**Motivating at Risk African Americans and Hispanics Through
the Study of New Media Technology**

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Abstract

The rising number of African Americans and Hispanics turning away from higher education is creating a problem that threatens many aspects of American society. Educators can help reverse this destructive trend by creating New Media based curricula that addresses the motivational factors impeding the academic success of these students. The recent advances in personal computing, as well as the rise of the Internet and global networks offer educators an unprecedented opportunity to reengage and motivate many of these students by teaching them to develop digital content that is technically advanced, economically viable, and which stays true to their core values. This new approach, which makes use of interactive technology, can bridge the gap and make it possible for many disenfranchised African American and Hispanic students to view academia in a more positive light.

The rising number of African Americans and Hispanics turning away from college and higher education is creating a problem that threatens many aspects of American society. It has been shown that increasing numbers of these students, many without sufficient economic and socio-political influence, can lead to increased levels of poverty, criminal behavior, incarceration

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(James, 2004), and greater family instability. However at the same time that some of these "at risk" students are turning away from higher education, new media centric areas of our economy and popular culture are experiencing incredible growth with this same demographic (Smith, 2010).

In the fall of 2002 LaGuardia Community College created a two-year degree program in New Media Technology as one of the methods to address the growing need for digital media professionals. Recent technological advances in the fields of digital arts and computer information systems, gave LaGuardia educators an unprecedented opportunity to develop new media based curricula that directly converged with the interests, passions and cultural value systems of the predominately African American and Hispanic student body. While the primary goal of the program was to provide quality instruction in new technologies, another key objective was to motivate many of these "at risk" students to embrace education and secure greater opportunities for their economic success.

What is New Media?

In order to fully understand the societal impact of new media and how it was utilized at LaGuardia to motivate "at risk" African American and Hispanic students, it must first be defined. The field of new media is an emerging discipline that encompasses numerous areas of study, all which have helped to fuel the union of science, news, literature, commerce, television, radio, film, and the recording industry into a new paradigm. According to the summary of findings from the Digital Youth Project (Ito, et al., 2008), new media is described as the convergence of traditional forms of communication, finance, and entertainment with new methods of Internet based delivery. The wide spread proliferation of high speed broadband networks, combined with

more powerful computers and sophisticated software, has created a technological focal point for the creation and dissemination of much the multimedia content driving popular culture.

Established minority filmmakers have also begun to make use of these new technologies and distribution methods as a way of leveling the playing field in Hollywood. Noted filmmakers Spike Lee and Robert Rodriguez are possibly best known for their first films, "She's Gotta Have It" and "El Mariachi", which both defied the Hollywood conventions of the time because they were produced for $160,000 and $7,000 respectively (Lee, 2010). Despite the fact that Lee and Rodriquez have produced and directed numerous films over the course of their careers, it is only recently that they took the opportunity to work on large-scale big budget films. As a result of working predominately in independent films at the start of their careers, both filmmakers have been extremely conscious of controlling the production costs of their movies. Lee and Rodriquez were avid supporters of using digital technology to enhance filming methods long before it became fashionable, and have heralded the use of this new medium for up and coming African American and Hispanic filmmakers.

Speaking in an interview about "Bamboozled", his 2000 satire about a modern televised minstrel show, Lee stated, "We decided to use digital video because we were dealing with the medium of television, and it gave us that video look. Plus, we didn't have a lot of money" (Fuch, 2000). Bamboozled shocked critics on many levels due to it's derisive subject matter and also because much of the film was shot using consumer quality Sony VX1000 digital video cameras. Lee said that while the learning curve of working with digital formats presented a challenge, the cost and portability of the smaller handheld cameras allowed him to create the film that he wanted at a price acceptable to the major studios.

Rodriquez echoed similar sentiments on the use of digital technology in film production.

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As an early adopter of computer based editing, Rodriguez noted that with the software, camera technology, and computer processing power available today, his first movie created for a total of $7000 in 1992, could be made for $70 today (Farber, 2006). He went on to say that "Technology can help you create happy accidents–you are writer, director, photographer, sound mixer. It's not that I am better than anybody…I just know I will make it wrong in all the right ways that will charm people make it human and not make it feel manufactured. The technology makes it possible" (Farber).

