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Talking Back:

Remix as a Tool to Help Students Exercise Authority when Making Meaning

"Looking back over all of my reflections, I see a trend of my ideas that this project is very different from others I have done before. . . . we were fully able to show our thoughts without the tight directions that are usually placed on assignments in high school."

—12th-Grade Student Reflection

In November 2013, I (Jennifer), a university professor in teacher education, sat in the keynote session at the National Writing Project's Annual Meeting listening to Henry Jenkins talk via Skype about participatory culture and remixing *Moby Dick*. The concept excited me. A remix deconstructs and dismantles others' creative expressions and reforms them into a new creative expression. I had already been thinking about interactions in the classroom and how to make them more student-centered and less reliant on the teacher's mediation (and thus more authentic). Jenkins's ideas offered a means to facilitate students' multimodal composing processes coupled with a response to literature that moves them beyond summative, plot-driven discussion of a novel and into interpretive analysis across overarching themes.

As Jenkins talked specifically about remixing, I realized we all do it, especially students. A year after this meeting, I introduced the concept of remix to my students. As we worked through definitions and examples of remix in class, one student tweeted: "Remix—More than just new song beats! Taking something known and making it new and relatable." As writers and producers of various texts, especially multimodal texts, we draw from material we know to make a point about some other material and, in the process, create something new. For me, this recognition was not about the technology; it was a paradigm shift about how students interact with texts, the authority they take when responding to texts, and how we as teachers conceptualize ownership to invite students to use their own creativity as a tool for reading and for writing/producing. Technology simply offered a medium through which we might accomplish that.

During the fall of 2014, I (Nick), a doctoral candidate, was also exploring ideas about participatory culture and remix in my high school setting. After seven years of teaching, I was accepted into an Ed.D. program at a nearby university where Jennifer was my professor. My concept of learning before starting a doctoral degree assumed that teachers were supposed to direct novices' thinking. My experience as an Ed.D. student problematized my beliefs about how we should be teaching and learning because the faculty spoke about learning as a conversation, not as dictation. In my role as a doctoral student, I was asked to join the conversation, add to it, and push back when I disagreed. In other words, to employ a critical lens and act upon it.

A critical lens seeks to create a more democratic society by analyzing the systems that support inequity based on people's membership in a specific group

(e.g., race, gender, language). Janks (2014) argues, "Critical literacy gives us potent ways of reading, seeing and acting in the world," and once students practice with critical literacy, they will understand the importance of language in "the workings of power, producing our identity positions, and affecting who gets access to opportunities for a better life" (p. 1). I was considering how all levels of students can benefit from being expected to exercise a critical lens and greater authority over their learning while planning to read Matt de la Peña's *Mexican Whiteboy* (2008) or *We Were Here* (2009). Remix seemed like a good tool to help my students join the conversation.

[The remix project] shifted authority of the traditional classroom from the teacher to the students by giving students structure and space to exercise their own will as readers and be the architects of their assessments.

Jennifer was teaching an undergraduate course with preservice teachers on digital media and technology in English education. We saw an opportunity to collaborate around our shared interest in remixing and have our students come together to remix the de la Peña novel they chose to read. This project offered a way to ask students to read more critically, deeply, and intentionally because it gave them a purpose for reading. It shifted authority of the traditional classroom from the teacher to the students by giving students structure and space to exercise their own will as readers and be the architects of their assessments. The conversation shifted from a traditional classroom scenario in which the teacher says, "This is what you should take from the text" to one in which the teacher and students ask, "What do I need to take from the text and other sources to produce an original, meaningful, multimodal product?"

What follows is an overview of the unit we taught. We discuss the project in the same order that we followed in our classes. First, we discuss the novels the students read. Next, we explain how we introduced the concept of remix to the students. After that, we lay out the five stages of the remix project: Intent, Plan, Product, Reaction, Reflection. Next, we put our project into conversation with the five characteristics of participatory culture as defined by Jenkins and Kelly (2013, p. 8):

1. Relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement;
2. Strong support for creating and sharing creations with others;
3. Some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices;
4. Members who believe that their contributions matter; and
5. Members who feel some degree of social connection with one another (they care what other people think about what they have created).

Finally, we discuss the core themes that emerged in performing this unit with our students.

The Novels and Framing Questions

Before we began the remix assignment, each student chose between two books by Matt de la Peña: *We Were Here* (2009) and *Mexican Whiteboy* (2008). We chose two books by the same author because we wanted to give students choice over their reading assignments, but we also wanted students to be able to engage in whole-class discussions regardless of the book they read. Most students chose to read *We Were Here*, but enough students chose *Mexican Whiteboy* to create a whole group for the eventual remix project. Without shared characters and plot line from a single novel, students were led to discuss characterization and theme. Additionally, using multiple books by the same author allowed students to identify authorial elements, such as tone and style, across both books. Where there was not agreement on such stylistic elements, there emerged potential for discussing authorial intent. Discussing these differences across the two books helped students illuminate small pieces of each other's books. The process was messy, of course, because students did not always understand the context of their classmates' comments and did not have personal connections to both texts; however, with facilitation from us, the advantages overshadowed the limitations.

