

CHAPTER 8

DIALOGUE ACROSS DIFFERENCE

A Case Study of Facing History and Ourselves' Digital Media Innovation Network

Justin Reich
Harvard University

Anna L. Romer
Dennis Barr
Facing History and Ourselves

One of the most troubling demographic phenomena in the United States is the re-segregation of American schools. In urban centers, decades of work to integrate student populations has been rolled backwards, and in suburban and rural areas, students increasingly find themselves living in homogenous neighborhoods. Nurturing robust civic and participatory competencies requires that students develop the capacity to communicate and collaborate across ethnic and class difference, but students' experience in schools is increasingly one of demographic isolation.

One way to counteract these alarming trends is by connecting diverse students online. Online spaces allow students in homogenous schools to engage with students from widely different life circumstances. Moreover, online platforms allow students to participate in dialogue across difference using the same media practices that are reshaping the civic sphere and defining this generation (Reich, 2008).

This chapter will examine a case study of the Digital Media Innovation Network (DMIN), a network of educators and students facilitated by Facing History and Ourselves. Facing History is an organization whose mission is to engage students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of racism, prejudice, and antisemitism in order to promote a more humane and informed citizenry (Barr & Bardige, 2012). In that spirit, DMIN is designed to bring together learners and educators from around the world to cultivate media literacy, perspective-taking skills, and related civic competencies. In Facing History classrooms, middle and high school students learn to think about individual decision making and to exercise the faculty of making moral judgments. The first DMIN project, conducted in 2010, involved 15 schools from around the world, and focused on Nicola Kristof's documentary film *Reporter* (Metzgar, 2009). *Reporter* documents Kristof's efforts to raise awareness of the brutal civil war happening in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the challenges not only of practicing journalism in a complex and dangerous place, but the additional challenges of getting western readers to care about stories from a world away. The film touches on core Facing History themes of identity, the self and the other, and memory, legacy, and judgment, and it raises questions about how stories can be told differently in different forms of media.

Teachers received extensive training on media literacy, Facing History's pedagogy and content, media production, and online collaborative practice. They then worked intensively with their students to create digital projects, and they brought their students into a global online community to share their work with their online peers. Students watched *Reporter* and shared their own media projects showcasing their lives, their communities, and their aspirations. Classrooms then participated in a focused period of online discussion about *Reporter* and about their own documentaries.

In this chapter, we will examine the inaugural DMIN project through the lens of *design research* (Dede, 2005). Design research is a method commonly used in the learning sciences and for the study and development of innovative pedagogical practices, such as those leveraging emerging technologies. The DMIN project was developed with a series of design principles reflecting both Facing History's core pedagogical stances as well as our strategies for adapting those core stances for online environments. The project was carefully assessed by our evaluation team (internal to the organization, but independent from the educators involved in the DMIN project), allowing

us to learn from our experiences and experiments as we design future iterations of the DMIN project.

To explicate this case study, we begin framing some of the challenges to civic education posed by a rapidly desegregating society, and the ways in which technology can accelerate or ameliorate these ideological boundaries. We then articulate the key rationales behind our 2010 DMIN project and define the principles that informed the learning design of our network. We conclude by presenting formative evaluation data showing initial evidence of DMIN's impact on students' competencies (such as media literacy skills), skills (such as perspective taking), and attitudes (such as openness to difference) (Romer & Mingo, 2011a; Romer & Mingo, 2011b). In particular, students involved in the DMIN project expressed a deepened respect for both the differences that emerged in the diverse online community and the values that were shared across these geographic and social divides.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Facing Re-Segregation

Political theorists, going as far back as John Stuart Mill and John Dewey, have long argued that exposure to diverse perspectives is vital both to a robust civil society and to the development of individuals within those societies (Kahne, Middaugh, Lee, & Beezell, 2011). Engaging in democratic discourse requires engaging with people who take different perspectives on issues, and differing perspectives are often a function of different backgrounds, upbringings, and life circumstances. Effective civic learning environments encourage students to encounter people with different ideas and beliefs. Therefore, one of the greatest threats to civic education in America today is demographic. Our schools and neighborhoods are increasingly re-segregated by both race and class.

