Learning through participation: A case study on the affordances of making YouTube tutorial videos

Cheryl Wei-yu Chen

National Taipei University of Business, Taiwan
wychen66@gmail.com

The Internet has offered many opportunities for interactions and participation. The current study positioned YouTube as a possible affinity space (Gee, 2003, 2004) for students to showcase their personal talents. The participants were recruited from a group of senior students in a Taiwanese university who volunteered to participate in this study. In their three-minute tutorial videos, students needed to teach the global audience something they were good at and then responded to the comments they might receive. Data were collected from students' reflective essays and transcripts of their group interviews. The data analysis process revealed that this "learning-through-participation" (Merchant, 2009, p. 110) approach was found to provide students with authentic audiences and an engaged learning opportunity (Dabrowski, 2018) for personal expression and community building. Taking the role of a YouTuber was found to be conducive to the participants' learning on technological, educational and social dimensions. Playing the role of content creators and responding to online comments also allowed students to develop a more cautious and responsible attitude towards online speech and etiquette. This paper ends with a few suggestions for continuing related research on helping students to become more capable and responsible citizens of the twenty first century.

Forum

51

Keywords: affinity space, YouTube, affordances

In the so-called Web 2.0 age, the Internet has become an interactive and participatory space where everyone can create and share (Berger & Trexler, 2010). Jenkins (2006a, 2006b) coined the term "participatory culture" to describe how new forms of participation are supported by technologies. A participatory culture is a culture which encourages artistic expression and civic engagement, with individuals acting both as consumers and creators of digital contents. Becoming a member of a participatory culture requires a set of skills and competencies. As Jenkins (2006b) states, "Access to this participatory culture functions as a new form of the hidden curriculum, shaping which youth will succeed and which will be left behind as they enter school and the workplace" (p. 3). For Jenkins (2006b), it is of paramount importance that these skills are incorporated into school curriculum to ensure that no "participation gap" exists to deprive the youth of the opportunities to fully participate in the digital world.

The current study is intended to respond to Jenkins' (2006b) call of helping students to be part of the Internet participatory culture by guiding students to make and post their YouTube tutorial videos. In their three-minute videos, a group of Taiwanese students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) were required to use English to teach something they considered themselves good at. By creating tutorial videos, publishing them on YouTube, and interacting with their audiences, students could become micro-celebrities who "view themselves as a public persona to be consumed by others, use strategic intimacy to appeal to followers, and regard their audience as fans" (Marwick, 2015, p. 333). Although many students might not feel comfortable with such a role, they could gain first-hand experiences of what it is like to publish their creation online and receive feedback from a global audience. The results were expected to offer a glimpse into learners' perceptions of taking the role of online content contributors and to gain a better understanding of using YouTube as a new context for language learning (Hafner et al., 2015; Terantino, 2011). These results will also further extend the current research on YouTube which has focused on using the video platform for vocabulary acquisition (Arndt & Woore, 2018;) and intercultural learning (Benson, 2015, 2017; Sun, 2018).

To reiterate, the current study examined students' learning from sharing their personal interests or talents by taking the role of micro-celebrities (Marwick, 2015) and making and posting their YouTube tutorial videos. The two guiding questions were:
1. What were students' perceptions of taking the role of YouTubers?
2. What did students learn from taking the role of YouTubers?

Literature review

Web 2.0 and participatory culture

The term "Web 2.0" has been used to refer to "the evolution to a more social, interactive Web that gives everyone a chance to create, share, publish, and collaborate" (Berger & Trexler, 2010, p. 3). A highly relevant concept to Web 2.0 is user participation. Jenkins uses the term *participatory culture* (2006a; 2006b) to discuss the importance of encouraging user participation and harnessing collective intelligence in contemporary digital spaces. Jenkins defines participatory culture as one:

1. with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement

2. with strong support for creating and sharing one's creations with others

3. with some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices

4. where members believe that their contributions matter

5. where members feel some degree of social connection with one another (at least they care what other people think about what they have created) (Jenkins, 2006b, p. 7)

It should be noted that not every member has to contribute in a participatory culture – participation can range from just browsing or viewing the online content, leaving a comment, to publishing one's own content. As Jenkins (2006b) puts it, "In such a world, many will only dabble, some will dig deeper, and still others will master the skills that are most valued within the community" (p. 7). Regardless of the form of the participation, a participatory culture welcomes artistic expression and civic engagement from people of all walks of life, resulting in a sense of community being created in Web 2.0 spaces (Merchant, 2009).

Media literacy skills and becoming multiliterate

To be able to become part of the participatory culture, Jenkins (2006b) argues that a new set of media literacy skills needs to be built on the basis of the ability to read, write, research, use technological tools, and analyze. Once these fundamental skills are established, Jenkins (2006b) concurs that there are 11 literacy skills which school curriculum needs to address (p. 4):

Play – the capacity to experiment with one's surroundings as a form of problem-solving

Performance – the ability to adopt alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery

Simulation – the ability to interpret and construct dynamic models of real-world processes

Appropriation – the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content

Multitasking – the ability to scan one's environment and shift focus as needed to salient details.

