

Twiss, L. (2017). How Urban Youth Use Digital Tools at Community Technology Centers to Support the Development of Civic Engagement Pathways: A Multisite, Multicase Study (Doctoral Dissertation, Towson University, 2017).

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Dissertation Abstract

This study explored how urban youth used, and did not use, digital tools at two community technology centers (CTCs) to support the development of civic engagement pathways. Research has shown that urban youth lack the same opportunities as their wealthier peers to engage civically (Levinson, 2007). This lack is problematic given the benefits of civic engagement, specifically as it relates to positive youth development and the strengthening of our nation's democracy (Lerner, 2004). CTCs have been shown to be valuable and viable places where young people can develop positively in a variety of ways (Kafai, Peppler, & Chiu, 2007). The purpose of this study was to better understand how young people could use the technology made accessible to them through CTCs to acquire particular skills and behaviors that could support their engagement in civic activities. This study employed a qualitative, multisite, multicase methodology that used Bers' (2012) Positive Technological Development framework to describe how young people made use of their digital tools. The cross-case analysis illuminated the importance of the participants' content creations. Content creation supported the following pathways to civic engagement: the development of civic skills, namely civic knowledge, collaboration, and communication; community building; and the emergence of civic identities. This research provides a perspective not yet fully explored in the literature about the intersection between CTCs, urban youth, and civic engagement. The findings reveal that CTCs served as vital spaces for the development of civic engagement pathways for the urban youth in this study, suggesting that CTCs may play a role in addressing the civic engagement gap.