



Pedagogy in a digital world

Professor Kit Grauer is the principal investigator for Citizens of Tomorrow, a four-year study examining digital media and marginalised youth. Here, she discusses her inspirations, activities and the positive impacts she hopes her work will have on urban art education



Can you begin by discussing what inspired you to dedicate your research to the study of marginalised youth in the context of digital technologies and media arts programmes?

As an arts educator, I was well aware – through my own experiences, research and reading in the field of education – that the students who would benefit the most from learning about the arts as part of their education were the most likely to be denied that opportunity. Over the

last decade, it has become clear that digital technologies and social media increasingly affect young people's lives. As young people move from consumers to active participants in media arts creation, their sense of self-efficacy is heightened. Our previous Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council study – The Art of New Media Education: A Study of Community-Based New Media Arts Education 2007-2010 – indicated that community-based media arts programmes attract marginalised young

people who do not have access to mainstream educational experiences.

Media arts education programmes for youth in community settings enable young people to develop a sense of self-advocacy and identity as a way to respond to how social, economic, cultural and political structures are affecting their lives. As educators, we felt that understanding these settings would help other educators and policy makers in the quest

Engaging marginalised youth in digital media

Researchers based at the **University of British Columbia** and **Concordia University** in Canada have embarked on a project that investigates marginalised urban youth's media arts practices in Vancouver and Montréal. The team aims to identify how arts programmes impact on youth's engagement around identity, culture, health and wellbeing

FOR MANY OF us across the globe, our lives are permeated with digital technologies, from personal computers and smartphones to robotics and transport. This shift in culture from the physical to the virtual has necessitated technological competency; nowadays, many job roles and titles are preceded by the word digital. It is therefore of huge import for policy makers, researchers and educators to equip people with the digital skills needed both now and in the future to enable continued societal growth.

With this objective in mind, researchers at the University of British Columbia (UBC) and Concordia University have established their Citizens of Tomorrow (CoT) research project, a four-year study that combines investigations into digital media with marginalised urban youths in Canada. Their aim is to identify effective means of enabling this demographic on the fringes of society to develop digital competencies.

Professor Kit Grauer is the principal investigator of the project, which specifically looks at marginalised urban youth's media arts practice in community digital-mediated arts programmes in Vancouver and Montréal. In close collaboration, the researchers across the project are helping facilitate creative practices and digital production to help influence young people's conceptualisation, negotiation and participation around issues of identity, culture and wellbeing. "Youth are savvy consumers of popular visual culture and are capable of recognising when new media is crafted at a

for better educational opportunities for this underserved population.

Marginalised youth have been underrepresented in studies of young people's media art practice. How is your work filling this gap?

We specifically targeted community-based organisations to study which ones had reputations for excellence in teaching media arts to marginalised youth by encouraging youth participation through scholarships, programmes or referrals. In this way, we have a wide variety of youth represented and can provide empirical evidence showing the value of media arts for marginalised youth in community learning contexts, of how young people use this medium to identify and articulate hopes and aspirations related to system barriers and personal challenges. We have also made sure that our research is widely disseminated through academic and non-academic publications, presentations and websites.

Thus far, what have you learned regarding effective pedagogical approaches using digital media?

Within the context of professional learning communities, programmes like the ones we studied create spaces for students to play, imagine and experiment in, whilst having the support of professionals guiding them through a filmmaking methodology. The pedagogical approaches offered at all of the sites are neither overly prescriptive nor unstructured. Instead, they are unique spaces in which participants can playfully explore ideas, issues and interests within a structure that teaches them how to give form to their various artistic enquiries.

Collaboration has played a key role in your research. Can you describe some of its greatest benefits?

For me, collaboration in research provides the same intrinsic rewards as we found in the community-based media arts centres. We have a great team of thoughtful, competent and dedicated researchers and educators who were chosen for their expertise and ability to work in a collective. We could each mentor early-career researchers and graduate students into work in the academy. We chose sites that would welcome us to probe their pedagogical and structural success deeply, and we each learned more from the collective than we could have done individually. This type of research always inspires me to explore ideas, issues and interests that go beyond my personal limitations, and to experience deep

satisfaction from the work and the productive relationships that are developed.

What roles do artists and teachers play in community-based sites in engaging with marginalised youth to foster youth participation and community engagement?

The artists and teachers at all of our sites treat the students like early-career professionals. The teachers in each programme draw from their professional experiences of new media arts production and construct their curricula accordingly. From most of the sites, titles like Teacher, Ms, Mrs or Mr are absent – the instructors are called and viewed as 'mentors'. Mentors draw from their knowledge working as filmmakers to ask the questions that articulate the constraints students are working under – to point out the possibilities and pitfalls of how students might bring their ideas to the screen.

