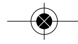
Dimensions of authorship in developing critical digital literacies

Tyson, an African American high school junior, was one of several youth whose composing practices illustrate the role that authorship plays in the digital age—particularly the role it plays in developing both conceptual understandings and critical dispositions. Tyson came to the academy well versed in video production. He and several of his peers had taken at least two courses—one in school and the other in an after-school program—on movie making, employing software such as iMovie and FinalCutPro. On the second day of the academy, after viewing posts from each of the participating countries on Space2Cre8, he asked to borrow a video camera for the weekend; he returned not only with footage, but an edited video that he had completed independently. The video was entitled *Tyson's City* and included recordings of major tourist attractions, which he labeled "random footage," and scenes from his neighborhood, including his house, the community fire station, and streets. Over these clips he laid snippets from popular music tracks. He offered to post his video on Space2Cre8 in order to introduce others to the academy.

We share Tyson's early video activities to suggest that, like increasing numbers of youth, he was a fluent composer across multiple platforms and with multiple modes. However, he was not immediately prone to authoring *critically*—that is, intentionally, through a composing process of reflexive, ethically-motivated semiotic choices and revisions to create a multifaceted product for a potentially global audience (cf. Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). For instance, other than sharing his initial video the first week of the program, Tyson posted only twice to the site—both times pictures of his favorite rapper, Drake, without commentary or attention to the critical designing challenges he had been given. In fact, he explained that when he began creating his cosmopolitan conversation video, in which he explored the concept of struggle, he was disengaged: "At first, like as I was making it, I wasn't really serious about it. I just wanted to do it just to do it. But then like I started to get more serious. I put more thought into it."

It is this very "seriousness" and "thoughtfulness" that we'd like to explore. Tyson explained several ways that the viewing and compiling of his and others' media shaped and reshaped his understandings and feelings about the concept of struggle. In fact, Tyson initially intended to produce a video about "my money issues." He searched and downloaded several photos on Google Image that showed stacks of money and people with large lottery checks. Having already learned how to compose videos, he initially thought he'd make short shrift of this assignment. It was the process of composing the cosmopolitan conversation video for an international audience that allowed Tyson to revisit his initial idea through iterations of reading, writing, designing, and contemplating. In revisiting his original plan, he further developed both the theme of the video as well as his own engagement in cosmopolitan practices.

Avila d_ch 4_t1a 9/20/2012 3:09 PM Page 72



The first major shift in Tyson's video came after he viewed Bakhti's video. When Tyson initially watched Bakhti's video, he didn't participate in the discussion surrounding it. However, when challenged to consider a wider audience than those he had previously made films for, namely the international audience on Space2Cre8, he broadened the topic from "money" to "struggle," stating that he knew that everyone could relate to struggle, because he had seen this engagement in relation to Bakhti's video. With this larger concept in mind, for several days Tyson sat still in front of a computer screen at the academy. Occasionally he worked on a different project, photoshopping a picture of a favorite music artist or assisting other youth with technical aspects of their videos. Tyson knew about struggle and wanted to express the struggle he had experienced in his life—and address it in a way companionable to Bakhti's video, too. However, he was unsure about execution.

Tyson seemed thwarted until he remembered the notes he had written while reading the seminar course text, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (Appiah, 2006), in preparation for leading a discussion on his assigned chapter. He had been struck by a particular passage in Appiah's text that he felt validated what he knew about struggle: "So, let's start with the sort of core moral ideas increasingly articulated in our concept of basic human rights. People have needs—health, food, shelter, education—that must be met if they are to lead decent lives" (p. 162). Through this quotation, Tyson had found the way to organize his video. He inserted a slide that listed the four basic needs articulated by Appiah and immediately set off composing the rest of his video. Tyson's finalized video included these major sections:

1. Title and topic slides "Struggle in Everyday Life"
2. Introduction of basic needs from Appiah
3. Slides of people struggling with hunger in past times
4. Slides of people struggling currently with homelessness in US, Pakistan, Haiti
5. Slides introducing money as the "main struggle"
6. Transition slide: "People don't just struggle in America"
7. Clip from Bakhti's video with overlay "Let's get Bakhti's point of view"
8. Conclusion and credit slides

