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Filmmakers/educators/facilitators? Understanding the role of adult intermediaries in youth media production in the UK and the USA

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Filmmakers/Educators/Facilitators?
Understanding the Role of Adult Intermediaries in Youth Media Production in the UK and the USA
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Abstract

The possibilities that making "their own" media might contain for engaging young people in learning has been celebrated in recent years, while the role of adult intermediaries in guiding these projects remains too often obscured. Here, I draw on several years of ethnographic research conducted in the UK and the USA to distinguish among three different types of facilitators: guides who privilege processes over outputs; collaborators who position themselves within an egalitarian team; and mentors, who draw on specialist knowledge to encourage young people to make "high quality" films. I assess the impact of these different modes on the central claims made for youth media as a means of developing skills, critical media literac(ies), and encouraging youth "voice." Although youth media organizations struggling with sustainability often conflate these practices, these approaches lend themselves to achieving diverse aims and thus differences could be better delineated by facilitators and by funders in order to realize the ambitions proposed by youth media projects.

Keywords:

- youth media,
- production,
- voice,
- media literacy,
- critical literacy,
- learning,
- facilitation

Introduction

In both the UK and the USA, the past several decades have seen a significant growth of hands-on digital media production projects for young people both within and outside of formal education (see Bazalgette, 2000; Boyle, 1992; Buckingham, 2003; Buckingham, Grahame, & Sefton-Green, 1995; Dowmunt, 1980; Fisherkeller, 2011; Sefton-Green & Soep, 2007). Assisted by the increasing affordability of digital technologies, digital media production, and the "special effects" of filmmaking especially (Lord et al., 2007), are seen as a unique way of engaging young people, particularly those experiencing different forms of social or economic disadvantage (Hague, 2014).

Although many youth media initiatives are heralded as being made "by the young people themselves," that statement contains a well-intentioned but purposeful deception. Exempting projects that are wholly youth self-motivated and executed (for instance the "skate videos" discussed in Buckingham & Willett, 2009), youth media projects with explicit educational intent always bear the direct or indirect mark of an adult. This
"intergenerational dynamic" wherein adults mediate the young peoples' participation is intrinsic to the structure of most youth media projects (Sefton-Green & Hoechsmann, 2006). Although this relationship is often very influential over, if not determinative of, the outcomes of youth media

participation, it has not been prioritized in the academic literature (exceptions to this include Chavez & Soep, 2005; Espinet, Paron, Denerstein, & Hyte, 2011; Fleetwood, 2005; Goodman, 2011; Stack, 2009; Tripp, 2011).

The aim of this article is to address this gap by focusing on the professional contexts, identities, and practices of youth media facilitators. Drawing on a unique body of comparative ethnographic research conducted in the UK and in the USA from 2006 to 2012, I illustrate how the substantive activities of youth media facilitators intersect with the abstract rationales used to justify their work. I consider how some of the most oft-referenced justifications for youth media as an educational intervention match with diverse pedagogical practices. Grounding a discussion of learning in youth media within an empirically informed understanding of facilitation practice allows for a more realistic and rich understanding of what actually occurs when young people and adults work together to create participatory media.

After outlining my research methodology and my rationale for choosing to employ the term "facilitators," I differentiate among three categories: guides who privilege experiential learning, process, and youth experimentation over the filmic product itself; collaborators who engage collegially with young people to make a film under their shared direction, and mentors who view young people as apprentices, to whom they teach "professional standards" and skills in hopes of aiding that the finished films get seen. I then explore how these different facilitation styles mesh with the most central rationales for youth media as an educational intervention. In particular, I highlight the intersections between facilitation styles and the accrual of "hard" and "soft" skills, the fostering of critical media literacy, and the development of "youth voice." I conclude by suggesting that rather than claiming the ability to fulfill an untenable range of learning objectives, youth media practitioners, and advocates should acknowledge these distinctive facilitation styles and the consequent learning experiences that flow from them. I argue that better matching of existing facilitation practices to hoped for learning outcomes can assist in achieving the aims set out by youth media organizers.

Shaped by institutional constraints, especially the increasingly limited availability of funding, to date youth media projects often have felt pressure to purport to be all things to all people. This research demonstrates that significant differences in facilitation practice exist, and these differences lend themselves to the facilitation of diverse educational goals. Better understanding of how facilitators conceive of and apply their pedagogy, and the limitations under which they work, allows for a more accurate and nuanced understanding of the experiences of young participants.