Distributed Cognition – the ability to interact meaningfully with tools that expand mental capacities

Collective Intelligence – the ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others toward a common goal

Judgment – the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources

Transmedia Navigation – the ability to follow the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities

Networking – the ability to search for, synthesize, and disseminate information

53

Negotiation – the ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative norms.

This list coincides with the definition of *twenty-first century literacy* proposed by the New Media Consortium (2005, p. 8):

the set of abilities and skills where aural, visual, and digital literacy overlap. These include the ability to understand the power of images and sounds, to recognize and use that power, to manipulate and transform digital media, to distribute them pervasively, and to easily adapt them to new forms.

Jenkins (2006b) further stresses the social nature of his set of eleven core media literacy skills which "shifts the focus of literacy from one of individual expression to community involvement" (p. 4). According to him, changes in the digital environment require new ways of thinking, processing information, and making sense of experience. Meaning is produced socially, by pooling collective wisdom and working collaboratively. To participate in the world of tomorrow, the young generation needs social skills for working together, negotiating across diverse communities, and reconciling conflicting information. For Jenkins, the social nature of new forms of literacy should not be neglected when discussing the multiple semiotic modes (namely, linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial) which constitute what the New London Group (1996) calls multiliteracies (see also Hung, et al., 2013; Yeh, 2018). Simply put, literacy is now defined beyond linguistic aspects alone; learners need to be able to interpret and respond to a wide range of multimodal texts and literacy practices (Jewitt, 2008; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003).

YouTube as an affinity space

A highly relevant concept to Jenkins' participatory culture is Gee's *affinity space*, which he defines as:

a place (physical, virtual, or a mixture of the two) wherein people interact with each other, often at a distance (that is, not necessarily face-to-face, though face to face interactions can also be involved), primarily through shared practices or a common endeavor (which entails shared practices), and only secondarily through shared culture, gender, ethnicity, or face-to-face relationships. (Gee, 2004, p. 89)

For Gee, learning is less about belonging to a fixed community of practice or learning from the master (Wenger, 1998) and more about pursuing a shared interest and purpose which transcends age, class, race, gender, and educational level. Membership of an affinity group is built through bonds constructed around "a common endeavor" (Gee, 2003, p. 192). Participation can take various forms, as people differ in their skills and interests. Affinity spaces also encourage peer-to-peer learning, and they provide a fertile ground for informal learning. As Black (2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2009) and others (e.g., DeLuka, 2018) have shown in their studies of online fanfiction communities, contributors learn to master essential writing skills and read works which inspire them more closely. They also learned to offer feedback to others and discuss one another's fanfiction, thus creating a positive, informal, peer-to-peer learning space.

According to Gee (2004), affinity spaces, whether virtual or physical, are a common occurrence in today's global, high-tech, capitalist world. Such spaces are often set up for

commercial purposes. For example, a car company may create websites and events (e.g., online chatrooms, fan pages, social gatherings) around which its customers can identify as owners of a particular car brand or social gatherings. Likewise, professionals across disciplines may networks with colleagues via an array of "activities, newsletters and other sorts of texts, websites...conferences in ways that have progressively taken on more and more of the features of an affinity space" (Gee, 2004, p. 79).

Another example of affinity space is YouTube. Since its official launch in 2005, this video-sharing site has become the most popular platform for viewing videos. In a recent survey done by the Pew Research Center (Smith & Anderson, 2018), three-quarters of American adults and 94% of 18- to 24-year-olds reported that they used YouTube. Part of the success of YouTube is due to the fact that every user can upload his/her creation to be viewed by a global audience; in other words, there is relatively law barrier for participation (Jenkins, 2006a). As Collins and Halverson (2018) argue, YouTube, with its 1.3 billion active users, has become "a gigantic affinity space for young users who watch their favorites, produce their own videos, generate feedback, and improve their video creation craft" (p. 80). Global users can enter this affinity space anytime, anywhere with their mobile devices. To put it simply, YouTube is a site of participatory culture (Burgess & Green, 2018), and its learning opportunities need to be explored further.

The affordances of learning to become a YouTuber

The popularity of YouTube has generated a group of content-generators called YouTubers, also known as YouTube personalities or YouTube stars (Arnold, 2017). Many fully-fledged YouTubers have become celebrities who are followed by millions of fans. For example, the Swedish-based video game reviewer PewDiePie (https://www.youtube.com/user/PewDiePie) has more than 64 million subscribers and 16 billion view counts on his YouTube channel. In a recent report done by *The Guardian* (Dredge, 2016), major YouTube celebrities such as Smosh and PewDiePie were deemed more influential on American youngsters than traditional celebrities such as Jennifer Lawrence and Katy Perry. It is also suggested that the younger generation enjoys the more authentic and intimate interaction afforded by YouTube celebrities. The rise of YouTube and YouTube celebrities has also changed the way people consume, create, and interact (Cayari, 2011; Su, 2017).