Although Tyson created his video quite quickly once he formulated a way to organize it, his conception of "struggle" continued to expand in dimension and nuance over several iterations of reading/viewing and writing/composing, as displayed in Figure 2. (We don't mean to imply that this figure is inclusive of all of the influences on Tyson's processes; rather, it highlights the processes that Tyson mentioned in his interview and those that were discussed in the composition course as noted in

Avila d_ch 4_t1a 9/20/2012 3:09 PM Page 73

field notes.) Figure 2 can be read as composing actions occurring over time from left to right; however, the figure has dashed lines to further emphasize that this is not a causal relationship of one idea leading to another—rather, it was a recursive process for Tyson, one of layering meaning. For instance, Tyson never abandoned his focus on money as a central issue. In fact, he used the same images of money that he found early on, but during the composing process, these photographs took new conceptual shape. Rather than remaining his personal issue, he communicated poverty as historically and globally at the root of each of the basic needs in current society.

The two arrows in Figure 2 are placed where Tyson identified a direct link between composing and reading—when one activity led to another. In these explicit ways, Tyson demonstrated the reciprocal relationship between reading a philosophical text and composing his film. In reading about basic needs, he brought the thinking he had been doing around "struggle" through authoring his video to his reading, and then brought the categories of basic needs from the reading to the organization of his video. Tyson would be the first to say that he had difficulty understanding the course text and that the content he used in composing was one of the few sections of the text that he felt he could grasp. We would also argue that his understanding of the concept of basic needs was far more nuanced after composing than it was when he first became acquainted with it through Appiah's (2006) text.

The concept took on an emotional dimension through Tyson's inquiry. He gave special attention to finding music, the song "Angel" by Sarah McLachlan, to use as background. This song, he remembered, had been deployed in a television commercial about adopting shelter animals. It was the saddest song he could think of, and he made it a point to time his slides to match the phrasing of the song, in order to influence the viewers' interpretation of the images—to feel about the pictures as he did, sad and serious. He saw his video as something to be taken seriously, and he wanted to communicate that he was someone who should be taken seriously as well. When we asked him what he would like people to think and know after seeing the movie, he said, "I may goof around a lot, but I am serious at one point."

After viewing his creation a few times one day at the academy, Tyson asked if he could get a copy of Bakhti's video. He said he needed to show—not just state—that the issues he was addressing were worldwide, and he thought Bakhti's video had done that powerfully. Thereafter he included the portion of Bakhti's video in which she describes her living conditions, which he overlaid with the text: "Let's get Bakhti's point of view. . . ." Tyson believed not only that her video would "sum it up," but he also hoped that Bakhti would receive the message that she was not alone: "She's probably going to think that she's probably not the only one who has those kinds of problems, because it happens all around the world." Tyson saw his video as a visual conversation response and starter. He wanted to put his work in conversation with Bakhti and her work, explaining: "I tried to connect it to somebody that I

