



Digital Media, Learning and Social Confidence:

An Ethnography of a Small Island, Knowledge Society

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Sheba Mohammid

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Abstract

This thesis presents an ethnographic examination of digital media and learning as key dimensions in the construction of a ‘knowledge society’ in Trinidad and Tobago. This eighteen- (18) month study investigates the dynamics of social practice in a complex ecosystem of learning in a low-income community. A concept of social confidence is foundational to the findings. Social confidence is a critical problematic faced by participants. It is linked both to possessing knowledge of content, and also navigating expertise to negotiate success in social contexts. This thesis traces the strategies that participants used to instrumentalise their learning to enact social confidence, examining issues regarding privacy, identity, failure, and shame. It unpacks literacies and skills that participants developed to build fluency in “finding out,” “trying over,” and “making meaning,” and their efforts to apply these literacies and skills to build social confidence in their everyday lives. The thesis complicates the interplays of formal/informal, global/local, and online/offline spaces. It adds a small island state perspective to recent scholarship in the field that is appreciative of informal learning but has largely centred on U.S. and European contexts. The study makes a novel contribution to academia as the first ethnographic study to examine social practices of digital media use within formal and informal learning in the knowledge society in the Caribbean. It addresses a practical need from local policymakers for more qualitative data to contribute to evidence-based policy and answers a call from regional academics for deeper insight into ICT use in the region.

keywords: Social Confidence, Learning, Digital Media, Knowledge Society, Small Island State.

Introduction

Chapter 1

Contouring a Cartography

Social Practices in Digital Media and Learning in the “Knowledge Society”

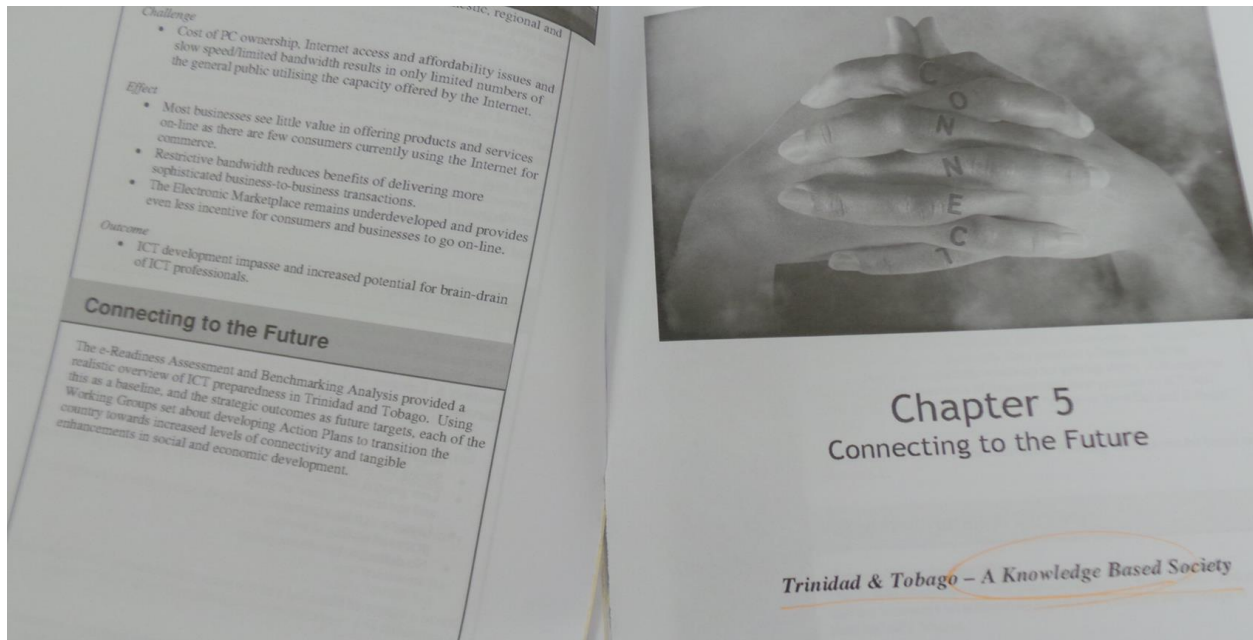


Figure 1. Picture of section on knowledge-based society in *fastforward* policy document.

“The Future of Learning Through Technology”

Women and men in suits, intermingled with queues of school children wearing pressed uniforms, entered the conference room at the Trinidad Hilton for the state-run event “The Future of Learning Through Technology”. As the attendees began to settle into their seats they started to see high-profile Trinidadian government representatives gather on stage next to Professor Sugata Mitra, one of a series of international guests in the global education sector who had been invited by the government during the time of the study to participate in events. Other high-profile

individuals included activist Malala Yousafzai, President of Coursera, Lila Ibrahim, and a telecast by Sal Khan of Khan Academy. These visits were met with enthusiasm as they were embedded in a movement in the local public sector to situate Trinidad and Tobago as a world-class knowledge society that uses digital media as a catalyst in education.

The aesthetics of the “The Future of Learning Through Technology” symposium played up the digital media element with large screens that displayed images of a future guided by technological interventions. During the break for lunch, they also broadcast a slideshow of local educational projects, a visible demonstration of the common discourse in local policy circles that technology is very much linked to the future of learning implicit in the title of the event. The main speakers took turns at the podium to speak to the guests. The rhetoric of the discussions centred around aspirations for Trinidad and Tobago eventually coalesced into a common vision of a knowledge society that would be achieved through education, and especially through the use of technology in both the traditional academic and the technical vocational sectors. The students present at the session were shuttled out during lunch as they were told the buses were leaving and they needed to get back to school, while the practitioners stayed for the plenary in the afternoon to discuss the future of education.

This event was indicative of what I found in my several years of experience as policy practitioner in Trinidad. While there are various ways in which the “knowledge society” may be understood, the everyday discourse among policymakers largely associated it with technology and education. Flanking this was a question of how these can be used to support learning and a problematic of how to understand what is taking place on the ground.

Situating the Study

The national policy discourse in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) proffers digital media and education as critical tools in constructing a knowledge society (*fastforward*, SmarTT). This study recognises that ‘knowledge society’ is a multidimensional concept that can be examined through a number of lenses (Bindé, 2005; Drucker, 1969; Machlup, 1962; Stehr, 2002). It approaches this prism through an ethnographic investigation that addresses the need to better understand the dimensions of digital media and learning, and in particular, the social practices surrounding these in the knowledge society. It thereby contributes to local evidence-based policy. It also addresses a gap in regional academic inquiry (Dunn, 2012; Mallalieu, 2007) and adds a developing world perspective to a growing body of scholarship surrounding digital media and learning in largely U.S. and European contexts (Ito et al., 2009; Ito et al., 2013; Leander, Phillips, & Taylor, 2010; Livingstone & Sefton-Green, 2016; Sefton-Green & Erstad, 2013). It makes a novel contribution to academia as the first ethnographic study to examine the social practices of digital media use within formal and informal learning in the knowledge society in the Caribbean. This study draws upon theories of social practice (Holland & Lave, 2009; Gutiérrez, 2011; Miller, 1995; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Schatzki, Cetina, & Savigny, 2001) and situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner, Fenton-O’Creevy, Hutchinson, Kubiak, & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). It makes theoretical contributions by developing a conceptual tool, ‘social confidence,’ as a critical problematic in this social practice.

The idea of a normative knowledge society built through digital media and learning is reified in a formal, written policy agenda, but is realised, in fact, as a construction in itself (Slater, 2014). This study destabilises the ‘known’ knowledge society of formal policy and instead confronts the messiness of day to day experiences (Mann, 1986). I use ethnography to

delve into one vein of the knowledge society: the everyday practices and tensions faced by Trinidadians as they use digital media in formal and informal learning. Recognising that written policy is just one narrative, I unpack the stories of the Trinidadian people themselves and their social practices. The research questions for the study were generated through engagement with the policymakers and practitioners who administer interventions. This engagement revealed a need to understand the social dynamics of practice, especially by adults in informal settings, to improve evidence-based policy. Policymakers and practitioners are often viewed as the knowledge workers most responsible for creating policy and effecting interventions. They are expected to produce demonstrable outcomes in a highly political environment. In their efforts towards showing the knowledge society through visible interventions, however, there is also uncertainty and instability in precisely knowing the knowledge society and how it is practised on the ground.

My participant observation with policymakers revealed that while there is a thrust to provide greater access and infrastructure, there is still a need for deeper data on how digital media is being used in knowledge sharing and what it means to participants. This is where my study finds its foothold. It is this need for deeper data that drove me to conduct ethnographic research in a low-income community, in order to better understand the practices surrounding digital media use. It uncovers the types of learning taking place, how this learning was applied to creation and production in online and offline spaces, and the skills needed to participate in the knowledge society, as it was performed in everyday life in Trinidad and Tobago.

I employed an ethnographic approach to collect rich data to understand the experiences of my participants (Horst & Miller, 2006; Miller & Slater, 2000; Miller, 2011, 2012; Quarry & Ramirez, 2009; Slater, 2014; Tacchi, Slater, & Hearn, 2003). This consisted of eighteen (18)

months of participant observation in Trinidad. It started off with my experience in a policy bureaucracy as coordinator of a national open learning intervention. This enabled me to better understand the research needs from a local practitioner's point of view. What became apparent here was the need for qualitative inquiry to move beyond broad assumptions and instead closely examine the endogenous practices taking place on the ground in Trinidad and Tobago. The fieldwork then shifted to participant observation, living within a community to consider how digital media was being used within formal and informal learning. To deepen my understanding of local perspectives, I have also conducted ninety (90) in-depth, face to face interviews. This immersion in Trinidad and Tobago has produced a range of insights that are useful in appreciating the everyday realities and cartographies of the lived knowledge society. On a meta level, it then moves beyond the corpus of policy as the singular, legitimate source of knowledge, to engage with the Trinidadian people themselves and learn from the practices embedded in their everyday lives. This project is a reimagined pedagogy: an effort to turn the idea of a hypodermic capacity building *for* the developing world on its head and move towards a process of learning *from* local communities (Freire, 1983; Goulet, 2005).

The aim of this project is therefore both an academic and practical exercise, underpinned by the belief that these are not mutually exclusive but, rather, complementary endeavours. The study originates from two spaces. One is a gap in the academic literature that calls for further research on ICT and learning in the knowledge society generally, and in Small Island Developing States (SIDS)¹ in the Caribbean in particular. The other is the gulf between

1 For further context see SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (S.A.M.O.A) (UN 2014) pathway which argues that Small Island Developing States (SIDS) face particular vulnerabilities. The outcome document of the Third Meeting of Small Island Developing States summarises key issues that form the global SIDS policy agenda at the time of the study while acknowledging that national development priorities and individual country circumstances

aspiration and application as a nation tries to practically implement digital media as a tool for building a knowledge society. I use ethnography to resist technocentricity and provide a more human-centred approach (Boellstorff, 2008; Coleman, 2010; Dourish & Bell, 2011; Horst & Miller, 2006, 2012; Miller, 2011; Miller & Sinanan, 2013; Miller & Slater, 2000). This research is an original contribution to academic literature because it provides endogenous insights into the practices and tacit experiences of digital media and learning from a Small Island Developing State's population. It contributes original findings to address a gap outlined in ICTD (Heeks, 2012) and regional scholarship (Dunn, 2012; Mallalieu, 2007) on how local populations are using digital media and what this means to them. Flanking this is the need outlined by Trinidadian policymakers for qualitative data on how participants apply digital media to learning and knowledge production. This study thereby provides a timely contribution to a growing body of scholarly work, and a practical input to local policymakers to enhance their ways of "knowing" the knowledge society and ultimately creating effective evidence-based policy.

This chapter introduces the project by outlining the research aims and questions that are generated by the existing literature and local practitioners. It then describes how the project addresses these. I look at how articulations of the knowledge society are often underpinned by the use of digital media as a development catalyst and enabler. I recognise, however, that entities like "development"² and "knowledge society" are neither simple nor stable concepts. These

need to be taken into account. The policy affirmations include "27. (g) promoting and enhancing the use of information and communications technologies for, inter alia, education, the creation of employment, in particular, youth employment, and economic sustainability purposes in small island developing States" (UN 2014 p.7)

² Surveying the literature reveals that "development" itself is neither a homogenous nor naturalised entity. It conveys a variety of meanings and can be practised in a number of ways. Modernisation theory positioned development as a Bretton-Woods based linear economic model that formed a roadmap for developing countries to follow (Rostow, 1952). This has been critiqued by dependency theorists for a Western-based linearity (Cardoso & Falleto, 1979; Frank, 1967; Frank, 1969; Prebisch, 1950; Servaes, 1996, 2008). World Systems theorists have critiqued modernisation theory for ignoring the wider macro-system that positioned developing countries on a

terms are loaded with meanings, whose rhetoric and practical application need to be unpacked. This intersects with a body of work that examines information and communication technology development (ICTD) and ICT in education. There is a call for more scholarship that resists technocentricity and instead considers a more human-based approach. This study addresses this call by examining how participants practise learning with digital media through a conceptual framework founded on social practice. I focus on situated learning to appreciate the dialectical relationship between participants' actions and meanings and the social world that contextualises them. The term *social confidence* is introduced as a conceptual tool to understand how participants instrumentalise their learning in their everyday relationships and negotiate failure and success. The need for the research and this study's objectives are then examined. The chapter next discusses some of the key methodological considerations in this study. It concludes by providing an outline of the thesis and the key findings of each subsequent chapter.

Knowledge Society

Contemporary social theory often classifies 'modern' society as a 'knowledge society' (Drucker, 1969; Machlup, 1962; Stehr, 2002), 'network society' (Castells, 2000), 'information society' (Bell, 1976) and/or 'well educated' society (OAS, n.d.). These terms are often used in coterminous and normative ways to describe a state of modernity underscored by technological advancement. Knowledge society analyses argue that knowledge production and information becomes foundational to the workings of the new economy (Machlup, 1962), which has moved forward to become a 'learning society' (Husén, 1974; Hutchins, 1968) populated by skilled

marginalised periphery to the developed core (Wallerstein, 1974, 1989, 2004). Human development theory and the capabilities approach (Sen, 1984, 1999, 2004, 2009; Nussbaum, 1988, 1992, 2003) advocates a kind of development based on the freedom for persons to do, be, or function according to what they value. A call has been issued for a more human-centred approach to development that values choice (Kleine, 2013) and well-being (Gough & McGregor, 2007; McGregor & Sumner, 2009), or even a "post-development" approach (Rahnema, 1992).

knowledge workers (Drucker, 1969). Conceptually, ‘information society’ and ‘knowledge society’ intertwine, and technology often drives their interaction (Duff, 2012). Similarly, the term ‘network society’ draws on this notion that an information society hinges on a series of technologically driven informational networks (Castells, 2000)³.

My inquiry is framed through the lens of digital media and learning in the knowledge society. Unpacking these concepts, however, reveals an underlying complexity. Their relationships to each other, to society as a series of technologically driven entities, and to the technologies through which they operate, are variegated. Network society as proposed by Castells (2000) views networks as fundamentally informational. Miller (2012), however, emphasises that networks can be understood as social and relationship-based. Bindé (2005) argues that in some ways, all societies have been knowledge societies so there should be a valuing of traditional knowledge. She describes simultaneous processes in which ICT can enable greater liberalisation of knowledge beyond the domain of a select few while also creating a deluge of “useless” information. Bindé consequently argues that one singular, techno-determinist model of knowledge society is not workable (2005). A distinction can be made between information societies centred on the diffusion of information, and knowledge societies that are not only about access to information or technical devices but use processes of learning as a means to achieve social and economic goals (Mallalieu, 2006; Mansell & Tremblay, 2013).

Inherent in these visions/versions of society are a number of practicable public policy challenges (Cutler, 2005; McCann & Giles, 2002; Rocci, 2010). Knowledge/ information/ networked society, and, increasingly their links to ICT, are spatially rooted in Western economic

³ See also the OECD’s investments in their Information and Communication Technology industries for knowledge economies (Seki, 2008).

analysis and are viewed as being twentieth-century advances. Mansell (2014) proposes that, counter intuitively, the information society may lead to social inequality, since disparities in access in the information society and the internet age have the potential to reinforce uneven power relationships in people's lives. Conversely, Smith and Elder (2010) argue that ICT and its potential for openness can lead to greater knowledge creation, but they raise an important question that still needs to be answered as to how this can be achieved

Unpacking Digital Media and Learning as Dimensions in Constructing the Knowledge Society in Trinidad and Tobago

While the knowledge society may be considered through a number of frames, such as innovation or indigenous content, the national knowledge society discourse in Trinidad and Tobago has been entangled with key dimensions of digital media and learning. Over the last decade, national development policy in Trinidad and Tobago has been marked by an increasing ideology of forging the country into a world-class, modern knowledge society by infusing education with ICT (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2011). This has been enmeshed with Trinidad and Tobago's participation in the United Nation's World Summit on the Information Society in 2003 and 2005, and WSIS +10 Review events in 2013 and 2014. In the last decade, the national policy agenda has articulated an aspiration towards a 'knowledge society' that is interlinked with ICT and digital media use. In 2003, the National ICT Strategy *fastforward* was developed as the national ICT strategy. It was based on the Vision 2020 National Strategic Plan, which mapped the national policy agenda and framed Telecommunications and ICT as major infrastructural enablers: "A major facet of Vision 2020 is the development of a strategy to facilitate the transformation of Trinidad and Tobago into a knowledge-based society through the effective use of Information and Communication

Technology (ICT). (*fastforward*, p. 9)

SmarTT is the National ICT Plan of Trinidad and Tobago 2012-2016, forged under the People's Partnership (PP) coalition government. It is built upon policy developed under a different political regime, and like its predecessor, it continues to be focused on an idea that ICT can be a driver towards a knowledge society, and this will lead to better quality of life. The vision of the draft plan is articulated as an aim: "To create a dynamic knowledge-based society, driven by the innovative use of ICTs to enhance the social, economic and cultural development of the people of Trinidad and Tobago" (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2013, p. 20).

In order to realise this aim, one of the focal areas of the national ICT plan is human capital development. It points to "building an e-Ready society through ICT-enriched learning" as a fundamental imperative to achieving this (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2013, p. 28). ICT-enriched learning initiatives include formalised ICT training programmes, certification and accreditation, upgrading ICT infrastructure in schools, enhancing ICT capabilities of school administrators and educators and mainstreaming ICT as a subject in schools. In the policy-making imagination, the knowledge society in Trinidad and Tobago intertwines ICT closely with schooling and education.

In my experience with local practitioners, the concept of "lifelong learning"⁴ (Biesta,

⁴ See the Faure Report [Faure, 1972], the Delors Report [Delors, 1996]. "Lifelong learning" is a term that was regularly used in meetings about national policy and education and ICT interventions that I participated in during my time working with policymakers in Trinidad and Tobago. It was often used to emphasise learning taking place throughout life stages, with a focus on promoting Trinidad and Tobago as the type of society that values continual learning as an important facet of their human development. The use of "lifelong learning" among Trinidadian policymakers was often conceptually related to the UNESCO (2016) definition, where "lifelong learning" is defined by a recognition that learning takes place across a broad spectrum of spaces including work, the community, the family, and in social and civic life. Conceptually tied to this was also an ideology that ICT can enhance opportunities for information acquisition, interaction, and participation. However, policymakers also

2006) has also persisted in knowledge society discourse as core to the continually learning society that policymakers envision. This is not surprising as it is consistent with the framing of development in the UN global policy agenda, evidenced in such strategic policy principles as Goal 4 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which calls on countries to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2016, p. 6). The UNESCO Education 2030 Framework for Action deepens this focus, calling on countries to provide lifelong learning opportunities for both youth and adults and stressing that lifelong learning is comprised of formal, non-formal, and informal learning. My experience with local policymakers uncovered that while everyday bureaucratic discourse often proffered an aspiration to promote lifelong learning, especially through a National Distance Learning Secretariat, unpacking this concept in practice has met with no small measure of ambiguity. There have been efforts towards more non-formal and informal learning initiatives in open learning, but historically a more visible political thrust has been to focus on tangible interventions of increasing ICT access within formal education settings.

ICTD and Education Development

In examining the particular dimension of digital media and learning in the knowledge society, this study contributes a developing world⁵ perspective to an emerging research agenda that investigates practices of digital media and learning in European and U.S. contexts (Ito et al., 2009, 2013; Leander et al., 2010; Livingstone & Sefton-Green, 2016; Sefton-Green & Erstad,

expressed fear that technologically underserved populations would be excluded (UNESCO, 2016).

⁵ While I acknowledge that there is debate regarding the use of certain nomenclature like “developing world” and “Global South” in global policy circles, the terms used in the thesis were selected to reflect the language that was used in local discourse among policymakers in Trinidad at the time of the study.

2013,2017). The idea of using ICT-enhanced education to promote a knowledge society is linked closely with the idea of development in/of the Caribbean region (CARICOM-Secretariat, 2008; Mallalieu & Rocke, 2007) but there is still a paucity of data on how digital media is being used in the Caribbean and there is the opportunity for significant research in this area. The insertion of ICTs into education initiatives has formed a large part of the development agenda globally (UNDP, 2010), but the social practices in these contexts have still been largely under-researched. Selinger (2009) argues that the rationale for the widespread popularity of ICT in educational development emerges from “the rhetoric that almost every government around the world believes that technology and education are the key to competitive advantage” (Selinger, 2009, p. 214). Scholars propose that ICT has the potential to revolutionise learning environments in formal, non-formal, and informal settings (Cartelli, 2013; Conner, 2003; McLoughlin & Oliver, 1999). Jonassen (1996) has mapped a history of the role of ICT in education as an evolution from learning *about* ICT, to learning *with* ICT, to learning *through* ICT. Globally, ICT in education in developing countries has involved a number of high-profile interventions that have focused on increasing access. For example, in the “Hole in the Wall” experiments in India, computers were connected to the internet and placed like Automatic Teller Machines in walls in villages and urban slums for children to access ((Mitra, Ritu, Shiffon, Jha, Bisht & Kapur, 2005). Mitra, Dangwal, & Thadani (2008) emphasise the role of access to digital media in paving the way to new pedagogies. Furthering this philosophy “Schools in the Cloud”⁶ initiatives allow children to work with computers in unsupervised groups and are based on exposing children to technology in self-organised learning environments. The One Laptop per Child (OLPC) programme aims to

⁶ See <https://www.theschoolinthecloud.org/about/>

increase access to low-cost laptops to over 2 million children in more than 40 countries, including regionally in South America (One Laptop Per Child, n.d.). OLPC founder Nicholas Negroponte has argued that this initiative benefits from linking children's natural curiosity to a Papertian constructivist approach to learning (Negroponte, 2012). Other scholars have critiqued the initiative and Negroponte's ideology of technology-driven learning in his influential 1996 book *Being Digital* as techno-idealist, arguing that the initiative needs to focus more on aspects other than the technology, such as curriculum development, teacher training, and assessment reform (Warschauer, Cotten, & Ames, 2012). Kleine (2015) suggests that "We have to keep in mind of course that technology is not a silver bullet but always one ingredient in wider systemic social change," (Kleine, 2015, p.93).

There is a tension in scholarship regarding what constitutes success in ICT in education, and Isaacs & Hollow (2012) argue that there is an important distinction between interventions that improve access and interventions that improve the quality of education. A variety of perspectives on the role of ICT in education has emerged. Proponents argue that digital media offers enormous potential to revolutionise learning (Prensky, 2010), while others, such as Postman (1993), have drawn on more techno-critical stances to critique the transformative role of ICT in the education system (Greenlaw, 2015). Selwyn (2016) contends that while there is much hype about the disruption of education by technology, there remains a need to problematise and critically examine this in a more precise and nuanced way.

The education narrative in Trinidad and Tobago has been entwined with ideas of opportunity, and there is a sense among policymakers that this can potentially be enhanced through ICT. A range of interventions promoting digital media as a tool to support education has been operationalised to this end in Trinidad and Tobago. These have included e-Connect and

Learn (eCAL), the local one-to-one laptop programme where laptops have been distributed nationally to Form one (1) students each year in secondary schools. This idea of providing each child with a laptop intertwines with aims and ideologies that tie together knowledge society, technology, and education. The purpose of the programme is to equip children with the resources to compete in the knowledge economy, promote greater digital inclusion, and provide the country with the tools it needs for development (IADB, 2011). Similar efforts to provide access have included the distribution of tablets to students in tertiary institutions. There have been calls from the executives of these institutions for educators to develop eLearning courses, and my ethnographic work with policymakers evidenced an administrative concern about the need for more local content. To promote greater eLearning content, a national knowledge gateway, www.knowledge.tt, has been established to support open learning using digital media. This has involved partnerships with international agencies that create MOOCS and learning materials through platforms such as Coursera and the Khan Academy. My immersion alongside these practitioners revealed that these efforts are still largely explorative as they try to forge interventions that will have the most impact in a climate of bureaucratic constraints and limited data. Their goals echo Smith and Elder's (2010) ideas about the possibilities of ICT for knowledge creation, but again pose the question of how this can be achieved.

Steyn (2011) follows Polikanov and Abramova (2003) in surmising, "There are many different views of the role of ICT for development. Optimists regard ICT as the solution to all problems, pessimists argue ICTs increase the divide, and realists see communities adapting new technologies" (Steyn, 2011, p. 20). There is a recognised need for greater research on ICTD in the Caribbean region (Mallalieu & Cambridge, 2007). When Mallalieu and Cambridge (2007) observe that people living below the national poverty line in Trinidad do not have pipe-borne

water but have mobile phones, they note that while similar studies of mobile use among the poor have been undertaken in Africa (Waverman, Meschi, & Fuss, 2005), India (Sharma, 2003), and Latin America (Frost & Sullivan, 2006), there is little documented on mobile use patterns among the poor in the Caribbean. Waller (2012) notes that there has been some evidence-based research into the patterns of ICT access and usage among Jamaican farmers. Mallalieu and Sankarsingh (2012) critique that there is little by way of case studies to inform the crafting of a formal strategy of how ICT can assist in development in the Caribbean. There is, therefore, a need for more research in Latin America and the Caribbean (Mallalieu, 2007). This opportunity to delve into how ICT shapes up as an enabler of development in the Caribbean suggests a burgeoning research agenda that spans dimensions of access, usage, and content, and which intersects with telecommunications policy (Dunn, 2012) and digital anthropology (Horst & Miller, 2012). Dunn (2010) has argued that ICT and its impacts on literacies is a key theme that needs further research in the region. He argues, “Competence in a range of information literacies is perhaps the emerging lingua franca in the Information Economy” (Dunn, 2010, p. 341).

Heeks (2012) calls for more research into the applications of ICT for development. While he uses economic and quantitative parameters, other scholars argue that quantitative analysis may not give a full picture of the practices of digital media and learning in a community. For example, Alkire (2002) argues that capabilities-based evaluation offered a more realistic image of the scope, benefits, and consequences of initiatives. For example, during a literacy intervention in Pakistan, economic measures failed to encapsulate other values such as empowerment against abuse that could have been identified using a qualitative approach. There has been a similar paradigm shift calling for new forms of measurement for assessing the use of digital media in the capabilities and values of communities (Gigler, 2004; Johnstone, 2007;

Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2010; Wresch, 2009; Zheng & Walsham, 2008). ICTD and ICT in education researchers are highlighting this gap. Heeks himself admits, “My work on successes and failures of ICT4D regularly gets cited, but it was built on a peanut of data.” (Heeks, 2012, p. 340.)

Regarding the ‘Global South,’ Servaes (2008) warns that: “Meaning is not something that is delivered to people, people create/interpret it themselves” (Servaes, 2008, p. 175). This idea drives grassroots investigations into how digital media is being used in learning in a developing context, and it converges with a Freirean philosophy that people on the ground in local communities must be regarded as subjects and not objects in their own history (Freire, 1983; Goulet, 2005).

Social Practice and Situated Learning

There is an opportunity to conduct research that resists a technocentric approach and instead adds an integral human-centred understanding of the knowledge society. There is a poignant need for moving beyond quantitative measures of access to observe the everyday practices that are taking place on the ground. Bräuchler and Postill (2010) argue that while practice theory has been a vital facet of social theory, there is still critical space for its application in understanding media and how it functions in people’s lives. They distinguish practice theory from other social theory that focuses on structures, systems, individuals, or interactions, and they define practices by suggesting that “practices are the embodied sets of activities that humans perform with varying degrees of regularity, competence and flair” (Bräuchler & Postill, 2010, p. 1). Barbara Miller (1995) argues that practices are people’s routine activities and that they are ultimately inextricably linked to the social structures within which they operate and the meanings people ascribe to their actions. She conceives of practices as a

pivot between structure and the individual. Understanding social practices is a move away from technocentricity in media studies towards appreciating how the knowledge society is realised on the ground through an interplay of human action, meaning-making, and the society in which these are embedded. Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) foundational theoretical contributions demonstrate the interplay of social order and agency as he describes both the internalisation of social order through habitus as well as the agency to invent, improvise, and affect social practice. Jean Lave (1988) emphasises the dialectical nature of this practice with human agency as "partially determined, [and] partially determining" (Lave, 1988, p. 16). Giddens (1984) situates individuals inseparably from the day to day contexts that they constitute. Schatzki (1996) and Schatzki et al. (2001) underscore the importance of tacit knowledges and shared practical understanding or "know-how" that maintains practice. In cultural anthropology, Ortner (1984, 2006) has emphasised that social practices are embedded in the historical contexts with which these actions are constantly in dialogue. This idea of historical production is entrenched in the work of Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003), who apply the concept of practice to learning and develop the concept of repertoires of practice to talk about the toolkits people develop over time, space, and history in order to confront the ways in which they learn. They argue for thinking of culture as a verb in learning and seeing it as something that people do.

Understanding this idea of practice in learning is useful because it is founded on appreciating what participants do on the ground and how this is situated in an interplay with the contexts in which they perform. These contexts form an ecology of local knowledge, relationships, and tools, such as technology. Holland and Lave (2009) underscore that social anthropology research on topics such as learning must appreciate the embeddedness of this activity. They argue, "If we study persons in the world, these persons are always material and

embodied. Minds do not act separately from bodies, nor does knowledge act separately from engagement in practice” (Holland & Lave, 2009, p. 2).

Wenger (1998) has critiqued traditional approaches to studying learning for constructing it as something that occurs within bounded contexts that are separate from the rest of everyday life. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, situated learning theory was formed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger as a theoretical approach to appreciating learning as embedded in everyday activity (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Situated learning theory conceptualises individuals as practising learning through activities that are embedded in the social spaces of communities of practice, in which they gain expertise and can move from peripheral to more legitimate forms of participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). This theoretical approach to learning not only focuses on content knowledge and skills based on this content but also on the relationships surrounding them. Wenger’s latest collaborative work has emphasised boundary crossing and identity negotiation, as people are not only engaged in a single community of practice, but also in a broader landscape of learning (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015). Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003), who apply the concept of practice to learning, resist treating people’s cultural differences as static traits but instead emphasise dynamic participation. Gutiérrez (2011) stresses the idea of movement in learning, namely how people live their lives and learn across multiple settings, including institutional and non-institutional contexts. Another strand of scholarship has argued for a need to understand learning in interest-driven (Ito et al., 2009) and not-school (Sefton-Green, 2012) settings. Rogoff, Mistry, Goncu, & Mosier (1993) argue that individuals can become fluent in more than one philosophy of learning and its practices. These concepts of fluencies and literacies in learning have become useful to appreciate how everyday and institutional practices are framed and reframed. Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) argue that academic

literacy is too often narrowly conceived, and that socio-cultural literacies also emerge as discursive practices. These theoretical considerations in understanding the situatedness of learning and dynamics of practice provide a toolkit for unpacking learning in Trinidad and Tobago. This involves appreciating the social practices taking place in learning and also how this learning is instrumentalised.

Social Confidence as a Conceptual Tool for Understanding Practice in Digital Media and Learning

Social confidence is a concept that emerges in my study as a critical problematic of the social practices of instrumentalising learning. It is the belief in one's ability to succeed in social contexts. It involves being able to achieve positive feelings of success, value, worth, and security in relationships and social interactions. It is distinct from social capital, which emphasises the building of social networks and their roles as resources (Bourdieu, 1986, 1992). Social confidence is based instead on how one feels in these relationships. It is also distinguishable from self-confidence, which centres on individualist feelings towards self, and also differs from competence, which can be measured based on success regarding expertise and efficacy with content. Instead, social confidence moves simply from feelings of competence with *content* to feelings of success in the *context* of one's relationships. For example, one may be competent in the technical aspects of learning one's craft, but not feel that one is able to adequately use this competency to build feelings of worth or value within one's relationships. Clearly, one's motivation for learning may come from a number of directions including employability, socio-economic mobility, and enjoyment of the subject matter. The findings of my ethnography, however, demonstrate that social confidence is a critical problematic that my participants face as social actors. I argue that unpacking the dynamics of their learning requires a framework that

considers the embeddedness of learning in a complex of sociality, in which participants try to achieve feelings of success and identities that are positioned to create and contribute meaning to relationships.

This concept of social confidence adds to emerging approaches that consider the social, emotional and cultural dimensions of people's feelings of confidence in their learning and its applications. Practitioners are recognising the need to develop models in an attempt to expand ideas of learning with technology beyond technical skill and access to digital media. For example, the Joint Information Systems Committee digital capabilities framework (JISC, n.d.) places an emphasis on digital identity and wellbeing as a key parameter in which other capabilities such as ICT proficiency, information, data and media literacies, and digital learning and development are situated. This framework highlights that a core issue is the negotiation of the reputational risks and benefits associated with learning with technology. The Australia Digital Inclusion Index (Thomas, Barraket, Wilson, Ewing, MacDonald, Tucker, & Rennie, 2017) extends the idea of digital inclusion to include a sub-index on digital ability which appreciates the notion of confidence as a critical facet of participation. My study argues that the concept of social confidence adds to these considerations by examining how people broker their confidence and participation in learning with digital media and its instrumentalisation in social practice in the global south.

I argue that studying the knowledge society is best achieved through an appreciation of the on-the-ground practices of its constituents. Social practice and situated learning theory provide a useful foundation for this understanding by appreciating the dynamics of the social practices of learning. Copley (2000) argues that any study of learning in Trinidad and Tobago must consider failure as a serious contention, and that this complicates our positive notions of

education. I argue that social confidence emerges as a critical concept in my ethnography as it demonstrates the tension between education as an aspiration and a pressure. It provides a conceptual tool that contributes to a framework for appreciating the situated nature of learning and the ecosystemic role of sociality in practices, identities, and boundary crossings (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015). I demonstrate that education is not only linked to disseminating and banking information (Freire, 1983) but also affects the social confidence of participants and the meanings they ascribe to formal learning, including fear of failure and shame-based classroom dynamics. My ethnography reveals how participants attempt to broker these dynamics and build social confidence through informal strategies, such as creating spaces of privacy in their learning with digital media, and in turn bringing these spaces into a dialectic with their relationships to garner feedback, demonstrate success, and ultimately attempt to enact social confidence. I do not proffer that this negotiation is simplistic or always successful, but I argue that it is an essential part of understanding meaning-making in learning as participants instrumentalise this learning in their interactions and identities in everyday relationships.

Research Need

The gap in scholarship highlighted by Heeks' (2012) statement on the paucity of data on ICT in development, is supported by my work with local policymakers who are trying to administer interventions that use digital media to construct a knowledge society through human development and learning. My ethnographic engagement with them reveals that Trinidadian practitioners are tasked with trying to tangibly develop and visibly "show" the knowledge society through initiatives and infrastructural investments. This is, however, in tandem with an uncertainty in trying to "know" the knowledge society when it is neither a stable entity nor is the use of digital media among its constituents fully understood. Policymakers complain about

limited data and the constraints this poses in effective design and the operationalisation of evidence-based policy. They are faced with trying to create policy based on scant information about what constitutes digital media use by participants and how this translates to effective learning and educational outcomes. This hampers the design of evidence-based policy and project plans that align with the practices and needs of communities. There is a lack of data on the whole, and when data does exist, it is largely quantitative and highlights trends in access without looking into how digital media is being used by citizens, and the resultant impacts and opportunities. Practitioners largely work with access figures as their basis for understanding Trinidad and Tobago's digital media landscape. The total internet penetration rate is 61.8%, with a mobile internet penetration of 43.0% and fixed internet penetration of 18.8% (TATT, 2014). Mobile phone usage is high, with a mobile penetration rate of 149.1% (TATT, 2014). While these figures are useful in that they permit macro comparisons to other regions or points in Trinidad and Tobago's historical telecommunications development, it is unclear what statistics like these mean in terms of the lives of citizens. Knowledge society policymakers outline a clear need for qualitative data to generate more comprehensive insight into digital learning practices and to translate them into evidence-based policy and relevant interventions. In particular, there is a gap in data on the informal landscape of learning for adults. This is consistent with a global challenge to promote lifelong learning as a key value. Yet data on adult learning and education remains weak, even in high-income countries (UNESCO, 2016).

Objectives and Importance of the Study

This study originates from a need, outlined in academic literature and by local policymakers, to better understand practices surrounding digital media and learning in the knowledge society in Trinidad and Tobago. Its main objective is to contribute to filling this gap

by providing qualitative data and meaningful insights into how Trinidadian citizens use digital media for knowledge creation, sharing, and use, and the social landscape of practices involved in this process. This study is an original contribution to academic knowledge because I conducted the first ethnographic study of social practices in digital media and learning in formal and informal spaces in the knowledge society in the Caribbean region. It is significant because it contributes new material on the endogenous practices and perspectives on ICT and learning in a Small Island Developing State. This is a meaningful and useful exercise because it adds a Global South context, namely of Trinidad and Tobago, to the body of academic literature on digital media, learning, and knowledge society development (Ito et al., 2009, 2013; Leander et al., 2010; Livingstone & Sefton-Green, 2016; Sefton-Green & Erstad, 2013,2017). This contribution is especially novel as it moves away from the normative technocentric measures of digital media access in and use in ICTD (Heeks, 2012), instead focusing on the qualitative dimensions of social practice to understand how learning and digital media use is situated in the everyday lives of participants. This study is also a useful contribution to policy as it provides data and analysis that can assist policymakers to “know” the knowledge society in more nuanced ways. It translates everyday experiences, bringing them into dialogue with the policymaking imagination of a knowledge society. This project privileges the experiences and knowledge of participants themselves as field guides to map out the practices that form the cartography of learning through the use of digital media in a landscape of formal and informal settings.

Research Questions

This study investigates the dynamics of social practice at play as participants use digital media for learning in the knowledge society. Concerns from practitioners about the need to better understand how learning and knowledge sharing is enacted on the ground drive my research

focus. The key research question asks, “what are the dynamics of social practice at play as Trinidadians use digital media in learning?”

Investigation into this question is framed through the following sub-foci. First, the study examines how participants practise learning with digital media in institutionalised and out-of-school settings. Second, it delves into understanding how participants negotiate failure, success, and social confidence in their learning and instrumentalise this in their everyday relationships. Third, it considers what literacies and fluencies are involved in navigating these practices in the knowledge society. This investigation draws out the everyday dimensions of social practice in the knowledge society from the point of view of the citizens who construct it in their daily lives.

Methodology: Ethnographic Approach

To address my research questions, I adopted an ethnographic approach to achieve a rich sense of the local context on the ground and the practices at play. This offered a holistic understanding of how digital media and learning function in the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago in the specific local context in which it is embedded (Fife, 2005). As a methodological framework, ethnographic approaches provide a way to understand the entire cultural context in which participants perform their daily lives. This is crucial in understanding digital media use in knowledge production and learning, and what this means to the community. Digital ethnographic approaches offer a way to resist technocentricity and provide a more human-centred approach that appreciates the experiences and views of local constituents (Boellstorff, 2008; Coleman, 2010; Dourish & Bell, 2011; Horst & Miller, 2006, 2012; Miller, 2011, 2012; Miller & Slater, 2000; Pink, Horst, Postill, Hjorth, Lewis & Tacchi, 2015). There is a tradition of using ethnography to provide the richness and depth of data needed to construct evidenced-based policy founded on the multidimensional practices of local communities. This

ethnographic approach has been used to successfully examine learning in a way that appreciates the entire context in which knowledge processes are situated to give a fuller understanding of how these processes take place and the impacts they have (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Varenne & McDermott, 1998; Spindler, 1959, 1974). Varenne and McDermott (1998) note the value of shifting the emphasis from the individual psychology of the student, teacher, or school to understanding the cultural context in which they are embedded. For instance, although Spindler's (1959, 1974) foundational work took a micro approach, taking a teacher and a student as units of analysis, he underscored the importance of situating his inquiry in a wider cultural setting of interpersonal relations and emphasised the value of ethnography in this regard.

I chose to conduct an ethnography in Trinidad and Tobago with Trinis as my field guides due to the opportunity it offered for rich, complex, contextual data about day to day practices and the perspectives of my participants. This facilitated an experiential observation of how digital media is used in relation to knowledge processes and everyday lives. In some ways, I followed the tradition of ethnographers, trying to learn what they would regard as the point of view of the 'native' by observing and by participating in aspects of their lives (Geertz, 1976). I am conscious and cautious, however, of the political dimensions of this process and recognise the need to resist the construction of an 'other' that is exoticised for the purposes of an academic exercise (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1981; Said, 1978). It is important to view the people of Trinidad as subjects in their own life history (Mohanty, Russo & Torres, 1991). This relates to a Freirean notion that the student is a teacher and the teacher is a student (Freire, 1983). Ethnographic methodology, then, aims to respect the agency of the subjects of the student and acknowledges the positionality of the researcher (Narayan, 1993). This study argues that the people of Trinidad cannot be reduced to sufferers of hardships or passive recipients of policy, but are engaged as actors

themselves in a struggle with successes and challenges (Natrajan & Parameswaran, 1997).

Ethnographic approaches support this recognition with methods focused on valuing voice and participation in the context of communities (Tacchi, 2012b).

The methodology of this project triangulates participant observation with interviews that directly engage participants, to share their perspectives and (de)construct the meanings ascribed to their experiences. My methodology consisted of eighteen (18) months of immersion in the field and ninety (90) in-depth, individual interviews. I began by working as a policy practitioner in a national learning initiative, and then I became more immersed in a Trinidadian community. I thus had the opportunity to gain insights into an ecological understanding that intersects the micro/individual, meso/community, exo/institutions and macro/wider policy and social context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This is important in appreciating the multiple dimensions of human-centred digital media, and the range of approaches to it, such as individual communicative ecologies (Tacchi et al., 2003) and polymedia (Madianou & Miller, 2012). It also helps us recognize that what happens at the individual level is affected by larger political and power processes (Appadurai, 2001).

As is common in ethnographic research, I engaged in participatory immersion (Fetterman, 1989; Horst & Miller, 2006; Mosse, 2005; Spradley, 1980). My approach built on the seminal ethnographic work of Miller and Slater on the internet and social media in Trinidad (Miller, 2011; Miller & Slater, 2000). In addition to participant observation, I conducted ninety (90) individual interviews. These consisted of fifteen (15) interviews with policymakers and practitioners and seventy-five (75) interviews with Trinis in the Bellefontaine community. The interviews were all conducted in naturalistic settings, such as homes, offices, and community centres (Schensul, S., Schensul, & LeCompte, 2013). A semi-structured approach offered

flexibility for participants to shape the questions themselves and provide new types of information and reflection (Weller, 1998). A natural conversational style with participants was adopted with an emphasis on two-way dialogue (Davies, 1997).

At the beginning of my study, I worked as an ICTD policy practitioner by leading a national open access knowledge initiative that utilises digital media as a tool. I had the opportunity to observe experiences within the education system. My previous networks in industry and the development field in Trinidad allowed greater access to a range of actors, from politicians to strategic decision makers, technocrats, subject matter experts, administrators, and practitioners implementing policy. Attention was paid to how people recounted their experiences and what they self-identified as challenges and solutions to the issues they face on the ground in making digital media and ICT in education interventions successful. Over the course of my time working with practitioners, it became clear that immersion in a community in Trinidad and Tobago was necessary to gain an understanding of the on-the-ground contours and cartographies of this perceived knowledge society.

I conducted extensive ethnographic work within a community I call Belleton. Here, I lived and interacted with Trinis in their day to day lives. I participated in and observed their everyday routines and general everyday practices, especially how they used digital media in their formal and informal interest-driven learning. The study of Belleton consisted of daily participant observation and semi-structured interviews with seventy-five (75) participants who live in the community. I made a deliberate effort to be as inclusive as possible of participants from different educational backgrounds. In Trinidad, students write an entrance exam at the end of primary school and are streamed into either a “prestige” or “non-prestige” secondary school. My sample included people who attended both types of institutions. My participants included current

students in tertiary and technical/vocational education as well as Trinis who were not currently enrolled in any formal education. The interviews were semi-structured and included questions asking them to recount their experiences of using digital media. They were asked about the types of digital media they use, how they use it, and what impacts it has on their lives. In my interviews with students, we discussed how they used these within their institutions in formal ways, as well as the informal strategies they employed in their own communities. I also used these interviews as a forum to discuss my participant's interests, hobbies, professional and practical pursuits, and how they used digital media within these. This was an important source for data on knowledge creation, sharing, and use.

