THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRAXIS, EMPOWERMENT AND CAPACITY FOR SOCIAL
JUSTICE ACTION AMONG YOUTH PARTICIPANTS IN A TECHNOLOGY- EMBEDDED,
ONLINE SOCIAL JUSTICE EDUCATION PROGRAM

By

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Abstract

This study explores the use of technology for social justice education in one case, the online social justice education platform TakingITGlobal (TIG). Framed by the theoretical work of Paulo Freire, the principles of social justice education and empowerment theory this study explores youth empowerment and engagement in TIG’s on-line platform. TIG’s program model has a clearly stated mandate to leverage technology use for social justice education and action. TIG connects unstructured youth engagement to a structured social justice framework that provides resources, opportunities for action and possibilities for connecting with a social justice community. While much has been written on the use of social media in supporting social justice, little work has been done around the use of social media within an explicit social justice education framework. Data were collected in the form of documents from the TIG website, an interview with a senior staff member and documents written by TIG youth members in which they self-reported their experiences using the TIG platform. Findings from the case study demonstrated that the primary focus of technology use in the platform was to facilitate the development of awareness and issue understanding, connect engaged individuals to networks and empower them to engage in sustainable and meaningful action. TIG pedagogy adhered to the principles of social justice education and demonstrated the technology-embedded practices that support the transformative use of technology. The findings indicate that TIG documentation expressed a clear intention to use technology to support social justice education and action. It also seems clear that TIG’s social justice education program and technology use interacted to support participants’ feelings of empowerment and development of praxis. Participants consistently identified their experience using the technology and platform as having a
positive impact on their feelings of empowerment, their engagement in social justice, and their capacity to achieve their social justice goals. TIG is an online space that purposefully combines political participation with the fluid collaborative elements associated with youth culture. Considering the evidence regarding the conditions necessary for transformative use of technology it would appear that more research should occur around the transformative potential of technology used explicitly for social justice within a pedagogic approach that adheres to the essential elements of social justice education suggested by Freire’s framework.
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Chapter One
Introduction

Research indicates that information computer technology use in schools has not produced the dramatic learning outcomes that proponents expected (Apple, 2010; Becker, 2001; Clark & Gorski, 2002; Cuban, 2001). Researchers have concluded that specific elements in the learning environment are associated with technology being used in a transformative way, among them a technology-embedded, critical and collaborative pedagogy (Becker, 2001; Cuban, 2001; Facer, 2011; Hattie, 2009). Proponents of the use of technology in education are still optimistic about new technologies. This optimism is based on the argument that youth are largely technologically competent (Prensky, 2001; Tapscott, 1998) and that youth tend to engage actively in social media (Ito et al., 2013; Ito et al., 2010; Jenkins et al., 2007; Loader, 2007; Loader & Mercea, 2011; Vromen, Xenos & Loader, 2015).

Several researchers argue that online communities create opportunities for non-hierarchal, user-centered learning experiences that participants identify as empowering and important (Gee, 2009, 2013b; Facer, 2011; Ito et al., 2013; Jenkins et al., 2007). Further, evidence suggests that while youth are viewed as largely politically apathetic (Buckingham, 1997, 1999; Loader, 2007; Loader & Mercea, 2011; Serup Christensen, 2015), in reality, youth are highly engaged in issue-based politics and formation of political identity through online political practices that are self-actualizing, empowering, and facilitated by participatory technology such as social media (Buckingham, 1999; Jenkins et al., 2009; Loader, 2007; Loader, Vromen & Xenos, 2014; Vromen et al., 2015; Westheimer, 2008). Additionally, online activity may indeed impact positively on political participation and redefine the nature of political participation and social activism.
(Cohen & Kahne, 2012; Ito et al., 2010; Jenkins et al., 2007; Loader et al., 2014; Serup Christiansen, 2015; Vromen et al., 2015). This study applies the theoretical framework of Paulo Freire (1994, 1996) and the principles of social justice education (Burrell Storms, 2012; Hackman, 2009; Mayhew & Fernandez, 2007) and draws from empowerment theory (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995) to explore the potential impact of participatory technology on youth empowerment and engagement in social justice action. The primary purpose of this case study was to explore the possibilities offered by participatory technology for youth empowerment for social justice, in particular, the ways technology may support the development of empowerment, praxis and engagement in social change among youth through a technology delivered social justice education program.

This study explores the use of technology for social justice education in one case, the online social justice education platform TakingITGlobal (TIG). Described as a “social network for social good” (TIG About, n.d.), TIG offers an extensive database and internal social networking tools that allow registered members and non-members access to thousands of resources, organizations, events, and global opportunities for action. Resources offered by the site include an online community with over 500,000 registered users. TIG’s program model is predominantly online with a clearly stated mandate to leverage technology use for social justice education and action. The primary focus of technology use in the platform is to facilitate the development of awareness and issue understanding, connect engaged individuals to networks, and empower them to engage in sustainable and meaningful action in the world (Annual Report, 2012; Annual Report, 2013; TIG About, n.d.; Guide to Action, 2004; TIG Programs, n.d.).
TIG vision of technology-embedded social justice pedagogy implicitly borrows from Freire’s work. TIG’s emphasis on social justice engagement as an iterative process that requires a pedagogic framework to support empowerment of youth for social action re-invents Freire in a digital space. Freire continuously asserted in his writing that his ideas were not a method to be followed but reinvented within one’s own context.

Therefore this case study describes the integration of social justice pedagogy and participatory technology, and examines the ways in which technology-embedded social justice education may support transformative education in the TakingITGlobal platform.

Much has been written on the possibilities or impossibilities of using what Vromen et al. (2015) termed “everyday” social media such as Facebook or Twitter for social justice, but little work has been done around the use of social media within an explicit social justice education framework. Considering the evidence regarding the conditions necessary for transformative use of technology it would appear that more research should occur around the transformative potential of technology used explicitly for social justice within a pedagogic approach that adheres to the essential elements of social justice education suggested by Freire’s framework.

Research Purpose and Research Questions

The primary purpose of this case study was to explore the possibilities offered by participatory technology for youth empowerment for social justice, in particular, the ways technology may support the development of praxis, empowerment, and engagement in social change among youth through a technology delivered social justice education program.

The study concentrates on four questions directly related to the research purpose:
1. How did TakingITGlobal intend to use technology to support social justice education and action?

2. How did elements of TakingITGlobal’s social justice education interact with technology, and how did this interaction impact upon empowerment and development of praxis in youth participants?

3. How did TakingITGlobal participants perceive their experience in using technology for empowerment and engagement in social justice?

4. How did TIG participants use technology in supporting their capacity to achieve social justice goals?

Technology is a broad term, but for the purposes of this research, technology will be defined as the forms of participatory technology that Ito et al. (2010) described as most clearly associated with youth culture and voice, including social media and digital spaces. Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, and Robinson (2009) defined such technology use as participatory because it emphasizes the interrelationship between technologies and the cultural communities associated with the use of these technologies. In particular, “new media technologies make it possible for average consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content in powerful new ways” (Jenkins et al., 2009, p. 8). The potential for youth to shape political narratives and identities through powerful media has significant implications for youth empowerment and agency. The current research describes how the digital social justice education program TakingITGlobal may be one of the innovative ways this technology is being used to support youth empowerment for social justice action in the world.
Organization of the Thesis

Chapter One outlines the arguments against and in support of transformative use of technology, and introduces the social justice frameworks employed in the study. Chapter One also introduces the case described in the study, the online social justice program TakingITGlobal, defines the research purpose, and details the four research questions that define the study.

Chapter Two considers the work of Paulo Freire, whose pedagogy of praxis or informed action, provides what Greene (1986) called the blueprint for critically aware, transformative education. Freire’s work implicitly informs much of the social justice pedagogy that serves as the framework for TakingITGlobal’s social justice education program and the theoretical framework of the current study. Chapter Two also describes how the principles of empowerment theory intersect with social justice pedagogy and Freire’s theory of praxis to support transformative education. Chapter Two will connect the use of technology to both praxis and empowerment, and consider how such technological tools may support transformative education through a descriptive case study of an online social justice education program, TakingITGlobal.

Chapter Three summarizes the literature around the use of technology in education, and in particular the debate around the potential of participatory technology to contribute to social justice education, youth political identity, and civic action.

Chapter Four describes the case study methodology employed in conducting the research, including the case selection criteria, description of participants, description of data sources, and the data collection process. Chapter Four also describes the process by which the data were coded and analysed.
Chapter Five provides a detailed description of the case, TakingITGlobal. Patton (1990) argued that the level of rigour required of qualitative research is dependent upon thick, solid descriptive data. Chapter Five provides description of the TakingITGlobal program, participants, social justice pedagogy and curriculum, and digital citizenship programs. Chapter Five also describes the ways in which technology is integrated with social justice and the development of praxis in the TIG platform, and how TIG members and staff express their understanding of the program in terms of empowerment, technology, and achieving their social justice goals.

Chapter Six considers the case study findings in relation to the research questions. The findings indicate that TIG expresses a clear intention to use technology to support social justice education and action. It also seems clear that TIG’s social justice education program interacts with technology use to support participants’ feelings of empowerment and development of praxis. Participants consistently identified their experience of using the technology and platform as having a positive impact on their feelings of empowerment, their engagement in social justice, and their capacity to achieve their social justice goals.
Chapter Two

Theoretical Framework

Paulo Freire

Paulo Freire’s (1994, 1996) pedagogy of praxis or informed action, provides what Greene (1986) called the blueprint for critically aware, transformative education. Freire’s work (1994, 1996) critiqued traditional educational practices as the “banking model” of education in which students were seen as “detached from reality” (Freire, 1996, p. 52) and students were conceived of as passive recipients of content designed, chosen, and directed by the teacher. Freire argued that democratic, problem-posing education was needed, education in which students “develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world….they come to see the world not as a static reality but as a reality in the process of transformation” (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Freire (1996) termed this process of transformation conscientization and described problem solving education as involving “a constant unveiling of reality”. While traditional educational practices seek to “maintain the submersion of consciousness, [conscientization] strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality” (Freire, 1996, p. 62). For Freire, education was about critical awareness through dialogue and problem posing, intervention in one’s own lived reality, and intentionality to change that reality.

Freire (1996) argued that the purpose of an education program was to position the learner as an active subject, rather than as a passive recipient of knowledge; Freire described such an education as creative and able to inspire passion and impatience for social change. For Freire, this process began at the "point of emergence" (Freire & Macedo, 1998, p. 83) or engagement with ideas, and is facilitated by a program that is
"active, dialogical, critical and criticism-stimulating" (Freire & Macedo, 1998, p. 83). Dialogue is essential, as dialogue develops a critical attitude but Freire also places importance on empathy, trust, and hope. For Freire, hope gives dialogue power and meaning. Freire (1996) described a process he called praxis, in which critical reflection and awareness generated by understanding of lived experience is supported by dialogue and collaboration with others with clear and hopeful intention to transform the world.

Freire thought all human kind contributes to the creation of culture through their labours, and rejected hierarchal models of knowledge. Within a Freirean framework, a popular culture blogger could contribute to world knowledge as significantly as a canonical work of literature. Freire's philosophy has important implications for the possibility of young people impacting upon their world through their creative labour because it does not dismiss the importance of this work merely because they are young and still forming their world view. In describing literacy, Freire said that learning is “an attitude of creation and re-creation, a self-transformation producing a stance of intervention in one's context” (Freire & Macedo, 1998, p. 86). The role of the educator in such learning is entering into dialogue with the student about concrete situations and providing the tools by which the learner can engage in praxis. In other words, the teacher’s role is to create the conditions for praxis through dialogue about real world problems that are meaningful to the student, and provide the tools to support the praxis process.

Freire (1996) argued that the process of praxis is essentially radical because it demands a new reading of reality, rather than adapting to an historical condition. Freire (Freire & Macedo, 1998) described the ways in which his students in Guinea-Bissau had
to critically comprehend and then radically re-conceptualize the colonizing ideology of their education system. In the current context, Freire's framework supports the reconceptualization of youth citizen positions and political participation suggested by Loader (2007) and Vromen et al. (2015) and the reconceptualization of youth culture described by Jenkins (2006), Gee (2013b), Facer (2011), and Ito et al. (2010) as non-hierarchal, individualized, and mediated by participatory technology. Such a reconceptualization is one that Freire would argue is necessarily radical as it seeks to re-read and re-make the world.

Freire (1996) argued that critical understanding and action-oriented practice are both necessary components of pedagogy. He cautioned against the negation of lived experience and practical application by theory, as well as the dangers of engaging in action disconnected from critical understanding. Freire’s (1996) pedagogy described five interconnected elements that together result in the process of praxis: lived experience; critical reflection; the development of a critical consciousness; collaboration and dialogue; and action. It is these five elements that provide the framework for transformative education that we define as social justice education.

**What is Social Justice Education?**

Bell (2007) defined social justice education as involving “social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of responsibility toward and with others, their society and the broader world in which we live” (Bell, 2007, pp. 61–62). Bell (2007) and Picower (2012) argued that social justice education must be both theoretical and practical while Nagda (2003) described the necessity of integrating curriculum and pedagogical process; all three researchers asserted that engaging students as both critical
thinkers and active agents of change is essential for transformative education. Hackman (2005) argued that social justice education is not only about diversity, dialogue, or democracy but must include critical interrogation of systems of power and prioritize student agency that is oriented toward social change. While Hackman (2005) identified a range of definitions and understandings of social justice education and acknowledged that the diversity of definitions work by supporting multiple entry points, she maintained that five fundamental components underpin any education program that identifies itself as engaged in active social justice with intentionality to create change in the world: content mastery; critical thinking and analysis of oppression; action and social change; personal reflection, and awareness of diverse group dynamics (Hackman, 2005, p. 2).

Mayhew and Fernandez (2007) found similar pedagogical components, including group dialogue, service learning, content understanding, peer interaction, and reflection contributed to student’s understanding of social justice education. Burrell Storms’ (2012) study of undergraduate students enrolled in social justice courses found that students identified curriculum elements such as content and issue understanding, and pedagogic elements such as connections to personal experience to social context, as well as collaboration with peers as essential to their engagement in social justice action.

Hackman’s list of essential pedagogical elements, Mayhew and Fernandez’ list of effective pedagogical components, and Burrell Storms’ findings are clearly similar; all use Freire’s pedagogy as a blueprint for their social justice education programs and prioritize Freire’s five interconnected elements that make up the process of praxis: lived experience, critical reflection, critical consciousness, collaboration, and action.
**Lived experience.** Leonardo (2004) claimed that Freire’s most important contribution to critical pedagogy was in the way he located critical education firmly within the lived experiences of real people. Freire (1996) argued that lived experience must be historically situated to be meaningful in the process of praxis; it must be attached to critical understanding of the conditions within which our lived experience was created. The role of the educator is to open paths of discovery for the learner to travel in the process of seeing and understanding the problem; the educator does not dictate the path or undergo the process for the learner. The process must be one of active problem solving by the learner, not passive reception of content. Freire (1996) objected to passive consumption in his description of the banking model of education and argued instead for a critical, active, problem solving model of learning in which students decide for themselves what is important to know and how to know it. In this model, students critically investigate their lived reality, identify problems, and actively engage in solutions to change the conditions of their lived reality.

Mayhew and Fernandez (2007) found that the experiences of students are “important sites for constructing a pedagogy of transformation and social justice” (p. 15) while, for Au (2012), curriculum must be connected to lived experience because the development of a critical consciousness is a social process. Bell (2007) argued that social justice education should begin with lived experience as the starting point for developing a critical standpoint and the passion to engage in action.

**Critical consciousness and critical reflection.** Leonardo (2004), in his discussion of critical social theory as an essential aspect of a quality education, defined critical awareness as the ability to “question, deconstruct and then reconstruct knowledge in the
interest of emancipation” (Leonardo, 2004, p. 12). Leonardo (2004) argued that criticism is not valuable in and of itself, but for the way in which it drives a process that aims at meaningful social change. Intentionality for action is an essential element of Freire’s (1996) concept of praxis, and reflection is a condition of action; “action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection” (Freire, 1996, p. 48).

Critical awareness must also include the understanding that our actions, thoughts and experiences are bound, in an interactive relationship with the power structures in which we are invested (Foucault, 1995, 1994; Greene, 1986; Leonardo, 2004). Freire (1996) described the relationship between oppressors and the oppressed as mutually constructed. By becoming emancipated through critical awareness, Freire (1996) argued, the oppressed were able to free not only themselves but their oppressors from the power structures that dehumanized them both. For Freire, hope for the future of the world lay in the critical process he called praxis, which would result in social action that sought to free all humanity from oppression.

Au (2012) makes a clear distinction between consciousness and critical consciousness, a distinction that originates in reflection. Doll (2013) asserted that “recursive reflection lies at the heart of a transformative curriculum” (Doll, 2013, p. 217) and that curriculum is a process requiring active meaning making by all actors in the environment. Freire (1996) so prioritized critical reflection that he considered critical reflection to be a change action, particularly when other forms of action may not be possible:
Action and reflection occur simultaneously. A critical analysis of reality may, however, reveal that a particular form of action is impossible or inappropriate at the present time. Those who through reflection perceive the infeasibility or inappropriateness of one or another form of action (which should accordingly be postponed or substituted) cannot thereby be accused of inaction. Critical reflection is also action (Freire, 1996, p. 109).

**Collaboration.** For Dewey (1916), learning is a by-product of a process of interaction. Doll (2013) argued that part of the complexity of teaching and learning is the negotiation between individual understandings that are both historically situated in lived experience and actively shaped through interaction. Hattie’s (2009) study of 800 studies in a meta-analysis concluded that, for learning environments, collaboration, not competition, led to more positive academic achievement outcomes. Social justice educators (Burrell Storms, 2012; Hackman, 2005; Mayhew & Fernandez, 2007) found collaboration and dialogue to be pedagogic elements consistently identified by students as contributing to their understanding and readiness for action.

For Freire (1996), collaboration was the process by which praxis occurred; “in the dialogical theory of action, Subjects meet in cooperation in order to transform their world” (Freire, 1996, p. 148). Freire’s (1996) conception of problem-posing education uses dialogue between actors in the educational environment so that “they become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow” and termed this educational practice “education as the practice of freedom” (Freire, 1996, p. 62). Social justice educators interpret Freire’s concept of dialogue as an aspect of student-centered classrooms that support diversity and student agency (Hackman, 2005). Mayhew and Fernandez (2007)
found that collaboration and dialogue were effective in supporting student’s understanding of social justice issues.

**Importance of action.** Education that aspires to transform students’ understanding of the world involves "embodying different habits of perception, of speaking, of theorizing, and of acting" (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2008, p. 23). Gurin-Sands and Gurin’s (2012) study of how intergroup dialogue models in university courses impacted on social justice activism found that dialogue students were more motivated than students enrolled in traditional courses to engage in personal and social action. Gurin-Sands et al. (2012) concluded that both critical knowledge building and critical dialogue were necessary to develop the politicized personal and group identity that motivates action. “Collective action is found more frequently” argued Gurin-Sands et al. “among individuals who have developed politicized group identities and who both cognitively and emotionally critique the existence of structurally created and reinforced inequalities” (Gurin-Sands et al., 2012, p. 62).

According to Freire, the development of critical awareness must include action and the hope for transformation, as any critique without hope is unable to sustain resistance or create the conditions for agency; critical pedagogy must assume that transformation is possible and engage in a hopeful and conscious re-making of the world (Freire, 1996; Greene, 1991; Leonardo, 2004). For Freire (1996) critical pedagogy is about transformation; it “requires theory to illuminate it” (p. 106). Praxis can never be purely theoretical; it is “reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed” (Freire, 1996, p. 107). Further, Freire (1996) emphasized that action must be initiated and led by the oppressed; any theory of transforming action must “assign the people a
fundamental role in the transformation process” (p. 107). Empowerment of the oppressed is a central aspect of Freire’s concept of praxis.