Avila d_ch 4_t1a 9/20/2012 3:09 PM Page 74

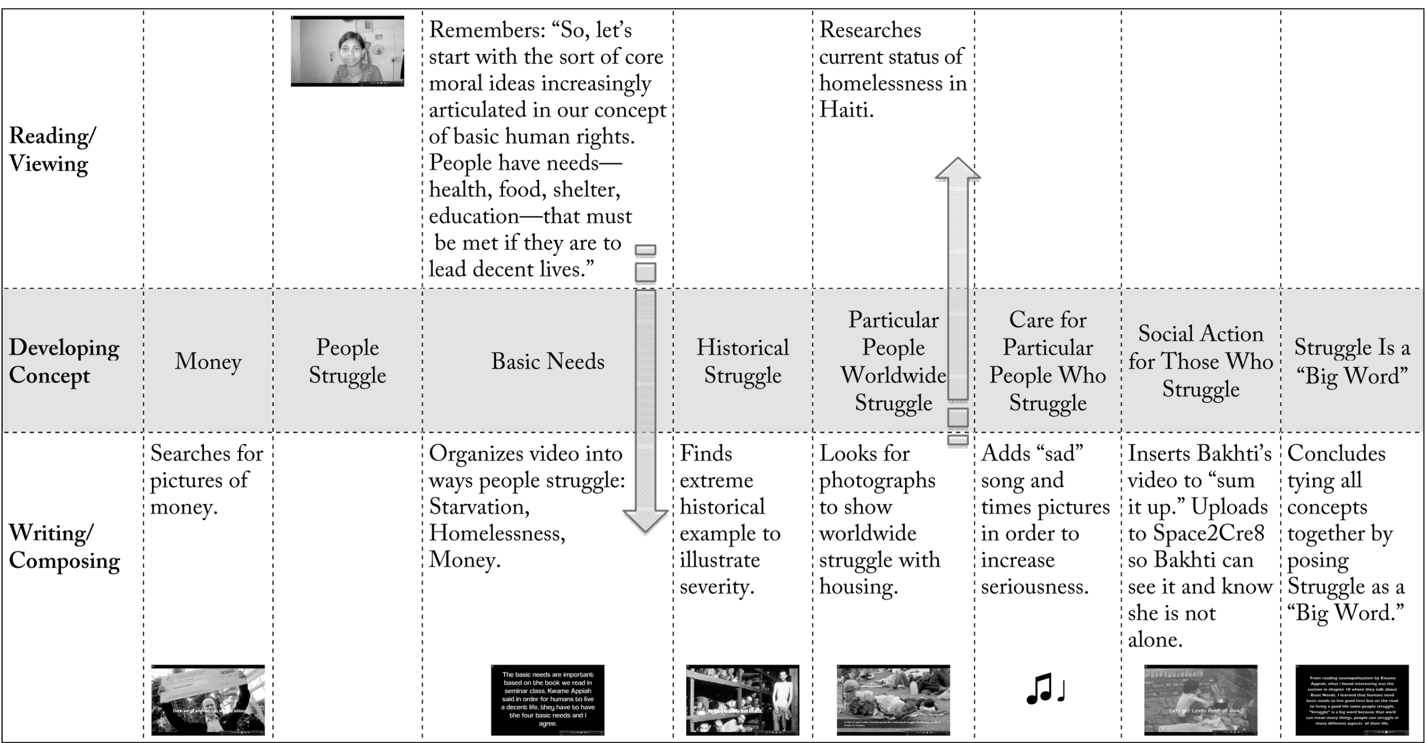
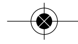


Figure 2. A Learning Map of Tyson's Processes.

Avila d_ch 4_t1a 9/20/2012 3:09 PM Page 75



could actually talk to because she's on Space2Cre8. She made a video about where she lives at and how they struggle. Like they actually have a house, like a house, but they don't got things like we've got in this country. . . ." He also wanted the video to be in conversation with the author of the course text, indicating that he would like for Appiah to see how his written ideas had been represented in movie form.

In composing his video we see that Tyson was not only applying critical lenses to the text after reading, he was demonstrating the reciprocal processes of critical authorship and readership. He authored a cosmopolitan understanding of struggle—interpreting through composing and layering concepts and media in such a way as to find an entry point into the conversation with others about struggle. In a sense, he authored a "serious" self—as a critical composer who can speak to a range of distant others, from Bakhti in India, for whom he felt much empathy, to Appiah in the U.S., with whom he contemplated having a "serious" conversation about complex philosophical ideas.

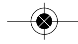
Developing cosmopolitan practices through critical authoring

Eva's experiences with composing similarly shaped her understanding of the concepts she studied in the academy. Additionally, like many of the other youth, composing also afforded Eva an opportunity to try on cosmopolitan ethical practices both locally and globally. For Eva, this experience resulted in an "awesome" change in the way she saw and interacted with others in the world.

At the beginning of the academy, Eva, a Latina high school junior, felt ambivalent—at best—about interacting with unknown others. She explained, "Like before when I would get on the train [the New York City subway], I would try to avoid everyone, like, as much as possible, 'cause you know I always thought that people were kind of mean and stuff." Eva didn't avoid interaction only on the train. For the first two weeks of the academy, she sat quietly through all three courses, rarely making a comment. When she interacted with instructors one-on-one, she often shrugged her shoulders rather than speaking. On Space2Cre8, she posted or otherwise interacted only when she was asked to do so.