Today, many of the African Americans and Hispanics who were influenced by the early independent works of Robert Rodriquez and Spike Lee are now acutely aware that they can create and tell their own stories for a fraction of the costs of their mentors. Such is the case with African American filmmaker and director Angelo Bell, whose 2009 released feature film, "Broken Hearts Club", was promoted through Facebook and distributed on Amazon.com and Netflix. His decision to pursue this method of filming developed out of the desire to take his passion for storytelling into a visual medium and to profit from his craft (Bell, 2010b). The use of digital filmmaking equipment and Internet based distribution enabled him to achieve this goal. In addition to his Facebook and Twitter pages, Bell maintains his own blog (Bell, 2010a) for the purpose of marketing and promoting himself and his films on the web.

If the film and television industries have been transformed by the "new media ecology" (Ito, et al., 2008), it can only be said that the music sector has been irrevocably altered by this shift in technology and communication. For example, the early African American and Hispanic pioneers of Hip Hop used microphones, records and inexpensive turntables, in conjunction with freestyle poetry, to tap into their creative energies. The innovative use of common household

items allowed many underprivileged African Americans and Hispanics to create their own musical renditions with limited resources. Today this process is again being recreated, but instead of using turntables and records, the tools of the trade are high-end personal computers and specialized music software.

Using computerized digital workstations to create entirely new audio compositions are only one area in which new media based technology has changed the music industry. The use of the Internet as a delivery medium, and the ability to digitize music collections into compressed and easily transmittable audio files called MP3s, has been a large factor in this transformation. The global reach of the Internet, and the negligible cost of transmitting digital information, has enabled authors to market and promote their music without having to rely solely on mainstream recording labels. The rise of non-commercial peer-to-peer file sharing networks like BitTorrent, and the commercial viability of music downloading sites like the iTunes store, have given artists the means with which they can communicate directly with their fan base.

Explaining the Motivational Landscape

Over the past decade there has been a great deal of debate over the concept of the "digital divide" and how the lack of access to computer technology and global communication negatively impacts African Americans and Hispanics. It is a widely held belief in many academic circles that access to these technologies may level the playing field for minorities and make opportunities for success and advancement possible (Sahay, 2006). While it is true that access to digital technologies is a key component of success in many areas of 21st century society, the barriers facing the educational advancement of African Americans and Hispanics are more complex. In addition to providing access to technology and global communication, it is also important to address the motivational and systemic reasons why African American and Hispanics

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continue to shun higher education in numbers far greater than their counterparts from other groups.

According to Deci and Ryan's Self Determination Theory (SDT), all human motivation can be allocated to three main motivational categories: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; 2008). Before we can determine how this theory may be applied to analyzing the motivational factors that affect the educational decisions of African American and Hispanic students, it is important to define these motivational categories.

The first of Deci and Ryan's (2000; 2008) motivational categories, intrinsic motivation, can be described as a process that begins at infancy, where individuals are spurred on to action without the promise of external rewards. Individuals, in this case, are motivated by the internal self-satisfaction derived from the action, as opposed to being motivated by the possibility of an external reward that may be gained by engaging in the action. For example, a young musician may enjoy playing a style of music because the fast paced tempo of genre makes the songs instinctively pleasing. This behavior would be in contrast to the musician who plays a style of music merely for the financial and status based rewards gained as a result of performing. Deci and Ryan go on to explain that in spite of the fact that all humans have certain autonomic motivational tendencies, these patterns can change over time and cause individuals to deviate from the natural intrinsic motivational tendencies due to outside factors such as negative experiences and destructive reinforcement. Conversely, Deci and Ryan propose that positive experiences and constructive reinforcement throughout life can help individuals sustain their natural intrinsic motivational tendencies and, as a result, become more self-determined to achieve success. Out of all of the three categories, Deci and Ryan believe that intrinsically

motivated individuals have greatest opportunity for academic success.