As I am a Trinidadian who has served as an ICTD policy practitioner and lived and worked in Trinidad, I am familiar with the context and have established networks in the field. This posed many practical advantages and allowed my easy entry into the fieldsite, but due diligence and consideration of how I was situated in the field were nonetheless necessary. I was deliberately reflexive and conscious about challenging my own preconceptions throughout fieldwork, given that I worked as a policymaker and I am a Trini myself. Ethically, I made every effort to ensure that people understood that their participation was completely voluntary, there was no pressure to participate in interviews, and that they could choose to remain anonymous. Respect for the participant is foundational to this study. Scholars conducting research in the Caribbean underscore that their fieldwork required constant and complex negotiation of identity including parameters of class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender (Taylor, 2010). I was conscious of this negotiation and that I faced many of the issues that Atkinson, Coffey & Delamont (2003) found are consistent in ethnographic work. These included such dimensions as brokering access and identity, problematics in distinguishing the strange from the familiar,

appropriate levels of intimacy, and the need for reflection on researcher biases. I negotiated these through a process of being open and reflective on the intersubjectivity necessarily involved in my study (Crang & Cook, 2007).

Thesis Outline:

Negotiating Social Confidence in Formal and Informal Learning with Digital Media

The thesis has been organised into the following chapters. Chapter Two (2) provides the context of the community, Belleton, where the research is centred. It describes the socioeconomic and demographic landscape of this ex-squatting area that is in the process of building itself up. It outlines the relationship participants have with education and digital media, as both play a major role in the progress narrative that is so entrenched in and valued by this community.

Chapter Three (3) describes the educational context of postcolonial Trinidad and Tobago by examining issues of access, social mobility, prestige, success, and failure that are embedded in the system. It argues that education is both a representation of opportunity and fear of failure in the imagination of participants. On the one hand, it is an economic strategy as it can be instrumentalised to “get paper,” which has the dual meaning of certification and money. I argue that education is also socio-culturally embedded in the identities and relationships of participants. It occupies an important dimension in their social confidence as feelings of success and shame are embedded in the interplay of formal learning and sociality. Participants often feel that they are judged publicly through constant examination. If they do not attain immediate academic achievement, the shame associated with this failure plays a significant role in degrading their social confidence. This is a complex negotiation, however: equating academic achievement with social confidence is also an oversimplification, as participants are often

polarised into a dichotomy of having “book sense” or “common sense.” In practice, academic or theoretical book knowledge was frequently viewed as alienating participants from their family and peers, creating tensions in their social confidence. Simultaneously, participants from the “common sense” applied institutions of technical/vocational education experienced tension as well, since these were often seen as second-class options and of lesser prestige than formal grammar schooling.

Chapter Four (4) examines the formal space of the classroom. I argue that digital media is often ideologically framed as an innovation to promote educational transformation, but in practice is mainly reified as an information dissemination tool replicating traditional pedagogies. This chapter argues that participants create their own corridors in these institutions, using informal strategies to support their learning through brokering peer-to-peer interaction, collaboration, and knowledge sharing in sophisticated ways that create safe spaces for them to negotiate their social confidence in their learning. It was common for participants to use digital media to blend their academic and social interests by negotiating these in complex ways within trusted relationships on dyadic media and in public class groups, such as on WhatsApp and Google Docs. Even more widespread than the collaborative use of digital media, however, was its private use by participants to learn online to try to avoid shame in the formal/non-formal classroom and broker their social confidence in front of their instructors and among their peers. This sometimes created a tension, however, between the sanctioned “correct” content or format given to the students by their instructor, and the approaches they found online, which sometimes differed from the instructions they were given in the formal setting.

These informal strategies in institutionalised learning lead to the unbounded field of out-of-school learning. In Chapter Five (5), I argue that participants, with varying levels of academic

attainment, vibrantly practise informal, interest-driven learning in their ‘own ways’ in their everyday lives, using digital media to create spaces of safety and privacy for learning. I discuss tensions in delineating what can be considered as legitimate learning. I then examine the situatedness of this learning in everyday contexts and uncover a set of practices involving interest and playfulness in learning as participants instrumentalise it for skill building and to negotiate social confidence. The chapter argues that fear of failure often inhibits one’s feelings of proficiency and comfort in learning and lead to added pressure. However, participants often discovered strategies to build social confidence through a dialectic of privacy and sociality, thereby enhancing their opportunities to try new things. This chapter draws on situated learning theory and moves beyond an emphasis on communities of practice to argue that learning is positioned in negotiating social confidence in a landscape of learning (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015) and an ecosystem of everyday relationships. Here participants used digital media for privacy where they could ‘try their hand’ and parlayed their learning in a complex of identities (Sefton-Green & Erstad, 2013).

Chapter Six (6) delves deeper into how participants craft informal learning and production in their everyday lives by describing the literacies and fluencies involved in participation in the knowledge society. It uses examples of DIY, crafting, micro-enterprise, and cooking to unpack the meanings and processes embedded in the genres of participation termed “finding out,” “trying over,” and “making meaning.” The thesis unpacks these literacies to argue that (re)searching, playfulness, and failure are embraced both as part of learning subject content and how to instrumentalise these to create social confidence in social contexts. It argues that a range of creative and critical thinking skills are involved in these practices. This chapter first describes the literacies encompassed in sophisticated practices of ‘finding out’ from digital

media and experiential learning situated in doing, making, and relationships. It then demonstrates that experimentation and learning from failure are important in non-linear, informal learning practices participants termed “trying over.” It then argues that fluencies in “making meaning” are important to participants, as navigating social confidence demanded skills not only in gaining expertise but also developing fluency in the sensitivities and sensibilities of how to appropriately use this expertise in relationships. For example, one father I spoke with researched recipes in private and developed his skills and expertise as a cook but brought these into a dialectic with his family to gain feedback, refine his learning process, and feel that he is meaningfully contributing to his family and enacting social confidence within those relationships.

Chapter Seven (7) focuses on the interplay of offline and online and local and global spaces. I discuss Trini⁷ Anime fans, musicians, and craft enthusiasts, demonstrating how local content production is not limited to online spaces but is also practised through processes of production in offline communities, in which participants exhibit creativity through meaning-making in their relationships to enact social confidence.

Chapter Eight (8) concludes the thesis by underscoring the key discoveries of the dynamics of social practice of how participants use digital media in their learning. It demonstrates how these practices are not technocentric or platform-specific but are embedded in an ecology of relationships. I argue that negotiating social confidence is an important facet of this learning. Brokering failure, identity,⁸ and peer relations is a complex process that is

⁷ “Trini” is the local term Trinidadian citizens use to refer to themselves and their culture.

⁸ There is a deep vein of scholarship that raises the complex nature of identities, and identities in learning in particular. See especially Sefton-Green & Erstad (2013) (in their edited volume, which unpacks identities in learning lives), Arnseth & Silseth (2013) (who provide a useful chapter tracing identities across sites in everyday and institutional learning), Sinha (1999) (who examines the situatedness of learning to be a learner), Moje and Luke (2009) (for social and psychological models of identities in learning), and Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) (for recent

intertwined with how digital media is used in constructing the local knowledge society.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided the rationale for the study of the construction of the knowledge society in Trinidad and Tobago. Academic literature and local policymakers argue that there is a need for a more nuanced understanding of how local participants use digital media for learning as a critical dimension in unpacking the knowledge society. My research responds to this need, and in this chapter I outlined the research aims and questions that are derived from it. I presented an ethnographic methodology to obtain the depth and quality of data necessary to confront the research gap. I outlined the key scholarly debates and concepts that are embedded in this ethnography, including the knowledge society, ICT in education development, social practice, and situated learning theory. My findings, discussed throughout the remainder of this thesis, describe the dynamics of practice in the everyday knowledge society on the ground in Trinidad and Tobago. This chapter introduced the organisation of these findings in the thesis, and the argument, emergent from my ethnography, that social confidence is a critical conceptual tool for understanding how people navigate their formal and informal learning with digital media in the knowledge society, and how they negotiate their social confidence within their everyday relationships.

Chapter 2

Getting Through in Belleton

Mapping the Field



Figure 2. Walking through Belleton

This chapter provides a description of some of the main features of Belleton, the community where the ethnography was set, to contextualise the study. The chapter first gives a sense of the main demographic features of the Belleton community, while acknowledging that the ‘community’ concept is a complicated one. It then discusses a main shift in research design which moves the ethnography out of a computer centre intervention into a range of wider everyday spaces and mobilities that participants inhabit and traverse in their formal and informal learning. Next, the chapter delves into the socio-economic features of the community. The local idiom of “getting through” is invoked to show how ideas of survival and success are key

expressions of how people understand and live their lives. Education is central to this discussion. The chapter explores how digital media is conceptually linked to aspirations of education as a means to help people improve their lot in life. Providing children with computers is an important first step in linking digital media and educational aspirations. The chapter concludes by looking more closely at digital media use to give a sense of the ecology of devices, applications, and content, with an emphasis on the proliferation of smartphones in the community.

The Belleton ‘Community’

The research took place in the Belleton community within the region of San Manuel, which is close to the capital, Port of Spain. I deliberately chose to avoid situating the study directly in the capital as many of the indices and census measures for the capital show that it is an anomaly compared to the rest of Trinidad and Tobago. Belleton was selected as the site of the study as it presented a mix of lower to middle-class residents and a fairly typical mix of ethnicities. It is a residential area that at the time of the study comprised 680 households and a total population of 2,300 (Belleton Regional Corporation, 2010⁹). Belleton had been a squatting community and there was still a high level of economic vulnerability and marginality present. The Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago measured regions of Trinidad and Tobago based on a series of variables meant to represent digital inclusion factors. These are in turn based on International Telecommunication Union metrics. Belleton did not have as high a Digital Opportunity Index (DOI) or ICT Development Index (IDI) as Port of Spain or some other regions of Eastern Trinidad, but ICT access was still high. Studying Belleton was, therefore, an opportunity to study an area that had access to digital media, but also a history of poverty and

⁹ Note: Data was collected from the regional corporation of the area. I have changed its name to Belleton Regional Corporation to protect the anonymity of the fieldsite.

economic constraints.

Belleton is set in the San Manuel¹⁰ region, which originally comprised a series of estates that produced sugar and later coffee (Anthony, 2001)¹¹. Relics of its past plantation days persisted in the landscape in defunct coffee sheds and the verdance of the lands, but it is now largely a suburban area with its residents finding work in trades in the locality or undertaking professional pursuits in Port of Spain. During the study, Belleton consisted of a young population with a median age of 34 years.¹² The average household size of the wider San Manuel area was 3 people (Central Statistical Office, 2011), but in Belleton the average household was 5 people. Regardless of household size, the majority of households were headed by people who were currently employed (Central Statistical Office, 2011).

In Belleton, most people lived in nuclear or extended families and tended to live at home until they got married or, more usually, entered a common law relationship. There was a roughly even proportion of males and females in the region (Central Statistical Office, 2011). Sixty-three percent of the households were regarded as male-headed households (Central Statistical Office, 2011). Women in Belleton were still expected to perform traditional domestic roles, but the

¹⁰ The area had a life expectancy of 73 years (Central Statistical Office, 2013). Overall, the area had a high Human Development Index (Central Statistical Office, 2013) but it was not without challenges common to the rest of Trinidad and Tobago. It had good infrastructure, such as electricity and water typical of suburbs on the island, but also suffered from other complaints common in the country such as violent crime and concerns about the cost of living and cost of food (Central Statistical Office, 2013). There was also a high vulnerability to landslide and flooding in the area.

¹¹ The colonial history of the area created a diverse range of settlers who were involved in the sugar plantations, including ex-slaves and indentured labourers. A large mandir with a statue of the Elephant God Ganesh sat cross legged and greeted you as you entered the area. The rest of the religious iconography was distinctly Christian. A blue-green neon cross on a church lit up at night like a beacon, flanked by flickering streetlights and the buzz of candle-flies. There were nine (9) churches in the community: three (3) Catholic, two (2) Baptist, three (3) Pentecostal, and one (1) Anglican. The Catholic and Anglican churches tended to be larger and fancier buildings than the others. One of the churches, a Pentecostal church, was located at the local bus hub and was part of the buzz around the hub. There was still a level of superstition in the area and babies were adorned in jet beads to ward off jumbies (evil spirits).

¹² Belleton had a dependency ratio of 48% (Central Statistical Office, 2011). The age group of the youth population 7-24 represented 40% of the population (Belleton Regional Corporation, 2010).

majority of the younger women were also entering the workplace. San Manuel was largely Afro-Trinidadian (42%) and Mixed (35%) (Central Statistical Office, 2011), but the Belleton community had a settlement of Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians, and was thus more representative of a mix of the two ethnicities that were the largest groups in Trinidad (Central Statistical Office, 2011). The study included an even mix of males and females and a representation of different ethnicities. Belleton was typical of the high primary and secondary education rate in most regions of Trinidad and Tobago and the nation's increasing uptake of tertiary education (Central Statistical Office, 2011). In the area, approximately twice as many people between ages 20-54 years old had attained (or were studying for) tertiary level certification, compared to older generations between 55-80 plus years (Central Statistical Office, 2011). The study included a mix of participants who had attended both denominational schools and public government schools.

There was a strong sense of "being from Belleton" articulated both in the area and when research participants interacted with people from other parts of Trinidad. As Belleton is close to Port of Spain, many participants regarded other parts of Trinidad as "the country." There were running jokes of never going past the lighthouse, a national relic landmarking crossroads heading out of Port of Spain. The people in Belleton tended to know each other and who people were related to and friends with. When walking to the shop on the main road, people would say hello to each other. Studying the Belleton "community" was useful because it grounded the study in a particular locale. It was a tool used to select a slice of the knowledge society for deeper observation. However, this cartography was not without its contours. Implicit in this frame of the Belleton community is an acknowledgement of the complicated nature of the 'community' concept. Postill (2011) problematizes the community concept in media studies, questioning the

emotive, normative ideas of a benign space that he argues is often contained in the term. For similar reasons, Amit (2002) had raised concerns about the anthropological tradition of using community as the social unit of inquiry. A sociological imagination of community¹³ no doubt lingers from interpretations of Ferdinand Tönnies (1963) *Gemeinschaft*, in which community is seen as the embodiment of traditional values, contrasted to the modernity of a *Gesellschaftian* society.

Parsons (1951) positioned “community” as an essentiality, a unit of society along with other units such as class, ethnicity, and kinship. In doing so, he emphasised social integration. Calhoun (1982, 1983) underscores collective action as a key facet of community life. Tonnian theory has not been without critique, however, and Schmalenbach (1977) recognises individual’s consciousness within communities and the voluntary entry into groups. Turner (1969) argues against viewing community as a set structure and instead positions it as a way people imagine their sense of belonging. Cohen (1985) ascribes more fluidity to the concept: he also argues for the symbolic nature of community, but he emphasises that people imbue personal meaning into symbols. This means that symbolic systems are more open than is often acknowledged; in fact, flexibility and change are core elements, and community is not a uniform reality. Community may then figure as a space of movement and transformation (Cohen, 2001). Lave & Wenger (1991) emphasise the community of practice as a space for learning in which groups are based on shared interests. Critics of this term have argued that it is problematic because it often implies a certain homogeneity and benignity (Barton & Tusting, 2005; Gee, 2007; Postill, 2011), but Duguid (2008) has argued that the recognition of practices is emphasised in the community of

¹³ It is beyond the scope of this study to trace the complex history of the community concept. Delanty (2009) provides a survey of the iterations and contestation of the term in detail.

practice concept. Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) extend the community of practice concept to refer to a landscape of learning in which people cross boundaries and negotiate their identity. They argue that Trinians do not only ground their learning in discrete communities of practice based on subject content, but also navigate their learning and digital media use through complicated patterns of sociality consisting of a range of peer, family, work, and casual relationships. Following these scholars, my study recognises the Belleton community as a textured and contoured landscape of learning. What emerges in the following chapters is a melange of participants and their digital media use and learning in everyday relationships and negotiations of collaboration, privacy, failure, shame, and social confidence. The emphasis of the work is on mapping the knowledge society through the practices of participants, with Belleton acting less as a container and more of a starting line. This line ultimately branches into complex contours as one follows participants into formal and informal spaces. This movement determined the direction of the study, starting with a core shift in research design.

Locating the Field: In the Computer Centre and Out Again

My initial approach to studying the everyday lives of a Trinidadian community was to find a set of users of a government intervention. The intention was to study the community of Belleton in relation to the computer facilities at the library in the wider San Manuel area in which Belleton is situated. This decision was predicated on a policymaking categorisation of users. The ingredients seemed right. The community had areas of marginalisation, what can be considered relative poverty, and a history as a squatting settlement. There was a centre with computers and internet access as part of a government intervention. There might also have been some sort of romantic appeal or imagined synergy of the library as an institution and its links to knowledge and the knowledge society theme. However, upon entering the community, what

people were doing was different and more nuanced than the narrow category of users the study had initially constructed. I did not find regular users from Belleton of the San Manuel Computer Centre¹⁴ intervention.¹⁵ This was an important learning curve and led to a shift in research design. Instead of starting within an intervention to find its users, I spoke to people living in the wider Belleton community to learn what they used and how they used it. I discovered that it was important to learn the everyday practices of residents to retain a fidelity to what was happening on the ground with Trinis instead of trying to fit them into a neat and predetermined category of users. My ethnography thus embraced the messiness of the everyday. This was a significant shift in research design.

“Getting Through” in Belleton

In their Jamaican ethnography, Horst and Miller (2006) argue for the utility of understanding the socio-economic conditions of a community through the idioms it employs. They discuss the feeling of “pressure” associated with hardship, work, and poverty that persists in Jamaica as they draw upon Littlewood’s (1998) representations of pressure in Trinidad. Similarly, Pertierra (2009, 2011) describes the “luchar” or struggle that accompanies everyday

¹⁴ See Miller and Slater (2004) for ethnographic study on the online/offline dynamics of cyber-cafes in Trinidad and see also Burrell’s (2012) ethnography of centres in Ghana.

¹⁵ This did not mean that the San Manuel community library and its digital media services were not being used in the wider San Manuel area and it was not itself a critique of the initiative. However, it did not become central to this study, as the Trinis I observed in Belleton and the 75 Trinis interviewed did not use it. Belleton Trinis were also not aware of the Star.tt Community Access Centres being built in other areas of Trinidad and Tobago. These centres were being built up in vulnerable areas with low internet penetration, such as in rural coastal areas. Practitioners on the Star.tt project had told me that, in contrast to Belleton, those communities where centres were being built were limited in access and people had been using the Access centres. It would not have been feasible for the length of time and depth of immersion needed to pursue any kind of direct comparison with the fieldsite. However, a study of these areas and of the Community Access Centres there would make for interesting follow-up ethnographic work building on the findings of this study. A critical gap policymakers identified in my study is the need for more evidence-based national policy and a better sense of what Trinis are doing so that initiatives could be designed and managed more effectively. In moving away from a narrow definition of users to a broader understanding of Trini practice, the study can better address this academic and practical need.

life in Cuba. These ethnographic accounts in the Caribbean provide relevant idiomatic expressions of the constitution of everyday life experienced in Belleton. Here, ideas of “pressure” and “struggle” contribute to a survival motif as participants talked about how hard things are and the feelings of stress that accompany living paycheck to paycheck or not having a paycheck and trying to “make ends meet.” Conflated with this idea of hardship and survival in Belleton was a marked idea of being able to achieve and demonstrate success—to “get through.”

This idea of showing success, betterment, and progress was important in the fieldsite, and a common phrase people used to describe it was “GT” or “get through.” If you had “GT” you had succeeded. To “GT” in a relationship was to get the person you desired and often had sexual connotations. To “GT” in life in Belleton meant that you had enough money to be comfortable and were not feeling stress from economic hardship. Trinis said that this success meant that you did not have to worry about paying bills or living “hand to mouth.” Common aspirations were to own a house or extend an existing one with better quality materials and to own a car. Parents wanted to see that their children “got through” via educational attainment and achieving permanent, even professional, careers. They saw this process of “getting through” not only as mere survival, but also as socioeconomic mobility and a passage to a better life. The community held up examples of people who had “got through.” These included people who had been able to sell or rent out their homes and move out of the community to a more middle-class area, especially to one of the growing gated communities that indicate higher socioeconomic status (Mycoo, 2006). People were also able to demonstrate instances of GT in the area through buying newer cars, passing the entrance exam for a prestigious secondary school, or getting certifications. Educational attainment as GT incurred short-lived praises, however. Lasting admiration was only sustained if participants could parlay their educational success into evidence

of a higher quality of life. Participants measured their success or whether they had GT through material gains, social signifiers of status, and feelings of improved social confidence among their peers in the community.

Attempts to demonstrate “getting through” in the face of a history of poverty were inscribed on the landscape in Belleton.¹⁶ Del Real and Pertierra (2008) argue that housing is an important space for expressing material as well as social well-being. It was common in Belleton for houses to be unfinished but punctuated with indicators of a more middle class socioeconomic success.¹⁷ For instance, the Johnston’s house did not have ceilings in the children’s rooms, but they had invested in a spiral staircase that went up to nowhere in the hope that at some stage they would construct an upper level on their house. Other people still had galvanised appendages but had built some brick around them or were trying to lay the foundation “to complete” their house. In her work in the region in Jamaica, Horst (2004) argues that “as with other places around the world, the ownership of a house is an important symbol of achievement and respectability (cf. Carsten & Hugh-Jones, 1995; Tan, 2001).” The building process in Belleton may have taken several decades, and people often thought of the houses they were living in as “in the meanwhile.” This differed from what Horst (2011) found in the “how far we come” ideology of returnees in Jamaica, where houses were seen as a life project that people would add onto as projects or improvements to their houses. Participants in Belleton often did not see the house they were living in as their complete house. It was often still “in progress” as they were saving up to finish it. These houses had often started out as one-room shacks with outdoor bathrooms

¹⁶ See Taylor (2013) for an ethnography of the materiality of poverty in the region in a squatter settlement in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Taylor (2013) argues that the relationship between the poor and material possessions is not merely one of lack and deprivation but instead material objects are used by the poor in nuanced ways to address social and emotional needs.

¹⁷ See Holston’s (1991) arguments on the politics and aesthetics of housing facades in Brazil.

and had cumulatively been expanded to be closer to what they imagined their house as looking like. In the “meanwhile” they often took loans to invest in more middle-class signifiers of “being comfortable”¹⁸ such as big screen televisions, washers and dryers, stainless steel refrigerators that could make ice, and leatherette furniture with cleaner lines and a more modern feel¹⁹. The meanings signified in the materiality of these houses were linked to feelings of comfort and social confidence, which demonstrated socio-economic success to their peers in the community. Participants used these improvements in their enactment of social confidence in their relationships. They instrumentalised these improvements as evidence that they were also “getting through” and not failing in life.

The area was a patchwork of unfinished houses and people trying to build up, enhance comfort, and enact social confidence through the visibility and visuality that signified “getting through.” People walked on unfinished floors of their houses to find the remotes to their flat-screen televisions. Sand-heaps were common in yards as promises of future construction. Some of these had grass growing on them, forming hilly mounds as construction was often delayed by years. Many people had taken building loans or envisioned a future in which their children would contribute to the household, enabling them to “finish” the house that would ultimately belong to

¹⁸ People in the community mainly shopped outside Belleton as there were only a couple of small shops in the area. There was no large grocery or pharmacy. Residents went to other groceries on the neighbouring main road or shopped in downtown Port of Spain. There were no fast food chains or restaurants in Belleton. People bought food from small business people from the community at the bus stop hub or sometimes in front of houses, where mostly mature women would set up small stands with geera pork, souse, pholourie, fried chicken wings, and fried potato pies. People often went to the main area of San Manuel to buy fast food. A growing trend towards online shopping also emerged during the study as participants used mainly U.S. sites and shipping services linked to post boxes in Miami. Amazon.com was the most popular and participants regularly used reviews to inform their purchase decisions. They felt that there was a wider variety, and often lower price, associated with online shopping. Many participants did not have credit cards but bought prepaid online shopping credit cards offered by local banks that they could preload with cash specifically for this purpose.

¹⁹ See Miller (1994) for comparative ethnographic study set in the 1990s describing homes and their furnishings in Trinidad.

them. In the meantime, the visibility of “getting through” remained critical to their social confidence.



Figure 3. A house at the end of a dirt road in Belleton



Figure 4. A house being built up in Belleton



Figure 5. Some typical houses in Belleton



Figure 6. View of an original one room house from a new one





Figure 7. View of an old house and the reflection of new apartments across the road

Trinis in Belleton were representative (insofar as anything ever can be) of a spectrum of different classes and ethnicities. Research participants belonged to families ranging from lower- to middle-class. West Belleton was mainly middle class, whereas East Belleton was a lower-class area and participants described a spectrum of what it meant to be lower class as well as differences in their levels of socioeconomic mobility. The consensus among participants was that the community of squatters started off as lower-lower class, but they were now a mixture of lower-lower class, middle-lower class, and upper-lower class. This distinction was based on being able to buy food and other essentials readily or to pay bills. Having a car or having amenities such as indoor bathrooms, TV, cable, and better internet were all markers of moving up in status. The older people in the community did not feel that they could become middle class,

but they aspired for their children to do so. Many young people felt that they eventually wanted to move out of the area to somewhere “safer.”

During the study, crime²⁰ was a critical national issue in Trinidad and Tobago and the country had become known globally as having an exceptionally high homicide rate (Greenberg & Agozino, 2011). This has been an escalating problem, and murder rates increased over one hundred percent in the last decade (Emmanuel, 2014). East Belleton had a reputation for being particularly dangerous. There were pockets where people bought, sold, and took drugs, and the neighbourhood was rife with petty crimes such as stealing. It was common to hear about gangs and gang-related crimes and occasional shootings, with a few shootout homicides occurring during the study. Many children and youth who should have been in school lingered playing truant on the streets during the day. Police helicopters routinely circled the area. Throughout fieldwork, I had been warned by participants to be careful taking pictures and not to move about on my own without one of my informants. Participants often labelled the area as dangerous, but attitudes to crime were complex. In a similar vein to Prentice’s (2012a) ethnographic findings in Trinidad, there was a dual sense of shame towards worthless people conducting the crimes in their community and also a feeling that this lower-class crime was minor compared to the real crime going on in the middle and upper class that is often ignored. Hosein’s (2009) ethnography further complicates normative ideologies of legitimacy and legality by arguing that these are negotiated in complex ways by Trinis to be able to provide for their families. Some families in the area were involved in the drug trade. Participants often wanted a better life for their children

²⁰ Belleton was known as a particularly dangerous area. It was in the county with the highest crime rate in Trinidad, one where violent crime rates had risen from 11.5% to 52.1% in 10 ten years (Central Statistical Office, 2012).

but also felt relatively safe since they were known as being from the area and felt they could move around without disturbance as long as they were not personally involved in gangs.

Education and finding legitimate work as a tradesperson or aspiring to be a professional were seen as important routes to avoid becoming involved in gangs and gang-based violence and “getting through” in legitimate and safe ways.

Yelvington’s (1995) ethnography of a Trinidad factory describes a tension between ideas of work and pleasure in Trinidad. On the one hand, there was a prevailing assignment of a “Carnival mentality” to Trinis who are assumed to be fun-loving and lazy. Yelvington also observes that it is common practice for Trinis to balance multiple jobs and constantly working towards material betterment, thus challenging the “carnival mentality” stereotype. This ethnography confirms Yelvington’s findings. In Belleton, obtaining a permanent job with a steady income is seen as an important mechanism for getting through, and young people who use their education certifications to secure work in the government or private enterprises are expected to contribute to the home. The entry of young people into the workforce is an important strategy in the community for alleviating economic hardship. Many parents relieved of the burden of supporting their children were able to focus on channelling more resources into what they saw as a better lifestyle, such as building up their houses or buying a car. Most young people stayed at home until they got married and they often paid some bills. As children grew up and got steady jobs, they were able to cosign for loans. The act of borrowing was important in the area, and most people had building or car loans. The local informal savings group, *Sou Sou*,²¹ was also an important saving mechanism in Belleton.

²¹ Deriving from the French “Penny by Penny,” this involved people contributing a fixed sum monthly into a community savings. They then received a “hand” in turns which would consist of the total contributions (Mendes, 2003).

In 2010, the workforce of Belleton comprised 900 persons (Belleton Regional Corporation, 2010). Of this group, the majority worked in private enterprise (61%) followed by those who worked for the Government (25%) (Belleton Regional Corporation, 2010). The major occupation of the working population was clerical (17%), while the major industry was Transport, Storage and Communication, which made up 13% of all industries. Thirty-three percent of the population earned less than TT\$500 (AUD 97) per week (Belleton Regional Corporation, 2010). This was followed by 11% who earned \$1,000 - \$1,999 (AUD 194-388) (Belleton Regional Corporation, 2010). Many people from Belleton worked in Port of Spain or “Town,” making a daily commute there. Others were tradespeople in the area. It was common to see a small business constructed in a wooden extension in front of some of the houses on each street. There were mini-groceries, nail studios, hairdressers, plant stores, mechanics, and machine shops.

Many of the older people learned a trade. There was a common story in families that the parents only went to primary school or some level of secondary school and then had to work to “help out” the family. While working, though, they were often sent to learn a trade. This could have been at the John Donaldson Technical Institute or through the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP), or as an apprentice to a tradesperson in their community. It was common for people to “hustle” or find strategies to earn extra income outside of formal salaried jobs. Examples of this included people taking loans to invest in maxi taxis, taking on yard work, sewing, and selling cakes or Christmas treats like ponche de creme and pastelles. For people in their thirties and below, it was becoming more common for their parents to push for them to go to some form of University while working, even if meant starting off by doing an Associate Degree, Certificate, or Diploma with the aspiration that they might obtain a

professional job.²² These observations on aspiration in education in Trinidad and Tobago complicate normative assumptions that people who come from low-income communities have inevitably low educational aspirations (CARICOM, 2010; Frye, 2012; St. Clair & Benjamin, 2011). Participants who had recently left school were often hopeful about the prospects of continuing their education, but were still expected to work concurrently to studying. Many participants had attended the government composite school in the area. Others had gone into town to another a more prestigious school. All participants had attended public primary school in the wider San Manuel district. There was an ongoing rhetoric that education was important, especially among the older members of the community. The young people described differing experiences in practice. Some parents had pushed their children and supported their educational aspirations. Others, while saying education was critical, did little to encourage their children as they were working all the time to make ends meet, were not able to help with homework, or felt that although they would like their children to do well in school, they did not want to push their children because they did not seem academically inclined or “could take book.”

There was a government primary school that many of the neighbourhood community attended, and also two main secondary schools nearby. These were both “non-prestige” co-ed government schools that had been converted to five-year schools when the national policy changed three-year “junior secs” to five-year schools. Many people I spoke to in East Belleton had attended these, but some passed the Common Entrance exam and the later Secondary School Assessment (SEA) exam, meaning they could go to Port of Spain to attend Convent, St Mary’s College, Queen’s Royal College, Bishop’s Anstey, or another seven-year, denominational

²² See ethnographic work on aspiration in education in another Caribbean context by Hoffman (2016) who uses the conceptual lens of “figured worlds” (drawing upon Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 2001) to demonstrate educational aspiration among low-income youth in Haiti.

“prestige” school. One young lady from the area, Naomi, who attended a "prestige school," said this was an aspiration of hers since she was in primary school. Her mother told her that girls from that school won scholarships and it became a dream of hers to attend that school and win a scholarship. She would point to girls in the uniform when she saw them on the streets in ‘Town.’ Many of the young men sitting on the corners and kerbs, however, voiced a different story. They often attended one of the nearby schools but passed few classes or dropped out early. The people in the area who attended "prestige schools" were held in high esteem by the older folk, who voiced their own lack of opportunity with education and saw it as a primary way out, especially from the drug culture. Hosein (2007 p.126) however complicates a simple translation of education to employment in Trinidad by arguing that “education, opportunity and empowerment still need to come together in the challenge that schools face to prepare young people for a living wage in the market.”

A group of young men who lamed on the streets in Bellefontaine did not complete secondary school, to a certain extent because they were seen as not being able to “take book.” They shirked off school at the end of Form 3 as many felt that they were seen as failures in school. It was common for these young men to join gangs, and many had become involved in dealing marijuana in the area. According to a 25-year-old man, Tafe:

If you were not doing good in school and you didn’t want to leave and run wire (referring to tech-voc training such as electrical work) then you start dealing (drugs). You could get through with better things faster than if you was in school and you could also get cred in the community. People ‘fraid you coz you toting gun and you is a big man.

As illustrated by Kai, some young men who did not do well in school negotiated their identities as failures in the school system by joining gangs and working in the drug trade. This was partly an economic enterprise but, as Kai highlights, it also intertwined with one's identity in the community and enacting social confidence through the "cred" that these gangs conferred. This often contrasted with the feelings of failure that these young men associated with academic pursuits in school.

Belleton Trinis in their fifties and older often did not have many educational opportunities. It was therefore important to them that their children were afforded such opportunities, and they were willing to make sacrifices for this. They valued getting professional, steady, and secure jobs. If someone wasn't seen as academically inclined, they were sent to "learn a trade," but the dream was that their children would become professionals. This idea of pursuing non-professional trades was common among older people in Belleton, but they often aspired for their children to pursue a professional career. Some young people in the area had dropped out of school and started working in more technical vocational jobs. These were seen as the only option for Trinis who could not "take books" in order to avoid a life of crime. However, many participants, in their twenties and thirties who did "take books" and had done well at school and started a steady job were also interested in more technical and vocational interests. They often did this kind of work as a hobby or as a sideline job. Participants were engaged in creative pursuits such as music, nail art, crafts, hairdressing, cake making, decorating, and gardening. They often did not risk giving up their full-time job that they saw as "practical," but pleasure in pursuing their interests was an important part of their quality of life, and many would have liked to expand their hobbies to full-time entrepreneurial livelihoods. This often caused a tension with older generations, who often saw this interest-driven entrepreneurial aspiration as a

waste of time because these young people were able to hold a steady job. These young Belleton Trinis responded by brokering their interests as hobbies or sideline activities. An accountant braided hair on the side. A council worker took in woodwork projects on the side. A bank worker made cakes for her friends and family and would take orders for special events. The space these interests occupied was often “on the side” to formal jobs and training, but they were often given central focus and investments in attention and time. These young Belleton Trinis often did not have any formal training in these areas and crafted their own practice employing digital media such as YouTube tutorials as resources to develop their skills.

“Making Sure Our Children Not Getting Left Behind:” The Imagination of Technology as Educational Investment

Personal Histories of First Computers in Belleton

Pertierra and Horst (2009 p. 101) argue that “the larger Caribbean nations, such as Jamaica, Cuba, and Trinidad and Tobago, have experienced a long history of involvement in media at national and transnational levels. There is much evidence of the role that mass media and information communications technologies (ICTs) have played in everyday life across the Caribbean region for almost as long as mass media have existed.” The Belleton community had a rich history of investing in technology despite their economic constraints and digital media were seen as key educational resources for young people and linked to the idea of enhanced opportunity to get through, especially in the modern world where participants were considered “backwards” if they did not keep up with the latest technology. The Belleton youth who came of age in the early and mid-2000s constituted the majority of adult participants in my study. Most of them grew up in one- or two-room shacks with families struggling to make ends meet. However, they commonly received a desktop computer when they were in their early teens, in spite of their

modest living conditions. For many of these young people, getting this computer was linked to a high point in their life story. They were going to a new school, coming of age into their teens, and perhaps still in rough circumstances with aspirations to achieve the material improvement of their living situations. These desktops in the early- to mid-2000s were an important commodity in Belleton and formed a significant landmark in the personal history of the participants and their community. These first computers were often positioned in a communal centre and shared by the family. Some participants talked about how, as children, they took charge of the computer, while others said their time was closely rationed or monitored by their parents. These narratives of access to and ownership of a computer were juxtaposed against circumstances of financial difficulty, which participants describe as “rough times” or “things being tough.” This was not to make some claim that everyone in Belleton had computers in the early- or mid-2000s, or even that they have them now. When the computers started trickling into Belleton, children who did not have them would often visit the children of houses who did have them in order to play games. Having a computer was an important symbol of getting through and conferred high status, as owning one was an aspiration in itself as well as an imagination of a lever to propel a child towards educational success. These shared stories of young people from low-income families in East Belleton being given these computers were poignant when seen in the context of how modest their other material circumstances were. They reported that they sometimes lacked food in the house and regularly could not pay bills.

Genres of origin stories for these computers emerged as people shared stories of the first computer they owned. There was a common story of a family relative from abroad sending money that was used for a computer. This was unsurprising as there is a strong tradition of remittances in the Caribbean to help families who subsist on low incomes (Itzigsohn, 1995;

Mundaca, 2009; Orozco, 2004), with Latin America and the Caribbean having the fastest growing and highest volume remittances markets globally (Terry & Wilson, 2005). These remittances were often earmarked for a computer when they first became common in Bellefontaine because it was seen as important for the educational progress of the children in the house. It was also common for relatives abroad to ship barrels to Trinidad with the (new or sometimes second hand) computer itself inside. There was the story of a boss giving an old computer to a family when he/she upgraded his own home machine. There was the story of a company/ people disposing of machines that they thought were outmoded, and a family acquiring these and having them refurbished or “patch up” as they would say, and continuing to use them for as long as they would last. These narratives intersected closely with the importance of relationships in the community. Participants were quick to admit that one of the major livelihood strategies for their family’s advancement and the better situation they enjoyed in life was linked to having a network of people that helped and supported them. Many of the parents of these young people were tradespeople and domestics who worked with bosses in more affluent areas or in companies with access to resources. They spoke openly about how they have benefitted from their associations with Trinians in better positions who have helped them along the way.

Another common “first computer” story was of parents or a family member (often an aunt or uncle) investing in a machine for a young person to provide a greater educational opportunity or to help them to keep up with “the future.” Computers were commonly a gift for passing the Common Entrance Exam or, as it became known, the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA). As they entered secondary school, the family often thought that the teenager should have access to a computer. Most of the families described how they took loans to purchase these devices and made sacrifices to pay off these loans. They were also focusing on

building up their houses and their situation in life. The computer is part of this progress narrative. People regularly discuss the dangers of technology, but there is an overwhelming feeling that technology is linked to the future, progress, and educational opportunity. Trinis see technology and digital media savvy as admirable, and fear “getting left behind” if they are not skilled up with these tools. This is often the motivation for parents to take a loan to buy a computer. Participants saw this as the way the world was going. In fact, there is still a feeling in Trinidad that to get ahead in life a person has to be “world class,” especially because it is necessary to compete or keep up to date on a global scale. This is linked to ideas of being well-educated. Being adept at using technology is regarded as an important facet of being a skilled and educated individual who can keep up to speed with what is going on.

The nostalgia of the “first computer” was part of this digital media narrative. It may be critiqued undoubtedly as a technocentric discussion, but it was with a certain alacrity that participants talked about their own experiences. Participants were often excited to talk to me as they heard I was studying something to do with digital media. Many were eager to show some level of sophistication and declared themselves geeks or interested in gadgets. When they talked about their history of using the internet, such as the early days on MSN, changing from Hi5 to Facebook, or how their passion for YouTube grew, there was a sense that this was significant to them not in a clinical or technical way, but in a real and complex sense. In these narratives, “access” was not simply a measure of number of computers or households with the internet. Instead, having a computer was tied to a series of meanings within the community. When participants talked about getting their first computer, it was more than a technical discussion. It was intertwined with emotion and a remembrance of a particular time in their life and the hopes of their family.

Participants in East Belleton recounted how they were excited to receive their computers, but I found that differences in participants access trajectory ran deeper when many explained that they had a computer at home but did not have the internet. This was in contrast to many of the middle-class families on the Western end of Belleton who did have internet access or acquired it earlier than those in the East. Years would go by in which the East Belleton Trinis could say that they had a computer, but were still not connected to the internet at home. Their parents could not afford the internet service; it was seen as a luxury. Instead, these participants would have used the computer to play games that were preinstalled, look up research via an inbuilt encyclopaedia such as Encarta, or to learn to type on Mavis Beacon software.

Some of these young people would have accessed the internet at school, but this was mainly in highly monitored computer lab settings to learn Information Technology and did not translate to multidisciplinary use. Many of these participants had internet connectivity at home from their later teen years as part of a subsequent investment by their parents. They recalled that this greatly enhanced the utility of their computers. The computer as a tool was first seen as linked to keeping up with the times or the world, and later the internet was viewed in much the same way. However, this access, unlike the one-time investment or gifting of a machine, incurred a consistent monthly cost. Most of the young people in my study were willing to contribute to this when they started working. Over time, families came to see it as a given that they have internet access in much the same way that they would pay for any other utility bill. Participants said that they preferred by far to use the internet at home than at the library, even if at first they had dial-up connections in the early 2000s. Using the computer became a very personal experience. The freedom to use it at home with one's own internet connection was a much more enjoyable experience as they felt it was seamlessly integrated into their everyday

household practices, thereby reinforcing what it meant to be “at home.” It was with similar alacrity that participants expressed the intimacy they felt about their personal devices such as the smartphones and, to a lesser extent, the laptops they owned during my study. They now felt that it was not sufficient to just have a shared device at home; rather, possessing one’s own personal device was important to them.

During the study, it was common for parents to invest in a mobile phone and laptop for their children, especially as they entered secondary school. The former was often framed as a safety measure, while laptops and tablets were seen as essential tools for education. The discourse of investing in technology as an educational resource persisted in the national imagination through the local ‘one laptop per child’ programme, eConnect and Learn (eCAL), in which laptops were endowed by the state to individual children entering secondary school. Participants expressed ambivalent feelings towards this initiative. Trinis believed the government should invest in technology, but this aspiration was mingled with disappointment towards its implementation. Some felt that there was no clear plan. Others thought that the recipients were only using them for games and they saw no clear educational purpose.

Communicative Ecologies, Polymedia, and the Popularity of Smartphones During the Study

This section gives a sense of the main technologies being used in Belleton during the study to provide the context for a deeper discussion of learning practices and instrumentalisation of this learning in the following chapters. Digital media use in Belleton was deeply embedded in an ecosystem in which people integrated their activity across platforms, online and offline relationships, and various contexts while navigating their privacy and sociality. A growing body of work rejects the technocentricity of measuring digital media use by platform and instead

acknowledges the social processes by which people integrate digital media into the ecosystem of their everyday lives. Tacchi et al. (2003) use the term “communicative ecology” to refer to a broad framework of communications are connected to social systems. Ito et al. (2009) underscore the inseparability of the technological, social, and cultural dimensions of this ecology. Madianou and Miller (2013) propose a theory of polymedia as an integrated environment where individual platforms are defined in relation to other media. They argue that as cost diminishes and access and literacy heightens, there is a greater emphasis on the emotional and social consequences of media. Findings in Belleton also rejected any decomposability of media use into discrete technological platforms as participants demonstrated an ongoing navigation and negotiation of an ecosystem of their digital media use and social practice. While acquiring a new computer, tablet, or upgrading one’s phone was seen as getting through, it was a common expectation that one would have access to a device, especially a smartphone, and it was noteworthy if someone did not own a device. The excitement of a new device was often short-lived, and new models quickly replaced the novelty of a new purchase. Having a device in and of itself was not special, and it was what participants could use this device to do and how they incorporated it in their lives that imbued meaning. How a device is used is more important than mere ownership of it, and people demonstrate their competencies through activities including having a range of friends on social media, participating in WhatsApp groups, maintaining or growing personal connections, and demonstrating knowledge of technology itself, the latest happenings, or expertise on a particular topic. In contrast, device ownership is seen more as a facilitatory affordance.

Many Belleton Trinis owned two to three personal devices. All research participants

owned mobile phones,²³ and many also had either a laptop or a tablet and sometimes both. The household may have had a desktop as well, but it was rarely used (if at all). Normally, this desktop was part of the communal family setting in the living room, while the mobile phone and laptop/tablet were for personal use. Having personal and intimate access to their device was important to participants. Participants kept their mobile phones and tablets with them at most times. Participants pulled their phones from their pockets and tablets from their bags, saying that these were appendages that they felt naked without. They rarely had their laptops on them when out of the house. These laptops were in their room, as they were seen as too bulky to carry around. Sometimes laptops were perched on a desk, but mostly they remained on beds where participants could use them to go online and especially to watch YouTube, which was a favourite site among my participants. It was common for them to be watching YouTube on their laptops while WhatsApping on their mobile phones. Websites were often shared via links on WhatsApp or during face to face discussion among peers. People would rarely use devices communally, but there was often a discussion of online content in face to face groups or sharing of links. Laptops were mainly used for watching videos (especially YouTube), doing work, homework, and playing some games. Tablets were often used for games, but people would fluidly move from platform to platform and search some sites and scan videos in order to get recommendations offline to find what they were looking for.

Belleton Trinis who had laptops and no tablet sometimes mourned their purchase decision because of mobility issues. They wanted to carry around their device everywhere with them. Many said that they would pull out their mobile phones but not their tablets on the street or

²³ See Donner (2015) who unpacks arguments surrounding mobile phone telephony in the Global South (particularly South Africa and India) and its associations, limitations, and complexities within ICTD and development.

in a taxi. They felt that the mobile phone was so common that people did not pay it any mind, so they were safe. While the desktop computer was a landmark of digital media investment in Belleton in the early to mid-2000s, the smartphone had overtaken it as a key tool in the community. Coinciding with the findings of a growing body of research in the Caribbean region, mobile phone use is now prolific in Belleton (Dunn, 2012; Horst & Miller, 2006; Mallalieu, 2007). Over 95% of participants have a smartphone of some kind. Due to this high use among participants of mobile devices, delving into some of the more common ways that mobile phones are used can provide some deeper context. My findings concur in many ways with the argument made by Madianou (2014) that the multifaceted nature of the technological and social complexity of smartphone use makes it a polymedia environment. My research also indicates that the smartphone integrates with wider social practices across platforms and relationships.