Like Tyson, Eva began making her cosmopolitan conversation video in response to the videos she had viewed on Space2Cre8, and did so without an articulated aim or outline. Eva explained, "At first it was like, I didn't have any, like, 'this is what I'm going to do,' 'this is what I'm going to do.' It was just—make videos and something will come." She checked out a video camera one weekend to record random footage. On Monday morning as she waited for her train to come, she saw a man playing a guitar in the station. She had seen him almost daily playing music for spare change, as do many musicians along the subway lines, but had usually paid him no attention. This time she remembered the neighborhood map (see Appendix B) she had drawn and labeled with places and people in order to analyze who she considered

Avila d_ch 4_t1a 9/20/2012 3:09 PM Page 76



to be "neighbors" and how she defined "neighborhood." This memory prompted her to realize that although this man did not show up on her map, he was actually part of her daily life. Yet, because she had deemed him different—a white man in a predominately Latino and African American neighborhood—she had ignored him, and if anything, thought he was "weird." Practicing self-reflexivity, she considered the cosmopolitan ideal that as a global society, we can no longer pretend that others don't exist, and she really listened to his performance for the first time and recognized that he was a good musician. She approached the performer with her camera, told him she was doing a class project, and asked him if she could interview him about his life. He agreed, and they talked until her train came. Over the next two days, she had conversations with the owner of the taco truck she frequented. She also talked to a woman she often saw on her train. She then talked to people in the academy whom she realized she had essentially—up to that point—ignored.

After watching the raw video footage she had collected, Eva eventually spliced clips of these conversations together in an order that would show the range of the interests of others around her, as well as the patterns of similarities in their interests—even across what initially might be seen as differences in race, language, age, and gender. In Figure 3, we provide a transcript of the interview snippets that constitute her video.

It wasn't until Eva neared completion of the video that she realized she had been practicing the cosmopolitan ideal of hospitality, especially as exemplified through conversation and dialogue—Appiah's dominant metaphor for a cosmopolitan ethic. That is, she had stopped ignoring her fellow human beings, and she had developed a curiosity about and respect for the diverse interests of others. She explained:

> I didn't notice until yesterday that I'm talking to these people. You don't see it in the video, but they're having a *conversation* with me. I'm not just coming up to them and just like, "Well, what do you do?" I didn't want to do that. I'm not a reporter. I'm talking to these people, which is awesome. These are conversations [pointing to her video clips on the screen]. Real conversations. They're not just questions I go up to ask random people. That's why the title is called *Making Conversation* [shows title screen of the video] because this is conversation. This is what realness is.

This discovery was the most exciting moment of the academy for Eva. She explained the change of mind she had experienced this way:

> Before when you would get on the train and you don't talk to anyone, you don't really learn anything. You don't really experience anything. . . . Even a friend you haven't talked to for a long time—if you actually talk to them, it could be a good experience. It could be a life changer. It's how I changed.

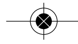
Like Tyson, Eva gained a more sophisticated understanding of a concept, "conversation," as she composed her video. In addition, she concluded her reading of the

Avila d_ch 4_t1a 9/20/2012 3:09 PM Page 77

Text on screen	What are you passionate about?
Fellow male participant	I'm passionate about skateboarding.
Man in subway	I'm passionate about music.
Fellow female participant and friend	About being independent and making my own money.
Woman on train	My son.
Younger sister	Riding my scooter.
Taco truck server	I love to do a good.
Fellow female participant	I'm passionate about food.
Girl on the train	Music.
Fellow male participant	Basketball.
Text on screen	Why?
Fellow male participant	Because that's something I love to do and won't give up on.
Man in subway	'Cause it brings people together to have a good time, to dance and celebrate.
Fellow female participant and friend	Because you want to have your own stuff and not depend on anybody.
Girl on train	Because I love it. I love the rhythms that people create with it. There's music all over. Even in the train station as we riding. If you listen to the tracks and everything and the wheels there's music all around us.
Woman on train	Because he was never supposed to be born.
Younger sister	Because I like to feel the breeze when I'm riding it down the hill.
Fellow female participant	Because I like experimenting and seeing the different flavors and how my taste buds go crazy.
Text on screen	Has anything gotten in the way of your passion?
Man in subway	A lot of people don't want to have a good time.
Fellow female participant and friend	My grandmother. She's rude. She says rude things out her mouth.
Woman on train	No!
Younger sister	The sidewalk.
Girl on the train	People!
Fellow female participant	I'm passionate about food.
Text on screen	So, what are YOU passionate about?

Figure 3. Transcript of Eva's Cosmopolitan Conversation Video.