In terms of research, the educational possibilities – or affordances (Jiang, 2017) – of becoming a YouTuber remains to be examined, and the current research intends to fill this gap. The young generation does not just watch YouTube videos to learn or entertain themselves; they may take on more active roles on YouTube. Chau (2010) contends that as young people take on the roles of social networkers and media creators, YouTube offers a participatory culture where they can develop, interact, and learn. There have been previous studies on students' digital video projects (e.g., Hafner, 2013; Yeh, 2018) which required learners to post their videos on YouTube, but in these cases, YouTube seems to serve more as a cloud storage space where learners can conveniently store and retrieve their video productions. In these projects, the learners were not required to adopt the role of micro-celebrities (Marwick, 2015) who not only posted their YouTube videos for self-expression, but also gained a global outreach to create their own affinity groups. Posting or publishing videos on YouTube should not be the end of a digital video project. The social interaction between video creators and their audiences should also deserve some attention, and this study intends to examine this aspect. Examining this interaction also addresses many of **55**

the 11 skills described above. Jenkins (2006b, p. 4) recommends learners navigate in the new media landscape, with skills that deserve particular focus including *collective intelligence* ("the ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others toward a common goal"), *judgment* ("the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information"), *networking* ("the ability to search for, synthesize, and disseminate information"), and *negotiation* ("the ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative norms").

In previous studies where the possibilities afforded by multimodal composition were examined (Jiang, 2017; 2018; Yeh, 2018), students produced multimodal materials on prescribed topics. For example, Jiang (2017) assigned five curricular topics from the course textbook (culture shock, first impression, youth, marriage/love, AIDS) while students in Yeh's (2018) study had to make videos to showcase aspects of Taiwanese culture (e.g., festivals, cuisine, and arts). Although students in these studies seemed to be able to exercise their creativity, there appeared to be little room for them to take on the role of micro-celebrities who "viewed themselves as a public persona to be consumed by others, use strategic intimacy to appeal to followers, and regard their audience as fans" (Marwick, 2016, p. 333), and the prescribed topics might have limited relevance to their own personal interests or talents. Moreover, the end products mainly functioned as homework assignments where the end of the course marked the end of students' participation in the digital projects and did not fully explore other more interactive elements of the participatory culture (e.g., networking or negotiating with others on the Internet). This current study attempts to fill these gaps in the research of multimodal composing.

In summary, the present inquiry intended to continue the works of integrating digital video projects into English learning (Hafner, 2013; Hafner & Miller, 2011; Jiang, 2017, 2018; Yeh, 2018) by providing students with engaged learning opportunities (Dabrowski, 2018). It examined the learning potential of taking the role of micro-celebrities to share their personal interests or talents by posting their YouTube tutorials. There were two guiding research questions which shaped the study, as follows:

1. What were students' perceptions of taking the role of a YouTuber?
2. What did students learn from taking the role of a YouTuber?

Research methodology

1. Participants and research context

To recruit participants for the current study, an intact class of senior English majors (n=40) were approached during a lunch meeting in a university in Taiwan. The students were debriefed about the study, and ample time was given to answer any questions. Fifteen students (thirteen females and two males of an average age of 21.5 years old) volunteered to join the study. The researcher did not teach this class in their senior year but had taught the entire class in their freshman year and half of the students in their sophomore year. Judging from their self-reported scores from standardized tests and the researcher's past assessment of their class performance, the participants' English proficiency levels ranged from B1 to C1 in the CEFR.

A consent form was signed by each participant before the study began. The consent form, along with the entire research proposal, was approved by an external university-based

research ethics committee in Taiwan, which advised, for ethical reasons, that the study

not be implemented with the researcher's current students. To protect students' identity, pseudonyms are used throughout the study. Via texting and email communication, all the participants were helped by the researcher to refine their scripts before they used them as captions on their videos.

The participants spent approximately three months in writing and revising their video scripts, making and posting their videos on YouTube, and interacting with the YouTube audience. In the fourth month, they wrote a reflective essay about how they felt about posting a YouTube tutorial video and what they learned from the process (see Appendix A for the prompts). A semi-structured group interview (three to five students in each interview) was also conducted. Each interview lasted between 20 to 30 minutes (see Appendix B for the interview protocols). The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by a trained research assistant. Figure 1 delineates the research process.
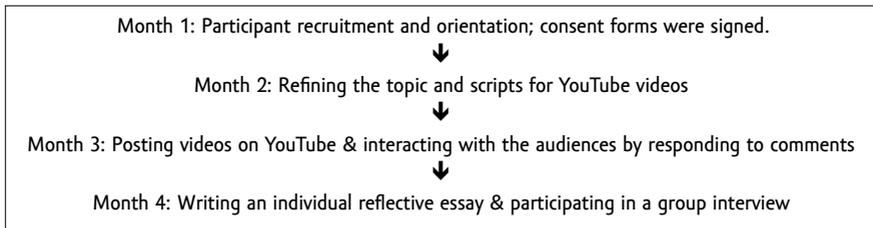

Month 1: Participant recruitment and orientation; consent forms were signed.
↓
Month 2: Refining the topic and scripts for YouTube videos
↓
Month 3: Posting videos on YouTube & interacting with the audiences by responding to comments
↓
Month 4: Writing an individual reflective essay & participating in a group interview

---

Figure 1. Research process

2. Data collection and analysis

The primary data sources for this study were students' reflective essays and transcripts of their group interviews. To answer the first research question, relevant comments pertaining to students' perceptions were extracted from the data pool to understand students' general perceptions and descriptions of the experience. To answer the second research question on students' learning, Jiang's (2017) categorization of the affordances of multimodal composing was adopted. The three categories were (1) *technological affordances* (the digital aspects which prompt students to invest in their language learning in "self-paced and personally relevant way," (p. 416); (2) *educational affordances* (new learning experience in the classroom and beyond); and (3) *social affordances* (improved teacher-student and student-student interaction and civic participation). Sub-themes pertaining to each of the three major categories were identified in the data analysis process (see Table 1).