The mobile penetration rate in Trinidad and Tobago is 140% (TATT, 2014). There are two (2) providers: the incumbent, a product of the state-owned Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago (TSTT) bmobile (rebranded from TSTT in 2006), and Digicel, an Irish firm that entered the market in 2006. In my study, over 90% of participants in Belleton owned a mobile phone, with most of these being touchscreen smartphones with a mix of bmobile and Digicel phones. Over 80% of these smartphones were Android devices. There was a mix between Samsung phones and lower cost Blu, Alcatel, and Digicel own brand phones. Participants who owned Samsungs were more likely to upgrade their phones when newer models were released. Many participants told me that cheaper phones had given Trinis a chance to have a smartphone. The youths emphasised that many people on the street (especially older people) did not use most of the features of the smartphone, often using it just for calls, texts, radio, and sometimes WhatsApp. Regardless of whether or not they used the features, it was important to

them to be able to brandish a smartphone. These mobile phones were a status symbol in both the lower- and middle-class areas. In West Belleton, there were more Samsungs and iPhones, and in East Belleton there were more Alcatel's and Digicel own brands, but in both regions most people had smartphones.

A smartphone was seen as a necessary item in one's life. Lower income participants routinely invested in mobile phones, sometimes availing themselves of specials and offers that the providers promoted to try to compete in the local market. When someone's phone broke, there might be a moan, but it was taken for granted that a replacement would have to be purchased as most participants saw the smartphone as an indispensable part of their life, likening it to an extension of themselves or their home base. They often felt that they would feel disconnected, unsafe, or out of touch without a mobile phone. Mobile phone ownership in Belleton had largely come to be equated with smartphone ownership. Most people used Wi-Fi and apps, with the exception of some older people who owned a smartphone but did not use most of the features and only used the touchscreen for calls. A minority of people owned older phones with button keypads, but these were usually a second "cheap" phone from the other provider so they could call people who were on that network at a lower cost.

Most participants had Wi-Fi at home from Blink (TSTT), Flow, or Greendot. They would use Wi-Fi at home on their smartphone, or if they went to visit a friend they would commonly ask for the password so that they could connect there. Not many businesses in Belleton provided free Wi-Fi, but it was increasingly common and expected when participants visited restaurants and stores in malls and Port-of-Spain. Participants would often connect to the Wi-Fi as soon as they were at a location that offered it. Pay as you go data purchase for mobiles was rare as participants often felt that it was expensive, but some people bought data packages for their

mobiles, especially when they could secure a deal or promotion. The providers often ran deals such as “weekend passes” or packages focused on specific interests. A common one was social media data packages that allowed participants to access social media only, at a lower cost than a more inclusive data package. Participants in the area commonly purchased this package as they felt it was a good investment to enable them to keep in touch. Digicel also offered access to Facebook from their smartphones for free without the purchase of a data package. Young professionals were the most common demographic to purchase a data package that did not limit it to social media or a specific interest, as they felt that having internet access on their phones was an important feature.

Participants in Belleton regularly had a range of mobile applications installed on their smartphones. Since most smartphones were Android, these applications were either pre-installed apps, such as the Email app, or they were acquired through the Google Play store. Most of these apps had been accessed for free. The main categories of mobile apps used in Belleton were social media apps, gaming apps, location-based apps, photo-filters, productivity apps, and interest-driven apps such as fitness, sport, and recipes, as well as app locks to protect privacy on specific apps.

Social media apps were the most popular type of app used, with WhatsApp being the most popular of these. The majority of participants under 55 years of age had WhatsApp on their phones, with participants in their forties and under often using its message and call features as their main form of communication. Many people had originally had BBM on their phones when cheap Blackberries were popular in the mid-2000s. They had migrated to WhatsApp as Android phones became more popular. Most participants had all their contacts on WhatsApp but only spoke to twenty or fewer main contacts to whom they were closest. Many people also belonged

to WhatsApp groups. Some of these, such as circles of friends, work, and school groups were regularly used while some less popular ones would be muted. WhatsApp use included negotiating a range of social practices, including frequency and length of messages, use of forwards, and changes to profile pictures and status messages. How WhatsApp groups were navigated was commonly a personal negotiation. For instance, some participants were in a closely-knit community youth group. They regularly used a couple of WhatsApp groups with each other. Rebecca, 21, was a lively woman. She had a variety of interests and was at a time in her life where she was broaching a lot of philosophical issues. The all-female WhatsApp group she and her friends had created as part of this community youth group was an important outlet for her. They had daily discussions that were unplanned, and there was no formal structure. Spontaneously, topics arose based on what was going on in someone's life. One of the women, a sociology student, would often post a provocative question. Another woman, Shanice, told me that Rebecca was regularly the first to respond. Shanice also enjoyed the WhatsApp group and the discussion there but was less ready to post messages than some others in the group. She read the messages actively and followed the conversation but would only respond if there was something that she felt she needed to express or a question she wanted to ask.

Facebook and Instagram were other commonly used social media apps. Instagram was mainly used by people in their thirties and younger, and it had replaced Facebook in this demographic as the main way to display photos. It regularly involved sophisticated use of photo filters that came from the Instagram app itself or from other applications. Facebook was seen as an important space to keep in the know, especially about news and local information, given that news stories were often aggregated and spread through Facebook and local businesses often updated their Facebook pages. It was also seen as space to broadcast messages as people would

spread their stories about an event or an opinion. Other social media, such as Snapchat, were gaining popularity among younger people, and Twitter and Pinterest were regularly used by a few participants.

By far the most popular video app was YouTube, which people used for entertainment and tutorials. People would sometimes watch videos such as “how tos” on their phones, but they would also often “listen to” YouTube as they streamed music on their smartphones through the app. ICTD research on phone use in Africa and Asia has argued that people more often use phones for communication rather than information gathering (Souter, Scott, Garforth, Jain, Mascararenhas & McKemey, 2007). Findings in Belleton, however, contest this, showing that participants regularly use their phone to find information on YouTube and through search engines such as Google. Further to this, fixed distinctions separating information and communication into discrete categories are destabilised as people often fluidly share, shape, and created information in negotiation with personal communication and relationships.

Gaming apps are another popular genre of application use. While games such as Call of Duty and Grand Theft Auto were still mainly used on consoles and others such as SIMS were used on laptops and tablets, many people also used their smartphones for games. These games often fell into two categories. Some of them, such as Candy Crush, were seen as time wasters that one could play throughout the day or when waiting in a line or at work. Others were seen as time sensitive or demanding checking throughout the day, such as Clash of Clans and Clash Royale. Participants regularly used platforms surrounding their gaming, such as YouTube, to access tutorials, and they used WhatsApp to keep in touch, share information, and obtain feedback.

Other apps, such as productivity apps (especially among working professionals) and

interest apps, were also installed on phones. Most people however wanted to limit the apps they kept on their phones to ones that they used often. They were more interested in searching for information online using their Google Chrome App, Facebook, or YouTube, and avoided bloatware. Participants were often annoyed about the trend for most sites to try to make you download an app and would more happily use the mobile version of a website. If an application was downloaded and sustained on a user's phone, it needed to demonstrate value to the participant's life. Waze was of particular note in this respect as it was identified as one of the most popular apps being used in Belleton. Waze claimed to be the largest community-based traffic and navigation app.²⁴ Trinis saw it as relevant to them as they could access Trinidad's road systems and get real-time traffic updates. One issue that united Trinis, in particular, was disdain of traffic. Most of the business headquarters and government offices are in the capital, Port of Spain, and there was a massive daily migration along the highways where commuters sat in gridlock traffic until reaching work and then once again at the end of the day on their way home. Many participants felt that this was not a simple matter of convenience, but a quality of life issue that affected their daily rhythms and was linked to both the concept of time and the value of their time in a world that they saw as increasingly fast paced. This relationship to time and the feeling that sitting for hours in traffic on both morning and evening commutes was discussed with mounting levels of frustration. This time spent in traffic was often framed as a "waste" or a "drain."²⁵

The Waze system relied on users' GPS information to generate real-time updates on the

²⁴ Waze (<https://www.waze.com>) is an Israeli app that was bought by Google and is available for free in countries worldwide.

²⁵ Trinis attached a high opportunity cost to transit and felt that their time was being taken away from other activities, such as spending time with their families who lived with them in towns spanning away from Port of Spain. Even though Belleton was fairly close to the capital, the rush hour commute still took almost an hour.

best routes. Users could also actively edit maps, adding and sharing information.²⁶ Waze built itself on the ideals and processes of collaboration to create fluid information through implicit GPS tracking and active user updates. Belleton shows how the idea of technology facilitating a collaborative society (Tapscott & Williams, 2006) is both complex and multidimensional. Collaboration is not a homogenous practice whereby Trinis instantly become more publicly collaborative but involves the brokering of this information through different relationships on public and private levels in particular and nuanced ways. The ways that my participants interacted with Waze differed significantly from person to person. They often did not take the time to actively or manually add any information themselves. Only a few participants edited maps. One man, James, could not help but correct misinformation or add edits, such as showing that a road is one-way. James, however, was in the minority. Most people said that they used it to log on for directions but did not see themselves interacting on the systems. The idea that it was crowdsourced was appealing to many users, although they were often not aware that the information was directly drawn from their own driving behaviours through the system accessing their GPS. When they did realise this, they were open to it and felt that it was fine because it was not private information and it was contributing to the greater good, producing something that they use. There was a general affinity with the idea of collaboration. Users viewed Waze's outputs as legitimate information coming from an official source because the information had proven accurate in practice and because it was often recommended by peers. peer-to-peer

²⁶ Participants ascribed a utility to the application that they said accounted for the popularity of its use. There was a gamification element to the app as well whereby users could collect points by performing tasks or going to certain locations. Trinis largely said that they did not bother with the points on the system at all. They saw it as a waste of time. What they felt was important was how the system could impact the quality of their offline lives and whether they could get somewhere faster or avoid traffic, and get to their destinations and (often) loved ones. The information on the system was characterised by users as "up to the minute," changing, useful, and accurate. These were the traits that users ascribed to quality information more than the idea that it came from an "official" source.

interactions in Waze sometimes occurred through the system features themselves. One man, George, turned it on every day when he left work so that his wife could follow his trajectory home. She did this as well when she went out. They felt that there were some safety and comfort in being able to glance and know where the other was on their route home. Interactivity regarding Waze more often occurred across platforms. On a WhatsApp group, it was common for someone to send an update saying, “Waze says...” On a local radio station, traffic updates were given based on Waze with time estimates and the rate of traffic flow on popular roadways. Face to face, people would log on together and plan their route or where to go or sit in the car and discuss changes to their plans based on Waze. There was also mixing with other locative platforms as many people had started using Google Maps for directions and Waze for updates.

Some initiatives aimed at stimulating local app development had been launched in the region and locally in T&T. These included development agencies that frame app development as an innovative way to stimulate the ICT sector, such as the World Bank InfoDev’s Caribbean Mobile Innovation Program (Pitch IT Caribbean, 2016), partnerships between regional bodies and corporations, and linkages with governments in the North. The latter included the Caribbean Industrial Research Institute (CARIRI) TekMania Code Rush (in collaboration with Microsoft) (CARIRI, 2013) and their mCentre Mobile App Innovation Awards (in collaboration with Infodev and the Canadian Government) (CARIRI, 2016). None of my participants had been involved in these competitions, although a few who were studying Information Technology at UTT or UWI were interested in app development and had used online sites and YouTube tutorials to provide instructions and advice. There was sometimes a buzz in the area about a local app when it was launched as it was something made by Trinis, but interest was often shortlived and usage was often not sustained after the novelty of the new app wore off. Examples of local

apps whose use followed this pattern include a doubles wrapping game based on the local food and a location based recommendations site F1rst. Most participants would not keep local apps on their phone, but instead, use local content on sites such as F1srt and LoopTT if they stumbled upon them.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided context regarding the former squatting area that forms the fieldsite of this ethnography. I described a major shift in the research design that uprooted the study from an original intent to focus on users of a computer centre in a library. Instead, I followed participants' practices in the more unbounded spaces within the Belleton community, immersing myself in the everyday lives of participants who use an ecology of digital media. This chapter presented demographic details about Belleton and the young, lower-class, and middle-class population who live in the community. It simultaneously recognised that the community concept is a complicated one (Amit, 2002; Postill, 2011) and resisted representations that over-romanticise the idea of community. Instead, I presented community as a way people imagine their social belonging (Turner, 1969), placing emphasis on heterogeneity, movement, and transformation (Cohen, 2001). I argued that the community of practice concept (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that is often critiqued for benignity and homogeneity (Barton & Tusting, 2005; Gee, 2007; Postill, 2011) emphasises practices (Duguid, 2008) that can be regarded as part of a wider textured landscape of learning (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015). The context of this landscape was examined in more detail. Socio-economic idioms in the Caribbean, such as the term 'pressure' in Jamaica (Horst & Miller, 2006) and 'struggle' (*luchar*) in Cuba (Pertierra, 2009, 2011) give a regional sense of the survival narrative expressed in Belleton. In Belleton, this survival narrative is conflated with aspirations to demonstrate that one is "GT" ("getting through") or succeeding,

evidenced through highly visible and visual socio-economic signifiers. These are instrumentalised to enhance feelings of comfort and enact greater social confidence among peers, and they are associated with further pressure or struggle to achieve them. I explored these aspirations in relation to work and education in Belleton. I discussed the ideology that digital media are key educational resources to prevent children from getting left behind by using investments in first computers as illustrations of personal histories. The chapter then provided an overview of contemporary technology use with an emphasis on smartphone proliferation, drawing on theories of communicative ecology (Ito et al., 2009; Tacchi, Slater, & Hearn, 2004) and polymedia (Madianou & Miller, 2013) to argue that users do not approach technology as a series of discreet platforms, but as an integrated ecosystem of social practices. In the following chapters, I show how people navigate digital media, learning, and social confidence.

Chapter 3

Local Context of Education:

Structures and Ideologies



Figure 8. Queen's Royal College, Magnificent Seven, St. Clair, Port of Spain, Trinidad, by Grueslayer, 2014, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TnT_PoS_M7-1_Queen%27s_Royal_College.jpg. Used under Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic License

The previous chapter outlined the central role of education and its associations with

technology in Belleton. This chapter provides deeper context that unpacks some of the critical structures and meanings embedded in the education system in Trinidad and Tobago. The idea that education is a productive strategy for improving one's economic and social life chances runs deep in postcolonial Trinidad and Tobago (Brereton, 1981; Campbell, 1996). Participants in Belleton spoke about "getting paper" where "paper" has a dual meaning, signifying both a certificate and money. Succeeding in formal schooling and obtaining certification is considered to improve one's position through instrumentalizing the accreditation to bring financial gain and escape poverty or move up the social ladder. The national imagination has valued education as a chief enabler for a better life, and taxpayers' dollars fund a system where citizens are entitled to free primary, secondary, and tertiary education. A growing number of people can also access free pre-school education through government-run Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) centres. This education system was developed under and modelled on, the colonial system, and the government has rolled out a series of policies targeting expansion in education post-independence (Alleyne, 1995; Foote, 2008; Lochan, 2014).

This chapter examines the educational context in Trinidad and Tobago to provide a backdrop for the social practices surrounding learning. First, it discusses how, historically, education in T&T has moved from domination by a planter elite (Williams & Harvey, 1985) to be linked to ideas of economic betterment and social mobility (Brereton, 1981; Campbell, 1996), as well as modernity and nation building (Cudjoe, 1993; Waldron, 2009; Williams, 1993). It then explores how merit (Blair, 2013), prestige (De Lisle et al., 2007) and socio-economic background (Jules, 1994; London, 1989) interplayed in secondary school selection, which formed a pivotal role in the lives of students. Next, it looks more closely at how the education system is structured around examination and competition (Anderson, George & Herbert, 2009),

and how parents invest in after-school lessons and other strategies to try to bolster a child's success. Feelings of failure and pressure are unpacked, and questions are raised as to whether the assessment system is succeeding (Cobley, 2000; George, 2006; Robotham, 2000). A tension arises in the discussion of access and quality as local scholarships raise questions about content (Blair, 2013; James, 2010; Jennings, 2001; Mutua & Sunal, 2013), particularly whether the educational system has been endogenously developed or has been modeled on the metropole and is therefore not contextually relevant (Bacchus, 2005; Jules, 2006; Nettleford, 2000; Thomas, 2014). The chapter concludes by unpacking some of the social dynamics around concepts of social confidence, "book sense," and "common sense," and the educational landscape that includes formal academic education, Tech-Voc education, and informal out of school learning (Fournillier, 2008; Prentice, 2015).

Education in Trinidad and Tobago: The Facts

During the time of the study, 16.7% of the national labour force had completed only primary school education, secondary school graduates comprised 32.7%, and university graduates made up 22% (Central Statistical Office, 2016). Students entered primary school from age 5+. They then took a Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA) at the end of primary school at 11+ to determine which secondary school they would be attending. They were placed based on their test scores to schools ranked on a hierarchical system, with traditional grammar schools often being considered more prestigious. In secondary school, students took the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) examinations and could go on to take the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations (CAPE). Students underwent a continuous system of examination throughout their school lives (Anderson et al., 2009). There were 455 government primary schools and 125 government secondary schools (Gopeesingh, 2015). Lochan (2014)

underscores that despite changes in government, national policy has emphasised the creation of a knowledge-based economy, and a vision that he considered is linked to global “education for all” goals.²⁷ T&T’s Fourth Basic Education Project (1995-2002) was aimed at educational expansion of primary schools. The Secondary Education Modernisation Project (1999-2006) was targeted at secondary school reform and was financed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), with over U.S.\$150 million allocated to expanding the number of schools and improving their quality (Lochan, 2014). There was a mixed-management model that involved both state and private providers who were often linked to denominational bodies at the primary and secondary levels. Herbert and Lochan (2014) note that the tertiary education and technical/vocational (Tech-Voc) sectors have undergone major growth in Trinidad and Tobago over the last decade and a half, with an investment since 2000 of over U.S. \$2,000,000,000 dollars. Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE) enables all citizens to access undergraduate tertiary education at public and private institutions free of charge, and post-graduate tuition attracts a 50% supplement. In addition to free tuition provided by GATE, the Higher Education Loan Programme (HELP) can be accessed on needs-based criteria to assist with the peripheral costs of living expenses and learning resources. The government also funds a number of supplemented Tech-Voc programmes, some of which offered incentives such as stipends. In 2010, there were over 80 registered post-secondary and tertiary institutions in T&T, with 96% of these being privately run (Ministry Science, Technology and Tertiary Education [MSTTE], 2010). While only 4% of these were public, they accounted for over 68% of full-time enrollment (MSTTE, 2010). These public institutions included The University of the West Indies (UWI), The

²⁷ These have been promoted internationally in Jomtien 1990 and the Dakar Goals of 2000.

University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), and The College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT). Public Tech-Voc training initiatives included the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP), Helping Youth Prepare for Employment (HYPE), and Multi-Sector Skills Training (MuST). A National Training Agency was also established and implemented Trinidad and Tobago Vocational Qualifications (TTNVQs) and Caribbean Vocational Qualifications (CVQs). Indicative of this high national investment in education are the budgetary allocations to education. For example, over a quarter of the national budget was allocated to education each year during the study (GORTT, 2015).

Getting out of Poverty: Ideologies of Education, Economic Improvement, and Social Mobility

“Little Black Boy go to school and learn.

Little Black Boy show some concern.

Little Black Boy, Education is the key

To get you off the streets and off poverty.”

(Lyrics excerpted from a popular calypso in Trinidad and Tobago - Gypsy, 1997)

The colonial and post-colonial historical context has embedded education in the national consciousness in Trinidad and Tobago as a chief pathway towards achieving socioeconomic success (Brereton, 1981; Campbell, 1996), or as the 1997 Calypso says, to “get you off the streets and off poverty.” The local literary canon is rife with examples of education as a key theme. In Anthony’s (1996) *The Year in San Fernando*, the lower class believe that education is the sole chance for a better life. In Lovelace’s (1979) *The Schoolmaster*, the people of a village in Trinidad want to construct a school for their children as a promise of offering modernity,

progress, and a path to prosperity that they would never have access to if they were not educated. Naipaul's (1969) seminal, *A House for Mr Biswas*, describes the protagonist's attempts at learning and how the hope of the family rests on the bright son Anand and his educational accomplishments. Participants in the Bellefontaine community where the ethnography was conducted similarly describe education as a fundamental strategy for achieving financial stability and social status.

There have been four (4) main stages of National Educational Policy in Trinidad and Tobago (Foote, 2008). First, there was a colonial system in which limited schooling was available exclusively to the children of the white planter class. Second, post-independence policy purported to provide the right to primary and then secondary education on an equal opportunity basis. Third, there was an expansion of secondary schooling (1968-1983), which included training in technical-vocational skills for students who did not demonstrate high academic performance. Finally, the current policy concentrates on expanding access to postsecondary education through the provision of free tertiary education via the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE) programme. Foote's (2008) taxonomy is useful in showing the main shifts in national policy. This is not a simple story, however, as ingrained in this ongoing narrative are undercurrents of uneven access and particular meanings attached to education in Trinidad and Tobago. It is loaded with associations of social mobility, nation building, modernity, and making a living.

The historical context of postcolonial Trinidad and Tobago unfolds a story of education that is situated in strategies and ideologies of social mobility (Brereton, 1981; Campbell, 1996; Dookhan, 1975). In the plantation era, the exclusivity of education limited access to the white upper class (Williams & Harvey, 1985). Miller (2000) argues that the English exploitation of the

island meant that there were limited investment or opportunities in education during colonial times. Upper-class children were often sent abroad to be educated. Post-slavery, however, there was a rise in access to primary school education, and it was seen as a key mechanism in trying to establish a place outside of the plantation system. Campbell (1996) underscores that for most black and coloured children, the road out of the cane fields and the domestic servant's quarters was a mobility that passed through the primary schoolhouse. There was a dual education system in which religious groups, primarily consisting of Roman Catholics and Anglicans, developed schools in addition to the government-run secular schools. The strong presence of these religious groups was a product of the country's colonial past: the island had not only been an English territory, but there were also a number of French Creole settlers and landowners. These groups promoted an ideology that education cannot be separated from religious instruction. The East Indian population were late in obtaining even primary education. Their main means for establishing themselves had been through land ownership, but the Canadian Presbyterian Mission funded by John Morton from 1868 canvassed them to shift their mobility strategy towards education. There was a focus of the missionaries on educating the East Indians. This became linked to ideas of social prestige based on a professional career, most often in the medical field (Campbell, 1996). This complicated relationship between religion, education, and prestige persists in the imagination of education in Trinidad and Tobago. In Bellefontaine, it is common for the idea of prestigious schools ("prestige schools" as they were grouped in local parlance) to be equivalent to the denominational schools that were based on a European grammar school model.

Campbell (1996) notes that in the colonial education system there were a few secondary schools that were initially for the white upper class who did not send their children abroad to

study. St Joseph's Convent was the first established on the island in 1836, along with the Queen's Collegiate School in 1857. The former, founded by the Sisters of Cluny, was a school for girls. It mainly concentrated on the three Rs, grammar, geography, English, French, and needlework, and there was no external examination. It was not regarded that there was a need for accreditation as it was largely to prepare wives and mothers. Accreditation and examination were critical issues in social mobility, however. The College Exhibition would allow a handful of "bright boys" among the blacks and coloureds to enter the elite Secondary School system, and by the 1920s girls were winning the Collegiate Exhibition as well. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century also saw a select few black students being granted university scholarships based on merit to attend university in England. Locally, clerics' and solicitors' examinations were also established. Self-instruction was also a growing practice as there was an emerging set of exams one could sit to attain certificates on the island, for instance, in order to make the move from teacher to junior civil servant.

There were some farmers and artisans who made a living in agriculture and tradesmanship, but by the late nineteenth century there was also an emerging black and coloured middle-class. Education was the chief means of this socio-economic improvement in families as a cadre of teachers and minor civil servants emerged from the lower classes. The lower classes found that education was a means to improve their lot within their own class (Braithwaite, 1953) and a minority were able to climb to middle class status (Brereton, 1981). Education was seen as a pathway to an improvement in living conditions, and it was also instrumentalised as a social practice to bring prestige to a family. Brereton (1981) argues that the black and coloured educated class paraded their education around because it was often the sole thing they had to boast about. Education, then, was largely regarded as linked with opportunity and a small

subsection of the black population increasingly made their way into professional careers as pharmacists, doctors, solicitors, surveyors, and journalists, to name a few. Only a minority would successfully be able to achieve social mobility through education, but it became an important aspiration in a postcolonial country. Bacchus (2005) points out that by the early twentieth century in the Caribbean, parents often regarded education as an important economic investment and they carefully calculated the returns that it could potentially bring. Children who were not seen as academically inclined were taken out of school so that the most promising son could have resources to support the aspiration that he would end up in a professional career.

In the 1960s²⁸, waves of independence had brought talk of education for all as a tool for nation building and launching T&T into the modern era (Walrond, 2009). Eric Williams' historic speeches lauding the possibilities of education to the everyday man in the town square (that he dubbed the University of Woodford Square) were a testament to this (Cudjoe, 1993; Williams, 1993). Education became even more loaded with associations and aspirations to opportunity. Subsequent governments sustained an array of post-independence policies towards free provision of education. Yet my research suggests that this "freeness," as it is regarded in T&T, is a complex concept in practice. Many parents in Belleton saw education as a right. A high value placed on children making the most of their education as it was linked very closely to the aspirational values of "getting through" in Belleton through socio-economic improvement. Participants argued that while education was free, they routinely made sacrifices for school supplies and strategies such as extra lessons in order to provide their child with the best

²⁸ For historical context see ethnography of Trinidad in the immediate post-independence era by Clarke (2010).

opportunity in education. Although tuition was freely provided, parents also complained about the practical high cost of the peripherals of schooling, since supplies like uniforms, supplies, books, and transportation were expensive. The government runs programmes to assist with some textbooks, school feeding by provision of breakfast and lunches, transportation and uniforms to lower income families. In practice, however, participants often found that these programmes were not as effective in delivering the assistance they promised. Participants complained about inefficiencies in the system, such as the late procurement and provision of textbooks, which meant that parents still had to buy many text books. There was also a feeling among participants that because these were free provisions they were often not valued. People argued that some children from lower income families would not take the box lunches in school that one could access if he or she came from a low-income family. While this placed an additional burden on the family, some felt that it was a matter of pride that kept children from taking the free lunches. Counter to this, however, was a contrasting sense from others that these were free provisions by the state and not taking it was deemed a waste.

There was often an attitude that this “freeness” of education brought with it complications as participants felt that students took their educational opportunities for granted. Some contrasted the state of free tertiary education during the study with the paid system of the 1990s. There was often a nostalgia of a past in which participants felt that people saw the value of education. There was a common regard that free tertiary education was positive, but some participants felt that students saw it as an easy next step after secondary school instead of a privilege. Since it was free, they argued that it was not something that was valued and its “freeness” compromised the amount of effort students put in. Some complained that UWI had

become a "mall" where students go to “lime.”²⁹ They talked about the fast food chains and stores on campus and questioned whether students were “serious” about their education or whether increased access had caused them to take it for granted. Some participants were sceptical of the types of degrees that students were taking and questioned how practical or marketable they would be in the workplace. Education was commonly described as an economic necessity or a means to an end with a practical outcome of improving one’s lot in life. Education by participants was often then seen as not something one did for the fun of learning as much as a practical path towards a secure and stable future. Some younger participants countered this popular view, and instead talked keenly about loving what they did or finding something to study that they enjoyed. Some participants had started taking less traditional diplomas at institutions in creative industry fields like film, videography, graphic design, or music production. There were mixed feelings in Belleton about this. There was an emerging sense that education could foster a life where one could pursue what they love, but mixed with this was an enduring scepticism about whether these would lead to jobs and if getting paper or accreditation in these areas would lead to getting the paper in the form of financial return. Parents expressed concern about ensuring that their children would not face the same dire economic problems that they had often found themselves in by not being able to pay bills or make ends meet. Education then was linked to a sacrifice that could get you out of these circumstances. Ultimately, it was seen as the chief opportunity towards economic betterment and social mobility.

Parents in Belleton often saw it as too late for themselves to become educated and start a career but believed it was the main way their children could obtain a better life than they had. It

²⁹ Local term for spending casual, fun time in a group that is often linked to feelings of stress relief.

was not uncommon for children to receive patronage from the employers of their lower-class parents, aunts, uncles, and a wider circle of surrogate “aunts” and “uncles” in the community, especially links to the diaspora who had migrated abroad. Education was an investment and a resource in the lower-class community of Bellefontaine, and it was often regarded as the only means of securing better employment and an enhanced quality of life. When asked why they saw education as important, it was common for participants to talk about it emphatically as “THE” way to get out of poverty. With free tertiary education, obtaining a university certificate or degree was often seen as a chief aspiration that made the most of the system and the opportunities that were afforded to you. The attainment of being streamed towards success, however, came earlier than this and was often linked to being placed in a “good” secondary school. This competition to be placed in a prestigious school was positioned within a complex of strategies aimed at obtaining signifiers of success and socio-economic status.

Getting into the “Right” School: Selection, Merit, and Prestige

Students in Trinidad and Tobago took an exam between the ages of 10 and 12 that determined which secondary school they would attend. This Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA) Exam replaced the Common Entrance Exam in 2000 (Lochan, 2014). Its antecedent had been the elite Collegiate Entrance Exam through which only a minority could enter the secondary school system. The government of the 1960s to 1980s had dedicated expenditure to education drawn from oil revenues and borrowing from international development agencies. In a post-independence society, the People’s National Movement, led by founding Prime Minister Eric Williams, focused attention on promises to expand secondary education. These were linked to sentiments of nationality, equality, and the opportunity for the working classes to have the chance at better livelihoods and social standing. National policy in that era was built on

increasing access to secondary school education. This went through several iterations in which school placement and success or failure were important determinants as milestones in the life of a child. More government secondary schools were built. These included seven-year schools where one could also sit A-levels, five-year schools, junior secondaries (junior secs), and senior comprehensive school. The junior secs were three-year shift schools, and students could be streamed into a senior comprehensive school. These often had the reputation of being rough and challenging environments for teachers and students. The junior secs were eventually mainstreamed into five-year schools. The highest reputation for prestige has largely remained with the traditional denominational seven-year, same sex schools that were overtly dubbed in everyday parlance as “prestige schools.” While today the SEA exam entitles a child placement in a school or a resit of the exam, the issue of a hierarchy of selection is still embedded in the system.

Before students sit the exam, parents write down a series of four choices often ranked from a top “prestige school” as a first choice to government secondary schools as lower choices. Students are placed in a school based on their exam results. Lochan (2014) notes that only approximately 25% of students would be placed in traditional grammar schools that are deemed more prestigious, and he questions the impact of this process of school selection on the self-esteem of the other 75%. De Lisle et al.’s 2007 study shows that the majority of families in Trinidad and Tobago value traditional denominational schools the most and put them as the highest choices for their children in the hope that their marks would merit entry into one of these “prestige schools.” My findings in Belleton were consistent with this. London (1989), however, argues that this apparently egalitarian administration, in which students compete to enter school based on their mark, is intertwined with a continuing elitism where students from higher socio-

economic classes are privileged with a set of extra resources, such as better primary schooling and extra lessons, that raise their chances to enter a “prestige school.” Coupled with this is a national Concordat Act (1960) that gives denominational schools the power to select 20% of their students (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1960). A report by Jules (1994) argues that students attending “prestige schools” are often from families where parents possess higher educational qualifications and more professional occupations, while students attending “non-prestige schools” commonly come from families where parents have undertaken lower levels of education and are employed in manual jobs.

This idea of the meritocratic value and opportunity of education is still, however, an important hope that persists in modern Trinidad and Tobago (Blair, 2013). A number of commonplace lifestyle strategies have been engineered to support this. Participants in the Belleton community often spoke about education as the chief means to get out of poverty or make a difference in the lives of their children. Private extra lessons have become a common practice among students in Trinidad and Tobago (Brunton, 2000; Lochan & Barrow, 2008). While Miller, Costa, Haynes, McDonald, Nicolescu, Sinanan, & Spyer (2016) found that prosperous families in a rural area of Trinidad tended to enroll their children in afterschool lessons, this study discovered that in spite of their low household income, parents in Belleton regularly invested in after-school lessons for their children for the Secondary Entrance Assessment Exam (SEA), Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC),³⁰ and the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Exams (CAPE).³¹ Students in Belleton went to teachers who offer private tuition at their homes or in institutions especially set up to offer extra-school

³⁰ Taken at the end of Form 5

³¹ Taken by students who move on to Form 6

lessons. This was a sophisticated system. For SEA, sometimes the classes were run by the class teacher or another teacher who was known for producing students who went on to top choice schools. In their study of SEA students, Lochan & Barrow (2008) discovered that 88.2% of students were taking private tutoring to assist with their preparation for their SEA exams. After school lessons for secondary school were selected based on teachers from schools that were doing well in certain subjects or from retired teachers who were renowned for success in an area. The news of the “best” teachers was spread through recommendations from other students or parents. Students would routinely travel out of their community to attend the lesson classes of the teacher who was best in their subject area. This attendance of after-school lessons would sometimes be used to supplement the classroom learning of a child who was struggling. It was also an important strategy that parents employed to give their child a “leg up” or enhance their chances of being able to compete with their peers.

The word “competitive” was often used in Belleton to describe the educational landscape in T&T. Parents generally felt that while it was a free system, it was still extremely competitive to get into the right schools and to attain good results. In addition to after-school lessons, parents would often try from as early as possible to give their children a “better chance” in life. There was often a tension between means and what was easily accessible, and what was thought as providing the child with the best opportunity. Free Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) centres were established by the government in the area for pre-school ages, but many parents were sceptical of them and would sometimes try to send their children to the pre-schools that were privately run and had a higher reputation. Parents would also try to get their children into what were considered the better schools in the area, including denominational primary schools, which they thought may improve their children’s chances of getting accepted into a good

secondary school. These were usually located in Port of Spain. While many of these strategies were routinely observed, there was also a tension between the idea of wanting a focus on education for the child and whether or not this played out in practice. While parents in Belleton were often vocal about the value of education, not all were able to support their children. Sometimes this was due to financial constraints. The number of children in the family can make it difficult for parents or single mothers to provide for all of their children. At other times, parents felt that they were not educated themselves and were thus unable to help with homework, or there was the rhetoric that education was important but no priority was placed on it in the home, especially when it was considered that their children “did not take schooling” or were not academically inclined.

My respondents generally believed that if they could go to a prestigious school, they would have improved chances in life because in attending these schools a person was more likely to achieve superior results in their final exams. Moreover, the higher social status associated with these schools positioned one in an improved place in society. Only a minority of children in the area went to these “prestige schools.” However, many parents would still put them down on the form as their child’s first choice. My participants cited notable examples of people from the community who had attended these and were considered to have “gotten through” with better careers and life opportunities as a result. For instance, one woman, Francine, was the one child in a family of twelve children who had been deemed to have really succeeded educationally. In the 1980s, she achieved high enough grades in the Common Entrance Exam to attend her first choice, St Joseph’s Convent. She was now a partner at a law firm and lived outside of Belleton in a gated community in the wider San Manuel district. She was often used as an example to children in the family and in the area as parents would point to the Lexus that she was driving as

a symbol of what education could achieve. Francine had almost become a mythologised figure who stood for the promise of education as she had risen from a dirt-poor family that, at the time, was barely making ends meet. However, her story is more complex in practice when she recounts it. Francine poignantly recalls how she felt excluded in school for not having the same background as many of her peers. She did not have the same resources or go on trips abroad and was often identified as an outsider. Her education was supported by the family of one of her friends in school, who would give her uniforms and books. She did credit her educational opportunities as the sole opportunity she had and her desire to get out of poverty as her main motivation. Lyle, a man who attended a “prestige school” in the late 1970s, had not received the same patronage as Francine to provide him with books and uniforms, and he spent most of his secondary school life playing hooky and avoiding school. He talked about how he became a bully in order to avoid being picked on for not having the same background as the other children who came from families with better socio-economic standing. Danya, on the other hand, had just graduated out of a “prestige school” in Port of Spain and she felt that while it was clear when she was invited to the houses of her peers, that many of them came from a different background, she did not feel a high level of exclusion, but instead identified strongly with the ethos of the school. She had been dreaming of wearing that uniform since she was in primary school. She felt that the resources that they had access to were excellent and the teachers pushed the students to work towards high results and winning scholarships. What she felt made the difference was the expansion in what she saw as the possibilities for her life. She argued that these schools expanded your confidence that you could achieve bigger things than had previously been in your worldview because the school exposed you to new ideas, people, and a self-belief that you were capable of competing on a global scale.

Most research participants in Belleton had not attended a “prestige school.” Many participants in their twenties were attending some form of tertiary institution after secondary school. The majority of these had attended the San Manuel Secondary school or another government school. Some people in the area commented that the idea of the “prestige school” was one that was more associated with social status than with educational opportunity: if a child worked hard it did not matter what school they went to because they could achieve success regardless, especially with free tertiary education. The “prestige school” was often an aspirational marker in the hierarchical sorting and selection of the child at primary school. Many parents felt that any education at all was useful as many younger people in Belleton who had attended a range of government schools were getting higher paying jobs than their parents and were contributing to the home. Some of these had also worked their way to professional careers. Others were sometimes described from early on that they “could not take book” or were not academically inclined.

Lochan (2014) argues that poor placement in secondary school was a critical factor that undermined the confidence of students from early on. As I will demonstrate through ethnographic findings in Chapter Four (4), students’ confidence was not only based on their abilities but also how these abilities were instrumentalised in feelings of success in their sociality. Social confidence was an important problematic in how participants felt that they were constantly under assessment and pressure to succeed or “not fail” publicly.

An Examined Life: Pressure and Quality in Education

Anderson et al. (2009) note that Trinidad and Tobago has had a deep history of national assessment of student aptitude and achievement. This was rooted in the colonial times when the British Examination Bodies assessed students, and it persists through examinations being

administered by the Ministry of Education and the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC). Demarcating children as often occurs before a child has entered secondary school, and examination and assessment are common features that are used as determinants of a student's aptitude. It is a common practice for children to spend their entire school lives in one stage or another in anticipation of and preparation for an examination. Flanking the major SEA, CSEC, and CAPE examinations is a series of assessments in primary education, including National Tests at each stage, monthly tests, midterms, weekly tests, and projects that are routine parts of the structure of school life in which students are marked and often ranked in relation to their peers. Some participants felt that this is healthy competition or part of a coming of age process in which students who want to do well focus their efforts and make sacrifices to reach their goals and improve their lives. Others felt that it imbues students with a sense of pressure. Often, this sense of constant examinations was taken for granted as just part of the system and was equated with what it meant to be in formal education and getting accredited or "getting paper."

School life, the curriculum, and teaching are largely centred on assessment in T&T. For instance, while a range of subjects, including science and social studies, are taught in the lower classes in primary school, in the years leading up to the Secondary Entrance Assessment Exam, English and mathematics are the main subjects that are drilled into students. This is because the exam consists of English, mathematics and creative writing, and does not include additional subjects. In his seminal novel set in Trinidad, *A House for Mr Biswas*, Naipaul (1969) comments, "No learning mattered except that which led to good examination results" (Naipaul, 1969, p. 382). This book is a representation of a family that pumped all their resources into their son Anand, who was considered the bright child. It also depicts a teacher who is simultaneously revered by but also humiliated by, the students in the class. Though fictitious in its account, it

bears commonalities with stories told to me by my participants in Belleton, who grew up in a school system that hinged on shame-based education using grades, ranking, fear of embarrassment in front of peers, and chidings from teachers and parents as motivators. Many adults in Belleton still associate education with a sense of deep pressure. Students are sometimes streamed into A, B and C classes based on academic ranking, but even when they are not, it is common to demarcate who the bright children are by ranking in class exams. Even students who achieve success in school often feel that there is enormous pressure to succeed and that they are constantly under examination to prove themselves in school and avoid the shame of failing to reach the expectations that people may have of them.

Social confidence is a critical problematic in the fear of failure implicated in formal education. Participants expressed concern about not being able to “take book” and demonstrate academic success. They also worried about the embarrassment that was associated with academic failure and how they would be regarded by their instructors, peers, and family. Many associated this education with shame and a constant fear of public failure, and reported that this undermined their social confidence and willingness to try. Social confidence emerged as an important consideration within learning and digital media use in my study as participants were not only focused on their competence in a subject but were concerned with how their learning affected their identity, and enactment of social confidence within relationships.

Trinidad and Tobago has had a history of payment by results in its teaching system and a focus on exam scores and quantifiable results are embedded in its reward system (Campbell, 1996). Compounding this, Mutua and Sunal (2013) argue that development agencies that have pumped funding into T&T place a greater emphasis on testing content rather than demonstration of broader contextual knowledges. Rote learning and testing by recall are common pedagogical

approaches in the T&T educational system (Blair, 2013; James, 2010; Jennings, 2001). George (2006) observes that learning outcomes are usually measured in T&T by performance in classroom tests, place in class, regularity, and punctuality. She argues that these metrics, however, do not give the full picture of a student or adequately define the quality of education.

Educational practice in T&T is a complex story. On the one hand, there is a legacy of instrumentalizing educational access for greater prosperity and social mobility (Brereton, 1981). On the other hand, scholars question the quality of this education (Robotham, 2000). In the 1990s, the World Bank underscored that there was still a need for increased access due to overcrowded schools, as well as a need to improve the quality of education. A major improvement initiative was launched, but while this did lead to the expansion of access to primary schooling and early childhood care, Lochan (2014) notes that significant challenges remain, such as with school infrastructure and curriculum reform and instruction. Alleyne (1995) argues that although access to secondary schools increased in post-independence T&T, there has not been a corresponding improvement in the quality of education. Other scholars have questioned what quality education actually means and how it is best measured. Cobley (2000) suggests that failure has been an important and complex element in the education system in the Caribbean. He argues that historically when UWI was founded, it exhibited a high failure rate in terms of poor examination results. Administrative pressure to raise quality and standards consequently resulted in the establishment of punitive practices. In studying more recent UWI examination results, Robotham (2000) questions how quality can be best measured and how a student's development and readiness for the workforce is best assessed. Robotham (2000) has found that there have been an increasing number of graduates with first class and upper second class honours, but employers complain about the inability of graduates to apply their knowledge

in the workplace in practical ways.

These critiques of the local education system intersect with critiques that the education system in the region has not been endogenously developed to fit a Caribbean context but has largely been a replication of the system of the Metropole (Bacchus, 2005; Jules, 2006). Education in the Caribbean has often been linked to ideologies of modernization (Jules, 2008) and scholars argue that the region is still trying to find its postcolonial foothold in this sector (London, 2002). Rex Nettleford (2000) has argued that, in the Caribbean, the university is modelled on the Western pattern of empirical ideas of knowledge. He calls for an epistemology that involves more imaginative and human dimensions in conceptualising and curating knowledge. Rocha (2008) draws on Freirean ideas and calls for a reconception of knowledge construction in formal institutions in the Caribbean. She argues for a rejection of approaches that hinge on banking or disseminating information through authoritarian and didactic instruction styles.

This tension between seeing education as the foundation for a better future and complaints about the quality of education are highlighted in local cultural representations. A popular calypsonian called Mighty Sparrow surmised this problematic in two of his famous calypsos, *Education is Essential*, and *Dan is the Man in the Van*. In the former, he extols the virtue and necessity of getting an education, echoing a view that is deeply emblazoned in the Trinidadian consciousness. As Mighty Sparrow poignantly puts it:

“Education, education this is the foundation.

Our rising population needs sound education

To be recognised anywhere you go,

You gotta have your certificate to show
To enjoy any kind of happiness,
Knowledge is the key to success.
Children go to school and learn well
Otherwise, later on in life you go catch real hell...
...For employment, yes, employment, you must be intelligent.
So it's essential, very essential, to have your credentials
But if you block headed like a mule,
Remember, no one will employ a fool..."

(The Mighty Sparrow, 1967)

Education is Essential links education to the sense of being able to “get paper” or obtain a certificate that will secure your employment. This is reflective of the narrative told by participants in Belleton that intertwines education, certification, employment, and socio-economic success. While examinations are seen as pressure, they are often considered to be a necessary pressure. My participants take for granted the idea that education equates to examination and that passing these examinations is the primary way to achieve employment. In contrast, Sparrow’s calypso *Dan is the Man in the Van* is sceptical about what can be learned within the current education system. The calypsonian makes fun of the type of knowledge that is cultivated in school and how devoid it is from the reality of his life. He links this directly to a pattern of a colonial, Anglocentric style of education that is disjointed from the local context of the island. Regional scholarship has argued that this colonial legacy in content and administration has persisted into the twenty-first century (Brown & Conrad, 2007). In Sparrow’s

words:

“But in my days in school, they teach me like a fool,
The things they teach me ah should be ah block-headed mule...
De poems an’ de lessons dey write an’ sen’ from England
Impress me dey were trying to cultivate comedians!...

Who cares a--bout:

Peter, Peter was ah pumpkin eater?

Some little, little people tie Gulliver?...

Dey wanted to keep me down indeed, dey try dey best, but didn’t succeed

You see, mih head was duncee an’ up to now ah cyar read!”

