


Using New Media in Teaching Greek Roma Students

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Abstract: In her article "Using New Media in Teaching Greek Roma Students" Fenia Frangoulidou discusses the use of media material as a supplementary teaching tool in a Roma classroom. Since 2011, Aristotle University has been running a European Union funded project that deals with a wide range of supportive measures for Roma students. Sociologists, social workers, and educators are the primary participants responsible for its implementation. In her study Frangoulidou discusses gender relations and racism and presents an analysis of the participation and interaction of six high school students in a mixed class of twenty-eight students. The purpose of the study is to acknowledge the significant role of media culture in creating a sense of belonging and participation and to use popular culture in developing young people's understanding of social values and cultural norms.

Fenia FRANGOULIDOU

Using New Media in Teaching Greek Roma Students

In the study at hand I discuss the findings of a study that took place in the context of a parallel support class with Roma students. In October 2011 the European Union started funding educational programs in Greece aiming at underprivileged groups such as ethnic minorities and immigrants. Within this framework, Aristotle University Thessaloniki ran two programs: the first one was designed for Roma teenagers (students between 13 and 17 years old) and the second for non-Native students who had entered the country during the past two years. The two groups had some striking similarities: both experienced social exclusion to a great extent, as well as racism and prejudice.

The Greek Roma population is between 180.000 to 350.000 of whom "approximately 300,000 individuals of Roma origin living in Greece with a substantial number living in 52 improvised and dangerous encampments" ("International" 8). It is difficult to estimate the exact number of the Greek Roma population because many are not registered as Greek citizens and there are no details available on ethnic affiliations through the censuses that have been carried out in Greece. Roma people are scattered all over the country, mainly concentrating in four regions (Eastern Macedonia-Thrace, Thessaly, Western Greece, and Central Macedonia) and around Attica. As a general classification, I separate the Greek Roma to those who tend to integrate in Greek society and those who live on the margins, residing in tents, shanty dwellings, or caravans. Accordingly, Roma students can be divided into two separate groups in terms of their living conditions: the ones who settled for a long time in decent conditions and those whose attendance in schools is disrupted by regular family re-settlements. Inevitably, the form of education needs to be different based on different social and educational needs. The program run by the University took notice of these parameters and has applied various strategies for each group. For those students who still live a nomadic way of life, special classes have been organized in their settlements. These students are between 13 and 17 years old and most of them are illiterate. The main purpose is to provide some basic literacy skills and to prepare gradually them in order to enter into the national educational system.

On the other hand, there exist the "privileged" Roma: students who have attended elementary school, at least partly most often the senior classes of elementary education. These students are considered as "privileged" in terms of their living conditions. For example, their families live in real houses with tap water and indoor bathroom facilities. As a result, their way of living matches non-Roma norms (on Roma housing conditions, see, e.g., "The Situation" <<http://www.i-red.eu/?i=institute.en.publications.295>>). The first group, the nomads, makes a living usually by collecting scrap metal or recyclable material, whereas the second group consists mostly of merchants plying their trade in open markets by selling carpets, clothes, or seasonal fruit. Living in poverty and in conditions of socio-economical deprivation, most Roma teenagers have limited access to formal education. Even when they succeed in attending school — usually by making use of introductory classes and support teaching — they face tremendous problems in engaging and participating equally with the rest of the students in the curricula. This becomes more evident wherever support classes with a small number of students are not available. Similarly to the majority of Roma in other Central, East, and South European countries, Greek Roma are caught in a vicious cycle of poor educational opportunities and extreme social exclusion (e.g., in Austria and Hungary, see Tötösy de Zepetnek). 1997 was a turning point for Greek Roma students since a major project for Roma education started running, being financed by 75% by the European Union. This program was followed in 2001 by another project, this time aiming for the integration of Roma people. Both programs have been criticized for disputable quantitative results.

Roma students who have entered the secondary education means that they have acquired some basic knowledge in elementary school, mainly in reading and mathematics. Significant factors in their unofficial education are both traditional media such as the television and digital media including the internet. Media culture is important to them because it is one of the few windows they have concerning dominant ideologies and practices. Although this group is considered as "privileged," these Roma teenagers still face significant educational and racial obstacles in secondary education. Mostly in cases where the non-Roma students are the majority, insults and personal attacks are common, the

Roma people are frequently referred to as "Gypsies," a word with negative connotation in the Greek context as it implies someone who is dirty, lazy, and a cheater. Inevitably, this kind of stereotyping and prejudice affects the Roma students' participation, performance, and self-esteem.