The harms from these trends are raising alarms from across the political spectrum. From the right, libertarian political scientist Charles Murray's (2012) book *Coming Apart* describes how upper class, White Americans have created their own residential enclaves separating them from working class, White Americans. Murray argues that these class divisions threaten the fabric of a unitary nation. On the left, education scholar Gary Orfield has long documented the re-segregation of American schools (Orfield & Lee, 2005), and his most recent 2012 report *E Pluribus . . . Separation* (Orfield, Kucsera, & Siegel-Hawley, 2012) shows that racial segregation continues to grow and so-called "double segregation," segregation by both minority status and poverty level, also continues to expand, again threatening to create two Americas with two separate and unequal systems of schooling. Of course, people living

with other similar people can hold very different beliefs, but the risks of narrow ranges of thought are greater in homogenous communities.

These divisions between neighborhoods are aggravated by tracking practices within schools (Oakes, 2005). In many schools, whatever diversity remains after residential sorting is further homogenized by assigning students into classes by measures of academic achievement. Since academic achievement is highly correlated with family income, dividing students into basic, college prep, and honors tracks creates situations where, even in demographically diverse schools, students experience classrooms filled with students from similar backgrounds.

Here then, we come to the nub of a critical problem in the civic mission of schools: If we know that meaningful civic education requires having students engage with peers holding diverse perspectives, how can we encourage dialogue across difference in the face of these stark and growing demographic divides? One answer involves creating online spaces where diverse students can convene and learn together.

Media: Siloes and Bridges

The influence of emerging media technologies on civic discourse is a contested topic (Gardner & Davis, 2013). In particular, there is an ongoing debate as to whether new practices in media distribution and consumption are creating greater connections between diverse people or creating greater intellectual isolation.

As early as the mid-1990s, scholars warned that the emerging World Wide Web would allow individuals to narrowly tailor their media consumption practices in ways that allow people to consume only those ideas that aligned with their pre-existing biases and preferences (Negroponte, 1995). Going even further, Pariser (2012) argues in his book *The Filter Bubble* that Web technologies such as cookies and other Web tracking technologies allow content and search providers online to conduct this filtering for people without their knowledge: people visiting ideologically polarized sites can have their search results algorithmically adjusted to continue to deliver more ideologically polarized content. Americans once watched Walter Cronkite together. Today, people can choose to receive their news from a plethora of narrowly tailored partisan sources and watch media that confirms their biases. Even if they don't choose to do so, online content providers can build automated information siloes on their behalf.

Others however, argue that online spaces build bridges and connect people with diverse opinions and political beliefs. In particular, online enthusiasts have long argued that virtual communities can bring together people across the divides of geographic self-segregation (Rheingold, 2000). When

people congregate online around their interests, like video games or baseball, they are likely to develop networks that span across typical demographic divides. For people in residentially segregated neighborhoods or workplaces, these online communities may be much more diverse than the communities that people typically spend time in within the physical world. In one study of high school students, Kahne and colleagues (2012) showed that both politically driven and nonpolitical interest-driven forms of online activity are associated with greater reports of exposure to diverse perspectives; kids who do things online, political or otherwise, encounter diverse ideas.

While the overall effect of new media on civic discourse is unresolved (and perhaps too multifaceted to be resolved in any meaningful way), it is clear that many people see the potential for new media to build bridges across differences. For a reporter like Nicolas Kristof, emerging media provides the opportunity to raise awareness and concern for issues of injustice happening in places far afield from the communities of people who read the *New York Times*. For Facing History and Ourselves, emerging media provides the opportunity for our international community of educators and students to be in dialogue with one another, a community that intentionally works with schools serving a wide array of diverse student populations.

Facing History and Ourselves

Before delving into the specifics of the JMIIN Reporter project, it is important to have a broader background on Facing History and Ourselves (Barr & Barzide 2012). Facing History and Ourselves is an international educational and professional development organization whose mission is to engage students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of racism, prejudice, and antisemitism in order to promote the development of a more humane and informed citizenry. Facing History and Ourselves believes that by studying the historical development of the Holocaust and other examples of de-humanization, collective violence, and genocide, students can make essential connections between history and the moral and civic choices they confront in their own lives. By exploring a question in an historical case such as why some people willingly conform to the norms of a group even when those norms encourage wrongdoing, while others speak out and resist—Facing History offers students a framework and vocabulary for making such connections and to think about how they can make a difference in their worlds. Facing History and Ourselves has nine offices in North America, an international hub in London, and a network of 29,000 educators who reach nearly 1.9 million students each year. From these offices, we work with educators and students in many different settings—traditional public schools, charter networks, independent schools,

schools serving particular faith-based communities—but we have a special commitment to working with large urban districts and schools serving students in low-income neighborhoods.