The second category type, extrinsic motivation, is when individuals are driven to actions solely by external factors, such as fear of punishment or expectation of a reward, rather than as a result of a natural innate sense of self-satisfaction for achieving a specific goal. Deci and Ryan (2000; 2008) hypothesize that extrinsically motivated people will only work towards achievement if a reward or threat of a negative outcome is deemed great enough to warrant taking action. An example of an extrinsically motivated person would be the child that works hard in school to get straight A's only because their parents promised a reward for such an outcome. Deci and Ryan classify extrinsically motivated people as having a moderate opportunity for academic success.

The final category of Deci and Ryan's (2000; 2008) three motivational types is amotivation. Amotivated individuals are at the bottom of Self-Determination Theory scale, as it pertains to maximizing opportunities for academic success. These individuals tend to avoid acting in their best interest by either not placing value on a given task, or not having the self-confidence to believe that they are capable of accomplishing the specific task. These individuals are the most difficult to motivate towards successful academic outcomes due to their negative mindset.

The Impact of Race and Culture on Student Motivation

Identifying what motivates individuals is a complicated issue in a best-case scenario. When we further convolute the setting by looking at it through the historical prisms of race, and American cultural conflict, the level of difficulty rises exponentially. The trials and tribulations of slavery, the backlashes against both legal and illegal immigration, the years of Jim Crow Segregation, the struggle to integrate into a new country and culture, the fight for civil rights, the

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subtleties of institutionalized racism, and the stigmas of affirmative action have all played a large part in shaping the collective motivational tendencies of African Americans and Hispanics. Utilizing the SDT developed by Deci and Ryan (2000; 2008), and understanding the historical context of the negative and destructive United States minority-majority race relations, a strong case can be made that the motivational tendencies of African Americans and Hispanics have been moving from intrinsic motivation, to amotivational over the years as a direct result of unfair treatment at the hands of the mainstream society.

Historically, African Americans have long been shut out of higher education. The roots of these barriers begin within the institution of slavery, where blacks were forbidden from learning to read and write, and arguably continued up until the nadir of civil rights movement when the Supreme Court case of Brown vs. the Board of Education challenged the concept of racial segregation through the guise of "separate but equal" education. It was only due to the outcome of this case that African Americans and other minorities legally, if not in practice, gained access the same educational opportunities as whites. While this was an encouraging development, some academics and social scientists believed that despite the civil rights movement helping to put in place structures that eventually would minimize systematic racism in education, the positive effects would not be immediate. As a result, many culturally destructive trends continued to be felt for years to come.

Although both groups have struggled to find equality and secure a place within American society, the historical landscape of Hispanics within America differs from that of African Americans. The Hispanic experience has its own unique and complex set of challenges that can explain why, when we examine their place in traditional educational settings, the motivational

tendencies of some Hispanic students may trend more towards Deci and Ryan's (2000; 2008) amotivation than towards extrinsic or intrinsic motivation. According to statistics by the Pew Hispanic Center (Pew Research Center, 2009). Hispanics have the highest dropout rate of any ethnic group in America. The Hispanic drop out rate (17%) is nearly three times as high at that of whites (6%), and nearly double the rate of African-Americans (9%). Many academics have pondered that some of the factors attributing to this ethnic disparity are language barrier challenges for non-English speakers, anti-immigrant perceptions, greater financial responsibilities as a result of providing for larger immediate and extended family members, and the effort needed to balance cultural identity against the need to integrate into mainstream society (Pew Research Center). However, while all of these challenges may present barriers to educational success and drive some African Americans and Hispanics toward amotivational behaviors, the current shift in education as a result the new media ecology offers hope that some of these students can be reengaged.