In an effort to cope successfully with issues such as social exclusion, poor educational performance, and low self-esteem a new plan has been designed deriving directly from two main assumptions. First, that the current educational approaches in Greek schools are teacher-centered and that they favor traditional media (books, whiteboards). They do not make extensive use of digital technology although they have the capacity. As it has been stressed in several previous surveys (see, e.g., Buckingham, *Schooling*; Kenway and Bullen), the use of digital technology offers young people a sense of autonomy and power, whereas, at the same time, it creates anxiety in adults — not teachers exclusively — that teens will go out of control. Second, curricula tend to ignore the culture of ethnic minorities, as well as the knowledge of teens drawn from life experiences away from school. A great amount of knowledge derives in the case of these Roma teens from their occupation with digital technology, but it is considered as illegitimate and inferior.

If taken for granted that these are the conditions in Greek high schools, multivocality and inclusion, self-empowerment, and authority are then objectives difficult to implement. Students cannot make themselves heard nor can they engage successfully in the dominant group's culture and norms. Further, the chances to create a positive sense of themselves are reduced significantly. Similar statements have been made with regard to other education systems. For example, David Buckingham argued that the schools in the United Kingdom have failed to follow the social and cultural changes which took place in the last fifty years (*Schooling* 10). If this is true for the United Kingdom, it is even more apparent about Greece, where ethnic minorities were invisible until the mid 1990s when the country was prompted by the European Union to take measures to ensure the social inclusion of minorities and was, subsequently, financed for that and subsequently the Greek government was forced to pay more attention to Roma people. At the same time, the use of new media technology, until recently, was costly and most teachers were not trained to use new media technology.

For the above reasons I argue that a new educational plan needs to be set and implemented. The case study presented here is based on cultural studies especially with regard to literature and the significance of popular and celebrity culture including the social impact derived from culture. Further, adopting an optimist perspective on new media I argue that digital technology offers relative empowerment and autonomy to its users and I illustrate the way by which I encourage ethnic minority students to use new media technology by drawing on popular culture. According to Clare Birchall, there is an increasing amount of knowledge which comes from media: "The rise of the print medium and of general literacy ensured a degree of knowledge exchange on a wide scale. Locally, of course, 'illegitimate' knowledges have always been exchanged. Yet, the velocity and scale of knowledge exchange in the Internet age is unique. Those local, 'illegitimate' knowledges now enjoy mass participation" (5; on digitality, pedagogy, and social inclusion, see López-Varela Azcárate and Tötösy de Zepetnek). In *Beyond Technology: Children's Learning in the Age of Digital Culture* Buckingham argues that these knowledges are ignored by educators and often discredited and that popular knowledge and experiences outside of formal education are considered at least less valuable. However, the more popular culture dominates our everyday lives the more popular culture will become a central source of this unverified knowledge for youth. For example, a recent survey shows that the time young people spend on new media recording or uploading videos is significant and equal between both genders (Lenhart <<http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Teens-and-online-video.aspx>>). Moreover, a considerable part of popular culture is now celebrity culture. The extra textual dimensions of any star transform them into celebrities: when profiles and biographies, interviews, photos, and gossip about a person attract the interest of audiences and dominate the discussion over a person's work or contribution of any kind, he/she can be considered as a celebrity (see Marshall, *The Celebrity* 635). A celebrity persona operates as a form of social bonding, while at the same time negotiates forms of social behavior and provides information and knowledge (see Turner, Bonner, Marshall 14-15). In *Celebrity and Power* P. David Marshall links the urbanization and the issue of governmentality of cities with the emergence of celebrity culture and argues that through the glamour and appeal of stars symbolic power is exerted over the masses and discipline is easy to be achieved.