**Empowerment Theory**

Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) described empowerment as a construct that supports development of specific behaviours in individuals and groups, and connects individuals with support systems for the purpose of social change. Empowerment is a process by which “individual well-being is linked with the larger social and political environment” (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995, p. 569). Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) argued that empowerment is often confused with psychological constructs such as self-efficacy and locus of control, but identified empowerment as apart from these similar and contributing constructs. Empowerment, they argued is an:

intentional, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources or simply a process by which people gain control over their lives, democratic participation in the life of the community, and a critical understanding of their environment (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995, p. 570).

Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) defined empowerment as both a processes and an outcome; certain processes may be perceived as empowering, while the outcome of such processes “may be a level of being empowered” (p. 570). Examples of empowering processes could include participation in organizations, collective decision making, shared leadership, and collective action (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Feeling empowered could include feelings of control in specific contexts, mobilizations of skills, development
of organizational networks, and creation of organizational partnerships (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Collaboration, access to resources and tools, and critical understanding of the sociopolitical environment are essential elements of empowerment; “organizational and community empowerment, however, are not simply a collection of empowered individuals” (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995, p. 571). As Sampson, McAdam, MacIndoe and Weffer-Elizondo (2005) argued in their study on social activism, the development of a sense of collective engagement connected by an organizational framework is a necessary condition of collective action. Engaged individuals must act with intentionality as a community to develop community level empowerment. Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) described a number of empowerment models, but highlighted four key elements that appear in organizations that support individual and collective empowerment:

- Motivating and challenging positive group belief systems
- Meaningful opportunities that capitalize on members’ diversity and strengths
- Diverse and deeply connected array of economic and social supports
- Talented and dynamic leadership (Perkins & Zimmerman, p. 574)

This list mirrors many of the principles and practices of social justice education and Freire’s framework. It also aligns with what many proponents view as the empowering aspects of participatory technologies such as flexible leadership, low barriers to participation, interest-based, supportive community connections, and the possibility of diverse identity positions (Gee, 2009, 2013b; Loader, 2007; Loader et al., 2014; Vromen et al., 2015).
Technology as a Tool for Empowerment and Praxis

Freire (1994, 1996) argued that the role of the educator is to create the conditions for dialogue and provide the tools for critical awareness leading to purposeful action towards a more equitable world. Technology is most certainly the tool of the learner in the 21st century (Gee, 2013b; Ito et al., 2010; Ito et al., 2013). It is not, however, the tools we use, but the ways in which we use them and the purposes we use them for that define the use as transformative or empowering. Jenkins et al. (2009) argued that “the tools available to a culture matter, but what that culture chooses to do with those tools matters more” (Jenkins et al., 2007, p. 8). Cuban (2001) argued that when we use technology we must ask why and to what purpose we are using it.

Freire (1996) asserted that if we are to re-read the world, we must reinvent the tools needed for this process; others have argued that new technologies are capable of transforming democracy by providing new spaces and pathways for civic and political engagement (Gee, 2013b; Loader, 2007; Selwyn, 2007; Vromen et al., 2015). Freire (1996) argued that collaboration is essential to socially transformative education; new technology allows for easy access to collaboration on an unprecedented scale (Gee, 2013a, 2013b; Ito et al., 2013). Jenkins et al. (2009) argued that participatory technology enables a shift in emphasis from individual voice to community action. The collaborative nature of participatory technology and the ease by which knowledge can be shared creates the context for the potential translation of ideas and thoughts into action, and for critical reflection to develop in to concrete change (Cohen & Kahne, 2012; Facer, 2011). To employ the tools of technology in the sense Freire (1994, 1996) intended, youth need
to use technology to identify and engage in social issues and to become empowered for collaborative critique and action for social change.

Examples of technology use for empowerment of youth for social action are numerous: Generation Pulse; the Harry Potter Alliance; Youth Voices, and the Born This Way Foundation for example, illustrate that youth are capable of shaping the uses of technology for their own political purposes. TakingITGlobal is unique even among these cases due to a conscious and intentional integration of technology use with social justice education principles for the purpose of education that empowers and engages youth in re-reading and re-making the world.
Chapter Three

Literature Review

The Technology Debate

Technology has not produced the dramatic learning outcomes many proponents expected. Potential reasons for this failure include: the digital divide, which concerns issues of equitable access and use; lack of teacher technological training; lack of structural support for technology use, and pedagogy that does not support effective use of technology (Becker, 2001; Clark & Gorski, 2002; Cuban, 2001; Ito et al., 2010, 2013; Zhao, Pugh, Sheldon & Byers, 1995). Becker’s (2001) classic study of technology use in schools still represents one of the most extensive studies of the failure of technology in education. In the study, Becker found that technology has traditionally been used for the attainment of basic literacy and numeracy skills and is rarely used in transformative or innovative ways in any classrooms (Becker, 2001) while Zhao et al. (1995) found that teachers frequently fail to use technology in an innovative way. These classic studies highlight the issues associated with computer use in education in the early years but remain relevant to technology use in modern educational environments. Gray, Thomas, and Lewis (2010) conducted three national surveys of teacher technology use in schools, finding similar results to those found by Becker. Gray et al. (2010) found that while computer access was mostly equitable, computer use was differential; teachers clearly used computers less frequently with low SES students. Significantly, while the questionnaire addressed the use of social media, the survey found that the technology used most often in schools was laptops, interactive whiteboards, and projectors; the form of technology use was most often administrative, email, and word processing. Gee
(2013b) has argued that traditional classrooms are incompatible with transformative use of technology and Facer (2011) finds it necessary to defend the viability of schools as physical spaces in a digital educational environment.

Becker (2001) and Zhao et al. (1995) found pedagogy to be the most impactful variable on transformative computer use, identifying computer use as being strongly influenced by teacher beliefs about teaching and learning. Becker (2001) concluded that a critical, inquiry-based and collaborative pedagogy may support transformative use of technology, while Zhao et al. (1995) identified the interaction of teacher pedagogy with the technology and the educational context as the primary factor in effective technology use. These conclusions are supported by other researchers (Cuban, 2001; Facer, 2011; Gray et al., 2010; Hattie, 2009).

Innovative technology use in education is a complex issue. Zhao et al. (1995) argued that too often research focuses on the technology itself without considering the interaction between technology and the context in which it is to be used. Hattie (2009), in his argument against unbridled innovation, asserted that educators should not merely seek to innovate, but should learn what makes a difference when they innovate. This argument is central to the technology use debate. It is not the technology that creates a positive effect but how it is used and why. It is essential that teachers are not only competent in the use of technology, but that they embrace technology to the point that they embed it in their pedagogy (Becker, 2001; Cuban, 2001; Gee 2009; Zhao et al., 1995). Zhao et al. (1995) found that when the use of technology was consistent with pedagogical beliefs and the technology was conceived of as a tool to support practice and curriculum objectives, the use of technology had a positive impact. The reverse was true when technology was
isolated from curriculum and practice or not compatible with the pedagogical beliefs of the teacher. Certain teaching practices, such as teacher centered learning, rote learning, and emphasis on individual effort have not proven to be teaching practices best supported by technology (Apple, 2010; Becker, 2001; Cuban, 2001). Using technology outside of the practices it best supports reduces the positive effects of technology, and potentially upholds the inequities that advocates claim new technologies have the potential to subvert (Facer, 2011; Gee, 2013b; Jenkins et al., 2009).

**Transformative Education and Technology**

Many researchers argue that the emancipatory potential of technology is eroded if not disallowed by the existing structure of the education system (Apple; 2010; Becker; 2001; Cuban, 2001; Gee, 2013a, b; Ito et al., 2013). The problem, argued Cuban (2001), is that the educational system lacks any sense of social purpose, and the problem with technology in particular is that it is used without any understanding of the social practices that accompany it. Apple (2010) argued that this lack of understanding is a deliberate form of social control, intended to uphold existing inequities, while Gee (2013b) asserted that we are in an anti-education era, in which we “have forgotten education as a force for equality in the sense of making everyone count and enabling everyone to fully participate in society” (p. 31). There are many educators who believe that contributing to the building of democratic ideals and principles should be the purpose of education (Apple, 1993, 2010; Cuban, 2001; Dewey, 1916; Gee, 2013b; Kohn, 2008; Westheimer, 2008); according to these educators technology use, to be transformative, must also be intended to support empowerment and democratization, not as a periphery outcome but as a primary and intentional goal of education.
The use of the internet to support the ideals of democratic and transformative education has mirrored the history of the use of technology in general; fervent belief and fanfare followed by crushing disappointment as the reality of the technology use was evaluated (Loader & Mercea, 2011). Far from providing transformative and emancipatory experiences, the internet seemed more likely to support entrenched social and economic structures and privilege the narratives of dominant social groups (Apple, 2010; Fuchs, 2014; Gray et al, 2010). This first wave of technology fervour followed by disillusionment has been replaced by a second wave of optimism attached to the empowering possibilities and democratic potential of social media, Web 2.0, and mobile technologies. Proponents argue that such technologies offer the possibility of participation through membership in communities that are fluid, non-hierarchal, and oriented toward self-actualization; participatory technologies are seen to facilitate engagement in a form of politics that is personalized, empowering, and identity based (Loader, 2007; Loader & Mercea, 2011; Loader et al. 2014; Vromen, 2015). Further, this type of alternative political practice is viewed as particularly appealing to youth, who tend to be disengaged from traditional democratic practices, highly engaged in issue and identity politics, and largely competent with the tools of participatory technology such as social media (Facer, 2011; Gee, 2013a, b; Jenkins et al., 2009; Loader, 2007; Loader & Mercea, 2011; Loader et al., 2014, Vromen et al., 2015; Westheimer, 2008).

This view of online spaces is certainly a positive one. The assumption that all youth are technologically competent and have equitable access to technology and instruction in transformative use of technology is questionable (Becker, 2001; Cuban, 2001; James et al., 2009). While terms such as “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001) and the “Net generation”
(Tapscott, 1998) are widely used, they are reductive and deeply problematic (Bennet & Maton, 2010; Brown & Czerniewicz, 2010) as these terms assume a homogeneity of experience, based on age, for which there is no evidence (Brown & Czerniewicz, 2010). There are technologically competent adults and technologically incompetent youth. More importantly, even if one assumes that youth of today are a digital generation (Ito et al., 2010), youth competence with technology does not necessarily translate into the type of innovative learning described by technology advocates (Cuban, 2001; Gee, 2013a,b; Ito et al., 2013). Youth are more likely to use technology for recreational purposes, particularly in the absence of explicit instruction and support in using technology for critical thinking or innovative learning (Cohen & Kahne, 2012; Cuban, 2001; Jenkins et al., 2009). The potential of participatory technology for agency and self-expression has been eroded by the challenges of cyberbullying and hostile internet interactions such as trolling, flaming, and doxing. Weinstein et al. (2015), in a longitudinal study, found that youth online civic expression was significantly declining in everyday social media sites due to perceived hostile environments. Young people who engage politically online and express civic identities in digital spaces are more likely, according to Weinstein’s (2015) study, to experience hostile online interactions.

The enthusiasm for the vision of the technologically empowered young citizen clouds the reality that unlike Gee’s (2009) conception of affinity spaces, many digital spaces are unsafe, hierarchal, compromise participants’ privacy, and position participants as consumers (Fuchs, 2014; James et al., 2009; Weinstein et al., 2015). While participatory technologies may be viewed as inherently democratic (Gee, 2009; Jenkins et al., 2009; Jenkins, 2006) because they potentially permit users to produce, remake,
rework, and re-envision culture, such a conceptualization may be wishful thinking and certainly has its critics (Fuchs, 2014; Morozov, 2011, 2009). Fuchs (2014) argued that online technology is not used this way and cannot be used this way because of the consumer-based nature of the internet. He suggested that microblogging platforms such as Twitter are dominated by lifestyle and entertainment topics and consequently contribute nothing to democratic debate or social change; further, he asserted that digital technologies make the world seem more equitable while consistently upholding dominant and oppressive views, serving to submerge real debate and action on equity issues (Fuchs, 2014).

What then, as Gee (2013b) asked, constitutes a proper education in the highly technological 21st century for a person who “wants to be a producer, and not just a consumer, a participant and not just a spectator, an agent and not a victim in a world full of ideology, risk, fear and uncertainty” (p. 25). Facer (2011) in her discussion of the future of education in a technological world, argued that we can envision a future in which education serves to create active citizens who act upon the world. Questions regarding the future direction of education and technology are inextricably linked with conceptions of the purpose of education. If one believes that the purpose of education should be to develop not only academic achievement or workplace skills, but empowered and active citizens of the world, then social justice education becomes a tool in the development of such a future; social justice education allows us to have the conversations that matter (Au, 2012). The question then becomes: what is the relationship between social justice education and participatory technology, particularly in light of the history of computer technology and education.
Participatory Technology and Conversations that Matter

A number of theorists have argued that young people are already actively engaging in conversations that matter through participatory technologies in digital affinity spaces (Gee, 2013; Loader, 2007; Loader & Mercea, 2011; Loader et al., 2014; Vromen et al., 2015; Westheimer, 2008). Ito et al. (2010) characterized participatory technology as digital, networked, interactive, and an integral part of modern youth culture and voice while Jenkins et al. (2009) defined participatory technologies as the technology forms that help shape and facilitate participatory culture. For Jenkins et al. (2009), participatory cultures are characterized by informal membership in affinity spaces (Gee, 2009) that have few barriers to creative participation and civic engagement, provide strong support for sharing user generated content, and a flexible mentorship model in which knowledge is passed from experienced participants to beginners. Within such communities members are free to contribute regardless of their level of expertise; Gee (2009) and Jenkins et al. (2009) argued that all members feel their contributions are valued and there is a strong degree of social connection between community members that is facilitated by technology. These technologies include online interest groups such as gaming communities and social media, digital forms of creative expression such as podcasting, blogs, and You Tube, and collaborative problem solving such as Wikipedia (Jenkins et al., 2009).

Jenkins (2006) and Ito et al. (2010) found that such groups developed around interest affinity and identity formation, while Loader (2007), Loader et al. (2014) and Vromen et al. (2015) argued that participatory culture and the associated technologies permit new forms of civic engagement and diverse pathways to political participation.
Weinstein (2014) found that youth did express civic identities online, but in a later study (Weinstein et al., 2015) found a pattern of withholding political expression from everyday social media that could be at least partially explained by youth choosing to express their political identities in safer online spaces. Such digital spaces with politically engaged participants or “curated settings and audiences” (Weinstein et al., 2015, p. 87) may offer more than safe haven for political identity formation; they may in fact provide the type of pedagogic support that Freire (1996) argued was necessary for the development of praxis leading to social activism. Online spaces which integrate social media forms with social justice pedagogy and curriculum may move the conversation about what matters toward praxis that potentially results in meaningful impact upon the world.

Youth political identity. Traditional politics, according to Loader (2007), tend to be hierarchal, with little space for youth, who are viewed as citizens-in-waiting (Buckingham, 1997b). In contrast, online political spaces may provide a point of intersection between traditional forms of democracy and socially loose, non-hierarchal, flexible "affinity spaces" (Gee, 2009). These spaces, Loader asserted, "provide young people with the communication channels to both facilitate such less regulated personal interaction and grant access to a broader range of transnational political influences” (Loader, 2007, p. 3). In this view, digital media, as the pervasive form of communication among youth, enable participants to engage politically on their own terms and in their own way. While Vromen et al. (2015) indicated that some youth political groups primarily used social media to organize and recruit members, the potential exists for more civically active use of technology as members re-purpose social media for political
use (Cohen & Kahne, 2012; Jenkins et al., 2009; Vromen et al., 2015). Further, Vromen et al. (2015) studied the use of everyday social media such as Twitter and Facebook in organizing for political expression and did not consider spaces such as TakingITGlobal that combine participatory technology with explicit social justice and civics education.

James et al. (2009) argued that new media are providing youth with new spaces for identity exploration and construction by allowing for diversity in self-expression and self-reflection, as well as exposing youth to more diverse audiences that provide the social feedback required for identity formation. Within traditional politics, youth are largely perceived as apathetic (Buckingham, 1999; Westheimer, 2009). Youth are often ineligible to vote, tend not to vote, and do not affiliate themselves with political parties as politically active adult citizens do (Cohen & Kahne, 2012; Loader, 2007; Loader & Mercea, 2011; Vromen et al., 2015; Westheimer, 2008). Research indicates, however, that youth are engaging in political discourse in new and non-traditional spaces and identifying with self-actualizing political practices that suggest new forms of engaged citizenship (Jenkins et al., 2009; Loader, 2007; Vromen et al., 2015; Westheimer, 2008). Weinstein et al. (2015) found that 72% of the study interview subjects expressed political identities on personal social media platforms, although this pattern changed over time as respondents aged and responded to online issues such as hostility and surveillance. Weinstein et al. (2015) found that these changed participation patterns indicated that some interview subjects chose to express their political identities in spaces other than everyday social media, including offline and curated online spaces with a more differentiated audience.
Loader (2007) viewed political practices by youth as more concerned with identity construction within a changing and increasingly globalized world; youth political participation, he argued, is defined by "fluidity, mobility, individualism and consumerism" (Loader, 2006, p. 2). While both Loader and Jenkins (2009) were able to reconcile consumerism with empowerment, some critics (Apple, 2010; Fuchs, 2014; Morozov, 2011) found this contradiction more problematic.

Ito et al. (2010) concluded in their three year ethnographic study of youth technology use that the generational identity for today’s youth is a technological one, a finding supported by Loader (2007) and Vromen et al. (2015). Ito et al. (2010) described the many ways in which youth are “hanging out” in digital spaces; developing knowledge, identity, and agency through the tools of participatory technology in unique and collaborative ways. Ito et al. (2010) and Jenkins et al. (2009) argued that the online participatory cultures that form around interest-based online activity tended to develop individual participants’ sense of agency and interest in civic engagement. Cohen and Kahne (2012) conducted a large scale, national study that surveyed nearly 3,000 American youth between the ages of 15 and 25 years of age and targeted four ethnic groups. Analysing data drawn from three surveys and follow up interviews, Cohen and Kahne (2012) concluded that youth who are highly involved in non-political, interest-driven online activity were five times more likely to engage in the eleven indicators of participatory politics as defined by the study, such as political blogging or petitioning, and four times more likely to engage in any form of political act than youth who were not highly engaged online. The study found that almost half of all youth surveyed had engaged in at least one act of participatory politics online, suggesting that political
participation in digital spaces is an important dimension of youth political participation and identity. Cohen and Kahne (2012) also found that participatory technology had the potential for more equitable political participation, both in terms of increased participation of youth who are marginalized in the political process in general, and across racial and ethnic groups within youth culture. The study found distribution of participation online to be far more equitable than the distribution of participation in traditional political forms such as voting. Cohen and Kahne (2012) describe their findings as a “cultural shift” (Cohen & Kahne, 2012, p. 9) in which the pervasiveness of youth participation in online cultural spaces may transfer to the political realm. Loader (2007) described young people as “culturally displaced” in terms of their political engagement: “young people are not necessarily any less interested in politics than previous generations but rather traditional political activity no longer appears appropriate to address the concerns associated with contemporary youth culture” (Loader, 2007, pp. 1–2).

The Cohen and Kahne (2012) study supported the public perception of youth as politically apathetic, as it indicated that over half of all the youth surveyed did not engage in any political activity at all; nevertheless, it is clear from the survey data that participatory technologies are a potential avenue by which youth may engage politically via their participation in online cultural spaces.

Some studies have indicated that the internet impacts positively on political mobilization and in particular support youth mobilization in offline spaces (Cohen & Kayne, 2012; Serup Christensen, 2015). Vromen et al. (2015) found that social media use is pervasive among youth groups of a public or civic nature; citizenship norms were found to be contextual but social media was used consistently to share information,
mobilize action, and “redefine political action and political spaces” (p. 80). Perhaps the most interesting finding of the study was the ways in which social media use was described as shaping both the nature of political engagement and the definition of what it means to be an active citizen (Vromen et al., 2015).