Identifying the Tools for Reengagement

If one is observant of the recent trends in urban culture in relation to the areas of fashion, speech, music, entertainment, and status, it is clear that Hip-Hop holds a significant sway over the attitudes of many African American and Hispanics. This is especially true in the urban inner cities in which Hip-Hop originated. Noted Hip-Hop artist and activist Chuck D of Public Enemy has long stated that "Hip-Hop is the Black CNN" (Mahoney, 2010) and merely reflects attitudes and experiences of many inner city minorities. According to Daudi Abe in his essay entitled "Hip-Hop and the Academic Canon" (Abe, 2009), the African American and Hispanic experience provides the theoretical framework for Hip-Hop's origins. He continues on to say, "over the last 30 years, the hip-hop movement has risen from the margins to become the preeminent force in

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US popular culture". Abe hypothesizes that one of the reasons for this dominance is because, despite the lower social standing that African Americans and Hispanics occupy in the US in relation to mainstream white society, America has always equated urban culture as "avante garde" and the "definition of hip and cool". This impact on mainstream American culture becomes even more evident when we view the 2009 RIAA statistics on music industry demographics and learn that Hip-Hop is the second most popular music genre, only trailing behind Rock (The Recording Industry Association of America [RIAA], 2008). Further examination of music industry demographics underscores the popularity of the Hip-Hop genre across racial and socio-economic classes.

Once relegated to the fringes of society, Hip-Hop can arguable be described as firmly in the mainstream. When we consider that African American and Hispanics have primarily dominated Hip-Hop, the influence that both groups have had on shaping popular culture is difficult to contest. Academics seeking to reengage disaffected minority students would be severely remiss not to take advantage of this unique a form of popular culture in developing new coursework. The use of computerized software and hardware in the production of Hip-Hop music makes the synthesis of new media technology a natural instruction method in which to tie together the interest of African American and Hispanic students with marketable technical skills.

Countering Low Motivation: Mapping the Plan of Reengagement

Understanding the causes of why African American and Hispanic students may have greater amotivational tendencies concerning education, and what are potential motivators, would be the first steps in developing a plan of action to address and correct the problem. Based on Deci and Ryan's SDT (2000; 2008), if academics want to reverse the negative impact of

destructive reinforcement that is at the core of amotivational behavior patterns, we need to inspire "at risk" African American and Hispanic students to positive action. This can be achieved by designing a reward-based curriculum that takes into consideration, and identifies, their highest values. To offer African Americans and Hispanics the greatest opportunity for educational success, the ultimate goal of the curriculum would be to move these "at risk" students from the amotivational, to the extrinsic, to finally the intrinsically motivated behavior patterns highlighted in the SDT.

Phase one in designing a plan to combat low motivation in underperforming African American and Hispanic students is to create a curriculum developed within the confines of a supportive and nurturing environment. This nurturing classroom environment is needed to offset the lack of self-esteem and confidence that is usually inherent within those who trend towards amotivational behavior. In short, these students need to regain confidence in their ability to succeed if they are to shift toward extrinsic motivation from their current amotivational behaviors. The next step in guiding amotivated students towards the reengagement is to make them understand the rewards, whether monetary or status based, that are possible as a result from the successful completion of the coursework. The positive benefits of this academic reengagement should be demonstrated through the curriculum in a culturally viable way that enforces the teaching of critical core competencies in the technologies required for success in the 21st century marketplace.

However, there will always be students who don't respond to this approach of academic reengagement. In these situations where the student initially fails to shift their amotivational behavioral patterns toward extrinsic motivation, the new media driven course material should emphasize the possible negative outcomes if they do not strive to master the competencies

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defined in the curriculum. Essentially it is necessary for the amotivated student to understand

how failure to perform will directly impact upon them and their cultural value system, if the shift

towards extrinsic motivation is not achieved.

The final phase of the reengagement process involves encouraging the underperforming

African American and Hispanic students to develop a sense of pride in their accomplishments

that does not stem from anticipation of a reward, or fear of a negative outcome. To reach this

goal of helping African American and Hispanic students move from extrinsic patterns to the

more self-determining intrinsically motivated behaviors, the curriculum should be structured in a

format that encourages students to enjoy learning for the sake of knowledge accumulation. This

is without a doubt the most difficult phase of the reengagement process, as it requires a

fundamental change in the way that many of these students have come to think about the

traditional mainstream education system. It is for this very reason that a new non-traditional

approach utilizing new media based curricula must be taken.

Turning Theory into Practice: LaGuardia's New Media Technology Progrzm

As the curriculum for the New Media Technology program at LaGuardia Community

College was being updated in 2005, a number of LaGuardia's institutional factors were taken

into consideration. The question of how to motivate and instruct an ethnically diverse student

population that has generally not responded well to the traditional teaching strategies was a main

concern. The goal of the redesign was to create a program of study that would reengage

disaffected learners while training them in marketable technology based skills.