Results

The participants produced tutorial videos which showcased a wide range of their talents, including cooking and baking (May, Dave, Anne, Sarah, Jenny, Mila, Kate, and Cindy; n=8), instrument playing (Amy and Mike; n=2), arts and crafts (Wendy and Irene; n=2), teaching of smartphone functions (Bonny and Anita; n=2), and Korean teaching (Gina; n=1). Data collected from their reflective essays and interviews will be discussed in the following section.

1. Students' perceptions of taking on the role of a YouTuber

Data analysis revealed that students' perceptions of taking the role of YouTubers can be discussed in five sub-themes.

a) Generally positive perceptions. Taking on the role of a YouTuber to publicly share their talents was a novel experience for all the participants. Generally speaking, the participants perceived the YouTuber experience quite positively. Expressions such as "amazing and thought-proving, "extremely exciting," and "absolutely delighted" abounded in students' recounts of their participation in the research project. The collected data also indicated that many students gained a sense of accomplishment upon the completion of the project. Making the video was a creative outlet for the participants. More importantly, it allowed them to be part of the online participatory culture by viewing themselves "as a public persona to be consumed by others, use strategic intimacy to appeal to followers, and regard their audience as fans" (Marwick, 2016, p. 333). Kate described the entire experience as a process of "self-growth" and "self-breakthrough" (Kate's reflective essay). In short, taking the role of micro-celebrities was conducive to transforming the literacy practice of video-making from an act of self-expression to that of community building (Jenkins, 2006b).

b) Mixed emotions. With regard to students' perceptions, another noticeable theme is some students' mixed emotions about their participation in the project. In their reflective essays, Cindy and Amy explained:

> **Cindy**: I felt excited and anxious throughout the project. The exciting part was that I could explore and learn new things. At the same time, I was anxious with making my video interesting and writing the English script.

> **Amy**: I enjoyed everything I did for this project. In the beginning, however, I felt nervous because I have never acted like a YouTuber before. I was also worried that my video would bore the audience.

As can be seen from above, Cindy and Amy seemed to enjoy participating in the project. But at the same time, they were concerned with the content of their videos. As a generation growing up with digital technologies, they knew that it was not easy to make eye-catching YouTube videos.

c) Anxiety with encountering trolls. Some other students were anxious with the possibility of encountering trolls or receiving harsh comments. Besides posting their videos, an important part of the project was to respond to the comments left by the viewers. In their reflective essays, many students expressed the fear of having to deal with trolls or haters as they took the role of content creators:

> **Anita**: In today's society, anyone can articulate his or her opinions without any fear. As a result, there are many trolls today. I would feel terrible if I received criticism after posting my videos. A brave and strong heart is needed if we want to be a true YouTuber.

> **Dave**: Receiving comments from trolls is a major nightmare when you post something on the Internet. Nobody wants to convey incorrect information and be considered as

a fool in front of the camera. The pressure of producing the video will disappear once I post the video, but it will probably come back after receiving comments from trolls.

d) Power of receiving constructive comments. Students were relieved as they started to receive comments from the audience, and the comments were quite positive. In the sea of YouTube videos, it was definitely not easy for their videos to be seen, but most of the videos did receive a few comments. Juxtaposing with students' fear of receiving nasty comments was a sense of relief upon the receipt of constructive comments. May wrote about her experience in her essay:

> Someone left a comment below my video. She said that the sound at the beginning and the end was not clear, and the camera was a bit shaky. Although it was not a compliment, it did not have rude or impolite words. Her encouraging comment made me feel she did watch my video.

May felt that this viewer's words demonstrated a healthy relationship between YouTubers and netizens. She further remarked, "Nowadays, more and more netizens leave a lot of heartbreaking comments without thinking twice. On the Internet, we feel free to say anything, but we should respect each other instead of insulting or humiliating others in public."

e) Possibilities of building an affinity group. One of the most elaborate comments was received by Irene who taught bullet journal methods in her tutorial. In her reflective essay, Irene expressed her excitement upon receiving a particular comment:

> The most impressive comment I received was from a person who said he benefited a lot after watching my video. He thinks the tips I teach are so useful that he decided to keep a journal. I was very happy upon seeing such an encouraging comment because it means that my tutorial enlightens someone to keep a journal. Although the click rate is not high, the sense of achievement overwhelms me.