Several researchers referenced the perceived apathy of youth in traditional politics and suggested that youth are increasingly more involved in issue politics attached to conceptions of identity formation and self-actualization (Loader, 2007; Loader et al., 2014; Vromen et al., 2015; Westheimer, 2008). Within this conceptualization, participatory technologies are viewed as supporting a new model of active citizenship that is personalized, divorced from political party affiliation, self-actualizing, non-hierarchal, social, facilitated by digital networking, and increasingly expressed as issues-related digital activism (Loader et al., 2014; Vromen et al., 2015).

**Digital spaces and civic action.** Sociality is central to the potential of participatory technology to contribute to youth empowerment for political action. Wilson (2002) argued that an “information system that knits diverse people together through meaningful relationships” holds real promise for facilitating civic participation and participatory democracy (Wilson, 2002, p. 384). Sampson et al. (2005) analysed over 4,000 civic engagement events in Chicago over a 30 year period in order to better describe the changing identity of civic engagement. They concluded that “meaningful relationships” have less to do with membership in traditional civic groups, and more to do with commitment to collective action within a community. They argued that when civic action is reconceptualised as collective social action, engagement in civic action does not appear to be weakening. Further, this study found that collective action did not result from
aggregation of individual action but through the development of a sense of collective engagement and efficacy facilitated by an organizational infrastructure, rather than dense social ties (Sampson et al., 2005). Such an argument aligns with empowerment theory models (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995) and supports the effectiveness of online social justice communities which connect participant engagement to an organized network.

Cohen and Kahne (2012) argued that networks have always played an important role in civil activism and online networks are no exception. Social networks that support critically engaged youth in expressing their understanding and commitment to social justice politics allow youth to develop citizenship norms that include the development of collective efficacy that is essential for mobilization and action.

This concept of activism that is meaningful and impactful, even though it is attached to a digital network rather than a face-to-face community, is important. Critics of the role of technology in activism frequently locate their argument in the ineffectiveness of digital activism and the possibility that such virtual activism replaces more traditional forms of political participation that are more impactful and meaningful (Fuchs, 2014; Morozov, 2009).

Slacktivism refers to actions that are termed political activism by participants but have no real impact on political outcomes or affect any change in the world (Morozov, 2011). The term is generally aimed at social network campaigns and petitions that give participants the illusion of enacting social change that make them feel better about themselves but have little real impact and may in fact be affiliated with consumer campaigns, consumption models or government surveillance (Morozov, 2009). Critics argue that slacktivism leads to deterioration in the quality of participation by the
politically engaged. In other words, people may engage in acts of slacktivism instead of more impactful forms of political participation. Cohen and Kahne (2012) found this argument to be without merit; their large scale survey data found that while participatory politics are an important aspect of youth political identity, politically active youth tend to engage in traditional political practice as well. The study found that 90% of youth who reported acts of participatory politics also reported voting or involvement in institutional politics. The politically engaged do not appear to substitute online activity for offline activity, but rather, engage in both forms of participation (Cohen & Kahne, 2012; Jenkins et al., 2009; Serup Christianson, 2011).

Serup Christianson (2011), in his description of the difference between slacktivism and virtual activism, defined slacktivism as “low effort activities that are incapable of furthering political goals as effectively as traditional forms of participation” (p. 4) and argued that such a criticism could also be applied to many traditional methods of political participation, including voting and signing a petition. Further, as digital activism critic Morozov (2011) noted, even acts of slacktivism require political interest, however slight; the way to tell whether an act of online activism is serious or slacktivist, according to Morozov (2011), is to look at what it aspires to achieve. Freire asserted “that critical reflection is also action” (Freire, 1996, p. 109); while not all online political acts may be equal, the slacktivism label does not apply to online social justice spaces that work to actively develop critical consciousness and provide resources and education that empower participants in real world change.
Participatory Technology, Youth Identity, and Social Justice Pedagogy

Vromen et al. (2015) focused on the increasing use of social media for political engagement, but one must understand the difference between participant’s use of the technology and the intended use of the technology. Facebook, for example, may be used for social justice action by users and indeed Facebook Causes is an explicit attempt to leverage the platform in this way, but there is definite tension between social justice ideals and Facebook’s corporate intentions (Fuchs, 2014). Little research has been done on the convergence of participatory technology, youth political identity, and participatory technology spaces which are designed specifically for social justice and supported by social justice pedagogical ideals. It is possible to argue that online social justice spaces such as TakingITGlobal, the Harry Potter Alliance, the Born This Way Foundation, Generation Pulse, and others do indeed support user empowerment through knowledge and awareness building, community building, and orientation toward social action. Cohen and Kahne (2012) concluded that support and infrastructure will be necessary for youth engagement in participatory politics to reach full potential while Loader (2007) suggested that online political spaces that purposefully combine traditional political action and the world of informal, individualized youth culture represent an intersection that provides "genuine opportunities for young people's political efficacy" (Loader, 2007, p.4) and may very well suggest the future of democratic engagement.

What is needed is rigorous, theoretically-informed research that reports on current use of participatory technology and how it is, or is not, empowering youth for social justice action. Descriptive case studies may enable us to identify the conditions under
which participatory technology may effectively support social justice pedagogy and engagement in meaningful social justice action by youth.
Chapter Four

Methodology

The primary purpose of this case study was to explore the possibilities offered by participatory technology for youth empowerment for social justice, in particular the ways technology may support the development of praxis, empowerment, and engagement in social change among youth through a technology delivered social justice education program. In this study, I describe the use of technology within a single case, the online social justice program, TakingITGlobal (TIG).

Case Selection and Participants

Selection of the case was dependent upon a number of factors being present in the educational environment. In order to address the research questions, the research site needed to embed participatory technology use within a social justice education program and engage in practices that created the conditions for empowerment, agency, and praxis. The following case criteria were suggested by the literature on technology use in education and the theoretical framework:

- Use of participatory technology embedded in social justice education pedagogy and curriculum.
- Social justice interest-focused affinity space rather than broad social media.
- Orientation toward self-actualizing political identity rather than affiliation with a specific political position (issues and identity based politics).
- Collaborative approach with peer-to-peer interactions supported by participatory technology and social justice pedagogy.
- Social justice pedagogy with orientation toward collective action.
- Flexible, non-hierarchal authority structure that is youth-led.
- Oriented toward equity and emancipation.
- Emphasis on sociality

There are many social justice education programs, some of which, like Free the Children/Me to We, have a significant online presence with Facebook and Twitter followers in the millions. In order to address the research questions, the research site needed to embed technology within its social justice education program; technology needed to be used with intentionality for social justice action. Vromen et al. (2014) described a variety of youth empowerment organizations that, like Me to We, use social media for circulation of information, recruitment, mobilization, and the maintenance of a brand identity. Vromen et al. (2015) suggested such organizations do not create alternate spaces for youth political engagement or identities but rather reassert citizenship norms such as volunteering and voting. Vromen et al. (2015) described such organizations as using technology as an additional tool in their existing offline activism.

In contrast, TakingITGlobal is an example of the type of online, youth-led organization that Vromen et al. (2015) argued is more likely to support self-actualizing political positions; “digital media are used to enable participants to personalize engagement on their own terms” (Vromen et al., 2015, p. 82). Such organizations conceive of technology as central to the groups’ activism, as demonstrated by TIG’s extensive and active online community.

Taking IT Global (TIG) is a recognized and established program with over 500,000 registered users. TIG’s social justice education programs and online community demonstrate clear commitment to the principles of social justice pedagogy. TIG employs
student-centered, collaborative, experiential, technology-embedded instruction practices that have been shown to provide the context for transformative technological use (Becker, 2001; Cuban, 2001; Gee, 2009; Hattie, 2009; Zhao et al., 2002). The organization’s commitment to the use of technology is clearly demonstrated by eight programs intended to support digital citizenship and two mobile applications (Explore 150 and Commit2Act) intended to leverage technology for engagement in social justice.

TIG has a significant social media presence, including active profiles on what Vromen et al. (2015) called “everyday” social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Google+, and Linked In. Members are able to connect their profiles to everyday social media sites but TIG also has internal social media tools that allow members to connect with other members, programs, partners, and resources without following external links. TIG members can “friend” other members, “like” other members’ projects, and use internal messaging to contact other members. Sociality is clearly a priority in TIG’s approach to social justice education.

TIG’s partnerships include significant members of the social justice, technology, and education sectors, including the United Nations, Promethean, Microsoft, Adobe, and Canadian government organizations (Annual Report, 2013, p. 38; TIG About/supporters, n.d.), but the organization is youth-led and youth oriented (TIG About/Who We Serve, n.d.). These partnerships allow TIG to provide extensive resources and programming but TIG itself is a not-for-profit organization that does not affiliate itself with a particular political position other than social justice and increased youth political participation (TIG About/affiliations, n.d.). TIG’s program model is predominantly online with a clearly
stated mandate to leverage technology, and in particular social media, for social justice education and action (TIG Issues/technology, n.d.).

Two types of participants were recruited for this study. The first participant was a TIG senior staff member closely involved with curriculum and pedagogical planning as well as with administration of the online community. Liam O’Doherty is the Community Partnerships manager for TakingITGlobal and is also responsible for many aspects of the online community. O’Doherty has been with TIG as a senior staff member for over eight years. My 45 minute interview with Mr. O’Doherty was conducted by telephone on October 7, 2014.

The second type of participant was chosen from registered users of the TIG platform. In order to use the platform, users must sign up for a free membership account which requires users to create a member profile. Creation of a member profile requires users to share some biographical information, including geographic location, gender, and issue interest. While the registered members were homogeneous in the sense of shared affinity for social justice, they demonstrated variability in other respects, including age, country affiliation, issue interest, race, and gender as demonstrated by their self-created membership profiles. This diversity in user profiles allowed for both the description of shared aspects of the core experience, as well as permitting the descriptions of variations in experiences that enriched the data (Patton, 1990).

Users may choose to contribute testimonials to the Member Stories section of the online community which is then linked to their member profile. Seventy-five Member Stories were chosen using the site randomize function and included in the study to illustrate how participants perceived their engagement in social justice through the TIG
The design of the Member Stories page (Figure 1) asks participants to answer four questions about their social justice interests. These questions are:

1. What inspires you?
2. Tell us about an issue that matters to you and how you became aware and involved.
3. Share your perspectives on what makes a good leader.
4. Do you think TakingITGlobal can help you achieve some of your goals? Have we already?

Figure 1. Sample Member Story page. Member Story for Davis Opoku Ansah. Pages include biographical information (name, country) and a hyperlink to the user’s TIG profile page. There are options to contact the user directly, leave a comment, and share the story on social media. Each member Story includes answers to the same four questions and a selected quotation from their answer is featured at the top of the page.

Only question four related directly to the use of the TIG platform for social justice and was therefore included in the analysis as most relevant to the research questions. In addition, I only considered Member Stories that were self-generated, excluding any stories that were created by TIG staff. The TIG platform has extensive translation
capacities, (the site is available in thirteen languages) but I only included Member Stories published in English. It is important to note that all Member Stories must meet certain criteria before they are published on the website. These criteria include appropriateness, adequate use of writing conventions, and the “submitting member’s level of activity within the online community” (TIG About/community, n.d.), although the process for assessing a member’s level of activity is not specified. The criteria for acceptance of a Member Story also stipulate that stories are intended to be inspirational; TIG chooses to feature stories “about youth who are passionate, who are making a difference, and who are using TakingITGlobal to achieve their goals” (TIG About/community, n.d.).

It is important to note that TIG is explicitly targeted to youth membership, which TIG defines as “young people between 13-30 years of age, who show some level of being globally aware and engaged as socially responsible leaders of their communities” (TIG About, n.d.). Inclusion of youth participants’ viewpoints and experiences is essential in a study with a social justice perspective, where all voices and experiences are considered and valued, and young people are positioned as actors within the social network, rather than docile bodies without agency (Sargeant & Harscourt, 2012). Further, Sargeant and Harscourt (2012) argued that including youth in research in an authentic manner not only provides the missing perspective of those who experience the effects of learning environments, but also positions them as active social agents, important considerations for social justice oriented research.

**Access to site.** I sought ethical clearance from the university (Education Research Ethics Board and General Research Ethics Board) and the organization sponsoring the program (Taking IT Global) before entering the research site.
Data Collection

Data were collected between August, 2014 and December, 2014. Two forms of data were collected, one individual educator interview and documents from the TIG website. Document types included policy documents, curriculum documents, and self-reported descriptions of participants’ experiences within the program (Member Stories). These member-generated stories from the website allowed participants to describe their experience in their own words. These data permitted deeper understanding of participants’ development of critical awareness leading to praxis and feelings of empowerment for social justice, and, in particular, in the use of technology in this process.

Interview. The senior staff interview was conducted by telephone with Community Partnerships manager Liam O’Doherty on October 7, 2014. The interview was approximately 45 minutes long. The audio-recording of the interview was transcribed verbatim and field notes were typed immediately after the interview was concluded. The interview was transcribed and analyzed within a week after the data were collected.

Document selection. Three types of documents were collected to complement the interview and to support triangulation of data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). These documents were collected between August, 2014 and December, 2014 from the website https://www.tigweb.org/. Official documents included the Annual Reports for the most recent years available (2012, 2013) and TIG-created descriptions of programs produced for public consumption. Such documents must necessarily be examined for organizational bias, particularly in advertising and branding materials (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Official documents examined also included curriculum documents published online which were
referred to as Guide to Actions, which provided a detailed description of the organization’s social justice curriculum and pedagogy. Official statistical data sources included the organization’s internally generated numbers regarding description of participants, participation in programs and social media, and perception of social justice impacts on both participants and the world. Such data may describe trends within the case setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) that contribute to understanding of the research questions. These data, however, must be viewed critically, as statistical data created within an organization must be examined for the ways in which they may be used to construct a particular story or reality (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Similarly, qualitative data from organizational staff or stakeholders interviews and even program participants must be examined for bias that may contribute to the creation of a specific narrative regarding the program.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) described personal documents as “subject-produced data” that “describes an individual’s actions, experiences and beliefs” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 124). As participants’ perceptions of their own feelings of empowerment and praxis using technology for social justice were central to the research questions, it was essential that first person narratives be included in the data. Personal documents can also include documents written by subjects that are discovered, rather than solicited by the interviewer (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Discovered personal documents were particularly instructive data to answer the research questions which sought to understand the relationship between empowerment for social justice action and the use of participatory technologies by youth. What youth chose to say about their experiences and how they used technology in these experiences were central areas of exploration.
**Codes, themes, and pattern seeking.** The data were analyzed through open coding and identification of themes and patterns (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In addition, ongoing reflection and analysis took place throughout the data collection process as interpretation shapes and re-shapes the study along the way (Stake, 2010). Data were coded to identify emerging themes using Atlas.ti software and descriptions were developed from these codes. Using these descriptions, I created a composite description that represented the essence of the common experience of participants in using the TIG platform for social justice education and action (Creswell, 2007).

Prior to beginning the coding process I took a break from the data in order to gain a fresh perspective and allow time for reflection (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Data coding began February, 2015, with the application of five preliminary categories derived from the research questions, the data (interview and documents referred to by the interview subject) and the literature on effective social justice education (Bell, 2007; Burrell-Storms, 2012; Hackman, 2005; Mayhew & Fernandez, 2007; Picower, 2012) and guided by Freire’s concept of praxis (Freire, 1994). The literature identified five essential pedagogical elements of social justice education that systemized Freire’s concept of praxis. These five essential pedagogical elements provided a framework for analysis of TIG’s social justice education program as well as being representative of practices identified as most effectively supported by technology use. These five elements became my initial open codes and are described in Table 1. Two additional open codes,
Table 1. *Initial Open Codes and Descriptions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Justice Element</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content Mastery</td>
<td>Knowledge/Understanding</td>
<td>Knowledge building as both a participant experience and a planned program outcome; issue knowledge, empowerment, explicit content and skills instruction in social justice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking and</td>
<td>Critical Awareness</td>
<td>Reference to development of critical consciousness and standpoint; critical thinking, empowerment, analysis of lived experience and context, challenging apathy and capacity building as an experience of a participant and as an intentional outcome of programming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Oppression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action and Social</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>References to direct and indirect action both individual and collective; engagement for action and empowerment for action as both participant experience and intentional outcomes of program. Action could be local or global in nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Reflection</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>References to personal reflective practices such as lived experience, self–actualizing and growth mindset, empowerment, self-efficacy and identity creation. Reference to reflection as a practice of programming. Reference to collective reflection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Diverse</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>References to forms of collaboration including connecting, network building; elements of collaboration such as affinity space, safe space, empowerment, engagement, equity, diversity and evidence of collective engagement and shared schema for awareness and action both by participants and as an intention of programming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Dynamics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. *Technology and Context Codes and Descriptions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>References to participatory technology use such as online communities, blogs, online learning spaces, blended learning, mobile applications and social media. Participant perceptions of technology as impacting on action, awareness, knowledge and understanding, empowerment, inspiration, reflection and collaboration for social justice in either a positive or negative manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>General information on the case study setting and program including references to social justice framework, program specifics, internal participation and impact numbers and program philosophy or vision. Aspects of the context that contradict social justice principles such as commodification, lack of diversity, hierarchal structures, lack of empowerment and lack of access.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

devolved for elements specific to the use of technology and case study context are described in Table 2.

**Coding Process**

The coding process began by reading the interview and document data to get a sense of the whole and then using a template analysis style (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010) to develop seven descriptive categories that were fairly broad and tended to overlap (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010); for example, technology could be coded under knowledge building as well as technology.

The process of discovering patterns in qualitative data is iterative, involving continual movement from the codes, themes, and patterns in the data to validate, modify, and expand on emerging concepts (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Transcripts and data were continuously revisited as I attempted to make sense of the collected data; consequently, observational notes were kept during the process to document the evolution of ideas and decisions made during the analysis stage.
**Data organization.** I organized the data by type of data collected. I read the data in the following order:

1. Policy documents that described context and programs (Annual Reports and website)
2. Interview
3. Curriculum documents suggested by interview (Guide to Actions)
4. Policy documents suggested by interview (program descriptions)
5. Participants’ personal documents (Member Stories and member profiles)

**Data transcription.** I read the context documents (Annual Report of two most recent years available) in hard copy, wrote notes in the margins and used a colour coding system utilizing the initial seven codes as a provisional coding system. These documents were then scanned and loaded into Atlas.ti for further coding. The interview was transcribed verbatim. Using a hard copy with large margins to facilitate comments (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010); I applied my initial seven code categories to the interview as a provisional coding system. I circled all references to specific documents, programs and website sections, and created a list for further study. The interview transcript and interview notes were then scanned and loaded into Atlas.ti for further analysis. Using the list of programs obtained from the interview, I read and coded these documents using a colour-coded system and my initial seven codes as a provisional coding system. These were then scanned and loaded into Atlas.ti for further analysis. As participant perception of their own experience is central to my research questions, during the data collection stage I collected participant stories that were published online in the member Stories section of the website. I collected Member Stories using the randomize
function on the website to select 75 stories, at which point data saturation was reached. I
applied my seven initial codes to the fourth question asked by TIG in the Member
Stories. This question asked participants to describe how TIG could or had already
supported their social justice goals and as such this question was most relevant to the
research questions. The documents were then scanned and loaded into Atlas.ti for further
investigation.

As I read the participants’ descriptions of their experiences using technology for
social justice, an issue arose related to my desire to understand the relationship between
technology use for social justice and engagement in social justice action in the real world.
It is possible to argue that technology use is an action in itself; Freire (1996) would
certainly consider technology use with critical reflection as action. I was interested to see
whether participants’ engagement with online social justice translated into genuine praxis
in the sense Freire (1996) intended; as critical awareness and engagement with the
intention for meaningful impact in the actual world. Consequently I created an eighth
code that I referred to as Praxis and included in the code description four levels of praxis
that described the extent of social justice engagement exhibited by the participant in their
story and their member profile. The codes for Praxis are described in Table 3.