To best appreciate the environment under which this redesign was developed, it is

necessary to comprehend the institutional profile of LaGuardia Community College. LaGuardia

is large urban community college located in Long Island City, New York, and is one of the 23 colleges that comprise the City University of New York (CUNY) system. The current 17,000 plus full time students that are enrolled at LaGuardia are predominately from poor and working class backgrounds, with learners of Hispanic and African descent encompassing more than half of the school population (LaGuardia Community College, 2010). However, while the school has a sizable African American and Hispanic student population, nearly 80% of all the first year students entering LaGuardia require some level of basic skills instruction in math, writing, English as a Second Language (ESL), or reading before they are ready to tackle college level materials. Based on the ethnic makeup of LaGuardia's population, and the challenges facing these students, it was decided that the revised New Media Technology curriculum should be a hands-on and project-based degree that featured consistent reengagement throughout the program of study.

The structure of the new curriculum was set up to reflect elements of the SDT scale discussed by Deci and Ryan (2000; 2008). This decision was made in order to engage many of the underperforming students and help them to shift from amotivated behaviors, to extrinsic and intrinsic motivators that offer greater opportunities for academic success. Classes throughout all levels of the curriculum would be taught with an equal amount of time devoted to lecturing on the theory of new media, and similar time in the computer lab where those theories would be put into practice. This would permit students with difficulty staying focused during traditional classroom lectures to be constantly reconnected to the subject matter through hands-on exercises.

At the very beginning of the redesign, it was obvious to the curriculum developers that technology had created a new dynamic that was fundamentally changing the way in which this generation communicates. The designers surmised that the visual nature of new media was better

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suited to helping build the confidence levels of underperforming amotivated students than traditional degrees due to the creative and technical aspects of the discipline. Classes on topics such as video production and interactive web design, which rely more on visual acuity and creativity than on written and linguistic acumen, would limit some of the initial academic barriers facing many amotivated students. This approach would allow them to gain academic confidence as they developed marketable technical skills.

To address the concerns of how to best reengage amotivated African American and Hispanic students at LaGuardia, it was estimated that the creative nature of the new media courses would allow these students the flexibility to draw material from their own cultural and racial backgrounds in crafting digital content. By allowing students to connect their unique cultural and racial experiences to their class work, instructors would gain greater insights into the value systems of these learners and how to best motivate them towards academic success. For example, in the introductory course within the major, *Introduction to New Media*, students are required to complete a basic new media project that addresses a core digital competency every week. The syllabus for *Introduction to New Media* was developed as a series of staged assignments that increase in difficulty, from low stakes to high stakes, over the course of the semester and culminate in the creation of a student's first digital portfolio. Since each assignment builds upon the theories and methods from the previous project, students must stay engaged in the coursework from week to week in order to be academically successful. To invest the learners in ongoing process, each student has total creative control on how to implement their weekly project in terms of design.

The final assignment for the class requires the student to develop an original creative

project based on any topic of their choosing. The project can on any subject but must incorporate the material covered throughout the semester. The purpose of the staged assignments and the final culminating project is to build intellectual confidence by gradually introducing complex technical subjects, promote academic accountability by forcing the students to stay engaged, and empower learners by encouraging individual creativity and project ownership.

In addition to the introductory course, LaGuardia's ePortfolio initiative was implemented at every level of the New Media curriculum in order to stay in alignment with the overall educational goals of the institution. Prior to graduation, students would be required to design a final professional portfolio to facilitate transfer to a four-year institution or market themselves to potential employers. During the time since these changes were implemented, students have created interactive portfolios containing multimedia web sites and video productions on diverse topics ranging from the child soldiers in Sierra Leone to the latest trends in urban sportswear. This open and creative format allows the student to personalize the course work to highlight the subject matter and issues that they value most. According to statistics on the effectiveness of ePortfolio based courses compiled in 2007 by LaGuardia Community College's Office of Institutional Research (OIR) (Eynon, 2009), students in New Media focused classes were more likely to pass their courses than their counterparts in non technology centric courses. The pass rate for technology-based classes was 77.1% as compared to the 72% pass rate for courses not enhanced with digital media.