The same time that a celebrity can function as a stabilizing factor, another celebrity can work as a transformative one. A popular singer is one of the many preferred models of subjectivity with which audiences are encouraged to identify themselves (see Rojek 38): there is a pool of singers, from Shakira to John Lenon, anyone can choose to identify with and this means that a celebrity star has also a transformational power and is able to create online communities of subgroups (see Marshall, *The Celebrity* 244). As the world becomes more and more fragmented, people will look for things to bring them together and this is why popular and celebrity culture is important as it can create a sense of belonging. As legends and heroes were once of shared interests around whose life the attention of a community concentrated, today movie stars, singers, and celebrities of all kinds play the same role. However, one could argue that the struggle between legitimate and non-legitimate knowledge and power has been sufficiently discussed by Michel Foucault and who postulated that knowledge is constructed culturally and located socially. In the case of the Roma, the exclusion of popular culture from the education only serves to perpetuate social inequalities, because, when certain knowledge is excluded from the curriculum, specific social groups feel also excluded and unable to engage with the school, as an institution. To make marginalized groups visible in their own terms often means taking initiatives and developing strategies which are "off limits" from the curriculum: in this case, for example, I changed the type and the rules for the assignment. Also, another difficulty that needs to be considered is the issue of students' motivation. As Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux argue, the marginalized group has to link personal identities and their experiences with the teaching content and process. This is the way to find or to create their cultural relation with the curriculum. Otherwise, the socially excluded, like the Roma, remain invisible, unheard, and fail in education.

A powerful means in students' motivation is, I posit, digital technologies such as computers, video-cameras, mobile phones, the internet and the world wide web: they help transmit attained knowledge — both legitimate knowledge, like transcripts of books, and illegitimate knowledge, like comments on the private and social behavior of celebrities. The demolition of barriers via social networks offers a new sense of community and sharing. Although most of the scholarly interest on the use of the internet focused on the social and educational use of teens, the impact of computers and mobile phones on minority and marginalized groups is increasingly evident. As Rich Ling and Heather Horst note regarding the use of mobile phones in under-developed countries, this equipment "has quietly provided people at the bottom of the income pyramid access to electronically mediated communication, often for the first time" (363) and this is similar for the majority of Greek Roma teens. Their mobile device is their first phone and their first internet connection. The predominance of mobile phones over computers can be explained by their lesser cost and the increasing availability of free, public wifi connections, which reduces the cost of communication. That is why I integrate the use of mobile phones use in students' assignments. Along with the experience of popular culture I exploit digital knowledge inside the classroom. The task was challenging as I had, on one hand, to deliver the writing, grammar, and syntax of the curriculum, while on the other deal with topics such as violence and racial discrimination through another path more engaging and more appealing to Roma students. My study took place in a high school in the suburbs of Thessaloniki, a city of almost one and a half million people. From a regular class of 28 students I worked with a group of 6 students (5 boys and 1 girl) aged between 13 and 15 years old. They all failed in school at least once and, since both parents were Roma, I chose as a subject for discussion a famous Roma singer, a celebrity of the past and a legend when it comes to folk music.

While Greek Roma are marginalized similarly to the majority of Roma in Europe, my students are living in an underprivileged industrial area where there is a variety of ethnicities, mainly Russians and illegal immigrants from Pakistan. The only positive image of Greek Roma is their reputation as talented musicians and singers. In that field, Roma are generally accepted and recognized by the majority of Greeks and thus I chose to start the class with a Roma musician as a study case in order to serve my goal to focus on inclusion by showing that the two cultures converge and empower my students through encouraging multivocality and innovation. I assigned them work through a digital presentation on the popular Roma singer, Manolis Angelopoulos, and provided them with a range of material beforehand. Angelopoulos was a star who achieved fame in the 1960s and 1970s and aspects of his life dominated the press of that period. He was a popular figure, a celebrity singer with a

distinctive public persona. Apart from his good voice and his artistic performances, he also married a young, blond woman who was not Roma and this challenged the dominant ideologies of both the Roma and non-Roma communities at that time when mixed marriages occurred rarely and were broadly disapproved. Although he was considered a traditional Roma figure — at least with regard to his physical appearance and fashion style — and a loyal member of his community (he was married before with a Roma woman), his radical interracial marriage represented an alternative ideological position of blurring social boundaries.