Facing History brings historical and moral dimensions to civic education. The Facing History and Ourselves framework is built upon the notion that democracies are fragile enterprises and can only remain vital through the active, thoughtful and responsible participation of its citizens. Facing History highlights the importance of creating learning environments that encourage reflection, deliberation, debate, and questioning processes that allow teachers and students to develop well-informed perspectives and judgments about complex social, moral, civic, and political issues. To become informed and thoughtful citizens of their communities and of the increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, adolescents need civic education that goes beyond the traditional civics class. They must develop sufficient background in history and world affairs—as well as in science and the humanities—to know what to make of new information, or at least how to find out. Students need to understand the major controversies and conflicts of today's world; the national and international institutions and processes that protect or impede human rights and well-being; and the pivotal events and processes that have shaped our world and continue to influence our common destiny.

In addition to knowledge and competencies in history, social sciences, and civics, tomorrow's world citizens will need literacy and media skills that enable them to find, interpret, and evaluate information and to communicate their views with integrity and persuasiveness. They will need to develop “habits of mind” that encompass multiple perspective-taking, admitting divergent views and discrepant information, tolerating uncertainty and ambiguity, and ultimately forming integrated understandings and judgments on which they can base individual and collective action. As sources of news, information, and opinion proliferate, these kinds of “new media literacies” will become increasingly important. If as adults we want the next generation to join us in building more compassionate and inclusive communities, in standing up to injustice and preventing cruelty and violence, we will need to stretch their imaginations—and our own—as together we attempt to walk in unfamiliar shoes and communicate across cultural and ideological divides.

THE DIGITAL MEDIA INNOVATION NETWORK REPORTER PROJECT

As new media continues to reshape how young people interpret and shape their world, Facing History and Ourselves strives to thoughtfully explore ways that new media can shape our practice, and the DMIN Reporter

project has been among our most important recent experiments. The project had four core goals:

- For teachers and staff to gain new expertise in integrating new media into their teaching of documentary film to enhance Facing History's approach to learning by promoting dialogue with others
- To expose students to multiple perspectives from outside their immediate classrooms
- To provide new platforms for student expression and student-generated work
- To enhance student media literacy, both by viewing and discussing documentary film and ancillary documents (e.g. Kristof's columns) and by creating their own content and posting it to a shared educational network

These "new" goals were all in the service of Facing History's core goals of creating a more humane and informed citizenry.

The DMIN Reporter Project was conducted over one year in five phases: (1) recruitment; (2) teacher training; (3) classroom media projects; (4) on-line dialogue; and (5) evaluation. In the spring of 2010, Facing History and Ourselves identified 15 teachers from our educators' communities around the world to join our new Digital Media Innovation Network. The Network had its first event in July 2010, with a week-long, in-person symposium for teachers and staff providing an intensive exposure to ideas about the production of and teaching with new media.

Teachers returned to their classrooms in the fall of 2010 committed to use *Reporter* to catalyze student-generated projects many of which focused on their own communities, using new media. The 15 participating teachers adapted the material from the symposium and crafted curricula to suit their students and the demands of their courses, and their students created very different kinds of projects ranging from documentaries to posters, but all agreed to convene their students at an online workshop December 6-10, 2010 hosted on a social networking site.

The online workshop was entitled *Making Media, Making Sense, Making Change*. Students were to post their work, log on to read or view the work of others, as well as to participate in two sets of online discussions. The first set of prompts drew from scenes from *Reporter* to spark discussion about core Facing History themes of identity and justice. For instance, one discussion thread begins with a clip from *Reporter* where captive rebel soldiers, just teenagers, describe their wartime actions to Kristof. The question then asks students to reflect upon and parse one captive child soldier's request for forgiveness. The second set of prompts asked student to reflect on the changing nature of media and their own media projects, with some prompts

drawing on video clips of experts who participated in the summer teacher symposium. The online community also provided teachers and students with classroom pages to showcase their projects and ongoing work from the fall semester as well as to communicate and reflect with classes of students from distant places who were exploring similar themes. After the intensive online workshop, the Facing History and Ourselves evaluation team conducted surveys of the participating teachers and students and a discourse analysis of various discussions produced by the online community.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR THE DMIN REPORTER PROJECT