Researching "facilitators"

This article is based on multi-sited ethnographic research conducted with youth media projects mainly in London, with additional interviews conducted in New York, from 2006 to 2012. This research skews more heavily toward experiences in the UK, where the bulk of my fieldwork was conducted, but I draw on comparisons with experiences in the USA, where appropriate. My broader project addressed how youth media participants, facilitators, and funders differently understood media production as a means of fostering "civic engagement" (Blum-Ross, 2012b). I conducted participant-observation, held in-depth semi-structured interviews with participants, facilitators, and funders, and incorporated creative and visual methodologies, where appropriate, across eleven case studies (Blum-Ross, 2012a). In total I engaged with over fifty youth media organizations in the two countries and conducted formal and informal interviews with approximately sixty-five youth media facilitators, managers, and funders. In contrast with much of the existing research on youth media, which tends to focus on a single organizational site, I was able to conduct fieldwork across multiple sites and projects and in two countries, which enabled a comparative perspective (see also Fisherkeller, 2011).

Some of the initiatives I studied met sporadically over a period of many months; others were intensive over a period of days or weeks. They ranged from drop-in projects where young people self-selected participation to projects for a pre-identified group at a school or youth centre. The participants came from diverse socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds; in almost all of the projects I studied organizers

identified the young people as "disadvantaged" in their reports to funders, based on geographic, economic, sexual, or other officially described "marginal" status. They ranged in age from twelve to twentytwo, although approximately 90% of the young people I encountered were aged fourteen to nineteen. All of the initiatives I studied emphasized practical hands-on digital video production using a range of technologies (including digital video, editing, and occasionally music production software) rather than simply having young people act in or draft scripts. The subject matter and genres used varied widely, ranging from comedies about dating to documentaries about gang crime, some of which I detail in the final section of this article.

While roughly a third of the projects I studied took place physically within school buildings, or in formal-education serving sites such as "City Learning Centres," I decided to focus on production projects that took place outside of the formal educational curriculum in a wide array of professional and pedagogical contexts. This was due to my particular interest in how these initiatives articulated their value in funding applications, a process not required of statutorily funded schools. In the UK, funding for these initiatives came almost entirely from government sources, with some additional income from private philanthropy. In the USA, the situation was the reverse.

In this article, I have chosen the term "facilitator" to describe the practice of an older person (I use the term "adult" as a broad category since the facilitators I encountered ranged in age from early-twenties to mid-sixties), who occupies an educational leadership role during the media production process. I identified this terminology as a professional term of practice across many of my field sites, a self-ascribed job title used by many but not all of my informants. Many youth media practitioners used this term either as a direct or indirect reference to Paulo Freire's theory of Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1973, 1993), which was influential in the development of many pioneering youth and community media projects (Bordowitz, 1996; Burnett, 1996; Goodman, 2003). According to Freire, rather than a unidirectional process in which the adult "teacher" is assumed to be a giver of knowledge and the "student" the receiver, instead, the process of education is best thought of as a collaborative engagement. Some of the informants whom I interviewed, as I discuss below, self-selected other terms. Some described themselves as "educators," as "filmmaker-facilitators" or simply as "filmmakers" and every variation thereof. "Facilitators" is a flawed catchall term but one intended to capture a range of professional practices.

Working Conditions

By and large, youth media facilitation is a relatively low or insecurely paid position and, as such, requires facilitators who are willing to work on the "strength of their belief" (Fleetwood, 2005). Although some consider youth media facilitation to be an alternative to the precariousness of working as a professional filmmaker, the profession is nonetheless characterized by significant financial insecurity. In some cases, as Jenson, Dahya, & Fisher (2013) underscore, facilitators are required to expend considerable financial and personal resources, often unacknowledged and unreported, to support their projects.

All of the facilitators I interviewed either currently or had previously worked as short- or long-term freelancers with little (and sometimes no) opportunity for continuing professional development, access to grievance procedures or industrial representation, and few established supervision or appraisal systems. However, about a quarter of the facilitators I interviewed had moved into more permanent staff positions within organizations where they had managerial responsibility to others or a guaranteed income through scheduled classes. This is not to say there are no training opportunities for youth media facilitators, some more well-established organizations, for instance the Educational Video Center in New York City (Goodman, 2011), theBay Area Video Coalition in the San Francisco Bay Area, Mouth That Roars in London, Venice Arts in Los Angeles, and The Video College in London among others,1 offer some training, evaluation, and reflection opportunities for staff members—and smaller organizations often do this on a more ad hoc basis (see Espinet et al., 2011 for a detailed "best practice" example of a systemic professional development program for youthmedia educators in NY). Similarly, some funders or umbrella organizations, including the British Film

Institute and the Moving Image Training Alliance in the UK and the National Association of Media Arts and Culture and the MacArthur Foundation's Digital Media and Learning initiative in the USA, have attempted to fill these gaps by providing some access to networking opportunities, sharing of good practice, or training.