Mexican Whiteboy is about a teenager named Danny who goes to live with his father's family for the summer. As the title suggests, he is of mixed race;

his father is Mexican, and his mother is White. Danny lives with his mother, attends a private school, and only speaks English. Moving to San Diego with his Mexican aunts, uncles, and cousins in a neighborhood largely made up of Latinos is a daunting experience for him. The one bit of cultural capital that Danny brings with him is his impressive talent as a baseball player.

We Were Here follows Miguel from the moment he begins his punishment for an unrevealed crime. He finds himself in a group home for juvenile offenders. In addition to his confinement, the judge who presided over Miguel's case has ordered him to keep a journal. Part of the unique quality of this narrative is that it is told entirely through Miguel's journal writing. Predictably, his beginning at the group home is contentious, but enemies turn into allies, and Miguel eventually turns those allies into friends.

We chose these books because they are accessible to a wide range of teenage audiences. Both protagonists deal with issues common to adolescents: independence, morality, identity, and social acceptance. In addition, de la Peña artfully presents both individual and institutional issues of race, including episodes featuring racial epithets, society treating non-White people as criminals, and the anxiety many feel when holding conversations about how race informs identity. de la Peña accomplishes the difficult task of presenting racial tensions in ways that are realistic, representative of contemporary America, and engaging. We wanted to frame our class conversation with a critical literacies lens. Bronner (2011) wrote, "Critical theory refuses to identify freedom with any institutional arrangement or fixed system of thought" (p. 1). These novels are good anchors for asking students to grapple with making meaning of inequities in society and to consider their role when they face these inequities throughout their lives.

Based on these goals, we broke each book into four sections of relatively equal length. We gave the students reading due dates for each section and asked them to take notes in the margins of their books. To give them focus, we asked them to address the following questions in their notes:

> Section 1: What does the protagonist want? What is getting in his way? What should he do to get over these obstacles?
>
> Section 2: What is the protagonist worried about? What is causing the worry? What is he doing to make his stress worse or better? What are others doing to make his stress worse or better?
>
> Section 3: Who has power in the story? Who lacks power in the story? What/who decides who has power?
>
> Section 4: How do the conflicts for the character conclude? Has the power shifted in the book? How? Why?

The questions associated with each section were meant to lead the students through a progression from small, tangible concepts toward large, abstract concepts. For Section 1, we wanted the students to get to know the characters and their struggles from an individual standpoint because both Danny and Miguel experience loneliness and have trouble fitting in. By the time the students finished the book and participated in the Section 4 discussion, we were asking them to understand the underlying systems of power that are present in American society as depicted by the novels. Both characters have experiences that reveal the real consequences of systemic inequalities, and in the end, students recognized these systems.

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As illustration, consider the thinking that took place in each group. In *Mexican Whiteboy,* students recognized that parents have power—something they can relate to their own lives. Moving beyond that, some students noted that Manny lacks power, explaining, "Because you see him speaking freely at the start of the novel, but he is put into a mental half[way]-house throughout the rest of the novel. This strips Manny of all voice and power throughout the rest of time." In *We Were Here,* students recognized that Mong gains and maintains power through "outrageously violent behavior" toward other boys in the

group home. They pointed out that this behavior creates fear in his housemates and robs them of power, as seen in the passage where Tommy says, "But if they knew how he was really like he wouldn't even be here. They'd put him in solitary confinement. Or they'd try him as an adult" (de la Peña, 2009, p. 30). Students also noted that Miguel has power because "he is able to manipulate and deceive Rondell very easily. He shows this power when he lies to Rondell about getting the money stolen from Flaca." Students recognized how the positioning of characters and the use of language and actions work to demonstrate power dynamics in the novels.

We, the teachers, shared the role of discussion facilitator, while students were held responsible for the content that they mined while reading. Regarding their discussions of the novels, the students were individually assessed for their contributions. We only awarded credit for contributions that added a new perspective or piece of information to the discussion. Some of the systems that they unearthed from the novels were as personal and familiar as a family connection, but some were as abstract as universal moral truths. Remixing the novels was meant to be a means of further developing and expressing those understandings. One student wrote, "I learned a lot about the book from this project which I didn't get from just reading through it. I learned the truth about Mong and Rondell [from *We Were Here*], and that what may seem horrible to one person may seem like heaven to another." After reading and discussing the novels, we introduced the concept of remix to the students.