The DMIN Reporter project was designed by a cadre of educators at Facing History and Ourselves, shaped by the work of 11 classroom teachers, and co-constructed by these educators and more than 500 students. Each of the stakeholders in a complex learning experience such as the DMIN Reporter project brings different goals, perspectives and agenda to the project. Several key features of the project, which we call design principles, created the conditions for our stakeholders to work together to create a meaningful academic project that promoted dialogue across differences and engaged students in media creation and perspective taking. These five design principles shaped the development of the DMIN Reporter project and will inform the design of future DMIN projects:

1. Intentionally Solicit Diverse Participants
2. Build Educator Community First and Invite Students In
3. Engage Differences Sideways through Compelling Content
4. Create Safe Spaces for Sharing
5. Allow Students to Express Themselves through Media

Intentionally Solicit Diverse Participants

Many networks exist for helping teachers connect with other like-minded teachers for online collaborations, especially for building partnerships across the globe. iEARN (www.iearn.org) is one of the oldest and largest networks sponsoring international collaborative projects. The Flat Classroom Project (www.flatclassroomproject.net) accepts applications for collaborations several times a year. The annual Global Education Conference (www.globaleducationconference.com) is a free virtual conference through which educators can learn about ongoing projects and connect with one another. While this remains understudied, anecdotal evidence suggests that while these projects have global reach, many project networks consist

primarily of independent schools or other schools primarily serving affluent students. They afford geographic and cultural diversity, but economic diversity can be difficult to curate in these networks.

In order to meet our goal of exposing students to multiple perspectives from outside their immediate classrooms, the DMIN Reporter project needed to include a diverse community of teachers and students. In recruiting and selecting teachers for the project, Facing History deliberately sought out teachers working in diverse settings: in the United States and abroad, in private and public schools, in urban and suburban settings. Teachers selected for the project needed access to networked technology for their classrooms; enthusiasm for the work (enthusiasm to learn being more important than established expertise with technology); and a willingness to commit to the project. In the end, 15 classrooms comprised of 522 students participated in the project from public, parochial, and charter schools and from all over the United States and the world: Shanghai, Cape Town, London, Toronto, Chicago, Brooklyn, San Francisco, Oakland, Cleveland, Washington, D.C., Boston, Los Angeles, and suburban towns in Tennessee, Colorado, and Florida.

Facing History and Ourselves leveraged our global network of offices and educators in order to forge such a diverse group of teachers into a community. One of the particular advantages of our network is that we have deep relationships with educators in a variety of urban school systems in cities like Oakland and Chicago, where half of students are eligible for free or reduced prices lunches and nearly all students are from minority racial or ethnic groups. These long-term relationships of support and trust were vital in getting teachers from urban centers to participate in our technology-mediated experiments. We connected these schools with other schools in suburban American communities where only a fraction of students are eligible for free lunch and 80% or more of the student population is White—along with schools in other parts of the world serving varying populations within those countries.

Student projects and classroom pages made visible these differences, as the Boston, Cleveland, and Oakland students were primarily if not 100% students of color, speaking in ways that were distinct from their peers in Florida, Colorado and Tennessee, not to mention the range of English spoken from Shanghai to Cape Town. Some classrooms themselves were heterogeneous. Their projects also highlighted socioeconomic and cultural differences from exploring gangs and teen pregnancy to a project to help youth in Haiti after the earthquake. International classrooms provided further definitions of diversity, as the Cape Town students offered examples of students of color living in a country and continent where they are the majority. What was uniform across the classrooms was the excitement and enthusiasm for the project and the eagerness to share their worlds and their confidence in doing so.

Build Educator Community First, and Invite Students In

Before attempting to build safe, trusting relationships among students, educators in an online collaboration need to build collegiality among themselves (Barab, MaKinster & Scheckler, 2003; Matzat, 2010). In the Digital Media Innovation Network project, Facing History worked with participating teachers to raise funds to bring teachers physically together for a week in the summer before their teaching. During this week, teachers watched and discussed *Reporter*, learned to use social media and video editing tools; and explored how new technologies were changing media, education, and individual identity.

Of course, finding the funding to bring people together physically can be difficult, and similar opportunities for building educator relationships can happen entirely online. In their book *Flattening Classrooms, Engaging Minds* (Lindsay & Davis, 2012), Julie Lindsay and Vicki Davis, classroom educators with deep expertise in international collaboration, describe a “handshake” process that they use in their Flat Classroom projects (www.flatclassroomproject.org) to connect individuals from different schools. Through this process, educators can use online tools like webinar meeting rooms to introduce themselves, discuss their classrooms, and clarify expectations around the project. Once they’ve gotten to know one another, the educators can then invite their students into this budding community. Lindsay and Davis recommend a similar “handshake process” for students, including the development of online social profiles and the opportunity to interact before beginning project work.