In *The Celebrity Culture Reader* Marshall points out that style represents a statement of difference as well as a statement of solidarity with a particular audience (204-05). Popular music stars in the past conformed to that by managing simultaneously to convey both commitment to a style or a norm, but also to add a creative difference. In that sense, Angelopoulos was committed to a close relationship with his Roma audience by singing Roma songs, while at the same time differentiated himself by getting married with a non-Roma woman and this suggested to his followers a need for innovation and distinction. Of course, his choice widened his appeal to non-Roma audiences and contributed to his effort to become a celebrity (long after his death books are still published about his life and television shows present a fascinating portrayal of his career). Angelopoulos met the criteria of wider popular acceptance and subversion and his case offered a plethora of issues to be discussed in class. During the first week's classes I brought into the classroom traditional media material such as magazines and newspaper articles, as well as a short clip from a 2007 episode from a television series called *Η μηχανή του χρόνου* (*The Time Machine*; the series is with and about personalities of popular culture based on the US-American game show *The Time Machine*). I also used parts of a book about his life, entitled *Μπαρή Σεβντάβα* (*A Great Love*) (Aleksandris). My emphasis was on the written form of the media because I knew that Roma students were not familiar with it owing to both cultural and social status reasons. Specifically, Roma are not familiar with the written form, their language is only spoken, and their social context does not favor anything written.

At first, my students found the case of Angelopoulos fairly interesting. He was a sort of legend for them, they heard things from their elder relatives, but eventually as they read the gossip and the details of his life, they became more and more excited. In 2002 his non-Roma ex-wife, who is also a singer, gave material to an author to publish a biography about her life with Angelopoulos, namely Thanasis Aleksandris's *A Great Love*. I took photos from the book and showed my students pictures of him and we discussed his style. To align myself with the curriculum, I used his figure to teach them how to use adjectives and how to be descriptive. Then, using the picture on the book's cover, I raised issues on gender and identity. On the cover, the faces of Angelopoulos and his wife were shown in a close up shot against a yellow background. The happy couple is smiling, projecting an air like old Hollywood stars. For Roma students, machismo was evident in his figure (large moustache, black suit) and was perceived in a positive way. My effort to encourage a critical reflection on the cultural and social norms of the Roma was not an easy task. Teachers in schools of underprivileged background need time to challenge pre-given ideas and prejudices, as well as to encourage students on self-reflection. I spent almost two weeks of classes to discuss about all kinds of violence and ways to prevent it. A lot of times I had to confront deeply rooted ideas about the use of violence and female inferiority as for Roma violence is accepted way to solve problems and the women's infidelity is a given. A manifestation of this is the fact that a woman only acquires high status in Roma society when she becomes a mother-in-law through her son. Obviously, cultural and social differences were apparent, but my effort was to question them.

Later, when the discussion turned to his ex-wife's claims of violent behavior towards her, all of my students of both gender defended him with several arguments. They pointed out the fact that she was an ex-wife — implying that negative feelings were the motivation behind her assertions — and employed arguments of men's superiority and men's intrinsic sense of justice. These claims did not surprise me since they reflect widely accepted beliefs of the Roma community, as well as that of Greeks in general. My response to students' tolerance of domestic violence was well prepared and based on a scene described in the book. When the happy couple married, that same day Angelopoulos's mother said to the bride that she would do everything she could to separate them. Her overtly negative reaction proves the power that a woman holds as a mother-in-law from the side of

her son. It is the time where she actually exercises her power over the weakest member of the family, her daughter-in-law. The male students criticized negatively her aggressiveness, but did not go further to challenge patriarchy. On the contrary, the female student disagreed with her action which was a predictable reaction for a Roma mother-in-law. The scene was a useful example to bring to discussion the issue of racial discrimination. The dialogue between the two women is a stereotypical expression of the rejection of a non-Roma woman by a Roma mother. So, it was a chance to talk about the stereotypes which are directed vice versa. In the case of Angelopoulos's marriage, there is a radical action which has created something more than a creative difference for his Roma audience. He went against the very community which marriage is designed to establish. Cross-cultural marriages were not common at that time, but both sides Roma and non Roma created tension as they were suspicious of their partners' devotion to their racial origin and even nowadays interracial relations are questioned by both communities. On the other hand, Angelopoulos's interracial marriage gave a boost to his career, presented him as the symbol of interracial subversion and "a knight of real love." The press and the magazines in the 1970s covered the story from the very beginning — since the couple went out together — and spread the news of the marriage fast. The popular culture of the era found in the face of Angelopoulos a new iconic figure: he was the Roma who performed a subversive act which cut out the racial differences.