With this great encouragement, Irene started to entertain the possibility of posting more videos on her channel. She wrote, "With this great experience, I have started to think about producing other types of videos, such as vlogs of life, makeup, recommendation of tasty food, and of course an upgraded version of keeping a journal." She continued, "Watching YouTube is one of my hobbies. If I can make videos to entertain people just like other people (the YouTubers) do to entertain me, why not?" Irene's words are a great testimony to Collins and Halverson's (2018) statement that YouTube has become "a gigantic affinity space for young users who watch their favorites, produce their own videos, generate feedback, and improve their video creation craft" (p. 80). For Irene, being able to evoke someone's interest in keeping a journal enlightened her to devote herself more to the affinity space of YouTube.

Another illuminating example of YouTube as an affinity space was provided by Mike who posted a guitar tutorial. In the group interview with him, Dave, and Sarah, Mike mentioned that he received a comment from a viewer who said he was interested in further collaboration. Mike explained, "I responded him by asking what kind of collaboration he had in mind. Does he mean we both play the guitar or does he mean one plays the guitar and one sings? He hasn't replied me yet, but I am in awe with the power of the Internet." Although the collaboration has not been confirmed yet, the comment Mike received demonstrated the power of YouTube as an affinity space where like-minded strangers can meet and interact with each other (Gee, 2004).

59

f) Being a YouTuber. Although posting their tutorial videos enabled some students to reach like-minded strangers, most students (n=12) felt being a YouTuber took too much hard work. The first-hand experience of posting a tutorial and responding to online comments made students realize that being a professional YouTuber is not an easy job. As Wendy remarks in the group interview, "A full-time YouTuber is just like a TV actor. The job seems glorious, but actually it takes lots of efforts to become a successful YouTuber." If they had time in the future, seven participants said that they would make and post more tutorial videos in the future while two participants stated that they would make videos to share privately.

To summarize, students perceived the experience of taking the role of YouTubers quite positively. They were especially delighted when their efforts were recognized by the viewers. A sense of community was forged when the video initiated further actions taken by the viewers. They also gained first-hand experience of what it was like to be a YouTuber.

2. Students' learning from taking the role of YouTubers

The current study adopted Jiang's (2017) three-way categorization (*technological affordances*, *educational affordances*, and *social affordances*) of the affordances provided by digital multimodal composing to understand students' learning from taking the role of YouTubers. Data pertaining to each of the three categories will be explained in the following section.

(a) Technological affordances
(a-1) Editing skills (n=2), solving technical problems (n=2), and using new tools (n=3)

Analysis of the data reveals that *editing skills* (n=2), *solving technical problems* (n=2), and *using new tools* (n=3) were the technological possibilities afforded by the YouTuber project. Take May for example. She wrote about the process of shooting and post-editing her film:

> Facing the camera alone made me feel embarrassed and nervous. My voice is too soft. I remade every part of my video again and again. During the post-production, I turned up the volume to solve the volume problem. Also, it was difficult to cook and shoot at the same time, so I ended up asking my father to do the shooting for me.

May's efforts of actively trying to solve technical problems can be seen from the above excerpt. Other students also commented on how they learned to use a new software to edit their videos, to use a new font to provide captions, and to organize the clips into a coherent story in the video form.

(a-2) Transmediating meanings across modes (n=2)

The YouTuber project also allowed students to transmediate meanings across modes (Jiang, 2017), that is, to translate meanings from one sign system to another, or the translation of a work into a different medium. In this study, transmediation took place when students transformed their carefully written scripts into YouTube tutorials by combining the resources they had at hand. The transmediation process was not an easy one, as Sarah remarked, "As I participated in the YouTuber project, I found that the most challenging part is how to convey a thought via video thoroughly." Likewise, Amy experienced the same problem; in her words, "One difficulty I encountered is how to make my ideas come alive. I think I am creative, but sometimes it is hard to film the ideas in my head." Both students were able to overcome the challenges posed by transmediation and produced well-made tutorials.

(b) Educational affordances

(b-1) Developing research skills (n=3) & learning proper professional terminology (n=2)

Preparing to shoot the tutorial afforded students with learning opportunities to learn the different components of making a film. Some participants were concerned with using the right terminology to deliver their contents, and they tried their best to learn the right terms by watching videos made by professionals. Mike elaborated in the interview:

> Since I self-taught myself how to play the guitar on the Internet, I thought I would teach others how to play a simple song. I chose Ed Sheeran's *Photograph* because the prelude uses only a few single tones. I played along as I taught. I also made sure I used the right terms by watching a lot of guitar tutorials before the shooting began.

The same interview was participated by Sarah and Dave who baked and cooked to produce their tutorials. They mentioned consulting the videos of famous cooks like Gordon Ramsay and Jamie Oliver to perfect their scripts before undertaking the actual task of making the food. All the three students were quite observant with the language which the professionals used to convey their expertise. By watching videos of professional cooks, these students received informal mentorship (Jenkins, 2006b) from the masters in different trades. In addition to correct terminology, Bonny and Wendy also mentioned they researched extensively on video styles and special effects. To summarize, the preparation work was quite intensive, and the project allowed these participants to study different components involved in video making.

After viewing their finished products, some students were able to identify some areas of improvement. In other words, this project allowed students to see what they could work on in the future. In terms of English learning, Jill, Mike and Dave reflected that they needed to practice speaking English clearly in front of the camera so that their speech could be comprehended more easily. Mike also remarked that he needed to learn how to insert more visual aids, like a guitar tab, to teach the steps of playing the guitar. These comments suggest that the YouTuber project affords opportunities for students to not only learn English beyond their textbooks, but also direct them towards more self-learning in the future.