Engage Difference Sideways through Compelling Content

Engaging students in dialogue across difference does not mean starting conversations with, “Hey, let’s talk about how we are all different.” Rather, educators should identify compelling content with broadly relevant themes and use conversations around that rich academic material to highlight how people from diverse circumstances bring their individual perspectives to complex conversations.

The documentary *Reporter* addresses two themes that resonate with students from diverse circumstances. In one sense, the film is about Nicolas Kristof’s work unveiling the brutal impacts of the civil war that has caused widespread suffering and the death of more than 5 million citizens in the Democratic Republic of Congo. At the same time, the film is about the challenges of telling those stories in a changing media landscape, as Kristof struggles with attracting an audience for these dismal stories in a world saturated in entertainment. Students are drawn into conversation about rights,

justice, and international responsibility; and they are fascinated by the ways technology is transforming media and news for their generation.

For instance, in one online discussion, students watched a short clip from the film in which a captured African child soldier asks Kristof for forgiveness for his actions during the war and for help in returning to Rwanda. It's a richly complex moment (Why is the child soldier soliciting forgiveness from an American reporter? What might happen to him after the American reporter leaves the scene?) and it provoked a nuanced online discussion about the meaning of *forgiveness*. Some students viewed forgiveness capaciously ("Forgiveness means to open your heart") and argued that Kristof could offer forgiveness to the child soldier as a human being. Other students argued that forgiveness can only come from those harmed. One said, "I don't think Kristof is in a position to forgive the child soldiers because he isn't one of their victims." During the conversation, the notion of forgiveness emerged as a universal phenomenon experienced across diverse human cultures, but in examining this complex scene, students literally saw (each comment had an icon photo of the speaker) how forgiveness could be interpreted differently by people in different settings, and how their collective diversity contributed to a more nuanced set of collective understandings. Students affirmed comments of their peers, for example, an African American student from Cleveland gave a shout out to a White Florida peer's complex analysis: "I totally agree with everything you said here. And your definition was great, I loved it." Another Cleveland student of color affirmed an extensive, sophisticated definition of forgiveness by a young man of color from Cape Town, noting: "*I think this is the best definition I've seen of forgiveness. You are very intelligent beyond your years!!! I agree completely with what you are saying.*"

Create Spaces for Sharing

Like many collaborative online projects in the last five years, Facing History chose to use a Ning network (www.ning.com) as its online space. Ning allows educators to create "niche social networks," like mini-Facebook sites for particular groups with specific purposes.

Ning is only one of several good platforms for collaborative communities. Moodle courses (www.moodle.org) and wikis have similar collaborative features. Mightybell (www.mightybell.com), a new collaborative platform from the founder of Ning, may also be of interest to educators. The specific platform chosen is not as important as making sure to design a space that encourages students to share through both online discussion and media productions.

In the Digital Media Innovation Network project, each participating student created a profile page to share interests and hobbies. Each classroom

also created a group page, where classes showcased and discussed their digital documentaries. Finally, the network facilitators created discussion forums for hosting conversations about *Reporter*, media literacy, and the themes emerging from the student documentaries.

The project organizers chose to concentrate these discussions over a one-week period, so the collaborative part of the project would take up a limited part of the school year and would take advantage of the energy generated in an intensive period. Organizers posted a series of discussion questions for students to respond to, and each started with a media clip or shared text to provoke interactions.

Allow Students to Express Themselves through Media

The mini-documentaries and other media projects that students made in advance of the online convening provided powerful opportunities for self-expression, and they also gave peers a window into others' lives. A group of students in Shanghai created a video tour of their school and their daily academic life, and a student from Colorado commented that "it's cool how the school building looks like some buildings in America." A group of students in Oakland, California, created a video about the problems of gang violence in their community. In response, a student from rural Colorado wrote, "I find these videos really interesting since life here in Castle Rock is a lot different than in Oakland." Several other students from urban communities commented about other challenging issues, such as teen pregnancy in their own communities.