One of the anticipated benefits of the curriculum change was that the skill sets required to produce quality digital content would create lines of convergence across multiple disciplines such as business, mathematics, physics, technology, art, literature, music, film, and journalism. As a result, many of the African American and Hispanic students that were ambivalent towards

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the benefits of traditional liberal arts and science subjects, are now being prompted to discover

the value in these disciplines. By incorporating a multimedia enriched pedagogical approach that

enables African American and Hispanic students to merge popular entertainment genres like Hip-

Hop and movies with traditional liberal arts and science coursework, they are able develop

highly marketable skills while gaining a greater appreciation for traditional liberal arts and

science coursework.

Examples of Successful Reengagement

To illustrate the benefits of instructing African American and Hispanic students with this

pedagogical approach, the following case studies detail the experiences of two prior students in

the New Media Technology Degree Program at LaGuardia Community College.

Case study A.

J. Singletary (personal communication, December 1, 2010) is a single 23-year-old African

American male who graduated from LaGuardia Community College with an Associate in

Applied Science (A.A.S.) degree in New Media Technology in 2009. He is currently working as

a video editor in the corporate training division of a major international packaging and shipping

company. In addition to his fulltime job, Mr. Singletary founded College Dropout Films after

graduating from LaGuardia in 2009. College Dropout Films (http://vimeo.com/user3253499) is a

consortium of independent video producers dedicated to using this new Internet based visual

medium to benefit aspiring Hip-Hop artists. The name "College Dropout Films" is an inside

reference between the various members of the group. The premise of the story being, that if it

had not for becoming involved in digital film production, they would have all dropped out of

college.

During the interview, Mr. Singletary stated that he was drawn to the study of new media as a result of the movies that he grew up watching. He was especially influenced by many of the 3D animation movies created by the computer-generated imaging (CGI) company, Pixar Animation Studios, made famous by Steve Jobs. Films such as Ice Age, Toy Story, and Monsters Inc. all played a significant part in sparking his interest in the digital arts. Mr. Singletary originally gravitated towards LaGuardia's New Media Technology Program because it was the closest equivalent to a formal course in 3D animation that he could find at the time. In addition, the lower tuition rate that CUNY institutions charge in comparison to private universities made LaGuardia one of his only viable options for college.

During the course of his study, Mr. Singletary, an avid fan of Hip-Hop music and culture, discovered he had a significant aptitude for film and video editing. He stated that the more traditional majors in liberal arts and sciences did not interest him because he could not relate to their standardized lecture formats and content. Furthermore, he did not see a direct correlation between his life experiences and the subject matter contained within the liberal arts classes. It can be stated that he had a fairly negative view of traditional educational methods and it is doubtful he would have continued his education after high school if it were not for the program in New Media Technology.

Mr. Singletary stated that the study of New Media changed his views on education because it offered a different style of teaching and learning. What particularly interested him was the less structured and more "hands-on" approach to creating digital content. While lectures were part of the classroom organization, the lectures in new media were far more interactive. Some of the tools used to instruct students included Podcasts, special effects movies, cartoon animations, and power point presentations. The "hands-on" learning substituted task based projects for

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standard written exams that enabled Mr. Singletary to problem-solve and figure out methods that worked specifically for him. This individualized style of exploration gave Mr. Singletary a sense of personal satisfaction because of the freedom to express himself in the digital creations that he developed.

Despite working fulltime and pursuing entrepreneurial endeavors as the founder of College Dropout Films, Mr. Singletary is currently planning on continuing his education in 2012. His goal is to attend either Hunter College or Brooklyn College and obtain a Bachelors of Arts in film production. Examples of his creative work can viewed on his Vimeo page under his music production pseudonym, "Joey Snaxx" (http://vimeo.com/user4254885).

Case study B.

 J. Batista (personal communication, December 4, 2010) is a married 26-year-old Puerto Rican male who graduated from LaGuardia Community College in 2006 with an A.A.S. degree in New Media Technology. He currently works as an interactive media designer for a New York based advertising firm creating Flash advertising banners and micro-sites.