(The Mighty Sparrow, 1963)

“Non-Academic” Training

If you aren’t “bright” or don’t have “brains” or it is decided by your family that you cannot “take book,” then you also have the option of learning a technical/vocational trade. While technical/vocational training on the island has expanded, there remains a feeling that it can never be as prestigious as the grammar school model of academic training (Campbell, 1996). From the 1920s onwards, in addition to academic scholarships through exams dubbed College Exhibitions, handicraft awards were introduced that gave scholarships based on technical vocational subjects. These provided another avenue to pursue training, but they were not applauded in the same way that academic achievement was. There were no awards ceremonies by schools or great distinction assigned to them. Campbell (1996) notes that, historically, while arts and crafts were introduced to schools, crafts have never been as prestigious as arts. While arts have been associated with the more classical grammar school model of academia, crafts have been

associated with manual work.

In the early twentieth century, this technical vocational curriculum on the island was mainly administered by the Board of Industrial Training. There was first a focus on apprenticeship and then on examination through the City and Guilds UK exam. Campbell (1996) argues that it was obvious that a trade bursary was not as great a lever of upward social mobility as an exhibition to QRC or CIC, but it was a tool that people could use to put themselves in a more advantageous socioeconomic position. This was especially true after the oil boom in the 1970s when there was a recognised need for skilled craftsmen, more institutions for Tech-Voc education were established, and government policy brought a focus on manpower needs to the national discourse. When these subjects were introduced to the curricula of Senior Comprehensive schools, however, there was a notably chaotic atmosphere. Most school administrators had come from academic backgrounds and there were often administrative issues, disjointed programmes, and social prejudice regarding Tech-Voc subjects (Campbell, 2000). Some participants in Belleton learned a trade while in Junior Secs or Senior Comprehensives, or they attended the John Donaldson Technical Institute for short courses or a more in-depth study. Many others had participated in courses at a nearby Community or YTEPP Centre.

Ethnographic work in Trinidad has also revealed vibrant learning processes outside of formal educational spaces, such those practised by garment workers in a Trinidad factory (Prentice, 2015). Besides formal Tech-Voc training for certification, many participants in Belleton learnt trades such as plumbing, hairdressing, automotive mechanics, domestic work, woodwork, and sewing via an apprenticeship. Many of them starting off helping out a family member or being sent to work with a craftsman in the field. A number of people in Belleton ran small businesses as a result of this or had their own entrepreneurial aspirations. Many others did

not provide services for financial gain but used these skills within their own families and everyday relationships to contribute to meaningful social interactions and negotiate their social confidence.

While education was still highly valued across Trini society, a tension has developed between generations. Many older people still view formal academic education as the way for a better future for their children, but they would also complain that their children did not have more “practical” skills or participate in helping their parents. And, yet, it was not the case that young people were uninterested in practical activities. A number of younger people had become increasingly interested in more craft and DIY-related pursuits, often stating that their interest had been sparked online on sites like YouTube and Pinterest. Some of them were interested in pursuing these activities as certificates, while many others felt that they could learn them online and practice them enough to be able to demonstrate their skill. The important thing, they explained, was the demonstrable skill and not the certificate. As “getting paper” was a dual process of attaining a certificate and obtaining money, questions arose among participants as to whether informal practices, such as watching YouTube, are less valuable than formal learning since they do not tie into accreditation systems. On the one hand, there was a concern that without certification informal learning would not translate into professional opportunity. For example, Joshua, a 23-year-old participant, was interested in photography and perfected his skill by learning more about it online, but felt sure that he must pursue a more ‘practical’ degree. He did not feel that there was a developed creative industry in this field in Trinidad and believed that without accreditation he would not be able to support himself or his family since he saw ‘getting paper’ or a certificate as tied to getting a good job and having economic stability.

Many Bellefont Trinis stressed the importance of formal education as important and tied

to social mobility and escaping poverty. Others argued that there are opportunities to earn money and develop a career by developing skills informally online and marketing your portfolio.

Francis, a plumber and tradesman, did not see the need for certification. He learned the basics through school but felt he was able to gain more mastery through informal learning online and by actually practising on various jobs of increasing complexity. He believed that, in his field, people were not interested in certificates but in past jobs, referrals, and evidence of quality work. He then felt that he could use YouTube videos online to learn new techniques to enhance his portfolio and that this portfolio was more valuable than an accreditation.

There was also a question by some in the area about whether learning had to be equated with economic outcomes. Others said that learning simply for the love of it with no economic goal was either a luxury or could only be pursued by those who had already put themselves in a position where they could make ends meet. The word ‘holistic’ came up sometimes when I spoke to young professional Trinis who argued that this type of informal learning was part of creating a holistic person. For instance, Mary-Ellen, a young woman who was interested in making bracelets, saw this as an artistic and creative activity that made her more of a holistic person. Her professional career was as an accountant, but she was able to engage her creativity through this interest and learn about it on YouTube.

The majority of participants did not overtly distinguish their learning processes as anything special or separate from their day-to-day routine. It was in the embeddedness of this everyday life, however, that learning often became significant. Apart from “getting paper” in the form of certification and money, many participants increasingly parlayed everyday learning through digital media to add value to their relationships and thereby negotiate their social confidence as they received feedback, esteem, and gratitude or felt that they were making

meaningful contributions. In her ethnographic work on informal learning in Mas Camps in T&T, Fournillier (2008) calls for a broadening of ideas of learning to include these informal spaces, practices, and the playfulness incorporated in lifelong learning.

Book Sense, Common Sense, and Social Confidence

Many participants commingled a nostalgia for schooldays with poignant recollections of feeling a fear of embarrassment and shame in the classroom. The classroom formed an important site in which their social confidence was negotiated from early on. A student was often seen as a failure if they did not grasp a subject immediately. In Form 3, students were streamed into class groups based on whether they were good at sciences, modern studies (language, arts, and business), or a more technical/vocational avenue if they were not academically inclined. A large portion of participants' identities and social confidence was based on feelings of success and failure within the school system. This was not a straightforward matter of students with high grades feeling more confident than students who did poorly, but one's identity was judged, and social confidence was negotiated in a number of ways. For instance, Dexter was typical of the young men who did not do well at school. He felt that he was judged earlier on as someone who was not bright, so he emphasised this identity by gaining social popularity through being the class clown and undermining efforts of the teacher to corral the class into activities. This emphasis of the non-academic persona was also common among young men in gangs in the area or "taxi girls" who would befriend drivers in the area and exchange their attentions for phone cards, emphasising that they had street smarts as opposed to bookishness.

While education was often seen as a major lever in one's quality of life, there was a tension between abstract and practical knowledge. In Lovelace's (1979) *The Schoolmaster*, education is associated with progress in T&T, but academia is also contrasted to the practical

things that are necessities in the village. In the novel, for instance, one young man called Pedro questions why he would need to go to school when he can use his hunting skills that have already served him well. When the school is built, Constantine Patron asks who will pick the cocoa, fetch the water, or cook. Being “practical” is considered to be a high compliment among Trinis, who regularly choose to describe themselves in this way. The words “abstract” or “theoretical” were not used in everyday language as a polemic to “practical,” but words like “airy fairy” and “up in the air” were used as its contrast in negative ways. Being practical to Trinis, then, was linked to being “down to earth,” which was seen as a very positive attribute. There was a practiced conceptual framework that juxtaposed being practical to being pretentious or “stush.” It would be an oversimplification to conclude that academic achievement or getting paper immediately denotes confidence in social contexts. While it did confer resources or capital (Bourdieu, 1986, 1992), it was the instrumentalisation of this “getting paper” or learning that people used to negotiate social confidence. “Getting paper,” or high academic achievement and socioeconomic success built on this achievement, can also be an alienating force in one’s everyday relationships in the low-income community. Building social confidence is a nuanced process that does not only involve success in content learning, but also success in being able to instrumentalise these resources in social settings effectively to counter binary oppositions that often marginalised participants in complex ways. Students who did well in school in Belleton were often faced with being labelled as having “book sense.” This was often posed as a binary opposition to “common sense” or the ability to be practical in day to day life. One young woman, Paige, who had also been seen as the bright one in the family, felt that she was also deemed to be awkward and “klutzy,” laden with the assumption that she was only good at books. This was perpetuated within her family, and she was compared with her siblings and cousins who were not

doing well in school. On the one hand, she was praised and defined as the one in the family that would make something of herself. On the other hand, she felt that any error she made in the domestic space was exaggerated as a failure to prove that her success in academia undermined her competence in more pragmatic everyday things. Jacob, a student who was still taking his degree, felt that if a student was seen as academically inclined, there was the aspiration that the student would go to university and receive a degree. This was lauded by one's family, but he also said that there was a feeling in his family that he was studying for too long while his brothers had already started working and practically contributing to the family. Academic success is thereby assigned a separateness from the everyday sphere of life. Getting paper as a certification is not enough. In order to be deemed as truly successful in the community, one must demonstrate success through material possessions and a career, and one must show that they had used their schooling to achieve a higher quality of life. In order to navigate this economic success to build social confidence, participants were tasked with being able to parlay their success in their community by building and nurturing relationships and being seen as someone who was not detached by their learning but still connected or "in touch" in Belleton.

While education was idealised in Belleton, there was a consistent underlying recognition that it also conferred a deep pressure upon participants. At the extreme was the belief that if a person could not "take book" and tried too hard he/she might break under the pressure. There was a madness motif that was also associated with education and well-known characters in each area of T&T would often provide examples of this based on a mixture of their personal history or community gossip. In Belleton, people would talk about several characters in Port of Spain, now vagrants roaming in the street, who had cracked under the pressure of school and went mad or started taking drugs. In particular, a narrative was constructed about a man who begged at a

nearby intersection and who would sketch portraits. These were stories of wasted "brains" and how the failure of these people came from being "too bright" and not being able to stay grounded in the world with a sort of madness instead replacing functionality.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided background to the context of the education system in Trinidad and Tobago. I have examined key features and complexities embedded in the social practices of learning, and the meanings embedded in the education narrative. I have demonstrated how entrenched education is as a thematic and problematic in the national consciousness. It is the main government budgetary allocation (GORTT, 2015) and is a recurring motif in cultural representations of the island (Gypsy, 1997; Lovelace, 1979; *The Mighty Sparrow*, 1963; *The Mighty Sparrow*, 1967; Naipaul, 1969). This is consistent with the attention paid to learning, not only in policymaking rhetoric, but also in the everyday discourse and practices unveiled in the ethnography of Belleton. The chapter first describes how the national education system has been founded on a colonial history and a sequence of policies that had propelled expansion of access (Foote, 2008) through universal primary and secondary school (Lochan, 2014) and free tertiary education (Herbert & Lochan, 2014). This historical context of Trinidad and Tobago was discussed to demonstrate how education was limited to a planter elite in colonial times (Campbell, 1996; Williams & Harvey, 1985), but became regarded as a key lever for social mobility and economic betterment (Brereton, 1981; Campbell, 1996; Cudjoe, 1993; Williams, 1993). It then investigated ideas of merit and prestige, such as the pressure to be placed in a good "prestige school" based on the Secondary Entrance Assessment. First choice schools are often traditional denominational grammar schools (De Lisle et al., 2007). My research in Belleton supports the tension between the opportunities of good secondary placement through a merit-

based system (Blair, 2013), ideas of socioeconomic inhibitors of success (London, 1989), and undermined confidence due to poor placement (Lochan, 2014) that may be embedded in this system. This emphasis on examination pervading the T&T system (Anderson et al., 2009) was further explored with critiques that this system of assessment does not provide the full picture of the participant (George, 2006). This ties into ideas of “getting paper” in Belleton and the complexities surrounding it. Obtaining a certificate through examination may have been an important life strategy to socio-economic success, but it also conferred undercurrents of pressure and a strong sense of shame-based education in which pedagogies use fear of failure as a motivator.

Scholarly debate surrounding the pedagogical system of education are examined as a tension between ideologies of education as opportunity and critiques of the quality of the system (Alleyne, 1995; Robotham, 2000). Scholars argue that this system is marked by rote learning (Blair, 2013; James, 2010; Jennings, 2001) and information dissemination (Rocha, 2008) of specific content rather than broad contextual knowledges (Mutua & Sunal, 2013). They claim that the T&T education system is largely an inadequate post-colonial reproduction of the Metropole (Jules, 2006; Bacchus, 2005; Brown & Conrad, 2007). My research in Belleton supports these views and points to how the system also generates feelings of shame due to the presence of failure as a key issue (Cobley, 2000). In this system, the negotiation of social confidence is a key problematic.

This chapter showed how participants brokered failure and negotiated their social confidence, thus demonstrating how learning and knowledge involve complex practices as a dichotomy of “book sense and common sense” is present in social norms in Belleton. It argues that “getting paper” or certification often provides status, but is also embedded in practices of

being able to instrumentalise this education to “get paper” or financial return. This chapter also shows how participants often recognise another form of knowledge that is more practical and everyday, and how this is often seen as incompatible with formal educational attainment. The technical vocational (Tech-Voc) sector is introduced to show that in addition to traditional academic-based schools, there has been a parallel development of craft and technical-based training on the islands. These are often pathways to economic stability, but are usually regarded with less prestige than traditional academic pursuits or professions.

I argue that education simultaneously represents a promise and an opportunity for success and social mobility, as well generating feelings of failure and shame in education. These dynamics are central to how participants view their experience of education and the effect this has on their social confidence. Due to the proliferation of access and the high regard for education in the public imagination, this chapter argued that unpacking institutionalised education experiences are an important entry point into understanding the effects of digital media and learning in the knowledge society. It provides an integral context for appreciating the nuanced social practices and negotiations of social confidence that I describe in the following chapters. It introduced social confidence as a key problematic arising in the spaces of learning in Trinidad and Tobago. I have argued that the negotiation of this social confidence includes not only building capital through “getting paper,” but also being able to parlay these into social contexts without being labelled as someone who was unsuccessful at education and “could not take book” or being alienated by formal success as only possessing academic “book sense.”

This chapter has deliberately introduced the national policy and institutionalised, educational context of Trinidad and Tobago, to provide a foundation for understanding how learning is imagined nationally. It provides the necessary context to unpack some critical

dimensions of the educational system in Trinidad and Tobago. I complicate this with a contention that this institutionalised space is just one facet of a prismatic and multi-dimensional context of learning in Trinidad and Tobago. The chapter has thus argued that the landscape of learning is a textured one, and there has also been a profound history of informal learning (Prentice, 2015) and out-of-school lifelong learning (Fournillier, 2008) that is not rooted in academic institutions. In the following chapter, this study will draw upon this context of national, formal education in Trinidad and Tobago as a launchpad to discuss a range of social practices in school and not-school (Sefton-Green, 2012). These are spaces where social confidence is negotiated. In the following chapters, I will undertake a deeper examination of formal learning, bringing these ideas into dialogue with an examination of informal spaces, to show how learning in Trinidad and Tobago is situated within an ecosystem. I argue that this ecosystem challenges clear distinctions between the formal, non-formal, and informal spheres of learning and offers instead a number of identity negotiations and boundary crossings (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015) that people make as they navigate their social confidence in the knowledge society.

Chapter 4
Classroom Containers and Corridors:
Formal Pedagogies and Informal Strategies of Digital Media Use
within Education



Figure 9. Classroom in a tertiary institution

The previous chapter described the main features of the education system in Trinidad and Tobago. This chapter delves deeper into classroom dynamics among adults within the formal education sector. Many Bellefont Trinis in their twenties were continuing their formal education after secondary school. They accessed this for free through the Government Assisted Tertiary Education Programme (GATE). A few older adults in Bellefont were going back to school. It was also common for adults to take technical vocational courses at the Community Centre. As part of my study, I conducted interviews and participant observation with a cross-section of

Belleton Trinis aged eighteen (18) to fifty-five (55) who were in tertiary, technical vocational, or continuing education institutions. I audited classes with some participants and spent time with them among their friends in their institutions and at their homes. The idea of the “class” is loaded with connotations of a “closed, intense yet fragile world” (Livingstone & Sefton-Green, 2016, p. 4). This study examines a range of practices in institutional spaces, observing an enmeshed ecology of the learning experiences of participants within the classroom and beyond any clear-cut claim to its boundaries. When I spoke to administrators, there was an aspiration that infusing technology in the classroom would bring about “transformation.” The reality was that while technology was being upgraded at a number of institutions, teaching practice remained largely unchanged in these classrooms, and digital media continued to support more top-down teaching methods. Leander et al. (2010) refer to these types of classrooms as closed containers in which the power dynamic favours the teacher disseminating information in a didactic fashion. The imagined transformation through technology remains elusive. However, I also observed a set of informal strategies in which learners were using digital media to support their own learning. These practices, which included using the internet for private research and collaboration or interacting outside the classroom, were not sanctioned within the formal space. Instead, they created ‘corridors’³² around these classrooms: spaces that students themselves nurtured through mixing leisure with supporting their own learning aims and negotiating their social confidence.

³² Leander et. al (2010) unpack the concept of the classroom as a container in their arguments of mobilities in the geographies of learning. I use this metaphor and add the concept of corridors in my cartography of learning in Trinidad. I use corridors to describe the informal spaces that form trajectories towards and beyond the classroom within formal spaces and are informal spaces in themselves within formal schooling. The corridors that intersect classrooms in schools are both mobilities to get to formal bounded spaces of learning; and spaces in and of themselves where students spend time embedded in social exchanges surrounding a range of formal educational and informal activities. In the geographies of learning, these corridors are spaces that intersect with the formal classroom content but can be extended to include both offline spaces and online spaces (such as Skype, WhatsApp and Google Docs) where students interact.

Nkhoma, Dang and Lu (2012) argue that economic constraints act as a critical barrier preventing developing countries from benefiting from ICT in education. From my discussions with policymakers and my observations in the tertiary institutions that my participants attended, however, it was evident that T&T had been increasingly investing in ICT in education. This had often meant outfitting classrooms with more specialised equipment and connectivity, as well as creating virtual institutional eLearning classroom environments through online Learning Management Systems (LMS). Livingstone (2012) observes this type of infrastructural investment as becoming normalised in developed world educational settings. However, she introduces a wider unresolved question of whether digital media are instruments in supporting the delivery of traditional education or whether their effective impact on enhanced outcomes demands new pedagogies that take account of soft skills and digital literacies. Livingstone and Sefton-Green (2016) argue that while there has been ethnographic research that has explored how students make sense of school, a great deal of research has focused on institutional and teacher points of view. In the Caribbean, scholarship on how ICT is being or should be integrated into education is an emerging field (Ragbir & Mohan, 2009; Waldron, 2009). While technology is often touted as a transformational catalyst, Steele (2008, 2011) has observed that Caribbean students do not always have positive experiences of eLearning. This intersects with an emerging question in the region of whether technology is being used simply to transmit information or whether it is effectively being deployed as a tool in transforming learning experiences (Thurab-Nkhosi, 2013). In their experiments on game-based learning in tertiary education in Trinidad and Tobago, Mohammed and Mohan (2011) demonstrate that there is often a focus on the technology itself, but an emergent need is for more culturally relevant teaching material. In his study on Trinidad and Tobago, Pearce (2011) argues that a key gap in Caribbean scholarship is an

examination of the perspectives of learners. Educators and researchers have identified an immediate need for deeper research into how digital media is being used in tertiary education in the region (Kistow, 2011; Thurab-Nkhosi, 2013).

This chapter explores the conceptual, formal classrooms of sanctioned practice and corridors of informal strategies within the tertiary and technical vocational education of Trinis in Belleton. It starts by discussing educational spaces to show how digital media is largely framed by administrators in technocentric ways that focus on infusing learning with new technological tools linked to an ideology of transformation, but in practice, there was often little change to existing pedagogies or any curriculum reform. Digital media in the classroom usually functioned as information dissemination through PowerPoint and email. Although Trinis in Belleton found that the introduction of digital media in their formal classes often did not live up to promises of transformation, they were regularly using digital media in informal ways to support their education and enact social confidence.

This chapter argues that on the ground the educational landscape is not a simple dichotomy of formal and informal with clear-cut boundaries. Rather, participants engage in a range of informal strategies within the formal spaces that form a complex matrix of practice through which they attempt to broker proficiency in their learning and social confidence. This demonstrates how participants use social media to create corridors in which they mobilise resources and “lime” (spent casual time) with their peers through WhatsApp groups, Skype, Google Docs, and Hangouts. I present cases to exemplify how a sophisticated range of social practices are performed as students negotiate privacy and interaction to broker knowledge-sharing and negotiate their social confidence. I show how a top-down, information dissemination format focusing on the teacher-expert often persists. However, when we look at students’

learning practices beyond the student-teacher interaction, we find that this top-down approach by no means defines students' overall learning experiences. The chapter complicates this space by arguing that participants have mixed feelings about schooling, as some were able to successfully instrumentalise it in building their social confidence. It simultaneously argues that there is a tension between the ideology of education as a panacea of opportunity, and feelings of failure introduced in Chapter Two (2), as most participants in the study were reflective about the role that shame and public failure played in classroom dynamics. The chapter shows how participants attempt to avoid this shame and enact social confidence through using digital media to discover resources online in private. They integrate these into their own learning and class interactions to create strategies of resistance against shaming in education. The chapter then concludes by exploring the tensions associated with formal eLearning spaces as Trinis grappled with perceptions of formal eLearning and issues of interaction and motivation. This includes cases of people who have taken eLearning courses as part of their degree, and also the general hesitance in Belleton towards taking Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) as there was a concern that these would be replications of the pressure and examination associated with formal education.

White Board/ Black Board and Blue: Digital Media as Dissemination in the Classroom

Regardless of whether they came from 'prestige' or 'non-prestige' secondary schools, many of my participants in their twenties were now enrolled in some form of educational institution for further studies. This was a mixture of university and city college or technical type training and involved both full time and part-time students who also worked during the day. This kind of formal learning setting was often the first context that came to mind when discussing digital media and learning in broad terms in interviews. It was also linked closely to the type of interventions imagined by practitioners in their day-to-day discourse on using education in

building a knowledge society. Most Trinis, however, did not find that their lecturers used digital media in any deep way that transformed their education. Nearly all of these tertiary institutions had implemented an eLearning platform of some sort, ranging from Blackboard to Moodle to Canvas software, but these were scarcely used. Participants often felt that it would have been beneficial to them for their lecturers to start using technology to put up their lectures on the internet. Students were accustomed to accessing lectures on their own from all over the world on YouTube, and they felt that their own lecturers should have started putting up more resources. They felt that it was backwards' that the lecturers were not using ICT more. Some lecturers had begun putting up slides in class, but students usually found that this simply replaced the whiteboard and had made no real difference to their style of teaching. Participants also wished their lecturers would integrate more references to digital resources that they could follow up as supplements. Most lecturers still stuck primarily to traditional textbooks and centred their lectures around these. Students regularly said that they were disappointed at the disjuncture between the level of technological advancement their institutions promised to offer and the reality that confronted them when they attended. Institutions would boast about the type of equipment and quality of access at their student orientation. However, students often found it to be a different case when they were actually attending the institution. There were many plans in the works to upgrade equipment or create a faster internet service. Some institutions had already added in smartboards and other more sophisticated equipment, but students found that they were not being sufficiently used.

Like most participants, Dave did not use the computers on campus but instead brought his own devices. For Trinis, this was most often a phone or tablet and sometimes a laptop. Mobility and portability were important and having access to technology was seen as a critical

part of education to both the students and their parents, so investments were often made to ensure that they had access to devices. Dave was a second-year undergraduate at a local university. Typical of many other young people in Belleton, he started working straight out of secondary school. Dave worked for two years as a shop assistant before starting his degree in sociology and then helped pay for his education by working at a pharmacy in Port of Spain on weekends. He also picked up some shifts during the week when he did not have classes. Like many other participants, getting a degree was a big deal in Dave's family. He was the first person in his household to receive a tertiary qualification. Both his parents had completed secondary school and left after their O levels. His older sister took her A levels and got a job as a clerk. She had hoped to repeat a couple of her subjects and get a Diploma eventually, but she got pregnant straight out of school and did not feel that she could return to education yet, although it remained a persistent aspiration.

Dave's father never told him directly, but he always heard from his father's friends how his father boasted about his son starting university. When he began his degree, he got a new laptop as a present from his parents. This was the laptop that he carried with him to classes, slung across his shoulder in a free, red Digicel canvas bag that he got when he bought his mobile phone on a promotional offer. He was planning to purchase a tablet for better portability. He travelled to university and toted the laptop with him to access the internet between classes or take notes in class. Dave found that the connectivity at his university was decent in most areas, but there were some spots without coverage. He rarely used the desktops in the library because, like many participants, he preferred the intimacy and convenience of using his own device. He preferred to sit outside in the corridor on an old wooden bench and log on to his machine instead of sitting in the rows in the library where he felt inspected and monitored and where he could not

speak to his friends. He would have a few tabs open on his machine. A couple may have been games, another YouTube, one would be the library tab, and then there would be a series of journal articles that he may have been reading. His friends would pass by and chat about the “big fete” over the weekend, talk about class, swap notes from a section one of them had missed, or share references for an essay they were working on. His friend Tano leaned against the bench, propping himself up to watch a YouTube video Dave had pulled up of the latest vines³³. They laughed hysterically. Tano asked Dave to send him the references for the articles he was reading so he could check them out. They continued their casual intermingling of peer-to-peer social and academic exchanges as Dave packed up his laptop, and textbooks and they moved to class.

When Dave and Tano walked to their Introduction to Social Theory class, they turned the bend and laughed as they remembered the mayhem the previous week when the lecturer wrote on the interactive whiteboard in permanent markers. Some of the lecture theatres had been outfitted with interactive whiteboards a couple of semesters ago. A circular went around to student emails about the enhanced functionality and how lecturers would have now been accessing the internet and using a variety of dynamic multimedia options that the new devices provided. IT sometimes issued these circulars with the intent of highlighting new introductions to the technological infrastructure at the university. They were framed as pieces stitched together in a sporadic but progressive improvement narrative in which students were being availed with new opportunities for enhanced education. Words like “modern” and “state of the art” were often used to frame this narrative when new technology was installed. There was a buzz when the interactive whiteboards were first installed, but in practice, they made little difference to the

³³ Slang for extremely short videos (usually approx. 5 seconds) that featured funny clips of content and were posted on social media such as Facebook, Twitter etc. These had gained popularity among Trinis during the study.

teaching approach or to Dave's or Tano's experience in the classroom. They ended up being treated as routine parts of the classroom with no added functionality but instead being treated like ordinary whiteboards or projector screens. Semesters after their installation, the teaching approach of writing notes and showing mostly text-based PowerPoints remained in place. When the Introduction to Social Theory lecturer, Dr Mahajeet, wrote on the interactive screen with a marker, it was not because of its novelty. The permanency of the marker may have been a mistake, but the blue inked scribbles on Durkheim were a testament to how Dr Mahajeet was treating it in a taken-for-granted way as an ordinary whiteboard to which he had become accustomed, and that conformed to his usual teaching methods. Although it had been touted as a dramatic improvement in itself, Dave did not feel that this introduction of new technology in the University had changed the existing approach to teaching or his experience of lecturers.

When Dave and Tano made it to class, the whiteboard had been cleaned with a translucent permanent blue smear from where the marker had scrawled. The students were all arranged in desks facing the lecturer, who got up in front of the class and started clicking through a PowerPoint presentation. That week they were finishing up Social Facts and moving on to Karl Marx. There was a picture of a fully bearded Marx emblazoned on a slide, but the PowerPoint was mostly text based with summary points and definitions. This was common in the format of Dave's lectures and even in his tutorials. Students sat back and took notes as lecturers talked over text based PowerPoints, expanding on the course textbook or reading from the slides. Dave felt like this had just been an extension of his secondary school teacher's blackboard. Belleton students also remarked that the configuration of the closed classroom space was a replication of secondary school too, as was the largely top-down dynamic of an educator talking to the class.

Leander et al. (2010) remark how the classroom is often likened to a closed container.

The students enter in as learners who are bounded within an area that is physically and conceptually demarcated for learning. Like many participants, Dave felt that the structure of the class and format of the lecturers indicated that learning here was regarded a process of being taught; of receiving instruction. One mother in Belleton remarked about school, “you there to shut yuh mouth and learn.” This was a normalised ideology among Trinis on how education was practised. There were intersperses of what the lecturer regarded as interaction where he asked if there were any questions or posed a question to the class. Dave was often chided for talking with Tano and another student, Sita. Sita considered this to be unfair because they were talking to each other about the subject and what they thought about Marxism. All three, however, said that this was a common experience since primary school, where peer-to-peer discussion was seen as disruptive to the educator. Students may have been asked to research topics and make presentations, but interaction and collaboration were regulated by the educator who assumed the role of guiding the class.

Dave’s experience had been that digital media used in this university setting mainly conformed to this paradigm of the teacher administering instructions in a contained classroom that acted as a bounded space of learning under the instructor’s care. Digital media in the classroom were largely equated with PowerPoint slides. Dave did not find this overly stimulating. He said that Jeet (as he fondly called Dr Mahajeet) was a good enough lecturer. This format of instruction was what he had come to expect at university. If a subject piqued his interest, he would go home on his own and look up videos and documentaries, and much of the discussion with his peers about the subject actually happened outside the classroom space. Lecturers would sometimes email the slides to students or post them up on the Learning Management System (LMS). Students usually preferred email, though, since many did not have

any online classes and did not regularly visit the LMS. Dave found that this email interaction with his lecturers did sometimes make them more accessible as he could reach them outside of class and he appreciated getting the notes or slides. The email, however, was more for lecturers' dissemination of information than discussion and instructors often preferred that students visited them during their open consultation hours. The email function, then, was mainly a replication of the broadcasting of information that Dave, like many of the Belleton students, described as their experience of formal education.

Liming in Corridors: Informal Strategies in Formal Education

Participants mainly saw digital media use in their education as assuming the form of an instructor delivering messages through PowerPoint and email. Singh (2014) argues that Web 2.0 applications may be useful to promote interaction in Caribbean educational settings, but uptake has been slow. Instructors often laud the idea(l) of using technology for collaboration but are hesitant to use these applications for interaction, often because of their inexperience in using these social media in educational practice (Bailey & Johnson, 2014; Gaffar, Singh & Thomas, 2011). There was, however, a vivid stream of informal digital media used by students for knowledge construction, sharing, and use. This was a set of non-sanctioned practices that participants assembled themselves as a support for their formal education. It involved collaboration and interaction that usually had not been initiated by the lecturer but instead was spurred and sustained through student activity. Most of my participants who were in formal education described some kind of group that had been created by students. The most common of these was a WhatsApp group that a student in the class would have created and invited his or her peers. Skype, Google Hangouts, and Google Docs were other platforms of collaboration being employed. In some instances, the lecturer was invited to join the group, but more frequently, it

was a space students created themselves to discuss school work, assignments, and resources, and to socialise among themselves. A measure of self-direction was infused in their formal learning, which had been shown to be a contributor to academic success in other Caribbean educational studies (Bodkyn & Stevens, 2015). These, however, were neither purely self-driven individualist pursuits nor a solely informal democratising of education through collaboration. Instead, these informal corridors were enmeshed in an ecosystem of social practice in which participants attempted to navigate contexts to build their expertise, surmount challenges in their learning, and negotiate their social confidence among their peers.

Janique was a 20-year-old young woman from Belleton. She attended her second-choice school. It was not considered one of the most elite top choice “prestige schools,” but it was still regarded as a decent opportunity. She lived at her childhood home with her parents and three sisters. Her older sister had recently had a baby, and she helped out with its care as her sister worked full time and the father was no longer in the picture. Janique also helped with her mother’s small business where she sold hair and beauty supplies in a small shop front joined on to their house. She was looking for a job to contribute to the house and have her own spending money. She had worked part time during her A-levels and before starting university and was saving up to buy a car. Her campus was in East Trinidad and it took her over an hour each day to commute. She sometimes walked or took a taxi to the Belleton terminal, then a maxi-taxi (minibus) to City Gate station in the capital, and then another maxi-taxi to class. The transport cost was a burden on her, as was the time spent commuting, and she did not linger on campus because she would try to get home before it turned dark when she had afternoon classes. All her classes were face-to-face, and she had to be physically present at the university when the roll call was taken. On days when she did not have any classes, she stayed home. Janique wished she had

more time to socialise at school, but as she helped out at home with familial obligations at the shop and with her sister's baby, she tended to only go for classes. She also tried to save money on meals and transport as much as possible as her younger sisters were still in school and she did not want to be an added burden. She searched for a job that would not interfere too much with her university schedule.

Janique was a first-year undergraduate doing a degree in biochemistry. She had always loved the sciences and biology in particular and found school to be a generally positive experience as she was seen as the "bright one" in her family. Her timetable consisted of classes in zoology, botany, microbiology, organic chemistry, and labs. Like Dave, her classes were largely lectures with her instructors using PowerPoint. Some of her lecturers emailed notes to the class. As Janique packed up her faded green satchel at the end of the day, she stuffed in her textbooks and tablet. If she had stayed at school for lunch that day, she might also throw in her empty lunch container. Mostly, however, eating lunch together with her friends meant buying fast food at the campus cafeteria. Janique and her friends slinked in the corridor outside the Biology building, sitting on concrete steps eating lunch and chatting about life and their classes. They complained about lecturers and gave advice on challenging subjects. They lightened their moods after tough assignments by joking around and swapping gossip. They shared resources on journal articles and textbooks on the material they were currently studying that might have been useful and tackled problems together, such as stringing together carbon chains in chemistry equations. Janique rarely got to stay to have lunch on campus, but this interaction in the in-between space outside of any class was a regular feature of her daily life as Janique and her friends stayed connected through a mixture of Skype, Google Docs, and WhatsApp. The practices surrounding this usage proved to be a complex of trying to find ways to build

proficiency in subject content and enact social confidence.

When Janique got home, she would unload her satchel on her bed, stretching her shoulder out from the weight of its strap. She relayed with her sister, who was on her way out, passing her the baby. Janique sometimes would start preparing dinner or take up some responsibilities in the shop. When she settled in at night to study, she pushed her satchel and books across the yellow flowered sheet to make way for her laptop that she had rested on an old encyclopaedia so that it did not overheat. She pulled up research engines and YouTube and clicked on the white and blue S logo at the bottom of her screen to launch Skype. Her two closest friends in class were already on. They might have chatted for a bit on video or just used voice if they were doing something else while chatting. Here they recounted the day and may have picked up on a past conversation about a detail of their life. Anushka and Nadia were two other young women in their Skype group. Anushka was from South Trinidad but lived near campus, and Nadia was from central Trinidad. They continued the discussion about their lives that they had as a running dialogue each night on Skype. Nadia's uncle was in hospital. Anushka was having problems with her boyfriend. Their conversations veered from serious issues to casual chats about the latest episode of "How to Get Away with Murder" or "Scandal."

Amid this chatter, the group pulled up their assignments and reports they were working on. They opened their turquoise, soft cover lab books and turned to the latest specimen sketches they were assigned. They sometimes launched into a full discussion on a topic that was particularly exciting or frustrating to them at the moment. Anushka needed some clarification on the aldehydes and ketones section they were working on in class. She felt lost. The other girls explained to her what they understood and Janique sent them both a link to the Khan Academy on YouTube that she thought gave a useful explanation. After a direct discussion on a particular

topic, they may have minimised the Skype screen as they carried on with their work. The Skype engine would remain launched, however, and they routinely pasted in interesting links they had found relevant to a topic they were studying or a question that had come up in a reading. They were not involved in any formal peer tutoring group at their university, which Knight (2013) argues played a positive role in his study on the neighbouring island of Barbados. There had been talk of their faculty establishing peer tutoring since Freshers Week, but nothing had yet materialised. These daily informal Skype sessions, however, had become an important mechanism for the women as it created a safe space where they were able to help each other tackle challenges, problem solve, and share resources. They felt that this space was insulated from the public scrutiny of the whole class where they may be judged. It was embedded in the social interplay of discussing serious and fun personal issues as well as sharing information and collaborating on schoolwork directly.

The girls lived far apart, and this was an important way for them to keep in touch. It was useful for Janique as she felt that she did not get to spend much time on campus. Anushka, however, felt that even though she lived on campus, this Skype group was still a significant space for her because she was able to seamlessly integrate it into her studying while in her own personal space. She found that it allowed her to have support when she was at home, and it was a different dynamic from studying in a group on campus because she felt that she also had group support when on her own. She was able to tap into it when she needed discussion but also get on with her own studying. The girls found that it was comforting to know that while they were studying, their friends were also there on Skype so they could always ask a question or relieve stress by taking a break and having some casual conversation. They did not find that it was a distraction, but instead, they concluded that they were accountable to each other as the girls

knew they would be online while studying and had the encouragement of other peers who were going through a similar course and life journey. Janique had never been involved in any peer tutoring groups or formal eLearning forum, but she felt that this type of informal discussion had always been critical to her success. Since secondary school, Janique felt that these small informal groups were useful. She and her friends would have phone calls, use Skype, and take part in Google Hangouts during A-levels to work through past exam papers late into the night. She could integrate these safe spaces with her own private study time when she felt that she would prefer to tackle the subject on her own. She felt socially confident to ask questions and participate in the private space and intimacy of the group. The security and intimacy that this small group of trusted friends provided was common in how Trinis attempted to enact social confidence by finding trusted peers with whom they could broker their learning away from the public space of the classroom. Janique, for instance, found that she could be more open in these smaller groups because she had built trust with her friends in them. This intimacy was built through a mixture of academic and more casual social interaction that had nothing to do with school work. As Janique built a closer rapport with her friends, she began to gain greater social confidence in the group. She felt that she could admit when she did not understand something without feeling like she was being judged.

Participants also negotiated their social confidence and learning in wider groups among their peers as part of collectives on WhatsApp and Google Docs. These were not homogeneous spaces of collaboration, however, but involved complex interplays of privacy and sociality, as well as attentiveness to navigating appropriateness in these settings for knowledge sharing and interchanges that would foster social success. Formal education was contoured by corridors in which people could use digital media informally in a discourse blending schoolwork subjects and

social exchanges. These were navigated as spaces outside the formal where there was sometimes more room for casual discussion and questions. As these corridors formed mobilities to learning imaginations, they also formed complicated spaces in which social practice was performed and social confidence navigated.

An example of the complication of learning spaces was demonstrated by Jian, a 21-year-old participant who was part of a Google Docs group for his undergraduate zoology course. Here the class pasted links, discussion questions and full articles. Sometimes the material was properly referenced. Other times there were chunks of text pasted from the web on a topic they were studying. There were also links to newspapers or online articles on current research in their field. Most of the material related directly to their course syllabus, which a classmate had pasted at the top, but there was also sharing of general topics in their field that had piqued a student's interest. The students' collaborative Google doc was like a massive brainstorm of the class on the course. It was informally started by a student, Anil, when some of the class were asking about resources when they first started the course. Anil had suggested it in class, and the lecturer said it was an excellent idea but he did not subsequently join the doc. Jian regularly went into the doc and added content. Not everyone in the class used it, but while the doc itself was messy and informal, he found it beneficial for finding new resources that his classmates had curated. He found that the recommendations were relevant because they were coming from peers in a similar situation. Jian thought it was interesting because he felt that people were open and there was no sense of competition or withholding information. The culture of the doc had become one of collaboration and people enjoyed kudos from their peers who would add comment balloons or make a chat entry on the sidebar to "give props" for a particularly useful piece of information. In class, Jian's experience had been that some students would be willing to explain subjects to him, but people

were very closed to lending out their notes. However, he felt that the informality of the doc was disarming and made his classmates who were open to posting feel like they were all struggling through the subject together.

Upon deeper discussion with participants, it became clear that the content they placed in the document was curated with an increasing openness as people felt more socially confident within the group. Some participants were concerned when others were on the collaborative document as well and could see what information was being entered. There were feelings of worry about being scrutinised or judged on the content that they were adding. As the document became messier, students felt a freedom to add content with less restraint, but there was often still an underlying attention paid to whether others would criticise them for adding content that was irrelevant or incorrect. Students often felt more anonymous when either no one else was on the document with them or when many people were simultaneously adding, and they could become lost in the crowd and evade scrutiny. A nuanced set of dynamics were at play as participants both gauged and created the culture of the group. Attention was paid not only to the content itself that they were adding but also to how this curation contextualised their identity in the class. This complex use of informal knowledge sharing to grapple with subject matter formal learning and also to negotiate social confidence was further demonstrated in the dynamic use of WhatsApp among students. Many students used WhatsApp in purposefully dyadic communication with trusted friends to ask questions and create spaces of privacy and security as enclaves in their more public learning settings. Participants also joined larger WhatsApp groups with their class.

Like most of my student participants in Belleton, Dana was in WhatsApp groups for her classes. As with many of the class groups, such as Jian's Google doc, these were informally

created by a student who thought that it would be an easy way to keep in touch outside class. There was sometimes vibrant discussion in these groups, especially around assignment or exam time, but also throughout the semester and even during holidays people touched base. The WhatsApp group, like the Skype group, was a mixture of serious class discussion and social discussion about lighter issues. People shared resources and asked questions about problems they were having on a topic, as well as put up memes or links to funny videos with hashtags such as “#stressrelief” or “tgi.” The group had also become an interactive notice board for the class. People posted or asked about assignments or exam dates and locations. Dana felt a sense of comfort that if she had missed something or she was unsure, she could simply WhatsApp the group. She also felt, however, that she could have missed posts because sometimes messages were flowing so much on a topic that by the time she checked her phone, there were almost a hundred messages in the group. It was an incentive for her to keep checking the group because she felt that it was an important facet of staying “in the know” in her class. The group remained “sticky,” and peers in the classroom would have regularly told someone to check WhatsApp for more information.

Wortham’s (2005) yearlong study of classroom dynamics demonstrates how social identification and academic learning interplay as students develop and resist a range of identities in the classroom that are linked to success and failure. Participation in the WhatsApp groups was not homogenous, but instead involved a complex set of practices regarding identity and social confidence. Often a few more outgoing students dominated the WhatsApp group messages. This consisted of a mix of students who were the more vocal ones in class and others who were perceived as quiet in class but had become more active in the WhatsApp group. Participants often mixed humour with serious class work. This was a careful balance as interaction on the

groups could gain a participant acclaim or denote them as an annoying disturbance in the group. Social confidence was a critical problematic that participants tackled as they navigated the social interplay of the academic and casual. On the one hand, these spaces were opportunities to build social confidence by demonstrating knowledge and expertise, and by becoming a useful resource. One could easily assume the identity of a “know it all,” however, and be alienated by peers. Participants often played with the type of content that they posted and their responses to and from others. Practices of enacting social confidence were intertwined with gaining fluency to navigate the context and figure out and shape the rules of the space.

These digital media collaborations on chat, messaging, and online docs were examples of informal strategies that Dana and her peers, like other participants in Bellefontaine, had created themselves as non-sanctioned but relevant components of their day-to-day education practice. They existed outside the physical or conceptual space of the teacher-led classroom container. They were like corridors that formed mobilities for people to get to places in their learning trajectories. Like corridors they connected classes as content was shared and problems tackled, and students were peer-supported to get the “know how” competence or confidence to progress in their course. These were also the corridors of Dave and Tano sharing laughs and journals on sociology or Janique eating lunch on the steps.

Formal schooling is recognised as a complex space converging academic and social dimensions with a range of performances and interactions (Leander, 2002; Lemke, 1990; Sefton-Green & Erstad, 2013,2017; Varenne & McDermott, 1998). Academic knowledge sharing and “liming” were co-mingled. To “lime” in Trinidadian parlance was to engage within small groups in pleasure-centred activities of hanging out (Mendes, 2003). Trinis limed in corridors in education settings, in school, and online. This lingering on corridors was sometimes perceived by

educators as a waste of time. These corridors, however, were spaces outside the class where participants shared both knowledge and resources relating to their classwork as well as feelings of camaraderie and competition, as this knowledge construction was embedded in a wider sociality. Liming on Skype, Google Docs, or WhatsApp groups then challenged a dichotomy between pleasure and seriousness in learning and introduced a playfulness into informal learning. In the following chapters, I developed this idea of playfulness further in my observations of interest-driven, out-of-school learning. These informal corridors within formal learning formed a complicated and often fluid matrix in an ecosystem of practice. They were sometimes negatively associated with dimensions of distraction and a further pressure to prove oneself among peers. When successful, these spaces were described by participants as opportunities that helped them “survive” school through a mixture of informal help by “finding out” information, and also through the social release and liming associated with them that was often seen as a way to release pressure and build social confidence. These practices were not embedded in a fixed dichotomy of informal associations versus formal structures. Informal corridors instead formed intersections with the formal cutting down a semantic binary of formal and informal into a complex of social practice in which feelings of social confidence played an integral role in the attitudes and actions of participants.

“Learnin for Yuh Self on YouTube:” Attempting to Avoid Shame and Navigate Social Confidence in the Classroom

While many students in Belleton had started using social media such as WhatsApp groups for their courses, digital media was most consistently used by participants to research information for their courses. This was regularly done in private and then negotiated into their interaction in class. Some participants would use journals and other academic sources that they

would cite. Even more widespread than this was their use of YouTube to supplement their understanding of a subject. This was often done to better grasp a topic with which students had been having trouble in the hope that they would be able to “get it” before they re-entered the classroom space. They hoped they could then avoid the embarrassment of being behind their peers as they often felt that they were constantly being assessed and compared through formal testing and everyday classroom discussions. For these students, interaction was often associated with the idea of being measured as their knowledge was pitched against one another’s. The normative discourse on collaboration in school administration meetings equated it with a positive reinforcement of teamwork and communal values. Forced collaboration in the classroom was, however, seen by students as part of a struggle to prove oneself in the face of comparisons, pressure, and low feelings of social confidence.