One of the central themes that emerged involved students' recognition of both the foreign and the familiar among their diverse peers. In discussing *Reporter*, the students shared a human repulsion to the terrible situation in the Congo, but they had different interpretations of the problem, the actors, and potential solutions. The level of originality of their contributions and their commitment to civic engagement did not correspond to levels of existing privilege. In reacting to one another's media projects, students found similar themes related to adolescence in their diverse stories while appreciating the wide differences in people's experiences. As one student wrote in her reflection, "*The most surprising thing that I learned with this project is that there are also other students and teachers that are just like we are. They might not be in the same place as we are in and they might have totally different lives than we do but we are all making a difference in our classes that can hopefully move the world.*"

This kind of perspective taking, of recognizing the shared humanity of diverse peoples, is at the heart of developing civic and participatory skills.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

At the conclusion of the DMIN Reporter project, Facing History's evaluation team conducted several studies to assess the impact of the project. In this chapter, we will focus on findings from four open-ended response questions embedded in a ten-question survey distributed to students at the end of the DMIN project. The survey was distributed to all 522 students in the project; 255 students from 13 of the 15 participating schools responded.

The four open-ended questions were:

1. Tell us what you learned as you created your own project (or worked on a group project), before the online event. (*n* = 238)
2. What did you learn from viewing or listening to other students' projects on this web site? (*n* = 247)
3. On the web site other students viewed and commented on some of your class' projects. How did this public sharing and feedback influence your learning? (*n* = 232)
4. What was the most surprising thing you learned during this project? (*n* = 233)

In analyzing the responses to these four questions, three major themes emerged: the opportunity to access multiple, different perspectives, DMIN as a catalyst for learning, and the value of the chance to participate in a caring, constructive community. The themes presented below draw from a more detailed research report available through Facing History and Ourselves (Romer & Mingo, 2014).

Gaining Access to Multiple Different Perspectives

Students described a sense of surprise and wonder that other classes geographically distant from their own were studying similar material, affirming the value of what their teacher and they are doing. In this way, the project led students to recognize similarities across difference. Students also conveyed wonder at the differences in their lives and circumstances. This awareness—that we can be very different and similar along different dimensions, at the same time—proved to be one of the exciting and recurring motifs of their responses. Many students were reading a wide array of responses from students from schools across the globe that are living in quite different worlds, yet all are teens growing up and differentiating from their parents, and are in relationship to teachers and to one another. Some students learned new and surprising facts about their own classmates, due to the collaborative nature of their projects.

For some students, the differences they discovered were exciting. In response to the question about viewing or listening to the work of other students, a participant from Cape Town, South Africa noted: *“I learnt that many people can view things in different ways and by us all sharing these views we are exposed to different opinions which could alter the way we think.”*

For other students, these differences were framed more as a surprising or even jarring experience. By participating in the online community, students were exposed to a wide range of views and opinions, and many showed growth in the realization that their personal opinion was not necessarily the only right one. One student from Colorado confronted this diversity, writing, *“I learned that views on issues that I have, are not always universal. My opinions aren’t always all that there will ever be.”* Students also responded that people were different and needed to be respected. A number of students also reported making an emotional connection to the stories; they were moved and often learned new things or perspectives about an issue as a result of this emotional response. Some variants of “we’re all different, yet we share so much” or “we’re all so different” were frequent insights that emerged from this project. As one 18-year-old female student from London wrote about one of her key insights: *“That everyone’s opinions were different despite doing the same thing.”*

Catalyst for Learning

Opportunities for media production, public feedback, and online dialogue provided new venues for student learning. The students’ words revealed their enthusiasm about the value and impact of their participation in the online workshop. Across the four questions, students confirmed that they learned a great deal from their participation in their projects and in the online workshop. One San Francisco student described her learning during the project phase, before the online workshop:

As I created my project, I learned so many things that I hadn’t really thought about before. It made me think of all the editing and misconceptions that go on in the world. How people’s stories become so twisted that they bear no resemblance to what those people being interviewed had said before. From my own experience, I have learned to let people speak their thoughts. We are but humble guides. We move the flow along, but it’s a gentle push . . . getting the perspectives of these people highlights what we’re trying to show others, that this is something real and important, but we aren’t changing what these people want to say. They are saying these things and we just need to listen.

Furthermore, students indicated that public sharing and feedback greatly influenced their learning, particularly in the areas of gaining deeper

understanding of their work, life, and society. Specifically, 21% of the sample reported that they were inspired to improve their own work, as a result of the public feedback. A small group of students had mixed feelings about the public feedback, including concern for hollow compliments, or feeling that other students did not understand or appreciate their work, but on the whole, students described both learning from the experience broadly and from each other specifically.