However, where training is available, it often is difficult for facilitators to access these opportunities as most are contingent workers employed on a day rate; training time subtracts from the time in which they would otherwise be directly accruing income. This circumstance results mainly from the structure of youth media funding—by and large, funding is for individual projects rather than for organizational core costs (the "contract culture" discussed in Stanley & STEP Steering Group, 2005). Therefore, many organizations are unable to support staff in professional development because of the substantial and already underfunded costs of day-to-day project delivery. However, some organizations offer informal professional development routes, by inviting new facilitators to "shadow" more experienced mentors or encouraging opportunities for ad hoc discussion and reflection. Some of these opportunities focus on the day-to-day context of or problems inherent in project delivery or on skills development, ranging from technical filmmaking skills to advice on managing participant behavior or working with children with special needs. Yet, as of this writing, no academic courses or accreditation programs specifically are geared toward youth media facilitators and few formal opportunities exist to engage in discussion of theories of learning with or through digital media.

Mentors, Collaborators, and Guides

In the youth media projects I studied, facilitators varied greatly in terms of how "hands-on" or "hands-off" (literally and metaphorically) they chose to be. Although all of the projects I studied broadly fell under the heading of youth "participatory video" (Braden,1998; Shaw & Robertson, 1997), nonetheless, they vastly differed in practice. Paying attention to these differences reminds us that "the word 'participation' is kaleidoscopic; it changes color and shape at the will of the hands in which it is held" (White, 2003, p. 8).
Rather than assuming all facilitators practice their profession in the same way, this section outlines some of the key differences among the facilitation approaches I observed in my field research. I present these differences along a loose continuum but underscore that these categories are fluid, and a single facilitator might find him or herself moving among these modes in a single project.

Guides. The first model is one in which facilitators served as guides, concerning themselves with transmitting only very basic technical skills and ensuring physical and emotional safety. This is the most intentionally "hands off" approach with regard to the equipment. Facilitators use the digital video technology as a "mediation tool" (White, 2003) rather than an end in itself. These filmmaking projects were not so much concerned with making a film per se but, instead, making a film was a conduit for "instrumental" social or political skills or educational content (Belfiore, 2012; Lunch & Lunch, 2006). In some instances, these projects focused on the experiential learning embedded in making a film, encouraging the young people to "play" with the cameras, rather than on the making of a film product.

The "guides" were the most likely to describe themselves as "educators" and more often came from formal educative or social services positions working with young people. For instance, I encountered several former teachers and social or youth workers who had self-taught technology skills in order to branch into this line of work. In describing her motivation for becoming a youth media facilitator (work she'd been engaged in for about five years), one such guide told me, "I don't care if they study media, I don't care if they become doctors, lawyers, the ice cream man; I just want them to know their voice matters within society." These facilitators expressed less concern with established industry conventions for media content, format, or distribution. For instance, one facilitator told me while he liked having a "nice end product," for him the central questions of the project were "how did it make them feel? What did they learn?" In this model, although the facilitators engaged in discussions of content, they consciously limited their personal interventions into the young peoples' technical or

aesthetic choices. For example, one organization trained their facilitators to avoid giving determinative answers to young peoples' film related queries in order to encourage them to make mistakes and learn from these on viewing and analyzing the films later.

Collaborators. In the second model, instead of encouraging the young people to make decisions without intervention, these facilitators acted as active collaborators placing themselves among the "team" of filmmakers. As one very experienced facilitator (working in this area for over ten years) described this process to me, he was both an "educator and . . . a filmmaker. How I educate is through film and my education [background] informs my filmmaking." In this model, the facilitator is an experienced artist working with a burgeoning team, acting as colleague to a "jointly create original work for public release"
(Soep & Cha´vez, 2010, p. 51). This process intended to encourage young people to feel a sense of equality with the adult facilitators, or, as one facilitator described, to feel like part of a "community, they are filmmakers just like anyone else." Soep celebrates this relationship but notes that a significant risk exists of presupposing a "fully egalitarian environment where none exists" (2006, p. 201; see also Thumim, 2012).