Unpacking Remix with Students

While remix is all around us and something we do regularly, although usually unconsciously, we knew that distinguishing between what constitutes remix and what does not would pose challenges for students, just as it did for us when conceptualizing the project. We imagined possible submissions where students might change one or two things in another work and submit it as a remix, so we wanted to take time to really tease out what we were asking students to do and to engage them in some purposeful discussion about that. We wanted to move students toward creating remixes that offered comprehensive views of the novels' themes by putting them into intentional conversation with other elements from a variety of other texts. When we conceptualized remix, we thought about it on a continuum that moved from original content to new content and that considered recognizability of the original content, value of the remix, and transformation of the original content (see Fig. 1).

In discussing the continuum with students, we offered different examples of remix in popular culture, starting with remixes of the Norman Rockwell's image *Freedom from Want* (1943). We analyzed elements of the original work, just as we would a text, and then applied those elements to discussing remixes of the art (see W. [only last initial supplied], 2010). One remix parody we discussed depicts a modern family where the mother, cigarette dangling from her mouth, carrying the turkey platter, presents the family with a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken. Cans of Budweiser are spread around the table alongside open bags of Ruffles potato chips. The set up is clearly identifiable with Rockwell's original work, but as the students noted, the piece offers criticism about fast-food culture and a consumeristic, product-driven society. In the discussions of remix, we asked students to use the three questions about recognizability, value, and transformation to place each remix somewhere on the remix continuum (see Fig. 1). We then looked at where we had placed various works and talked about which were too close to the original (e.g., one element changed and no added value) or too far from the original (e.g., original no longer recognizable in the content) to be considered valuable remixes.

Because we did not want students to think that remix only applied to static images, we included other examples that demonstrated a breadth of remix possibilities. These examples included sampling in music, remixed movie trailers, and Danger Mouse's "The Grey Video" (peaches97062, 2006) that remixes various Beatles songs from the *White Album* (1963) with "Encore" from Jay-Z's *Black Album* (2003) over video from various Beatles performances on the *Ed Sullivan*

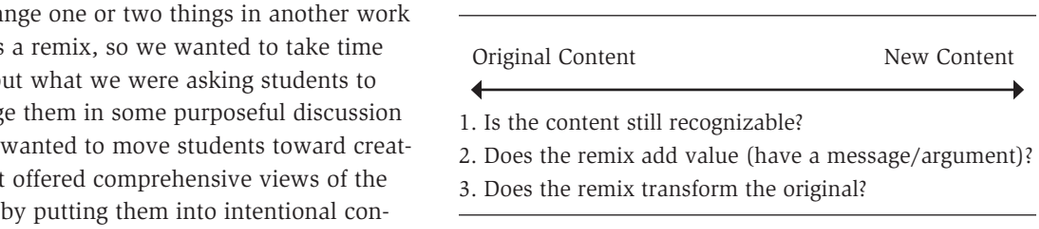

Figure 1. The remix continuum

Show. The final example of "The Grey Video" offered students a multimodal example drawing from multiple sources.

At this point, we focused the discussion on recognizability of all source material and on putting these materials into conversation with each other in new, unexpected ways to create something original. As part of this discussion, we created a class T-chart where students indicated in Column A traits that do *not* make a good remix (too little of the original content so that a viewer does not recognize the source, choppy mixing of source materials, and unclear message) and in Column B traits that make a good remix (takes an older message and puts it into a modern context, transforms the content to add something new and different while maintaining balance with the source content, and concise and clean presentation). These responses demonstrated to us that the students were taking away the key point from our work with the remix continuum: remix is not just using other people's work, but it is also creating new content to further transform the meaning. Now that they were able to recognize the form and purpose of remix that others had created, it was time to start leading them through creating their own.

Addressing Project Logistics

We are arguing, in part, that teachers should structure activities that give students a chance to build the skills needed to employ a critical lens and that remix can be such an activity. A critical lens seeks to break down societal structures and demonstrates that people who are not members of privileged groups are subject to both tacit and active discrimination. Remix is about combining the meaning-making activities of analysis, deconstruction, and reformation. First, we must analyze a piece of the world for what it says. Next, we must deconstruct how it accomplishes its message. Last, we must reform it to say something new. In addition to deconstruction, remix is an exercise in talking back to societal structures.

The claim that a critical lens should be brought into schools is not new to education or the English curriculum; Giroux (1988) wrote, "In the current political climate, there is little talk about schools and democracy and a great deal of debate about how schools might become more successful in meeting industrial needs and contributing to economic productivity" (p. 1). Janks (2012) asserts, "The move from knowledge consumption to knowledge production evident on Web 2.0 has removed previous forms of authorship and ownership. Authorship is further challenged by new forms of text making: mixing, mashing, cutting, pasting, and re-contextualising are taken-for-granted practices of the net-generation" (pp. 151–152). Such textual transformations require teachers and students to take a critical stance in examining text production and consumption.