The 75 Member Stories were coded for Praxis through the creation of a chart (see
Appendix C). The chart was then scanned and loaded into Atlas.ti for further analysis.

Data coding. The next iteration of coding involved the first use of Atlas.ti
qualitative software. Coding by hand had allowed for an intimate relationship with the
data and helped me to deeply understand the data, but throughout the first iteration it
became apparent that there was a great deal of overlap in the various code descriptions. It
was necessary to expand and merge codes in an attempt to clarify what I was seeing but it became apparent that the complex relationships between social justice pedagogy, praxis, empowerment, and technology would be difficult to separate and categorize. Praxis, for example, is a process that contains interdependent

Table 3. *Praxis Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Praxis Level</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Code Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginner</td>
<td>Praxis B</td>
<td>Evidence of critical awareness and thinking (knowledge building), inspiration and engagement; what Freire termed the emergence stage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Praxis D</td>
<td>Critical awareness and knowledge of issues combined with evidence of some collaboration with a stated action goal and/or self-actualizing goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Action</td>
<td>Praxis SA</td>
<td>Critical awareness, knowledge of issues, engaged collaboratively and planning to participate in action or participating in indirect action (content creation, dialogue, fundraising programs).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Praxis A</td>
<td>Critically aware, strong knowledge of issues, engaged in concrete action that is collaborative and impactful on others; mentorship or leadership role apparent.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
elements; social action cannot occur without critical knowledge and awareness. As well, it became apparent that the technology use could not be easily separated from the social justice curriculum elements, particularly as TIG is an almost entirely technology-mediated program. As the literature on technology use has demonstrated, technology may work to support certain desired outcomes (in this case, critical awareness and collaborative action for social change); technology did not create feelings of, for example, empowerment, on its own. Hand coding became quite difficult as I tried to trace the complex interrelationships. The use of qualitative software seemed to be a productive solution. I found it made sense to code data in segments of one sentence to a small paragraph and apply multiple codes to each data segment.

Emic codes, defined by McMillan & Schumacher (2010) as participant's viewpoints, actions and explanations distinctive to the setting, were coded as quotations or InVivo codes in the first round of coding in Atlas.ti. I wrote memos indicating which etic codes could potentially be linked to an emic code. For example, technology could be coded both with emic codes (participant perception of technology) and etic codes (function of the technology in the program). The memos would serve to suggest further codes in the next iteration.

Etic codes, defined by McMillan & Schumacher (2010) as codes informed by researcher perspective and concepts were coded under the seven preliminary codes.

The documents were coded in the same order that they were hand coded and loaded into the software program. Re-reading the Annual Reports suggested new codes under each of the seven preliminary categories. This code list numbered 61 codes; roughly 10
codes per each original initial code. I wrote a description for each of these codes (Appendix D).

Next, I re-read the participant narratives (Member Stories), applying the list of 61 codes and adding codes as they emerged. The coding procedure moved away from the seven original codes, although the technology and context codes continued to be useful organizing strategies for data relating to these categories. It became apparent that the elements of praxis such as knowledge, critical awareness, collaboration, reflection, and action overlapped in many instances and it was difficult to separate them into distinct categories. Codes such as "growth mindset" could reliably be coded under both "awareness" and "reflection." By the time I finished coding the participant narratives the codes numbered 178.

I printed out the codes list 7 times during the first round of coding on Atlas.ti. Each time I printed the list I spent time reviewing the codes. I compared codes for duplications, merging codes as necessary. I wrote descriptions for new codes as I created them. Code families are a tool in Atlas.ti that permits the researcher to link and describe groups of related codes. I created code families and began linking codes as a way of seeing patterns and relationships more clearly. This was the first level of the induction process. As I began to link codes and create families, the relationships between codes and the original categories became clearer. I still needed to create other family codes such as Empowerment and Issues to accurately describe the data. These families of codes became the emerging themes. I grouped them and wrote code link descriptions and family code descriptions. As duplications became apparent I merged codes, which is how I merged the 178 original codes to arrive at 80 codes. By the end of the first round of coding using
Atlas ti I had 10 emerging themes related to the 80 codes. These themes included the 7 original initial code categories as well as additional themes that emerged during the coding process. These themes were:

1. Knowledge
2. Issues
3. Critical Awareness
4. Reflection
5. Collaboration
6. Action
7. Engagement
8. Empowerment
9. Context
10. Technology for social justice

The third iteration began with re-reading all of the data including interviews and documents. I created descriptive memos for each document and interview transcript, summarizing the content. I made additional memos on aspects that connected to theory development or questions and observations for later analysis. I also made methodological memos. For each memo I created a family and links to codes, quotations and other memos in Atlas.ti.

I edited the code links to provide a better description of the relationships between codes. As I developed the descriptions of the code links, the complex interrelationships between the codes became even more obvious. As well, relationships between codes are often contextual and dependent upon the specific data; in particular codes relating to the
five elements of social justice are closely aligned with the praxis process. For example, participation in a social justice program may or may not lead to sustainable action depending on a number of factors. Participants’ level of praxis, access to mentorship and effective technology use may all impact on issue understanding and development of relevant skills and tools leading to social action.

The next step in the analysis process led me to review the research questions and assign the memos and codes with their attached data segments to sub-headings related to the research questions. This process was done using a word processing program rather than by Atlas.ti analysis tools to allow for a more intimate and comprehensive relationship with the data during the analysis phase. Atlas.ti query tools were used to search the data and confirm relationships between concepts suggested by the analysis. For example, query searches were conducted to explore links between technology codes and codes relating to aspects of social justice pedagogy.
Chapter Five
Findings of Case Study

Patton (1990) argued that the level of rigour required in qualitative research is dependent upon thick, solid descriptive data. This chapter provides detailed description of the TakingITGlobal (TIG) website and digital citizenship programs, TIG participants, and the platform’s social justice pedagogy and curriculum. Chapter Five also describes the ways in which technology is integrated with social justice and the development of praxis in the TIG platform, and how TIG members and staff express their understanding of the platform in terms of empowerment, technology, and social justice goals.

Chapter Five is divided into six sections. Section One provides a detailed description of the case context, including descriptions of TIG’s website, digital citizenship programs, membership, and conception of youth engagement. These descriptions were created primarily from data from the themes of Context, Knowledge, Issues, and Technology for Social Justice Education.

Section Two examines TIG’s social justice education framework, including their stated philosophy, their vision of praxis, which they term “theory of change”, and their social justice curriculum documents, in particular, their primary curriculum document, The Guide to Action. These descriptions were created primarily from data from the themes of Knowledge, Issues, Critical Awareness, Reflection, Collaboration, Action, Engagement, Empowerment, and Technology for Social Justice Education.

Section Three describes the ways in which TIG consciously embeds the use of participatory technology within their social justice framework to support participants’ engagement and capacity to achieve their social justice goals. These descriptions were
created primarily from the data from the themes of Engagement, Empowerment, Context, and Technology for Social Justice.

Section Four describes the ways in which the TIG platform supports member’s development of praxis, and how participants’ perceive the technology and platform as impacting on their development of praxis. These descriptions were drawn from the data regarding the essential social justice education elements (Critical Awareness, Reflection, Collaboration, Knowledge, and Action), as well as the themes of Engagement, Empowerment, and Technology for Social Justice.

Section Five describes the ways in which the TIG platform uses technology to support youth engagement, and the ways in which members perceive technology facilitating their engagement in social justice. This description was created primarily from the data in the themes of Empowerment, Engagement, Collaboration, Reflection, and Technology for Social Justice.

Section Six describes the ways which TIG supported building capacity in youth participants to engage in social justice action, and also describes youth participants’ perceptions of technology use to facilitate capacity building. This description was drawn from the data in the themes of Critical Awareness, Reflection, Issues, Knowledge, Collaboration, Empowerment, Action, and Technology for Social Justice.

**Section One: Description of TakingITGlobal**

This section will describe the case context, including the TIG website, programs, membership, and conception of youth engagement.

**TIG website.** TakingITGlobal (TIG) is defined throughout the website and policy documents as a non-profit, international organization that is “led by youth, and
empowered by technology” and is “at the intersection of three major global trends: the globalization of major issues, the technology revolution, and the demographic force of young people” (Guide to Action, 2004, p. 21). TIG describes its goal as developing creative, technology-enabled and globally aware young citizens through capacity building, fostering cross-cultural understanding, and increasing awareness and involvement among youth in global issues (Annual Report, 2013). These goals are mediated by technology and TIG views itself as a ‘social network for social good’ (About TIG, n.d.); the platform offers extensive social networking tools including member profiles, friend lists, blogs, and podcasts to an online gallery and e-zine containing member-generated content (Guide to Action, 2004, p. 21). The platform includes an extensive database that allows registered members and non-members to access thousands of social justice organizations and events as well as global opportunities for action and education. Resources of the site include numerous Guide to Actions, toolkits, a project development system, workshop kits, and an online community with over 500,000 members (Figure 2).

TIG was founded in 1999 by Canadian teenagers Jennifer Corriero and Michael Furdyk. Their vision of TIG was a "space to facilitate youth-led change, and foster inspiration, information and involvement" among young people globally (About TIG, n.d.).

TIG documents identify the program as one that specifically uses the tools of participatory technology to enable and engage youth in social justice; the use of technology in supporting social justice education was and is a large part of
TakingITGlobal's mandate. Digital youth engagement is described as the primary goal of TIG’s use of technology for social justice (Annual Report, 2013).

Figure 2. TakingITGlobal home page. The red banner heading features icons for TIG pages from left to right: Community (Discussion Boards, Members, Badges and Newsletters); Action (Guide to Actions, Commit2Act, Initiatives, Petitions, Sprout ideas); Opportunities (Toolkits, Organizations); Media (Games, Blogs, Global Gallery, TIG magazine) and Issues (Culture, Education, Globalization, Health, Human Rights, Media, Peace and Technology). These nine Global Issues are also featured in the coloured banner on the left side of the page, and the photographs illustrate different aspects of the platform such as tools or community, permitting the user to access information in multiple ways.

As a non-profit organization the majority of TIG’s programs are free. Community Partnerships manager for TIG, Liam O’Doherty described TIG’s programs as easily accessible in terms of being “free and not behind a login wall, and it allows for much higher google sharing and google spidering and lets people find it easier” (L. O’Doherty, interview, October 7, 2014). TIG programs that charge a fee such as Sprout e-courses, Future Friendly Schools and teacher professional development courses are offset by
partnerships with corporate sponsors who “want to provide that freely to people they’ve had a conference with” (L. O’Doherty, interview, October 7, 2014). Schools who buy licenses to TIG paid programs are permitted to provide free services to their stakeholders. Young activists with innovative social ideas are not turned away from programs due to lack of funding; rather, TIG utilizes the program network to connect youth with funding and mentoring opportunities that are free of charge; “the goal is to provide as much of the platform for free [as possible]” (L. O’Doherty, interview, October 7, 2014), making TIG programs and resources accessible to most young people and educators.

**TIG programs.** TIG’s social justice programs are designed to provide pedagogic support to the curriculum by making the process “more of a social experience” (L. O’Doherty, interview, October 7, 2014). TIG runs 18 programs; 13 of which are predominantly technology-based. Five are completely online, six are predominantly online with a face-to-face component, and two are mobile applications. Each program contains sub-programs; for example, TIGed features virtual classrooms, educational resources and professional development courses. The programs are organized under three categories: Digital Youth Engagement, Global Education, and Social Innovation. Due to the complexity and size of the TIG platform, analysis concentrated on the programs classified under Digital Engagement as most relevant to the research questions. For a summary of the Global Education and Social Innovation sections of the platform (see Appendix E).

**Digital youth engagement programs.** There are seven programs classified under the category of Digital Youth Engagement programs. This is the largest category of
programs and appears first in the program descriptions listed in the 2013 Annual Report. The seven programs are described in the following section.

Figure 3. Online Community Home Page. The online community page features Discussion Boards, social networking tools for meeting members such as member profiles and Member Stories, newsletters published by TIG on issues and opportunities to earn badges for social justice activism.

*Online community.* The TIG online community (OC) has 537,667 members globally and is intended to connect members to information resources, activities and actions to "provoke education and mobilization" (Annual Report, 2012, p. 12) on local and global challenges. The online community has numerous sections, including educational resources, discussion boards and community tools (Annual Report, 2012, p. 12). These tools include petitions, initiative pages where participants can feature their change ideas and network with other members, and Member Stories, which feature the
stories of TIG participants (Figure 1). The online community also includes the two mobile social justice applications, Explore 150 and Commit2Act (Figure 6).

In 2012, over 92,000 people joined the TIG community, while in 2013, 39,246 joined and 2.4 million people visited (Annual Report, 2012; Annual Report, 2013). The Online Community is staffed by TIG volunteers through the OC Volunteer program with TIG staff acting to oversee content.

Figure 4. Online Profile Page Sample. Profile of Jennifer Corriero, TIG co-founder and Executive Director. The profile page includes a self-generated description, brief biography and links to organizations, initiatives and causes with which the member is affiliated. The page also contains a box indicating how many members find the member page or actions to be inspiring, lists any badges earned and provides social media links to contact the member through TIG or other social media. Members decide how much information to share on the site.
**Member Stories and member profiles.** All TIG members create a profile, which is designed to emulate social networking sites such as Facebook (Figure 4). Profile pages allow members to create a public profile and avatar, collect resources, communicate with other members, join groups or initiatives, and add friends. Members can also collect badges for their actions, add feeds, and track their activity on the site discussion boards. TIG user profiles are easily connected to everyday social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube.

Member Stories are featured on different sections of the Online Community and are "meant to act as inspiration to other members" (About TIG, n.d.). Online Community Manager Liam O’Doherty described the member’s stories as particularly powerful in inspiring and engaging TIG participants because members describe their own experiences and struggles in trying to become change agents:

One of the most important community building pieces of the OC, would be the Members Stories’ section, and that basically provides a prime and inspiration and a catalogue of the different young people in our network who have told us something about themselves. Who have shared their inspiration, their perspective on what makes a good leader, what is important to youth in their community, how TakingITGlobal has helped them achieve their goals. And I really feel that those types of stories and that communication really helps young people see what's in it for them and what other young people have been able to achieve. (L. O’Doherty, interview, October 7, 2014)

Member Stories are selected based on published criteria which include a demonstrated commitment to social justice and the use of TIG in achieving social justice
goals. Member Stories submissions are also assessed for the submitting member's level of activity within the online community although what constitutes an acceptable level of commitment is not specified (About TIG, n.d.).

**Discussion boards.** TakingITGlobal discussion boards are active spaces for community discussion; over 60,000 posts and almost 15,000 threads are recorded (Figure 5). Members can post, start a new thread or compose a poll in the featured forum or an issue forum on a number of social justice topics. The Discussion Forum is separated into four sections: Featured Forum, Issues, Bulletin Board, and Feedback. There are 12 Issues topics, each of which has a featured thread, as does the Featured Forum section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thread</th>
<th>Replies</th>
<th>Views</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[ ] Sticky: Discussion Policy on Technology</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4440</td>
<td>pengshao1903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] Sticky: Inventions and their Implications</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>111841</td>
<td>JoanNet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] (Poll) What social network sites are being used by teens today?</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1817</td>
<td>JFats25599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] Do you have an iPhone?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2719</td>
<td>PayToo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] online store service</td>
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<td>1940</td>
<td>sandyswift03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] Cyberbullying questions</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3119</td>
<td>GregoryM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] Will iPhone 4 Promote a New Wave of Sexting?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2108</td>
<td>KevCommon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5.** Discussion Board Sample. The Technology Board includes discussions of a consumer nature but also contains threads about privacy, cyberbullying, equitable access, how technology is used and technology addiction. The discussion board guidelines are featured at the top of each discussion board page and provide clear rules for the discussion boards based in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Amnesty International.

The Bulletin Board provides a place for members to publicize events and projects and supports a real time chat. The Feedback section permits members to ask questions,
access the site safety and privacy functions, and post comments about the site in general or suggest future site features.

Discussion forums are moderated by TIG staff and the community through peer reporting. Guidelines are based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the discussion boards are intended to be an "open, constructive and respectful space for TakingITGlobal members to discuss any topic with members from diverse backgrounds" (About TIG, n.d.).

**Blogs.** TIG blogs are composed by community members who apply through an online process to blog for the site. Members need to agree to a one year commitment and to blog at least twice a month on social justice issues that interest them. Blogs may be submitted in any language as the TIG site has translation capabilities. TIG members are able to comment on blogs and connect to bloggers both through TIG social networking tools and everyday social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and Google+.

TIG blogs are attached to the TIG e-magazine and bloggers range from youth members to community mentors and TIG program staff. Each blog is accompanied by a blogger profile, including an option for members to indicate whether they found the blog inspiring, the results of which are posted to the blogger’s profile page.

**Petitions.** Re-launched in 2013, the petitions section supports multimedia submissions and includes a petitions toolkit so users are not limited to the TIG platform. More than 200 petitions were posted in 2013 (Annual Report, 2013, p. 11) and 4,869 signatures appeared on 2012 petitions (Annual Report, 2012, p.12).

**Educational games.** TIG has created 11 online interactive educational games as part of TIGed thematic classrooms (TIG Youth Media/Games, n.d.). These games were
developed in partnership with York University, the University of Toronto, and Dalhousie University and are intended to "engage students with complex issues such as mental health, food security, democracy and poverty" (Annual Report, 2013, p. 11). Increased traffic on the website to the games (over 300,000 users visit the section each year) necessitated the creation of an educational game repository which houses not only TIG created games but also games created by other not-for-profit organizations. Games are searchable by issue and school subject focus.

Online magazine. Eight issues of the TIG online magazine, formerly named Panorama, are published each year (TIG Youth Media/magazine, n.d.). The magazine is described as a multilingual platform for opinions, creative writing, and reflections of experience submitted by TIG online community members. The magazine is curated by volunteers and themes are selected based on the interests of members.

Explore150. A mobile application that is designed to engage Canadian youth to explore and discuss what they find inspiring about their country, TIG’s vision for the app was to foster interest in history by focusing on historical interpretation from diverse viewpoints (TIG Programs/Explore 150, n.d.). A Youth Advisory committee was consulted on how best to target the app to youth users. The app is described as combining "peer to peer sharing with Canadian history" (Annual Report, 2013, p. 18) and the experience is gamefied by the addition of point levels and prizes. Users play by uploading photographs and written reflections to add to the existing database. The database was created through a process mobilizing 994 contributions and 700 participants across Canada through the UserVoice platform. In total, 419 site ideas were submitted and 1,531 votes registered in UserVoice. Sites were selected by 26 digital media bloggers who
developed content to showcase the diversity of their personal narratives about places they consider instrumental to their sense of Canadian identity. Explore150 demonstrates collaborative content creation that combines "offline word of mouth elements with online presence and the gaming component of the in-app environment" to ensure that youth have a platform to "express what matters to them about their corner of Canada, while being encouraged to explore beyond their community" (Annual Report, 2013, p. 18).

*Commit2act.* A challenge-based mobile application, Commit2Act was launched in 2012 and expanded in 2013. The app is intended to encourage peer interaction and collaboration through user-generated challenges that support existing social justice campaigns, as well as promote awareness of social justice issues, and in particular,  

![Commit2Act TIG Site Page](image.png)

*Figure 6.* Commit2Act TIG Site Page. The Actions graphic is an example of the Commit2Act Action page. Users can search actions by most recent, most popular or all actions. Users can also search by Activity, Leaders, Discover or Profile. The site page includes a link to download the app.
environmental issues, in users’ daily lives (TIG Programs/Commit2Act, n.d.). The app has five pages: Activity, Leaders, Actions, Discover, and Profile (Figure 6). The Activity page is a real time activity feed that updates current actions, from environmental awareness campaigns to personal lifestyle changes. Actions are predominantly environmental and social-issue related. The Leaders page ranks individual users and groups by the number of actions they have completed. The Actions page lists current actions by several search methods. Clicking on a particular action opens a further screen that permits the user to read about the issue and activity and take action by clicking an action button, describing the action taken with a comment and photograph, and sharing the action. The Discover page connects users to information, campaigns and further resources relating to issues. Users may also opt to click the action button in this page. The Profile page permits users to upload a photograph and location, and record their actions and group memberships. Participants can register an action without actually doing any action, which is a definite weakness in the program.