Mentors. At the most interventionist end of the spectrum were facilitators who consciously acted as expert mentors, teaching the young people to replicate "industry standard" aesthetic and content conventions. This was an explicitly hierarchical relationship and emphasized the expertise of the mentor and the opportunity for the young person to gain quantifiable skills—especially "hard" technical skills. For these facilitators, highlighting their skills as artists and filmmakers was a prominent part of their identity work. For instance, one facilitator described to me how he wanted the young people to "attune" themselves aesthetically to a different engagement with the world. He said he wanted to teach the "killer instinct" of being a filmmaker, to become a person who "cannot bear to see the world through a frame that looks wrong" (see also Pink, 2007 for a similar analysis of cultivating a filmmaker's aesthetic). Another facilitator, who had worked as a filmmaker for over twenty years and with young people on-and-off for at least ten, described his passion for "sharing the magic" of filmmaking and helping provide the young people with, in his words, an "artifact" they could feel proud of and could potentially open doors for them—for instance in applying for jobs or further study. As a consequence, this model focused on the creative end product, with its attendant pressure to ensure "high quality" as a way to guarantee circulation of the film at the projects' conclusion.

For the sake of differentiation, I have intentionally positioned these models as points along a polarized spectrum. However, many facilitators who describe themselves as "filmmakers" also detailed their commitments to acting as "educators," and the reverse. Equally, some facilitators moved between and among these categories even within a single project. However, as I describe in the following analysis sections, how facilitators implicitly conceived of their own roles as intermediaries, and the professional backgrounds that informed their practice, had a significant impact on the ways in which they oriented their projects. In the remaining three sections, I connect the discussion here of differing modes of youth media facilitation practices to some of the central claims about learning in youth media, oft repeated across my field sites. I consider some of the main educational justifications for youth media initiatives—that they enable "hard" and "soft" technical skills, foster different forms of "media literacy," and promote youth "voice" —in relationship to these different models of facilitation.

"Soft" and "hard" skills

Alternatively described as "life skills" (Mouth That Roars, n.d., p. 3) or "soft skills" (Livingstone, 2012), youth media is seen as a way of encouraging a host of communicative and interpersonal competencies, including working as a team, gaining confidence, and learning how to engage in research and investigation (Sefton-Green & Soep, 2007). Equally, there are attendant "hard" technical and professional skills associated with youth media, such as learning how to use a camera, mastering associated editing or music production software packages, or even time-keeping and numeracy (Chandler & Dunford, 2012; Into Film, 2014). Poyntz and Hoechsmann (2011) note

that although some organizations might alternatively embrace (or reject) one version of the skills rhetoric or another (for example, embracing or resisting the language of "vocational training"), these skill-based categories are not mutually exclusive, and policy-makers like the BFI make a strong case for filmmaking being unique in drawing on a multiplicity of skills simultaneously (British Film Institute, 2014; Lord et al., 2007).

My research indicated that each facilitator model, described above, led to differing approaches to the question of using media production to foster various professional and personal skills. Guides—those facilitators most likely to identify as educators rather than filmmakers—were most likely to identify the "soft," rather than the technical, skills associated with filmmaking as central to their projects. Several reasons undergird this. First, the guide-facilitators, generally, have more confidence in their own "soft" skill set.
Facilitators who acted as guides were those least likely to have pursued specialist filmmaking training and, consequently, were less likely to emphasize these "hard" skills as part of their projects (for instance, guides might choose to teach editing via basic software packages such as iMovie rather than the more complex Final Cut editing software) but were often highly experienced at working with young people in areas of self-expression, communication, or team work (see Jenson et al., 2013 for a comparison with classroom teachers). Second, the emphasis on "soft skills" tended to form a core rationale for the projects. For example, in one project, young people were asked to explore ethnic divisions between Turkish and Afro-Caribbean young people in their East London neighborhood. The skills development relating to discussion, debate, and interpersonal communication were most prized in this project. Reflecting on it after completion, one participant told me that she felt she was now "more aware of the issues and a lot of things were said and discussed." This, rather than the film itself, was the intentional outcome.

Collaborators aimed to strike a balance between "hard" and "soft" skills and hoped that the final films represent both of these categories. Of primary importance to these facilitators was that young participants should feel a sense of "ownership" over the process—which might occasionally mean a sacrifice in terms of "quality" in order to involve all of the young people on the project, despite differing skills levels. For one facilitator I interviewed, this meant maintaining a "rough vision of what the end product is going to look like. But . . . I think you'd be foolish to try to stay rigid to your vision." She advocated for facilitators to alternate between more open guidance and more explicit mentoring—at times enabling the young people to follow their ideas and experiment with the technology, and at other times jumping in to direct the proceedings. She explained that she did not believe that "if kids are to feel ownership over it they have to do everything themselves."