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What is new is the way that these critical issues are manifested in a world where new modes and means of communication fall in and out of fashion at a seemingly exponential rate. Jenkins and Kelley (2013) coined the phrase "participation gap" to describe the divide between adolescents who lack access to the tools, skills, and cultural knowledge necessary to engage in a culture that is mediated by new forms of communication that are largely housed in technology. The participation gap occurs when people do not have access to technological tools or are not given the opportunity to build skills associated with making meaning using these tools. We attempted to minimize the participation gap by first implementing activities designed to teach our students, located across two physical contexts, about Google Drive.

Scaffolding Google Drive

People engaging in projects of all sorts are using shared online work spaces to collaborate, and we wanted this remix unit to give students that social experience. Both of our classrooms used Google Drive as the main communication tool for many core elements of the class (syllabus, make-up assignments, class calendar, etc.). We also constructed scaffolding assignments that required students to use shared folders and documents, so they would all be familiar and proficient in doing so. Last, we required many assign-

ments to be turned in via Google Drive before beginning the project. By requiring students to use Google Drive many times and in many ways before beginning the project, we had very few issues with the tool once we began the remix project.

Google Drive is also where we published all assignments, examples, and rubrics. We used Google Drive to create a folder for the entire class. Within the class folder, we made a folder for each of the eight groups. We assembled teacher-designated groups of three to four high school students and at least two university students. Groups were made up of students who all read the same book because we required each group to use their chosen de la Peña book as the "original source text" for their remix. We then broke the project into five parts: Statement of Intent, Plan, Product, Impact, Reflection. Attached to each part were a group assessment and an individual reflection assessment (one to three paragraphs).

We wanted students to be metacognitive about their process, but individual reflections also provided a good way for us to hold students individually accountable for their work.

In keeping with Jenkins and Kelley's (2013) suggestion that participatory cultures encourage sharing with others and have a social connection, we had the groups publish their work to the rest of the class. Since we were promoting remix as a valid creative interpretation and expression, we encouraged students to look at other groups' work and feel free to appropriate others' ideas. The individual assessments were kept private between each student and the teachers so that students could be honest.

The Individual Reflections

We wanted students to be metacognitive about their process, but individual reflections also provided a good way for us to hold students individually accountable for their work. We asked students to answer the following questions in their reflection:

- What was the writing/creating process like?
- How do you feel about the direction of the project?
- What were your contributions to the intent statement? What were the contributions of each of your group members?
- What strengths did you bring to working collaboratively in the group?
- What areas might you improve upon from working collaboratively in this group?

Using the "comment" function on Google Drive, we were able to give students feedback about their project and their writing and address any issues that arose. We found ourselves surfing the folders while watching TV at night and noticed that assessment became something that we were both drawn to rather than having to carve out time to drudge through. The difference was that we were having a dialogue with the students. When we first started this practice, we did not expect the students to respond to our comments directly, and most of them didn't. However, there were a few who did, sometimes at night and on weekends. We were drawn into these conversations by the alerts that came when students left comments or responded to our comments. This may appear to impede upon teachers' personal time; however, we had given the students no expectations of immediate replies, so we could guiltlessly leave no comment on them if we chose. It was all voluntary, so these interactions more closely resembled communication practices that we all use on a daily basis through social media, and it felt natural. It virtually extended the parameters of school, allowing class time to focus on producing the remix rather than dealing with misunderstandings or redirection.

The Remix Project Assignment

The assignment was broken down into stages with benchmark dates to help students manage its scope and to help us support them in developing their ideas in process. At the beginning of the discussion for each stage below, we include a reflection excerpt from a high school student, Lucy (pseudonyms used for students throughout). The introduction to her final reflection explains, "My group read *Mexican Whiteboy.* The teacher gave directions on what needed to be turned in on what day, but the product itself was left up to us on what to design."

The Statement of Intent

The statement of intent was very difficult to complete. The project is too vague and that adds a whole new level of difficulty. . . . But coordinating time [for both high school and college students] to work on this assignment at the same time . . . is nearly impossible. (Lucy)

The first part of the project, the statement of intent, seemed like a simple task at first, but it ended up taking most groups more than a single class period to complete. We asked each group to brainstorm ideas and generate a 1–2 paragraph explanation of what they intended to create. We gave them the following questions to consider while writing:

- Who is your audience?
- What do you want your audience to learn from your piece?
- What do you want your audience to feel from your piece?
- What is the overall message of your piece?
- What message, tone, information do you want to avoid in your piece?
- Into what genre(s) does your piece fit? How does it fit into that genre?
- What mode of storytelling will you use to accomplish your intent? Why is that mode the best way to accomplish your intent?
- Is there any other important information about your group's intent?