Creating a Constructive Community that Cares about the Same Issues

Many students expressed an appreciation for the opportunity to see and hear colleagues grappling with the same issues they were. This solidarity decreased their sense of isolation. Some students reported being surprised and pleased to discover how much other people cared about their projects, about these questions, about this work—and how powerful the care and engagement were to sustaining students' own sense of commitment and value of the work. As one student from Florida wrote, *"There is a community much larger than I thought who care about the same issues as me"*.

One young woman from Boston explained,

I learned about the other things people really cared about. It gave me the chance to really think about the issues that other people are taking the time to get people aware. It gave me inspiration to start more projects and help out more in my community and other places as well.

For some students, the sense of solidarity with others made the experience of the projects and the discussion an exercise in community building as well as an academic exercise. Discovering that students from distant worlds—students who looked different or whose English had a different sound and rhythm—care about the same issues as themselves and are trying to make a difference was an eye-opening insight to some students. Other students spoke about the desire to stay engaged with the issues and to create awareness among others.

Discussion

The online workshop provided the opportunity to 'gather' with students from far flung places and whose lives are truly different from their own, along a number of dimensions (class, culture, language, race, ethnicity) and yet be engaged in similar kinds of exploration—making sense of the

documentary *Reporter*, learning to use new media to construct meaningful projects on related topics. All worked to create a generative environment for reflection and learning. Many students wished the workshop had lasted longer, felt that they were just beginning to build relationships and were eager to continue to communicate with their peers in other classrooms.

A full 20% of the sample commented on some aspect of the constructive quality of interactions with other students and adults on the website. Students appreciated and liked the collaborative nature of many of the projects, and most appreciated the opportunity to get feedback from their distant peers. One student even commented specifically on the “safety” of this online workshop and the positive impact of that safety for learning.

From these findings, we have good initial evidence that the DMIN project met its goals: to allow students to encounter and learn from multiple perspectives from outside their immediate classrooms, to provide new platforms for student expression and student-generated work, and to enhance student media literacy. In addition, we found some evidence of positive student outcomes along the dimensions of civic engagement, agency, and tolerance, and academic engagement, which are always targeted domains for Facing History classes.

CONCLUSIONS

In the 2013 Iris M. Carl Equity Address for the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, Uri Treisman (Treisman, 2013) argued that “Poverty is an issue for us to address as citizens. Opportunity for learning is an issue for us to address as educators.” Treisman’s point was that certain structural features of inequality in the United States are beyond the scope of what can be addressed by teachers and principals in their professional capacity. We cannot, from the classroom, roll back decades of re-segregation. We cannot, from the classroom, turn the tides of residential homogeneity. We have responsibility as citizens to address these issues, but our responsibility as educators is to do everything we can to ensure all students access to high-quality learning environments, to the best of our ability, despite the challenges of structural inequalities within our society. This short online workshop demonstrated that the students from the most privileged backgrounds benefited as much from this opportunity to work across diversity as those from more challenging environs. All students benefit from diversity, and this short project demonstrated how students who have first-hand experience with inequity contribute equally in terms of originality and insight, to the benefit of all. For Facing History, the DMIN project was a way to struggle against ill-effects of residential segregation, to leverage our relationships and decades of work with students from diverse communities in

order to bring these students together, in one online place, to learn from one another, to encounter different perspectives, and to listen to a diversity of voices and life experiences.

In the process of building and then analyzing our online community project, we identified a set of design principles for creating online spaces where students can encounter diverse perspectives: intentionally soliciting diverse participations, building educator community first, engaging difference sideways, creating safe spaces for sharing, and allowing students to express themselves through media. Using these design principles, we developed a learning environment where students had the opportunity to engage in rich content, create their own media pieces, and then use student-generated media along with the documentary *Reporter* to stimulate a rich set of conversations about questions of the power of media, the role of producers and consumers of that media, and the ways in which these conversations provoke an understanding of our unique perspectives as well as our shared humanity. This last element, discovering and affirming shared humanity across difference was particularly striking given that many students had not traveled to these different communities and only had preconceptions about the identities of these peers based on generalizations (White and suburban Americans, Blacks, urban, Africans, British, Chinese). This opportunity to share work and work together provided a richer, new, and grounded set of understandings of difference.