At the end of the spectrum were mentors who consistently, although not exclusively, emphasized "hard" technical skills. While this emphasis might operate to the detriment of developing "soft" skills, this was not always the case. For instance, one project took place in the well-equipped studios of a leading arts organization. The production standards of the facilitators and, consequently, of the young participants, were exceptionally high. In my estimation, the resulting films (including music videos and investigative documentaries) were virtually indistinguishable from student productions at nationally recognized film schools. In this project, the mentor-facilitators supported and conscientiously engaged with the interpersonal dynamic of the youth filmmaking team, inviting active participation and a deep sense of ownership over the final films. However, in this instance, the young participants had relatively high levels of previous film-making experience, and, as such, the facilitator faced a less stark choice between emphasizing "hard" or "soft" skills.

For mentors, one of the additional driving goals was to help young people secure future employment. One facilitator, relatively new to this area, having worked with young people for only around two years, relayed how he wanted to avoid the young people being "disappointed in the end product they created." As this facilitator put it, a facilitator might substantially "polish" the rough cuts produced by the young people, often doing more than adjusting sound levels and transitions—in some cases fully re-editing and repackaging the films. The emphasis on employability is a new driver for youth media funding, particularly although not exclusively in the UK or in countries such as Singapore where "hi-

tech" industries are increasingly invested in (Lim, Nekmat, & Vadrevu, 2011). For example, the BFI now offers funding for youth media organizations to provide "high quality vocational and skills training to young people" in order to support "the British film industry and maintain . . . its growing position in the global market" (British Film Institute, 2014, p. 7). This emphasis on using youth media as a means to prepare young people for the job market of the "creative industries" or "knowledge economies" can alternatively be read either as a narrow neo-liberal focus on employability, or as a "kind of equalizer" in situations where young people are not succeeding in more traditional forms of schooling (Poyntz & Hoechsmann, 2011).

Critical Media Literac(ies)

Media literacy is an encompassing term that includes the concepts of "hard" and "soft" skills and youth voice that I discuss in the surrounding sections. However, a key aspect of media literacy, and one of the most consistently cited claims for youth media production as an educational intervention (Buckingham, 2003; Erstad, 2010), is the idea that through creating media young people will learn to orient themselves analytically to media texts. At a policy level, media literacy has been defined in the UK as the "ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts" (Ofcom, 2010). In addition to the skills associated with "accessing" and "creating" texts, the central argument for young people producing their own media is the idea of "understanding" or even "critiquing" mainstream media (Goodman, 2003) through developing in young people a "more questioning attitude" toward the media they encounter in their everyday lives (Dowmunt, 1987).

The realization of the possibilities media literary discourse promises is the locus where "media educators must play a profound role" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2012, p. 5). As Buckingham (2003) has underscored, the creation of digital media is not in and of itself a guarantor of critique, or even basic understanding. Rather, young people need to be supported in these goals by facilitators (be they teachers, parents, facilitators, peers, or other intermediaries) in order to deliver on the "democratizing potential" of youth media production (Taub-Pervizpour, 2013). Self-evidently, youth media projects have a (sometimes more or less central) mandate of learning to create media. Yet the aspirations for youth media production as a way of fostering media literacy are about "more than just teaching filmmaking" (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009, p. 3). Rather, media facilitators aim to use media production as a way of "empowering" young people to become media literate but for different ends (Dezuanni, 2011; Kellner & Share, 2007; Soep, 2006).

Although there is a broad emphasis on youth media production as fostering "critical media literacy" or deconstructing the ideological intent of media to analyze how it influences our "understanding of the world" (Kellner & Share, 2005, p. 370), in practice only a very few opportunities for media analysis arose in the projects I studied. Of the eleven in-depth case studies in my field research (ones I followed from inception to completion) and several other projects I studied partially, less than a third included watching and discussing either existing media texts or the ones created during the project (see Tripp, 2011 for a further discussion of the tension between youth media production and critical analysis of texts). Of these, several were analysis opportunities to study media industry conventions to apply them in the young people's own films, rather than to critique.

In projects where facilitators acted as "guides," the dominant forms of media literacy were processual elements of film creation. These facilitators did not include co-viewing or discussion of media texts, most commonly for one of two reasons: either the facilitators were not especially interested in film per se as much as they were in the content of the film or they wanted the young people to "explore" and "play" without the facilitators asserting leadership. The collaborator-facilitators encountered a similar problem. When I asked about the choice not to discuss and analyze existing media texts, several facilitators either indirectly intimated or directly stated that they did not engage in this type of activity because it would make the project "too much like school."