As Lucy discussed, difficulty resulted from the open nature of the assignment. We asked students to make a remix based on themes within a book. The only rules were that it be multimodal and publishable on Google Drive, even if via a link to an external source such as YouTube. This is a task more easily accomplished by an individual than by a group because an individual needs only to bring a single creative concept into focus. As another student wrote, "I can see now that the purpose of making these instructions so broad was to convey different ideas of the book that we read. Different groups will have very different products, and it will be interesting to see the different perspectives." A creative collaborative project requires each student to produce a creative concept, communicate that concept to others, comprehend the concept of others, and synthesize all of those concepts into a shared vision. That complexity is why we next gave students detailed help in planning to turn their intent into a product.

The Plan

Writing down the plan for the remix project was not as complicated as the letter of intent. Since my group already had an idea of what the remix would be, it became much more simplistic. All that was needed was to write down what steps we needed to take in order to create our remix. The college students have been much more helpful in this process but myself and Madison have had to continually keep Lee and Peter on task. (Lucy)

Since the above excerpt was shared via Google Drive with the teachers only, we were able to see that the initial fogginess of the assignment had come into focus for Lucy's group. Also, Lucy had a safe space where she could quietly alert us to her perspective that the two high school boys in the group were dragging their feet. This was a much more comfortable interaction than her having to surreptitiously give this report face-to-face during or after class. Since each student submitted these reflections, we could compare Lucy's account to Lee's and Peter's before deciding on an intervention. We made a note and checked on the situation during the next class.

For this second stage of the project, we gave the students three planning tools. The first tool was a calendar. It showed due dates for each part of the larger project, class days that would be committed to working in groups with computer access, class days that would be committed to the project without computer access, and class days during which we would do work not related to the project.

The second tool was the "Task Matrix" (see Fig. 2), a table that asked the students to break the project into smaller parts and name the tasks that needed to be accomplished to realize the vision outlined in the letter of intent. It also asked students to define which people would be responsible for each task. Since students created the definition of their product, each project was different. This part of the progression was designed to encourage students to anticipate the process of creating their unique remix and to break up the project amongst themselves according to their strengths.

The third planning tool was the "Asset Map" (see

	Individual	2–3 people	Whole group	Outside person	Asset
1. Gather Images		Jeb & Bernie			• Bernie's laptop • Camera from Don's mom
2. Find Music	Hillary				Free music archive (http://freemusicarchive.org/curator/video)
3. Write Story			Everyone		

Figure 2. Example group task matrix

Fig. 3). It asked the students to define what resources, knowledge, and skills each of them possessed that might prove useful in completing their remix. It was inspired by Kretzmann and McKnight's (1996) work reframing community activism in an asset model rather than a deficit model. We wished to frame our remix project in an asset model, as well.

To every group's asset map, we added ourselves and a few of our basic assets (e.g., language expertise, access to YouTube on a school computer). We did this to model how to fill out the map and to encourage each group to see us as productive assets, not just as task masters. Collective intelligence, a term coined by Levy (as cited in Jenkins & Kelley, 2013), defines communities in which "nobody knows everything, everybody knows something, and what is known by any member is available to the group as a whole on demand" (p. 86). Utilizing the collective intelligence construct coined by Pierre Lévy and explained by Frey and Walsh (as cited by Jenkins, 2006b) and seeking to expand the learning ecology are two key characteristics of the remixing program created by Jenkins and Kelley (2013). This includes sharing ideas amongst the students but also moving into the larger communities to which the students belong.

All of these tools were published in a folder designated for each group, but they were shared with the entire class. We encouraged students to look at other groups' planning tools to inspire them to recognize assets that they might have ignored, see people outside their group as assets, and possibly integrate more effective planning strategies into their own plan for executing their product.

The Product

Now if we had used a website instead of iMovie then [having to all work on one machine] wouldn't have been the problem. It was just the technology we decided

Name	Expert knowledge	Moderate knowledge	Novice knowledge	Friend/ family outside of class	Possessions/ access	Helpful links I found
Mr. T	• grammar • narrative language • organization	• Google Drive • design principles • photography	• Photoshop		• access to multiple DSLR cameras • access to multiple computers with Photoshop	• iMovie tutorial
Dr. D	• narrative structure • grammar • Google Drive	• Movie Maker • iMovie	• design principles • Audacity		• access to video recorders • access to audio recorders	

Figure 3. Asset map

to use on the project that made it difficult. Besides that fact, the final product was easy to make and was done in a timely manner. (Lucy)

The third and central part of the project was the product. It became clear over time that the affordances and constraints inherent in the schools would impact the products. The groups were initially given two weeks and multiple class periods to construct their products. We pushed the due dates back a couple of times, as it became obvious that multiple groups were not going to meet the deadline. During this phase, many of the college students visited the high school campus to work with their high school partners. Groups that were able to work together under these circumstances made greater strides than the ones who did not, and camaraderie grew more easily. It was clear that collaborative work was hindered when co-participants did not share a time and place while working or, as in Lucy's case, when they chose tools that could only be worked on by one person at a time.