Classroom dynamics involve a complex assemblage of practices. Scholarship in education unearths a range of tensions teachers face as they play complicated roles administering strategies in classroom management, encouragement, and discipline (Edwards, 2007; Garrett, 2014; Roache & Lewis, 2011). In the cultural politics of education, school can be a site for building one’s view of oneself as “somebody” (Luttrell, 1993), but it can also be a space where one begins to identify as a failure (Levinson, Wels, Holland & Foley, 1996). A chief part of participants’ social practice in the classroom involved trying to avoid feelings of shame or being shamed. This was a common feature of students in a range of classroom settings. Kyle, for instance, tried to stay quiet and blend in during math class in the fear that he would be called on, while Delors, his friend, would try to find the videos on YouTube in advance to understand what was going on. Delors recounts being embarrassed in class many times and felt that he was not particularly good at math and just wanted to get it over with, as it was a prerequisite for some of

his other classes. He recounted how other students had stopped coming to the class as they saw it as a waste of time during which they were ridiculed. There were countering examples where participants in Belleton recalled positive classroom dynamics in which social confidence was fostered through patient educators or demonstrable success in a subject area, or where they could parlay non-academic roles such as being the “class clown” to provide instances of social success. Some explained how peer-to-peer practices, such as attempting past papers together before exams, created feelings of support in their schooling. It was most common for participants in Belleton to describe versions of similar classroom dynamics to Delors, where they felt marginalised and embarrassed by not picking up a topic quickly enough. This shame was often associated with an erosion in social confidence and a failure to achieve or feel confident to continue with further formal education.

Varenne and McDermott (1998) argue that failure in school is framed by a culture in education that normalises competition, evaluation, and ranking in the North American educational system. This study discovered that identifications and constructions of failure were also important concerns in Trinidad and Tobago, and the authors argue that these factors interplay with the problematic of social confidence. Participants in Belleton commonly talked about ranking and feelings of failure and shame in the classroom as dynamics that affected their social confidence. They felt that schooling was a space of intense and continuous comparison and competition. This would happen during day-to-day classroom discussions where students felt they were being judged not only on their own personal merit, but also in comparison to their peers. As I described in Chapter Two, the secondary school one attended was seen as an indicator of how well one could “take book,” and children in the community who attended a “prestige school” were seen as the “bright” ones in a complex interplay of “book sense” and

“common sense.” School involved rigorous assessment by examination at all stages. Participants regularly described how receiving exam results pitched oneself against others as students would show each other their marks and one would gauge how successful one was relative to the achievement or failure of peers. Social confidence was a chief problematic as students identified as a success or failure in the context of peer groups, families, and the community. Participants did not talk as much about attempting to succeed as they did about trying to “not fail.” It was a growing practice for participants to try to avoid embarrassment and grapple with the problematic of their social confidence by attempting to keep up with their classes or fill in the gaps of a course that they were struggling with by using YouTube tutorials privately to “not fail” publicly.

There was also a complex range of dynamics regarding subject proficiency and social confidence in non-formal classroom spaces. Participants who were not regarded as academically inclined sometimes found these spaces as refuges from a barrage of feelings of failure within formal settings. These non-formal settings became spaces where they felt that they were demonstrating success and could enact greater social confidence. However, these non-formal settings were still a complicated landscape of social practice. Pedagogical styles that relied on comparison and assessment-centred dichotomies of success and failure were often retained in teaching in these non-formal, technical/vocational classroom, and students sometimes felt that the setting remained consistent with this focus in the classroom on shame-based education.

Mooley, a delivery man who was taking a short plumbing course at the Belleton Community Centre, had enjoyed the course at first but felt that the instructor eventually became obsessed with pressuring them about the upcoming exam. Candace, a young woman from Belleton who had just left school, had started a sewing class in Port of Spain with her aunt. Her aunt had some experience sewing, and although the class was for beginners, Candace would go

home and look up tutorials on YouTube to attempt to keep up to speed as the teacher, who all the adult women called “Miss,” would embarrass a student if they did not immediately pick up what she was teaching. Research participants felt that embarrassment was a common issue that was embroiled in, and often undermined, their feelings of social confidence. A 38-year-old woman in the sewing class called Floris would regularly get embarrassed as she had no experience at all in sewing and would often take a while to grasp what was being taught. The women felt that the teacher was certainly experienced and knew her trade as she had been practising it for years, but she had a one-way approach to teaching. It was like a Pictionary game where someone would draw a clue, and the other players would not be able to guess what it was but instead of drawing another clue, the drawing player would just keep underlining that clue and pointing at it in mounting frustration and confusion that they had not understood. Floris had started using YouTube to try to keep up with the class and to negotiate her social confidence by avoiding further embarrassment in the classroom, as she felt that she had been assigned the dunce cap. Both Floris and Candace found that being able to use YouTube privately was useful as they could try to figure things out without facing the public space of the class. This use of YouTube tutorials had varying levels of success for Floris, however. On the one hand, sometimes she felt that it helped as she received some better insight into how to do a particular stitch or what a technique meant. There was also a tension, however, that YouTube was not “Miss way” or the right approach, as Floris would end up being chided for taking an approach that she discovered online that was not the same as in class. Candace found that she also encountered conflict between what she did in class and what she did using YouTube at home. For instance, she sometimes found workarounds on YouTube, such as avoiding making patterns first, but she would be careful to do things in the sanctioned way in the classroom. She would sometimes give

her peers tips and point them to videos, but mostly her use of YouTube was a private activity as it would often be at odds to what was being taught in class. Her practice then became a mash-up of informal and sanctioned approaches. Knowing when to use which approach and how to integrate them became an important part of successfully negotiating her social confidence in and through the class.

Imagining and Experiencing Formal eLearning

While most of the participants used digital media informally to support their learning, few of them had taken formal eLearning courses. Dolly (2011) argues that more institutional support is needed for educators to implement effective eLearning experiences for their students in T&T. Matthew, a full time tertiary student, was one of the few who had taken an eLearning course at his university. One of his lecturers had made an attempt to set up a class online using the eLearning platform at his institution. This class on data communication was sparsely attended. Matthew did not enjoy the class and felt that it hardly made a “blip on his radar.” The class consisted of lecture notes and a forum on the university’s Learning Management System (LMS). Matthew would periodically log in to check the lecture notes. There was no live streaming lecture or videos, but students were meant to read the lecture notes and interact and discuss on the forum. This did not happen. Instead, many students did not see it as a “real” class. Matthew felt having a physical class would be more useful because he felt that the lecturer’s presence would be ensured. When discussing his face-to-face classes, however, Matthew concluded that he did not think that they were particularly interactive or dynamic either but because attendance was being monitored he felt that people showed up physically for the class although he wondered if people showed up mentally. He found that he was often bored in his physical classes, but the practice of an instructor lecturing to the students and providing

information was something he had come to expect as the “normal” format of a class.

Many students had not had much experience with formal eLearning and were hesitant about the prospect. The main reason for this aversion was the worry that they would lose motivation in an online class or that they would become distracted. They often felt that there was barely any interaction in the physical classroom so there was a fear that the eLearning space would have been even more alienating. The physicality of the classroom with a lecturer present was something that participants had come to expect as the standard format of education. There were mixed feelings when it came to the idea of the convenience of being able to use eLearning platforms anywhere, as opposed to going to class. Some participants found the prospect of logging on from home appealing, especially in instances where they had to commute to other campuses or were working and studying part time. One mother, Stephanie, was working as an administrative clerk and had recently had a baby. She felt she would have been able to attend more of her classes if she had an eLearning option. Countering this benefit of convenience, though, was a feeling by many that they would have been on their own in this “virtual space” and they would have become distracted. “Distraction” was a word that came up regularly in my discussions. Participants felt that digital media could distract from more beneficial pursuits. It was one of the criticisms they levied against programmes like the eCAL (laptop per child) initiative in Trinidad, where they thought games played on the machines distracted the children. Similarly, there was a concern about distraction and motivation when it came to eLearning at university. Students who had not been engaged in eLearning environments worried that they would not offer the structure that going to school provided. They were concerned that there would not be the motivation to continue or personal contact to keep them on track, so they could easily get lost or distracted instead of completing the course.

Only two (2) of my participants, Gail and Margaret, both women in their fifties, regularly took eLearning courses as a core part of their degree. They did not share the perceptions of the participants who had not taken eLearning courses and instead generally found them useful in allowing them to access educational opportunities they felt they would otherwise not be able to take up. They were friends, and Gail encouraged Margaret to sign up for the course. The degree programme was based on social work and managing a non-governmental organisation (NGO). Both women were involved in a charity and they were enthusiastic to be doing the degree. While both worked full time, they saw the degree as enabling them to better focus on their calling and to prepare them for leadership roles. It was linked to the idea of employment opportunities and fulfilling a long-held desire to attain a degree. Gail and Margaret had not pursued any form of tertiary education in the past. Both had attended separate “non-prestige” government secondary schools and had focused largely on having and providing for their families for the decades after school. They worked full-time and pursued this degree on a part-time schedule. It was a foreign programme offered through a blended learning approach with a local campus where they attended face-to-face classes and some eLearning courses that they took in their own time at home.

They emphasised that these online classes were particularly useful because of their convenience. The women were able to navigate between picking up their children, preparing meals, and logging on to the platform to do the course after work. They raved about the eLearning courses that they had taken. The courses were based in the United States with about twenty students from the United States and a few from the Caribbean. The format was largely text-based with readings, writing assignments, and a forum. They did not see a disadvantage in it being online or being text based. The women emphasised that the level of participation online

was high. Preece and Maloney-Krichmar (2005) argue that community-building and participation can be achieved in eLearning spaces, and that the sense of community comes from a series of social interactions that can happen regardless of physical presence. Margaret and Gail did not feel that they missed out by not seeing the lecturer and other participants in person. One could upload a picture or a generic avatar to accompany posts. Gail had uploaded a picture and felt that it was more personalised that way. Margaret, however, had not put up a picture of herself and found this liberating. Davies (2004) argues that disembodiment online can provide a freedom to navigate identities. Margaret liked that she was judged on her input and thoughts and not on what she looked like. Both women felt that the participation was more active on the eLearning courses than in the face-to-face ones. They attributed the high level of social interaction in the forum to accountability as they felt that it became easier to see if a student had not participated in the online space. They also felt that camaraderie was built as peers tried to help each other on the platform. Margaret was in the second year and found that the workload was suitable in the courses on campus and the eLearning ones. Gail was in the third year and felt that the sacrifice in terms of time was building. She did the online course after work, when her household chores were completed, and she was still online for her course at around 1am. Both women felt that being able to do some courses online instead of having to go to campus had improved their chances of being able to balance their life commitments and successfully completing the degree.

Margaret and Gail described themselves as not being technically savvy when they first started, but now felt that their confidence had been built in both the subject matter of the course and being able to use technology more effectively. They were emphatic that they wished more of their courses were eLearning based. This contrasted with many of my participants who said that

they did not think that they had the discipline to do the bulk of their degree through eLearning courses. These participants felt that face-to-face lectures created more of a structured environment. Some of my participants who were enrolled through distance learning through foreign universities had the option to pursue their studies online. Instead, they chose to enroll at a local affiliate institution that offered face-to-face classes because they felt that this provides more structure for them. Margaret and Gail disagreed that face-to-face offered more structure or interaction. They found that when immersed in the online environment of an eLearning course they had the same amount of guidance and structure and, given the option, they would have considered converting to a fully online format of study. Margaret and Gail were notable exceptions in their experiences of eLearning, however. Most participants had not taken online courses and those who had taken them briefly, like Matthew, felt like they were watered-down replications of face-to-face classes. Margaret and Gail had both felt like they were able to utilise these spaces to enhance their learning and achieve a greater sense of success or social confidence among their peers, which they felt bolstered their confidence to pursue further learning. These feelings regarding eLearning were in the minority in the study, however. More commonly, there was a fear associated with it, namely that it would replicate failure in the classroom and that it would increase one's chances of failing as the online course would not provide the same didactic support that students had often come to equate with formal learning. Students' concerns about the dynamics of these classes regularly translated into a general reluctance among participants to enter them voluntarily.

None of my participants took any Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), although they were becoming popular globally around the time of my study (Bali, 2014; Mackness, Mak, & Williams, 2010). Some of the Trinis in Belleton did not know about the free online courses,

but even when they were aware, there was a reluctance to sign up. This was often attributed to time constraints at first. Upon deeper discussion, many participants, however, revealed that the idea of voluntarily signing up for an academic course conferred a certain pressure to them that they associated with education. School was often seen as a place of pressure where they had to avoid failing. Paul, a 32-year-old office clerk, explained that what he heard about online courses seemed interesting, but his life was too busy with work and other commitments to sign up for a course when he was not sure if he could meet its demands. Even though it was free, he felt that keeping up with assignments and preparing for an exam was daunting. He felt that he was out of the educational system that focused on assessment and the pressure associated with it, and the idea of voluntarily entering back into it seemed stressful to him. Paul's feelings were typical of my participants in Bellefontaine and their perceptions of MOOCs. Apart from notable exceptions like Margaret and Gail, there was an unfamiliarity with eLearning, an uncertainty of what the courses would be like, and a fear that they would replicate the high levels of stress and assessment that participants associated with their educational experience. This was in contrast to a meet-up I had attended at the Hyatt hotel in Port of Spain to which a leading global MOOC provider invited some of its local students. The Trinidadians who had taken MOOCs were buzzing about their experiences. Some had found the collaborative elements and opportunity to interact with people around the world exciting, while others were more grateful for the opportunity to take the course privately and move somewhat at their own pace. Most of these MOOC enthusiasts had achieved a fair level of educational experience and attainment. Many had degrees and had positive associations of learning and felt that it was part of their identity. While coordinating the national knowledge.tt initiative, there was a workstream to promote open education with the general public in online and face-to-face events. In interfacing with the public, there was often a gap in

understanding what MOOCs were. When people became more familiar with the concept of MOOCs, the response was often that they were a great idea, but there was still a barrier to people actually signing up for them as there was a perception that an online class would be a stressful commitment that would create unnecessary added pressure. Fear of public failure in the class played a significant role in this. I argue that the dynamics of practice that participants associate with their learning, such as shame-based strategies in education, previous academic success/failure, and social confidence, play a major role in whether participants were willing to try eLearning courses voluntarily. The majority of my participants did not participate actively in a formally sanctioned eLearning course, but they did employ informal strategies that used digital media to support their own learning.

Conclusion

ICTD researchers, such as Nkhoma et al. (2012), argue that economic constraints act as a barrier preventing developing countries from benefiting from ICT in education. However, in Trinidad and Tobago, I observed that investments were being made in ICT infrastructure with a view that it would be a catalyst in modernising teaching. My study therefore follows Livingstone (2012), who argues for the need to appreciate learning practice in the classroom in a non-technocentric way to better understand whether digital media are instruments in supporting delivery of traditional education or whether their effective impact on enhanced outcomes demands new pedagogies that incorporate soft skills, and digital literacies. My ethnography found that classrooms in T&T were increasingly being outfitted with tools such as smartboards, projectors, and connectivity to facilitate greater communication. This supported Livingstone's (2012) observations of classroom digitisation in developed countries where there was often an expectation that this technology would promote enhanced education and teaching

transformations. These classrooms, however, were often still dominated by traditional methods of pedagogy and curriculum delivery. These ICT tools were often used as information dissemination tools, such as through PowerPoint presentations or lecturers emailing their students. A top-down pedagogy centering on knowledge delivery to learners persisted. Being in class often meant feeling separated from the instructor. Technology did not solve this problem, despite its framing as a new interactive tool.

Few of my participants took eLearning courses. They already felt distanced from their instructors in classrooms and felt that trying to interact in a virtual space would have only widened this separation. There was a general wariness of online courses as many felt that without physical face-to-face meetings and interaction, their motivation would be compromised. This was not always the in-practice experience of participants who had taken eLearning courses, however. Some found eLearning courses to be positive and inclusive spaces of collaboration, while others had shared in the negative perceptions experienced in Steele's (2004, 2008) studies of eLearning in Trinidad. The determinant factor did not seem to be on the technology itself, but on ultimately fostering feelings of deeper and more meaningful participation. My findings, however, support Mohammed and Mohan's (2011) observation that in Trinidad there is often more of an emphasis on technology than pedagogical reform and social interaction in designing eLearning initiatives.

My study supports Leander et al.'s (2010) findings that while sites of learning in formal education are often regarded as closed classroom containers, there are critical mobilities and more expansive paradigms at play in learning. The closed classroom conceptualization does not take into account the multi-sited and open spaces that exist in practice in the geographies of learning in which participants embed their daily social practice (Sefton-Green, 2016). Within

these formal institutional spaces, participants also create and practise their own informal strategies using digital media. They use technology for peer-to-peer interaction and collaboration outside of the sanctioned formal activities prescribed by their instructor. Pearce (2011) critiques research in education in the Caribbean as needing more grounding in learner-centred perspectives. When taking into account the practices of learners, it becomes clear that learning in Trinidad and Tobago is embedded in a spectrum of social relations. This aligns with Miller et al.'s (2016) concept of scalable sociality where people interact in a diversity of forms ranging from the private dyadic to more public exchanges in accordance with their purposes. Trinis lingered in conceptual corridors outside their closed classroom and interacted with peers in one-to-one, small groups and more public collaboration. They used a variety of platforms from WhatsApp groups, to Google Docs, to Skype for informal exchanges and academic collaboration. These were informal spaces of playfulness and stress relief and places of knowledge creation, sharing, and use.

These informal corridors facilitated participants with informal resources to reach academic goals and were also spaces that provided a break from the pressures of classrooms, which were often closely tied to assessment. These spaces were not only bounded in institutions, but lead from formal contained classrooms to participants' homes and casual day-to-day spaces. Their informality risked them being overlooked in a stock take of ICT in the education space. They were, however, a very real and active set of practices being performed daily in the lives of my student participants. Mapping the contours of the knowledge society in T&T has meant acknowledging the immersion of participants in informal practices outside what may be considered formal education. Sojourns in these informal institutional corridors are a recognition of the diversity of learning taking place within institutions, destabilising attempts at top-down

dissemination. Within these spaces, a range of social dynamics was being practised that hinged on participants' feelings of shame and social confidence. This is a complicated set of social dynamics. Although the information dissemination format of the teacher expert persisted even in non-academic settings, students often navigated their own use of digital media, privacy, and peer-to-peer interactions to broker proficiency in learning and social confidence.

Participants informally negotiated social practices in their learning through dyadic and group interactions using platforms like Skype, Google Docs, and WhatsApp. These evidenced a complicated interplay of practices surrounding sharing subject content and enacting social confidence among peers. Participants often felt that they were subject to intense comparison, ranking, and competition in the school system. Feelings and framings of failure were observed to be an important problematic in the classroom (Varenne & McDermott, 1998). Even more common than collaborative use of digital media was its use by participants to try to learn on their own in order to avoid feelings of failure and shame that eroded social confidence. For example, participants regularly used YouTube as a tool to research topics for their classes so that they could keep up to speed or figure out how to do something privately and avoid being embarrassed publicly in front of their peers. This shamed-based education and pressure often framed participants' imagination of classes. This was a crucial reason why people were hesitant to take MOOCs: they felt that they would have to deal with the pressure and potential embarrassment of examination and assessment. Although participants were not taking MOOCs, and few were enrolled in formal eLearning classes, a range of informal strategies to use digital media were being practised outside of the sanctioned approaches of institutions. Students socially "limed" and shared information in metaphorical corridors outside the contained spaces of their classrooms. They navigated these as a means to achieve the feeling that they could survive in

school. This dually hinged on knowledge construction, especially “making it through examination” and enacting social confidence. Following on from this discussion of informal corridors, the subsequent chapters in this thesis show how participants navigate the knowledge society through informal and interest-driven learning outside of formal education.

Chapter 5
Trini “Own Way” Learning:
Navigating Interest, Privacy, and Social Confidence



Figure 10. Cooking with YouTube

Chapter Four (4) discussed the dynamics of using digital media in learning within classrooms and corridors in the formal education sector in Trinidad and Tobago. This chapter examines informal learning in out-of-school contexts. A growing body of scholarship argues that learning is not only a process of individual cognition but is grounded in sociocultural and historical processes (Cole, 1996; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Gresalfi, 2009; Hutchins, 1991; Lave, 1988; Seely Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Vygotsky, 1978a). This intersects with a thrust towards understanding learning outside traditional institutions or “not-school” that

explores how people navigate contexts outside of traditional education in a range of temporal and spatial sites (Sefton-Green, 2012, 2016). There is a tension as policymakers have often marginalised informal and non-formal settings as less central or important than formal education (Bekerman, Burblues & Keller, 2009). Bekerman et al. (2009) argue that learning outside of the formal school system is not only a supplement or substitute for formal or “real” education but is a “real” and meaningful domain in itself. In practice, there is an interplay between formal and informal education and the academic and everyday rather than clear dichotomies (Gutiérrez & Larson, 2007; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). Fluidity, boundary crossing, and identity negotiation (Sefton-Green & Erstad, 2013) across a range of sites are common characteristics in learning practice, especially crossing institutional and non-institutional settings (Arnseth & Silseth, 2013; Scribner & Cole, 1973).

Lave and Wenger’s situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the type of everyday, socially embedded learning taking place in informal settings in Trinidad and Tobago. They argue for recognition of a kind of situated learning that occurs outside the traditional boundaries of a formal classroom space and is instead practised in everyday, non-intentional ways through processes of doing. They propose a model whereby learners move from the periphery to the centre of a community built on varying levels of expertise in a field; that is, a community of practice (Lave, 1993; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Prentice’s ethnography (2012b, 2015) reveals Trinis in a community of practice “thieving a chance” to learn in sanctioned and non-sanctioned ways as they practise learning-by-doing in the workplace setting of a garment factory. The findings in Belleton show Trinis outside of school, and often outside of any primary vocational setting, using digital media for informal learning in their everyday lives. Here they craft learning

experiences that build on a number of different relationships and interactions in their everyday lives. Instead of being embedded in a singular community of practice, Trinis often traverse a number of communities. They practise mobility in a wider ecosystem of learning. This argument intersects with recent arguments of Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015), who are increasingly framing a geography of learning in a landscape approach in which many communities are in dialogue with each other. Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) often cite professional knowledge as examples of this. Trinis' everyday pursuit of knowledge-building online is often not tied to a primary career but is instead an expansion of their skills and interests. Ito et al. (2009, 2013) observe a kind of interest-driven learning by U.S. kids who use technology in openly-networked, peer-supported, production-centred ways in which learning happens by doing. Practices of interest-driven³⁴ learning are evident among adults in Trinidad and Tobago in the nuanced ways by which they balance family, responsibilities, and career, and negotiate their feelings of having left "education." The findings here supported a vivid array of interest-driven learning activities among adults who felt that they had left learning spaces behind. This learning spanned a number of categories or topics, including Trinis going online to learn about cooking techniques, crafts, artisanal trades, homemaking, childcare, fixing and repairs, news, documentary film, photography, beauty and fashion, sport, music, anime, and gaming. This learning intermingled a mix of pleasure and practicality. These more popular forms of learning were not tied to an institution but were an independent pursuit of knowledge sharing that arose from a deep interest in a subject or a belief that this topic would be beneficial to one's life in a practical way.

This chapter explores how Trinis perform everyday learning using digital media in and

³⁴ See Azevedo (2011, 2013) who unpacks practice-centred theory of interest relationships and implications for design in learning environments.

out of school settings and how they instrumentalise this learning in building their social confidence. It first unpacks how play and interest intersect with informal learning. It shows how this learning is situated in acts of doing and a sophisticated sociality that encompasses both communities tied to the specialist content of the activity and ecology of everyday relationships. Building social confidence forms an important part of this process. The chapter argues that while research on learning with digital media often emphasises collaboration, participants use digital media such as watching YouTube tutorials to gain privacy in their learning and “try their hand” in areas they might not have attempted in more public settings or classes. They do so in nuanced ways that emphasise a sophisticated interplay of privacy and sociality as participants selectively interface their private learning with their peer groups. The chapter further examines these practices by describing how this interest-driven learning is often instrumentalised as a key facet of the identity of participants, and how this brokers social confidence within their relationships.

Navigating “Own Ways” of Non-Institutional Learning in a Landscape of Everyday Relationships

“Own way” is a term that was volunteered by Trinis in numerous discussions about learning in Belleton. This “own-wayness” has complex meanings to Trinis. On the one hand, the term “own way” in everyday parlance is linked to stubbornness and a resistance to being guided or taught. For instance, Sheila, a woman in her forties, told me that her teachers did not like her at school because she was too “own way.” This determination to challenge the teachers and try non-sanctioned ways of doing things created problems in Sheila’s education. Although she enjoyed trying her hand at pastries, she dropped out of her home economics class because she wanted to try approaches that the teacher saw as incorrect. She said she had been collecting “buff” (being chided) since she was young for being “too own way.” This was perceived as a

clear lack of discipline and unwillingness to be taught and created friction with her teachers, who found her too stubborn. However, with regards to their informal interest-driven activities, Trinis often talked positively and with a certain pride about finding their “own way” to do things. This “own way” had a particular appeal to Trinis in Belleton, who often contrasted their freedom and autonomy to look up anything they want on YouTube with formal top-down, teacher-centred educational experiences and a sense of pressure to pass exams or satisfy requirements. This informal learning was framed as an unbounded space in which they could choose what they wanted to learn and how to learn it. When Fabien, a shopkeeper, described building a new garage gate, he relished the choices he had and how he constructed his “own way” by looking at different techniques by various YouTubers, adapting this to his space and materials and reusing some of the old gate he had. This was a practical problem to solve, but he also took pleasure in both making the gate and making his own way. These observations align with Prentice’s (2012b, 2015) ethnography of garment workers, in which he emphasises the role of pleasure in informal learning and how Trinis create their own style.

Seth, 23, was a university student who was studying Information Technology. He was interested in coding, and a key goal of his was making mobile applications. He found that his computer science classes in school were focused on other aspects, such as networking, so he and his friends would often go online to find resources on various forums and sites such as Stack Overflow. He would also look up YouTube tutorials. Seth had started to play around with the code and come up with ideas for new apps. Although he sometimes wished the tutorials he found online were more interactive and that he could get feedback on his work, the absence of an instructor was a relief to him as he felt freer to experiment and try new things. He equated a teacher with someone who would tell him that what he was doing was wrong. He told me in a

confessional style that he did not always do things the “right way.” He sometimes mixed different techniques or found workarounds or hacks online. He felt that he would be “buffed” (admonished) for this. He felt that he would not be free to experiment with different techniques, projects, or ways of learning. This would discourage him from “trying his hand” at different projects and putting his own input into them. For Seth, a big part of the joy of making these apps and this interest-driven learning was the opportunity to experiment. The freedom to fail and try different approaches was a major facet of this experience.

“Ways” are routes to take you someplace. In Trinidad’s geographies of learning, they are paths to take you to a goal or a learning outcome. In formal education in Trinidad, the goal and the way to get there are largely prescribed through a top-down pedagogical process. It is a defined and delineated space that was realised through a fixed curriculum. The previous chapter shows the permeability of this process, however, as Trinis used non-sanctioned ways of learning even in formal learning settings. The following case studies show how Trinis find their “own way” of informal learning outside these classroom spaces. Outside of formal learning boundaries, my participants were finding ways to reach goals and reflected on what these goals should be based on desired outcomes. Informal ways of learning, then, were mobilities that diverged from traditional teacher-centric, top-down spaces of education to give participants more control over their learning process. It may be tempting to conflate this “own way” learning with the legacy of Malcolm Knowles’ (1975) “self-directed” learning and its focus on individual autonomy that shaped his concept of andragogy.³⁵ Knowles’ (1975, 1980) idea of andragogy has

³⁵ Knowles (1968) proposed a model in which adult learning, andragogy, was distinguished from the pedagogy of teacher-led, pre-adult learning. He developed these ideas of andragogy starting from an assumption that adults possess an independent self-concept and direct their own learning (Knowles, 1980). Later he revised his clear distinction between teacher-led and self-directed learning and the binary between pedagogy and andragogy to place

been useful in challenging traditional, taken-for-granted notions of pedagogy but his individualist psychological approach has been critiqued for disregarding the social context in which learning occurs (Grace, 1996; Pratt, 1993). Informal learning in Belleton resists a neat categorisation as coterminous with self-directed learning. “Own way” learning was not only a departure from top-down pedagogy but also very much a navigation of sociality.

The ‘Ton Football squad was an amateur group of football³⁶ players that sometimes met “for a sweat” or a game on Friday evenings. The players regularly used YouTube and online football sites like Goal.com individually to grow and update a sophisticated knowledge base of matches, leagues, techniques, and player information. Each player would find routes online to source current, relevant information on their hobby and use it in their games. They demonstrated their knowledge base by improving their techniques on the field, but also through sharing information. As one young man, Marcus, put it, ‘being in the know’ was vital to their credibility as football enthusiasts among their footballing peers and in their wider relationships. They built their social confidence on the team by contributing to discussions, sharing new information, and demonstrating value to the squad. They also used this expertise to broker facets of their identities as footballers and football enthusiasts in their wider peer groups, families, and in school and at work. This process of finding information individually and being able to demonstrate it socially was common in Belleton.

Playing Up: Building Skill and Social Confidence

This study argues that Trinis perceive the relationship between formal and informal learning using digital media in complex ways. My re-imagination of the conceptual limitations of

them on more of a continuum than a dichotomy (Knowles, 1985).

³⁶ See ethnographic work on grassroots, amateur football in Trinidad by Kerrigan (2014).

learning supports a growing scholarship on learning outside school, which Sefton-Green (2012) argues needs deeper examination and an expansion of what are considered to be legitimate spaces for learning. Participants often grappled with a tension between ambivalence towards whether their informal learning was valid because it was outside formal education; and adamance that what they were doing online was, in fact, learning. When asked if they used the internet for learning, participants often did not at first volunteer their interests as examples. Their definition of learning was embedded in a conceptual framework tied to education and formal schooling. However, during deeper discussion about their own ways of using technology and everyday spaces in developing their interests, participants often became passionate in their conviction that their informal activities were valid forms of learning, and they went into detail on how they gained expertise. On considering their online practices, participants often reflexively contested their own assumptions of legitimacy in learning as tied solely to in-school education. Scholarship on Connected Learning underscores how interest-driven learning connects experiences, insights, practices, and communities that learners participate with, both in and outside formal educational settings (Ito et al., 2009). Among my participants, there was an overarching feeling that they were learning as part of their interests.

Gaming emerged as a key pastime that demonstrates tensions of legitimacy in playful, informal learning and value and skill development. This informal learning encompasses content specific to the interest and capabilities of participants, who would use their expertise to negotiate social confidence. As with other interests described by participants, activities involving gaming intertwined both online and offline spaces. Gaming included playing within the game itself, finding new games, hacks, and skills, and also liaising with other players in Trinidad and abroad. People followed games on Twitch as they would a sport on ESPN. WhatsApp groups were

formed around multiplayer games and face-to-face conversations often revolved around collaborative or competitive strategies and discoveries in games. Salen (2007) suggests that gaming goes beyond games themselves to involve a range of activities with other people and contexts. She argues that gaming constitutes an ecology of literacies, knowledges, and practices that the Institute of Play links to opportunities to rethink learning. This idea of applying gaming in education³⁷ has become an area of focus in design (Lacasa, 2013; Salen & Zimmerman, 2003) and was increasingly a buzzword among educational technocrats in Trinidad. There was a tension, however, among policymakers as to what constituted legitimate gaming in learning. This anxiety about gaming as an obstacle to education was also raised among participants in Belleton. For instance, when participants discussed the eConnect and Learn local laptop per child programme in Trinidad, there was often a concern that the laptops were being used to waste time. The time-waster was most commonly seen to be gaming.

Trinis were worried that these laptops were not being used for what they considered to be the educational purposes for which they were assigned. On the one hand, they saw games as a major risk and a threat to the productivity of the young people who had been given devices based on a national intervention funded by taxpayers. The word “distraction” was often used, and there was a concern that games would suck up time from more productive educational pursuits. On the other hand, when the explicit question of whether games can potentially be targeted towards learning came up in discussion, Trinis were often more optimistic. They saw possibilities and opportunities in this. However, few of them had heard of local websites such as Pennacool.com that use gamification elements for primary school learning. The main example Trinis gave for

³⁷ For a practical case of gaming applied to an educational context, see Sims’ (2012) study of the Downtown School. In practice, Sims cautions against taking an application of gaming in education as a panacea and found that it involves complicated relationships with social complexities such as privilege.

any digital game-based elements in learning was Mavis Beacon, which many of them said they used when they were younger to learn to type. Trinis in Belleton also reminisced with nostalgic references to the Encarta encyclopaedia games that often came on a CD along with their first computers in the 1990s. There was a mix of fear that games would be a major distraction and the possibility that gaming could be channelled towards learning, so long as the subject matter was tightly controlled. The discourse in Belleton was filled with a tension as to where games were best situated in learning. This discourse always assumed that game-based learning was directed at children. This was consistent with the large focus of game-based learning on children in the edutainment sector outlined in Ito's (2007) study of edutainment. While the sector may bifurcate in its origins in education or games/entertainment, the demographic is often children in or about to enter the formal education system. My study in Belleton, however, looked at adults and their informal and interest-driven knowledge processes. What I found was not only an affinity for gaming but also that a rich set of social practices and skills were used to build and demonstrate fluency in their knowledge.

Olivia Joseph/LivSkadl836 was a Clash of Clans enthusiast. This Helsinki-developed, free, multiplayer strategy game was the game that participants were most excited about. Olivia belonged to a clan of twenty-two (22) people. This consisted of seven (7) other people from Belleton and some others who lived elsewhere in Trinidad and who were cousins or friends of the Belleton members. There were eight (8) women in the group. Aside from one six-year-old cousin and a teenager, most of the group were in their late twenties or thirties. Sometimes international players joined their clan. The clan welcomed interlocutors passing through but maintained its core member base, who they felt had become a community. There was a seamlessness in daily life with respect to how members participated in activities. Throughout the

day, players would routinely pull out their tablets or phones to train their warriors, defend their fortress, or check messages from other Clan members. These tasks may have been done while multitasking and were balanced with other day-to-day activities. They often required intense concentration while players were involved in other activities, such as waiting in a queue at the grocery or eating a stewed chicken lunch. Once while I was driving a young woman from Belleton, called Tyrona, back to her house, she politely asked me if I could turn the music down. Driving without music in both public and private cars in Trinidad was uncommon. Trinis often played a variety of musical genres including Soca, Calypso, Reggae, Dancehall, Pop, Indie, Gospel, and R&B. Tyrona rather apologetically said that it would take a couple of minutes, but she was trying to concentrate on her part in a Clan War with her group who had messaged her that it was time to “get down to business.” I had spent enough time in the community for her to openly say this and for it to also seem like a perfectly reasonable and understandable request. It was common in Belleton for many of my participants to play games on their phones while we were out or having conversations. The Clash of Clanners would get alerts and have to check in on their game during the course of the day at selected intervals.

Like many other games, in Clash of Clans players could pay for add-ons that allowed them to move up levels. Some admitted to doing this, but only at nominal levels, and felt that the real currency was being able to “skill up” in the game itself. Improving technique, the ability to learn from failure, and adjusting manoeuvres were key features of how the Belleton players built their villages. They were highly motivated and able to work together to tackle complicated problems that they felt was fun if they bestowed the right level of challenge. They collected trophies, points, and accolades through admiration from their fellow clan members. Gee (2007) argues that while people critique the utility of gaming for learning specific content, learning

entails much more than rote recall of information embedded in specific subject matter. He proposes that learning through games occurs via the development of a number of skills, such as interaction, production, risk-taking, customisation, agency, well-order problems, challenge and consolidation, system analysis, and lateral thinking. Shaffer (2005) argues that gaming allows people to develop skills by *doing* instead of just conceptually learning, arguing that this is an important feature of knowledge creation that is often overlooked by formal education: “But to know is a verb before it becomes a noun in knowledge. We learn by doing—not just by doing any old thing, but by doing something as part of a larger community of people who share common goals and ways of achieving those goals” (Shaffer, 2005, p. 107).

Salen (2007) argues that processes of play³⁸ develop both an openness to trying, failing, and learning from your mistakes, and an openness to other people. She stresses the creativity involved in play in informal spaces where rule-breaking is not punitive, but risk-taking is rewarded. She argues that a range of explorative and communicative skills are developed here in experiential ways. Gee (2007) positions the skill set developed in gaming as skills needed to compete in the modern world or “21st Century Skills.”³⁹ Countering stances, however, have warned against overplaying the idea of new 21st Century Skills in education as a techno-utopian

³⁸ It is beyond the scope of the thesis to discuss this in detail but see other particularly relevant literature on processes of play, play and learning and play theory by Bateson (1955), Caillois (1961), Dewey (1911), Huizinga (1955), Mead (2001), Piaget (1962) and Vygotsky (1978b).

³⁹ The 21st Century Skills movement argues that life in the 21st century demands a new set of skills to compete in an ICT-driven environment (Dede, 2007; Kalantzis & Cope, 2008; OECD, 2009; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). This has spurred initiatives linking stakeholders in the education and tech industries, such as the Partnership for 21st skills (www.21stcenturyskills.org) and the Cisco/Intel/Microsoft assessment and teaching of 21st century skills project (www.atc21s.org). This thinking has emerged from, and focused primarily on the American education system, but the ideology has global spread with more and more countries adopting the philosophy in their policy positions (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

vision (Greenlaw, 2015).⁴⁰ The idea of 21st Century Skills is a buzzword, along with terms like “innovation”, which is increasingly becoming common in the everyday rubric in the knowledge society policy discourse in Trinidad and Tobago. In interfacing with local policymakers, I found that there was often an expressed desire in the policymaking circles to develop modern, technologically-enabled, 21st Century Skills in Trinidad through game-based learning. Alongside this, however, is a tension in ICTD⁴¹ as to what constitutes the legitimate use of games in learning interventions. Slater (2014) gives a clear example of this in another context when he describes how an Indian Telecentre discouraged gaming among the local community who were seen as beneficiaries of the ICTD intervention⁴². In Trinidad, the ‘knowledge workers’ themselves in public organisations were discouraged from gaming as a waste of time. Mark, a young technocrat at the Ministry of Science and Technology, admitted openly that gaming wasted a lot of his time at work and eroded his productivity. Belleton Trinis were worried about gaming as a distraction for students but were intrigued by the prospect of it being used in learning. Trinis in Belleton played games and practised a range of skills in games but were unsure of whether to identify this as learning. Issues of what was considered and defined legitimately as learning arose, especially since gaming was commingled with enjoyment, stress release, and pure fun. There was a question, then, of what dichotomies existed in what constituted knowledge and knowledge society in practice and how these could have been challenged to create the most effective applications. Trinis proudly wore the term “gamers,” a

⁴⁰ Greenlaw (2010) applies Postman (1993) to give a more techno-critical stance of 21st Century Skills in education.

⁴¹ See Heeks (2009) who argues that tens of millions of people in the developing world play computer games but there is a low level of research in this area (p1).

⁴² For examples of ICT interventions that were deemed as failing because participants preferred using the digital media for entertainment rather than anticipated perceived welfare outcomes see Pal and Chirumamilla (2013) & Ratan and Bailur (2007).

term that intermingled with roles as mothers, fathers, teachers, managers, clerks, technicians, and students. To try to remove gaming from their identity was an oversimplification. Trinis, however, did not delineate gaming as learning by adults. It was not a language that they commonly paired together.

This learning by doing was similarly practised in a number of pursuits in Belleton, where participants honed their skills reflexively by watching YouTube videos and trying out, tweaking, and learning. The Belleton Clan players went online to YouTube and Clash of Clans Wikis to learn about strategies and manoeuvres. This was a process of careful selection as there was an abundance of information out there since Clash of Clans had become one of the most popular ranked games in the Android App store. Discovery and selection of what information was relevant to build up one's fluency of the game demanded critical thinking and skilling up, not only in playing the game but also in being able to research associated information. This information was key to building proficiency in the game and demonstrating expertise among peers, which was used to build social confidence.

Jerome, a 33-year-old member of the Clash of Clans group, was typical of many other gamers in the area who traversed a wide set of resources on the web searching for information that would benefit their gaming. Like Caleb and Olivia, he used the Clash of Clans Calculator app that he found online. He was an avid researcher on the Clash of Clans Wiki. Niemeyer and Gerber (2015) describe the importance of paratexts (resources outside the official content of the game) for players who gain skills through being able to navigate these texts as well as the game itself. The Wiki was set up, operated, maintained, and updated by other players and had no official affiliation with the game itself. Jerome, like other users of the Wiki, did not care if the Wiki or the YouTube videos were official or not. They found the information it provided to be

credible because it came from a community of players. They assessed the quality of the information based on whether or not it was useful. None of my participants added information to the Wiki. Instead, they mainly shared information within their group or with people they knew. They used both online and face-to-face interactions to share and show knowledge of the game and use this knowledge to negotiate their social confidence.

Discussion of the game took place on the platform in the chat box. Group members would share immediate feedback or commentary on the game that was taking place. Most of the interaction of the clan with each other occurred via WhatsApp. Liv, Tyrona, Caleb, and Jerome may have been individually sitting staring at their screens, but they were often involved in highly social processes across a number of platforms. This discussion of the game and its associated strategies, conquests, and failures were not only performed online but when we were out as a group in Belleton, this was often a major topic of conversation. There was a great deal of collaboration and sociality linked to sharing information and refining skills surrounding the game and the lives of gamers (Hjorth, 2007). Trinis negotiated interactions in offline and online spaces, among Trinis and non-Trinis and in introspective, dyadic, and communal ways. Liv received WhatsApp messages reminding her of wars that were taking place and discussions of plans with her team. She introduced the game to a younger cousin, but a more competitive player was concerned that her cousin's skill level would not be good enough, so she started teaching her cousin moves. She had to broker her cousin's entry into the group and manage the resultant relationships forming within the group. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that these processes of learning the community's ways of knowing, and its situated understandings and values, are important mechanisms for skill development featured in communities of practice.

Being able to demonstrate expertise in the game was not only useful in playing the game

but in building relationships and instrumentalising learning to enact social confidence. This occurred both with people inside the clan online and with other people whom the players met in their everyday lives. The WhatsApp group was a key site where people would share strategies and attacks. This included links to other platforms such as YouTube. The group's notifications would light up with advice regarding attacks; for example, people would type in the effectiveness of their Gowivi (GolemWitchWizard) or why a Gowip (GolemWizardPekka) worked better for them. This dynamic collaboration in the group was the result of individual research, reflection, and gameplay negotiated within sharing and collaboration. The group also moved from simply sharing discussion on game content to general discussion about their everyday lives, interests, relationships, and whatever other issues they were currently confronting. Engaging with other players and building relationships was critical to not only convey the content of the game but to parlay conversation into other areas, topics, and interactions in which players felt that they were sharing information, contributing, and developing their social confidence.

The players also used their knowledge of the game to build social confidence within everyday settings. For instance, Grace, a 25-year-old trainee at a manufacturing company, was also part of the Clan. She described how a while after she started her job, she noticed other people in work playing the game on their mobile phones. She went up to one of her colleagues and struck up a conversation about the game. Similarly, another one of her colleagues came up to her and started chatting after seeing her engaged in the game. Grace described this process as an ice-breaker for her at her job. She was new there and did not know many people. She felt she was able to leverage her know-how of the game to give people tips. Grace found these interactions could provide a bonding experience or at least a way for people to get to know her.

She was a more experienced player than many people at her job. This was useful for her as people would come to her from different departments to ask for tips. She didn't feel that she had forged deep friendships, but it was a useful tool in building her social confidence at work. She explained that her experience in her workplace was not unique. One of her colleagues, Abdulla, seemed quite shy but would engage in discussion about aspects of the game. Grace warned that one did have to be conscious of how ideas were put across so as not to be labelled a "know it all" and become socially isolated at work. Practices of gaining and demonstrating knowledge were performed in an ecology of offline and online interactions involving a range of platforms. Knowing how to appropriately and fluidly move through and interplay with relationships was an important part of successfully developing one's skills that transcended the content of the game itself. The ability to apply one's knowledge was a key facet in this practice of translating expertise to build social confidence.

Privacy to "Try Yuh Hand"

Learning was situated in Bellefontaine within a complex ecosystem of relationships. The social nature of learning observed in Trinidad and Tobago, however, cannot be reduced to a catch-all of collaboration. In fact, participants regularly brokered their learning in practices to achieve privacy and negotiate their social confidence. While there has been much discussion of the potential for digital media to facilitate collaboration (Donelan, Kear & Ramage, 2010; Tapscott & Williams, 2006), Trinis in Bellefontaine also emphasised the importance of digital media for providing spaces of privacy to try and fail without judgement. Penny, a 37-year-old store clerk, only started looking into cake icing because she wanted to make a cake for her niece. She looked up YouTube tutorials and attempted one. Many participants spoke about using YouTube to "try yuh hand" on new projects and subjects. Penny felt safe to "try her hand" because with

YouTube she could learn to make (and potentially make a mess of) the project in private. This was in contrast to her experience in school, where she felt that any mistake she made was highlighted by the teacher and amplified by the public setting of the classroom. Penny, like many other participants, was able to try out a few different techniques until she felt that she was ready for her work to be seen by her family and friends. She went on to try different icing ideas and make rose covered cupcakes for her colleagues at the shopping centre. Penny would make and scrap projects in private. She could fail at attempts without anyone knowing or having to satisfy any criteria. This was a space free from examination, and it offered her the opportunity for experimentation. She felt that this opportunity to try in private and have a measure of control over when she debuted her work was essential in building her confidence in social settings. Her confidence was then not only grounded in her ability to decorate cakes beautifully; esteem from her peers was key. This was an important means through which she was able to negotiate her social confidence. She felt that if she had been judged negatively for her earlier attempts, she would not have continued cake decorating. This idea of judgement was a central one for Penny, as it was for many other participants who used the privacy they could get from using online videos to try crafting, cooking, DIY, and a number of other interests. They often told me that they were reluctant to enrol in a course in these areas, and so online learning effectively provided the only way they could learn about these subjects. Hanna, a 19-year-old student who lived with her two younger brothers and father, was also typical of how participants used digital media to create private spaces in which to improve their social confidence. When her mother migrated to another country, each family member had to increase their share of domestic duties, and her aunts who lived next door would often drop off food. Hanna devoted a great deal of time in private to looking at YouTube videos about cooking. She tried out some simple dishes when no

one was at home, and then tested them on her younger brothers before she felt comfortable enough to try to cook for the extended family. Finding spaces of privacy and safety in her relationships to try without public failure was important in her practice before she felt that she could share what she had learned with her extended social groups. Participants often started off by learning in private and then introduced their interests to their peers, but they were only motivated to do so if they felt that their efforts would be a social success. They were deliberate and nuanced in deciding who to ask for feedback; who to share their work with; and at what stage in their learning they would feel comfortable enough to do this.