By sharing challenges the intention of the app was to create a community of collaborative dialogue and action. (Annual Report, 2013). In 2013, Commit2Act was integrated with social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Yahoo, and LinkedIn to increase sharing possibilities. In 2012, 3,383 actions were taken and in 2013, 2,361 challenges were registered.

*Culture Connect.* Culture Connect, an online program, was piloted in 2013 and designed to encourage reflective understanding of the diverse nature of global culture (TIG Community/Culture Connect, n.d.). Participants documented their culture and the cultures of others, while reflecting on the similarities and differences, in order to produce
"creative expressions of their lives, their cultures and their visions for the future" (Annual Report, 2013, p. 12). The program combined a four week online course delivered through a TIGed virtual classroom and a mobile application designed to engage youth in documenting their culture and the cultures of others. Fifty youth from 29 countries participated in the program (Annual Report, 2013; TIG Community/Culture Connect, n.d.). TIG's vision for the Culture Connect program is to "create a model of crowd-sourced, peer to peer mentorship" (Annual Report, 2013, p. 12).

Adobe Youth Voices. Adobe Youth Voices is a blended program, delivered both online and onsite through travelling exhibitions across Canada. The mission of the program is to "ignite creative confidence in youth by empowering them to find their voice and make it heard" (Annual Report, 2012, p. 27). The program is described as an engagement program that "harnesses creative skills to solve problems through the power of storytelling with digital media" (Annual Report, 2013, p. 14). Delivered to youth in 37 countries identified as underserved, the program allows participants to display their digital art to a global audience (TIG Programs/Adobe Youth Voices, n.d.). The art, which is showcased in a virtual gallery as well as a travelling exhibit, is intended to reflect a social justice issue in the artist's community, and some community volunteerism is a requirement of the program. The program actively fosters collaboration on multimedia projects across the globe; six global collaboration groups ran in 2012 and the Adobe Youth Voices Youth Summit attracted participants from 23 countries. Aspiring artists who participate in the program are supported by Adobe Foundation Creativity Scholarships and, in 2013, TIG launched an interactive toolkit as a resource to support aspiring artists in exhibiting their artwork online.
Defining Moments. Similar to the Adobe Voices Program, Defining Moments is a blended program that uses digital art creation to engage Canadian youth in a national citizenship project that explores diverse perspectives on Canadian identity (TIG Programs/Defining Moments, n.d.). The program ran 100 arts based workshops attended by more than 1,200 youth from across Canada and featured 800 digital art pieces submitted to the online gallery. The art pieces included written reflections detailing the artist's conception of their own attachment to Canada. The program included a travelling exhibit and an online collaborative panel that connected participants in Toronto, Yellowknife, and St. John's.

TIG participants and spectrum of engagement. TIG documents specifically identify youth as the target demographic and define youth as "young people between 13-30 years of age who show some level of being globally aware and engaged as socially responsible leaders of their communities" (TIG About/youth, n.d.) TIG does not define this engagement exclusively as action, but as leadership and social responsibility, reflecting their vision of social justice engagement as a process. The TIG youth engagement spectrum is summarized in Table 4.

The TIG Youth Engagement Spectrum defines a process that aligns clearly with social justice pedagogy and the praxis process as well as with processes that support empowerment such as capacity building, promoting leadership, and deep, diverse connections to supportive networks (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disengaged</th>
<th>Under engaged</th>
<th>Engaged</th>
<th>Highly Engaged</th>
<th>Over Engaged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characterized by lack of critical awareness or misconception about issues, unwilling to take risks to expand understanding; has emerging awareness but lacks opportunities; or has capacity but lacks engagement.</td>
<td>Characterized by emerging awareness but faces political, socioeconomic or cultural barriers to participation; lacks access to resources and opportunities; needs capacity building.</td>
<td>Characterized by critical awareness and desire to be engaged and involved in making a difference; acts in formal/informal contexts; has access to resources and opportunities; relies on networks and capacity building opportunities; motivated and leads others to engage.</td>
<td>Characterized by critical understanding and active involvement; desire and capacity to take action; leadership experience; acts as mentor.</td>
<td>Characterized by high level of commitment to focused areas of concern; may take opportunities from others; may over extend themselves and intimidate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(TIG About/youth, n.d.)

**Section Two: TIG Social Justice Education Framework**

This section examines TakingITGlobal’s social justice education framework, including their stated philosophy, vision of praxis, which they term “theory of change”, and their social justice curriculum, in particular the document Guide to Action.

**Philosophy of social justice education.** The philosophy of TIG is "Inspire, Inform, and Involve" (Guide to Action, 2004, p.1). Their mission is identified as "enabling young people to understand and act on the world's greatest challenges”; their vision is described as "youth everywhere are actively engaged and connected in shaping a more inclusive,
peaceful and sustainable world" (Annual Report, 2013, p. 1); this description locates TIG within the traditions of a social justice education framework (Burrell-Storms, 2012; Hackman, 2005; Mayhew & Fernandez, 2007). TIG emphasizes diversity, inclusiveness and democratic participation as key values of the program and essential to their vision of a "collective future" (Annual Report, 2012, p. 2). Innovation in solving problems is described as "vital" to both leadership and change (Annual Report, 2012, p. 2).

TIG’s goal is to facilitate youth empowerment for social justice action through the support of a technology-based framework that “builds consensus around outcomes” and “creates alignments among a collective of young people” (Annual Report, 2013, p.2). This framework fosters “connections that lead to mobilization and action….that can affect change at both the project and systemic levels. It is through this process that TIG, as a practitioner organization, fosters the development of leadership behaviours among young people globally” (Annual Report, 2013, p.2).

Theory of change. TIG's vision of praxis is called "theory of change" (Annual Report, 2013, p. 3; TIG About, n.d.) and is described as a step-by-step system with four phases or target areas: youth development, youth action and development, social movements, and societal values. TIG's theory of change is predicated upon a belief that change occurs when individuals have the "opportunity, ability and motivation to engage meaningfully" (Annual Report, 2013, p.1). TIG’s theory of change is the belief that:

Through collective action, young people possess the capacity to direct change.

Awareness about key issues and the capacity to identify an issue as problematic are critical components that serve to distinguish those who lead by initiating projects
from those who follow by participating or learning about them (Annual Report, 2013, p. 2).

TIG’s theory of change is described as four interconnected stages of progressive development in becoming an involved global citizen. The four stages are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. *TakingITGlobal Theory of Change*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Development</th>
<th>Youth Action</th>
<th>Social Movements</th>
<th>Societal Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developments of a sense of social responsibility and awareness of global issues; building capacity among youth regardless of their engagement level.</td>
<td>Access to global opportunities to build skills and create a global community of engaged youth.</td>
<td>Collaboration with other organizations to ensure youth participate and become key stakeholders in change efforts.</td>
<td>Impact upon shared values, influencing attitudes and behaviours toward creating a more equitable and sustainable world.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(TIG Programs/Theory of Change, n.d.)

The emphasis in TIG’s theory of change on critical awareness, knowledge building, action, collaboration, and ongoing reflection as an iterative process clearly demonstrates how the platform aligns with social justice pedagogy and Freire’s theory of praxis. The theory of change also illustrates TIG’s belief that young people can be influential in the political process in a meaningful way. TIG documents, as well as Liam O’Doherty, assert that individual action must be connected not only to the collaborative efforts of other youth but to “outreach at the institutional level, appealing to organizations or those connected directly to political processes” (Annual Report, 2013, p. 3). TIG works actively to connect youth not only to their own technology-based framework, but to
collaborative partnerships at the institutional level. As Liam O’Doherty argued, such partnerships may empower youth by building political influence that enables them to impact on policy resulting in sustainable change.

**Curriculum.** TIG provides a number of curriculum documents free on its website. Toolkits and research reports are available in nine categories. Five of these toolkits directly support technology-facilitated social justice education and learning: Online Volunteering, Web 2.0 for Social Change, Mobile Learning, Civic Life Online, and Access to Technology. TIG Education (TIGed) provides thousands of lesson plans and teacher resources, as well as virtual classrooms (TIG Resources, n.d.). The primary document that describes the social justice education curriculum is the Guide to Action. Described as the “general framework” upon which the TIG platform is based, the Guide to Action has evolved through a number of iterations, was written by young people, and is available in multiple languages (L. O’Doherty, interview, October 7, 2014). The beginning of the Guide to Action describes a six step, circular process that TIG terms the Action Process Overview (Figure 7). The Action Process begins with personal reflection and inspiration and moves through critical awareness, connecting and collaborating with others, capacity building, action planning, engaging in action and evaluating the impact of action, and returns to the first step with reflection and continuing inspiration. This process description aligns with both social justice pedagogic elements (Hackman, 2005; Mayhew & Fernandez, 2007) and Freire’s concept of praxis.

The Guide describes each step in detail and includes activities, suggestions for further resources, inspirational stories, and connections to TIG online platform tools and initiatives. For example, in the group planning page the Guide recommends connecting
the project to the TIG online projects page as an effective method to raise project awareness and recruit participants.

There is an emphasis on reflection, self-actualization, and personal growth; the Guide lists 18 potential outcomes or skills that may result from the program, from issue awareness to leadership, advocacy, and communication skills to patience, determination, and confidence (Guide to Action, p. 18).

The Guide to Action is clearly oriented toward the creation of sustainable and meaningful action. During the implementation step, the Guide includes a list of potential barriers to effective action and provides activities to build resilience and reflection skills on how to stay focused on solving potential problems. As well, the Process Overview prioritizes evaluation and reflection on progress as essential elements of meaningful and sustainable action. The Guide provides instruction about sustaining actions, including clear and measurable goals, collaborating with organizations, building strong alliances with mentors, and maintaining strong and effective leadership (Guide to Action, 2004, p. 20).
**Figure 7. TakingITGlobal Guide to Action Process Overview.** The Process Overview summarizes TIG’s social justice pedagogy and Theory of Change and describes the functions of the TIG platform. Step One (Reflect and Inspiration) is represented in the platform by the online community, particularly member Stories. Step Two can be seen in the resources, toolkits and issues pages. Step Three is represented in the Guide to Actions, Initiatives, and Discussion Forums, as well as the programs. Step Four, Five, and Six can also be seen in the online community, programs, resources, organizations and initiatives pages.

### Section Three: Social Justice Education Integration with Technology

This section describes the ways in which TIG consciously embeds the use of participatory technology within their social justice framework to support participants’ engagement and capacity to achieve their social justice goals.

**Technology-embedded social justice education.** Taking ITGlobal’s (TIG) intention to use technology for change is clear from the first paragraph of the Guide to
Action, where TIG’s aim is described as to "help youth develop their potential as creative, technology-enabled and globally aware citizens" (Guide to Action, 2004, p. 2). The 2013 Annual Report identified TIG's role as "facilitating intercultural dialogue, power micro-actions and support place-based discovery through technologies such as the online community and mobile social justice apps Commit2Act, Culture Connect and Explore 150" (Annual Report, 2013, p. 9). Additionally, curriculum support for technology use is provided through issue specific toolkits, five of which support technology-facilitated social justice education and learning: Online Volunteering, Web 2.0 for Social Change, Mobile Leaning, Civic Life Online, and Access to Technology (TIG Resources/Toolkits, n.d.). In terms of social networking tools, TIG documents describe the platform as a "social network for social good” (TIG About Us, n.d.); the online community of over 500,000 members is provided with robust internal social networking tools that are also connected to external social networking such as Twitter and Facebook. The app Commit2Act, while servicing a considerably smaller community of members, is intended to facilitate digital service learning and connect it to real-life actions on environmental issues (TIG Programs/Commit2Act).

Participants’ responses to the platform demonstrate that technology may engage youth through sharing narratives, and that stories can be a powerful instrument of inspiration and awareness building. This is clearly an intended use of technology within the platform, as demonstrated by policy, website and curriculum documents and staff interviews. Senior staff member, Liam O’Doherty, for example, explained that the “platform and the technology is about reinforcing the things you already want to do, that it shouldn't be seen as a limiting factor but a jumping off point” (L. O’Doherty, interview,
October 7, 2015); the technology is intended to support and facilitate youth empowerment through a social justice education framework, not place boundaries around engagement in social justice.

The Guide to Action is the organizational framework of TIG social justice education pedagogy; O’Doherty described it as an “eight step process, where you have a problem in your community, you assess it from several different points of view, make a plan, revise that plan, implement that plan, measure the plan. There’s a change process” (L. O’Doherty, interview, October 7, 2014). The importance of this process is in developing the types of young people:

Who can see a challenge and assess it from several different points of view and intercultural perspectives or potentially even connect with those people and ask them for their advice directly. Those are the types of leaders and change agents that we need in order to solve some of the problems we are facing. (L. O’Doherty, interview, October 7, 2014)

The Guide to Action refers to technology use or provides links to the website on almost every page, connecting the curriculum document to online resources, initiatives, campaigns and Member Stories (Figure 8). Technology is clearly embedded within the framework, an essential component of use of technology for transformative education. TIG intends to use technology in this way and this intention appears to be reflected in the entire curriculum and in all of the programs on the site.
Kelvin Gyekye, a TIG member and teacher from Liberia, explained in his Member Story that he was greatly inspired by the passion of his students but that “they have all the energy and they have all this curiosity, but they have no framework to put it in” (Gyekye, n.d.). Kelvin identified TIG as providing this much needed social justice education framework (Gyekye, n.d.). By using TIG curriculum resources and online community tools in his classroom, Kelvin described in his profile that he was able to build a framework to support his student’s passion and leverage engagement to build critical awareness, and described how his students are now involved in local actions, including publishing their stories on the TIG website (Gyekye, n.d.).

Kelvin’s story illustrates the TIG approach to social justice education through technology. TIG defines technology as “the creation, modification, usage, and knowledge of tools, machines, techniques and systems to solve a problem, improve a pre-existing
solution or achieve a goal” (TIG Issues, n.d.). TIG provides comprehensive and diverse curriculum resources and programs that are intended to work together to build the understanding, awareness and skills necessary for meaningful social action. This process is facilitated by a technology-based delivery that connects youth to inspiration (Member Stories and initiative pages), an engaged and active community (online community, mentoring, groups), comprehensive resources (curriculum guides, toolkits, workshops, programs), and diverse opportunities (programs, initiative pages, groups) for online and offline engagement in action.

**TIG use of technology in engagement for social justice.** One of the most salient uses of technology in education is as a tool to engage students; the technological competence and affinity for technology demonstrated by many youth only increases the potential for technology use in engagement (Facer, 2011; Gee, 2013b; Ito et al., 2010; Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins et al., 2009; Loader, 2009; Prensky, 2001). Community Partnerships Manager at TIG, Liam O’Doherty, described how the TIG platform works to engage youth in social justice:

> It starts with information and inspiration, and tries to make it basically understandable to young people in their own realities. We do this by sharing people's stories, providing useful and up to date information, and opportunities to get involved in the various issues. And so by providing multiple different resources from multiple different perspectives, we are showing the interlinkages between the global issues that young people of our generation are addressing and dealing with. (L. O’Doherty, interview, October 7, 2014)
O’Doherty further described how TIG resources and community support the initial engagement process:

we've created this process about reflecting and getting inspired on who you are and what you can do and what resources you have and what is happening in your school and community. Then identifying, getting involved and focusing in on what is interesting to you, getting other people involved, building a team. But getting other people involved may be a key window for getting people involved for the website and the platform, where you can look at other leaders who are like you, who have led similar projects or led similar initiatives on other social issues around the world. Or you can just connect with someone else in your community to understand from them the challenges and successes that they have had and what might be useful to know going in. Getting connected, basically jumping off and accelerating your own knowledge and experience through mapping your networks and tracking different contacts. Creating a plan, having a lasting impact, and monitoring or evaluating what you have done. (L. O’Doherty, interview, October 7, 2014)

A number of sections of the TIG website are clearly intended to engage youth with technology and connect them to the social justice framework through technology. The educational games, for example, are highly engaging and inform youth about issues and initiatives. Commit2Act was specifically designed to “gamify the experience” (L. O’Doherty, interview, October 7, 2014) as a way of engaging youth in social justice issues and campaigns. The online community uses social networking tools to inspire, engage and connect youth for involvement in social justice.
Section Four: Development of Praxis Through the TIG Platform

This section describes the ways in which the TIG platform supports development of praxis, and how participants perceive the technology and platform as impacting on their development of praxis. The section is divided into five subsections; each subsection describes how the TIG platform supports the development of a particular social justice element, and how participants perceive the technology supports that development.

The Guide to Action clearly demonstrates that TIG’s social justice education program aligns with established social justice pedagogy (Hackman, 2009), and Freire’s concept of praxis. Critical awareness, critical reflection, knowledge building, collaboration, and action are all critical components of praxis and social justice education; all five elements are supported and facilitated by technology in the TIG platform as evidenced by TIG documents, the interview with Community Partnerships manager Liam O’Doherty, and the 75 Member Story responses included in the study.

Critical awareness. Critical awareness is an essential aspect of TIG’s social justice education, as identified by a TIG policy document:

Awareness about key issues and the capacity to identify an issue as problematic are critical components that serve to distinguish those who lead by initiating projects from those who follow by participating or learning about them. (Annual Report, 2013, p. 2)

TIG documents make a clear distinction between participation and leadership, and locate this difference within the development of critical awareness. In this vision, the role of technology is to build critical awareness through sharing narratives and actions (online community, Commit2Act), and issue education (resources, programs). In simpler terms, it
is “the mental journey that they go through …. [To] understand why it’s important to them” (L.O’Doherty, interview, October 7, 2014). For example, Kubiateno Ekong wrote in his Member Story response that TIG:

Create(s) a platform for me to interact with like-minded youths who share my interest, passion and belief. I feel I am a part of something that matters, and it encourages me to push myself harder to make my contribution to this community really count and it has made me a better and more creative person in the process. (Ekong, n.d.)

Christino Gomez’ Member Story response identified the TIG platform as instrumental in developing his understanding and awareness of social justice issues, and in particular global issues because of the emphasis on diversity and cultural responsiveness. He noted that “the forum, global issues, and the pages of different organizations allow me to be updated on relevant topics and the action of leaders around the world. This makes me a global citizen” (Gomez, n.d.).

Critical reflection. The emphasis on reflection in the Guide to Action clearly demonstrates the importance that TIG places on reflection in the development of critical awareness and effective, sustainable action. The Member Stories, for example, catalogue the reflective process as members describe what inspires them, how they became involved in social change, what they think leadership looks like, and evaluate the impact the TIG platform has on their social justice engagement.

Liam O’Doherty, manager of the TIG online community, emphasized how the online community works to encourage reflection on a personal level that "accelerates knowledge and experience," and added that in developing action plans:
There are moments of reflection and checking and monitoring and evaluation, so that you are actually having the effects that you are looking for, and you are in a dynamic relationship with the stakeholders, people who you are trying to have a positive impact on. So that is a recursive but dynamic process. (L.O’Doherty, interview, October 7, 2014)

O’Doherty’s comments illustrate that TIG views engagement in social justice as a process, and recognizes, like Freire, that the process must involve critical reflection throughout in order to result in genuine praxis leading to sustainable action.

**Knowledge building.** The 75 Member Story responses included in the study consistently identified the resources and programs of the site as being instrumental to the development of their issue understanding and engagement in action. Sean Amos, a TIG member from Kenya, described the resources available as “unmatched in quality, accessibility, and the range of topics and interests” and asserted that “I believe that TIG has the potential to reach and empower young people in ways that many of today’s world leaders could only dream of achieving” (Amos, n.d.). Davis Ansah, from Ghana, wrote that “I have written letters, articles and many others through the knowledge from TIG” (Ansah, n.d.).