The groups also began to influence each other. Many voices in literacy education argue that meaning is made through social interaction and that classrooms should facilitate learning in this way (Jenkins, 2009; Jenkins & Kelley, 2013; Beach, Thein, & Webb, 2012). The intertextuality between the groups' products, modes, and processes suggests that students were moving fluidly in and out of mentorship roles and viewing each other as assets. Multiple examples of this arose. One group found an animation application that was relatively easy to use and had a free trial. Another group saw this and adopted the same tool. The makeup of each group also affected the products. For example, both of the groups that used the animation tool found that the free trial was limited to a 60-second product. One group worked within that limitation; the other group had financial assets and purchased the full version to make their product longer.

In addition, since students designed their products, they found themselves faced with the challenges that came with their visions. As Lucy's reflection shows, the individual reflections that they submitted after publishing their remix gave them space to think about how they could have done it better. Here is how another student put it when she realized her group had taken on a more difficult task than intended: "Though it was a challenge and took more than one s[i]tting to complete, my group and I pulled through the trenches and made it to the glory land." Feeling like you made it to the "glory land" is nice, but the true test is how your creation is taken up by a real audience, so we next had the students view and respond to each other's remixes.

The Impact

The reaction our final product received was not what I expected . . . . Our original intent was to make the audience feel more assured of who Sofia was and feel more confident than awkward. The audience saw the more casual aspect of the remix and how people were supporting Danny and that was one of the main points that our group was trying to make. I believe they felt the casual aspect more than our group thought because of the pictures we chose to use. Majority of the pictures used were from The Sandlot *and since that was a more humorous movie, the more playful side appeared in the remix.* (Lucy)

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Since every group's product was published to the shared Google Drive folder, we asked all students to comment on each other's work. In this half-paragraph from Lucy's reflection about the comments her group received, we can see her commenting on and enacting a number of positive literacy behaviors. She clearly did a close character study of Sofia, a minor character in the book, and her group decided to use the remix as an opportunity to creatively add depth to the character. It isn't a stretch to call this perspective an unintended criticism of the novel for having too little female depth, though Lucy's group never directly voiced such a concern. The excerpt also shows Lucy finding success through her audience's commentary and drawing conclusions about the cause of miscommunication related to multiple modes. Last, she talks about using the movie *The Sandlot* (1993) in their remix. Using others' creative work is often at the heart

of remixing, and Lucy shows an understanding that people may have transferred their previous experience with her reference material onto her remix, thus muddying her original intent. Many of the students' reflections that were connected to their products' impact showed a mix of success and failure, but like Lucy's, they tended to have a positive tone.

We assigned each student to view two other remixes and give the groups feedback using the following questions as prompts:

- What comment/argument does the remix make?
- What does the piece make you feel?
- In what genres does the remix fit?
- What aspects of the de la Peña books do you see in the remix?
- What new elements do you see in the remix?

We then used the same prompts to give our feedback to every group. This served both as a model for students' feedback to one another and as another viewpoint for those who created the product. Students also engaged in self-assessment, considering what they communicated well to their audience, what disconnects occurred, what caused the disconnects, and how they might have improved on the product to correct any miscommunication. The answers to these questions, and all of the reflections they had done throughout the project, were collected into a larger, single reflective piece to culminate the unit.

One of the most positive behaviors that we saw reported in the reflections was students taking personal responsibility. By not controlling the mode, message, or tools that students used to create their remix, we, as teachers, were less culpable for many of the difficulties that the students faced.

Final Reflection

Overall, this remix project was a challenge. Looking back at my reflections through this project, I notice how challenging my group personally made this project for ourselves. The technology that we used combined with finding time to work with the college students proved to be the biggest struggle. (Lucy)

The fifth part of the project was a final reflection that asked students to synthesize their previous reflections into a single document. This is the prompt we gave them: "You will individually produce a polished essay in which you discuss your experiences with each component of this assignment." We expected the essay to address all of the guiding questions posed in each of the students' individual reflections, and we added this set of questions to help them see and address connections across all of their reflections:

- What trends do you see in your reflections?
- What ideas or feelings do you seem to express consistently?
- Was the reflection process helpful to completing the project?
- What did you learn about working in a group?
- Did you like being in a group, or would you have rather done this alone? Why?
- Was it a good idea to work with the high school/college students? Why or why not?
- What did the project teach you about the de la Peña book that you didn't understand as you read it?
- What did viewing others' projects teach you about the de la Peña book?