A number of my participants had started using YouTube and fitness apps for exercise. Makeda (29 years old), Cheryl (21 years old), and Brendon (34 years old) were examples of Trinis who used digital media for fitness. While convenience and cost were influential reasons they preferred not working out at the gym, another key reason was that they wanted to be able to work out in private. This was typical of the tension described by Trinis between instruction versus learning on their own. On the one hand, they felt that they were missing out on the feedback from an instructor. For instance, Cheryl had tried out a yoga class with a friend once and felt that the interactive feedback was useful in correcting her poor form and the mistakes she was making. On the other hand, there was often the feeling that being able to learn in private was an affordance of YouTube that allowed participants to try new interests such as workout routines, crafting, and DIY at their own pace and without the scrutiny of peers. Cheryl was worried that she would not be able to keep up with an aerobics class, but felt more open to trying it because she could use YouTube videos on her own at home. Many participants described a reluctance at first to see themselves as someone who could craft, cook, do DIY, or pursue a number of other activities. They did not feel competent or confident enough to start a class, but

since they were able to use online resources in private they were often more willing to try. They would commonly practise their interest in private as it developed and until they felt that they had improved; only then did they feel comfortable enough to share their interest and new skills with others.

Participants who used YouTube to exercise all felt that their success would be measured through physical results, but building and demonstrating expertise also became an important part of their practice. Brendon was private about his routines and felt that he wanted to debut his transformation. He did not discuss exercise with his peers, but was motivated to improve by the idea that they would see a change in his physique. He felt that once he had improved first at home, he would make an effort to start lifting at the gym again. Makeda started sharing exercise advice with her younger brother and eventually felt comfortable to send tips to a WhatsApp group she shared with her friends. Cheryl was happy to share her favourite YouTube videos and fitness tips with her coworkers and family as she built her social confidence. Participants' knowledge-building practices were often performed in private but brokered through their relationships. They spoke to their peers and coworkers about their forays into YouTube, who asked them to make recommendations of videos or give advice, and this became part of their identity as "someone who does work out."

"They Does Do".... Identity and Social Confidence

Sefton-Green and Erstad (2013, 2017) argue that identities across people's learning lives are critical facets of their experiences of learning and how this learning interplays with a range of contexts. It was a common refrain for Trinis to define a person as someone who "does do" something. "Eli does do woodwork." "Makeda does workout." "Penny does ice cakes." "Olivia does game." These were common statements by the peers of the participants. There was no idea

of a homogenous public identity⁴³ in which people were defined by one activity alone. Instead, participants described their identities as composites of multiple roles, such as mother, father, friend, and their occupation. A demonstrable interest could be an important facet of someone's composite identity, especially if it helped them to build their social confidence. Keera, for example, was a 24-year-old who was picking up odd jobs here and there as she studied for a Human Resources diploma part-time. She felt that she did not have much to show compared to her school mates from secondary school, as many of them had already finished their degrees or started families. As a part-time hobby, she had started experimenting with different styles in doing her own makeup, hair, and nails. YouTube videos were a key part of this as she watched tutorials to learn skills and try out different techniques. She would try new eyeshadow looks, an ombre lip, or stiletto nails in private. She would scan a number of different YouTube beauty channels and try to find a mix of styles she liked, new trends, and women who were of similar skin tone or who had natural African hair texture. When she felt that she had mastered a look, she would feel comfortable to debut it. This would often be when she went out with her friends. Eventually her friends started asking her for tips and recommendations, or if she could do their nails or hair. Keera enjoyed doing hair, makeup, and nails. Finding out about new products, techniques, and trends became a passion for her. She was able to demonstrate know-how through her own looks, and through testing her expertise on other people and through giving advice. For instance, Keera had switched from her relaxed hair to her natural hair and had started growing it out. People would ask her for tips on which products were working, and she would extol the merits of Jamaican Black Castor Oil or deep conditioning strategies to prevent breakage. Bit by

⁴³ See Miller (1994) *Modernity- An Ethnographic Approach: Dualism and Mass Consumption in Trinidad*, which discusses the complex nature of public identity in Trinidad.

bit she became known in her circle of friends and her neighbourhood as someone who “does do makeup.” Or if someone was looking for a manicure, she may be recommended as “Keera does do nails.” This was a claim she could make to a skill that enabled her to negotiate her social confidence as she felt that she was accepted and valued because she was successful at her interest. This was complicated, though, as she also felt pressure that she must always be “on point” or that failing in a look would diminish her credibility and adversely affect how people saw her. Maintaining her identity as someone who “does do makeup, hair, and nails” meant that she was always researching and trying new approaches on YouTube.

Another example that illustrates how Trinis used their hobbies to broker social confidence is Vishnu, a 35-year-old man who “does make beads.” Vishnu worked in a full-time job at a family-owned grocery store, but he made Perler bead craft items for order and sale. Perler beads are fusible plastic beads that are arranged into a pattern. He found most of his patterns online and sometimes took images and enlarged them to make the individual pixels visible so that he could place the beads into that design. Vishnu showed me some of his crafts. The deeper our discussion went, the more sombre he got, and he began to open up even more. When his father died, he went into a deep depression. He was focused only on helping his mother at home and would not leave the house. He became obese and felt locked into a cycle of despair. One of his friends came to him and had a serious discussion about the turn his life had taken. He started searching for anything that would make him happy or think back to a time when he was happier. He remembered his Perler beading hobby from when he was younger and decided to go on YouTube and start learning more about it. He then started working towards mastery through videos of increasing difficulty and produced more and more creations. Vishnu felt that this contributed to getting his mind refocused on something positive and gave him

something to talk to people about. He did not make a significant amount of money from his small business selling the bead crafts, but he ascribed a great deal of gratification to his production and continuous learning. This joy came from time spent alone pursuing his passion, and also from showing it to his friends or to regular customers who would sometimes inquire about his craft. Vishnu was able to negotiate his social confidence by showing his craftwork, talking about his interest with his peers who worked in the shopping complex, and giving his pieces away as gifts. Building a skill was not a panacea for social success, however. This social interplay was carefully navigated as Vishnu had also experienced being made fun of because of his interest. He was selective about who he showed his work to and discussed his hobby with. He felt safe with some of the people who worked at the shops near to the small grocery, and used his interest as a topic of discussion that could help build his relationships. Along with instrumentalising his learning to build esteem with his peers, he was also aware that social relations were complex and would feel out the person or the situation before exposing his interests. As much as mastering the techniques of his craftwork, skills in understanding the social context were also an integral part of successfully demonstrating his hobby and building relationships. As Vishnu told me, quoting a local saying, “monkey know which tree to climb.”

Martin, aged 58, worked as a taxi driver at a hotel in Port of Spain where he was part of a stand of other taxi drivers that he saw daily. Many of these drivers used YouTube tutorials to diagnose problems and conduct repairs on their vehicles. Martin was also interested in learning these skills, and so he asked his daughter to show him how to use YouTube. His daughter, and later his grandchildren, showed him how to use different aspects of the computer, the internet, and YouTube tutorials in particular. Martin ended up using his mobile phone more than the laptop at home to look up videos. He became an avid viewer of tutorials in order to deal with

issues relating to his vehicle. He avoided going to the mechanic when he had a problem and instead would play around with the engine and search and research resources online. He and his colleagues on the stand would regularly talk about their experiences fixing their own vehicles. Being able to claim that you solved a problem yourself using the internet instead of a mechanic became a source of pride at the stand. Martin found utility in the practicality of using YouTube with the financial incentive of avoiding mechanics' fees. He was also motivated by the pleasure of playing around to learn something that he could use to solve a problem himself.

These expressions of expertise constituted integral facets in constructing social confidence. They involved a complicated set of practices, however. Building expertise played a significant role in feeling that one could add value to relationships and enact social confidence. However, there was no guarantee that becoming more proficient in content would translate into greater social confidence. There were instances, for example, when participants were seen as “know it alls” when they tried to demonstrate expertise or when their private appraisals of their work did not match with the esteem offered by their peers. Sociality is a complex landscape, and instrumentalising learning is nuanced in its negotiations. Social confidence is an important problematic in this. For example, 25-year-old Shaqua found that when she showed her crafts to her friends, she was able to claim an identity that enabled her to find a niche in the group. However, she also complained about jealousy. Sometimes when she felt that she had improved or perfected skills, she realised that within the group there were expressions of disdain among members, and these complicated how she felt. This was an example of the variegated and textured complexity of relationships.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ See Wilson (1973) where he uses a metaphor of “crab antics” to describe status competition, hierarchies

Conclusion

My study discovered a vibrant ecology of out-of-school learning in Belleton. This supports Sefton-Green's (2012) arguments that to understand learning there must be a deeper appreciation of the vivid array of learning practices taking place outside of institutions. Participants practised informal learning in these everyday relationships in nuanced ways to develop skills, gain mastery, and enact social confidence. These processes may have been linked to professional development, entrepreneurial aspiration, feelings of holistic personal development, and improvements to their quality of life. This study builds on the foundational work of Prentice (2012b, 2015) in Trinidad, which found that pleasure was an important element in informal learning and meaning-making among Trinis, who chart and craft their own knowledge construction in ways that are relevant to their lives. My observations in Belleton show that besides learning as linked to any primary vocation, Trinis were practising learning centred on a wide range of hobbies and interests. This coincides with Ito et al.'s (2009, 2013) argument that interest is an important driver in learning and how this learning becomes practised in a sociality.

While Ito et al.'s observations of U.S. kids emphasise the importance of online communities, my findings with respect to adults in Trinidad and Tobago suggest that there is a strong interplay of online and offline community spaces.

My findings also suggest that Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory is applicable to the context of Trinidad and Tobago as this out-of-school learning is characterised by its informality and embeddedness in processes of doing and sociality. Situated learning theory

and how people compete for prestige in the Caribbean.

emphasises the role of communities of practice in which learners gain mastery in a community that shares similar interests. This is supported in instances of learning where people coalesce around thematic interests in Trinidad and Tobago, such as gaming. I argue, however, that participants engage in informal learning that is not only embedded in a community based on the specific interest, but which is also performed across a range of everyday communities and relationships. Penny's cake-making and Vishnu's beading are examples of the importance of non-interest-specific everyday relationships in shaping learning practices. This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter. These findings support Wenger-Trayner et al.'s (2015) work emphasising how the ecology of communities shapes the landscape of learning and the identity negotiations and boundary crossings that navigating this territory entails. My findings for Bellefont suggest that non-content-specific communities and relationships within families, peer groups, and everyday spaces are critical to learning and enacting social confidence.

In unpacking the social practice of this everyday learning, I discovered that not only do Trinis use their everyday relationships to provide inputs into their learning, but they also often instrumentalise their learning to build their relationships. Trinis use their informal learning to broker their identity as people who are able to "do" or perform skills. Performance and construction of successful identities were used to negotiate their social confidence in their relationships. Although discourse on digital media often emphasises collaboration (Donelan, Kear & Ramage, 2010; Tapscott & Williams, 2006), this study shows that while relationships are important in learning, digital media is actually often used to provide spaces of privacy where participants can learn, experiment, and hone their skills before they feel confident enough to share it with others for feedback and to negotiate their social confidence among family and peers. This opportunity to use digital media (such as YouTube) as safe spaces in which to fail in private

is important to Trinis who feel that this contrasts with their fear of failure in public, which is in turn associated with their experiences of being shamed for failing in formal education. This cartography of the knowledge society reveals the complexity of how Trinis instrumentalise their sociality in their learning, and their learning in their relationships. Inherent in these processes are a range of dynamics of social practice as participants negotiate their social confidence through navigating private and public spaces of learning through digital media.

My observations of the critical role of identity in using learning to enact social confidence supports arguments by Sefton-Green and Erstad (2013) on the importance of identity as a concept in the learning lives of individuals and the sociality in which they are embedded. Participants used their informal learning to construct complex identities that incorporated their “doing.” “They does do” was a common Trini phrase in describing who someone was in the community. Becoming fluent enough in a skill that one had the confidence to perform it in front of others was an essential part of the identities of Trinis in my study. They instrumentalised this to build positive associations in spite of failures within formal education or other aspects of their lives. This interplay of learning and identity was foundational to their capacity to enact social confidence among participants in their everyday lives and communities.

Chapter 6

Knowledge Finders, Seekers, and Makers in the Field

Local Literacies at Play:

Finding Out, Trying Over, and Making Meaning in Trinidad



Figure 11. A Belleton crafter's desk

Chapter Five (5) introduced a set of practices surrounding informal digital media use in Belleton. This chapter builds on this to examine specific skills, literacies, and fluencies that were involved in this learning. Increasing ICT access through greater availability of devices,

connectivity, and applications has been a key focal area of a range of policy and interventions in the Caribbean region (Dunn, 2012; Mallalieu, 2007). Emerging scholarship in the region suggests that there is a deeper need to understand ICT use, the literacies people develop, and how they apply these to opportunities for informal and lifelong learning (Dunn & Johnson-Brown, 2012; Mohammid, 2016). Dunn argues that ‘competence in a range of information literacies is perhaps the emerging lingua franca in the Information Economy’ (2010, p. 341). This intersects with a growing body of literature that argues that effective use of new media is linked to development of literacies (Aufderheide, 1992; Bawden, 2008; Hobbs, 2010; Jenkins, Purushotma, Welgel, Clinton, & Robison, 2009) and fluencies (Papert & Resnick, 1995). The media literacy movement delineates skills that embody critical analysis, knowledge assembly, and production (Aufderheide, 1992; Bawden, 2008). Hobbs (2010) argues that media literacy skills are life skills that are necessary to navigate an information-rich society, and identifies five (5) core competencies: the ability to access, analyse and evaluate, create, reflect, and act. Jenkins et al. (2009) suggest that participatory culture is the new future: one that is marked by affiliations such as formal and informal membership in communities, expressions through creative production, collaborative problem-solving, and circulation of media content. In order to enjoy, exploit, or be afforded this opportunity, Jenkins et al. argue that participants need a range of competencies for full participation and propose a series of eleven (11) skills: play, performance, simulation, appropriation, multitasking, distributed cognition, collective intelligence, judgement, transmedia navigation, networking, and negotiation. Sims (2012) critiques this idea(1) of “participatory culture” for presenting a version of social life that is too normative instead of representing the complex social practices taking place. He cautions against reducing these practices to overly individualist and voluntary notions of society.

This chapter examines the types of skills, literacies, and fluencies that Trinis negotiate in their informal learning and everyday sociality through the three key processes of finding out, trying over, and making meaning. I first, unpack the practices involved in a genre of participation that Trinis described as “finding out” as participants used a number of critical skills to search, curate, and refine their analysis of information in an ecology of online and offline spaces and relationships. The chapter next explores how informal learning was often non-linear and incorporated practices of “trying over.” Here I use examples of microenterprise crafting to illustrate experiential and experimental learning that incorporates failure and remix. The chapter concludes with a case study of a father who pursued a passion for cooking. I use this case study to unpack how processes of meaning making were critical in learning practice among participants. It argues that beyond content-specific knowledge, meaning making is an important problematic that involved fluencies in understanding, navigating, and constructing contexts (Edwards, Biesta, & Thorpe, 2009; Erstad et al., 2016). This chapter demonstrates that instrumentalising learning for constructing meaning and building social confidence in relationships is a complex and messy engagement that demands a range of skills in performing knowledge in social contexts.

Finding Out: Doing, (Re)search, and Relationships

Trinis did not identify with the term “knowledge society” to describe what they were doing online or their everyday practices of gaining, using, repurposing, or constructing knowledge. Instead, when asked what they were doing online, they often said that they were “Finding out...” “Finding out” emerged as an important genre of participation among Trinis. Ito et al. (2009) propose a conceptual framework that is ecological rather than categorical and argue that a genre-based approach centred on participation is more holistic than taxonomies focused on

technology. Trinis told me that they used the internet to “find out” how to do everything from making a sheet, cooking a dish, learning to dance, playing a game, practising math, to fixing a phone. On close examination of the processes at work, it became clear that this “finding out” was not a matter of a passive viewer soaking up information on how to do something and then following these instructions by rote to reach their aim. Instead, “finding out” was a dynamic and active process that involved an interplay of searching for relevant information, judgement, critical thinking, and creative application and modification of this information in processes of “trying it out.” This was achieved through dialogic and sometimes dialectic practices that intertwined making with feedback from family and peers. Trust and safety played important roles in “finding out” as participants brokered their knowledge construction and social confidence through a search that entailed looking and doing in privacy and in social settings. Critical and creative thinking were integral to successfully navigate this learning and to enact social confidence.

“Finding” was an active movement implying seeking, looking, and being able to critically assess and creatively apply knowledge in practice and social contexts to construct material inputs and social confidence. Vossoughi and Gutiérrez (2014) emphasise movement and boundary crossings as facets of practice in learning:

...there is a tendency for research on learning to emphasise the “vertical” movements, that is, linear trajectories from novice to expert, often within a single setting or set of educational experiences. The risk here lies in overlooking a world of developmental experiences and processes that scholars within this tradition refer to as “horizontal” forms of learning (Engeström, 1996; Gutiérrez, 2008) ... the opportunities for learning that

emerge as people, tools, practices, and interests move across settings and across the social contexts or activity systems that constitute any given setting. (Vossoughi, & Gutiérrez, 2014, p. 609)

“Finding out” involved an exploration of a set of paths and contexts in the cartography of the knowledge society, and “developing” involved savviness to learn and instrumentalise this learning to enact social confidence. To be successful in this endeavour, the individual must develop a repertoire of skills. This skill set was one that equipped the seeker with the discernment and resourcefulness to reach, refine, and redefine his or her goal. These processes were fluid and in constant evolution and development. The terrain of the finding was not a fixed online space. It existed at the intersection of both the online and the offline. It was embedded in interplays of searching, looking, and doing. In order to “find out” something, Trinis did not only look for the answer to be handed to them. They found the solution and reached their goal by interacting with the problem in an interplay of privacy and embeddedness in relationships. For instance, to find out how to make a dish, the recipe and tutorial videos were part of the process for homemakers and hobby-cooks. Finding the correct recipe and skimming the best resources by seeking the most relevant tutorials were part of a successful “finding out.” Applying this knowledge to making the dish, however, was a key ingredient in the process, as was finding opportunities to play with and remix the content and refine the search online for resources based on feedback from their attempts at executing the recipes. Learning by doing and processes of making were important components of interest-driven learning in Trinidad and Tobago. This experiential, in-practice learning was situated in everyday contexts. It was not based on a detached or abstract knowledge base, but instead was very much embedded in acts of doing, and

in the individual having the fluency to find and translate knowledge into personally productive, socially situated outcomes. It involved competency in multimodal literacies in ever-evolving, everyday contexts where information could be made into meaningful products and into meaning itself. The skills and fluencies in successfully “finding out” were not limited to subject matter, but also included social contexts, as participants refined their skills to instrumentalise their learning in their relationships and to build their social confidence. I argue that success in learning is multidimensional and includes finding ways to negotiate this learning into social contexts in order to enact social confidence. It was important, then, to build fluencies in being able to “find out” how to successfully garner, create, and share knowledge in ways that contributed to relationships and did not alienate peers. The following cases delve deeper to unpack the practice of “finding out.” They illustrate an emergent body of literacies consisting of a range of creative and critical thinking in order to seek out appropriate and relevant information, and streamline these into productive goals that enabled participants to build social confidence.

Trinis were looking up information online and shaping and reshaping their own learning trajectories in ways that were embedded in the complex sociality of their everyday lives. The case of Eli Marcano a 29-year-old man in East Belleton who practised woodwork, provides an in-depth examination of how informal learning involved nuanced processes of “finding out” using digital media and relationships. Eli lived with his grandmother and worked at the local council as a manual labourer. Only at the very end of our second conversation, however, did he talk about working at the council. He had always referred to himself as a woodworker. Eli did not study for formal qualifications in woodwork at school. This was typical of the majority of participants in Belleton who started pursuing their interest in their hobby outside of their formal education. Eli started woodworking by helping his uncle who was a woodworker. He was not in

any formal apprenticeship, but he wanted to expand his knowledge, become more versed in the particularities of woodwork, and attain more specialised skills. Instead of enrolling in a course, Eli logged onto his laptop and went online to start exploring more about the woodworking craft. When his laptop broke, he logged on using his low-cost Digicel Alcatel smart phone and invested in a data plan. He didn't buy a replacement laptop because he now had new priorities of starting his own small woodworking business and he needed to save. He continued to go online to learn more and more about woodworking in a voracious quest to understand more. It became a quest, not just for the basics of woodwork he had been helping with in the workshop but for something much more specialised. He started delving deeper and deeper, searching for wood treatments and new techniques and approaches to produce quality and lasting craftsmanship. When he was building a new desk for a neighbour in his community, he went on YouTube to look up different styles and techniques. He would also go on YouTube when he did not have a set project to learn about types of machinery. He wanted to become versed in how to use the best tools. He did not have access to all the tools yet but invested in them piece by piece in a process of building not only his tool collection but also a range of skills in how to use them, and a repertoire in his area as a skilled woodworker who can be trusted to produce quality craftsmanship. Woodworking had become a way of augmenting his income, but Eli's aspirations were to own his own small business where he could focus on woodworking. He said that money was not his major motivator, that he loved it. His enjoyment and passion for the craft motivated him to spend his time looking up new ways to become a better woodworker.

Using the internet to find resources had become a primary strategy for Eli to learn more about woodworking and techniques that he could apply and experiment with. YouTube was his first point of searching to expand his knowledge base. He felt that he had found his own way of

learning that suited him.

Eli said, *“YouTube is the best teacher.”*

I asked him, *“Why do you think YouTube is the best teacher?”*

Eli said, *“Because you can ask anything and you will get 50 different ways of doing it.*

You can find the one most convenient to your style.”

Eli may have been watching videos on YouTube, but the framing of this as a process of asking underscored a key dynamic of the YouTube experience in Bellefontaine. Trinis said that they watched or even listened to YouTube, but they often also talked about the process of asking or YouTubing as an active pursuit. There was a level of autonomy, critical thinking, and self-management of their knowledge-seeking that was, after all, ultimately framed as a search. Trinis were searchers for knowledge on YouTube, and they partook in a series of decision-making to craft this search. Eli’s framing of why YouTube was useful to him was telling of this. YouTube was seen as a teacher, but this was not a relationship necessarily where a teacher imposed a curriculum. Instead, the learning process was driven by what the viewer wanted to ask. The viewer, like Eli, then was more than a passive consumer in this equation or a learner who was consuming an imposed curriculum through a set pedagogy. Instead, when I inquired more about Eli’s use of YouTube, and he talked through it while he navigated the site, it was clear that he was an active participant in managing his learning process. “Asking” became an important step involving a series of decisions as to what was already known, what built upon what had already been learned, and what was useful. This was the same curiosity that he demonstrated on the shop floor when he felt that he “forced himself to become an apprentice.” He was maximising his

opportunities to find information and learn skills that were relevant to him by deciding what to ask YouTube. Of course, YouTube was not a monolithic entity, but there were a number of different channels and YouTubers. Eli played a role in crafting and curating a cumulative journey towards mastery of his skills by defining his own goals and getting feedback from people he produced work for or to whom he showed new pieces.

Eli's learning process involved a critical appraisal of how he could best tailor his experience online. Curiosity and "asking" continued to play a key role in this. While he talked about this ability to have his questions answered on YouTube as its key benefit, he also felt it was embroiled in a limitation of YouTube. Eli felt both empowered and constrained in his ability to have his questions answered on YouTube. On the one hand, he felt that he could not get all the answers to his specific questions via the videos, and he felt limited by YouTube's levels of interactivity. On the other hand, Eli did not feel he needed to go to a face-to-face class to achieve the interaction he desired. Instead, he started searching online for ways to augment his learning experience by accessing a space where he could find answers to specific questions. Eli came upon a series of forums and message boards. He started scanning these and reading the responses or trying out a couple of questions to assess their relevance and utility. He eventually found one focused on woodworking in the tropics and started participating in it.

Other participants in the forum were from the Caribbean and South America. Here they would discuss issues that were relevant to them. Eli continued to watch YouTube videos to learn new techniques and approaches that interested him and use the forum to obtain detailed answers to more specific questions. He found that he did not have to ask many of the questions he had because other people on the forum had already asked them. There was a shared interest in many of the same issues. Eli learned more about the best woods to use in the tropics, where to access

them through distributors, and how to safeguard against pitfalls that he was facing, such as the challenges of the oiliness of the wood and how it compromised long-term quality in the humid tropics. He also answered questions on the forum and was happy to share responses to questions that fellow woodworkers asked that he may also have faced or known the answer.

Eli was motivated by feedback from people he knew when he made pieces for them. He was a member of a church and started crafting pieces for the church or for the congregation when members needed a cupboard or a desk. Their feedback was an important encouragement to him. He was reluctant to show them his work if he did not feel that they would find his piece up to par. Eli felt great satisfaction to see the form and function of an object exude quality craftsmanship to satisfy a purpose elevating something as mundane as a wardrobe or a cabinet or a door, to something he could feel proud about and that would be appreciated by people he knew. The input of people who had no subject matter expertise, but were instead part of his everyday relationships, was a critical part of his practice. The feedback from these people became key measures of his success and showed him where he needed to concentrate his efforts to improve his skills. Eli participated in a landscape of learning that consisted of an ecosystem of communities (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015). This was not tied to a single community of practice but traversed multiple communities online and offline. His use of YouTube and the Forum became resources that Eli tapped into based on a needs assessment of the knowledge and skill that he was trying to build. He felt, however, that his skill development would never stop and while he had disliked school, he enjoyed this idea of continually learning⁴⁵. There would always be ways to improve as he would receive feedback from his relationships with his family, friends,

⁴⁵ See Blum's (2016) anthropology on learning vs schooling in a U.S higher education context.

or clients. This reliance on an interplay of digital media resources and feedback from everyday relationships was typical of the social practice of informal learning in Belleton.

Ria Sahai was a 33-year-old bank teller. Ria did not consider herself particularly good at crafts, but she was an avid user of Instagram and YouTube and had made all the soft furnishings in her bedroom. Instagram use had started growing during my study, and YouTube was used by all of my participants. Creativity⁴⁶ and crafting may not have been primary characteristics that Ria attributed to her identity as a mother and bank worker, but “making” was an important facet of her everyday life. In fact, her main hobby and stress relief centred on sewing soft furnishings⁴⁷. Here she used a range of creative and critical thinking skills that encompassed multiple modalities of learning in her research. Ria decided she wanted to sew a bedsheet around Christmas. She felt it would be cheaper than a store-bought one. She could get exactly what she wanted and she felt it was an exciting endeavour. She had seen some simple styles on Instagram, and it inspired her to give it a try. Ria went on to YouTube to look at tutorials. She bought fabric from a Syrian fabric store in Port of Spain and started on her project. Her mother had always sewn, so she had access to an old machine. Ria had never been interested in it while growing up, but now as she was trying out making the fitted bedsheet, she asked her mother for tips. The bedsheet enterprise grew into a makeover of the bedroom. She made pillowcases and matching cushions. Ria would scroll through Instagram looking for ideas and then watch YouTube tutorials to get the specifics. She adapted the designs to suit what she wanted. The fabric she

⁴⁶ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine creativity in detail. It is important to acknowledge that conceptually, “creativity” can be unpacked to reveal a range of dimensions and contestations. A growing body of scholarship is engaging with and expanding with it as an element in and frame in learning. Sefton-Green et al. (2011) provide a useful edited volume as a starting point for examining emerging perspectives which applies this discourse to examine creativity in learning, teaching, pedagogy and the school system.

⁴⁷ For discussion on the anthropology of making things see Miller (2009)

chose for the bedsheet was tan with olive coloured leaves. The store did not have enough fabric for the whole sheet, so she used some olive fabric at the top. She then tried to form some leaf cut-outs on her cushions. Ria felt that her attempts were often a disaster to start with and looked nothing like the Instagram pictures. A main part of the learning process for her was figuring out what she had done wrong and trying again.

Ria used a number of different resources in her learning process. A multi-modal learning of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic styles emerged in her “finding out” which approach would be the best fit. Ria had to make decisions as to which fabrics to choose and techniques to adopt. She did not settle on a single style but instead sifted through a range of tutorials. Ria herself didn’t put up any pictures of her crafts on Instagram. Instead, the content she was creating was largely offline. She preferred finding the material online to teach her to sew than solely relying on her mother to teach her or to go to a class because she felt she could tailor her own experience. She tapped into her relationships for feedback, however. Her best friend gave her opinions on what she did or did not like. Her mother had dabbled in sewing when she was younger and became an interactive resource that she could go to for tips.

Some of these skills were content-specific, such as crafting techniques, but many of them were also wider media literacies that are transferable to other contexts. Ria’s ability to search, find, and process information and define, modify, and assess her own learning agendas were core to the success of her ongoing learning endeavours. Her learning was not limited to a project but was an ongoing process. She grew in competency in her crafts, but she also applied this competency to other areas of her life to feel that she was adding value to her relationships, building meaning, and enacting social confidence. Ria spent her days making lunches, presentations, and decisions. Processes of “making” were subtly embedded in taken-for-granted

ways in her life. She used digital media for recipes, PowerPoint images, and recommendations on which products to buy and where her children should go to school. She practised a range of literacies to be able to process complex information and translate these into meaningful endeavours. Everyday, informal learning strategies were seamlessly intertwined into Ria's processes of making a life for herself, making meaning in her relationships, and negotiating her social confidence through successfully mediating her knowledge into these relationships. Her online learning involved a critical appraisal of resources, knowing where to look and what to find, and defining and redefining her "finding" strategies through iterative acts of "trying," which were common to the informal learning practices described among participants in Belleton.

Trying Over: Failure, Experimentation, and Non-Linear Learning

Walking through a Christmas market in San Manuel meant passing through clouds of the sweet and slightly acrid smell of sorrel and tamarind jellies and the warmth of nutmeg and cinnamon as one neared the ponche de creme and the heady scent of puncheon rum took over. Many of the vendors had traditional recipes that they had used for years. Some of these were being flavoured and remixed by some of the artisans as they played with their recipes and their packaging with ideas they found online, especially through YouTube. A few of the stalls at the market were run by people from the Belleton community. Most of them were avid YouTube viewers who admitted to finding content online to gain ideas, inspiration, techniques, and tips to help with their crafts. Gauntlett (2011, p. 8) argues that there is a growing movement from a "sit back and be told" culture towards a "making and doing" culture with the internet playing a role as a key resource in this transformation. The process of making is increasingly being formed as a social, economic, and technological movement that often uses digital media and involves the acquisition and application of practical skills in creation, construction, remix, and appropriation

(Anderson, 2012; Brahm & Werner, 2013; Hatch, 2013; Kelly, 2013; Niemeyer & Gerber, 2015). There is a growing inquiry into the intersections of this making with learning (Halverson & Sheridan, 2014). In Belleton, the act and art of making were not only relegated to a delineated community of professional craftsmen, but “makers” were intermingled roles in the everyday lives of Trinis who actively pursued interest-driven learning to support their hobbies or solve everyday problems.

One of the stalls in the Christmas market was run by a Belleton woman named Ameera. She was one of the Belleton Trinis who was parlaying their hobbies into a commercial interest. This initially only happened with a few of my participants, but as my study progressed I observed that more people were trying to move their hobby into an entrepreneurial avenue.⁴⁸ This was often a sideline to another fixed job or their main role as a homemaker. Ameera’s story is typical of how “finding out” was linked to being open to making mistakes and “trying over.” This “trying over” formed a type of learning that was non-linear and iterative. In order to successfully pursue their own learning agendas online, participants worked to define what knowledge areas they needed to learn more about, and they employed creative and critical thinking and judgment to sift through and find what was applicable and relevant to them online. They developed skills that supported experiential and experimental learning. Implicit in this experimentation was an acknowledgement that their learning would incorporate failure as a part of moving forward to reaching, refining, and (re)defining goals.

Ameera was in her late thirties. She had two (2) children and made baby clothes and

⁴⁸ Luckman (2015) highlights the politics involved in creative micro-enterprise industries such as crafting. She echoes Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) in describing the validity of these economic strategies while also considering challenges such as the limitations often faced by artisans including an inability to scale up their businesses and sustain themselves with the economic return on their craft.

stuffed animals. Her stall was a rainbow of pastel colours reminiscent of the cotton candy sellers that peddled their goods on the Trinidad highways. Bibs and onesies hung on tiny clothes pegs across the stall. Some were patterned with tiny stars. She had embroidered flowers on others and created patchwork designs on the rest. Bright felt dogs with giant glass eyes were lined up on the back of the stall. She frequented the markets and had a spot in a monthly market near Port of Spain. She had also been trying to get some of her baby clothes stocked in a children's store on the main road in San Manuel. Her main sales so far, though, came from her Facebook page.

Ameera started making children's clothes when her own children were born. Baby clothes were expensive, and she felt that it was something special to make a gift for her baby. She described the process as "trying over" in a process of "constant trial and error." The craftsmanship and stitching were neat and precise. She did not allow anything to make it to the stall that she found sub-par. Ameera took pride in her display and the quality of her products. Her sewing room at home, however, was a departure from this. Draws were littered with cast away and failed attempts and prototypes. Ameera had amassed a collection of old "try-outs." These early attempts of her work bore little resemblance to the polished final products that she displayed. Ameera said it was a "process" before any item reached a quality worthy of being sold. There were onesies with mismatched leg holes. There were oddly shaped stuffed animals that looked like a cross between a dog, a bear, and a duck. There were unfinished collars and examples of basting gone wrong. These were only some of the failed attempts that survived. Many had been torn apart for buttons or fabric for patchwork. For every completed work, there were many failed attempts. Ameera was one of the few participants who started using Pinterest. She used Pinterest for inspiration and some patterns, and YouTube for tutorial videos.

Ameera spent her evenings on Pinterest while her children did their homework. She had

boards called “New Projects,” “Baby Clothes,” and “Fluffy Friends” where she collected ideas. She pinned anything that caught her eye. Her creations were often an amalgamation of a few ideas that she put a twist on. When she made some cloth baby shoes, she opted for breathable cotton that would be comfortable for children in the tropics. She would often jump off Pinterest to an external link if there were patterns or more ideas. This time spent searching for inspiration was relaxing to her. She could get lost in this time among the smell of dinner wafting in the air, the aroma of hot roti or macaroni boiling or eggplant or tomato cooking on the stove. The children were in their rooms or lying on the floor reading books for homework assignments, writing essays, or doing sums. Ameera sat with her laptop searching through Pinterest or skimming through YouTube videos. There were a few crafters that she followed. She usually searched for particular styles or questions on techniques. She had perfected some of her stitches and finishes but was in a constant state of trying out and learning new ones. Improvement and iterative learning were important skills in Ameera’s learning trajectories. This fascination with finding new fodder for her projects was not limited to the evenings. She downloaded the Pinterest and YouTube Apps on her phone and would top up her data just so she could continue searching while in queues at the grocery or in idle moments in the car waiting for her children to come out of school. Ameera often watched YouTube videos she had saved while she was about to try a new project. She would watch the video and pause it. She would also stop it and refer to another video and come back to it for a particular tip or technique.

Fern, a 44-year-old domestic cleaner who made dried flower arrangements as a hobby, was another example of how “trying over” and remixing content was a common part of following instructions for many Trinis who used YouTube. Fern would rarely follow a set arrangement style of a video, but instead she would go through a range of resources online,

intermingling this with her own ideas and feedback from her family and friends. Like other participants in the study, being able to scan, sort, and arrange information from various sources were key competencies in being able to effectively use information in her life. “Following” implies a certain passivity, but these Trinis actively searched out resources and critically appraised and re-searched/researched until they had pieced together a matrix of the most relevant content to them. This was then applied in constant dialogue with doing and with their relationships, in which they would refine their practices in attempts to broker social confidence. The learning process involved them trying something out and tweaking their doing and also their finding of information that would be most applicable to them reaching their goals. Ameera did this when she was sewing children’s clothes, shoes, or new stuffed animal patterns for the market. Caroline, a 27-year-old who enjoyed crafting but did not sell her goods, is another example of this. She was trying out a pattern for a stuffed whale but decided that she wanted to incorporate scraps of fabric that she already had, so she merged the original pattern with a series of other tutorials on upcycling, patchwork, and quilting. Like other Trinis in Belleton, her learning process involved amalgamations of practices of searching, reflection, trying out, doing, retrying, and re-assessment to not only reach but define and refine her goals and her pathways for getting to them. This type of non-linear learning involved a complex of creative and critical thinking, judgement, and decision-making skills. As these Trinis practised their craft and made projects, they were also building capacity and fluency in skills that enabled them to access, assess, and apply ideas and techniques, and to become more confident and competent learners and doers with these two roles intersecting. It was evident that they were not mutually exclusive, but in practice, “learning” and “doing” intersected and interconnected in ways that supported each other with no clear boundaries between the two. The privacy to experiment in their learning

gave participants a sense that they could take risks and try out new ways of doing, without the pressure associated with trying to perform in public. They felt that they could instrumentalise their skills into more social settings when they were ready. This was important to them in feeling that they could take risks in their craft and navigate these in their negotiations of social confidence.

These learning practices by participants did not follow a set curriculum, but they did interplay with the existing communities in which they were embedded. Ameera would have sometimes received advice from her fellow crafters at the market, or on a rarer occasion asked questions on YouTube. The chief source of her feedback, however, as with Fern and Caroline, had been from her family and friends. As she had started selling more of her crafts, she increasingly relied on feedback from her customers or potential customers. She gleaned this feedback at the market and also on Facebook. Sometimes, she overtly asked for people's opinions, but more often suggestions and ideas emerged through more general discussion about their lifestyles, their children, and what they were looking for in the market. Ameera had become more adept at picking up subtle cues that might inform her craft and her trade. She had no formal market research strategy but found it useful to join a number of Trini mothers' groups on Facebook. She did not sell her goods here, and the marketing or direct sale of merchandise was often frowned upon. Again, this was a much more subtle and sublime process of trying to understand what, as she said, "works and doesn't work." She listened to the mothers' complaints and their descriptions of what their children were interested in. She tried to get inspiration from them and assess their needs through deep processes of listening and reflection and then trial and error as she tried to adapt, improve, tweak, or expand her repertoire of skills.

Skill mastery was integral to fulfilment of these crafters in Bellefontaine. Their interest-driven

learning through “trying over” was adaptive and responsive to an ongoing needs assessment of what type of products and skills they needed to build. They did not have a fixed curriculum; instead, there was a fluidity to their learning enterprise. They made decisions about what they needed to better understand and what skills to build, and they assessed areas in which they were deficient. This level of critical thinking and creativity was core to their practice. They felt that they must get the techniques right and followed a disciplined process until they mastered a stitch, pattern, or crafting step. It was often important to them that their work was high quality and looked professional. Mastery was important too, and they felt that they only attained this through a reflexive process of actually making, doing, and trying. Their fluid curriculum, therefore, reflected the constant negotiation of what they needed to master. It was common for them to practise until they achieved the skill level that they desired and that would bring positive feedback from their family and peers. While they may have been sitting in front of a screen, watching videos and had never uploaded any of her own, one may argue that they were very much active participants in their own learning-by-doing in their offline ecologies. Like many other interest-driven learners in Trinidad who cook, craft, tinker, make and try different hobbies, learning was something that was embedded in application, activity, reflection, and community. Only when they tried to make something did they understand what they needed to learn to better. It was by reflecting on their own process and getting feedback that they made judgements on what to do next in a fluid continuum of ongoing knowledge creation, sharing, and use. There were many mistakes made along the way. The learning process of these crafters was iterative, and while there was often initial frustration as they would have many versions before reaching the desired goal, these Trinis were developing new practices of learning.

Anthropological studies have emphasised the complex nature of failure and

experimentation in craft making (Graves, 1984; Schiffer & Skibo, 1987). Wallaert-Pêtre's (2001) study of pottery making in the Cameroon highlights how learning practices in crafting interplay strongly with cultural attitudes towards failure:

“Among the Dii, Duupa, and Doayo (apprentices or confirmed potters), potters refused systematically to construct new or overly complex vessels because they believed they could not successfully make them. They limit their efforts if they are not certain to succeed and consider mistakes and errors as negative.... Among the Fali, on the other hand, all potters were always ready to attempt new tasks, even if they knew they did not have the ability to succeed. They do not limit their efforts and believe that something can be learned even through failure. They consider unknown tasks to be a challenge. Thus, they adapt their skills to new tasks and learn through trial and error.” (Wallaert-Pêtre, 2001, p. 483)

Participants in my study consistently described their formal education in school as a culture that discouraged failure. Similar to the cases of the Dii, Duupa, and Doayai, this often meant that participants limited trying things that they felt they might fail at in school. As discussed in Chapter Four (4), if participants made a mistake in school, got low marks, or did not immediately take up a subject, their aptitude and attitude were questioned. Students who failed were often seen as not “being good” at certain subjects. For instance, if they were initially not good at sciences in school, they were often told: “you don’t have a mind” for sciences. There was a question of their aptitude and learners who failed often felt this failure was framed as an indictment on their own inherent capability. There was a high degree of comparison embedded in

the education system, and Trinis found it very competitive. One's failure was not an isolated or personal event in school but was pitched in comparison to peers who may have been doing better. One's capability to achieve was then tied to an attempt to never fail. One's attitude may be questioned, and the student may be blamed for a failure and chided for not making a good enough effort. Report cards often said that a student needed to try harder, but in a linear learning system, the content was often repeatedly delivered in the same fashion with no reflection on why one did not understand it initially and no room to adapt the learning process. If participants missed foundational elements, then they were behind the class and likely to stay behind as they were constantly playing catch up without the fundamentals. Interest-driven learning in Trinidad, such as in these crafters' cases, were demonstrations of how learning could be iterative, non-linear, and adaptive. They felt safe in their attempts, and there was no pressure to get attempts perfect the first time. They could determine the pace of their own learning and go back to problem areas or look for and figure out other ways to simplify complex problems until they were able to grasp the content or master the skills. By having been free to fail without a shame-based learning context, they felt more open to trying new projects. They were active participants as they then pushed themselves not only to master new skills but were motivated to experiment and practise different approaches and techniques to reach and (re)define their goals and have greater control over how these were socially enacted to negotiate social confidence.

Caroline, Fern, and Ameera expressed what was commonly said by participants in Belleton: that they had been gaining a set of skills that they did not feel were taught or appreciated in school. Failure was an essential part of gaining a new skill in their craft. It was only through a non-linear process that they were able to master a technique. They may need to source different tutorials, try different patterns, and revisit instructions before they gained

fluency in a particular skill or achieve the product that they had envisioned. Goal-setting and discipline were important to achieving this, but participants also recognised the role of mistakes and failed attempts. Fenton-O’Creevy et al. (2015) describe how failure is often associated with extreme negative emotions that mar one’s identity with feelings of incompetence. However, he goes on to demonstrate how people often leverage this failure in productive ways to become more resilient and ultimately enhance their competence through reflection and practice. These crafters initially saw unsuccessful attempts as failures, but as with the Fali tribe, they were so integrated into the process of trying, doing and making and in their own day-to-day skill mastery that they rarely saw them as failures anymore, but rather as simply steps in a non-linear process. They had to build on these mistakes in a reflexive way and may have needed to rethink or revisit their initial assumptions or attempts.

These crafters felt that they were able to express their own imagination through the craft by mixing and remixing ideas and adding their own twists. Ameera, for instance, tried out different colour schemes or unlikely fabric choices on the baby clothes. She had once tried to make a brown cotton crib sheet with puff painted hibiscus flowers that turned out to be a disaster. She played with the fabrics on the stuffed animals and added little embellishments. Sometimes her ideas worked, and other times they didn’t. The content she found online was a guide. This practice of remix was a popular one in Belleton where Trinis would often put a spin on what they were making. Ameera was one of a subsection of the Belleton participants who had started to parlay her hobby into a small business. More typical were Trinis like Caroline who used digital media resources in their learning on crafting as a hobby. Sometimes this meant improving their livelihoods through saving money. More often they were not making direct economic gains. However, they often felt that their quality of life was enhanced as they were able to express

themselves through creating and remixing content, and instrumentalising this in their relationships to build social confidence.