(b-2) Identifying areas of improvement (n=6)

The comments students received also offered some directions for self-improvement. Cindy, Jean, and Mila all received comments about the technical aspects of their videos, like loud background music or shaky shooting. Amy taught how to play the piano with a cellphone app and Gina how to speak some everyday Korean phrases. Both received comments referring to the fact that the contents were still too difficult for beginners. Dave, who self-reflected that he could not speak clearly in front of others, also received a comment saying that he spoke too fast in the video. All of these comments helped students to identify the problems from viewers' perspective and can be taken into consideration when students want to make similar videos in the future.

(c) Social affordances

(c-1) Connecting with other people (n=5)

In this study, the social affordances offered by the project can be discussed from Jenkins' participatory culture (2006a; 2006b). In a participatory culture, one feels connected with other members in the community. For Cindy, making and posting her video connected her to the outside world; in her words, "Sharing my video was a good way to connect myself **61**

to this endless world. If I have more ideas and time in the future, I may keep making and posting more films on my channel." A sense of community was also evident in Kate and Amy's reflective essays, as they discussed how they would try to better address the audiences' needs and interests if they made more videos in the future.

This project also initiated some real-life interactions between the participants and their friends and families. As mentioned earlier, May had to ask her father to control the camera as she focused on cooking when shooting footages for her tutorial. Likewise, Gina, who taught daily Korean phrases in her video, received much assistance from her colleagues when she tried to film the tutorial. She described the behind-the-scene efforts in these words, "I finally realize that it takes a village to make a good YouTube video!" (Gina's reflection essay).

(c-2) Developing a sense of civic engagement (n=3)

A participatory culture also encourages artistic expressions and civic engagement (Jenkins, 2006a; 2006b). Both elements can be identified in Sarah's recounts of her experience. Sarah took the extra step of renting a space to shoot her baking tutorial. She described the process in her reflective essay, "I chose to record the video in a culinary classroom because of its great ambience. I wanted my audiences to feel relaxed and impressed by the artistic feel of my tutorial." She felt that knowledge sharing was the aspect she liked the most about the project which allowed her to see the world from a different angle. When I further asked her about what she meant about "seeing the world from a different angle" in my interview with her, she responded, "I felt the project allowed me to see the world from the perspective of producing responsible contents online. You are responsible for what you produce online." Sarah believed that her contributions mattered (Jenkins, 2006b) and she should be held accountable for what she produced.

As mentioned earlier, an important part of the project was to receive and responded to viewers' comments. Taking the role of content creators means that the participants had to open themselves up for others' feedback. As Kate said, this experience really taught her the importance of saying something positive on the Internet. Jenny felt that she had "dodged a bullet" because she did not receive harsh comments on her cooking tutorial. She further elaborated in her essay, "Some YouTubers are not as lucky as I am. Some netizens use radical words in their comments. This is really bad. If the YouTuber happens to be in a weak state of mind, I cannot imagine what terrible things will happen to him or her." As mentioned earlier, many students expressed their fear of receiving nasty comments from trolls or haters but were relieved and elated when some viewers gave them positive feedback. Students' candor points to the fact that building the Internet to be a civil place where civic participation is encouraged seems to require more efforts from its users.

Table 1 summarizes the three types of affordances and the specific learning opportunities pertaining to each category.

Table 1. Affordances from the data set

Technological	Educational	Social
• Editing skills (n=2) • Solving technical problems (n=2) • Using new tools (n=3) • Transmediating meanings across modes (n=2)	• Developing research skills (n=3) • Learning proper professional terminology (n=2) • Identifying areas of improvement (n=6)	• Connecting with other people (n=5) • Developing a sense of civic engagement (n=3)

Discussion

The current study continued the research of multiliteracies by asking students to take on the role of content creators on YouTube. By sharing their personal interests or talents, the participants became so-called micro-celebrities (Marwick, 2016) who posted their self-made contents and interacted with global audiences. The participants generally enjoyed the project, although they were nervous about receiving comments from unknown audiences. They felt a sense of achievement as their videos were recognized and appreciated.

The current study adopted Jiang's (2017) analysis of the learning possibilities afforded by making and posting one's own YouTube video. As Jiang (2017) cautions, these three types of affordances are not mutually exclusive; they are likely to overlap or function simultaneously. This is definitely the case in the current study, as two or more affordances occurred at the same time. In some cases, it was difficult to completely separate technological affordances from educational ones. Jiang (2017) advises that in practice, teachers do not have to isolate the affordances from one another. Rather, they can embed these affordances into meaningful pedagogical activities to take advantage of students' personal strengths and interests and build on them to help students develop further.