Avila d_ch 4_t1a 9/20/2012 3:09 PM Page 78



seminar course text by daring to differ with its analysis of globalization. She explained how her composition demonstrated the antithesis of the popular idea that the "world is getting smaller" through globalization and technology:

> The world's not getting smaller, it's getting bigger. . . . So when we go up to him [pointing to video] or him, or her and you just talk to them, that brings us closer. You might not notice it, but it does. . .when you cross each other's boundaries. . . . When you actually start to listen to the other person, then it's like, "Oh there's a whole new world that I didn't even know." That's how the world grows [motions smaller and larger].

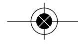
Eva had realized that engaging with others is not just a cosmopolitan practice, but an orientation towards others, a critical habit of mind, that results in an expansive and inclusive understanding of the world as connections across boundaries are established and relationships with others previously unknown and distant are developed.

In the crossing of boundaries, Eva grappled with notions of congeniality versus collegiality. When the academy began, she did what she was asked and was kind to others. However, over time she gained a more sophisticated understanding of how to engage with others through cosmopolitan hospitality. She explained, "Like you have your idea and they have their own idea. And you guys both, whether you feel strongly about it or not, you have your ideas and you try to defend your ideas as much as possible." Eva adds texture to the idea of hospitality—that it is more than being open-minded and respectful of others. Rather, for Eva it involves a reflexive and critical accounting of a person's assumptions and ideas in relation to others. In the final weeks of the academy, she not only spoke up, but also started to guide her peers' discussions by posing questions about the content of the courses and challenging others to explain the opinions they posed. Eva had decided that she would not simply share her video, but use it to begin these same kinds of conversations locally and globally, off- and online:

> Mainly I want to know what people in India are passionate about or people from the Bronx that I've never met. It would be awesome to know, you know? Like when they tell me their passion, I could tell them my passion and we spark up a conversation from there. It would be awesome to have more friends.

After the academy ended, Eva independently posted survey questions about schooling in the differing countries. She had been conducting research for a school report on conditions of schools in urban settings, and felt it wouldn't be enough to just understand what students at her own school felt about their education, but that her understanding could benefit from global knowledge. Explaining what had changed for her during the academy, she noted that not only was she more comfortable with the group, but she left feeling confident in discussing ideas, feelings, and thoughts with those she would have previously ignored or avoided.

Avila d_ch 4_t1a 9/20/2012 3:09 PM Page 79



Final Thoughts

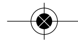
Engagement with media creation at critical points in Eva's and Tyson's creative processes influenced their conceptual explorations of "struggle" and "conversation" in ways that expanded their previously held notions. Their learning was mediated by on- and offline iterations of integrated reading, writing, designing, and discussing. For both Eva and Tyson, critical digital authorship was instrumental to comprehending traditional print texts, as well as reading their social network and interpreting distant youths' artifacts.

Based on the work of Eva, Tyson, and their cohorts, we encourage classroom and out-of-school teachers interested in guiding youth in the development of their critical print and digital literacies to consider the significant role that content creation, or authorship, plays in concept building and learning. In this digital age, traditional content creation, such as book reports, unit projects and essays, cannot be merely digitized and relegated to the end of a unit as capstone demonstrations of content mastery. Rather, as demonstrated by these youth, students' learning is mediated by the active role of authorship within reading, and recursive reading within multimodal designing. As Tyson demonstrated with his use of "sad" music, intentional choice of images paired with words, and a remix of Bakhti's video, teachers can design instruction to challenge the dominant role of static print in literacy instruction. Tyson designed and communicated with each of these modes individually, as well as in concert on the screen. Each of these literacy skills, we would argue, is necessary for navigating learning in the 21st century.

Finally, we would not have learned about the youths' sophisticated and layered meanings, nor their complex designing and concept-building processes, without a "listening" orientation toward the youth (Schultz, 2003), itself a cosmopolitan practice. By this we mean taking a curious, receptive, and responsive stance when engaging with youth and their compositions, listening for patterns in their thinking and feelings with sensitivity to the social, cultural, and communal aspects of their experiences (see also Andrews & Smith, 2011). By creating space and time within the academy for youth to discuss their work and processes in depth with their instructor, Anna, and with the research team in interviews, we learned of their growing confidences and academic risk-taking, which informed our understanding of their learning. Writing conferences are not a new method of instruction, so in addition to tuning their ear for evaluation and instruction within conferences, we suggest that teachers take on the practice of *hospitable* conferencing, engaging in the same cosmopolitan practices discussed in this chapter.