The internal evaluation research that we conducted had a variety of limitations—we did not track student longitudinally, we had only an imperfect response rate to our survey—but for all of these limitations, students' feedback about the project, from students all over the world, reveal some important strengths of our program. Students felt that the project catalyzed learning about media and issues of social justice, provided the opportunity for students to engage with multiple perspectives, and created a community where students felt safe sharing their ideas, work, and criticism with students from around the world.

Our greatest hope is not that these kinds of online spaces are what must suffice for a truly heterogeneous commons in a residentially segregated America or global community. Rather, our greatest hope is that students have rich and meaningful experiences in their dialogues across difference, which transform their understandings of themselves and others such that they may choose as adults to work towards a more equitable, tolerant, and integrated world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge Facing History staff integral to the DMIN project for making this work possible: Dimitry Anselme, Director of Staff

Development, Deb Chad, Director of Program Technology, and Marc Skvirsky, Vice President and Chief Program Officer. We would also like to thank participating teachers and their students.

AFFILIATIONS

Justin Reich, Facing History and Ourselves/Berkman Center for Internet and Society, Harvard University; Anna L. Romer, Facing History and Ourselves; Dennis Barr, Facing History and Ourselves.

Correspondence concerning this chapter should be addressed to Justin Reich at justin_reich@harvard.edu.

REFERENCES

- Barr, D. J., & Bardige, B. (2012). Facing history and ourselves: A case study. In P. M. Brown, M. W. Corrigan, & A. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of prosocial education*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Barab, S. A., MaKinster, J. G., & Schickler, R. (2003). Designing system dualities: Characterizing a web-supported professional development community. *The Information Society, 19*(3), 237–256.
- Dede, C. (2005). Why lesson-based research is both important and difficult. *Educational Technology, 41*(1), 5–9.
- Gardner, H., & Davis, K. (2013). *The app generation: How today's youth navigate identity, intimacy, and imagination in a digital world*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Kahne, J., Middaugh, E., Lee, N., & Feezell, J. T. (2012). Youth online activity and exposure to diverse perspectives. *New Media & Society, 14*(3), 492–512. doi:10.1177/1461444811420271
- Lindsay, J., & Davis, V. (2012). *Engaging classrooms, engaging minds: Move to global collaboration one step at a time*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Matzat, U. (2010). Reducing problems of sociability in online communities: Integrating online communication with offline interaction. *American Behavioral Scientist, 53*(8), 1170–1193. doi:10.1177/0002764209356249
- Mezzgar, E. D. (Director). (2009). *Reporter*. [Video/DVD] New York, NY: Stick Figure Production.
- Murray, C. A. (2012). *Coming apart: The state of white America, 1960–2010* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Crown Forum. Retrieved from <http://hollis.harvard.edu/?itemid=%7Clibrary/m/aleph%7C013103047>
- Negroponte, N. (1995). *Being digital*. New York, NY: Knopf.
- Oakes, J. (2005). *Keeping track: How schools structure inequality* (2nd ed.). New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Orfield, G., Kucsera, J., & Siegel-Hawley, G. (2012). *E pluribus . . . separation: Deepening double segregation for more students*. Los Angeles: Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Humanos.

- Orfield, G., & Lee, C. (2005). *Why segregation matters: Poverty and educational inequality*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project: Harvard University.
- Parser, E. (2012). *The filter bubble: How the new personalized web is changing what we read and how we think*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Reich, J. (2008). *Reworking the web, reworking the world: How web 2.0 is changing our society*. (No. Beyond Current Horizons Review paper, Challenge #2). Bristol: Futurelab.
- Rheingold, H. (2000). *The virtual community: Homesteading on the electronic frontier*. Cambridge, MA: MIT.
- Romer, A., & Mingo, M. (2011a). *Making media, making sense, making change (part one): Students report on online workshop's impact on their learning*. Unpublished manuscript available from Facing History and Ourselves.
- Romer, A., & Mingo, M. (2011b). *Making media, making sense, making change (part two): Analysis of two online discussions about reports*. Unpublished manuscript available from Facing History and Ourselves.
- Treisman, U. (2013). 2013 NCTM Iris Carl equity address: Keeping our eyes on the prize. Retrieved, 2013, from <http://www.nctm.org/conferences/content.aspx?id=36436#equity>

2014 IAP Copyright or Reproduction
Not for Distribution or Reproduction
Proofing Copy Only