Making Meaning: Instrumentalising and Contextualising Learning for Social Confidence

Papert and Resnick (1995) argue that digital fluency demands not only knowing how to use technology but also to construct meaningful things with it. Scholarship on this digital fluency has focused largely on online creation, but my research demonstrates that Trinis practise fluency in a number of ways in both online and offline contexts, and develop the ability to contextualise information and create contexts. Harper's (1987) ethnographic work underscored the central role of coherence in being able to understand and apply knowledge and a certain purposefulness in being accepted as an expert. The case of Steven Jones, a 58-year-old auditor and home cook, permits an examination of the practices involved in learning and applying this expertise to create meaning and navigate contexts to build social confidence. Steven was an example of how out-of-school learning in Belleton was not abstract, but rather commonly situated in an ecosystem of applications and negotiation of literacies linked to fluency and fluidity in these contexts. These included both online and offline settings, including the everyday communities in which people were embedded. Participation, then, is not content specific or dependent on technology or platform. Instead, participation involves meaning-making⁴⁹ through social practices in assemblages that incorporate identities and expressions of expertise.

Food preparation has always been a practical aspect of Steven's life. He first started cooking when his mother would go out. He was the eldest and grew up in a single mother

⁴⁹ For further discussion on meaning-making and context see the edited volume by Erstad et al. 2016

household. When she would go to work or go out in the evenings, he would prepare meals for the family. They were basic at first: a combination of what little he had picked up from his mother or grandmother and experimentation with what worked and what burnt. When he got married, and he and his wife started finding practical ways to make a two working parent household function, he compromised and took the share of the cooking since his wife, who had just moved out of her parents' home, could not cook. Steven admitted that this wasn't the shorter end of the stick for him because while cooking had satisfied a utilitarian need, he loved to cook and he loved to learn, practise, and serve his family and social circle new dishes. He began to actively search online and spent hours on YouTube looking for ways to improve his technique and skills. There was a keen interplay between practicality, pleasure, and passion in the relationship that Steven had with cooking. constantly learning to produce new and better dishes, and presenting this expertise in his relationships. The processes of learning new dishes and techniques was an enjoyable one that he invested his time in, and which he felt that he could use to meaningfully contribute to building his social confidence.

Thomas and Seely Brown (2011) posit that the process of learning through making entails not only creating content but also constructing and reconstructing contexts through social practices and meaning making. Cooking for Steven had been elevated from a static and mundane routine to a constantly evolving learning process in which he could practise and produce for his family in a communal contribution. He linked cooking to emotions in that he could show that he cared for his family, and to a sense of satisfaction because his improvement did not occur in isolation, but was practised and contextualised in his most important relationships to enact social confidence. Edwards et al. (2009) deconstruct the stability of neat contexts and complicate a process of learning and contextualisation, arguing that:

rather than a thing, context is an outcome of activity or is itself a set of practices— contextualising rather than context...Practices are not bounded by context but emerge relationally and are polycontextual, i.e. have the potential to be realised in a range of strata and situations based upon participation in multiple settings (Tuomi- Gröhn, Engestrom, & Young, 2003). Here learning is the specific effect of practices of contextualisation rather than simply emerging within a context. (Edwards et al., 2009, p. 3)

It was in successfully contextualising his learning that Steven worked to enhance and enact social confidence and create meaning in his everyday life. Steven's work life was very much separate from his family, but the meals that he learned to perfect and produce were a direct way that he felt he enriched and added value to his relationships. He may have been sitting in front the computer alone or propping the tablet up to watch videos while he tried out new techniques in the kitchen by himself. He relished this opportunity. He did not participate in YouTube comment discussions, and his use of YouTube was mainly to watch videos, but this was not an isolated process as his private forays were brokered into creating expertise that he could use in his relationships. When Steven practised his skill in creating his dishes, he was engaged in a social learning process in which he elicited feedback from his family and friends. There was discussion on what was better about a particular dish or what they preferred. He was happy to get a sense of what worked and what didn't so he could go back and look up more and more videos to tweak the dish. He had once made a brioche that came out hard and chewy. His family loved everything else in the meal that Sunday but the brioche remained and they laughed

together about breaking their teeth as they feigned exaggerated motions of trying to pull the bread away from their mouths. He revisited YouTube videos to learn new techniques of using the yeast and experimented with using it dry. He then created a sponge by mixing the yeast with water, flour, and sugar. He would get his family to try samples of his different versions until he hit upon the perfect consistency. He would “like” a video he found useful, but he did not usually comment on YouTube videos online. However, he swapped ideas for technique with his friends and colleagues who were interested in learning. He carefully curated how he shared his interest and with whom. Steven used his culinary creations, expertise, and participation in his processes of learning in an interplay of privacy and sociality through which he could contextualise his learning to navigate social confidence and create meaning within his relationships.

Food played a central part in bonding with his wider family. For his daughter’s birthday, some aunts who were good cooks and Steven’s niece, who was a chef, came over to his house. They cooked together, swapping ideas with Steven sharing ideas he learned online in their raw form or through his own adaptation and amalgamation of various tips that he had found. His daughter, Ann-Marie, posted up a picture of his chicken cordon bleu and images of Sunday lunch macaroni pie, baked chicken, coo coo, callaloo, and beans to her Facebook page. Steven wasn’t on Facebook, but his daughter would show him the likes she got on her tablet. There was a social interplay of offline and online in Steven’s cooking learning and practice. This was derived from a learning system comprised of complex processes of Steven’s relationships with cooking and learning, his own needs for personal development and satisfaction, and his role in a community comprised of his family and loved ones. Steven was not embedded in a single community of experts. His participation was more akin to moving across the several communities and boundaries, described by Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) as a landscape of learning comprised of

several communities. Steven interacted with a number of different communities. His processes of learning were at the intersection of everyday communities that he manoeuvred. He obtained feedback and reflexively interacted with these communities within his home, professional, and online settings. He traversed his learning spaces in the same way he negotiated his everyday communities. These journeys were in fact inexorably linked.

When asked if he was pursuing any learning activity, Steven said that he was not in any formal training program. He had not been formally enrolled in an educational institution for decades. Learning, however, was part of his lifestyle and everyday practice of pleasure and practicality. An interconnectedness was demonstrated in Steven's relationship with learning and applying cooking techniques. The desire to cook was rooted both in the pragmatism of producing something meaningful for his family and the pursuit of something he enjoyed. The former seemed to validate the other in Belleton to prove that the activity was not a waste of time or an indulgence that adults used to avoid the pursuit of more practical endeavours. Based on how people talked about pastimes in Belleton, it was clear that, among older adults, playfulness and learning outside one's career for the sake of it often demanded the justification of a practical endeavour to warrant the activity's validity. Steven had not parlayed his cooking into a commercial career. He admitted that he had never thought of it in economic terms. He found that his interest in cooking and avid experimentation in learning new skills through YouTube tutorials and practising his hobby had given him an opportunity to become better at something that is core to his domestic role. This learning was not a direct economic contribution to the workplace but conferred value to him in a social and individualised context. He found that it brought joy to his direct social circle. It was also part of life that gave him balance, enjoyment, and personal fulfilment in becoming a better cook and also learning something new constantly.

He felt constantly learning had given him the opportunity to keep his mind engaged while offering a measure of stress relief and a focus on something other than work. There was a playfulness that Steven associated with his learning to cook, but it was still practical enough an endeavour to justify it. This was an intersection of pleasure and practicality that marked his learning enterprise. He was vibrant in his interest in cooking. He pursued it as a means of contributing to his family and also as a passion: it was clear that he enjoyed finding ways to continuously improve his skills as a cook and practise his interest with greater mastery. He was able to add to his social confidence as he felt that he could parlay his cooking through the material dishes and through his expertise to enhance his standing in his relationships in his family, at work, and with his peers. This practice of meaning-making was common in Belleton as learning was often undertaken initially in private using digital media, but was negotiated within an enmeshment of a range of relationships and the ability to demonstrate expertise in them.

Conclusion

The development of a number of media literacies and skills were important to Trinis as they tried to navigate the knowledge society. This observation supports a growing media literacy scholarship that underscores the importance of the skills users developed for effectively navigating the information rich knowledge society in which we live, These skills should be fostered in both formal and informal settings (Dunn, 2010; Hobbs, 2010; Jenkins et al., 2009). The skills I observed in Trinidad and Tobago intersected with and added to the literacies being recognised as important for people to participate effectively online and in knowledge construction, and to contextualise this knowledge to enact social confidence (Aufderheide, 1992; Bawden, 2008; Hobbs, 2010; Jenkins et al., 2009). Trinis perform experiential and experimental learning in private, and reflectively in their relationships. They practise a fluid range of skills that

are embedded in activities, and they often contrast this to more abstract notions of knowledge that they feel are entrenched in the framing of learning in traditional education. This reframing and reimagination of what learning can mean are exemplified through crafting, DIY, and cooking activities in Trinidad and Tobago. It illustrates the genres of literacies and fluencies encompassed in “finding out,” “trying over,” and “making meaning.” This framing supports Ito et al.’s (2009) ecological conceptual framework that proposes a genre-based approach centred on participation.

“Finding out” is an important genre of participation in Trinidad and Tobago that encompasses a number of practices and movements in a matrix of vertical and horizontal learning (Engeström, 1996; Gutiérrez, 2008; Vossoughi & Gutiérrez, 2014). It is not a passive experience of simply sitting in front a screen. Instead, it is an interplay of offline and online worlds involving reflexively learning and adapting content to refine, re(define), reach goals, and enact social confidence. In order to effectively “find out,” Trinis develop literacies that employ skills such as discovery, problem setting, problem-solving, critical thinking, and judgement. Their identities as learners in informal spaces involve a reskilling. They may sit passively to watch tutorials on YouTube, but this is only a part of the overall learning process. To view Trinis’ informal learning as passive is to overlook the wealth of skills that are being practised. They combine and remix information in interdisciplinary ways that intersect offline and online spaces. Participants converge multiliteracies through learning in ways that encompass visual, auditory, textual, tactual, and kinesthetic skills. This is often practised in tacit ways that are deeply embedded in their sociality. Learning, then, is not a separate instance or discrete act, but a way of being that is entrenched in everyday relationships and negotiates identities and feelings of social confidence. Participants demonstrated how they practise this learning as they create

invisible dossiers of tutorials, YouTube videos, Pinterest pins, tried-out projects, and attempts that are not stored in notebooks, but only exist in the spaces of doing and in dialogue with their relationships.

This informal learning is largely non-linear and challenges rigid ideas about the linearity of formal education spaces as it regularly involves practices of “trying over.” Trinis develop capacities in iterative learning that accepts failure and mistakes as opportunities to gain mastery and ultimately support more successful production. They contrast this with their experiences in formal education, where failure is often demonised and the student’s identity as a competent learner or proficient doer can be compromised. This informal space provides freedom for experimentation, iteration, reflection, discovery, collaboration, and rediscovery. Trinis feel less pressure in their interest-driven learning. Critical and creative thinking and doing, rethinking, making, and breaking are all part of a bucket of skills that they practise as they “find out,” “make” and “play.” A sense of playfulness, pleasure, and practical problem-solving characterises interest-driven learning in informal settings.

Participants instrumentalise their learning to construct meaning in their everyday lives. This resonates with ideas of digital fluency that emphasise the ability to not only use digital media but also to do so meaningfully (Papert & Resnick, 1995). Papert and Resnik’s scholarship on digital fluency has focused largely on online creation, but both online and offline contexts and the ability to navigate effectively between these is important to participants in this study. Expertise is developed and demonstrated as fluency in being able to effectively find and use information and make meaning in the lives of participants. This meaning-making is interlinked with feelings of personal satisfaction as participants apply their learning to contribute to their families and peers and build their social confidence. Contextualising knowledge is central to how

participants attempt to instrumentalise their knowledge to tackle problematics of social confidence in their everyday activities and relationships. This includes an iterative learning that seeks to deconstruct and understand contexts and address these in resourceful and relevant ways. Fluencies in tackling not only content knowledge but also complex and nuanced contexts is critical in broaching the problematic of social confidence and building meaning among participants.

Chapter 7
Traversing Global and Local Knowledge Societies
World Class Trinis:
Interplays of Trini Informal Learning and Production
in Global/Local and Online/Offline Spaces



Figure 12. A musical performance in Trinidad

The previous chapter concluded by arguing that Trinis used a number of skills in making meaning through navigating a range of contexts. This chapter builds on the complexity of notions of context and contextualisation to explore some of the practices and tensions of local appropriation of foreign content and local production. When Cyril, a 34-year-old Trini man, said to me that YouTube was “a world class,” he laughed at the wordplay. He said it was a classroom

where the world met to learn anything, and interplayed this with a pun on “world class” as a common term used in Trinidad to describe an idea of being of a high standard. This was a term that I also encountered in everyday Trinidadian policymaking discourse, which proposed that global connectedness and local content production are two main tenets of using digital media to achieve a “world class” Trinidad and Tobago. Globalisation and particularly globalisation and media theory were often foundational to framing the rhetoric around this. Slater (2014) argues, however, that seemingly universal concepts like ‘new media’ and ‘globalisation,’ and their relationship with each other, are neither natural nor neutral, but have been produced from within particular Western cosmologies. Mjos (2012) argues that our knowledge about the relationship between media and globalisation, and how they are related to production and consumption is based largely on a foundation of studying film and television industries. There has been a call for a critical examination of the geopolitics of these studies and for relocating the countries and communities which are normatively considered in developing theory (Pertierra 2016; Pertierra & Turner, 2013). In order to understand digital media use and its intersections with global and local content, a growing body of scholarship is rejecting normative ideas in favour of appreciating what takes place on the ground in communities in the developing world (Horst & Miller, 2006, 2012; Tacchi, 2009, 2012b). My time spent with Trinis immersed in their everyday pursuits and digital media use presented a unique opportunity to conduct inquiry in this area. The starting point here is the Trinidad community of Belleton.

My inquiry moves from the imaginations and expectations of policymakers in bureaucracies to the experiences and idiosyncrasies of Trinis in informal learning. Policymaking dialogue in Trinidad emphasises the importance of digital media for greater international exposure and for making Trinidad and Tobago “world class.” This idea of being “world class”

intersects with the language used by Trinis in their everyday lives. Policymakers use it to refer to Trinis accomplishing something that receives global recognition, such as a sporting accolade or a Miss Universe title. In policymaking discussions, this idea of a “world class” T&T is intertwined with both an understanding of what is currently going on in the world, and a production value or ability to create material that would be appreciated on the “world stage.” These ideas of using ICT to become “world class” and compete on a “world stage” were common in policy-making rhetoric at meetings I attended. Foundational to this aspiration is how Trinis are commonly positioned by policymakers as global citizens (McLuhan, 1960). Embroiled in this idea that digital media are tied to the international is a tension between production and consumption. On the one hand, ICTs are revered by policymakers and the people I spoke to in my community for their perceived ability to tap into modernity and the global. Trinis were excited by the prospect of knowing what is going on currently and globally. In policymaking circles, I saw this idea intertwined with aspirations for greater international competitiveness and a high significance placed on measurements rationalised through rankings, such as the World Economic Forum Global Information Technology and Global Competitiveness reports. There was a tension, however, as these policy groups also clustered around the idea of a local content agenda. Access and connectivity agendas were commonly seen as baselines that were foundational to an agenda for local content development by regional academics (Dunn, 2001, 2010, 2012; Mallalieu, 2007). Local, national ICT strategies from *fastforward* to SmarTT (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago [GORTT], 2013) spoke to this. Local content development was a phrase that was commonly used in Trini policymaking symposia and meetings where there was often

talk of avoiding a download culture in which people passively consume⁵⁰ global content instead of creating local content online. In his research on media consumption in the region, Dunn (1995b) however argues that the experiences of Caribbean people cannot be reduced to passively receiving the outputs of the global North.

This chapter considers experiences of Trinis themselves and the revelations and insights of popular learners spanning anime fanboys, Music lovers and local musicians, DIYers, nationalists, and nature lovers in Trinidad. I demonstrate how Trinis largely imagine themselves as positioned and competing in an international landscape. I examine how anime fans and music lovers feel connected globally through the internet. This sometimes opens up opportunities for them; for example, some musicians were able to leverage the web for learning and also distributing their music. Other participants, however, felt they had limited chances locally, and that they must migrate to the metropole in order to “get through.” The chapter next presents examples of crafting to show how the use of online resources such as YouTube is not limited to user-generated content on the platform or in online spaces (Brenner, 2013; Burgess & Green, 2009; Lange, 2014), but is in practice situated in a range of everyday contexts and relationships in which learning and social confidence is navigated.

Haruko, Bleach, and Learning Japanese

Ethnographic studies in Trinidad argue that the internet is not regarded locally as an external American importation or imposition, but rather have emphasised that it is appropriated

⁵⁰ Miller (1987) complicates the concept of consumption by arguing that it is a cultural practice that involves the transmutation and recontextualization of products in which meaning is created and transformed through context and use. My findings in this chapter intersect with a body of scholarship that problematizes a neat dichotomy between “active” production and “passive” consumption processes. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to delve into the depth of discussion necessary to examine the scholarship on consumption in detail. Alan Warde (2015) provides a useful introduction to recent developments in the field since the 1980s.

into Trini ways on the island (Miller, 2011; Miller & Sinanan, 2013; Miller & Slater, 2000).

Along with this affinity for the internet, Miller and Slater (2000) suggest that Trinis see themselves as possessing a sophisticated internationalism⁵¹. In my study, Trinis did not perceive themselves to be isolated islanders but instead positioned themselves in connection with multiple global spaces. Trinidad is a society with multiple diasporic linkages, and there was a strong sense in talking to participants that being able to form and maintain connections across the globe was important to them. These connections were brokered through flows of information and sociality with people inside and outside the country. My findings on how Trinis use the internet to pursue their interest in anime demonstrates some of the ways Trinis negotiate their participation with international forms of content and the social connections that are tied to them.

Anime has emerged an expression of Japanese pop culture across the world (McGray, 2002). The internet and interest-driven sharing online have contributed to its spread (Ito, Okabe, & Tsuji, 2012). I met many Trinis in Belleton who were fans of anime. They deployed a number of knowledge bases and connections to support learning more about their interest. Dex, a 21-year-old young man from Belleton, worked at an auto mechanic shop in the area and introduced me to a group of young men there who share a passion and communal interest in anime. It was part of their daily offline face-to-face conversations at the shop and their WhatsApp messages to each other. I conducted individual interviews with these young men and started spending some time with them at the shop. From our discussions, it was clear that Trini anime interest on the internet involved more than simply watching it online, and they saw their online participation as an active pursuit of further knowledge. Part of this process was finding new and sometimes rarer

⁵¹ See also Wardle's (2000) ethnography of cosmopolitanism in Jamaica for a comparative regional example.

anime through a fairly sophisticated combination of sites and applications. YouTube was used to view clips, single episodes, and trailers, but it was not a mainstay for searching for anime material. Websites such as crunchyroll.com, animetoon.tv, animenova.com, and their associated app versions for tablets and phones were seen as generally more useful than YouTube for the avid fan because of the quantity of resources available that they could sift through. The young men found the sites in the first place through a combination of web searches and referrals from friends. These may have been friends they knew in person or people they met online through anime sites. In fact, a number of Trinis I spoke with had built close relationships with fellow anime fans they had met online. These came from a range of countries, including the Americas, Europe, and Japan.

One young man, Marlon, told me that he had a number of online friends that he talked to from Japan. He had conversations with them via text chat and copied and pasted the contents of their messages into Google Translate to get an English translation that he could understand. He then did the same with the English to Japanese that he used to convey his own thoughts. He found that this worked well enough for them to continue communication and was proud to show off some of the Japanese phrases he had learnt. Marlon, like the other men working at the garage, had only attended a government secondary school and was not currently pursuing any further formal education. He worked at the garage detailing cars and had a passion for anime, spending hours every day online. This time spent searching the web for further resources was typical of the Trini anime fans I had spoken to. When Marlon was not on his laptop at night, he regularly used his phone and the apps that he had downloaded. Many of these apps streamed the latest anime episodes from his favourite series. He also used digital media to find out about other new and more obscure series or features. The friends he had made online were valued sources of new

information, and it did not matter to him that they were not Trini. He felt that they shared a similar interest. His fascination with anime extended from the shows to Japanese culture. Marlon was intrigued by the Japanese culture that he was exposed to via the different shows. He went on Google search and on YouTube to look up their food, for instance, and mused on the possibility of trying rice balls with some type of exotic fish, especially one that was poisonous if prepared incorrectly. He had a quite extensive knowledge of Japan, its regions, and its customs that he was excited to talk about. He wanted to buy a sword and get involved in Cosplay with people dressing up as their favourite characters, which he said was a growing pastime in Trini anime communities.

Trini anime groups were growing, and so was their presence on Facebook. Many of the young men at the garage were involved in a community called Trinbago Anime Lovers. It comprised over 7000 users and was a place for discussion on anime, characters, themes, new episodes, and series. There were meetups and events. The Trini Facebook page contained a highly visual component on the wall with people sharing pictures, characters, and memes. Many of these were a testament to the power of curated content and how selecting and sharing the “right” or “hottest” information or content emerged as a creative skill in itself. Other people created and shared memes or even drew and shared their own characters. Some of the anime fans drew, and a couple were interested in creating videos. They were content to share their creations with their friends for the moment, until they got to a point where they felt comfortable to post them more publicly. These young men were, however, passionate and lively when they talked about their interest in anime and how they pursued this online daily. There was some disagreement on the demographics that were interested in anime in Trinidad. I had spoken to one young woman in another interview who was a keen anime fan, and she said many young women

and girls who were also involved in the community. The perception of some Trini men I had spoken to however was that few Trini women were interested in anime. One young man told me that only Indian girls were into it and that one wouldn't find many 'darkies.' Other men, however, told me that a range of young women were interested.

These Bellefontaine men in the anime community devoted time and resources to pursuing their interest online. Mobile phones and tablets were becoming important instruments, especially for staying connected while not at home. Apps such as the Animax app for Android helped them to stay in touch with what was going on in the anime world throughout the day, as they could check in while on their breaks or on their way home from work. Many of the anime fans I spoke with started out by being exposed to anime on TV. This polymedia interplay was not uncommon in discussions I had been having with participants whose interests lie in other areas (Madianou & Miller, 2013). For instance, some of my participants discovered beauty gurus on TV and then went to YouTube to learn more about beauty, or they found out about a product on TV and then (re)searched for it online. Many of the young men were fans of *Kenshin* when it ran on local TV, and they became more immersed in anime through their discussions in school. Face-to-face discussion and word of mouth played an early part in processes of building an interest-driven community. Fans then moved from TV to begin looking up anime online. They found this to be a more rewarding experience, since it gave them the opportunity to see and find out about more shows. *Naruto* and *Bleach* were favourites that came up time and again. As Trinians became more immersed in using the web, the online community began to play an active role in sustaining their interest. Users in countries where the episodes were released earlier would share links or downloads with their friends in Trinidad. There was discussion via online chat. This was often a mixture of opinions and what many regarded as disambiguation around episodes. Some people

would clarify translations or the storyline as many of the anime episodes had subtitles or were dubbed. Fansubbing was a major community practice in which amateur fans do the translating and subtitling of anime (Ito et al., 2012), and Trinidadians were particularly appreciative of this practice.

On the surface, the young men I spoke to in Belleton had left school and were mechanics with interests in sports, such as football. In our first conversation, they generally did not purport to be interested in any deep learning experience, but as they spoke about anime, their discussions became passionate as well as nuanced and analytical. They were keenly interested in the themes, motifs, and symbolism of anime and enjoyed not only watching the episodes but discussing and reading comments on ascribed meanings and Japanese symbols. When I asked them how they related to anime as Trinis, they were eager to tell me that the experiences of the characters were universal. Many were interested in the heroism common to anime, although some felt more like villains themselves. My participants scoured message boards and comments lists. They had deep discussions with select people who they kept in touch with from around the world, as well as in the Trinidad anime community and in their own face-to-face peer group. A mixture of anime sites were regularly used, social media such as Facebook and Skype, and mobile apps such as WhatsApp. An entire mesh of an ecosystem of media was used to sustain their interest.

My participants were motivated to actively research and keep up to date with what was going on in anime, not only as viewers but also as active seekers of more and more knowledge about characters, episodes, themes, opinions, and analyses. There was a palpable thirst for more. These Trinis did not distinguish that it was a Japanese product and foreign to them. They felt that they were part of it, and they made it a part of their own lives in a day-to-day process of searching not only for episodes to watch, but also ways to better understand the craft and become

stronger participants in the community. There was still a strong sense of being Trini among these fans. They intermingled their Japanese interests and appropriated them through the application of Trini slang to anime content and interpretations. This was not a marginal pastime for the group. To dismiss the knowledge created, used, and shared here would be to ignore the everyday practices that are a passionate part of people's lives. My participants exhibited a desire for a higher level of expertise and a continual learning process involving the active seeking of additional information.

This interest of Trinis in Japanese culture forms part of a wider discussion on global and local content. The community of Bellefontaine reveals a complex tension between international exposure and local content production. Trinis immersed in anime and Japanese culture are an example of the ability to use the web to connect with cultural material beyond island shores. Peer connections and knowledge sharing on anime intertwine online discussions with foreigners with local discussions taking place on WhatsApp and in person. These local discussions tended to discuss the Japanese themes in ways that were more Trini, such as through the creation of memes with anime characters that relate to local social and political events or, as Trinis, say "bacchanal⁵²." Anime culture in Trinidad was thereby both retained as an artform that allowed Trinis to relate to people from around the globe and also remixed and assimilated in particularly Trini ways.

Rhythm (inter)Nation(al): Negotiating Foreign Music Fandom and Local Musical Expressions

The interplay of global and local content consumption and production is a complex one in

⁵² Trinidad term for social drama and scandal

Trinidad. The following case study of music enthusiasts and aspiring local musicians illustrates a number of the tensions and opportunities at play. Trinis are enthusiastic about being able to access music online. The majority of their access is of foreign music, but the internet is also used to spread word about local artists and their music, especially around the time of Carnival or when tied to a community of shared interest such as a church youth group or local gospel⁵³ singers (Mohammad, & Horst, 2017). Local musicians are then caught in a number of negotiations. My participants told me that they feel that if they want to “make it big out there” they need to have an online presence. Some complained that this is ultimately futile because the industry in Trinidad is too limited and they must move abroad. Others, however, were finding opportunities for their music to be promoted abroad through online channels while they were still in Trinidad. Other musicians saw the value of marketing their music online to foreign markets, but were reluctant to do so because of concerns that they did not feel they were at a professional standard. Then, there was the question by some of whether this popular allure of “making it away” was a criterion for success or whether they could redefine success by developing the industry locally. The following case studies on Trini practices for knowledge creation and sharing surrounding music offer a detailed picture of these issues and their intersections.

The near ubiquitous first response to the questions of what a participant did online was “listen to music.” In over 95% of cases, this meant YouTube. Trinis used YouTube frequently to access music. This sometimes meant that they watched music videos, which may seem like the obvious use for a video-based website. It also commonly meant that they set videos and playlists to play while they did other activities offline or visited other sites. A few of my participants used

⁵³ See Rommen (2007) ethnography on gospel music in Trinidad

the phrase “listen to YouTube.” It is an example of how participants tailor their use of websites in ways that are most relevant to their context. These Trinis were largely on their phones connecting to Wi-Fi spots or at home. Some used data plans and would plug in their headphones while they were commuting. Many others downloaded music from YouTube onto their devices and listened to it when offline and on the go. Participants were rarely seen using iPods or MP3 players and more commonly seen on their phones in a commute. Some of them had iPods, but they said that since Apple made you pay for music, they would much rather listen to it on YouTube and many Mp3 players ended up in drawers at home. Some would put on their laptops or tablets at home and listen to music on YouTube while they did chores or some other activity. Participants were far less likely to pull out their tablet or laptop than their phone on the street. I was regularly told that phones, especially the lower cost smartphones such as Blu, Alcatel, or Digicel own brand, could be easily used in public, but one would be more likely to get a tablet stolen although these (especially with the introduction of lower cost Chinese brands) were increasingly seen in public too. Another common place Trinis listened to music was at work, where they would log onto YouTube on one tab on their browser, plug in their headphones, and listen to music while they worked rather than talking to colleagues.

The majority of the music that my participants listened to and the videos they watched were foreign. While spending time in the community, I saw people with earbuds plugged into their phone. On closer inspection, the music was mostly from the United States, sometimes Europe, or perhaps closer to home, such as in the form of Jamaican dancehall. Most of the musicians or celebrities whose YouTube channels my participants subscribed to were American. Many of them showed me their YouTube playlist on their phone or another device, explaining that they rarely subscribe to channels and instead search for tracks and artists that they were fans

of. YouTube recommendations were a common way that they discovered new artists and stayed current. The genres they listened to ranged from pop to rock, electronic dance music (EDM), rap, hip-hop, gospel/worship, reggae, and dancehall. The majority of the music they accessed was from abroad, peppered with some local artists. Given the popularity of the local festival of Carnival and its musical forms in Trinidad, it is perhaps unsurprising that the rise in YouTube searches in my Belleton community for local artists happened around Carnival time. This was when I saw people most interested in Trinidadian artists, and steelpan bands in genres such as Soca and Calypso continue to flourish locally through their connection to Trinidad's annual carnival (Birth, 1994, 2008; Dudley, 2007; Warner, 1982). In the lead up to Carnival from the December Christmas season through to March, people were searching for Machel Montano, Bunji Garlin, Fay Ann Lyons, and other local musicians who had popular songs on the radio and were playing in fetes. Trinis also shared links to the videos with their friends on WhatsApp and talked about the songs that they thought were the "hottest." The diaspora also uses the internet to connect to T&T through music during Carnival time (Tanikella, 2009). Trinis shared many stories with me about an aunt, cousin, brother, or friend from New York, London or beyond who tuned in to search up the Trini tunes for the Carnival season on YouTube or on local sites such as TriniJungleJuice or TriniCarnivalDiary. As with other Caribbean countries, these transnational contexts are linked to the history and importance given to migration, visiting, and having connections with metropolises in the Global North (Horst, 2006; Olwig, 2007; Sørensen & Olwig, 2002; Potter, Conway, & Phillips, 2005). I was repeatedly told that the web was an important place for the diaspora to connect with Trini music during Carnival time. This may have been a

prelude to their visit for Carnival or a way to nurse a feeling of “tabanca,”⁵⁴ for not being at home.

The keen interest in local music in Belleton was largely seasonal and was closely linked to the popularity of Carnival in Trinidad. The majority of the music that Trinis tuned into year-round on YouTube or internet radio stations was foreign music that was on the international charts. Any local artists that they regularly listened to were more of an exception to the majority of their listening time. One of these exceptions was a local artist called Positive. He was described as a “rootsy” Christian singer. Many of the Belleton young people at the local church listened to him or watched his videos on YouTube. He had around 7000 subscribers at the time of writing, but it was questionable whether the number of subscribers was a clear indication of his popularity, because most of his Belleton fans told me that they did not subscribe but would instead watch his videos and sometimes like one of them with a thumbs up. Positive’s views on YouTube ranged from a few thousand to over 200,000 for *Mighty Healer* and over 400,000 for *Blessing after Blessing*, songs I had heard many people in the area talking about. These were not full music videos, but rather audio tracks that had been uploaded to Positive’s channel accompanied by a static picture.

Most of the Trinis in the Christian group knew about him and had shared his music with one another. Some said they learned about him from local radio stations or the Facebook page of the local radio station, which many of them subscribed. Some of them were quite enamoured with the radio station’s Facebook page as they told me that they were happy to receive the inspirational quotes and new song or artists recommendations that appeared on their wall. They

⁵⁴ A word used in Trinidad to refer to heartache.

also talked about the artist and asked each other if they had heard of a new song. These conversations usually took place via WhatsApp or in person. If a friend had not heard a new song, they would send an internet link to it, or if they were face-to-face, it was common to see a participant pull out their phones and play the video for the other person to see. It was far more common to see this happening with a foreign musician's videos than a local artist.

Music was integrated into their day-to-day activities and the polymedia experiences of their lives. For instance, one woman who was talking to her friends at the Bellefontaine Bus Terminal raved about this mesmerising song that she heard on the radio in the taxi. It was a perfect song for a wedding, and she believed it was something she should store away in some kind of virtual hope chest. She wanted the link to the song. She hummed a piece. One of the women said she knew it and pulled up the corresponding Ed Sheeran video on her phone. In an instant, the British singer was streaming on a phone screen in Trinidad. The women huddled around the phone. One wanted to know if they preferred to see it on her tablet as the screen was larger. They were too caught up in the video and singing along to respond. The women commented on how they had only ever heard the song on the radio before but now seeing the video enhanced the experience as it was so elegant. My participants frequently said that they only "take the video on" or paid attention to it if it was particularly noteworthy, beautiful, interesting, or funny. This could have meant an official or unofficial user upload of the music with an official video or some cursory visual as the video placeholder.

No one in the busy lot paid much attention to the group of women crooning around the phone, commenting on how graceful the dancing was and the aesthetics of the shot. Two of their male friends who were buying burgers at a street stand nearby looked over and teased the women, but other than that, people went along with their shopping at the vegetable stall or

hailing a taxi. When the Sheeran song, *Thinking out Loud*, was done, they clicked on another hit and squealed and laughed, pointing out, “there’s Ron Weasley!” in the video. Despite the British singer and Harry Potter references, they were a group of women who had never been to the U.K. They were, however, aware of a body of cultural references through a range of media. Some of them had cable TV at home, but many instead relied on YouTube to stay up to date with music. Most still listened to the radio, but this was usually when they were travelling in maxi taxis or taxi cars. When they had the option, they would tune into YouTube to be more “in control” of what they heard or got to listen “without talk” of radio announcers. About ten years ago, Trinis said that they needed cable to “stay in the mix” with the international music scene and access music videos on MTV, Vh1, and BET. I was told that it was so easy now to get everything they want to hear on YouTube. YouTube was the first site they would visit when they went online, and they would navigate straight there without going to the home page of a search engine. YouTube itself became the search experience of the online space and participants emphatically stressed that you could find anything you wanted on YouTube.

The value of using YouTube was also emphasised by aspiring Trini musicians. There was still a tension here between whether the web could be used to create international exposure or whether one needed to go abroad to a metropolitan city to “make it.” Frank, a thirty-two-year-old Trini aspiring singer and the bass player, told me about his dreams of “making it.” Frank wished that he could have pursued his music professionally as a career, but felt that Trinidad was limited. He complained that the market here was too small, especially because he did not sing Soca, Calypso, or what may have been regarded as Trini music. He preferred ballads and sung covers and also wrote his own songs. He was a member of a band in Trinidad, but they drifted apart after the lead guitarist got married, Nevertheless, he continued to sing and play in gigs at

local bars and events.

Frank considered an online presence, especially on YouTube, to be critical to any chance of making it while he was still living in Trinidad. He told me that people had been discovered there and cited examples of popular musicians who were discovered on YouTube. Burgess and Green (2009) argue that it is now common for individual stories to be used to mythologise success on YouTube. Frank acknowledged that it was a slim shot and posited he perhaps had a “one in a million” chance of being discovered, but he did not want to waste this chance so he would put up videos. These were mainly covers of American songs with a couple of his originals. He was reluctant to put up originals in case people stole them. There was a tension between concerns about intellectual property and piracy online versus the need for exposure to market one’s work. He felt that he had not yet found the right balance and felt uneasy about putting up his work. These songs were ones that he played regularly at gigs, so he was secure that people knew that they were his. He was willing to put them out there. Most of the covers were in his bedroom with him propped against the bedpost singing into the camera. He would put up a video every couple of months. He had about eighty subscribers to his channel, and his most popular videos had about one hundred views. He felt that this was slow, but it was progress. Frank was happy that his music was getting out there and was motivated by the idea that someone would hear one of his songs and connect to it. This idea of connection was important to him. He thought that that was ultimately what music was about, and he was bolstered by the support he received at gigs in Trinidad and now through people watching his videos online. He was particularly thrilled to receive feedback and comments, finding it encouraging.

Frank also had a SoundCloud page. Here he had put up twelve tracks, all covers of ballads. This was a site where musicians could put up music, and people could listen for free. He

only had eight followers here but was happy that he had started creating a presence online and felt that musicians should have a SoundCloud page as well as their YouTube one. He made the distinction that while YouTube was more visual, SoundCloud was more audio based. He said that a few of his local musician friends had also put up SoundCloud pages with music.

Ultimately, while Frank had invested some time in his YouTube and SoundCloud pages and enjoyed doing gigs and shows every few months in Trinidad, he felt that he had to go abroad to “make it.” He lived for a while in New York when he was younger and felt that he would need to move back there if he was serious about a musical career. He worked as an administrative clerk at a government ministry full time and was debating with his girlfriend whether they should leave their jobs and migrate to New York. There was a chance for him to get citizenship because his mother lived there still. He felt that he was in a state of limbo where he felt dissatisfied with his job here and that he was getting older and his dreams of a professional musical career could not happen in Trinidad. He used the word “limited” many times in our conversations. Trinidad was a limited place for Frank when it came to a chance for international success. He felt that YouTube and SoundCloud were necessary marketing tools no matter where one was, but Trinis must leave the island and go abroad to a place with a more developed music industry if they wanted to have a serious career.

This idea that Trinidad was a limited place for creative careers was shared by Raxo, one of the young men and avid anime fans working at the Belleton auto mechanic shop. Before I met him, I heard about him from many other anime fans as they said of him, “the boy can draw!” I checked him out on Facebook. He had posted only some of his drawings. When I met him, he showed me many others on his phone. He had not posted these up online publicly but instead would sometimes WhatsApp them to some of his friends. He was twenty-three and worked as an

auto-mechanic but had always loved drawing. He did art in the government secondary school that he attended in the area but stopped school after he finished his Ordinary level subjects at form five and did not pursue any other training in art. Instead, he started working as soon as he could to initially help his family and then move out of home.

Raxo did not post many of his drawing on Facebook because he felt that he wanted them to be perfect and of a certain standard. He was confident that he was talented and had received positive feedback from his friends. He drew many of the anime and manga characters in accurate details and played around with portraits. He felt that this was something he would love to pursue later on but felt he must leave Trinidad in order to do it. When asked about the local institutions that offer animation and graphic or art, Raxo was dismissive. He had not explored these programmes and had had no exposure to them, but he did not feel that Trinidad had the “up to date technology.” necessary to practise manga adequately. He felt that the training he would get outside would be more “state of the art.” Raxo thought that Trinidad was behind the times and in order to succeed with a professional art career, he must get training from abroad. He did not think it would be possible to do this online either but felt he must leave Trinidad and go somewhere more cosmopolitan. He told me that his mother’s co-worker had seen one of his drawings, and said that she had connections that may help get him entry to a school abroad. She could then sponsor his study abroad to further his art while staying with an aunt in London.

Raxo and Frank’s aspirations also included an idea of leaving Trinidad to fulfil their dreams and gain international success. However, Sarah, a DJ, felt that with the new technology now available in Trinidad she had tools and opportunities at home that she would never have had before. She was part of a duo of DJs and a group that participated in Soundclashes, remixing tunes and adding electronic beats to transform their rhythms. She created what she considered to

be “dance anthems” by remixing mainly Caribbean tunes, many of which were from Jamaica. She worked full-time managing a restaurant but was excited by what she said were the many opportunities she had had as a DJ to travel as well as to connect with audiences all around the world online. Sarah credited both these online and offline opportunities to the internet. She used YouTube to learn more about different audio software and to promote her duo’s music to the world.

Sarah had learned how to use the majority of her software through YouTube tutorials. She was enthusiastic about the prospect of being able to stay in the know and constantly upgraded her skills to become a better DJ. She also used the web to share the content she had created and to make connections. Her YouTube page was the most valuable to her, but she also used Facebook and Soundcloud. Her videos on YouTube gained from a few hundred to a few thousand “likes.” They were a mix of local gigs, jam sessions, and visits abroad to music festivals. Some of the videos were of performances and the crowd enjoying themselves while the group played. Others detailed their journey to music festivals and showed other bands, artists, and DJs that were performing there. What she raved about was not the number of hits they had had via social media, but the strategic connections she had been able to make. By putting up videos on YouTube and liking and commenting on others, she had made connections with other people who were interested in her genres of remixes. These had included fans as well as performers, promoters, and people in the industry who had invited her, her DJ partner, and her group to music festivals and sound clashes across the world. So far, they had visited both Toronto and the Netherlands to play in music festivals. They felt that they were representing Trinidad. Some of the videos she showed me had the Trinidad flag flying high in bars abroad that they visited while they were at festivals. She said that they were able to get a ministry to sponsor

some of these when they were invited to perform abroad. Sarah was particularly enthused that they were getting such international exposure and that the music was being appreciated by people around the world, while she was able to stay in Trinidad with her family. She had previously attended university abroad and returned to Trinidad, and she felt fortunate to be able to remain in her home country and still pursue her music throughout the world. She was preparing to go to a festival in Barbados through promoters that she had met online and felt that this online networking and sharing industry knowledge about opportunities, gigs, and funding had been invaluable. Sarah had garnered interest in her music abroad and locally. Her process of learning included a refinement not only in her musical expertise but also an improvement in her social interactions within a range of relationships. These relationships had been important for developing her communication style and helped her to feel greater social confidence among her peers and fans. She felt that it was not only proficiency in one's craft that was integral to success but also the increased social confidence to take risks and opportunities. She felt that as she developed greater social confidence, she was more open to new experiences and experimenting with her music. The fear of failure was a persistent one, but Sarah found that she was open to pushing beyond this as she gained more support. For her, expanding her music was a mixture of improving her craft through learning with feedback, and developing her social confidence to pursue this craft in different social settings locally and abroad.

Rachel, 26, a flautist from Bellefontaine, was training at a local institution and acknowledged that there was a tension between international and local learning. She said that some of her lecturers thought that they were superior simply because they had trained abroad. In some ways, she understood this. She had visited an academy in the UK and found that their training was more continuous, while in Trinidad she found that the training centred mainly around passing

exams and moving to another level. She, however, did not think that one had to go abroad to “make it.” She told me frankly and soberly that “not everyone can go away and be a superstar.” Many of her classmates she felt saw this as the only aspiration. She wanted to develop music locally and become a trainer in Trinidad. Rachel thought that this would be fulfilling and that she could still play at concerts and formal occasions, but her career would be centred around getting young people in Trinidad more involved in music and the flute especially. She found that Trinians see the flute as a fancy or more upper-class instrument, and she wanted to make it more accessible. She felt music had benefitted her life. She was never particularly academic or had “book smarts,” as she put it, but music was something that interested her from an early age, and her parents made sacrifices to enable her to pursue this interest. Rachel saw the internet as essential as a tool to get your music heard. She said that groups who had been able to create careers for themselves in the Caribbean had devoted a great deal of effort to their online presence. For Rachel, her interest in music translated her learning into performances and positive feedback as she improved. These were important in developing her social confidence, and she felt that beyond any financial remuneration, her enhanced social confidence resulted in positive feelings and contributed to her quality of life. Rachel felt that there were many talented students in her music classes, but while they possessed technical competency, they did not have the confidence to translate this confidence socially, and this formed a barrier in their careers.

YouTube had been invaluable for Rachel to learn more about her instrument and find tutorials and inspiration. She felt motivated by looking at younger people and children from across the world and seeing how well they were doing. She would say to herself, “Nah I have to do better!” The internet, and YouTube particularly was a rich resource for her. She was able to find new techniques and look at performances. Her interest in music arose in the first place when

her parents would force herself and her siblings to watch the Arts channel on television when they were younger. She realised that she loved the flute and her parents sent her to lessons.

Rachel saw the internet as a place where young people could get interested in music and learn to play instruments or share their passion. She expressed disappointment that there were not more tutorials on the steelpan. She said you mainly found some old footage from Panorama (local steelpan competition in Carnival) but found few tutorials in comparison to the other instruments. She was especially upset that you could not tell that it was a Trinidadian instrument or from “our people,” as she described it, but you mainly saw foreigners playing it on YouTube. Rachel had begun learning to play the pan and said that she might post some tutorials in future, but so far she had not put up any videos on her main instrument, the flute. She felt that she would someday, but did not feel that she was ready yet.

Trinis Getting Crafty: Wider Process of Production, Connection, and Creativity

Many of my participants used the internet as a knowledge base for “Do It Yourself” (DIY) or craft projects. This often started with crocheting, beading, making bags, or clay projects, and expanded as people gained insight into new project ideas online. None of my participants who used YouTube for craft ideas and tutorials had put up a video of their own. They rarely took part in the discussions and only sometimes used the “like” function to “favourite” a video. My participants could have been classed as simply consumers of YouTube content. They did not form part of the group of “personally expressive media” creators posting their work online as was described as common in the USA (Lange, 2014; Brenner, 2013). To see them simply as consumers, however, is not representative of their vast creativity in applying the video tutorials to their own production process offline. These crafting and DIY activities were mostly done as a hobby, although a few were now linking their hobby to entrepreneurial

aspirations. The use of YouTube tutorials in this way was an example of how knowledge creation and sharing was taking place through digital media. These were not sanctioned by any formal institution but were everyday practices that played a role in both leisure and skill building, underscoring that these were not mutually exclusive processes. Trinis who had varying levels of interest in formal education were watching instructional tutorials on subjects that interested them and practising them out of their own volition. This production, whether as a hobby or with some future commercial intent, was something they were willing to invest their time and resources in. The following case studies on Trini DIY crafts illustrates that knowledge sharing online cannot be reduced to a simple producer-consumer dichotomy. In practice, people interact with knowledge through a variety of connections and wider processes of creativity (Gauntlett, 2011) and to contribute to and build social confidence in their relationships.

