Children's Media Project offers outlet for youth voices

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Arts Editor

In an age where the youth of the United States is constantly bombarded by compelling media messages, whether through the Internet, radio, on television or in magazines, finding an outlet to express one's voice to the public has become an increasingly difficult pursuit.

In 1994, filmmaker Maria Marweski recognized the predominance of technology in the lives of Poughkeepsie youth and created Children's Media Project (CMP), a non-profit organization devoted to providing digital resources and teaching critical thinking skills to young people in the community.

"I loved teaching filmmaking as a medium for personal expression," Marweski explained in an emailed statement, adding, "Especially with young people who still have access to their creativity."

At the time of the organization's genesis, Mareweski showed significant foresight, as media and technology were just beginning to gain full speed: "I think Maria was ahead of her time when she formed CMP in 1994," explained Nicole Fenichel-Hewitt, the organization's Executive Director. "Now we're at a time when everybody acknowledges that media is not going away; it's going to become more and more a part of all of our lives."

Located in the heart of downtown Poughkeepsie in the historic Lady Washington Firehouse, CMP offers invaluable technological resources to the community with the hope that life and workforce skills come hand in hand with media literacy. Participants do everything from filmmaking to radio broadcasting, magazine-making to animation. Each project requires that students understand the process from start to finish, do effective research and have the confidence to communicate messages important to them.

"They have to step out of their comfort zones, be challenged to take positive risks and find themselves developing skills that they never tested before," explained Fenichel-Hewitt.

This past summer, CMP collaborated with local non-profit multi-arts educational center Mill Street Loft to produce Turn It Up! Radio, a six-week public program aired on Vassar's own WVKR. The show allowed Poughkeepsie youth to address issues most important to them, such as teen pregnancy, banned books and the AIDS pandemic. Because participants were not only completely in charge of the show's content, but also being paid for their work, the program was a valuable professional experience.

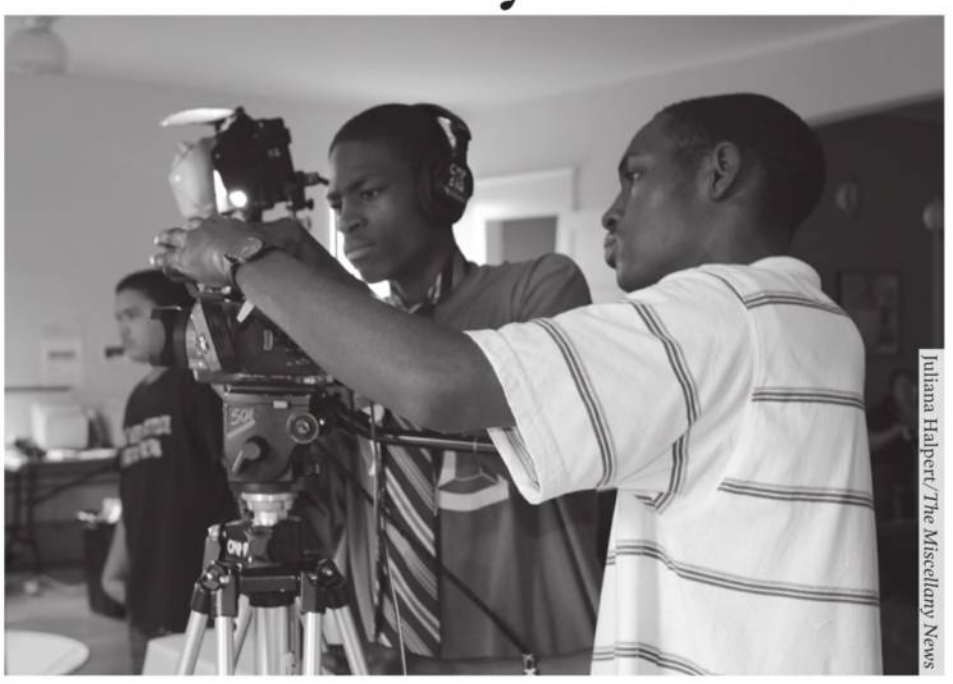
According to Fenichel-Hewitt, "It's about commitment, being there when you say you're going to be there and knowing what your position is."

Although Turn It Up! Radio was only broadcast during the month of July, Radio Uprising! is a show CMP airs on WVKR year-round. The program functions similarly as a platform for community dialogue, giving youth an opportunity to discuss political and social issues through grassroots production.

Tori Larson '14 got involved with CMP last year as part of the Community Service Work Study program. She testified to the program's ability to inspire self-esteem and facilitate critical thinking. "As they wrote and recorded more pieces, their voice—written and spoken—became more confident," she said in an emailed statement. "As they became more comfortable expressing themselves, students became interested in writing about more difficult, diverse subjects."

In addition to its radio programming, CMP also produces public service announcements and an annual television series called DROP TV, or Direct Revolution Of Programming, on public access. Now in its seventh season, the half-hour series broadcasts to 33 states in the United States, as well as Africa and New Zealand. The show not only unites the voices of youth from the Poughkeepsie area, but also incorporates children's media projects from around the globe.

Many participants have worked in conjunction with local social service agencies, including Battered Women's Services, Child Abuse Prevention Coalition, Grace Smith House and Planned Parenthood to distribute service announcements to the public. Past programs have addressed how to make positive decisions around drug use, how to escape violence in the community and the issue of pregnancy at Poughkeepsie High School.


Juliana Halpert/The Miscellany News

Poughkeepsie youth experiment with filmmaking as part of their participation in the Children's Media Project (CMP). CMP is a non-profit organization devoted to teaching critical skills to young people.