There is something to be said about providing a space for youth to take the responsibilities of a professional, as they are held accountable for their learning. Accountability is therefore not placed on the teacher; rather, they have a responsibility toward their production team and the work itself. Students would often describe the feeling of responsibility to their peers as they work together toward a common goal, such as the complete film, sound work, animation, video, exhibition and submission to an international, national or local film festival. As a result, a culture of professionalism emerges in which points of connection arise through dialogue, collaboration and interaction.

Finally, how does the impact of media arts learning on marginalised young people contribute toward the development of new curricula, pedagogies and policies that will help improve urban art education?

There are no written curricula that outline how one should teach in a systematic manner. Instead, the curriculum is modelled on how new media arts production works in the professional community. The value of these types of pedagogical places of learning is in the lessons they teach for creating a democratic place where the curriculum and pedagogy foster communication, collaboration and collective problem solving.

An enabling learning environment depends upon its ability to inspire mutual and empowering learning relationships among teachers and students. Successful media arts programmes for marginalised youth focus on learning activities structured by student engagement and mentorship.



high level,” explains Grauer. “Offering young people the means to craft works that resemble those made by professionals provides strong, intrinsic motivation.”

In order to deliver new research insights and deepen understanding of the role of digital technologies and media, the team has established distinct community sites at different geographical locations. The overarching objectives are to improve the learning experience of marginalised youth, contribute to the evolution of the digital economy, promote engagement and inform policy and actions.

THE NATIVE YOUTH PROGRAM

The Native Youth Program (NYP), is based at UBC’s Museum of Anthropology. The museum-based intern programme for urban Aboriginal youth provides students with an opportunity to discover more about traditional and contemporary Northwest Coast cultures, both from their own experiences and from local First Nations guest speakers. Crucially, the programme recognises the importance museums have in terms of representing the complexity of diverse cultures.

The lead researchers of NYP are Dr Jill Baird and Francine Cunningham, both of whom help to support marginalised urban youth in the development of skills in public presentations using objects and visual aids located at the museum. The knowledge garnered by the students is shared with peers and visitors through a range of mediums, such as guided tours and creative art projects. The interactions with indigenous artists foster an appreciation for indigenous cultures in the students, many of whom are involved in said cultures. Ultimately, the environment of constructing knowledge that is developed through the programme reflects how everyone – elders, artists, educators, youth and audiences – forms the culture in which the marginalised youth find themselves.

THE GULF ISLANDS FILM AND TELEVISION SCHOOL

The research at the Gulf Islands Film and Television School (GIFTS) is led by Dr Ching-Chiu Lin, with participation from Natalie LeBlanc and Anna Ryo. GIFTS is a creative, community-based media arts educational centre located on Galiano Island in British Columbia, Canada. Here, people are mentored by – and live with – Canada’s top media producers and industry professionals to produce short films. The environment participants find themselves in is one of

cooperation, collaboration and creativity, and everybody is treated as a filmmaker.

The location of this particular arm of CoT is important; participants are removed from familiar surroundings, such as school or home, to generate different perceptions and emphasise that what an individual has known thus far is not all there is to know. Additionally, all participants are surrounded by like-minded individuals with a shared interest, something that facilitates self-reinventions in the context of filmmaking.

The importance of working together as a team and using professional technical processes and equipment are key tenets of GIFTS. “There are clear examples that point to youth describing how learning through professional processes and practices have empowered them by providing tools to articulate ideas in sophisticated ways,” says Grauer. “It is the act of adopting professional behaviours and seeing the outcomes of engaging in such behaviours that an individual’s identity transforms.”

LA MAISON KEKPART

La Maison Kekpart is a community centre located in the suburbs of Montréal that is dedicated to helping youths and adolescents in difficulty. The centre provides multiple educational initiatives and media art programmes that address social issues such as crime, prostitution, drugs, poverty, family problems and school disengagement.

The lead researchers on the Kekpart House community site are Dr Juan Carlos Castro and Martin Lalonde, who have studied the wide variety of digital creation activities that take place at the centre.