An example of how YouTube tutorials were used in processes of learning, production, and connection can be seen in the home of the Dass family. Jesse, their eighteen-year-old daughter, was finishing secondary school. One deep purple wall in her room was covered with paper flowers she made, and the other was covered with a homemade wallpaper she had created. There was a cardboard cutout chandelier with beads hanging from the ceiling. That was part of a DIY kit that Jesse got for her birthday when she was ten. She kept it out of nostalgia. Jesse loved crafts, which was plain to see in her room with the desk piled with supplies of coloured paper and jars of pens and stationary around a laptop. The Dass family was middle class and in a higher economic bracket than many of my other participants. They had two children who grew up always having computers as well as internet access at home. Jesse was studying art as one of her subjects in school but found it quite boring. She complained that it was a series of rigidly structured exercises, portfolios, and projects that were regulated to fit a curriculum. Jesse felt that

she could be most creative outside of the school environment. She turned to YouTube to get inspiration, explore ideas, and learn techniques. The result had been a continuous stream of creations ranging from knitted scarves (which were at odds with the Trinidad climate) to jewellery, furniture, accessories, and embellished clothing. She had transformed many of her everyday objects to put a twist on them. Her dresser was covered in a textured material that she created as a kind of faux leather. Her art case was completely painted over to resemble an open lunch box complete with Trini food. She gave some of her creations to her friends as gifts, many of whom were also interested in crafts and watched YouTube tutorials themselves. This gift giving of her own creations and sharing her advice and expertise on crafts with her friends became important facets in building Jesse's social confidence among her peers. She instrumentalised her learning with online resources to enact social confidence and nurture her relationships. Her friends sometimes recommended videos to each other, but most of the instructions she followed came from searching on YouTube. Jesse subscribed to about 30 channels, mainly of crafts and beauty vloggers, but she usually searched for a particular project or idea she had on YouTube itself. She sometimes scrolled through videos that YouTube recommended, so the search experience ended up being an expansive one with more ideas, projects, and different techniques arising. For instance, one day she was looking at knitting, and then the recommendations feature led her to suggested baking related videos. She decided to learn to make brownies and cupcakes to give her friends as Christmas presents. Instead of using the chocolate recipe on the site, she adapted a family recipe for Trini rum cake. Jesse also watched YouTube tutorials for drawing. She used them to learn and master techniques and produced a range of drawings, with a high number representing Trinidadian places and faces.

Jesse wanted to pursue a career as a designer of some sort and actively used YouTube

daily. Her course instructors sometimes also had lifestyle vlogs, but she did not follow these. Instead, she focused her use on specific YouTube tutorials and would go on Google sometimes for supplemental information on materials and instructions. She did not watch the videos while making her craft. Instead, she would first watch the video and then make her craft by herself, coming back to the video as a reference if she needed to. She also used YouTube to look up career advice in the design field. Jesse was disappointed, however. She felt that the advice given was basic and generic, such as which subjects to pursue or years of experience needed, but what she wanted to know about was a more personal view on the experiences of the designers. She wanted to know how they felt about the field and what they did and did not enjoy about specific aspects, but she did not feel that any of the videos she had been able to find had been that intimate or real about the career.

Jesse used Pinterest and Tumblr as places for inspiration. Like some of my other participants, she would go onto Pinterest to view pictures and ideas for possible craft projects, or on Tumblr to scroll down looking at various artistic ideas that she may or may not have replicated. Participants did not go to these sites for the instructions or guides, though. Instead, they would look up the actual project or tutorial on YouTube. They could have been regarded as a group of active learners who elect to go online to gain knowledge from other users and apply it creatively in their own lives in ways that interest them. The main place by far that Trinis access information to practise their interest is through YouTube tutorials. “YouTubing it” has become a verb among my participants in the same way “googling” became a common term. They went straight to YouTube for information, saying that they preferred to watch a video than to read up the text. The YouTube video was sometimes supplemented by instructional text from a web search. Popular sites such as eHow gave simple step by step instructions that the participants

found useful when the YouTube instructor was not as clear as they wanted.

Marcelle was another user of YouTube. She was a 36-year-old marketing professional who had recently started using crochet tutorials. While Jesse could have spent anything ranging from hours to an entire Saturday on YouTube, Marcelle was more interested in short videos that were to the point. She ideally preferred videos that condensed instructions in 10-15 minutes or less. Her interest in crocheting started because she remembered her aunt and mother doing it while she was growing up. Her aunt now lived in the United States and her mother was too busy to teach her, but Marcelle said it was always something she wanted to learn. When she was talking to a friend about it, he suggested YouTube. She felt silly for not thinking about it earlier as this now seemed to be the obvious place to go. She said, as did many participants, that a person could learn anything on YouTube.

Marcelle had created a few items using YouTube tutorials and was perfecting new stitches. Although Marcelle's mother did not have time to teach her daughter, she was a source of feedback and advice for Marcelle, who would come to her for tips sometimes. Marcelle shared her work with a couple of close friends but felt that she needed to improve her skill before she showed more people her crafts. She watched tutorials and practised in private as she negotiated her skill development and her social confidence to bring her hobby into her friendships. Like Jesse, she searched directly on YouTube and watched related videos. Crocheting had become a hobby of hers, and she relied on YouTube instructors who were generally average users for whom crocheting was also a hobby. This was true for many participants who were learning from other users who had uploaded videos to YouTube. Marcelle found their information reliable and relatable. Soap making had also piqued her interest. She had an idea for her mother to supplement the family's income by making and selling fresh Caribbean green herbal seasoning

as a small business idea. She found that the commercial varieties they sold in their little shop were not that good, and they were already making their own seasoning for personal use instead of using the store-bought ones. When she started googling packaging for the seasoning, she came across some different options, and some of these were for handmade soaps. This piqued her interest, and she started looking up handmade soaps, including the types of oils used in them and their various properties. She visited YouTube where she could watch tutorials on the oils and the soapmaking process. She bought some oils and wanted to experiment with different soaps using Trinidadian ingredients such as local coconuts, spices, and herbs. She had spoken to her cousin about it, and they were interested to see if this could become a small business.

Jesse and Marcelle were examples of Trinis who were not authoring videos but were involved in wider processes of production and connection. There was movement between the online and offline without a radical separation between the internet and everyday life (Leander & McKim, 2003). Through their pursuit of knowledge of craft practices online, Jesse and Marcelle fostered and grew some connections both in online and offline spaces. Gauntlett (2011) stresses that making and crafting in traditional and new media spaces is tied to connection and sociality. Jesse's and Marcelle's learning and knowledge practices involve connections with content and also with people they know in person and online. These connections are both spatial and temporal. They can connect users to the future, such as when Jesse and Marcelle thought about their YouTubing in terms of their career and entrepreneurial aspirations; or they could connect users to the past, such as Marcelle's desire to pursue crochet because it is embedded in her family history and her nostalgia. Their production was nurtured, then, through material objects and relationships. They were able to use their informal interest-driven learning online to express themselves through their craftsmanship and their connections.

Constraints and Complexities of Local Content Production

Participants said that they did not find many Trinidadian videos on YouTube. When asked about local content online and having more Trini YouTube videos, in particular, there were mixed views. Some Trinis were happy with their current situation. They felt that they were adequately accessing the information they wanted and did not see any problem or need for more local content. Others said, in quite a matter of fact way, that there should be more local content. They especially linked this opinion to ideas of nationalism and heritage. When asked about Trini content and representation of Trinis online, there was frequently an immediate turn of the discussion to heritage and tradition. Some participants felt that Trini traditions should be represented online. These participants who did think that more Trini content should be on YouTube did not think of it regarding user-generated content and did not see themselves as having a role in posting this content. Instead, they saw it as something that an official authority, especially a government ministry or agency, should create. They felt the government should post videos that reflect Trinidadian culture and history. Many were not aware of any existing attempts, such as via knowledge.tt.

Trinis with an interest in local wildlife also felt that there should be more videos on local species of wildlife and nature in Trinidad available online. One person, talking about a recent hunting ban, thought that there could be a better use of resources in Trinidad if people were more aware of different species and how to identify features, such as when wildlife were carrying eggs or when mating seasons occurred. These wildlife enthusiasts argued that many Trinis were not aware of many of the details of local species. They felt that YouTube would be a good place to showcase this, since many Trinis were avid users, but saw this as the role of the government instead of something that they could create themselves.

The majority of Trinis I met were active YouTube users and spent at least a couple hours per day on the website, but it was rare in Belleton to find people who were creating and posting videos themselves. Even the musicians posting YouTube videos were in the minority. Some Trinis, like Rachel the flautist, felt they might create a YouTube video in the future, but they were not yet ready. There was the idea that they had to be “good enough” to publicly put up and share content. A couple of participants said that they messed around trying to create videos and put them on a private channel but they had never shared them with anyone. Some Trinis did think that it was something they might have wanted to create and share publicly, but this was tied to a perfection of their skill. For instance, handicraft hobbyists told me that when they had attained a certain quality of workmanship, they might put up a video. They shared a concern that to publicly put up a video and showcase yourself was to also expose yourself to criticism. This intersected with a problematic of how to navigate feelings of social confidence. Many of my participants said that they were not experts yet and that they needed to reach an expert status. Although many of the people they watched on YouTube were amateurs themselves, these Belleton Trinis were concerned about making a video where they showed themselves as amateurs or of low quality. Tied to this idea that if they were to create a video, it must be professional, was a complaint made by some of the Trinis that their equipment was inadequate. They worried that if they used the camera or laptop webcam they had that the video would be amateurish. While they conceded that many of the videos that they watched online were made without sophisticated equipment, they were concerned about putting out a video that did not have a high production value and how this would have also framed them as “wannabes” instead of add to their reputation. These Trinis did not see creating videos as a process of experimenting and growth. They did not see any room for error and thought that if they were to put up a video, it

would have to be what they dubbed a “bess⁵⁵ video.” There was a concern about being criticised or that no one would watch them. Some Trinis said that they did not post videos because they were sure that even if they did no one would look at them because they were not famous. The idea of putting up a video was very much linked to the reaction of the audience and their social confidence.

An example of this reluctance to share self-created content can be seen in the anime fan community I introduced earlier in this chapter. As I highlighted, some of the Trini anime enthusiasts drew characters but were hesitant to share them with the Trini anime group. Instead, they said that they wanted their work to be a certain standard for sharing. In deeper discussion on creating content themselves, these fans said they would potentially like to share something they created, such as through a video on YouTube or photos they had taken, but they were holding back. When asked about their hesitation, they credited it to wanting to perfect what they were doing or attain to a more expert status. The anime fans did not think that what they had created was ready to be shared yet. They would have wanted what they had created to have a more professional look or be a more finished product. Some blamed the lack of equipment. When asked what they thought about vloggers who simply used their webcam, participants said that that was fine, and they were comfortable watching these but when it came to creating their own online content they were reluctant to do something that was not professional or of high quality. Some fans said they would not create anything and were happy to watch, while others thought they would eventually create fan tributes or videos and post them. However, this came with a

⁵⁵ A term used by Trinis to refer to something they regarded as particularly high-quality and that was especially seen as being able to outshine others.

caveat of wanting it to be of a standard that would make them seem expert or professional so they could avoid being seen as a failure, and instead build social confidence. This idea of professional versus amateur content also came up when I spoke to an anime fan who was studying film. They said that local filmmakers were hesitant to put their work online because of piracy and intellectual property issues, but even more importantly, they did not want to be perceived as amateurs. Cutting and packaging a DVD made it seem more professional.

The main reason given by the majority of participants for not creating and posting a YouTube video, despite being an avid user, was that they had not even considered it. Many Trinis explained that making a video themselves was not something that had ever crossed their minds. They enthusiastically used YouTube to look at videos on a variety of their interests, but they saw it as a place where they view other people's videos. It was a knowledge repository for them that they could access. Many people liked videos with the thumbs up feature and some commented, but even these people said that it did not occur to them to put up a video. Some said that they lead busy lives and they would go to YouTube to get information and did not have the time to make videos themselves. There was the distinct idea here that YouTube was a place for watching videos instead of creating content. This was at odds with discussions that emphasise YouTube as a place for production (Lange, 2014). In Lange's work production is largely positioned as something that takes place on the YouTube site. However, my participants revealed that they used YouTube avidly, but as a resource for production practices that are embedded in a wider process than what is bounded online. They accessed YouTube to get information and to build their skills and techniques, but their production was largely enacted in offline relationships to express creativity and build social confidence.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the practices of Trinis to reveal that there is no simple, neat dichotomy of the global and local, but instead a complex interplay of appropriation and creativity. It examined learning among Trini anime fans to reveal how Trinis perceive themselves as internationally sophisticated, and how they manoeuvre a range of media literacies to curate content and foster connections to support their interest. Examples of this negotiation of international and local content production were further analysed through case studies of Trini music fans and local aspiring musicians and their practices and perceptions. These range from perceptions that the internet is a space of expansive opportunity, to feelings that Trinidad is a limiting place despite access to the web. On the one hand, fans shared an enthusiasm about being able to access foreign music, and local musicians enjoyed marketing their own music while in Trinidad. Counter to this, some local musicians felt limited and believed that you need to migrate to be successful in the music industry. Some of these musicians posted YouTube videos, but I found that this was rare among my participants. Most used YouTube to watch videos but did not create their own. The chapter then shared participants' insights as to why they did not create videos. Examples of Trinis using YouTube for crafts demonstrates that production and creativity among Trinis is wider than video posting. These discoveries in Bellefontaine challenge the emphasis that scholarship on YouTube usage often places on user-driven content online on the platform itself (Brenner, 2013; Burgess and Green, 2009; Lange, 2014). I argue that in order to best understand the production practices of participants it is also important to consider how people situate their learning with online resources such as YouTube in the textured spaces of their everyday lives, and in building social confidence in their relationships. Informal learning using digital media in the knowledge society, then, does not centre on the technology platform as a

bounded locale for participation. It instead involves a complex set of online and offline relationships, connections, and practices that are not only represented in the media themselves but are mobilised through a range of contexts and relationships as participants broker their learning and build their social confidence.

Conclusion

Chapter 8

**The Knowledge Society as
a Dynamic Ecosystem of Social Practice:
Navigating Social Confidence with Digital Media and Learning**



Figure 13. A community fair in Trinidad

This project is the first ethnographic study to examine the “knowledge society” (Drucker, 1969; Machlup, 1962; Stehr, 2002) through dynamics of social practice with digital media and learning in formal and informal spaces in the Caribbean. It is one of the few ethnographic studies of its kind in the global south and contributes a developing world perspective to a growing body of scholarship that examines digital media and learning in U.S. and European contexts (Ito et al., 2009, 2013; Leander et al., 2010; Livingstone & Sefton-Green, 2016; Sefton-Green, 2012;

Sefton-Green & Erstad, 2013,2017). This project is both an academic and practical exercise as it answers a call from regional academics (Dunn, 2012; Mallalieu, 2007) and local policymakers for a deeper understanding that goes beyond quantitative usage statistics to uncover how people are using ICT in their everyday lives. In order to investigate this use, the study drew on theories of practice (Gutiérrez, 2011; Holland & Lave, 2009; Miller, 1995; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Schatzki et al., 2001) and situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015). It contributes to these theories by developing the concept of social confidence. Social confidence, or the belief that one is able to succeed within social contexts, was observed as a critical negotiation in the everyday use of digital media by participants for learning. I used an ethnographic approach to follow the everyday footpaths of Trinis and uncover an ecosystem of learning in formal and informal (Ito et al., 2009; Sefton-Green, 2012; Sefton-Green & Erstad, 2013,2017), online and offline (Miller, 2011; Miller & Sinanan, 2013; Miller & Slater, 2000), and global/local (McLuhan, 1960; Slater, 2014) spaces. Embedded and enmeshed in the contours of this ecosystem is a cartography of sophisticated practice. I investigated this through a primary research question which asks, “what are the dynamics of social practice at play as Trinidadians use digital media in learning?”

This concretised an investigation through the following sub-foci. The first sub-question centred on how participants practise learning with digital media in institutionalised and out-of-school settings. I then asked how participants negotiate failure, success, and social confidence in their learning and instrumentalise this in their everyday relationships. Finally, I questioned what literacies and fluencies are involved in navigating these practices in the knowledge society.

This chapter briefly consolidates the answers to these questions that are presented throughout the thesis. I argue that constructing and traversing the knowledge society not only

involved participants using digital media in learning to build capacities within subject content, but also instrumentalising this by enacting social confidence to navigate social contexts. I first present the main empirical findings that demonstrate a rich ecosystem of practice. I argue that digital media and learning are key frames in regarding the knowledge society in Trinidad and Tobago because of the importance ascribed to education and technology in the national imagination. I show that education is simultaneously embroiled in an ideology of promise through social mobility and a problematic of prestige, pressure, and feelings of shame and a dichotomy between “book sense” and “common sense” that complicate the social confidence of participants. I then argue that this is enmeshed with an aspiration to use technology for educational achievement and transformation. This is linked to a wider desire to demonstrate the ability to “get through” and evidence a narrative of attaining “progress.” I argue that this also presents tensions in ascribing legitimacy regarding education and technology use. This chapter then reflects on the key findings by first problematising a notion of technology as transforming pedagogy: a key ide(a/ology) and often genuine ambition proffered by local practitioners through rhetoric and fiscal investment. I then argue that while the panacea of digital media remains elusive or oversimplified, participants regularly use it in sophisticated informal practices to broker their learning and instrumentalise this to create meaning in their life by enacting social confidence. The chapter briefly discusses this by situating learning in an ecosystem of everyday relationships and demonstrating the range of literacies and fluencies involved in this process of building social confidence through learning with digital media. The chapter next centralises the key findings to evidence the novel scholarly and theoretical contribution. It introduces the policy implications of this conceptual development of social confidence as a frame to understand the dynamics of practice in digital media and learning in the knowledge society. I then analyse the

limitations of the study as its dimensions were necessary considerations in delineations of scope to favour depth of inquiry. I conclude by using these challenges as opportunities to propose recommendations for further scholarly inquiry.

Social Confidence in an Ecosystem of Formal and Informal Learning

While this study acknowledges that there are a number of lenses through which the concept of the knowledge society has been examined (Bell, 1976; Bindé, 2005; Castells, 2000; Cutler, 2005; Drucker, 1969; Duff, 2012; Husén, 1974; Hutchins, 1968; Machlup, 1962; Mallalieu, 2006; Mansell, 2014; Mansell & Tremblay, 2013; McCann & Giles, 2002; Miller, 2012; Rocci, 2010; Smith and Elder, 2010; Stehr, 2002;), it demonstrates that in Trinidad and Tobago, the knowledge society discourse is often linked to education and digital media. Here, the knowledge society is then often positioned in policy as a “well educated” society (OAS, n. d.). This study argues that unpacking the knowledge society in practice expands definitions of learning to include a wider ecosystem of activity than what may be defined in strictly institutional educational settings. It demonstrates that the knowledge society is a term that is not commonly used by participants in everyday settings but when unpacking their practices of learning, they evidence a range of formal and informal practice that traverses an ecology of settings and spaces including online and offline and global and local. This thesis argues that in order to understand the knowledge society as it is lived on the ground, non-formal and informal aspects of learning must be taken into account as well as the nuances of education and how the classroom intersects with informal areas of people’s lives. It further argues that an appreciation of the social practices of learning with digital media are critical to understanding the tensions in the imagination and realisation of the “knowledge society” beyond policy rhetoric or limited

technocentric conceptions. The study advances the concept of social confidence to demonstrate how participants socially practice learning in the knowledge society.

Social confidence, or the belief in being able to succeed within social contexts, was revealed as critical to conceptually understanding practice and answering the research questions throughout the study. The study argues that learning is situated in social situations, and that digital media and learning are used not only to build content knowledge but also to navigate these contexts and negotiate feelings of success within the relationships of participants. The contexts in which these practices take place are complex, and unpacking them reveals less of a fixed stability of discrete spaces than a range of contextualisation of learning where *context* is *practised* (Edwards et al., 2009). The study asked how Trinians practise learning with digital media in institutionalised and out-of-school settings. The empirical findings support a complex ecosystem of digital media use, both formally and within informal contexts. The research context is an endogenous setting of a community fieldsite, described in Chapter Two (2). The ethnography reveals that aspiration to a better life via education remains a key narrative in Trini ideas of “getting through” or making it. This contributes a local community perspective to other ethnographic findings in the Caribbean that frame socio-economic experience of other communities as based on expressions of *luchar* or struggle (Perterra, 2009, 2011) and pressure (Horst & Miller, 2006; Littlewood, 1998). This “getting through” in Bellefontaine and its connection to education was evidenced in family investments in extra-lessons (Lochan & Barrow, 2008; Brunton, 2000), and in the importance placed on acquiring technology “for education”. Smartphones and digital media were used ubiquitously for a range of social and pleasurable pursuits, which created the first in a series of problematics as to what was seen as the legitimate use of digital media for learning.

I argue that education is a key focal area in both public fiscal policy and the national imagination as it represents a complex narrative of social mobility and aspiration in post-colonial Trinidad and Tobago (Brereton, 1981; Campbell, 1996). This ideology of increasing public welfare through access to education for all is complicated by critical questions of what constitutes educational quality and how/whether this is being realised and translated to productive outcomes (Bacchus, 2005; Blair, 2013; Hosein 2007; Mutua & Sunal, 2013; James, 2010; Jennings, 2001; Jules, 2006; Nettleford, 2000; Thomas, 2014). I complicated the local discourse of a meritocratic, formal education system. This ideology of meritocracy was simultaneously reified through examples of increased opportunity and challenged through the persistence of demarcations of “prestige” and “non-prestige” schools (London, 2002). I demonstrated how these ideas of prestige in the school system interplayed with the identities and social confidence of participants. I then further problematised the concept of social confidence, explaining how participants use a binary of mutually exclusive categories of “book sense” and “common sense” to classify students. I examine how this impacts the development of their social confidence and often imposes limits that they must contend with as they negotiate their identity.

Administrators often envision technology as having the potential to transform pedagogy within formal education to build a knowledge society. This study questions this transformational promise by demonstrating that, in practice, digital media investments are widely used to replicate existing pedagogies that support the top-down dissemination of information. For example, PowerPoints and emails are used by instructors in tertiary education with an increasing vigour to infuse technology into pedagogy in order to create more modern learning. These media, however, serve largely as replacements of blackboards and broadcast mechanisms without realising an immediate promise of a technology-driven transformation of education. Digital

media is also seen by practitioners as embodying new, collaborative, and interactive formats for revolutionising teaching. Participants often felt that there is a tyranny of collaboration associated with forced interaction that retains rather than replaces top-down dynamics. Framing this was a wider problematic regarding the promise of opportunity in learning and the fear of failure and shame associated with education (Levinson et al., 1996; Varenne & McDermott, 1998). There is a tension faced by practitioners who seemed to genuinely aspire to integrate new media to improve education, and how difficult they find this to achieve in a context of ideologies of education and classroom management that rely on competition, comparison, and shame as key motivators for student performance.

Dynamics of identity designation and construction play an important role in learning, and identity negotiation is a critical facet of enacting social confidence (Sefton-Green & Erstad, 2013; Wortham, 2005). Participants often associated educational experiences with feelings of pressure to succeed or, rather, to not fail, and especially to “not fail” publicly. The highly competitive and comparative nature of school settings creates feelings of shame-based education in which students are labelled as successes or failures based on demonstrating immediate uptake and recitation of “correctness” of content. The classroom is seen as a space of continuous assessment and examination (Anderson et al., 2009; Copley, 2000; George, 2006; Robotham, 2000) in front of peers and instructors. This public judgement plays a determinant role in whether participants garner identities of being academically inclined and able to “take book.” For example, my participants expressed a hesitance to take classes such as MOOCs if they had not already had positive experiences of high academic attainment. For those who did do well academically, there was often the feeling that having “book sense” often came at the expense of being seen to possess “common sense,” as these were pitched in a dichotomy of theory versus

practicality and real-world experience. This was evidenced on a more macro scale through the binary opposition in the national imagination of “prestige” grammar schools and “non-prestige” technical/vocational institutions (Campbell, 1996).

My ethnography reveals that participants employ a number of informal strategies in their digital media use within formal settings. Instead of using the Learning Management Systems and University emails, participants prefer to use their everyday spaces, which include the use of social media such as YouTube, Skype, and WhatsApp and collaborative platforms like Google Docs. While formal pedagogy is often seen as discouraging non-sanctioned peer-to-peer discussion as a distraction from learning, students’ strategies created corridors that blended sociality and academic collaboration in which students “limed” or hung out. This was practised in ecosystemic ways, however, with sophisticated levels of interaction that facilitated feelings of safety and privacy among participants as they negotiated how they interacted with their peers. For example, participants often maintained intimacy with a few trusted friends with whom they used Skype or WhatsApp and felt comfortable to ask complex questions. More public WhatsApp group chats and Google docs were negotiated carefully through a range of interactions and decisions of what should be shared and how. Negotiating and enacting social confidence plays a significant role in these practices as feelings of success in the social settings among peers are critical to navigations of contexts, which spaces participants use, and how they use them.

This study argues that social confidence is an essential part of how digital media is used to negotiate privacy in learning. The research reveals that this interplay of privacy and sociality is critical to understanding dynamics of the knowledge society. The findings answer my research questions by showing how participants negotiate failure, success, and social confidence in their learning and instrumentalise these in their everyday relationships. While a great deal of

scholarship describes technology as normatively aligned with ideas and ideologies of collaboration (Tapscott & Williams, 2006), this study argues that privacy is also an integral part of how digital media is used in learning. My ethnography shows that within institutionalised learning, students negotiate social confidence within private spaces that they create through the use of dyadic digital media and also through using online resources, especially YouTube tutorials, to try to learn concepts on their own before re-entering the classroom space. This was observed within formal and non-formal settings where students (re)searched YouTube videos to try to grasp topics in an attempt to avoid embarrassment in the classroom when challenged with these topics in front of their peers. This sometimes created a tension as to what was viewed as the properly sanctioned information by the instructor and alternative information the student found on the topic on YouTube.

This study addressed the research questions by demonstrating that this negotiation of social confidence through learning with digital media is not limited to formal education, but participants also negotiate their social confidence through a vibrant array of informal, interest-driven learning. Participants regularly tackled everyday problems and pursued their hobbies and interests through an interplay of digital media use situated in acts of doing and in their everyday relationships. Participants practised a range of interests, including music, cooking, DIY, anime, gaming, art, and beauty. Their practice was associated with a commingling and confluence of practicality and pleasure that was often regarded as dichotomous in their educational experience. It was common for participants to use digital media such as YouTube to carve out spaces where they could learn, try, and fail in private. They used online resources to (re)search ideas and tutorials, tailoring these to refine their goals while they were also creating, shifting, and experimenting with learning agendas. Failure was a significant part of this process, and while it

was often maligned in formal assessment, having the opportunity to be able to fail in private motivated participants to try new topics and interests. Participants who did not ascribe creativity to their identities or felt that they lacked proficiency in grasping concepts were more open to trying as they were able to fail in private. This study argues that these private spaces using digital media in learning are not simply representations of individualistic, self-directed learning (Knowles, 1968, 1980); rather, their functions are best understood by appreciating how they are used to negotiate social confidence within the everyday lives of the participant. After feeling that they had established safety and gained some proficiency in their learning, participants often extended these safe spaces to include sharing their work and getting feedback from trusted peers and family members. Further to this, they often built and enacted their social confidence as they gained proficiency and expertise in their interest and decided how to best demonstrate this interest socially. It was a common practice to use this interest in negotiating success in social situations, constructing an identity as a person who could successfully perform. Here “performance” has a dual meaning, referring to both their chosen interest and the social situation. Participants demonstrated their expertise as they compounded identities as one who “does do.” A domestic worker would, for example, not only be a domestic worker, but it would become known in the community that “she does do nails.” A council worker, for instance, became known for his expertise as someone who “does do woodwork.” Some participants parlayed these interests into economic activity through entrepreneurship or subsidising regular family incomes. Many others instrumentalised their learning to contribute to their relationships. A father, for example, honed his cooking skills online and through feedback from family to provide a wider array of meals. A bank worker used YouTube videos to decorate a cake for work colleagues. Gaming enthusiasts would offer expertise to co-workers and their own clan of peers. Crafters

decorated their homes. Flanking the materiality of their production was the making of their relationships and the social confidence that they could succeed within, and contribute to, these relationships and be regarded as a success.

In order to examine how these forays into social confidence building were attempted, the study broached my sub-focus which asked what literacies and fluencies were involved in navigating these practices in the knowledge society. The study argues that a sophisticated set of skills were involved in approaching learning with digital media. Foundational to these were literacies intertwined in genres of participation observed as “finding out,” “trying over,” and “making meaning.” This emphasises horizontal and vertical movement and boundary crossings as facets of practice in learning (Engeström, 1996; Gutiérrez, 2008; Vossoughi & Gutiérrez, 2014). Participants attempted to broker knowledge-building and application by setting, refining, and working towards their learning goals. This was pursued through finding solutions by developing literacies that allowed them to search for and critically assess relevant content online and apply these in practice within their relationships. This involved critical fluencies and literacies (Aufderheide, 1992; Bawden, 2008; Hobbs, 2010; Jenkins et al., 2009;) and infused playfulness in learning (Salen, 2007). This set of skills encompassed creativity (Sefton-Green, Thomson, Jones, & Bresier, 2011), critical thinking, experimentation, and iterative learning. Participants managed privacy and sociality in ways that helped them to feel that they were using their learning to contribute to, rather than detract from, success in their relationships. In order to enact social confidence in their interactions, participants were faced not only with developing literacies to find subject matter content but also fluencies that enabled them to negotiate this learning within social contexts. This involved a complex set of skills. A participant may, for

instance, develop expertise but be unable to translate this successfully into their relationships as they may be seen as a fraud or a “know it all.”

I argue that although there is a significant interest in informal learning through online platforms such as YouTube, the production associated with this remains invisible if we only measure it through a lens of online content creation. For example, within crafting and DIY, production was mainly focused on offline making through materiality and even more through meaning-making within offline, everyday relationships. Uploading of YouTube videos was scant except for a few notable exceptions, especially local musicians, but participants negotiated identities that resisted theories of globalisation that constrain individuals within a local-global binary paradigm. The findings support scholarship that challenges the normative geopolitical spaces traditionally considered as central to media studies (Pertierra 2016, Pertierra, & Turner, 2013). Trinidadians regularly position themselves as possessing a sophisticated cosmopolitanism. For example, the anime fans and musicians in my study participated in an interplay of identities straddling local and global, online and offline, and consumer and producer. They expressed mixed feelings on the opportunities that digital media might provide. On the one hand, some musicians felt that they were better able to promote their work, gain more international opportunities, or spread their art form locally and regionally. Flanking this, however, was a tension felt by others that opportunities in Trinidad and Tobago are still too limited, and while digital media provided opportunities to learn and refine their music making, in order to “make it big” out there they needed to migrate to the metropole.

Contributions to Academic Scholarship and Theory

This study is embedded in an inquiry into the knowledge society and focuses specifically on how learning with digital media is practised as a key dimension in its construction in Trinidad and Tobago. This thesis contributes a developing world perspective from the global south to scholarship on digital media and learning, which to date has centred mostly on US and European contexts (Ito et al., 2009, 2013; Leander et al., 2010; Livingstone & Sefton-Green, 2016; Sefton-Green, 2012; Sefton-Green & Erstad, 2013,2017). This research is also significant because much of the emergent scholarship on digital media and learning has centred on children and this study adds a critical perspective on adults who are also using digital media in their learning. As the first study of its kind in the Caribbean, it makes a significant contribution to understanding how digital media is being used in institutionalised and out-of-school spaces in the region. This is important in both deepening local understanding, and broadening global research agendas in ICTD (Heeks, 2012; Smith & Elder, 2010), education in the developing world (Mitra et al., 2005, 2008; Negroponte, 2012; Selinger, 2009) and knowledge society debates. It challenges and problematises dichotomies of formal/informal (Ito et al., 2009; Sefton-Green, 2012), global/local (McLuhan, 1960; Slater, 2014) and offline/online (Miller, 2011; Miller & Sinanan, 2013; Miller & Slater, 2000) spaces in learning and illustrates a more complicated interplay of these concepts in practice. It contributes a more contoured cartography of the knowledge society in which people navigate school and non-school capacity building, and production is embedded not only in online content creation but is also a spectrum of sociality. It then contends with and extends scholarship that emphasises understanding production using digital media through a focus on fluencies in online spaces (Papert & Resnick, 1995) and personal expression through online content creation within platforms themselves, such as YouTube (Brenner, 2013; Burgess &

Green, 2009; Lange, 2014). This research contributes findings that argue that it is important to appreciate the embeddedness of everyday sociality in production. It argues that if creative use of digital media is measured only through online content production, this excludes a range of meaningful practices, as participants navigate their learning with digital media, such as YouTube, to negotiate social confidence within a complex of relationships.

The theoretical lenses of social practice (Gutiérrez, 2011; Holland & Lave, 2009; Miller, 1995; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003) and situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015) have been useful frames in unpacking and understanding the ethnographic findings of the research. These findings, in turn, contribute to theory by underscoring the ecosystemic nature of sociality in learning and developing the concept of social confidence as critical insights emerging from the ethnography. Situated learning theory emphasises how learning is embedded in communities of practice in which members gain expertise and move from a peripheral to core participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Recent scholarship by Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) has extended this to a landscape of learning that is broader in its identity and boundary crossings. My study contributes to this expansion of situated learning theory by emphasising the importance not only of membership in subject-specific communities, but also of the traversing of everyday relationships as essential parts of formal and informal learning. It thereby advances a theoretical concept of social confidence as a critical element in understanding the dynamics of this navigation.

Policy Implications

My background is in public policy, and I had worked as a specialist in that sphere for a number of years when I commenced this study. I started this ethnography within a bureaucracy where I managed a national open learning initiative, and at first, I considered the potential to

examine the knowledge society construction from that vantage point. It became apparent, however, while immersing myself in this space, that the critical need was for a more nuanced understanding of how people were using digital media on the ground. There was a dearth of data generally, and in particular a lack of qualitative data on digital media use in learning in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean. This study contributes to filling this gap, addressing policymakers' need for a more nuanced understanding of everyday use of digital media for the development of better evidence-based policy.

The chapters of this thesis outline a set of practices through which participants interplay with digital media. It unpacks the contentions of education (Chapter Two [2]) and provides context of digital media and aspiration in a low-income community (Chapter Three [3]), which provides a sense of what progress means on the ground. I argue that this is important for a more endogenous appreciation of development. Chapters Four (4) to Seven (7) contribute an ethnographic understanding of how digital media is used in formal and informal settings. It complicates the administrative understanding of technology as transformational, and contributes a range of case studies detailing the strategies people apply to their informal use of digital media. By developing the concept of social confidence in learning, the study invites policymakers to appreciate digital media and learning in non-technocentric ways. It challenges policymakers by arguing that people use digital media to negotiate social confidence in a range of dimensions encompassing fear of failure, shame-based education, and pressure. It further demonstrates how learning is instrumentalised informally to enact social confidence and provides a range of literacies and fluencies that develop within such negotiations. This challenges the notions of limiting legitimacy of digital media use for "educational" content and shows how creative skills in finding out, critical thinking, non-linear learning, and meaning-making are integral to

rethinking how learning is envisioned. This experimental and non-iterative learning moves beyond content-specific rote learning to encompass the acquisition of a range of skills essential for navigating social contexts. It contributes to a reimagination of learning that converges playfulness and practicality to solve problems and improve quality of life. The policy implications of these findings, on the one hand, are fodder for evidence-based policy to improve considerations in formal education. I argue that an understanding of social practice and social confidence in these settings is essential to educational reform as the dynamics of this practice are key parameters in the classroom. Failure and shame are key hurdles that hinder participants from making positive associations with education, and this makes them reluctant to continue formal education. My argument is towards complicating the silver bullet promise of digital media in ICT in education paradigms. It argues for appreciating the social complexity of educational practice. While simply recommending a solution of importing informal strategies to formal settings would provide a neat conclusion, it would oversimplify and undermine the argument. Sims' (2012) ethnography is an example of this as he demonstrates how implementing gaming in the Downtown-School was not a panacea for educational reform, but rather replicated and reinforced privilege. Notions of the schooled society (Baker 2014) and pedagogising the everyday (Tyler 2004) are complex. Sefton-Green et al. (2011, p. 5) complicate pedagogising the informal into the formal as they warn that "attempts to programmatise and normalise creative learning can lead to the very banality and orthodoxy in practice that so many claim to be seeking to remedy." This thesis argues that there is certainly merit in expanding notions of educational practice by learning what people do in a variety of settings, but this must resist oversimplification by attempts to programmatise the informal into the formal and privilege formal spaces as the sole legitimate sites for learning. This ethnography proffers an appreciation

of how the knowledge society is ecosystemic and socially practised. It is a call to policymakers to expand the imagination of learning to a wider cartography of formal and informal spaces, and to appreciate the critical problematic of social confidence in navigating everyday life in these.

While it is beyond the scope of this study to recommend specific policy directives, it does raise several key areas for evidence-based national policy that appreciates the informal learning taking place. First, I complicate policy considerations regarding validating informal learning through assessment and accreditation. The idiom of “getting paper” expressed in dialogue and practice in the study stimulates a set of policy considerations regarding credentials. Chapter Three (3) unpacks the meaning of “getting paper” associated with gaining certification and translating this into productive economic outcomes. The informal learning practices I observed are intertwined with formal learning practices. This presents a set of local policy challenges that intersect with emerging global policy discourse (UNESCO, 2005) on how to best support out-of-school learning, both as a complement to formal learning and as an independent means of gaining an education. UNESCO’s Paris Declaration (2012) presents an agenda that prompts the assessment and certification of learning outcomes achieved through open methods of learning. This global policy discourse intersects with academic scholarship that argues that recognition by a credentialising institution is still relevant in today’s knowledge economy (Conrad, 2013; McGreal, Conrad, Murphy, Witthaus, & Mackintosh, 2014). This study provokes a range of policy implications as to how best to appreciate the types of learning taking place outside of formal institutions.⁵⁶ I argue that the idea of assessing informal learning is a complex one. There

⁵⁶ There have been attempts to address this locally. Mechanisms such as Workforce Assessment Centres in Trinidad and Tobago have been instituted to enable assessment of skills learnt through informal learning and industry praxis. Regionally, Caribbean Vocational Qualifications (CVQs) and nationally NVQs have been designed to focus on credentialising areas outside of traditional academia.

is the need to be more inclusive of the informal and technical-vocational sector, and find creative strategies to enable participants to fully utilise their learning for improved lives and livelihoods. The study, however, complicates this idea of assessment by contending that learning is not only content-specific, but also that there are a range of other literacies being developed that support areas of growth and meaning-making in the lives of participants. These may not be fully captured by current mechanisms of assessment. I argue for a policy review of assessment and accreditation, as my findings reveal that failure and shame in assessment, commonly experienced by Trinis throughout their school lives, have profound impacts on their attitudes to learning and social confidence. The study further complicates the issue of accreditation by showing how the translation of learning into livelihood strategies is not limited to credentialisation, but is embedded in a complex sociality in which participants leverage recommendations and relationships as core skills in contributing to their quality of life. For example, DIY enthusiasts often found that certification was not as helpful to them as building a network of recommendations, and crafters sought marketplaces for their products rather than qualifications. This study argues for enabling policy acknowledging the range of formal and informal learning activities taking place, and developing creative strategies to support these as expressions of wellbeing in the lives of Trinis. The multidimensional and multidisciplinary nature of the findings make clear the need for a range of stakeholders within government, academia, and communities to be involved in setting this policy agenda.

Secondly, having shown how informal learning with digital media is translating into production, I argue that national policy needs to consider how to best support this informal, non-institutionalised sector. This study demonstrates that informal learning contributes to a range of endogenous economic activities. These include micro-enterprises, subsidising household

incomes, and the development of creative industries. It argues for a set of policy considerations that radiate around both supporting learning with digital media and recognising how this interplays with production and distribution in online and offline, and local and global contexts. While this study recognises the contribution of the economic strategies proposed by Hesmondhalgh & Baker (2011), it extends arguments by Luckman (2015) on the challenges of scalability of economic distribution by makers and their microenterprises. Examples from the thesis on entrepreneurship by artisans, makers, crafters, and creative artists such as musicians, support my argument for an expansion of policy discourse to support production and distribution of goods and services that unpack the informal elements of learning and economy in the knowledge society.

Finally, having demonstrated how the knowledge society is embedded in sociality, I argue against reductive policy that measures the impacts of learning through narrow economic metrics. The study instead calls for a broadening of policy imagination and scope to include what is defined as learning, the spaces and practices of legitimate learning, and how these contribute to quality of life. The evidence in this ethnography demonstrates how learning is embedded in complex social processes in the lives of participants as it is instrumentalised to build social confidence. This has important policy implications in recognising the impacts of learning and the contributions it makes in everyday lives. It extends the work of Singh (2015), who argues that informal learning encompasses important social dimensions that must be considered in policymaking. Singh identifies Sen's (1993) human capabilities and social opportunities concepts (Sen, 2000, p. 31) as being important facets of the processes of learning. My research demonstrates that these social dimensions must be considered as core to learning practices. This ultimately has deep implications for formulating public policy, as it argues for policy that

focuses not simply on the building of subject-specific knowledge, but that also appreciates the sociality in which learning is embedded and how it impacts the social confidence, identity, and quality of life of Trinis. It provokes a profound rethinking of ICTD and ICTD in Education interventions, which are often designed with quantitative measurements that link to economic outcomes. It intersects with emerging scholarship on ICT policy that argues for including dimensions of leisure (Sey & Ortoleva, 2014), play (Arora & Rangaswamy, 2014) and activities that do not contribute to GDP but rather to the social lives of participants (Kolko & Racadio, 2014; Oreglia, 2014). The study challenges conventional notions of what can be considered legitimate use of ICT for learning within national ICT policy. By showing how this learning is instrumentalised by participants in meaning-making and socially productive ways, the study broadens what can be measured as valid outcomes of ICT interventions to a more multidimensional understanding of the impacts of learning and digital media on social confidence and quality of life.

Limitations

In order to collect the depth of data needed in the ethnographic research of this study, the scope of fieldwork was delineated to centre on adults in the low-income community of Belleton. This was an essential step in focusing on digital media and learning in the field so that immersive research could be conducted over eighteen months with fidelity to the multidimensionality of practice in the formal and informal learning and everyday lives of participants. While necessary, this delineation did limit the scope of the study. It was beyond the scope of the study to focus on other dimensions of the knowledge society, such as its construction in policy rhetoric or through other narratives that focus on indigenous content or innovation, for example. The idea of the knowledge society is a broad and potentially contentious one, and this study was limited to

providing a slice of one key dimension, but this was presented with a consciousness that there are alternative readings and themes surrounding inquiry into the knowledge society.

My study has its genesis in the local policymaking space, and my research focus was refined based on the need for evidence-based policy. I was, however, limited in how much I could delve into a presentation of the practices and processes of this bureaucratic space in the thesis. I used this policymaking need for better understanding of everyday practice as a launchpad to shape my research questions. In selecting to focus on the richness of practices in the low-income community, however, I was not able to delve deeply into the perspectives that other stakeholders, such as practitioners, may have presented.

I am reflexive of my positionality as someone who has worked in the national policymaking space and how my study was engineered as coming from this space. I was deliberate in my attempts to challenge my own assumptions based on what I encountered in the field. For instance, I had to rethink my focus on an Access Centre based on what I learned from participants about their everyday use. While I made every attempt to remain open and use this experience to learn from my participants, I am conscious of my own positionality. As a Trinidadian myself, I was able to benefit from a number of practicable advantages to gain entry into the lives and culture of my participants, but this also limited my detachment from the cultural attributes of the community I delved into.

Recommendations for Future Research

As this study confronts a burgeoning field of inquiry, it advances a number of key findings that contour a cartography of social practice alongside digital media and learning in the knowledge society. It stresses the importance of social confidence as a conceptual tool within this framework. This foray both forms a foundation and simultaneously forges new and

meaningful areas for further research. First, the limitations I acknowledge in delineating the study present opportunities for scholarship. There is the scope to extend the ethnographic methodology of this study to examine other areas of the knowledge society and, indeed, its very construction in the policymaking space. As this study focuses on citizens, a particularly useful area of study may broach the bureaucratic challenges that practitioners face and bring these two perspectives into dialogue. A logical and perhaps inevitable question arising from this study asks what the findings suggest for educational policy. While I contend that trying to influence policymaking should be approached cautiously, I also recommend that this challenge must be tackled constructively and, as a Trinidadian citizen myself, I feel that a responsibility of this study is to recommend further research that brings the policy-making and everyday spaces into dialogue. This research may constitute several dimensions that arise from this study, such as educational reform within formal settings and a wider call for an expansion of the appreciation of learning in an ecosystem of spaces. This ecosystem blurs formal and informal boundaries, as well as academic and tech-vocational conceptions of dichotomies in learning. Other concrete facets for further inquiry arising from this study include issues of production in creative industries, and innovation and entrepreneurship associated with informal learning and making.

This study consolidated a concept of social confidence as doing so was critical to the range of social practice observed in the field. The concept could be further developed through empirical observation in other contexts. The community studied was a low-income, urban community in Trinidad. Further studies could be multi-sited and include ethnography in communities with other characteristics, such as rural and more affluent communities. Beyond this, there is the wider prospect that I recommend for comparative study in other contexts within Small Island Developing States, the Global South, and more developed countries, to test the

claims made on failure and success in the social practice of learning, and to further evolve the concept of social confidence in other socio-economic and cultural contexts.

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