Bijal Damani, a young teacher from India, used the resources and networking tools available on TIG to support his charity, Galaxy Bazaar, which raises money to send underprivileged children to better schools (Damani, n.d.). Ng Hui Xin, an AIDS activist and TIG member from Malaysia, described a journey from awareness to action facilitated by the TIG platform:
Through TIG, I became aware of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)…. I decided to initiate a community project, First AIDS Kit, that empowers youth to become peer educators, providing their peers appropriate info on HIV/AIDS. TIG definitely helped me to make the project possible…. the tools and resources like Guide to Action, GYCA toolkit for youth response towards HIV/AIDS. Before I joined TIG I never thought that we, as youths would have the capacity to make an impact in our community. TIG has built my capacity, and thru TIG I also got to attend the Innovative Students Forum sponsored by Microsoft in partnership with TIG. It was also then the idea of implementing First AIDS Kit project was realized. (Xin, n.d.)

**Collaboration.** Effective social justice pedagogy requires that collaborative effort is applied to action. The effect of action is greater when a sense of collective engagement is facilitated by an organizational network (Sampson et al., 2005), making elements of collaboration such as community building, networking, and shared schema essential to meaningful action. Empowerment Theory models also describe community level empowerment as dependent upon intentionality to organize as a community, and such organization as necessary for collective civic action (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). TIG participants described the platform as very helpful in developing feelings of community belonging, networking, community support, and group empowerment through the platform resources and online community.

The online community was identified by 77% of Member Story responses included in the study as impactful on their understanding of issues, awareness, and engagement in community building and action. Temdayo Greats, a TIG member from Nigeria, found the
online community to be empowering because he could connect with like-minded individuals and know that “I am not alone” (Greats, n.d.) Julia Batkaeva, a TIG member from Russia, wrote that after reading the discussion boards and blogs on the site, she “found a new point of view” and realized that action was necessary and made possible because “together we are power” (Batkaeva, n.d.). A young teacher from Bangladesh, who identified himself in his Member Story as Md. Nurunnabi, viewed the TIG discussion boards as a space to discuss transformative education practices. He found the process empowering and informative, writing that “TIG will make a bridge among the world scholars and bring a revolutionary change in education” (Nurunnabi, n.d.). Irene Bangwell, from Nigeria, described the online community as “a place to draw peer energy for your work” (Bangwell, n.d.).

Participants described the use of technology as contributing to their empowerment through the possibility of their contribution reaching thousands of youth through the platform. Lazarex, a member from Canada, explained how the technology aggregates individual actions by connecting them to the collective action of a community:

In order to attain some greatness, success or simply knowledge; TIG is a key tool. We work as hard as we can in our little towns and places but we do need Take It Global to enact change for the better. (Lazarex, n.d.)

Similarly, Jolandie Rust, from South Africa wrote “I have embarked on a huge mission and know there are others here on TIG that would love to be involved and help. It's just a matter of people knowing about what I am doing” (Rust, n.d.). Jolandie’s identification of the collaborative tools as impactful on her social justice goals was a common observation among respondents. Of the 75 Member Stories included in the
study, many found the collaborative aspects, including the online community (77%) and social media collaboration tools (40%) helpful in achieving their social justice goals. Felix, a TIG member from Kenya, asserted that “the world is becoming interconnected more and more, it’s becoming a unit and coming together is the only option. TIG gets us together” (Felix, n.d.). Cris Cabal, a TIG member from the Philippines, described the platform as providing “a venue for us, the youth with common passion to serve the community, to interact and correspond to each other” (Cabal, n.d.). Birendra Kumar described the ways in which TIG supports his AIDS awareness work; he noted that “TIG helps me to do widespread networking, share ideas and experience and think in an innovative way” (Kumar, n.d.). Abraham Aniso, a TIG member from Nigeria, explained how TIG has supported his efforts:

It has provided a platform for collective reasoning with other like-thinking young minds, sharing in their experiences and enriching myself with new ideas from others in the reach-out team. It is also helpful knowing that I am not alone in the fight for a better society. (Aniso, n.d.)

Georgette, an AIDS activist from Jamaica who also volunteers as a youth ambassador, identified the social media aspects of the TIG platform, such as the connections she can make to youth around the world, as very engaging and described TIG as a "great place to be involved" (Georgette, n.d.). Vugar Rustami, a TIG member and youth activist from Azerbaijan, made the point that TIG “differs from all other social networks. TIG gives opportunity to all people to share and learn. TIG helped me in spreading information regarding events and projects which I realized” (Rustami, n.d.).
O’Doherty identified the social media networking tools of the platform as an integral piece of TIG’s mission to connect youth for social change, noting in particular the mobile app Commit2Act “is all about connecting cohorts of people who are doing similar actions… so that they can understand and learn from each other's experience and it helps to encourage and reinforce and push people to learn what they can do” (L.O’Doherty, interview, October 7, 2014).

**Action.** TIG policy and curriculum documents stress that actions are intended to be meaningful and sustainable. TIG’s theory of change (Table 5) emphasizes that individual action must be connected to “outreach at the institutional level, appealing to organizations or those connected directly to political processes” (Annual Report, 2013, p. 3) in order to result in sustainable change. Sustained action is associated with capacity building; without building capacity it is unlikely that youth will be able to sustain their actions both in terms of understanding of obstacles and development of skills needed to create impactful and meaningful change (TIG Programs, n.d.). TIG capacity building programs, as well as the Guide to Action, assist youth with understanding issues and obstacles to change, as well as building specific skills such as organizing, public speaking, action planning, marketing, grant writing, and presenting.

TIG programs such as Sprout e-course help youth in gaining the specific skills they need to enact action plans that are sustainable. The Guide to Action demonstrates that TIG provides concrete support thorough mentorship and resources for the development of action plans. For example, O’Doherty made a clear distinction between having a voice and making an impact. For him, what worked about TIG programming is the way that it
connects engaged youth to collaborations with organizations such as the UN that allow youth to have impact at the system level.

Michael Boampong, a TIG member from Ghana, viewed this aspect of the platform as empowering. He wrote that once youth become passionate about issues, they need the information and the opportunity to engage in action. He argued that the platform enables both of these aspects, and explained how TIG resources such as online courses and Guide to Actions, as well as the opportunity to connect to a large network, were instrumental to the creation of his own organization, Young People We Care (Boampong, n.d.).

Service learning (volunteering) connects lived experience to social justice awareness and as such is a powerful tool in building engagement and empowerment, and is an integral component of TIG’s social justice framework. TIG’s online platform connects members with numerous volunteer opportunities both in digital and real space. For example, TIG members Ca Ren, Teresah, and Julian volunteer on the platform with translation and editing and write for the online magazine, while Katherine volunteers for TIG events and workshops, as well as working as an online volunteer for the Global Gallery program.

**Section Five: Technology and Empowerment**

This section describes the importance TIG places on youth empowerment, and the ways in which the platform uses technology to facilitate and support political empowerment of youth.

There are seven programs classified under the Digital Youth Engagement section of the TIG website. This is the largest category of programs and appears first in the program descriptions listed in the 2013 Annual Report. This suggests that digital engagement is a
priority for TIG, particularly as the language and design of the 2013 Annual Report prioritizes digital engagement in a way that the 2012 Annual Report did not. O’Doherty described the empowering aspects of the TIG platform as the result of connecting engaged youth to a framework that helps them to focus their passion and support their understanding:

That can be very empowering and also scary when you realize how much agency that we as young people have to change the world. And so once you get that engagement within a structured environment, and understand the kind of steps and process or the things that are feasible through the platform. One of the biggest challenges we have is there is so many different things you can do, what do you do? Right, when you present someone with ten different forks in the road, where they want to go….it can be overwhelming and difficult to understand…. what should I click on this page with a hundred different links? (L. O’Doherty, interview, October 7, 2014)

O’Doherty suggested that perhaps the most empowering aspect of the technology is the possibility of connecting individuals perceived as powerless, such as youth, with a community that provides resources, mentoring, development of critical understanding, and opportunities to participate. He described this as the social effect of the TIG platform:

So, an interesting social effect …. is it automatically layers the experience or layers the technology or layers some of the interaction into a structured environment …. And so that may provide the first step or the first point of engagement within an issue. But once you realize and understand how the platform and the technology is about reinforcing the things you already want to
do, that it shouldn't be seen as a limiting factor but a jumping off point, something that you can use to connect to young people and learn from their experience and amplify and potentially change your own actions because of it.

(L. O’Doherty, interview, October 7, 2014)

For O’Doherty, the value of TIG lies in how it serves to connect youth to mentorship, technology tools, and a systematic approach to social justice that supports agency and facilitates empowerment, rather than limiting or binding it. He did, however, caution that there is a difference between feelings of empowerment and actual power, and argued that effective change must involve partnerships within the existing structure:

There is a voice, and then there's action and change in the world...access and influence are two different things. And often getting access to the decision making forum doesn't mean you have influence in it. And so we try and provide the access and then also support young people to be more influential by building relationships with UN agencies and allies within those agencies who are championing the roll of youth. (L. O’Doherty, interview, October 7, 2014)

The TIG framework, according to O’Doherty, connects youth to experiences and opportunities that allow them to not only have a voice in changing the world, but also an active role in that process.

Section Six: Building Capacity Through TIG to Achieve Social Justice Goals

This section describes the ways in which TIG supports capacity building in youth participants. While agency and having a political voice are important considerations for youth activists, TIG clearly recognizes that true empowerment must include the development of critical thinking, issue understanding, and collaborative skills to build
Table 6. Self-Reported Positive Experiences Using the TIG Platform to Achieve Social Justice Goals For Sample of 75 Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Justice Pedagogic Element</th>
<th>Number of Positive Responses</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents with Positive Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>58/75</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Development and Issue Awareness</td>
<td>59/75</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>67/75</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>45/75</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The data is derived from the self-reported member responses to the question: “Do you think TakingITGlobal can help you achieve some of your goals? Have we already? A total of 75 member responses were included in the data set.

capacity for meaningful action in the world. TIG’s social justice education framework describes a clear and focused intention to build capacity in youth through the use of participatory technologies that connect members to programs, organizations, resources, mentors, and causes all around the globe.

In general, in the 75 Member Story responses included in the study, participants described using the TIG platform to achieve their social justice goals as a positive experience in one or more areas of social justice (Table 6).

The Member Story responses described a variety of social justice actions ranging from engagement in the online community and resources from members in the emergence stage (Praxis level B and D; see Praxis Chart Table 3), to volunteering, participation in organizations, and sophisticated and sustained actions (Praxis levels SA and A; see Praxis Chart Table 3). The action engagement for all 75 member responses included in this study are described in Table 7. Member Stories responses indicate that TIG users clearly felt that their experience using the platform was positive, particularly in the areas
Table 7. Self-Reported Engagement in Social Justice Action for Sample of 75 Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Engagement Description</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in Action Offline (involvement in campaigns or organizations with real world impact)</td>
<td>23/75</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in Volunteering (Sustained online or offline service learning)</td>
<td>18/75</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in Action Directly Related to TIG Platform (Volunteering for TIG, conferences, involvement with programs, organizations, and partnerships through TIG)</td>
<td>16/75</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Action Reported Beyond Initial Engagement in TIG Platform (Active on discussion boards, online community, blogs and uses resources of site)</td>
<td>32/75</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Participant responses could be placed in more than one category.*

of empowerment, knowledge development, and collaboration. Reflection itself was not specifically mentioned in the Member Story responses (only one member, Seta, used the word reflection) but the Member Story format is in itself a reflective process. During the data coding process, 263 quotations were attached to the code for Reflection (Praxis) and 48 of these quotations were derived from the Member Stories data.

Participants’ perceptions of their engagement in social justice action were closely aligned with their praxis level. While members in what Freire (1996) called the emergence stage of praxis (Beginner and Developing in the Praxis Chart, Table 3) tended to engage in the online community and use resources of the site, participants who were coded as Praxis SA and Praxis A (Support Action and Action) demonstrated engagement
in social action that went beyond the online community and resources. These members reported being involved in campaigns, courses, organizations, and volunteering, both online and offline. Some of this action was connected to the TIG platform directly and some young activists described more individualized actions that were not directly linked to TIG. In total, 45/75, or 60% of Member Stories responses included in the study reported engaging in some form of social justice action.

Irene Komu, for example, identified TIG as supporting and developing her understanding of issues affecting her country of Tanzania so that she gained confidence to enter into the public debate. In her Member Story, she wrote that:

I have been reading the global issues which explain on social concerns…. In my country, it is hard to come across such a thing as for many of us are not so much aware of such issues until I visited TakingITGlobal then I am now confident enough to start a discussion at school about health issue because I have enough facts. (Komu, n.d.)

Elmahdi Ounmih, a TIG member from Morocco, thought that TIG inspired youth to become leaders, writing that:

Anyone that takes the initiative to connect with others must have some kind of leadership spark. When these kids and adults attempt to improve the lives of others through group mobilization and activity, it is a testament to the good that [the] site does. (Ounmih, n.d.)

Bert Ranis, a TIG member from the Philippines, described TIG as “a very powerful mechanism to empower young leaders of our generation” (Ranis, n.d.). Bert is not alone in describing the TIG platform as powerful; many of the Member Stories described their
participation in TIG as empowering in some way. Edith Knight, a TIG member from Kenya, wrote that “the discussions are empowering” (Knight, n.d.), while Neunghun Heo, a TIG member from South Korea, described himself as “empowered by the passion of numerous members in this place” (Heo, n.d.). Cherrie Kong, a member from New Zealand who participated in TIG conferences as well as being active in the online community viewed TIG as effective in a number of ways. She thought the community challenged her worldview, which broadened her understanding and described the process by which discussions develop into plans, organizations, and initiatives as very powerful for numbers and commitment:

My experiences on this site are constantly challenging my thinking and expanding the breadth of my understanding… I can't even begin to imagine how powerful it will be for all of us to have discussed our dreams, concerns, values and know each other before we put our full force into our community. I would like to connect with more people - youth and personnel within organizations. I think the action is just beginning! (Kong, n.d.)

Jonathan OsaObo, a TIG member from Nigeria, felt that the platform provided a space where youth could be empowered and heard:

It has given me the platform to make my voice heard on these issues, at the same time allowing young adults to participate in the global debates on these issues so they can share their thought and acquire new skills that can help them make that impact. (OsaObo, n.d.)

The debate around the possibility of internet-based technologies providing alternate spaces for political activity is a divisive one, but several TIG members discussed this
potential in their stories. Birendra thought that TIG can “bring a revolution” (Kumar, n.d.), while Sean identified the empowerment potential of TIG's technology platform and described it as much more powerful than traditional political empowerment. Davis also found TIG supported his sense of political empowerment; he wrote that “TIG has broadened my knowledge about the millennium development goals and now I can take my leaders on” (Ansah, n.d.). Cris was critical of what he perceived to be the political and social apathy of his generation, and suggested that what may empower them is skills and education:

Youth participation has always been the issues that I am concentrated into. I really want to look at the reason why does the youth neglect their power to do change for the community… Youth empowerment is a key to achieve one's goals. (Cabal, n.d.)

Thomas, an environmental blogger from Germany, found that TIG provided a wider audience for issue-style political engagement and began a blog on the site in English “to inform and convince people about their power as consumers” (Thomas, n.d.), while Michael saw the role of TIG as supporting youth social justice passion with a structured framework of education and opportunities:

I believe that a global education needs to be something more than just classes and lessons learned. It's about researching, discussing, and taking action on some important issues that can be dealt with using minimal resources. For some people whom I met the challenge for them was that they did not have the information and the platform to enable them to take action. (Boampong, n.d.)

Carlos Kiplagat, from Kenya, also thought the value of TIG was the way it connected him to a structured framework of education, community and opportunities:
By giving me a platform to share with the world what’s happening in my country, as well as taking relevant knowledge and skills that are applicable in my country. TakingITGlobal will bridge the gap, being a member has initiated the process (Kiplagat, n.d.).

TIG participants who engaged in service learning both in digital and real world spaces reported feelings of empowerment and indicated similar feelings of empowerment from online and offline volunteering; Katherine, Cherrie, Ceren, Julian A. and George all identified their online volunteer work as impactful and empowering. Some members questioned the connection of online engagement to real-world action (Nyx, Amy), while a few felt TIG was not going far enough in either its vision of change or its support of member’s actions (Adama, Lamin, and Bijal).

Bobby, who self-identified as very active in social justice, identified the components of the TIG platform that support his actions:

Most definitely TakingITGlobal can help me achieve my goals. This easy-to-access community allows for smooth collaboration among members, sharing of ideas and new opportunities, a forum to allow for the free flow of discourse, and most importantly its reach is global; allowing people from all countries to collaborate towards similar goals. TakingITGlobal has given me more exposure and allowed others to contact me for sharing and information. I look forward to using TakingITGlobal in the future to promote my projects and activities. (Cameron, n.d.)

Bobby is involved in a number of action projects, but members with less experience also found the TIG platform to be effective in helping them to achieve their goals. Freire (1996) clearly described praxis as a process and emphasized that the beginning or
emergence stage represents entry into critical reflection that is itself an action. TIG’s Guide to Action and program descriptions on the website clearly view social justice engagement as a process that aims for sustainable action but supports participants throughout the process of praxis. Nour, for example, identified the TIG platform as instrumental in developing her understanding and awareness, building her capacity, and connecting her with mentors and programs that enable her action. She wrote that “I believe that I am benefitting more through the technology TIG provides” (Nour, n.d.).

Bassem Saadallaoui, an environmental and poverty activist in Canada, identified TIG’s communication and networking tools as instrumental in supporting his Arab Youth Portal on Water project. As well, Bassem found the TIG community to be “a great inspiration and motivation resource “for initiating and sustaining actions (Saadallaoui, n.d.). Douglas Musiringofa, a TIG member from Zimbabwe, specifically identified the technology tools as contributing to critical awareness; the current generation, he wrote “have been termed the Young Digital Generation, but through this I would like to believe we learn, explore and give” (Musiringofa, n.d.). Hassan Shehawy, A TIG member and engineering teacher from Egypt, felt that the platform helped him by providing access to a global network:

I badly need global connections with peers from everywhere in the world and opportunities in education programs. Through TIG, I could be able to be a site partner in the Adobe Youth Voices program….TIG helped me connecting to people from different parts of the world and establish international collaborative projects where I, and my students, gain amazing global exposure. (Shehawy, n.d.).
Emmanuel is active in African student politics but views his participation in TIG as action as well. To him, networking and awareness is essential to change and with the TIG platform he is able to measure his impact by the number of visits his projects receive through the site. For Emmanuel, TIG provides evidence of his impact as measured by the traffic on his project sites.

Adesuwa Erd, a TIG member from Nigeria, wrote that TIG is helpful with some of his goals but argued that the platform should do more to sustain actions through partnerships and funding:

I think TakingITGlobal can help me achieve some of my goals. Being a TIG member has been very rewarding. I found TIG guide to action very instrumental and useful in my campaign against climate change. I am also a beneficiary of TIGedu e-course of Global Citizenship and Environmental Stewardship these two courses have not only built my capacity for action but have given me a platform for joint action with other youths like me working elsewhere in the world. Although TIG has provided a platform for learning, sharing of ideas, networking, they can do much more…. TIG can help with grants for this campaign and also globalize the struggle (Erd, n.d.)

Jacques Gimeno, a TIG member from the Philippines, thinks that the value in TIG is in the way it connects youth together to accomplish meaningful work through technology, but he criticized TIG for the platforms’ low profile compared to other social networking sites:

It's a good platform for people to come together and work on something that's really substantial. The Internet has opened so many doors to people and has been
instrumental in both good and bad situations. TIG's edge is being different, but not out of touch; basic but significant. What TIG needs to do is be more aggressive because people are being enticed by less educational and less relevant social networking sites. As a result we see the likes of YouTube and Facebook raking in millions of users (Gimeno, n.d.).