Compared with previous studies, a unique feature of the current study was that students were asked not only to play the role of content creators, but also to respond to the comments they received. This feature was designed to respond to what Jenkins (2006a, 2006b) called the social nature of new forms of literacy. As multimodal materials are ubiquitous and learners constantly traverse in digital spaces, it is imperative that learners know how to interpret and respond to different types of multimodal texts and literacy practices (Jewitt, 2008; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). In this study, interacting with the global audience of YouTube viewers through comment threads is considered an important type of literacy practice. Such interaction added a social dimension to this study and brought additional pressure to the participants who worried about receiving harsh comments from netizens. The participants' comments seem to suggest that YouTube is not hard to enter (i.e., with relatively low barriers to artistic expression), but to gain due recognition there is not an easy task. Having to respond to the comments they received also added a social dimension to the existing research on video making as a form of multimodal composing.

Although the participants were quite intimidated by the threat of trolls, they acknowledged that playing the role of YouTubers – even for just a short period of time – extended their learning beyond textbooks and classrooms. This project provided all the participants with opportunities to evaluate different information sources, present their skills or talents in the video form, and then communicate with their viewers. Although some students

commented they much preferred to share videos privately, joining this project was an unforgettable life experience which pushed them out of their comfort zone. Playing the role of content creators and sharing their products publicly also allowed them to develop a more cautious and responsible attitude towards online speech and etiquette.

This study was exploratory in nature, and it was not designed to investigate just language learning outcomes. The language learning gains reported by students deserve some attention because students were EFL learners. In the results section, under the category of educational affordances, it was mentioned that two students reported the learning of proper professional terminology when they scripted the contents of their tutorials. Making the tutorial also helped Jill, Mike and Dave to discover that they needed to speak English more carefully. Although such discovery is not a direct language gain, it helped the learners to identify a concrete direction for their future endeavors in their language-learning journeys. In future studies, more language-learning elements, such as peer reviewing or rehearsing the scripts, can be incorporated into the research design to enhance to educational affordances in the area of language learning.

This exploratory study was limited by a short time frame and small sample size. Nonetheless, the participants' candid accounts offered a glimpse into the learning possibilities offered in Web 2.0 spaces. Participants like Jean and Jill mentioned that in the future, they might shoot and post non-tutorial types of videos such as vlogs or funny videos. In future studies, researchers can consider removing the restriction of making tutorials to further uncover students' creativity. Furthermore, students can also form small teams to make a group video, and their collaboration can be examined to understand how collective intelligence is pooled together to finish a digital project.

In this study, many participants expressed anxiety with making their videos public on YouTube because of the possibility of receiving harsh comments. An important pillar to foster the creation of a participatory culture is respectful speech and the exchanges of constructive comments. To better prepare students for the reality of the Internet, teachers can guide students to read and analyze the discourses of online comments and practice giving rational feedback online. Extensive reading such as Nadia Petscheck Rawl's "This is what happened when we posted Monica Lewinsky's TED Talk" (https://ideas.ted.com/want-to-help-prevent-online-bullying-comment-on-facebook/) can be incorporated into the curriculum to instill a note of positivity on the power of encouraging comments. The Internet does not have to be dominated by negative comments. As can be seen from the participants' feedback, a simple positive comment can change their attitudes towards the experience.

Conclusion

While previous studies have investigated multimodal composing for prescribed topics, the current study invited students to take the role of YouTubers to create three-minute tutorials to teach their talents to the Internet audiences. The findings have added our understanding to students' perceptions of taking on a public persona and their perceived learning from completing the YouTuber project from brainstorming a topic to responding to viewers' comments. In Web 2.0 spaces where a common endeavor defines one's affinity space, YouTube continues to a fertile ground for young netizens to showcase their talents and meet like-minded people. While there are many forms of participation in these spaces, it is imperative that media literacy skills are developed to allow students to transverse in different digital domains and benefit from the intensive and extensive knowledge available on

the Internet. It is also the responsibility of researchers to continue to research on related topics and the job of educators to develop up-to-date, socially responsive multimodal curriculum to respond to the needs of modern-day students.

Acknowledgements

References

Arndt, H. L., & Woore. R. (2018).Vocabulary learning from watching YouTube videos and reading blog posts. *Language Learning & Technology*, *22*(1), 124–142.

Arnold, A. (2017). Why YouTube stars influence millennials more than traditional celebrities. *Forbes*, Retrieved from https://www.forbes.com/sites/under30network/2017/06/20/why-youtube-stars-influence-millennials-more-than-traditional-celebrities/#49328ebd48c6

Benson, P. (2015). Commenting to learn: Evidence of language and intercultural learning in comments on YouTube videos. *Language Learning & Technology, 19*(3), 88–105.

Benson, P. (2017). *The discourse of YouTube: Multimodal text in a global context.* New York: Routledge.

Berger, P., & Trexler, S. (2010). *Choosing Web 2.0 tools for learning and teaching in the digital world.* Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited.

Black, R. W. (2005a). Access and affiliation: The literacy and composition practices of English language learners in an online fanfiction community. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *49*, 118–128.

Black, R. W. (2005b). Online fanfiction: What technology and popular culture can teach us about writing and literacy instruction. *New Horizons for Learning*, *11*(2).

Black, R. W. (2006). Language, culture, and identity in online fanfiction. *E-Learning*, *3*, 170–184.

Black, R. W. (2009). English-language learners, fan communities, and 21st-century skills. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *52*, 688–697.