Larson attested to the powerful community-building potential of these projects. "CMP gives kids a voice; not only is it beneficial for the students, but for everyone tuned in listening to or watching their thoughts," she said.

These projects allow students to ask questions about what's going on in their community; they get to interview prominent figures in the area and eventually develop a broader perspective on issues they are passionate about.

Because the filmmaking process is by nature one that requires repeated analysis of the material, be it through research, script writing or editing, participants continually revisit information, making it more knowledge than memory.

With many successful projects under its belt, CMP plans to expand this year by starting up workshops in surrounding cities, including New Paltz, Newburgh and Rhinebeck. By utilizing community centers, public schools and libraries as sites of media education workshops, the organization hopes to vastly expand the number of youth it serves.

Not only does CMP give youth an opportunity to voice their concerns in the present, it also provides them with important resources for future endeavors. "When students leave our program, they've won awards, had their pieces shown at national conventions. It's amazing the portfolio they have built with us," said Fenichel-Hewitt.

In a town always on the verge of something better, the resources CMP provides are critical. By supplying the Poughkeepsie youth with an avenue of self-expression in a media landscape dominated by adult interests, CMP fosters agency, responsibility and creative participation in community issues.

"Recognizing that media is pervasive in the lives of our youth, CMP want to help young people become critical readers and active creators of media, especially those who are caught in the digital divide," explained Marewski. "To actively participate in the future, kids have to have access to digital tools."

Tallon a pioneer of technology in architectural study

Emma Daniels
Reporter

"It's funny, my hair is standing up remembering this," Assistant Professor of Art Andrew Tallon mused as he discussed what originally drew him to his current field of study. "I was nine, living in France; my mom was writing her dissertation, my dad was on sabbatical, and I fell in love with the Cathedral of Paris. It got under my skin, got into my heart, looking up into those high passages and longing to somehow get the chance to wander there," he recollected.

Tallon, who teaches medieval art and architecture, remains as passionate about architecture as an adult as he was as a young child, and this is why he now holds the key to the Cathedral of Paris.

He is also eager to spread his passion for architecture in the most effectual way possible, firstly to his students, but also to the general public.

"I have this problem," he said, "which is trying to teach architecture without having the architecture that I teach on hand. It's trying to get students to somehow experience it, and flat pictures on the pages of a book don't cut it."

A number of Tallon's recent projects strove to address this problem; he is at the head of his field when it comes to technological innovation.

For many years, he has taken spherical panoramic photographs of buildings, creating a sphere that wraps around your head virtually when you look at it on a screen, allowing one to examine in detail any piece inside the sphere. He has also taken gigapixel photographs—photographs that enable the viewer to extensively zoom in to an area of a building and see it in great detail.

Most recently, though, Tallon has been successfully experimenting with spatial archeology, a laser scanning-based technique he innovated. This technique uses $100,000 machines: laser scanners, which measure the distance between the scanner and everything that it sees at an incredible speed. This creates an exceedingly accurate spatial map of the building.


Jonah Bleckner/The Miscellany News

Assistant Professor of Art Andrew Tallon, above, teaches medieval art and architecture. He recently received a grant to study the design of the cathedral of Bourges using spatial archeology technology.

Through this technology, Tallon is able to read a building's story in a non-linear fashion.

"It a way of representing the building that is quite striking; you get to feel the spatial configuration of the building in a way you can't otherwise. On the computer, you are able to grab the scan and move it around—one spray of points, completed with other points, becomes an incredible document," Tallon said.

Tallon has used this groundbreaking technology for a great deal of his recent research, to tell the stories of numerous buildings: "The story of the push and shove of construction of a big stone and mortar and wood building, that moves and thrusts and wiggles and tries to stand up, a story that has many dimensions, social dimensions, economic dimensions and also the more purely structural dimensions," he explained.

He recently received a grant from the Samuel Kress Foundation for a study of the architecture of the cathedral of Bourges using the technique, and he also has used it for a web-based project—funded by a four-year grant from the Andrew Mellon Foundation—entitled Mapping Gothic France, which, simply put, is an attempt to tell the story of gothic architecture in a non-linear fashion.

Furthermore, his work is not only known amongst academics. His research was featured in an Emmy-nominated PBS/Nova special entitled "Building the Great Cathedrals," which aired nationally in October 2010, and in a feature-length documentary entitled *Les Cathedrals Devoilees*, which aired on public television in France and Germany in April 2011.

"I was in the field this summer, doing some work at Chartres cathedral and people were coming up to me saying "Oh! You're the guy!" When does an art historian get to feel like a rock star? That was kind of fun," he said about his worldwide recognition.

Tallon is not only modest but also quick to acknowledge his home institution. "It's fun to have Vassar's name floating around," he said, "and my research has applications throughout the curriculum that I teach."

Thanks in no small part to Tallon, Vassar has the world's largest collection of historical architecture spherical panoramic views. As well, next semester Tallon is teaching a seminar around the theme of Mapping Gothic France, where the students will co-curate an exhibit in the The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center focusing on Gothic architecture.

His research serves a purpose in more basic classes, though: namely, engaging and educating students in Vassar's iconic Art 105.

Alden Rose '14, a potential art history major who took the class last year, talked about how Tallon's lectures stood out due to his use of innovative technology. At least in the eyes of Rose, Tallon has solved his former dilemma of teaching without the actual buildings on hand: "His use of three-dimensional computer models, which he designed himself, gives each monument a new depth of understanding, really not able to be captured by floor plans and elevations," she said. "The columns spring up, the buildings breathe with light and you get a sense of the monumentality intended by the architects."