A number of TIG community members identified the platform as instrumental in developing and supporting their offline social justice actions. Mawejje founded Uganda Youth using TIG resources and networking to connect his organization to members and initiatives, while 13/75 respondents credited the education, resources and community they found on TIG with supporting their social justice efforts in the area of the environment and AIDS activism. Temidayo, Christino and Priya described TIG as instrumental in developing their organizations and projects. Neunghun and Emmanuel are active in youth politics in their home countries of South Korea and Liberia, and identified TIG as their communication and networking platform. Bernard and Bassem identified TIG’s global networking tools as essential to the success of their projects. Adama Diop, a TIG member from Senegal, identified the skills development and financial support he received through TIG as instrumental in achieving his social justice goals:

I started using the TakingITGlobal online portal since 2007 and for me, it was in overall a very positive and enriching experience. I was awarded a 2012 Pearson Social Innovation Fellowship by TIG. So I got a $1,000 seed money grant for my project and I benefited from the tools and lessons given through the E-sprout online classes…. The dynamic entrepreneurial women and girls of Agnam-Goly (my native village) are my source of inspiration. One day, they told me they do not have
access to credit. There, I came into action with a solution. It’s called crowd funding and it works for the Agnam-Goly community! So, the Pellital Microfinance Institution was created to socially and financially empower the women of my village (Diop, n.d.).

Some participants viewed the platform as valuable in terms of building or expanding their business model such as Bobby, who used it to promote his projects and recruit partners. Lamin sought to use the site to fundraise for his project, and Bijal intended to use TIG to expand his scholarship program, Galaxy Bazaar.

TIG members described the platform as contributing to their social justice goals in online spaces as well. Online actions by TIG members included contributing to the development of online content through discussion boards, posting resources and articles or blogs (9/75), and volunteering for the site through translation, editing, and capacity building leadership opportunities (6/75). Many TIG members identified the resources and programs as instrumental in developing their understanding and awareness of issues. Platform resources such as the Guide to Action, collaborative tools, and toolkits were frequently identified as helpful (33/75). Member Stories respondents mentioned programs such as the Pearson fellowship (Adama), Adobe Voices (Heather, Heba) and Sprout e-courses (Katherine, Lidia, Adama and Adesuwa) as important to their understanding of social justice issues, and impactful upon their engagement in social justice action. Many respondents felt that the collaboration tools offered by TIG (online community and initiatives, programs such as Adobe Youth Movements, social media tools such as friending, groups, resource sharing and storing, messaging, and discussion forums), and opportunities to connect to partnerships with social justice organizations through the site
were important to their social justice efforts (45/75). Of seventy five respondents, 77% specifically mentioned the online community as an important source of information, support, empowerment and inspiration.

Chapter Five described the findings of the case study of the online social justice education program, TakingITGlobal. Section One provided a detailed description of the case context, including descriptions of TIG’s website, digital citizenship programs, membership, and conception of youth engagement. It is clear from this description that TIG’s website and programs align with social justice pedagogy and the praxis process, as well as with processes that support empowerment such as capacity building, promoting leadership, and deep, diverse connections to supportive networks (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). It is also clear that TIG conceptualizes youth as not merely defined by chronological age, but by potential for change action in the world, and places great emphasis within the platform on engaging youth in realizing that potential.

Section Two examined TakingITGlobal’s social justice education framework, including their stated philosophy, their vision of praxis, which they term “theory of change”, and their social justice curriculum documents, in particular, their primary curriculum document, the Guide to Action. It is apparent that a significant contribution of the TIG platform to youth empowerment and capacity to engage in social justice is the way in which the platform connects unstructured engagement and passion in youth to a structured social justice framework that provides resources, opportunities for action, and possibilities for connecting with a social justice community.

Section Three described the ways in which TIG consciously embeds the use of participatory technology within their social justice framework to support youth
engagement and capacity to achieve their social justice goals. TIG’s online community, interactive games, and mobile apps are examples of the organization’s stated goal to leverage the competence and affinity for technology demonstrated by many youth to engage young people in social activism.

Section Four described the ways in which development of praxis is facilitated by the TIG platform. It is clearly demonstrated that participants perceived the technology and platform as highly impactful on their development of praxis, as participants included in the study found their experience with the platform to be overwhelmingly positive, particularly in the areas of collaboration, knowledge building, and empowerment.

Section Five described how the TIG platform uses technology to support youth engagement, and the ways in which participants perceived technology as supporting their engagement in social justice. TIG members frequently reported elements of the platform to be engaging, particularly the online community, discussion boards, Adobe Youth Voices program, and online courses.

Section Six described how TIG supported capacity building in youth participants to achieve their social justice goals, and also described youth participants’ perceptions of technology use to facilitate capacity building. TIG’s extensive website, resources, programming, and comprehensive social justice education framework clearly supports capacity building in youth members, as evidenced by the commitment to social justice action demonstrated by the Member Story responses included in this study. All 75 of the participants in the sample engaged in some form of social justice action, and 60% engaged in sustained online or offline social justice activism.
In summary, it is apparent from the data that TakingITGlobal intentionally and effectively integrates technology use with a social justice education framework. It is also clear that of the member responses included in the study, most described the TIG platform as effective in building their capacity for social justice, reporting their experiences with the platform as empowering, positive, and supportive of individual and collective social justice goals.
Chapter Six

Discussion

The primary purpose of this case study was to explore the possibilities offered by participatory technology for youth empowerment for social justice, and in particular, the ways technology may support the development of praxis, empowerment, and engagement in social change among youth. Chapter Six discusses the case study findings in relation to this purpose and the following research questions:

1. How did TakingITGlobal intend to use technology to support social justice education and action?

2. How did elements of TakingITGlobal’s social justice education interact with technology, and how did this interaction impact upon empowerment and development of praxis in youth participants?

3. How did TakingITGlobal participants perceive their experience in using technology for empowerment and engagement in social justice?

4. How did TIG participants use technology in supporting their capacity to achieve social justice goals?

The findings indicate that TIG documentation expresses a clear intention to use technology to support social justice education and action. It also seems clear that TIG’s social justice education program and technology use interact to support participants’ feelings of empowerment and development of praxis. Participants consistently identified their experience using the technology and platform as having a positive impact on their
feelings of empowerment, their engagement in social justice, and their capacity to achieve their social justice goals.

**Research Question #1: How the Technology Was Intended to Support Social Justice Education and Action**

Intentionality is an essential aspect of Freire’s concept of praxis; action cannot be an accidental occurrence but must be an intended outcome of the praxis process. Similarly, the literature on technology use in education clearly demonstrated that technology use must be used with clarity of purpose and within specific learning environments if it is to support transformative education (Becker, 2001; Cuban, 2001; Facer, 2011; Gee, 2009; Hattie, 2009; Zhao et al., 1995). The TIG platform clearly describes an active role for technology within a social justice education program; technology tools like “TakingITGlobal.org present an opportunity to combine engaging social networking technologies with citizenship and global education” (TIG Best Practices, n.d., p.4).

TIG documents define technology as the creative manipulation of specific tools with intention to impact on the world; this definition clearly demonstrates a vision in which technology facilitates transformative education. This vision is apparent throughout the TIG platform; technology is used to deliver social justice education and expand opportunities to connect participants to resources, existing campaigns, programs, and active members of the community. TIG is a program that connects youth impassioned by social justice issues to an organized framework that provides education, mentoring, opportunities, and community in a predominantly digital space. Many have argued that such spaces represent the convergence of youth online culture and new forms of political
participation, and may represent the future of democratic engagement (Cohen & Kahne, 2012; Facer, 2011; Gee, 2013a, 2013b, Jenkins, 2009; Loader, 2007; Loader et al., 2014; Loader & Mercea, 2011; Serup Christianson, 2011; Vromen et al., 2015). Cohen and Kahne (2012) found that connection to a supportive infrastructure was essential for continued online political engagement by youth, while supportive networks are an important aspect of both empowerment and the collective engagement that is necessary for civic action (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Sampson et al., 2005).

Unlike other youth social justice programs such as Me to We, TIG’s use of technology is an integral part of the program rather than a tool for organization, branding, or recruiting participants to face-to-face programs (Vromen et al., 2015). For example, the Twitter feed for the Commit2Act app contains almost no recruitment Tweets to the app or any other TIG programs but is almost exclusively composed of daily challenges to engage the membership in action. While the TIG site seeks to recruit new members (there is a “join” button at the top of every page), this is not the primary focus of technology use. Technology use in the TIG platform works to facilitate the development of awareness and issue understanding, connect engaged individuals to networks, and empower them to engage in meaningful and sustainable action to change the world.

**Research Question #2: How Technology and Social Justice Education Interacted in the TIG Platform to Impact Upon Empowerment and Development of Praxis**

The primary purpose of this case study was to explore the possibilities offered by participatory technology for youth empowerment for social justice, and examine the ways in which a technology-mediated social justice education program may support development of praxis.
**Connection of engagement to a technology-mediated social justice framework.** TIG connects youths’ initial passion and engagement in issues (emergence stage) to an organizing framework for critical social justice education, and an active, involved community of individuals and organizations. Of the 75 Member Story responses included in the study, 77% of participants reported that TIG had a positive impact on their collaboration for social justice, while 89% described feeling empowered through using the platform. Several respondents, including Kelvin, Michael, Birendra, and Bijal specifically referenced the way in which connecting to the TIG framework enabled their capacity to achieve their social justice goals.

TIG Community Partnerships manager, Liam O’Doherty, argued that action must include connecting youth to partnerships that permit them to build and practice political competence. Empowerment, while essential, will not lead to influence and meaningful impact unless alliances are made within the existing structures. The 2013 Annual Report contained an emphasis on political process and mobilizing for system level change through partnerships with organizations that was not apparent in the 2012 Annual Report. These differences appear to describe an evolution in TIG’s philosophy as the organization moves toward facilitating youth influence and impact in social justice change, as well as empowerment and agency. TIG not only inspires and informs, but involves participants through targeted capacity building facilitated by technological delivery. TIG defines a successful outcome not as action alone, but as an outcome in which an individual is critically aware and engaged to assume a leadership role that will result in meaningful action; awareness about “key issues and the capacity to identify an issue as problematic are critical components that serve to distinguish those who lead by initiating projects.
from those who follow by participating or learning about them” (Annual Report, 2013, p. 2). This distinction between leaders and followers explains, in part, TIG’s definition of a successful outcome as the development of a leader rather than participation in a specific action. In this view, youth leadership will result in sustainable action and social change while participation without critical awareness may not be sustainable. As O’Doherty explained, young change leaders are needed in order to solve global problems (L.O’Doherty, interview, October 7, 2014).

Many of the differences between the 2012 and 2013 Annual Reports center on TIG’s conception of increased independence on the part of participants of the program. In the 2012 document, the role of TIG is described as developing awareness, building capacity, and providing access to opportunities for engagement and skill building, as well as ensuring participation, and influencing attitudes and behaviours that impact upon shared values. The 2013 document describes a vision of a more independent participant, in which TIG has a facilitation role. The 2013 Annual Report describes a theory of change in which individuals increase their awareness, find and connect with other individuals, develop outreach efforts at the institutional level, and connect themselves to networks that can impact upon policy. This emphasis on the agency and empowerment of the individual is an important element of social justice but TIG’s conception of empowerment seems somewhat contradictory. TIG’s emphasis on agency and individual empowerment suggests limitless possibilities for youth social justice action, including the potential for the kind of radicalism that Freire (1996) argued was essential to transform the world. On the other hand, the emphasis on working within the existing organizational network suggested by both the 2013 Annual Report and Liam O’Doherty seems to
suggest that youth can most effectively make an impact by working within the existing structure, which seems to limit the possibilities for the kind of radicalism Freire argued was necessary for real change. One must, however, remember Freire’s emphasis on lived experience and understand that radicalism is contextual. Nour’s critical reflection about her home country of Iraq is potentially a radical action while similar social criticism from participants in more democratic countries may not be seen as particularly radical.

It is possible that by connecting impassioned and engaged youth to networks and organizations that enable change, youth will be able to develop the political competence and influence to enact sustainable change. As O’Doherty explained, the primary role of TIG is to connect initial engagement to a framework that provides education and opportunities for further engagement; a structured framework that is “not a limiting factor but a jumping off point” (L.O’Doherty, interview, October 7, 2014). Certainly TIG members describe their involvement in the platform as inspiring rather than limiting; Bassem reported that TIG greatly supported “initiating and sustaining actions” (Saadallaoui, n.d.), while 60% of Member Story respondents reported engaging in sustained online and offline social justice action.

Research Question #3: Participant Perception of Experience Using the TIG Platform for Empowerment and Engagement in Social Justice

As Gee (2013b), Ito et al. (2010), Jenkins (2006), and Loader (2007) argued, technology is highly engaging and extremely relevant in the lives of many youth. TIG clearly leverages this relationship between technology and youth in developing and supporting social justice engagement. One of the central issues of using participatory technology for social justice action is the question of whether online engagement reflects
actual social justice commitment or represents technological engagement instead of real action for impactful change. This argument is the keystone of the Slacktivism position, and indeed critics of the use of participatory technology in politics argue that technology-based actions supplant real, meaningful actions. Commit2Act, for example, supports inspiration and engagement through social justice game playing. In the app, users record actions that move them up the leader board. It is possible to record an action without actually doing one as participants self-report their actions. Participants are encouraged to upload photographs and resources about their actions but it is not a requirement to register an action as complete. The weakness in the Commit2Act app seems contradictory to TIG’s emphasis on the importance of sustainable and meaningful action, and is a common criticism of the use of technology for social justice action in general. Technology-based social justice activism is termed slacktivism precisely because such actions are considered to have little real world impact (Morozov, 2009; Serup Christianson, 2011). Freire, too, criticized the “illusion of action” (Freire, 1994, p. 107) that occurs when activism is not supported by critical understanding.

Commit2Act, however, does connect participants to information and resources intended to build their critical understanding. Commit2Act occupies an intermediary space between engagement and action. It operates as an online social justice game that sparks inspiration and supports engagement, but it also connects users to resources and organizations, and motivates participants to increased involvement in real world actions.

In addition, TIG does not define a successful outcome of social justice education in terms of action alone but conceptualizes a successful outcome as engagement in praxis. While action is defined as a meaningful and sustainable impact, and TIG curriculum and
policy documents are explicit that action requires critical understanding in order to be meaningful and sustainable, Commit2Act and other aspects of the TIG platform, such as Member Stories, serve to inspire participants to engage in social justice. Certainly TIG respondents such as Seta, Kelvin, Jonathan, and Elmahdi viewed their participation in TIG’s online community as a form of action. The question remains: does using Commit2Act constitute engagement in social justice action? What may be needed is a broader definition of action that includes forms of virtual activism that are informed by critical awareness and therefore move beyond the Slacktivism label.

Research indicates that the impact of activism is largely dependent upon the strength of the community relationships (Wilson, 2002); an argument made by those who are critical of the role of participatory technology in social activism is the weak nature of the social ties in digital communities, making social media ineffective in sustaining meaningful and, in particular, radical social action (Fuchs, 2014; Morozov, 2011). TIG, however, is not a weakly connected community; 77% of the 75 Member Stories responses included in the study identified the online community as impactful and supportive of their social justice goals. Unlike other social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, which were not intended for social justice action, TakingITGlobal is a network of youth impassioned by social justice.

Sampson et al. (2005) found that collective engagement facilitated by an organizational infrastructure supported civic action. The active online community of TIG, with over 500,000 members is evidence of such collective engagement. While it is difficult indeed to estimate how many of these members engage in social justice action outside of involvement in the platform, the data from the Member Stories responses
suggests that more than half of the members participated in campaigns, volunteering, and other social justice actions with real world impact. Further, all 75 Member Story responses demonstrated some level of reflective, critical engagement, which Freire (1996) defined as a change action. Challenging ones’ personal world view is an act of both courage and transformation.

Emmanuel, for example, while demonstrably active in the real world, articulated his belief that visits to his website were a way of measuring progress in social change. Like Commit2Act, it is possible that Emmanuel’s site traffic does not represent real social actions but it is also possible that youth engaged enough to visit Emmanuel’s site or play Commit2Act are also engaged in real world civic action. The Member Stories data would certainly seem to suggest this is a possibility and Serup Christiansen (2014) argued that there is no evidence for the substitution theory postulated by critics of online activism. Loader et al. (2014) suggested that political systems need to be more “culturally receptive to the lived experience of those they serve” (Loader et al., 2014, p. 11). Within a re-configured model of active citizenship, Emmanuel’s understanding of his website traffic as representative of actual agency and action in social change, is perfectly in line with current youth culture. More research would need to be done to describe more accurately the relationship between Emmanuel’s reading of the meaning of his website traffic numbers and actual engagement in real world action.
Research Question #4: TIG Participants Use of Technology in Supporting Capacity to Achieve Social Justice Goals

Participants used the TIG platform in diverse ways to support their involvement in a number of issues and causes. During the data collection and analysis stages, participants’ self-reported actions were checked against their TIG profiles as part of the praxis coding process. Participants were then assigned a praxis level, or level of engagement in social justice based in Freire’s (1996) conception of praxis. The results suggest that TIG respondents were actively engaged in both online and offline social justice work (see Appendix C).

Respondents who identified themselves as active in the online community were also active outside of the TIG platform through either TIG affiliated or independent action campaigns. As my assessment of their praxis level is based on their self-reported activity, it is impossible, as Serup Christenson (2014) has argued, to know if this action parallels real world action. However, Freire (1996) argued that critical reflection itself is a form of action, particularly when other forms of action are inappropriate or impossible at the present time. Regardless of how action is defined, it is apparent from the data that TIG members are able to build their capacity for action through the platform in all areas of social justice education. Member Stories respondents overwhelmingly viewed their participation in the TIG platform as positive and impactful on their development of awareness, ability to connect to an engaged community, and access to opportunities for education and action. For example, Emmanuel, a political activist in Africa, viewed his participation in TIG as action as meaningful as his offline political work. To him,
networking and awareness is essential to change, and with the TIG platform he is able to measure his impact by the number of visits his projects receive through the site.

The TIG organization maintains that the development of young leaders requires organized and accessible capacity building programs. Programs such as Culture Connect and Global Encounters permit young people to engage in capacity building activities with other young people around the world. These digital spaces clearly increase the opportunities youth may have to engage in capacity building, and these increased opportunities lead to youth engagement in leadership roles for sustainable, meaningful actions (Loader et al., 2014; Jenkins et al., 2009; Wilson, 2002; Vromen et al., 2015).

While a few respondents suggested that TIG needed to do more in terms of funding youth action campaigns or consider more radicalized visions of change, the majority of Member Stories participants included in this study felt that the platform supported and facilitated their empowerment for social justice action.

Freire, Radicalism, and Online Civic Spaces

Thomas is an environmental activist from Germany who blogs about ethical consumerism; the only TIG member in 75 stories to mention consumerism as a primary issue contributing to environmental issues and global inequities. This is an interesting omission as critics of the democratic potential of online spaces point to the consumer context of the internet as the primary impediment to the use of online technology in a transformative or emancipatory way (Fuchs, 2014). Lack of engagement with this issue in the Member Stories and interview data may indicate that although TIG follows a not-for-profit model in providing programs and resources, it may not be critically examining its own position on the transformative potential of online technologies. Similarly, there is
little engagement with more radical positions. Only one participant described TIG as revolutionary and TIG’s future direction indicates a position that advocates for youth activism within existing political structures. TIG describes technology as a potential answer to the question of declining youth engagement in civic participation through the integration of technology and global citizenship, which appears to attach normative political identities to youth culture without addressing the potential for the radical re-imagining of the world Freire argued was necessary for real change.