In some collaborative projects, the young people sometimes took it upon themselves, to watch different forms of media and use these experiences to inform their project participation. For example

in a project for young British Muslims, a seventeen-year-old participant had been assigned the role of cameraman. He reported to me how he had watched a TV documentary that influenced his aesthetic choices on the shoot the following week. He cited how the film he had watched had used close-up detail shots and established a compelling visual language. He worked with the project's collaborative facilitators to set up shots that simultaneously humanized and anonymized the subjects he was interviewing—a group of young people who were discussing the possibility of joining Jihad. In this example, the "collaborative" approach brought together various forms of media literacy, including creating, reading, and critiquing media texts. However, this required a high level of investment from the participant and was an exception rather than the rule of the participants I encountered.

The mentor-facilitators described here often focused on the mechanical aspects of media literacy, teaching not just to make films but also to create excellent outputs. For many of these mentors, the empowerment lay in enabling the young people to learn professional skills that might help them find work or to gain a wide(r) audience for their film project (a problematic objective that I return to below). These facilitators were those most likely to include a dedicated time in their projects for watching and discussing media texts. In the case of mentors, this included screening films they deemed to be artistically significant, with a follow-up discussion of the aesthetic and technical conventions employed by the filmmaker. As one experienced mentor-facilitator described to me, his definition of media literacy meant "you never watch a film again the same once you've made a film, because you understand all the tricks." Although this implied a critical understanding of resistance to manipulation of media, in this case, it also meant enabling the students to appropriate those "tricks" for their own films.

Youth Voice

The formation of "youth voice" is a specific arena in which both "life skills" and "media literacy" are brought together within the rhetoric of youth media production. The claim is that when young people, especially underrepresented, "at-risk," or marginalized groups (Hague, 2014) make their own media productions, a discursive space is opened up in which young people "have the opportunity to collectively struggle against oppression to voice their concerns and create their own representations" (Kellner & Share, 2005, p. 371). This encompasses both youth voice as a form of personal expression, as well as a wider social justice address (Fisherkeller, 2013).

The terminology of "voice" or "having a say" was almost ubiquitous across my research. One long-time London youth media facilitator described passionately how she felt that the process of youth filmmaking has "a power in it, the very process is about power and voice and identifying what [the young people] want to say." This coincides partially with Couldry's reading of the multiple definitions of voice or the "capacity to make, and be recognized as making, narratives about one's life" (Couldry, 2010, p. 7). Couldry's definition is twofold—it includes not only the making of the account but also the recognition of that account by some form of audience. Rheingold (2008) similarly distinguishes between young peoples' "private" voice versus their wider "public participation." Within youth media projects the claims around "voice" were often more oriented toward the first part of this definition than the second.

In my research, I found that the facilitators acting as guides generally were not concerned with the final filmic outcome and, therefore, had little interest in the young people's voices accessing any form of viewer or listener. For example, a facilitator who acted as a guide told me that he felt strongly that the process of making the film should be robust and "stand on its own . . . [without] an audience to validate the work." In these cases, the facilitators encouraged youth voice as a process aim rather than an externally observable outcome to be displayed in the final product. These guides attempted to accomplish this goal by encouraging the young people's full participation and not asserting their own perspectives. As Stack describes, in this sense the job is "to facilitate the voice of youth rather than have a voice themselves" (2009, p. 315).

Facilitators who acted as collaborators attempted to balance between the young people having control over the process, and, at the same time, putting forward their own opinions about content (sometimes in relationship to ensuring that the project stay "on brief," based on the project as described in initial funding applications) or technical aspects (in order to ensure better "quality" of outputs). For several facilitators, this balance was expressed through not only encouraging the young peoples' sense of ownership over the films but also experiencing it for themselves as part of their equal identification as educator and filmmaker.

Rather than contrasting the work of the young people with "her own" work as a professional, one (notably quite young herself) facilitator expressed her feeling that the films she collaborated on were her "films too . .. I would say I contributed." In some cases, this manifested in the ways in which facilitators "pushed" the young people beyond the easy route in their technical or investigative choices. For instance, one mentor-facilitator who incorporated his "education work" into his career as a filmmaker for over twenty years described how he wanted the films he facilitated to be "of as high a standard as possible even if that means pushing the kids beyond their comprehension at the time."