This final reflection was a major assessment, and the students were given class time to construct the essay.

One of the most positive behaviors that we saw reported in the reflections was students taking personal responsibility. By not controlling the mode, message, or tools that students used to create their remix, we, as teachers, were less culpable for many of the difficulties that the students faced. They complained that making a video was hard or that writing song lyrics took a long time or that finding an animation tool caused discord in their group, etc. Each time such frustrations arose, we told students that they were free to change the nature of the project. Seeing that starting a new project at any point past the beginning was a much higher hurdle than finding a solution, they usually pushed on and solved problems for themselves in ways that we could never have done for them.

Not all of the frustrations were created by the students, however. As we stated before, some of our deadlines were too ambitious, so we pushed a few back as the troubles inherent in the project emerged. Also, we were responsible for how the groups were

constructed and how they communicated, so we had to do our own reflection regarding how we could have made the project more successful as well. In addition to plugging holes, we believe there is room for extending the unit.

What We Would Do Differently

Mining the reflections to inspire further projects could be a valuable extension activity. Looking back at her reflection about part four, Lucy and her group may have had concerns about the lack of female voice in the novel, but they may not have recognized it for themselves. It would be valuable to mine other reflections for revelations about the novels that the students hinted at but may have needed teacher guidance to fully form. A culminating discussion centered on these issues might be a nice way to bring the students back to a traditional literary analysis perspective, and it would provide a conclusion to the discussions in which they participated while reading the novels before completing the remix. However, this was a long project, and the thought of extending it does feel a bit daunting.

The letter of intent stage was also the first time that the two classes (college and high school) were asked to work together, so there were a few misunderstandings. Though we did some preliminary online introductions between the two groups, that wasn't quite adequate. In the future, we would have them work together during some of the scaffolding assignments that were meant to teach them how to use Google Drive, thus allowing the two classes to work through communication issues. Also, some of the college students (preservice teachers) assumed their role was that of mentor rather than creative team member, so we could have dispelled those assumptions with earlier collaboration as well.

As an alternative, Nick also delivered this project to a separate section of high school students who were not grouped with college students. Since all of the students were a part of the same class, these cross-classroom obstacles were not present. Students were still required to publish in Google Drive, so they still had the experience of working with a shared, digital space. Ultimately, since part of our goal included giving students experience in working collaboratively and in viewing each other as assets, we would not turn this into an individual project. However, reflecting on miscommunications inherent in group work became part of how we started to answer the question, "How might a classroom inspired by participatory culture look?"

Participatory Culture

We conceptualized this remix project based on the work of Jenkins and Kelley (2013), who linked remix to the theory of a participatory culture. This theory is not necessarily tied to the classroom, and it is at odds with schools in some ways. The questions that are inherent when participatory culture is refracted through a classroom lens are tied to the five essential features of participatory culture that Jenkins and Kelley (2013) posited. This connection becomes clear when we put our students' reflections in conversation with these features.

Students appreciated the opportunity to choose how they expressed themselves, to incorporate their creativity, and to pull from their own knowledge and pop culture interests.

Low Barriers to Artistic Expression

While the open-ended nature of the project proved daunting and problematic to students initially, as they grappled with it, they discovered that it really did offer low barriers to artistic expression. Students shared the following in their reflections: "You get to express creativity *and* follow your own interests," and "It's fun to be creative, and at the same time, you are learning more about the book." Students appreciated the opportunity to choose how they expressed themselves, to incorporate their creativity, and to pull from their own knowledge and pop culture interests.

Not surprisingly, some students experienced issues with technology, but what was interesting was how some of them took up those issues and positioned them not as challenges, but as opportunities to press forward with their work: "We had to keep going back and 'reimagine' our remix statement of intent after experiencing these limitations with tech tools." Rather than letting the challenges with technology hinder their creative vision, they persisted in making their creative vision come to fruition by finding other ways to implement it.

Creating and Sharing with Others

Students naturally felt nervous about sharing their ideas and work with others, especially when the high school students were sharing with the university students; however, in the end, that experience proved to be a confidence booster. As one student noted, "Overall, the reactions caused me to feel more confident in our product." Another group inquired, "We want to see everyone's remixes. Can you put them in a Google Classroom?" (We think this question grew from students not realizing they could explore other groups' folders.) This level of excitement demonstrated support and trust across the participatory community of the two classes. The ability to be creative helped grow students' confidence in their own composing of remix: "I liked *stepping out* and doing something creative and trusting my instincts."