Beyond this, critical digital composition leveraged opportunities for the youth to try on new critical ways of being in the world—both on- and offline. Reading, writing, and engagement with others—distant and near—are tightly woven in the 21st century. The ethical imperatives of digital spaces are not relegated to cyberspace. As Eva recognized and demonstrated in a dramatic shift in her orientation toward unknown others, new configurations of people and ideas online are representative of the same

Avila d_ch 4_t1a 9/20/2012 3:09 PM Page 80



offline, and the ethics of critical engagement in a digital age exists both on- and offline. Eva and Tyson experienced what it means to engage in deep inquiry into concepts, and developed the confidence and the self-reflexive, hospitable literacy practices needed to engage in critical conversation about nuanced concepts with others—even those who seemed very different at the onset.

Curricula and pedagogies built around literacies in this age must be designed for an era characterized by access to and democratization of tools, people, and ideas in digital spaces. The recently released Common Core State Standards Initiative (2010), which was designed for college and career readiness, offers an entire appendix dedicated to defining, describing, and giving examples of "complex" texts, but still only asks of students to write traditional genres of narration and argument—with no nod to complexity of student-produced texts or processes. Not only do we see this as not representative of the writing/composing necessary for college, career, and the 21st century in general, we would argue that youth need experience composing across modes of communication, with others who are distant and unknown, and with similar focus on the composing processes—particularly critical processes—which we have argued have an ethical component around exchange with these distant and unknown others. We do not imagine that online, digital reading and writing should supplant traditional texts; rather, the critical orientations of 21st-century interpretation and composition can be taught in tandem, or in what Leander (2009) described as "parallel pedagogies." Imagine approaching a distant, unknown author, such as Homer, with the same hospitality, openness to other worldviews, experiences, and communication patterns—as well as confidence that these differences can be overcome—that Tyson and Eva developed in only four weeks of focused critical digital engagement. These are the kinds of reading and composing experiences that we believe should be typical in the 21st-century classroom.

Acknowledgments

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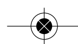
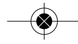
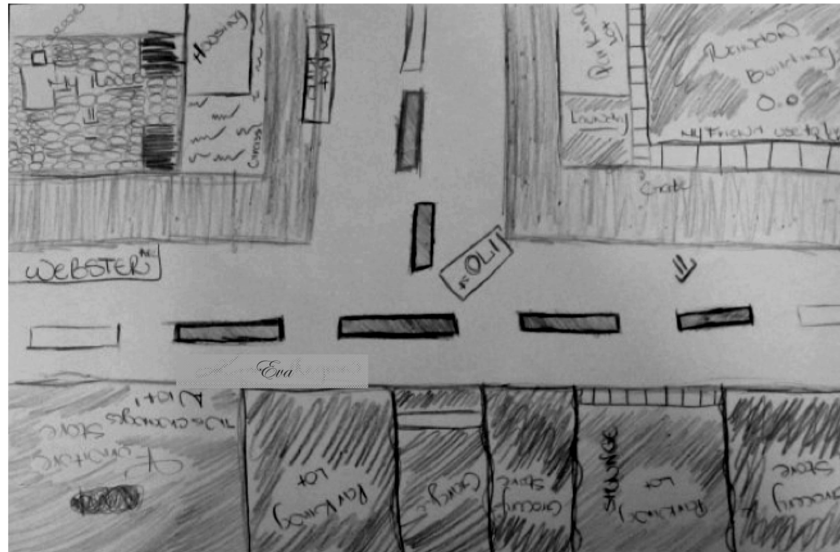