TIG’s 2013 emphasis on engaged youth enacting change at the system level suggests that TIG views meaningful social change by youth as dependent upon working within the existing structure. While youth are encouraged to become engaged leaders and define their own pathways toward change through empowering use of participatory technologies, they are also encouraged to build their influence within existing political structures. While there is nothing wrong with aligning with large agencies such as the United Nations that are “championing the role of youth” (L. O’Doherty, interview, October 7, 2014), the emphasis on this particular direction of engagement does move TIG away from the radical positions that Freire (1996) asserted were necessary to truly transform society. For Freire, changing the world was a “task for radicals” (Freire, 1994, p. 21) but he also considered the kind of contradiction presented by an organization like TIG. Freire asked how the oppressed (in this case, youth) are to proceed without the political power to enact change and argued that there is a difference between that which can only be changed by political power and “projects that can be carried out with the oppressed in the process of organizing them” (Freire, 1996, p. 36). Jonathan, for example, thought:
It is not enough to sit as young people and blame the world and everything in it for all the ills in the society. We have got to actively work for the change we want to see. TakingITGlobal is one way I am doing this (OsaObo, n.d.).

Sean identified the empowerment potential of TIG’s technology platform and pointed out that “TIG has the potential to reach and empower young people in ways that many of today’s world leaders could only dream of achieving” (Amos, n.d.).

Whether or not TIG, and indeed participatory technology in general could be considered a structure for organizing with youth for social change in the sense Freire intended depends largely on how one views youth disempowerment. Youth, as many have argued (Buckingham, 1997, 1999; Jenkins et al., 2009; Loader et al., 2014; Vromen et al., 2015; Westheimer, 2008) are largely disengaged from and disempowered by traditional political processes such as party affiliation and voting. In this sense it is possible to describe youth as oppressed or “culturally displaced” (Loader, 2007, p. 1). Proponents of this viewpoint frequently argue for the transformative potential of alternate forms of participation and alternate spaces for political expression offered by technology. As TIG member Sean discovered, platforms such as TIG offer young people the opportunity to not only be active participants, but leaders and shapers of a political message that is individual, connected to their life experience and peer group, and transportable across the globe at the click of a mouse or the tap of a screen. While traditional political participation tends to be hierarchal (Loader, 2007) and young people are viewed not as active citizens but citizens-in-waiting (Buckingham, 1997, 1999; Westheimer, 2008), online social justice programs such as TIG are potential sites of convergence between traditional forms of democratic participation and the socially loose,
non-hierarchical affinity spaces (Gee, 2009) that are frequently mediated by participatory technology (Ito et al., 2013; Loader, 2007; Loader et al., 2014; Jenkins et al., 2009). Loader (2007) argued that such spaces provide avenues for both individualized identity politics and access to more systemic political influences; TIG would appear to be purposefully positioning itself as such a space. It is possible that the primary contribution of the TIG platform to youth empowerment and engagement in social justice is the way in which it connects emerging social justice engagement and passion in youth to a structured social justice network that provides resources, opportunities for action, and possibilities for connecting with a social justice community. While there are tensions between the TIG approach and Freire’s conception of praxis, particularly in the way that structuring youth engagement places boundaries around the radicalism Freire argued was necessary for real social change, TIG is an example of an online space that purposefully combines political participation with the non-hierarchical, fluid, collaborative elements associated with youth culture and supported by participatory technology.

Limitations of Study

One of the central limitations of this study was the inability to interview TIG participants. The Member Stories, while useful in describing how participants used the TIG platform for social justice had undergone an unspecified selection process by TIG staff. The stated selection criteria included the submitting member’s level of engagement in the platform and the ways in which the story could inspire others. As such, the Member Stories could be considered a sanitized version of TIG participants’ assessment of the platform and their engagement in social justice. Certainly, the profiles of some TIG participants whose stories were included in the study demonstrated political action that
could be considered radical, although the Member Stories themselves and the TIG platform in general did not overtly encourage the taking of radical positions.

Second, personal interviews with participants would have permitted me to describe more fully the participant’s lived experience outside of the TIG community and potentially the resulting impact this experience might have had on their engagement in praxis and social justice. The TIG community is racially and geographically diverse, but the Member Stories narratives are similar, in part because respondents answered the same four questions. Personal interviews would have allowed for follow-up questions specific to individual stories and lived experience of the participants.

**Conclusions and Future Directions**

While it is true that many online spaces are unsafe, hierarchal, privacy compromising and serve to position participants as consumers (Fuchs, 2014), TIG’s mandate to deliver vigorous social justice education through a safe, online space populated by like-minded participants, sets it apart from most social media platforms. Weinstein et al. (2015) identified a recent, substantial decline in youth civic participation in online spaces specifically related to issues of security and surveillance, including a perception of increasingly hostile environments. Such spaces could not be characterized as empowering. Talking politics on the internet, argued Loader et al. (2014) and Vromen et al. (2015) can be a dangerous when done on everyday social media. However, affinity spaces such as TIG present a safe alternative for youth seeking an active role in the world. The criticism levelled by Morozov (2009, 2011) at “low risk” internet activism may very well be the aspect that engages youth in the safe, supportive and critically
reflective online communities like TIG. The current research contributes to the debate on the need for broader definitions of activism within digital contexts.

It is possible to argue that online spaces that intentionally use technology to support social justice pedagogy and embed technology use within a social justice education framework support user empowerment. The emphasis TIG places on awareness and community building along with the concrete support offered by the online community appear to lead to meaningful and sustainable social justice action for many members. TIG seems to be an example of an online space that purposefully combines traditional political participation and the world of informal, individualized youth culture that Loader (2007) argued represent an intersection at which point opportunities for political empowerment may occur. The current study demonstrates that platforms such as TIG not only provide effective technology tools for social justice work, but need to be considered as important spaces of exploration in terms of how technology serves as the context of youth culture and lived experience for engaging in political expression and civic activism.

The intersection of participatory technology and rigorous social justice education offered by TIG permits youth to build their capacity for social justice action in meaningful and sustainable ways. Considering the evidence regarding the conditions necessary for transformative use of technology, more research should occur around the transformative potential of technology used explicitly for social justice within a pedagogic approach that adheres to the essential elements of social justice education.

Gee (2013), Becker (2001), Cuban (2001, 2013) and Gray et al. (2010) all argue that transformative use of technology does not occur within the current education system. Research needs to be conducted around using technology-embedded social justice
programs like TIG within traditional educational environments. The current study provides an introduction to the philosophy and practices of TIG that can contribute to further research and practice by educators. TIGed virtual classrooms, for example, may facilitate capacity building for social justice education and action for both teachers and students through resources, skills development, collaborative opportunities, and opportunities to connect to social justice organizations and partners. The inclusion of a technology-embedded social justice program in a school setting may address some of the challenges to using technology in a transformative way within the current education system.
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Wilson, M. (2002). Does a networked society foster participatory democracy or is commitment to place based community still a necessity for civic engagement? In M. Pendakur & R. Harris (Eds.) *Citizenship and participation in the information age* (pp. 372 –387). Aurora, Canada: Garamond Press.


Appendix A
Letter of Information

Project title: Technology and Transformative Education: the Potential of Participatory Technology as a Tool for Social Justice Education

Masters of Education Student Researcher: Lynn Mitchell
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Richard Reeve
Faculty of Education, Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario

This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines and Queen’s policies. It has also been approved by an administrator at Taking IT Global.

What is this study about? The purpose of this study is to describe the way technology is used to help build an online community for social justice action. Specifically, this study will examine how the Taking IT Global online program uses technology to build participants’ critical awareness, feelings of empowerment and engagement in social justice action. Educator participants are being recruited through this Letter of Information and attached Consent Form. I would like to interview you for one hour by telephone. This interview will be audio recorded. After the transcription of the audio recording has been verified the original audio recording will be destroyed. There are no known physical, psychological, economic, or social risks associated with participating in this study. You can control your level of participation by checking the specific types of participation on the attached Consent Form.

Is my participation voluntary? Yes. You should not feel obliged to answer any material that you find objectionable or that makes you feel uncomfortable. You may also withdraw at any time with no effect on your standing in the program and may request the removal of all or part of your data from the study without consequence.

What will happen to my responses? I will maintain the confidentiality of participants’ identities to the extent possible. After the data have been collected pseudonyms will be used in place of the participants’ names. Only the researcher, research assistants, and my supervisory committee will have access to this information. Results of this study will be published in my master’s thesis and may be published in professional journals or presented at scientific conferences, but any such presentations will be of general findings and will maintain confidentiality to the extent possible. Should you be interested, you are entitled to a copy of the findings. To receive a copy of the results please add your e-mail address to the attached Consent Form. Data will be retained for five years. After five years, data will either be destroyed securely or retained indefinitely.

Will I be compensated for my participation? No.

What if I have concerns? Any questions about study participation may be directed to Lynn Mitchell at 9lm56@queensu.ca or 613-545-3983 or her supervisor, Dr. Richard Reeve at 613-533-6000 x77296 or reever@queensu.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at chair.GREB@queensu.ca or 613-533-6081.

Sincerely,
Lynn Mitchell
Appendix B

Letter of Consent

1. I have read the Letter of Information and have had all of my questions answered to my satisfaction.

2. I understand that I will be participating in the study called Technology and Transformative Education being completed by Queen’s University, Masters of Education student Lynn Mitchell. The purpose of this research is to describe how technology may facilitate the building of critical awareness, feelings of empowerment and engagement in social justice action by youth. The study will also describe the ways in which youth may use technology to build a community for social justice action. I understand that this means that I will be asked to participate in one, one-hour individual interview by telephone. I understand that the interview will be audio recorded. I consent that I will participate in this study in the following ways:

   (Please check all of the appropriate boxes)

   □ Participate in a one-hour, audiotaped telephone interview.

3. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without consequence. I understand that I may request the removal of all or part of my data from the study without consequence. I understand that every effort will be made to maintain my confidentiality to the extent possible. Only the researcher (Lynn Mitchell), research assistants, and the researcher’s supervisory committee will have access to the data. The data will be published in Lynn’s master’s thesis and may be published in professional journals or presented at scientific conferences, but any such presentations will be of general findings and will maintain confidentiality to the extent possible. Should you be interested, you are entitled to a copy of the findings by adding your address at the bottom of this Consent Form.

4. I am aware that if I have any questions, concerns, or complaints about participating in this study, I may contact Lynn Mitchell; 9lm56@queensu.ca; project supervisor, Dr. Richard Reeve (613-533-6000 x77296); reever@queensu.ca, or the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board (613-533-6081); chairGREB@queensu.ca at Queen’s University.

5. I have read and retained a copy of the Letter of Information. My signature below and check marks above indicate my consent to participate in this study.

   Educator’s name: _______________________________________

   Educator’s signature: ___________________________ Date: ______________

Email and/or postal address should a copy of the research results be requested: Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return to Lynn Mitchell. Retain the second copy for your records.
Appendix C
Praxis Chart and Online/Offline Activism

- Beginner (Praxis B) - evidence of critical awareness and thinking (knowledge building), inspiration and engagement.
- Developing (Praxis D) - critically aware and knowledge of issues combined with evidence of some collaboration with a stated action goal and/or self-actualizing goal.
- Support Action (Praxis SA) - critically aware, knowledge of issues, engaged collaboratively and planning to participate in action or participating in indirect action (content creation, dialogue, fundraising programs).
- Action (Praxis A) - critically aware, strong knowledge of issues, engaged in concrete action that is collaborative and impactful on others.

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<td>Azerbaijan</td>
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<td>Link to Story</td>
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## Appendix D

### Codes List and Descriptions

#### Knowledge Building

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content mastery</td>
<td>Participant identification of content understanding or program specific goal of content mastery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue Knowledge</td>
<td>Participant identification of issue understanding or program aspect intended to improve issue understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of tools</td>
<td>Use of resources of the site (online courses, toolkits, curriculum documents)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit content instruction</td>
<td>Social justice curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit skills instruction</td>
<td>Social justice skills development (leadership, speech making, connecting with other organizations, campaign design)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School bridge</td>
<td>Makes a connection to school program or curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities (organizations, initiatives, scholarships, volunteering)</td>
<td>Organizations, initiatives, scholarships, volunteering opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content creation</td>
<td>User created curriculum and content</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Creating Awareness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of oppression</td>
<td>Reference to critical analysis of oppression in curriculum or learning opportunity or program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standpoint building</td>
<td>Learning that may influence or impact upon worldview or standpoint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency (awareness)</td>
<td>Participant sense of agency or reference to creation of agency as a goal of program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiration (awareness)</td>
<td>Participant identification of feelings of inspiration or program identified goal of inspiration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal growth/self-actualizing/identity creation (awareness)</td>
<td>Participant identification of feelings of growth or program reference to this as a goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared schema for awareness</td>
<td>Community understanding of issues and orientation to action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment (awareness)</td>
<td>Feeling of empowerment due to awareness; Freire’s emergence stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement (awareness)</td>
<td>Evidence of intention to engage participants in social justice or evidence of participant engagement for social justice understanding or action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived Experience – acquiring it</td>
<td>World view based in our lived understanding of reality; how that may develop, change or influence engagement in social justice. Experiential learning that may influence or impact upon worldview or standpoint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived experience- using it</td>
<td>Lived experience applied to social justice understanding and action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Bridge (awareness)</td>
<td>School connection to awareness building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence/less deferential</td>
<td>Confidence in opinions and issue understanding, less deference to authoritative and traditional positions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools</td>
<td>Digital and other tools for social justice education awareness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Action and Social Change**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empowerment (action)</th>
<th>Reference to feelings of empowerment or program goal of empowerment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth participation/action</td>
<td>Reference to youth participating in social justice action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency (action)</td>
<td>Empowerment for action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiration (action)</td>
<td>The &quot;spark&quot; of social justice; what motivates the youth to engage in social justice work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-actualizing (action)</td>
<td>Participants feeling of agency in action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct action</td>
<td>Action plan, service learning, volunteering, use of technology tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect action</td>
<td>Fundraising, petitions, raising awareness, contributing to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
knowledge, online activism, online volunteering and even using apps and web 2.0 for social justice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaboration for action</th>
<th>Community building for social justice action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engagement (individual)</td>
<td>Reference to individual engagement in social justice education and action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement (collective)</td>
<td>Reference to collective action and engagement in social justice education and action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived Experience (action)</td>
<td>Relation of lived experience to action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Bridge (action)</td>
<td>Relation to school program aimed at action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content creation (action)</td>
<td>Technology mediated content creation- blogs, articles, art, resources, initiatives, video, photographs</td>
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</table>

**Reflection**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On creating awareness (reflection)</td>
<td>Awareness development either as participant identification or stated program goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy development</td>
<td>Evidence of empathy, equity and diversity issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On lived experience (reflection)</td>
<td>Reflection on personal lived experience as inspiration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On agency (reflection)</td>
<td>Reflection on sense of agency or empowerment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On self-actualizing/identity creation/personal growth</td>
<td>Use of reflection on lived experience as inspirational spark; evidence of growth in understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On confidence</td>
<td>Evidence of development of confidence to engage in social justice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective practices</td>
<td>Aspects of program to encourage reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On youth empowerment</td>
<td>Evidence from participant perception and program stated goals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On youth participation/action  Evidence from participant perception and program stated goals.

On global citizenship  An approach that is inclusive of all and celebrates diverse ideas, cultures and viewpoints; participant perception of themselves as global citizens.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaboration</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Code</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of group dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community building (knowledge/awareness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community building (action)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affinity space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared schema for action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentorship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence/competence (collaboration)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Code</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity/digital divide/access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commodification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a tool for understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>As a tool for awareness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>As a tool for action</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>As a tool for collaboration</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>As a tool for reflection</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participatory</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gameifying</strong></td>
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### Context

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Learning Environment</td>
<td>Aspect of the program learning environment that contributes to social justice education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of technology</td>
<td>Technology use for social justice education within the program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission</td>
<td>Reference to specific goals of program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Reference to organization of program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>Reference to internally generated statistic about program</td>
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</table>
Appendix E

Summary of TIG Global Education and Social Innovation Programs

Global Education Programs

Taking IT Global for educators (TIGed). The mandate of TakingITGlobal for Educators is to support "globally minded educators in utilizing technology to create transformative learning experiences" (Annual Report, 2012, p. 16). The program is intended to support delivery education in the key values of global citizenship, student voice, and environmental stewardship. TIGed allows educators to use or modify virtual classrooms in a number of subject areas and grade levels, as well as search resources, issues, videos and active member’s contributions, and create a collection of saved resources. Virtual classes include options to customize with logos and images, include a student writing section, and notification settings for blogs. The platform functions in a similar way to other blended delivery programs such as Edmodo or Moodle but the content is geared toward social justice education. The sign up process is simple for both educators and students and there is an option to connect through existing social media accounts. Class Twitter feeds can be integrated into the virtual classroom platform, allowing for real time feedback on local and global collaborations. TIGed offers professional development for educators in a blended format in the three key values areas. All programs are free of charge except for professional development courses. TIGed has a number of corporate and educational partners, including the Toronto District School Board, Microsoft Partners in Learning, and McGraw-Hill Ryerson which promote and support collaborative curriculum development in social justice education. TIG identifies the relationship with TDSB as particularly important to the organization's "potential to
affect change on a system-level” (Annual Report, 2013, p. 23). In 2013, 11,866 educators from 4,400 schools in 147 countries were registered TIGed users.

**Future Friendly Schools.** The vision for Future Friendly Schools is to support 21st century learning and "prioritize challenge-based learning and the immersive use of information, and Communication Technologies" (Annual report, 2013) through a certification program that recognizes schools engaging in innovative practices in integrating the three key values of student voice, global citizenship, and environmental stewardship. The program supports schools in creating an online digital portfolio of their accomplishments which is shared with the online community, creating opportunities for global collaboration and resource sharing.

**Global Encounters.** In collaboration with The Centre for Global Education, Global Encounters is a series of video conferences that connect engaged youth to each other as well as to mentors and speakers around the world. Each conference includes a live event, preceded by a week-long online program of activities through which students learn about the issue, collaborate with other students, and are mentored by experts.

**Education Fast Forward.** In 2012, TIG partnered with Promethean and Cisco to host a series of live debates on social justice issues using Cisco TelePresence technology. This partnership allowed youth voices to be included in the conversation along with educators and leaders from around the world. In 2013, twenty such conferences were held.

**Social Innovation Programs**

**Sprout e Course.** Sprout e-courses is a 9 week online program that supports youth in developing the skills in management, critical thinking, communications, team building
and problem solving needed to make their action plans a reality. In partnership with Microsoft's Youth Spark program, TIG awards scholarships to the Sprout program, enabling participants to access training, mentorship and seed grants to support their innovation projects. As well, the Sprout Self program supports individuals in developing their leadership skills through curriculum delivered through a customized, asynchronous platform that allows participants to review content and download activities at their own pace. In 2012, 12 recipients received Sprout scholarships and in 2013, 54 participants were awarded scholarships. All applicants must be members of the Innovate for Good community to be considered eligible for a scholarship.

**Innovate for Good.** A partnership program with Microsoft Youth Spark, Innovate For Good encourages youth participants to become involved at increasingly deeper levels of engagement through a blended format of online and offline opportunities. Participants are tasked with developing innovative technology-based projects that make a difference in their communities and are guided and supported through online and offline workshops, mentoring, and collaborative projects. Innovate for Good is currently a global collective of 2,380 members in over 75 countries.

**Educational Partnerships through the TIG platform.** The TIG platform, resources and video conferencing supports have been used by numerous social justice education organizations including Engineers Without Borders and the Global Youth Action Network, a United Nations affiliated initiative that supports youth voice and presence at UN events and processes. In total, TIG recognizes 3,870 affiliated organizations.
**Youth Movements.** Youth Movements is a collaboration project of 55 partner organizations across the United Nations system, including TakingITGlobal. TIG's role is to develop technology support for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and connecting engaged youth to initiatives and actions. TIG has hosted online inquiries in best practices to support youth-focused NGO work and created the YouthMovements.org Map, which serves to connect youth to initiatives focusing on the Millennium Development Goals. In 2013, the TIG platform became the online hub for current grantees of the program to detail their efforts online, update their projects status and develop awareness through integration with Facebook and Twitter. The site also provides translation services. In 2014, TIG released a multilingual mobile application to collect status updates from youth-led projects and released support resources, including a funding widget. The goal for the future is to expand the impact tracking abilities of the technology to support youth efforts in achieving goals.