Chapter 50
Engaging Urban Youth in Critical Media Literacy

Hyesun Cho
University of Kansas, USA

Randy Gomabon
University of Hawaii, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter describes how urban youth engaged in critical media literacy in the high school classroom by creating public service announcement (PSA) videos. The study delineates the process in which critical media literacy was implemented into diverse urban high school classrooms in Hawaii over a period of three years. The process included (1) acquiring technological and linguistic skills; (2) critically analyzing media texts; and (3) producing media on social issues. The data were collected from students' reflection journals, interviews with students and teachers, students' electronic portfolios, and participant observations by the researchers/teachers. Students expressed their voice toward positive social actions by producing PSAs on a range of social issues, such as poverty and discrimination. Building on multiliteracies and critical media literacy, this chapter argues for the importance of critical media literacy pedagogy that is deliberate to make curricular space for students' reflections and examinations of social issues.

INTRODUCTION

Creating a Public Service Announcement video was not that easy, but it was so much fun. We did a lot of research on the issues of discrimination in school and in society. Not only did we get to act, but we also got to experience operating a video camera. Once the video was finished, we put it together on the computer. In the end, it was aired on television. How cool is that…your work being on television. (Jake, Samoan 8th grade, interview)

Jake (all names are pseudonyms) was one of the high school students that the authors worked with at an urban public school in Honolulu, Hawaii, USA. While acknowledging the challenges of creating a public service announcement (PSA) video, he proudly explained about the process of multimedia development

on a social issue—discrimination—and argued for the value of media production. Jake and his group of friends collaborated in the multiple stages of developing a PSA video—conducting research on the topic of discrimination in school and in the community, writing a script, acting out the scenario, recording with a video camera, and editing the film with a computer. As he admitted to us at the end of the school year, it was his first time to "go extra miles" for school work because he thought it was "so fun" to work with cameras and computers. He was so eager to finish the PSA project on time that he and his friends worked on their project in his house late at night and even over the weekends.

This chapter reports on how culturally and linguistically diverse adolescents were engaged in critical media literacy as active agents of their urban community. Once labeled as 'at-risk' students by the local media, these students empowered themselves as producers of knowledge, rather than passive recipients of the negative images perpetuated in the media (Davis et al., 2005). Building on the frameworks of multiliteracies and critical media literacy, this study delineates ways in which critical media pedagogy was enacted to promote students' critical reflections on social issues and help them produce public service announcements for the well-being of urban youth in a diverse community setting. Findings from the study focus on pedagogical strategies used by teachers who employed a critical approach to media production, often defined as critical media literacy (Sholle & Denski, 1994).

This chapter first outlines a pedagogy of multiliteracies and critical media literacy, which allows students to challenge the media while engaging them in active learning where they connect their academic literacies and civic engagement in an urban school. Second, the authors discuss the school context in which students developed technological and linguistic skills to analyze and produce media. Third, by referencing the classroom examples, the authors explain how each component plays a critical role in student engagement and literacy development in the context of critical media literacy pedagogy. Finally, we make recommendations for teachers who are interested in employing critical media literacy in an urban classroom context.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Multiliteracies

Proponents of multiliteracies, the term first coined by the New London Group (1996), argue that we need to teach literacy in a multifaceted, critical, and reflective manner in a culturally and linguistically diverse society (Hawkins, 2013). The term multiliteracies "signals multiple communication channels, hybrid text forms, new social relations, and the increasing salience of linguistic and cultural diversity" (Schultz & Hull, 2002, p. 26). The framework for multiliteracies encapsulates two significant shifts in how literacy is viewed (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013). First, it provides a bridge between community-based texts and school-based texts and encourages a real-world, interdisciplinary approach to learning through the use of knowledge of each discipline (New London Group, 1996). Second, it acknowledges that literacy goes beyond print language and incorporates the multiple modes of meaning found in new information and communication technologies (Kress, 2003). In particular, the power of new media in the lives of young people cannot be underestimated (Morrell, 2015). Therefore, critical literacy education using media needs to be more effectively implemented into K-12 curricula in the United States and in other parts of the world (Choudhury & Share, 2012; Curwood & Cowell, 2011; Gainer, 2010; Hill, 2014; Hull, 2003, Lawrence, McNeal, & Yildiz, 2009; Morrell, Duenas, Garcia, & Lopez, 2013; Smith,

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