Burgess, J., & Green, J. (2018). *YouTube: Online video and participatory culture* (2nd ed.). Medford, MA: Cambridge Polity Press.

Cayari, C. (2011). The YouTube effect: How YouTube has provided new ways to consume, create, and share music. *International Journal of Education & the Arts, 12*(6). Retrieved from http://www.ijea.org/v12n6/

Chau, C. (2010). YouTube as a participatory culture. *New Directions for Youth Development*, *128*, 65–74.

Collins, A., & Halverson, R. (2018). *Rethinking education in the age of technology: The digital revolution and schooling in America* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Dabrowski, J. (2018). *Motivation and engagement in student assignments: The role of choice and relevancy.* Washington, DC: The Education Trust.

DeLuka, K. (2018). Shared passions, shared compositions: Online fandom communities and affinity groups as sites for public writing pedagogy. *Computers and Compositions*, *47*, 75–92.

Dredge, S. (2016). Why are YouTube stars so popular? *The Guardian.* February 3. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/feb/03/why-youtube-stars-popular-zoella

Gee, J. (2003). *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gee, J. (2004). *Situated language and learning: A critique of traditional schooling.* London: Routledge.

Hafner, C. A. (2013). Embedding digital literacies in English language teaching: Students' digital video projects as multimodal ensembles. *TESOL Quarterly*, *48*, 655–685.

Hafner, C. A., Chik, A., & Jones, R. H. (2015). Digital literacies and language learning. *Language Learning & Technology*, *19*(3), 1–7.

Hafner, C. A., & Miller, L. (2011). Fostering learner autonomy in English for science: A collaborative digital video project in a technological learning environment. *Language Learning & Technology*, *15*, 68–86.

Hung, H.-T., Chiu, Y.-C. J., & Yeh, H.-C. (2013). Multimodal assessment of and for learning: A theory-driven design rubric. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, *44*, 400–409.

Jewitt, C. (2008). Multimodality and literacy in school classrooms. *Review of Research in Education*, *32*, 241–267.

Jiang, L. (2017). The affordances of digital multimodal composing for EFL learning. *ELT Journal*, *71*, 413–422. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccw098

Jiang, L. (2018). Digital multimodal composing and investment change in learners' writing in English as a foreign language. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *40*, 60–72. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2018. 03.002

Jenkins, H. (2006a). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide.* New York: New York University Press.

Jenkins, H. (with Purushota, R., Clinton, K., Weigel, M., and Robinson, A.) (2006b). *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century.* Chicago: MacArthur Foundation. Retrieved from https://www.macfound.org/media/article_pdfs/JENKINS_WHITE PAPER.PDF

Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (2003). New technologies in early childhood literacy research. A review of research. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, *3*, 59–82.

Marwick, A. E. (2015). You may know me from YouTube: (Micro-)celebrity in social media. In P. Marshall & S. Redmond (Eds.), *A companion to celebrity* (pp. 333–350). Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Merchant, G. (2009). Web 2.0, new literacies, and the idea of learning through participation. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, *8*, 107–122.

New London Group. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, *66*, 60–93.

New Media Consortium (2005). A global imperative: The report of the 21st century literacy summit. Retrieved from https://www.nmc.org/publication/a- global-imperative-the-report-of-the-21st-century-literacy-summit/

Smith, A., & Anderson, M. (2018). Social media use in 2018. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. Available online at http://www.pewinternet.org/2018/03/01/social-media-use-in-2018/

Su, P. Y. (2017). The influence of YouTuber on consumers' decision journey in the cosmetic products (in Chinese). Unpublished Master's thesis, National Chengchi University, Taiwan.

Sun, T. (2018). Translanguaging to transcultural: Learning through YouTube interactional comments. Unpublished master's thesis. National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan.

Terantino, J. M. (2011). YouTube for foreign languages: You have to see this video. *Language Learning & Technology*, *15*(1), 10–16.

Thomas, D. R. (2006). A general inductive approach for qualitative data analysis. *American Journal of Evaluation*, *27*, 237–246.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yeh, H.-C. (2018). Exploring the perceived benefits of the process of multimodal video making in developing multiliteracies. *Language Learning & Technology*, *22*, 28–37

Appendix A

Writing prompts for students' reflective essays

Dear Students:

Congratulations on your efforts of completing the YouTuber project. Now, it's the time to reflect on this wonderful journey. Before you write your reflective essay, please think about the following issues:

1. How do you feel about the YouTuber project? What do you like the most and the least about the project?
2. Are there any difficulties you encountered when making your YouTuber tutorial video? How did you solve these difficulties?
3. What did you learn from making, posting, and sharing your YouTube tutorial?
4. What comments did you receive on your video? How do you feel?
5. Do you think you will post more YouTube tutorials? Why or why not?

Write a well-organized essay (at least 500 words) to summarize your answers to these questions.

Appendix B

Interview protocols

1. Are there specific YouTubers you follow or watch regularly?
2. Each of you made a three-minute YouTube tutorial video. Talk about how you selected the topic.
3. Talk about the comments you received after posting the video on YouTube. How do you feel?
4. If you can summarize the YouTuber phenomenon, how would you describe it?
5. Others