Informal Mentorship

In conceptualizing participatory culture between a high school and college classroom, we had hoped to build bridges that help preservice teachers who have no field placement experience see what working with adolescents is like and, conversely, help high school seniors interact at the college level to glimpse what expectations and experiences are associated with that. Predictably, aspects of that failed. One high school student bluntly shared: "I feel that the college students need to put forth more of an effort; it seems they tell us something to do and we have to do it rather than they bring up the idea and include it into what we are doing." This sharing offered opportunity to talk with students about dynamics in collaborative groups as well as individual roles and responsibilities.

The informal mentorship also yielded benefits where students were able to position themselves as experts on something and teach others in their group. One comment read, "I could show others how to do something they didn't know how to do." This reminded us that students need opportunities to share their knowledge with others and embodied the student-centered learning we were aiming for, where not all knowledge has to be generated by the teacher.

Belief that Contributions Matter

We recognize that building students' confidence in creativity and skill does not carry weight in the end if students do not perceive that their contributions to the process and work matter. While there were glitches with group dynamics, such as how some of the college students positioned themselves, students overall indicated that they felt they had value in a collaborative group. One reflective statement nicely captures this: "The direction of our project is on a straight road to being finished, and we are all working hard to make sure it is completed by its due date. . . . This is one of the only group projects I have done in which I feel that everyone has done their fair share." Equity of contributions and workload carries a lot of weight with students.

Social Connection

Not surprisingly, social connection also matters to students, which is one of the high appeals of allowing our classrooms to be inspired by participatory cultures. Students were frustrated when a social connection was not present with other students, as evidenced by one student's complaint: "Mr. Nowheretobefound was certainly no where [sic]to be found and had absolutely no input of his opinion for the ideas that were proposed." Contributions to the group and social connection overlap; in addition to feeling that their own contributions to the group mattered, students valued others' contributions and grew frustrated when team members were not there. Jenkins notes, "Not every member must contribute, but all must believe they are free to contribute when ready and that what they contribute will be appropriately valued" (Jenkins, 2006a). As teachers, we want to consider articulating to future students a point at which they are expected to enter as individual contributors to the collaborative work.

Social connection helped students do more than they felt they could have done alone. Not all students bring the technological skills with them to accomplish what they envision, but by mapping their assets as a group and as a class, students were able to see resources beyond themselves and minimize the urge to give up due to their individual frustrations with process and/or technology. One student noted, "I liked how we all just helped each other—even if we weren't in groups." Students recognized they had a wider array of resources available to them than they would have perceived if they were working alone. Another student noted, "I like this project, and I'm glad we did this project in a group at school. I do not believe that I would have been able to execute this project alone."

Themes that Emerged

"That's Not Fair"

One of the issues that came up in this project was fairness. The different assets that each group possessed made it seem like some had an unfair advantage. We challenge the usefulness of "fairness" in school. One aim of our project was to have students make meaning about how belonging to different groups in society creates different experiences and how such differences are unavoidable. Fairness implies equality in which all people are treated the same and given the same assets. Instead, we attempted to achieve equitability, in which all are given the same opportunity but are affected by the affordances and constraints created by their individuality. Equitability offers a much more useful environment in which to educate students because it gives teachers the opportunity to guide students to look at the assets available to them rather than focusing on the deficits they possess relative to those around them. In this model, students solve problems and create differently because they have different tools, and they are challenged to recognize and manipulate those tools in useful ways.

"More Power to You"

Power is a theme at the core of both de la Peña's books and Jenkins's theory of participatory culture. Who has power in this world is often decided by factors outside an individual's control and steeped in inherited value systems. Race, associations, and age are all reasons that different parts of society have for oppressing the protagonists of de la Peña's books. In a society that increasingly relies on technological tools to participate, those who don't have the tools or skills required to operate those tools are left behind. This project did not create a more democratic society, but it did give students one experience in making original meaning through a socio-techno-cultural activity. One student wrote, "I would probably not want to do something like this again but since [I]'ve done it once it would probably be easier the second time."

The project also gave students the opportunity to examine power structures through the novels and through their own group dynamics. Gaining power in this world requires knowledge of the systems that dictate power as well as experience in navigating tools that can problematize those systems. Another student reflected, "I learned that working in a team gives you power because everyone in the team depends on each other to get the project done." Some of our students gained their first experience with some of these ideas, skills, and tools—a first experience on which they can build. In fact, for many, it was the first time they had been asked to step back from complex issues in their world and to think about them critically. In the process, students experienced the conversation and compromises that inform collaborative, social construction of knowledge as they worked to express their ideas, have them accepted by others, and problem-solve through creative and technical obstacles.

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