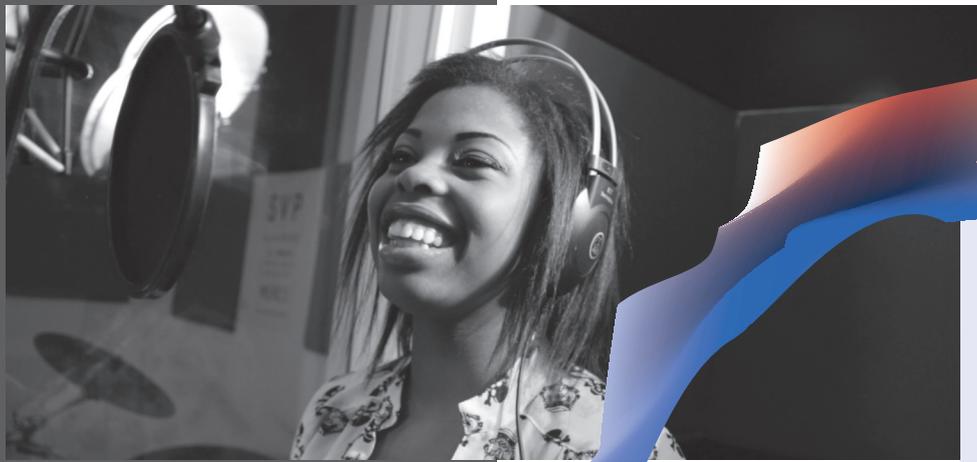
In giving the students access to the latest technologies in fields such as digital images, video production and sound design, they are offered educational experiences that are not far removed from true professional practice.

FROM CONSUMER TO PRODUCER

Although CoT will not be completed until later this year, findings so far have been extremely interesting. “We expected to find regional and structural challenges that were unique to each site,” elaborates Grauer. “However, what surprised us the most were the broad similarities of pedagogical emphasis that were confirmed by instructors and students participating in the programmes.”

In transforming marginalised youth from consumers to producers in a digital world, CoT and the programmes within it are helping transform the lives of individuals, giving them a means to build an identity for themselves, a sense of responsibility and encouraging them to both imagine and create.





TODAY'S LEAD RESEARCHERS FOR CITIZENS OF TOMORROW

The Citizens of Tomorrow project involves three community sites that work both independently and in conjunction with one another to equip marginalised youths with the digital skills necessary in today's increasingly technological world. The success of the research programme depends on the involvement of a range of researchers, led by different people across the different community sites. The lead researchers for each community site are detailed below.

THE NATIVE YOUTH PROGRAM, MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Dr Jill Baird is Curator of Education and Public Programs at the University of British Columbia's (UBC) Museum of Anthropology. Her research on the Native Youth Project (NYP) has focused on interviews with NYP participants inquiring about their attitudes and understandings of the role of museums, particularly in reference to their digital media experience in the Museum and student identity.

Francine Cunningham is an Aboriginal author, artist and educator. She joined the research grant as a research assistant in 2012 and has been researching the practical implementations of working with marginalised youth and ways of bringing it into the current curriculum. She is also the website designer and social media manager of the Program.

GULF ISLANDS FILM AND TELEVISION SCHOOL

Dr Ching-Chiu Lin is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy at UBC. She is also a faculty advisor in the Teacher Education Office at UBC supervising student teaching in visual art cohorts.

Natalie LeBlanc is a PhD candidate in the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy at UBC. Her research interests lie within arts-based (educational) research practices, art practice as research, living pedagogy and life history.

Anna Ryoo is a secondary school teacher, visual artist, UBC teacher education programme instructor and a PhD student at UBC.

LA MAISON KEKPART

Dr Juan Carlos Castro is Undergraduate Programme Advisor and Associate Professor in the Department of Art Education at Concordia University in Montréal, Canada. He is co-editor of *Youth practices in digital arts and new media: Learning in formal and informal settings* (2015).

Martin Lalonde is a PhD candidate in the Department of Art Education at Concordia University in Montréal. His research interests lie within the social sciences field of mobility studies and of complex systems theory, digital technologies in education, curriculum studies, youth digital culture, new media art pedagogical practices, participatory culture and multimodal literacies.

CITIZENS OF TOMORROW: A FOUR-YEAR STUDY EXAMINING DIGITAL MEDIA AND MARGINALISED YOUTH

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of our research is to investigate marginalised urban youth's media arts practice in community digital-mediated arts programmes and how it impacts their engagement around identity, culture and wellbeing.

PARTNERS

Concordia University, Canada

The Native Youth Program at the Museum of Anthropology, Canada

Gulf Islands Film and Television School, Canada

La Maison Kekpart, Canada

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DR KIT GRAUER is Professor Emerita, Art Education, at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. She has remained actively involved in art education organisations at the local, national and international levels. She is currently the principal investigator on the Citizens of Tomorrow research grant. Grauer's interests include community-based new media education, international issues in art education, teacher education, museum education, and art curriculum and instruction. She has written extensively and given numerous presentations, in-service sessions and keynote speeches in these areas.



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