After elements of Angelopoulos's life were discussed thoroughly, students were taught how to make a presentation and were assigned to do a presentation on him. The next step was to engage the students more actively in a similar project which would be within their interests. They were asked to choose their favorite Roma singer or musician and present her/him to the class. Any type of media could be used but the final assignment would have to be submitted as a CD. Most of the students do not have internet access at home, and even if they do, it is slow and often obtained illegally. For the purpose of the project they could also use the school lab during class hours. Knowing the time limitations of that I asked them to use their mobiles. All students have mobile phones which they used them for their assignment tasks such as to scan printed photos into digital formats, record live performances of their favorite singer, and upload the music to the school's computers and sometimes on YouTube. The need to record the music was generated by the fact that these singers do not generally release video clips and the material existing online is limited. Thus students became creative and one of them even recorded his uncle singing songs of his favorite singer in a family gathering. All the chosen singers were relatively young, sang in Greek — not in Romani — and were not part of the Greek mainstream popular scene. Paradoxically, some of the singers were also well-known among other students of my high school who were non-Roma and this implies a cultural interchange which becomes further interesting considering the multicultural origin of the school's students.

All the songs were dealing with relationships and love. A singer called Stathis Xenos who was older than the rest chosen by the students — he was around 40 years old and fit — appeared in a YouTube video clip with a big snake on his shoulders. I assumed he wanted to signify how fearless he was, but my students interpreted it as a sign of women's infidelity — a topic that the singer often sings about. As far as the video clip was concerned, it was a collection of photographs showing the singer in a recording studio accompanied by another musician with a synthesizer. His dressing style was recognizable and close enough with the dressing code of non-Roma popular singers, but the presence of the snake made the difference. Students identified the exaggeration of the singer's choice, as well as the unexpected shots with the snake, but they justified them as part of the spectacle: "All singers need to do something provocative to get attention" the students argued, thus showing me that they are aware of the practices of the music industry.

The students did not use the written language on the CD-s. They wrote almost nothing, apart from the singer's names and the song titles. No written narration, no comments, no etiquettes. Instead, they downloaded the music, photos, mobile pictures, and videos to complete their assignments. In some cases they used oral narration to connect it with their visual material and so they clearly preferred the visual rather than the written language. Although the visual approach needed more technological means — the use of the school lab only was not enough — they all preferred to complete the assignment using their mobile phones in public spaces where there was a free wifi connection. When it was difficult to find a written bio of their favorite singer, they employed other techniques like

recording a friend reading a life bio. When I commented about it, I received the answer that they did not want to make mistakes and mess up the CD. The underlying meaning was that students were aware of their weaknesses in formal register of writing or in written language in general and so they were trying to avoid it. Instead, they used their competence with digital technology and submitted CDs with plenty of photos — some of them blurred or fragmented — and videos recorded live or downloaded. There was a sense of play and fun, especially in videos recorded live as family members and friends were singing songs on demand. Creativity proved to be the greatest strength on the students' assignment. However, when I mentioned the importance of creativity to the class and asked them to be equally creative on all school's subjects, one student responded that "this was fun, school is no fun."

To sum up the points of interest on the students' assignments, first, there is a parallel Roma popular culture — with elements of folklore — that is not widely visible to the non-Roma. Although this culture borrows many aspects from the dominant popular culture (sound, style) it has not achieved wider attention. Roma students seem to know and participate in both cultural realms, but they identify themselves with Roma popular culture. This is evident by the fact that although there are well-known Roma singers and acceptable to a diverse audience, the students did not choose them for their assignments. Further, the students' favorite singers had a fairer complexion and their music sounded like a hybrid of traditional Greek folk and *bouzouki*. The similarity of the sound became more striking with the singer's age dropping. Similarly, the singers' outfits were more extravagant than the non-Roma singers, but not excessively. They were engaged and innovative with their assignment, using visual and oral material instead of written. While it was difficult for them to comprehend the value of the task, enjoyment and playfulness with new media which was not characteristic of their previous engagement with the school's tasks, they enjoyed this particular assignment. The students' response to the project was positive, but they had reservations about the value of its outcome. The issue of knowledge, for them, was always a result of a struggle in which they usually failed.