For facilitators acting as mentors, the issue of youth voice was intrinsically tied to producing films that were "good enough" to reach an audience. One mentor-facilitator gave two reasons for this perspective: first, the young people she worked with were "quite sophisticated so if something's not up to scratch they will be disappointed;" and second, if the film failed to reach an audience, the young peoples' voices would not be heard. Her practice as a facilitator and business model as a youth media organizer (notably her organization was incorporated as a social enterprise rather than as a charity) explicitly included distribution of the film in the structure of the project. This facilitator had managed a yearlong project with young people who had been excluded from school; it resulted in a well-produced film, which was distributed to juvenile detention centers and schools for "atrisk" young people.

Some mentors used the "quality" issue as a point of differentiation, sometimes criticizing other models of facilitations for their project outputs. For example, one facilitator in New York described his professional trajectory from being a professional journalist to running a youth media organization, a move he had made only in the past three years, having previously worked in TV. As he described it:

Facilitator: We had stumbled on a way of working that was very effective.

ABR: Effective for . . . ?

Facilitator: It produced really good films. We knew it was a great experience for teens, very engaging for us as teachers and the films themselves were better than anything we had seen . . . being brutally honest.

There are a number of diverse quandaries embedded in the recognition of "youth voice" as discussed by Couldry. First, youth medial organizations are structurally determined by the construction of their funding for specific projects or on the basis of contracts rather than for core organizational costs (Stanley & STEP Steering Group, 2005; Tyner, 2011). The implications of this reality are that little financial support exists for either the facilitators or the young people to assume the onerous task of trying to disseminate their films to a broader audience, and thus get their voices heard.

Second, while digital portals such as Vimeo or YouTube open up many possibilities for affordable distribution (and are actively used by many youth media organizations, see Tyner, 2013), all of the projects I studied that had pursued online exhibition had only relatively small numbers of viewers for the project final outputs. There is a significant difficulty in reaching the "engaged audiences" (Levine, 2008) who might give the young people's voices a listen and engage with the content of their stories or provide critical feedback. Although a number of outlets are emerging for youth media projects—for example, film festivals and mechanisms like the UK's Community Channel that operates on TV and online—the overall audience figures remain strikingly low in comparison to the mass viewings of the

ephemeral internet memes young people and organizers may have as a reference point (hundreds of views rather than thousands or even millions). It is possible that these projects may have some form of "digital afterlife," as Soep (2012) describes it, but it is difficult to track this information, especially externally.

Finally, it bears highlighting that there is a problematic lack of transparency within youth media projects that celebrate youth voice without acknowledging the potentially determinative effect that structural imperatives such as funding, timing, facilitator style, or potential audience might have on the young peoples' voices. For instance, in several projects I studied the facilitators had won funding on the basis of making films about a specific issue—often topics relating to youth "deficiency" like teen pregnancy or youth violence—and as such the young people were constrained by the source of the funding to explore specific topic areas. In other cases the remit was broader, but somehow the young people had nonetheless internalized this disciplinary practice and seemed to be almost inevitably attracted to making films on similar "issue-driven" topics even when not prompted to do so (Blum-Ross, Forthcoming). Interestingly, in my interview with the then-director of one of the two specialist UK funders of youth media,[2] she characterized this concentration on issues as a problem perpetuated by the facilitators rather than the funding source. As she saw it, in these cases the "cameras are just a tool and what they're learning are not skills that are actually connected to filmmaking . . . they could be replaced by poetry or art or whatever." This was not the aim of her funding stream—resourced through a national film body—and as such not something that she considered a "successful" output. In her view, the concentration on issues was a "limitation of the ideas of what the young people can achieve" rather than opening out to new creative avenues.

That an experienced funder who in her role had seen many thousands of youth-produced films made this comment highlighted to me that the issues over ownership intrinsic to youth media projects do not go unnoticed by audiences. This debate underscores that even in a supposedly open project that the young people's voices are invariably inflected through both the facilitator's and the funders' understandings of what they should say (see Chan, 2006; Fleetwood, 2005), and that in some cases "a particular kind of critical discourse [is legitimized] as the official critical discourse" (Jeong, 2001, p. 212).