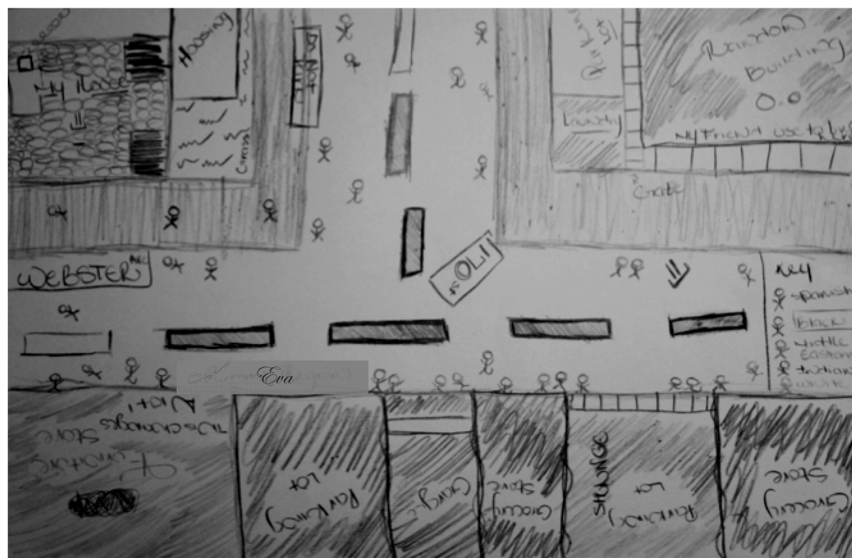
Avila d_ch 4_t1a 9/20/2012 3:09 PM Page 81



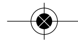
Appendix A

Eva's Neighborhood Maps and Commentary





Top: Eva's Neighborhood Map before the Academy
Bottom: Eva's Revised Neighborhood Map after the Academy



Transcript of Eva's Revision Commentary

[Eva holds her map to a camera and points to parts of the map as she explains her revisions.]

> I added people. And look, there's a key. These are [referencing the map key] Spanish people; these are Black people; these are Middle Eastern people; Indians and White people. Notice there are <u>no</u> White people, and rarely any. . . Middle Eastern. Notice there are no Indian people living in buildings. They are just working in the stores. Cosmopolitanism has made me real aware of who's around me. Here's [pointing to each building] grocery store, parking lot, grocery store, garage, parking lot, furniture store, apartment building, apartment building. That's basically it, you know. It's a little home for me. That's it. All I added was people.

Appendix B

Composing Interview Protocol

At each of the sites on the Space2Cre8 network, youth design multimedia and digital products (see Hull & Stornaiuolo, 2010; Hull, Stornaiuolo, & Sahni, 2010). They share these in various ways across the network. At the beginning of their projects, as they near completion, and/or once the digital products are totally finished, students are interviewed about their composing processes, purposes, and products. These interviews are video recorded digitally, making them a source of data for our ongoing research. Additionally, the interviews serve pedagogical purposes as 21st-century writing conferences as they involve detailed discussion of online, digital, and multimodal literacy practices. Drawing from the protocol below, the conferences engage youth in reflective dialogue focused on the processes through which they are rhetorically framing their compositions for intended and potential audiences both local and global (Andrews & Smith, 2011).

1) Ask participant what his or her digital story/product is about.
2) With participant, view video without stopping.
3) Following the lead of the student, ask a series of questions about the composing processes and rhetorical decisions made by the student, including:
    a. How did you begin to make this? What did you do next?
    b. Where did you get the idea for this story? What inspired you?

Avila d_ch 4_t1a 9/20/2012 3:09 PM Page 83

c. Would you say that your movie has a message? If so, what is it?
d. Who did you have in mind when you made this movie (i.e., audience)? Who would you like to see it? Why? Have they seen it yet? Why/why not?
e. How do you hope people see you after seeing this movie?
f. Have you talked to anybody about your movie? Have you made any changes after talking to that person?
g. Did you work mostly alone or with someone?
h. Will you post it on Space2Cre8? Why/why not? Did you think about the kids from India, U.S., Norway, South Africa, etc. when making the movie? What do you hope they think about the movie?
i. How did you make your movie (i.e., the process)? Did you think about any design elements? How did your movie change over the course of making it?
j. How did your ideas change while making the movie? How did your feelings change as you were making the movie?

4) Watch the digital story again frame by frame, discussing each of the visible composing and semiotic decisions that were made, including:
   a. How did you choose that image (or that scene)?
   b. How did you make the pictures, words, music, etc. match (i.e., work or fit together)?
   c. Why did you put that (picture/music/voice-over) in that spot in the movie?
5) Finally, ask if the youth is satisfied with the product as is, probing for why and asking if he or she would change anything as a result of this conversation.

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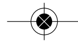

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