The objective of the class set at the beginning of the project was to engage students actively in the production of knowledge by using new media. More specifically, I tried to create a positive sense of identity for Roma teens and encourage their participation through material from their culture. Any manifestation of autonomy and innovation would be considered as self-empowerment. Also, inclusion would be the outcome of emphasis on cultural aspects which are of common interest. Starting with the first objective, the students' response to the project was positive: they took initiatives, used different forms of media in order to be descriptive and analytic and, more importantly, they fully engaged themselves in presenting something from their cultural experiences. They spent considerable time in gathering information about figures of their culture, in some cases producing the information by themselves (for instance, video recording and photo-sharing) in order to present this new knowledge in class. In this context, the main objective was achieved. What seemed lacking was the validation of information: while students were satisfied finding a piece of information for their assignment, they did not assess it properly assuming that once the information was on the internet it was valid. Paradoxically, they did not consider their assignment as worthy in terms of formal education and this was an unexpected outcome in the project. The students — although they enjoyed the assignment, a feeling they rarely experience in school — did not validate it as knowledge. They had a pre-fixed idea of what knowledge taught in the school is or should be, namely a more traditional teacher-centered education consisting of lectures, instructions, and written exams: hence their difficulty in accepting the digital play and gradual knowledge building as education. In general, the use of digital technology did not constitute for them a typical or significant knowledge and the same was true for the presentation regarding a popular star. Students had never had the experience of transferring meaningful experiences for them into school before and also of getting a reward for that.

Measuring the project's success against the objectives of the curriculum, I admit that the outcome was not optimal. Although the aim of the project was not to follow and implement the national curriculum, I took into account the need to improve the students' performance in forthcoming exams. One striking example was the session where I tried to teach the use of adjectives through photos of Angelopoulos. Despite the fact that the students engaged actively in a discussion triggered by the familiar image of Angelopoulos, they were unwilling to participate in the subsequent writing task. Also,

they were reluctant to create a detailed description of the character as a writing exercise. Their poor written production during the whole project led me to the conclusion that a change in the curriculum is as important as changing the teaching methods for effective teaching with Roma students. The current curriculum exaggerates the value of the written language and, as a result, it hampers innovation. It is counter-productive to invite Roma students who are not familiar with written language to participate in a different culture to their own through the use and teaching of written texts.

My argument for the need to change the content of curricula along with teaching methods and assessment also relies on the emergence of new, hybrid cultures positioned between the dominant culture and the ethnic minorities' one. As I mentioned above, the Roma students share their music with their classmates who have diverse origins: Albanian, Russian, Georgian, and Turkish. Hybridity is a fact that manifests itself, more evidently, in music, while the new generation of immigrants enters puberty. In my view, the current educational curriculum is outdated and has not followed the cultural and socio-economic changes that have occurred: it needs to be reconstructed so that it provides a realistic content drawn from the students' own life experience and incorporating explicit and achievable goals with social functions in a culturally sensitive manner. Inclusion is, certainly, one of the things students expect to achieve through education and that is why I put it as my second objective of the project.

The emphasis on "we" instead of "you" was achieved through a different way than the one planned. The Greek popular music scene features many successful Roma singers or singers of Roma origin. Drawing from this, I assumed mistakenly that those singers would have a broad appeal and impact on the young Roma and that they would be icons for them because these singers gained broader acceptance and had acquired social capital. Indeed, students did like these singers, acknowledged their success, but what became apparent was that the impact of their own distinctive ethnic popular culture was equally, if not more, important to them and dominated their choices. None of the singers my students chose to present had a distinctive Roma style. I did not know any of the singers, I could easily confuse them with the non-Roma and I noticed many similarities between their ethnic pop music and mainstream Greek popular culture. These singers were not part of the celebrity culture: no extra textual material was found around them in gossip magazines or websites. Thus they also differed in the extent of their social impact. Students preferred to underscore the importance of these singers in their personal lives and they took the opportunity to introduce me to their culture and they greatly enjoyed doing so. It was a way for them to get formal approval for their cultural capital and their digital skills and popular culture worked as a form of legitimization of their cultural and social identity. Thus, the sense of inclusion was created by making themselves heard by feeling accepted the way they are.

In conclusion, the case study discussed contributes to the growing literature around the negative and positive impact of digital technology on teenagers. Focusing on a marginalized ethnic minority group like the Roma, I targeted the teenage group usually referred to as the "net generation" Roma teens are part of: their digital skills are more than satisfactory given the fact that the use of the internet at home is limited and usually, if not exclusively, via mobile phones. Digital technology helped them to overcome the obstacles of written language and to express themselves in a more creative way. The students' empowerment was achieved in an individual but also in a collective level within the context of school. My claim is that digital media and popular culture may engage Roma students in education more effectively and may reveal their shared characteristics, but also their distinctiveness and as a result can increase their sense of inclusion.

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