Mr. Batista was initially motivated to study new media because of his interest in digital music production. He stated he was always fan of electronic music and had dabbled with the technology on his own. However, Mr. Batista wanted to expand his knowledge beyond his self-study efforts and believed a formal class would assist him in his goal to become a professional music producer. His decision to attend LaGuardia was for a straightforward reason. At the time, the New Media Program was the most affordable equivalent to a formal course in digital music production that Mr. Batista could find.

 Mr. Batista's views on a traditional liberal arts and sciences education mirror that of Mr.

Singletary. He found very few liberal art and science programs that spoke directly to his life experiences and interests. As a result, he described himself as fairly unmotivated towards pursuing a standard liberal arts or sciences degree and is doubtful that he would have continued his education beyond high school had it not been for the non-traditional pedagogies within new media.

While he initially was drawn to the New Media Technology Program to learn more about music and audio production, Mr. Batista developed an interest in online gaming and animation as a result of taking a Flash animation course at LaGuardia. The visual nature of Flash made it possible for him to create interactive web sites utilizing many of his interest such as graphics, movies, and music. Also, the way in which the classes were taught, with equal time given to theory and practical computer exercises, helped him stay focused during the lessons. Interestingly, during his time studying new media, despite having very little interest in subjects such as math and science, Mr. Batista discovered himself having to develop those very same skills as a result of his fascination with Flash animation and gaming. In order to create the interactive projects that he wanted, it became necessary for him to learn programming skills that made use of applied mathematics and physics to construct exciting new media based entertainment. Mr. Batista finds it ironic that he entered LaGuardia without a desire to study mathematics and now uses it in many of his interactive projects.

Since graduating from LaGuardia, Mr. Batista has started an online recording label in his spare time. Despite working fulltime as an Interactive Designer, he has not given up on his desire to be a successful music producer. His music label, Dangerbox Recordings, (http://www.dangerbox.net) specializes in Trance and Electro House music. The venture is still in the startup phase, but Mr. Bastista is hopeful that it will be profitable soon since he and his wife

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recently welcomed their first child into the world.

Mr. Batista has no immediate plans to return to school since the exceptionally strong demand for Flash programmers would make it difficult for him to pass up the money and attend classes. He has not ruled out the possibility of additional school in the future but he states that his current education has taken him to where he wants to be in this point in his life. Example of his work can be found on his web site (http://www.dangerbox.net/jbatista84/)

Conclusion

The benefits of the technological innovation we are experiencing at this point in history should not just be limited to enabling individuals to bank online or reconnect with old friends through Facebook. While many of us have participated in these activities and found them to be both convenient and exciting, the opportunity afforded our society by using new media based technology is far greater. We now have the ability to reshape long held negative perceptions about education and learning in some of the most disaffected and disenfranchised students within our midst.

In a recent speech on the future outlook of America's educational competitiveness, US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan referenced a famous quote attributed to Nelson Mandela, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Secretary Duncan was sounding the alarm that America must take immediate steps to reverse some of the destructive trends that are keeping our students, particularly minority students, from being more competitive on world stage. African American and Hispanic students have the highest dropout rates of all ethnic groups and comprise approximately more than a quarter of the US population (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). If we do

not address these educational divides, we risk the likelihood of the Untied States wasting vast reserves of human capital and falling further behind other industrialized nations.

The fields of digital arts and technology are among the most profitable and popular areas in our economy. It is quite possible for anyone with the proper training to develop a music demo, shoot a video, create an original video game, or start and promote a new business using merely a standard laptop computer. As educators begin designing new curricula they need to be mindful of cultural impact of technology and how these new mediums can be leveraged to reengage unmotivated and underperforming students. The convergence of established time-honored media outlets and new methods of hi-tech communications can make it possible for many "at risk" African American and Hispanic students to discover the benefits of traditional education in the liberal arts and sciences. In preparing these students to compete in the 21st century workplace, it is essential that we help them realize how their unique cultural and racial backgrounds can connect to their academic experiences and place them on a successful path for the future.

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