Conclusion

This discussion of the different professional roles for youth media facilitators, and how these practices correspond (or do not) with the learning claims made for youth media depicts a complex picture. The evidence demonstrates that youth media facilitators work within a diverse spectrum of engagement, ranging from projects that are youth-led and process oriented to those that are adult-led and overtly geared toward producing a "high quality" output, and almost every iteration in between. In considering this continuum, it may be tempting to assume that a "successful" facilitator will seek to locate himself or herself in the middle category, working as a collaborator to "enable young people to engage with, create and critique the power structures that surround them" (Stack, 2009, pp. 299–300). Indeed the collaborative mode, in many respects, is the default setting for youth media educators when they describe their work in abstract, whether or not this always matches up with the sometimes-messier reality. Instead of offering this model of facilitation as a gold standard against which other modes of practice should be judged, I argue that, given the institutional structures and personal histories that inform youth media and the breadth of potential learning outcomes hoped for by youth media proponents, more openly embracing the spectrum of facilitation practices is both realistic and desirable.

There are two reasons why I believe that a greater degree of transparency about the role and approach of facilitators in youth media can help, rather than hinder, this often struggling sector. First, is in bringing clarity to the process of "telling the story" of the possibilities of youth media both to funders and to partners. One of the great difficulties that many youth media organizations face is that the benefits of their programs, while recognizable to those working within this field, are not always obvious to outsiders. The "soft" skills I discussed above are not quantifiable and while they may

tangentially assist with more "hard" metrics like young peoples' achievement in school or later employment in the creative industries, it is difficult to make a case for causality. In many cases, youth media organizations experience considerable pressure to "attach" themselves to related social policy objectives (for example, reducing crime, achieving in school, community cohesion, and so on) in order to generate income (Gray, 2002). But in doing so they negate the idea that "creative endeavor is itself an outcome, not solely the vehicle for a series of other agendas" (Parker & Ruthra-Rajan, 2011, p. 207). Being more targeted about what a project is hoping to accomplish, and tailoring the facilitation methods accordingly, will also allow for an easier time in reporting on the achievements later, and potentially leave more room for a greater range of hoped-for outcomes.

Second, as Charbonneau argues, in many cases objectives such as "expression" are hidden away or lumped in with so many other competing objectives they do not form the main arena of focus (2011). What this outline of youth media facilitation tactics underscores is that there are some pedagogical positions that lend themselves toward meeting certain objectives rather than others. For instance, if the explicit aim of a project is to help young people learn skills that will help them access employment in the creative industries, then the approach of mentors is likely the best suited. Conversely, if a project is conceived around social objectives, for example facilitating young peoples' connections to their neighbors and learning to explore their local area, a more process-oriented approach from a guide or collaborator may be more appropriate.

In a striking number of cases across my research, I saw a mismatch between the stated aims of the project and the way in which it was facilitated. For instance, initiatives that were billed to young people as learning professional skills but in the end focused on content, inviting the young people to write a story rather than really using the equipment, or projects that seemed to be focused entirely on content but that instead involved lengthy collaborative meetings regarding the editing software. This led me to conclude that a greater degree of reflexivity on the part of the facilitators, funders, and project organizers (hopefully involving the young people as well) would help clarify the best approach to achieving what an individual project is aimed at accomplishing. I can best liken this to supervising students to write research papers and encouraging them to ensure their methodologies correspond to the requirements of their research questions.

Finally, I want to underscore a point running through this article—that many of these practices are inextricably tied to the constraints of applying for funding. In both the USA and the UK, the available funding for youth media is tiny, at best (Tyner, 2011,2013), and in the UK, it has constricted further in the past few years since I completed this research with the dissolution of two national youth media funders. This means that facilitators are limited in their ability to critically reflect on their practice, partly because of the time available and partly because they are forced to act opportunistically to fit themselves into whatever shape the funder requires. As one facilitator who had worked in this field for over twenty years described to me, funding "comes with so many connotations and baggage . . . [but] if this is the money that is available out there and we really want to run this project, we will do it with the money that we get offered." Thus, funders also bear some responsibility for avoiding conflating divergent models of learning, and thus avoid requiring organizations to propose an untenable range of programmatic objectives.

Notes

[1.] This list is produced in part through my research and in part via a discussion in 2014 that I initiated on the National Association of Media and Arts and Culture "Youth Media" listserv. I queried the practitioners and researchers on the list about the possibilities for professional development and training within their organizations, and if they were aware of other training opportunities.

2. At the time of my fieldwork. Both major UK government funding sources specifically targeted at resourcing youth media were eventually discontinued by the Conservative government under David Cameron. The downward trajectory of government spending explicitly on "youth media" versus the meteoric rise of funding for the "computing curriculum" and related "digital literacy" initiatives outside of school is beyond the scope of this article but is something I hope to explore in future research.

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